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SECULARITY AND THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF
THE “SCIENCES OF RELIGION” IN EARLY THIRD REPUBLIC FRANCE

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To Henry H. Mitchell
(1919-2022)

Contents

Acknowledgements		v
Introduction		1
Chapter 1	The Semantic Field of Positive Science	28
Chapter 2	The Politics of Abolishing the Catholic Faculties of Theology and Creating the Fifth Section	75
Chapter 3	The Culture of Knowledge in the Fifth Section and the Approaches to Non-Christian Religions	129
Chapter 4	The Advent of the Sociology of Religion at the Fifth Section	185
Conclusion		219
Bibliography		224

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Introduction

Like other properties of modernity, secularization was once thought to be a universal pattern of development. Although scholars are now exploring how to write the histories of the secular and the religious without assuming that modern states made religion irrelevant or confined it to the private sphere, identity and culture war politics are currently resulting in new configurations. Consider the United States and France. Conservatives in the United States have reintroduced in some states the teaching of creationism along with evolutionary theory. More recently, and in connection with an emerging Christian nationalist movement, Louisiana required the posting of the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms, and Oklahoma directed its teachers to incorporate the Bible into curricula.¹ Across the Atlantic, in France, *laïcité*, or the principle of state non-recognition of religion, has long been a self-identified pillar of the French Republic, but to advocates of freedom of religion both inside and outside of France, the laws banning headscarves in schools (2004) and full face coverings in public (2010) were restrictive and coercive in a domain where individuals should have the right to dress in accord with their religious beliefs. Some writers find that those strict applications of *laïcité* reflected an effort by centrist governments to placate voters who were more to the right and unsettled by a growing Muslim population.² That pattern has continued in the current Macron government, which passed the Law on Separatism in August 2021 that allowed state officials to temporarily close a mosque if it sponsored teachings that encouraged violence or hatred.³ While critics again point to

¹ Rick Rojas, David W. Chen and Elizabeth Dias, “With Louisiana Leading Way, More States Are Likely to Take up the Christian Agenda,” *New York Times*, 22 June 2024, Factiva; Sarah Mervosh and Ruth Graham, “In Culture War Volley, Oklahoma Tests the Limits of Bibles in Schools,” *New York Times*, 1 July 2024, Factiva.

² Denis Lacorne, *The Limits of Tolerance: Enlightenment Values and Religious Fanaticism*, trans. C. Jon Delogu and Robin Emlein (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 166.

³ Rachel Donatio, “France’s God Complex,” *The Atlantic*, December 2021.

encroachments on freedom of association, leaders on the right and in the center maintain that such measures are needed to affirm the values of the Republic and oppose the encroachments of fanatical Islam. In that telling, *laïcité* is a core value of not just French but also European identity vis-à-vis theocracies: the “continent of Christianity” that uniquely broke with “the domination of the religious over the collective.”⁴

Does the insistence on secular identity by certain French groups and on religious identity by certain American groups reflect differing trajectories of historical change? Are we witnessing a new phase in the “transatlantic religious gap”? The “transatlantic religious gap” is one historian’s term for “the abiding religiosity of the United States and the contrasting secularity of Western Europe,” a difference that European intellectuals had also commonly emphasized throughout the nineteenth century.⁵ Social scientists began to speak of a religious divide in the context of debating the plausibility of the secularization thesis. By the late twentieth century, America was a modern, post-industrial nation but sustained higher rates of religious participation than Western Europe, where church attendance was falling sharply.⁶ Even though social scientists continue to develop explanations of the Euro-American divide—one is that high levels of economic inequality and vulnerability drive religiosity in the absence of robust welfare state services to take over some of religion’s function in people’s lives—it remains worth asking why European secularity developed in the way that it did.⁷ Aside from religious participation, which has decreased in the United States since 2000, most French people continue to be bewildered by the prayer breakfasts and campaign stops at churches that are routine for American politicians of

⁴ Luc Ferry, “Europe, la princesse phénicienne et l’origine de l’Europe,” *Le Figaro*, 16 May 2024, Factiva.

⁵ Thomas Albert Howard, *God and the Atlantic: American, Europe and Religious Divide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2.

⁶ Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 83-110.

⁷ The economic insecurity argument is Norris and Inglehart’s; see chap. 4 of *Sacred and Secular*.

both major parties. We may still speak of a “gap” even if it is no longer with respect to the secularization thesis but to particular trajectories of secularity. Approaching the transatlantic gap in this way aligns with the “spaciotemporal” turn among sociologists after interrogating the assumptions of secularization.⁸ What are the contingent events and factors that led to varieties of secularity in different contexts?⁹ Among historians of modern Europe, the emerging field of “secular studies” has taken an analogous stance, treating secularist or anticlericalist discourse as fields of cultural production.¹⁰

This dissertation seeks to describe, through an examination of a historical case, some of the events and factors that influenced France’s trajectory of secularity. Naturally, there were a series of factors and changes over a long period that resulted in the contemporary culture of secularity in France, and the aim here is to render a piece of that larger picture by focusing on a formative moment in that trajectory. The case that will be explored is the institutionalization of the “sciences of religion” in late nineteenth-century France. The sciences of religion, or what we now call religious studies, became a university discipline in the same period as the influential reform that created the obligatory and secular primary school (1882) that is often referred to today as a foundational institution of the Republic. At a time when French elites were asserting the secularity of national education, they equally applied that vision to state universities, which were home to Catholic faculties of theology. The abolition of the Catholic faculties in 1885 paved the way for the creation of a sciences of religion faculty later that year.

⁸ Efe Peker uses “spaciotemporal turn” to describe this development in the secularization debate. Peker, “Beyond Positivism: Building Turkish *Laiklik* in the Transition from the Empire to the Republic, 1908-38,” *Social Science History* 44 (2020): 305-6.

⁹ For more discussion of this approach to secularity, see Philip S. Gorski and Ates Altinordu, “After Secularization?” *Annual Review of Sociology* 34 (2008): 55-85

¹⁰ The emerging field of secular studies is discussed in Todd H. Weir, *Red Secularism: Socialism and Secularist Culture in Germany, 1890 to 1933* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 2.

The reasons for taking the perspective of a single context become more evident when we consider the various efforts to introduce the scientific study of religion in universities on both sides of the Atlantic, from roughly 1870 to 1914. The Universities of Lausanne and Geneva established chairs in the “general history of religion” in 1870 and 1873, expanding on a very early chair founded at Basel in 1840.¹¹ The Netherlands were next, creating chairs in 1877 at the state theology faculties (Leiden, Groningen, and Utrecht) that had previously operated in connection with the Dutch Reformed Church.¹² Across the Atlantic, American universities were close behind. Boston University added the first professorship, in “comparative theology and the history and philosophy of religion,” in 1873. New York University followed with a chair in “comparative religion” in 1890, and the University of Chicago founded the first American department and Ph.D. program in comparative religion in 1892.¹³ Similar to those in the United States, with the exception of the Chicago department, the first chairs at Oxford in 1876 and 1886 were founded as a part of ministerial education.¹⁴ This arrangement was only partly true in France, since the new “sciences of religion” faculty replaced Catholic theology but similar approaches were being taught in the Protestant theology faculties that would remain open until 1905.¹⁵ However, to the surprise of most contemporaries, Germany lagged behind its peers, and needed until 1910 and 1912 to establish chairs in the “history of religions” at Berlin and Leipzig, respectively.¹⁶

¹¹ Thomas Albert Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 384.

¹² Arie Molendijk, *The Emergence of the Science of Religion in the Netherlands* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 71-82.

¹³ Robert Stephen Shepard, “The Science of Religion in American Universities, 1880-1930: A Comparison of Six Institutions” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1988), 21-86.

¹⁴ Louis Henry Jordan, *Comparative Religion: Its Genesis and Growth* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1905), 586.

¹⁵ Additionally, a chair in the “general history of religions” was added at the Collège de France in 1880. This will be discussed further below.

¹⁶ Howard, *Protestant Theology*, 394.

As the diversity of names for the new chairs indicates, motivations for preferring certain terms in one context were not the same as in another, and importantly, science was not understood in exactly the same way in each place. Even by the mid-twentieth century, the multiplicity of terms remained an issue for practitioners. As Joseph Kitagawa explains, the various names for the field in the United States, such as comparative religion, phenomenology of religion, science of religions, and history of religions, all referred, with minor differences, to a general body of knowledge that was originally known as *Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft*, or “general science of religion.” Although the shortened “science of religion” was used in the English-speaking world, the term “history of religions” was eventually preferred and treated as synonymous with “science of religion.”¹⁷ Of course, as Kitagawa notes, a difficulty here is translating *Wissenschaft* as “science,” which can be misleading. The adequacy of rendering *Wissenschaft* as “science” in English and French has been a perennial cause of reflection for historians of science and historians of modern Europe alike. Furthermore, Michael Gordin observes that science is an activity that occurs within languages. Individuals make linguistic choices in order to best represent their internal thought and also have it understood by their interlocutors, who may not be native speakers of their own language or of the language in which scientific conventions were first devised.¹⁸ “Science” is an analytical category, but “it is also an actors’ category, and those actors tended to imbue it with the cultural and ideological trappings of their era.”¹⁹ An aim of this dissertation will be to adopt an actor’s perspective and describe

¹⁷ Joseph Kitagawa, “The History of Religion in America,” in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), 15.

¹⁸ Michael D. Gordin, *Scientific Babel: How Science Was Done before and after Global English* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 4-7.

¹⁹ Michael D. Gordin and Kostas Tampakis, “Introduction: The Language of Scientists,” *History of Science* 53, no. 4 (2015): 365.

those cultural and ideological trappings of French science, as well as those of secularity. Such an approach may also be called seeking an emic account of categories and concepts.²⁰

An actor's approach will also be applied to portraying the culture of secularity in France, of *laïcité*, in the period in which the sciences of religion were instituted. As historians of science have come to appreciate the situated character of knowledge production (geographic or linguistic), scholars in secular studies have found similar relationships between secularity and context, including in an area that was thought to be an aspect of secularization—the proverbial conflict between science and religion.²¹ The conflict thesis is increasingly questioned by historians of science, but a group of sociologists recently surveyed the attitudes of scientists toward religion in eight countries around the world and found that the culture of secularism in a country influenced the culture among scientists.²² In France, most scientists do not consider science and religion to be in conflict with each other but, rather, “different aspects of reality.” The independence of the two domains means that discussing religious topics in the scientific workplace is considered out of bounds. To account for that view, which is more common in France than elsewhere, the sociologists classify France as having an “assertive secularism” that

²⁰ The term ‘emic’ refers to an analysis in which the observer tries to grasp how a given cultural domain is organized and structured in the mental world of the person who is being studied. By contrast, ‘etic’ denotes analyses that discover patterns in the behaviors of persons and the effects of their actions. Marvin Harris, “History and Significance of the Emic/Etic Distinction,” *Annual Reviews of Anthropology* 5 (1976): 329-50.

²¹ Two studies emphasize that German anticlericals and secularists were not necessarily areligious. Todd H. Weir, *Secularism and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Rise of the Fourth Confession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Lisa Dittrich, “Europäischer Antiklerikalismus: Eine Suche zwischen Säkularisierung und Religionsreform,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 45 (2019): 5-36.

²² The conflict thesis has received renewed attention among historians of science. Jeff Hardin, Ronald L. Numbers, and Ronald A. Binzley, eds., *The Warfare between Science and Religion: The Idea that Wouldn't Die* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018); James Ungureanu, *Science, Religion, and the Protestant Tradition: Retracing the Origins of Conflict* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019); Thomas Dixon, Geoffrey Cantor, and Stephen Pumfrey, eds., *Science and Religion: New Historical Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Ronald L. Numbers, ed., *Galileo Goes to Jail and Other Myths about Science and Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

maintains a strict separation between the public and the religious spheres.²³ Was such a relationship between secularist and scientific cultures true historically? How was the cultural or linguistic domain of secularity ordered in actors understanding?

The sciences of religion in France are well placed to exploring the ideological trappings of science and its relationship to *laïcité* given the anticlerical politics of the late nineteenth-century period in which they were institutionalized and the commitment of political leaders to promoting the scientific enterprise. Additionally, concerning the Francophone literature, the institutionalization of the sciences of religion is a subject that has been primarily treated by either historians of Protestantism or authors writing in volumes to commemorate the founding of the discipline or the institution where it was, and is still, housed.²⁴ This is less true for the American, German and British cases, where the creation of science of religion chairs has been brought into larger treatments of topics in cultural and intellectual history.²⁵ Beyond individual national contexts, the wider current in the science of religion across Europe has received its own analyses in relation to modernization and universalism.²⁶ Lastly, the sciences of religion, which later included the sociology of religion, offer an opportunity to consider from a new perspective the history of social science in France. Claude Lévi-Strauss remarked that a peculiar feature of the

²³ Elaine Howard Eucklund, David R. Johnson, Brandon Viadyanathan, Kirstin R. W. Matthews, Steven W. Lewis, Robert A. Thomson, and Di Di, *Secularity and Science: What Scientists around the World Really Think about Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

²⁴ Patrick Cabanel, “L’institutionnalisation des ‘sciences religieuses’ en France (1879-1908): une entreprise protestante?” *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français* 140 (March 1994): 33-80. Jean Baubérot, Jacques Béguin, François Laplanche, Émile Poulat, Claude Tardits, and Jean-Pierre Vernand, eds., *Cent ans de sciences religieuses en France* (Paris: Cerf, 1987); Patrick Henriot, ed. *L’École pratique des hautes études: invention, érudition, innovation de 1868 à nos jours* (Paris: Somogy, 2018).

²⁵ Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); James Turner, *Religion Enters the Academy: The Origins of the Scholarly Study of Religion in America* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Marjorie Wheeler-Barclay, *The Science of Religion in Britain, 1860-1915* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2010); Howard, *Protestant Theology*.

²⁶ Hans G. Kippenberg, *Die Entdeckung der Religionsgeschichte: Religionswissenschaft und Moderne* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1997); Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World religions, or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

rise of academic sociology in France was the discipline's close relationship with anthropology and sociology of religion, unlike in Britain or the United States, where sociology and anthropology emerged with separate disciplinary identities.²⁷

Science and Secularity in the Early Third Republic

The late nineteenth-century period in which the French sciences of religion were instituted is well known both for its ideological clashes between church and state, religion and science, but also for implementing several important social and legal institutions of *laïcité*. That period was the Early Third Republic, which lasted from 1870 to 1914. Two of its major achievements were the *école laïque* (secular primary school) of 1882, and the law of 1905 that separated church and state and formally established the principle of non-recognition. Those achievements are also understood to have played a central role in achieving what no prior post-revolutionary regime had successfully done: implant a durable democratic form of government and “end the Revolution.”²⁸ To achieve that outcome, the republican politicians who lead the early Third Republic employed emblems and statues on municipal buildings to establish a new symbolic order that represented the French nation as a republic.²⁹ They reinforced the new symbolic order with a political order that guaranteed many of the political liberties that were articulated in 1789 but had yet to be recognized by law: freedom of the press and to gather (1881), freedom to unionize (1884), and freedom of association for all citizens (1901).³⁰ The new *école laïque* instilled respect for a polity founded on those liberties and a knowledge of how to

²⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, “French Sociology,” in Georges Gurvitch and Wilbert Moore, eds., *Twentieth Century Sociology* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1945), 505-08.

²⁸ François Furet, *La Révolution: de Turgot à Jules Ferry, 1770-1880* (Paris: Hachette, 1988).

²⁹ Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir: l'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1880 à 1914* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989).

³⁰ Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le modèle politique français: la société civile contre le jacobinisme de 1789 à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

dutifully exercise them.³¹ Lastly, leaders encouraged an economic order favorable to small property owners and persuaded them that a republican form of government offered them the means to realize their aspirations and access to greater opportunity.³²

The creation of a sciences of religion faculty in 1885 was contemporary with the same set of reforms that produced the *école laïque*, and like it, involved the removal of religious personnel from a service that they had carried out in a state-run facility. Catholic clerics had served as professors in the Catholic theology faculties since the foundation of the University in 1808. Established by Napoleon, the University grouped all schools and faculties from secondary to higher education into a single entity that was administered by the Ministry of Public Instruction and had the sole right to confer degrees. Napoleon wished that theology faculties be included, but this created a hybrid arrangement in which professors remained responsible to their ecclesiastical superiors and the ministry officials under whose auspices they awarded degrees. The republican-controlled Assembly voted in 1885 to abolish the Catholic theology faculties and, several months later, to establish a new section in the sciences of religion at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE), an institute in Paris on par with the Faculty of Letters or the Faculty of Sciences but with a greater orientation toward research. As there were already four sections at the EPHE, the sciences of religion section was known as the Fifth Section, which held its seminars on the campus of the New Sorbonne in the Latin Quarter. The Fifth Section would be where the anthropologists Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss held posts as professors, as well as the historian of science Alexandre Koyré.

³¹ Jean Baubérot, “La morale laïque sous la IIIe République: une éducation à la liberté.” In Isabelle Saint-Martin and Philippe Gaudin, eds., *Double défi pour l'école laïque: enseigner la morale et les faits religieux à l'école* (Paris: Riveneuve éditions, 2014).

³² André Encrevé, *La France de 1870 à 1914: les succès de la République* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2006). See also Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976).

The institutionalization of the sciences of religion is a useful case through which to assess the relationship between secularist and scientific cultures, but so too is the early Third Republic because of the close linkages between the anticlerical republicans and positivism.³³ Positivism was a philosophical doctrine developed by Auguste Comte in the 1820s that steadily gained currency among urban, republican elites after midcentury. Comte's positive philosophy held that human knowledge passed from the theological stage to the scientific, or positive, stage by way of an intermediate metaphysical stage. Comte's historical law was also correlated to a hierarchy of the sciences, which began with astronomy, moved to chemistry and physiology, and culminated in sociology, the last science to develop since it dealt with the most complex phenomena, the relations of the social body.³⁴ Sociology was equally the last science to separate itself from theological or metaphysical ways of thinking and become positive in the way that astronomy and chemistry were. Comte did not believe, however, that the transition to a positive science of social organization had taken place, and in this respect, positivism was as much concerned with historical development as it was with reaching an envisioned future state of society.

A major republican political figure of the early Third Republic, Léon Gambetta exemplified the association between republicanism and positivism when he donated his brain to the Society for Mutual Autopsy upon his death in 1884. The Society had been formed by an atheist group of physical anthropologists who wished to devise a set of memorial rituals that were based on scientific practices such as an autopsy but that took the place of a religious

³³ Even before the Third Republic, positivism had been seen as "the worldview of republicanism," but from the 1860s, the influence of materialism resulted in a more radical strand of anticlerical positivism. Jennifer Michael Hecht, *The End of the Soul: Scientific Modernity, Atheism, and Anthropology in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 46-9. On the association between positivism and republicanism generally, see Ruth Harris, *Louordes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (New York: Viking-Penguin, 1999); Claude Nicolet, *L'idée républicaine en France, 1789-1924: essai d'histoire critique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982); Louis Legrand, *L'influence du positivisme dans l'oeuvre scolaire de Jules Ferry: les origines de la laïcité* (Paris: Marcel Rivière et Cie, 1961).

³⁴ August Comte, Lessons 1 and 2 of *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830), eds. Michel Serres, François Dagognet, and Allal Sinaceur, new ed., vol. 1 (Paris: Hermann, 1998).

funeral. One of Gambetta's political allies, Deputy Paul Bert, who was a physiologist and staunch anticlerical, participated in the ceremony even though he was not a member of the Society. As it was, Gambetta's brain caused a degree of consternation because it had less mass than the anthropologists expected for such a great figure.³⁵ By contrast, conservative and Catholic communities were appalled by such displays and decried the atheism of republicans. Catholics were equally outraged by the secular primary school, which they dubbed the "school without God," but they also felt that republican secularizing policies were really attacks on their faith.³⁶

It was not just the embrace of positivist science or the disputes over the place of religion in society that made the early Third Republic so ideologically charged. There was also the plight of labor (only amplified by an economic downturn in the 1880s and worker strikes), the shadow of humiliating defeat to Prussia and how best to restore the nation to strength, and the persistent debate over the best form of government to end the cycle of revolution. The republicans of Gambetta's generation had only proclaimed a new republic in September 1870 after the defeat and capture of Napoleon III had prompted the abrupt collapse of the Second Empire. However, for leaders like Gambetta, who had lived through the repressions of the imperial regime, Louis-Napoleon's coup of 1851 and then alliance with the Catholic Church to preserve order, remained very much in living memory.³⁷ As former oppositional activists, republicans had championed the institution of a national education program independent of the clergy and that gave young people

³⁵ Hecht, 27-8.

³⁶ James McMillan, "'Priest hits girl': on the front lines in the 'war of the two Frances,'" chap. 3 in Christopher M. Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, eds., *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³⁷ On the role of the Church in the new imperial regime, and the consequences of the conservative reaction to the popular revolt of 1848 and embrace of religious education, see Maurice Agulhon, *1848 ou apprentissage de la République, 1848-1852*, new ed. (Paris: Seuil, 1992), 158-66, 215-32.

a sense of their own civic obligations in a democratic society.³⁸ After 1870, republicans made it a priority to pursue that goal and confront the grip of traditional elites on society. Conversely, royalists saw the power vacuum and humiliation of 1870 as an opportunity to restore monarchy, religion and tradition: France's republics had been "short-lived and unhappy," they argued. The Catholic clergy put its support behind a restoration, but despite royalist majorities in the 1871 and 1873 elections, the effort encountered difficulties when the Count of Chambord, the grandson of Charles X, refused to ascend so long as the tricolor was the nation's flag.³⁹ Even though conservatives accepted a republic as the regime that "divided us the least," internal disagreements among legitimists and constitutional monarchists would continue to plague the conservative collation until it eventually lost its majority by the late 1870s, allowing the republicans to take control of government. Although now in power, Gambetta and other republicans still had to contend with conservatives who believed that the religious education provided by the Catholic Church was the best way to ensure respect for order and instill a sense of duty to one's fellows and the nation.

Positivism had been equally concerned with unity and the orderly functioning of society. What positivism offered to republican leaders was a belief that the methods of science could yield an understanding of the moral principles that had previously existed in the theological state of knowledge and of society. Jules Ferry, who was a key ally of Gambetta and later a prime minister, illustrated that kind of belief in positivist social theory when, in 1876, he spoke at the masonic induction ceremony for the positivist intellectual Émile Littré. Ferry observed that freemasonry and positivism were both committed to developing a form of sociability that was

³⁸ Kate Auspitz, *The radical bourgeoisie: the Ligue de l'enseignement and the origins of the Third Republic, 1866-1885* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

³⁹ Robert Tombs, *France, 1814-1914* (New York: Longman, 1999), 436-38. On the effect of the clergy's electoral activism on anticlerical attitudes, see Hecht, 42-3.

“prior to all dogmas, all metaphysical conceptions, and not just all religions but all philosophies.” This sociability was “capable of being sufficient to itself [since] social morals (‘morale sociale’) had their roots and guarantees in human conscience.”⁴⁰ Positivism and republicanism were not mere in close association, it has been argued, the one gave powerful tools to the other to legitimate its direct challenge to the Catholic Church and its capacity to provide values for social renewal.⁴¹

Ferry’s positivist and anticlerical positions are not in doubt, but he did embody a variety of anticlericalism distinct from the Gambetta variety that was antagonistic to religion.⁴² Six years after his address to the masons, when Ferry was serving as Minister of Public Instruction, he received the following note from the dean of the Catholic faculty of theology at the Sorbonne, Mgr. Henri Maret: “Despite the differences that can arise in our beliefs and opinions, each time that I take up with you the interests of religion, which I have a special charge to defend, I found in you such nobility of mind, such rectitude of thinking, such wisdom.”⁴³ Although Maret wrote this note after Paris and Rome had failed to reach an agreement about the status of the theology faculties, Ferry received at other times in his career additional testimonies to his sagacity and consideration from Vatican officials.⁴⁴ Ferry was anticlerical in the sense that he opposed the

⁴⁰ Ferry, “Le fondement de la morale: discours prononcé le 9 juillet 1876 à la Loge Clément-Amitié,” appendix to Legrand, *L’influence*, 245. In earlier draft of the address, Ferry had praised freemasonry for its commitment to a “moral law that was identical to sociability itself.” Ferry, “Des devoirs des hommes envers ses semblables,” appendix to Legrand, 242.

⁴¹ George Weisz, *The Emergence of Modern Universities in France, 1863-1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 10.

⁴² Hecht notes that Ferry was not very welcoming of the Society for Mutual Autopsy. Hecht, 29.

⁴³ Mgr. Henri Maret to Jules Ferry, 9 August 1882, Fonds Jules Ferry, Correspondance, Médiathèque de Saint-Dié-des-Vosges. The letter is also included as an appendix to Bruno Neveu, *Les facultés de théologie catholique de l’Université de France, 1808-1885*, (Paris: Klincksieck, 1998).

⁴⁴ See letters in “Correspondence des ambassadeurs, Ministère Ferry (1883-85): Vatican,” 40 J 118, Archives de la famille Ferry, Archives départementales des Vosges.

prerogative of the clergy in society, or the idea that moral norms depended on religious doctrine, but these views did not compel him to be hostile to religion.

The Gambetta variety of anticlericalism has been a classic feature of the early Third Republic historiography, but more recently, historians have begun to revise the portrait of republicanism as an ideological bloc guided by positivism and the intractable opponent of religion.⁴⁵ Ruth Harris' study of the mass pilgrimage movement to Lourdes contributes to that revision in an indirect way. She convincingly argues that our approach to the period should not assume a growing secularity and rationality, and invites historians to rethink the lens of a "unilinear" narrative of France in which religious belief was "stripped away" to make room for the secular Republic.⁴⁶ Of course, "the religious" as a historical object that comes to the fore in Harris' study is not itself a uniform thing. There was the pious observance of a pilgrim to Lourdes but there were other forms of spirituality or religious experience in between the charismatic pilgrim and an atheist or agnostic. Robert Priest has described such intermediate "intellectual and spiritual positions" in the 1860s among the appreciative readers of Ernest Renan's *Life of Jesus*. These readers desired a spirituality independent of the Catholic Church that they found fulfilled in Renan's book.⁴⁷ This dissertation argues that intermediate intellectual and spiritual positions may found in the final decades of the century as well. For the scholars of religion at the Fifth Section who will occupy a large share of the present study, and some of whom were friends of Renan, "the religious" remained something meaningful to them and they hoped to preserve a form of it in secular society by employing the practices of scientific history.

⁴⁵ Joel Revill uses the term "bloc" in his own effort to introduce nuance into the "lens of *laïcité*" whereby republicans are "intractable" opponents of religion. Joel Revill, "Emile Boutroux, Redefining Science and Faith in the Third Republic," *Modern Intellectual History* 6, no. 3 (2009): 487-8.

⁴⁶ Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (New York: Viking-Penguin, 1999).

⁴⁷ Robert D. Priest, "Reading, Writing, and Religion in Nineteenth-Century France: The Popular Reception of Renan's *Life of Jesus*," *The Journal of Modern History* 86 (June 2014): 258-94.

Even though the scholars of religion aligned themselves with the social category of science, they were not akin members of the Society of Mutual Autopsy. The point of their historical inquiry was not to have science replace religion, but to arrive at a remaking of “the religious” such that it remained intelligible to what they considered the modern mind, a mind that, like Renan’s readers, adhered to “century’s spirit of [rational] inquiry.”

The scholars of religion who will concern us here belonged to the Ferry variety of anticlericalism in that they resisted the clergy’s claim to mediate access to religion, but they were respectful of religious beliefs in others. This study is not the first to note the more respectful anticlerical stance of Ferry, although it has tended to feature more often in the histories of *laïcité*.⁴⁸ The 1882 law that made primary school obligatory and its curriculum secular bears Ferry’s name, and its passage is considered a victory of Ferry’s moderate anticlerical strategy.⁴⁹ In an area of convergence between secular studies and Third Republic historiography, the secular moral education of the primary school has been shown to be less of a rejection or absence of religious morality than previously thought. Members of the Superior Council of Public Instruction were concerned to keep as much of the core of religious teaching as they could.⁵⁰ In this respect they were quite similar to the historians of religion presented in this dissertation: no longer trusting of institutional religion to be the custodians of religious teachings, but not wanting to abandon the kernel of those teachings, either.

⁴⁸ Jean Baubérot observes that Ferry’s staff sent orders to prefects to avoid confrontation and respect “the wishes of the population” when it came to remove crucifixes from schools. Baubérot, *Histoire de la laïcité en France*, 4th ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007), 49-51. Outside the history of *laïcité*, see Encrevé, 87-9.

⁴⁹ Jacqueline Lalouette argues that the republican school led to an increasing number of citizens who understood that the origin of morality and justice were not divine but located in the realm of human affairs, and who, by 1900, were more prepared to accept the idea that the state should be *laïque*, and hence the 1905 law that separated church and state. Jacqueline Lalouette, *La séparation des Eglises et de l’Etat: genèse et développement d’une idée, 1789-1905* (Paris: Seuil, 2005).

⁵⁰ Pierre Ognier, *Une école sans Dieu? 1880-1895: l’invention d’une morale laïque sous la IIIe République* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Miral, 2008).

The revisions to the portrait of anticlerical republicanism still leave us with the question of how positivism fit into an ideological program that was “lumpier,” or less universally the intractable opponent of religion. Indeed, Gambetta and Ferry both embraced positivist ideas even though their anticlerical approaches differed. Here, too, the issue is that we need to rethink is our lens. As Michal Sonenscher recently observes, the historiography of positivism has a “scientistic aura” that is “somewhat misleading.” The scientistic label is not wholly incorrect because positivism was “certainly intended to be a science, but in the old, nonscientistic, sense of the term.” By setting aside the scientistic lens, it becomes possible to understand how positivism was intended to be a “mixture of emotion and rationality” that led to a science of altruism, or an understanding that love was rational. The other term that Comte coined, “sociology,” was conceived along similar lines: “a science of common values and shared beliefs.”⁵¹ We will find the scholars of religion in this study doing something similar: making religious sentiment rational. And they will similarly use history to integrate or bring “memory, imagination and rationality into productive alignment,” which in their case was a form of religiosity that was not based on belief.⁵²

This not say that historians of religion were practicing positivists in the way that a number of their contemporaries were. Rather, scholars of religion understood their activity to be within the cultural field of positive science (*science positive*). Positivist philosophy, which emphasized experimental methods and seeking law-like regularities, had a good deal of influence on the conception of positive science for a wider range of knowledge producers who were not strictly affiliated with positivism. Attention will be given in the chapters below to how the

⁵¹ Michael Sonenscher, “Positive Thinking: Social Science, Sociology and the Intellectual Legacy of Auguste Comte,” *Modern Intellectual History* 19 (September 2022): 948-9.

⁵² The phrase “productive alignment” is Sonenscher’s. “Positive Thinking,” 953.

domain of positive science functioned as a semantic field, and how the study of religion could fit into that field of cultural production. Like *Wissenschaft*, positive science has a particular conception for the community of speakers in our nineteenth-century French context. The issue of contextual specificity also applies for *laïcité*.

Is *Laïcité* Secularism or Secularity?

The early Third Republic is the period in which our case of the sciences of religion occurs, and as one of several formative periods in the history of *laïcité*, an aim of this dissertation is to describe how the cultural domain of secularity was ordered in actors' understanding and with respect to religious and scientific things. Portraying a conception of the secular raises the same considerations of language and context that were discussed above for science as an actor's category. Similarly, the ideological trappings of *laïcité* are both elements of the current debate over its meaning in France and how it was used in the past. For these reasons, the matter of translating *laïcité*, and whether it is synonymous with secularity or secularism, requires careful attention and explanation of choices.

For some, *laïcité* sits at the core of the French universalism that has characterized post-revolutionary republics, and was intended to safeguard liberties. While there are those on the left who hold such views, the version of *laïcité* that is typically advanced on the right makes that universalism more particularistic by attaching it to "being French or European." In which case *laïcité* becomes an exception to secularism elsewhere. A number French writers have resisted the narrative that *laïcité* is a French, or even European, singularity that requires strict separation of religion from collective life. Jean Baubérot has argued for more than a decade that there has never been a single meaning of *laïcité* in France's post-revolutionary history; rather, the

conception of *laïcité* has traversed a series of evolutions according to historical contexts.⁵³

Philippe Portier has continued Baubérot's historical-sociological approach, adding that after the Second World War, the French state opened itself to more "recognition" of religion, departing slightly from the principle of non-recognition instituted by the "great separation" of 1905.⁵⁴ Beginning in the 1960s, governments began to finance religions and consult with them before implementing certain policies, and later tolerated, in 1989, the wearing of religious symbols in schools on a case-by-case basis. Ironically, then, the measures enacted since 2000 that have sought to reassert the neutrality of public spaces have also preserved the postwar opening of *laïcité* to recognition of religion, in that the recent laws augment the state's interactions with and management of religion.⁵⁵

Other authors have employed a different tactic from the historical sociologists in response to the exceptionalist narrative of *laïcité*. They argue that *laïcité*, and secularism generally, is a universalist discourse that belies its relations of power and projections onto Islam. The American anthropologist Talal Asad maintains that the doctrine of secularism as an emancipation from the religious masks a contingent redefinition of religion as part of the rise of the modern state. The state then monitors the signs of religion's presence or "intrusion" in public life and then instills certain norms about presenting oneself in public.⁵⁶ Alternatively, some argue that secularism is but another articulation of Orientalism, "a name that Christianity gave itself when it invented

⁵³ Baubérot. *Laïcité, 1905-2005: entre passion et raison*. Paris: Seuil, 2005; idem., *Histoire de la laïcité*; idem., *La loi de 1905 n'aura pas lieu: histoire politique des séparations des Églises et de l'État, 1902-1908*, 3 vols. Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2019-2024.

⁵⁴ Philippe Portier and Jean-Paul Willaime, "Introduction: The complexity of the French principle of Laïcité," in *Religion and Secularism in France Today*, eds. Philippe Portier and Jean-Paul Willaime (New York: Routledge, 2022). See also Portier, *L'État et les religions en France: une sociologie historique de la laïcité* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2016).

⁵⁵ Portier and Willaime, 2-4.

⁵⁶ Talal Asad, "Reflections on *laïcité* and the Public Sphere," *Items and Issues* 5, no. 3 (2005): 1-12. See also, Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

religion, when it named its other or others as religions.”⁵⁷ In conversation with the critique of Asad, the historian Joan Scott tries to historicize the genealogy of secularism by tracing the initial usages of *laïcité* in France in the 1870s. As a concept, *laïcité* was deployed to define a separation between religious society and civil society: the state would exercise no religious power and the church, no civil power. However, for Scott, that separation was premised upon another enforced partitioning: women to the domestic, religious sphere and men to the public, secular sphere.⁵⁸

Continuing in the mode of critique, the French philosopher Mohamed Amer Meziane has recently argued that the origins of *laïcité* lie in the conception of the imperial state that developed after 1830 to legitimate the French conquest of Algeria. Republican thinkers, even though not it power, developed an ideology in which the republican principles proclaimed by the Revolution were to achieve the “secularization of Christianity”—that is to say, the spread of Christian ideals throughout the world, the Empire of Christ over the Earth and no longer in heaven. A secular empire, which now acted in the name of universal principles liberated from Christianity, worked to realize the new eschaton by regenerating the Muslims of North Africa and bringing them into the brotherhood of modern civilization. Hence, republicanism proclaimed itself to be a new set of principles that could serve as the foundation of society, replacing the religious principles that had performed that role and still did in Muslim societies. That *laïque* vision of society was proclaimed first in the imperial context and would only be realized later in the metropole by the “founders” of *laïcité* in the early Third Republic.⁵⁹

In terms of resolving whether *laïcité* is like secularism elsewhere and can be translated as such, neither the historical-sociological or critique approaches to *laïcité* offer very much help in

⁵⁷ Gil Anidjar, “Secularism,” *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Autumn 2006): 52-77.

⁵⁸ Joan Scott, *Sex and Secularism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

⁵⁹ Mohamad Amer Meziane, *Des empires sous la terre: histoire écologique et raciale de la sécularisation* (Paris: La Découverte, 2021), 71-106.

settling the matter. The Francophone authors, who recognize its geographic specificity, almost always keep the untranslated term; whereas Anglophone scholars tend to render it as “secularism,” and if they do use *laïcité*, their analyses treat it like secularism generally. My contention is that the present study’s sensitivity to an actor’s perspective and language has the advantage of shedding new light on the question. The French historical-sociologists try to render norms and mentalities but they do not give the finer, sematic analysis that the present approach allows.

Let us consider an example from the case of the sciences of religion. Shortly before the Fifth Section was set to open in March 1886, an editorial replying to Catholic criticisms appeared in February in the newspaper *Le Temps*. Given the parts where the author seems to speak with knowledge of actions within the government, the piece may have been written by a ministerial official. Writers in the Catholic press had faulted the republican government for not appointing any truly observant Catholics to the new section, a fact that revealed, they claimed, the government’s lack of neutrality and its preference for irreligion. The *Temps* author emphasized that the Public Instruction administration had done all that it could to have “Catholics alongside instructors who were Protestant, Jewish or Freethinkers,” but ultimately, they could not “convince any Catholic, priest or lay (‘soit prêtre, soit laïque’), to join a faculty that was manifestly founded on absolute neutrality in matters of belief.” This was not a great surprise as the newly created faculty “represented a novelty that Catholicism could hardly tolerate. It must, indeed, be seen as the secularization of teaching (‘sécularisation de l’enseignement’) concerning religious ideas. It is the final term in a progression that began with primary school and ends with theology.”⁶⁰

⁶⁰ *Le Temps*, 18 February 1886.

The *Temps* passage reveals one of the first hurdles to understanding *laïcité* in the French context. *Laïcité* does derive from the adjective *laïque*, which is used here to refer to a person who is affiliated with the Catholic Church but is not a priest. That individual in English would be a lay person, and both the English and the older French word *lai* have the same medieval Latin origin. The subsequent difference in the French context is two-fold: first, *laïque* would be preferred to *lai* from the sixteenth century; second, over the course of the nineteenth century *laïque* also came to designate someone or something entirely outside of the Catholic Church.⁶¹ The latter development explains how *laïque* in the *Temps* editorial could refer to a member of the laity and also write in defense of instruction about religion that was *laïque*. About the same time as the article, Albert Réville, who would become president of the Fifth Section, referred to the new teaching in just those terms: the “laicization (‘laïcisation’) of theology” could be achieved if the task were approached “in the correct way,” he confided to Renan.⁶² How does a *laïque* instructor—if the government had been able to find one—teach at a faculty that is newly *laïque*? Words are naturally polysemous, but it is also the case that the two meanings of *laïque*, the premodern and modern, were both still in use in the 1880s and remains so today. A *laïque*, or lay Catholic, could be an instructor, and as we shall see, a few estranged Catholics would join but not in permanent positions. The faculty and its subject matter could be *laïque* in the modern sense because they were no longer performed under the authority of the Catholic Church.

The *Temps* passage contains another hurdle that must be considered when attempting to translate *laïcité*. The author called the new instruction a “secularization of teaching concerning

⁶¹ Véronica Thiéry-Riboulot, *Laïcité: histoire d'un mot* (Paris: Éditions Champion, 2022).

⁶² Albert Réville to Ernest Renan, Paris, 4 February 1886, appendix to Patrick Henriot, “Les premières générations de l’EPHE: à l’ombre de Renan?,” in *Ma grande église et ma petite chapelle: 150 ans d’affinités électives entre le Collège de France et l’École pratique des hautes études*, ed. Jean-Luc Fournet (Paris: Collège de France, 2020), 37.

religious ideas,” unlike Réville who called it a “laicization.” “Secular” (*séculier*) has a particular meaning that, like *laïque*, originated in Catholic vocabulary, but did not undergo a semantic evolution in the same way. *Séculier/séculariser* remained ecclesiastical terms in French, designating the transfer of property outside of Church possession or the exemption of a person from the rule of their religious order. In the medieval period, *séculariser*, or “to make secular,” typically referred to a monastic who returned to the “world,” the “temporal.” After the Reformation and the emergence of absolutist monarchy, in which the two powers, spiritual and temporal, cooperated to oversee certain religious and legal affairs, *séculariser* expanded to include property and institutions. As for clerics, they could petition the Vatican to have “secular status,” which is to say that they were exempted from the rule of the Holy See but still in the charge of a local bishop and state official. A signed authorization from the state was required before the papal bull of *sécularisation* could be requested. After the Revolution, legal treatises and repertories scarcely mentioned the procedures of *sécularisation*; canon law and public law no longer had to interface in the way they did in the Old Regime.⁶³ The *Temps* author, then, was using the ecclesiastical sense of “secularize.” What was now being removed from the domain of the Church were ideas about religion, about the divine, nature of belief, moral teachings, etc. For many of the speakers in the Catholic audience to which the author was replying, the right of the Catholic Church to instruct the people in correct religious ideas had always been at the core of its apostolic mandate as the custodian of divine truth.

The English “secular” and the French *séculier* both share the sense of “temporal” or “worldly,” but when it comes to the action “to secularize,” the two meanings become distinct. A *séculier* cleric still had a connection with the Church even though exempted from certain aspects

⁶³ Brigitte Basdevant-Gaudemet, “Le lexique ecclésial de la sécularisation des personnes et des biens,” *Droits: revue française de théorie, de philosophie et de culture juridique* 58, no.1 (2014): 31-50.

spiritual jurisdiction. The understanding was that the cleric still lived according to the Gospel in the world.⁶⁴ The English sense of “secular” as “non-religious” or “without religion” is much closer to the French *laïque*, a person or institution that is wholly unconnected to the Church or the spiritual domain. That said, there are instances when late nineteenth-century French speakers used *laïque* more in the sense of subtracting religion. For example, in June 1885, the Paris city council decided against adopting a proposal from a resident that had requested the “reasoned and progressive *laïcisation*” of city street names, which the resident understood to mean removing all the “names of saints.”⁶⁵ Those instances aside, what is a general, distinctive pattern about usage of *laïque/laïcité* in contrast to the English “secular/secularism” is that an entity or institution that is *laïque* may still have religious things in it so long as they are not administered by the Catholic Church. In the lead up to the abolition of the Catholic theology faculties, the National Assembly considered doing the same for the Protestant faculties and the Rabbinical School. In November 1884, representatives of the Central Jewish Consistory emphasized their independence from clerical authority when they pleaded with members of the Assembly to not include the Rabbinical School in the proposed eliminations. The “Israelite religion is essentially *laïque*,” they said, and “the Rabbinical School is not under clerical influence, but under *laïque* authority.”⁶⁶ Réville used *laïciser* similarly in describing what the new faculty: theology would change domains and practices but it would still be a study of a religious object.

An interesting question for further exploration would be why in English “secular” came to signify subtraction, “what is left when the religious has been removed.”⁶⁷ The sense of

⁶⁴ Basdevant-Gaudement, 40-2.

⁶⁵ The *Temps* editors affirmed the council’s rejection of the proposal, which had enjoyed a moment of popularity for several days beforehand. *Le Temps*, 14 June 1885.

⁶⁶ Séance du 19 novembre 1884, Chambre des députés, Procès-verbaux de la Commission du budget pour l’exercice 1885, C 3305, Archives nationales de France.

⁶⁷ José Casanova, “The Secular, Secularization, Secularisms,” in *Rethinking Secularism*, eds. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 55.

“without religion” is contained in the German *säkular*, and can be dated to the early twentieth century. Prior to then, *weltlich/Weltlichkeit* was preferred among nineteenth-century writers, and were the equivalent concepts to *laïque/laïcité*.⁶⁸ Additionally, in contemporary German, authors may use *Laizität* to translate *laïcité* apart from *Säkularität* or *Säkularisierung*.⁶⁹

Given all of the preceding, I will translate the various forms of *laïque/laïcité* in the following manner. *Séculariser* and *laïciser* will be rendered using their English equivalents, “to secularize” and “to laicize,” in order to retain some of the specificity of the French senses and actions involved. Similarly, for the adjectives *séculier* and *laïque*, I will use “secular” and “laic.” Regarding the noun *laïcité*, and continuing the scheme just presented, an English rendering would ideally convey the idea of “laic-ness.” Early twentieth-century American English did have two terms to convey the state of being laic—“laicity” and “laicality”—but they are today more obscure than the adjectival forms and pertain to the sense of being a laic, i.e., a lay person.⁷⁰ Of course, a lay person is one of the uses of *laïque* in French, but when the actors that will concern us here use *laïque/laïcité* to participate in political discussion or denote their scientific endeavor, they generally employ the sense of “no connection with the Catholic Church or spiritual jurisdiction.” The latter sense does not have a proper English equivalent, mostly likely because Britain and the United States do not have the legacy of a long, entwined relationship between the French State and the Catholic Church, resulting in a set of conventions, norms and social statuses that influenced language even as it and society changed over time.

⁶⁸ Lucian Hölscher, “The Religious and the Secular: Semantic Reconfigurations of the Religious Field in Germany from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries,” in *Religion and Secularity: Transformations and Transfers of Religious Discourses in Europe and Asia*, edited by Marion Eggert and Lucian Hölscher (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 35-58.

⁶⁹ Lisa Dittrich uses *Laizität* when referring to the French case in her comparative study of anticlericalism. Dittrich, “Europäischer Antiklerikalismus.”

⁷⁰ *Webster’s New International Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd ed. (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam, 1943), s.v., “laic” and “laicize.” See also *Webster’s New International* (Springfield, 1912).

Chapter Outline

Like the political leaders who were involved instituting the sciences of religion, the scholars of the Fifth Section understood that they were pursuing a laic activity. That activity also operated in the cultural field of positive science, but this did not mean that religion should recede in favor of science or be effaced from laic civil society altogether. For many of the scholars, the historical study of religion was a way to pursue a laic, rational religiosity. They thought that society should become more laic (i.e., no longer guided by the teachings of the clergy) but they were aware of the loss that would result from entirely abandoning religion. In contrast to the sociologists who later joined the Section, many historians of religion thought that a way to preserve a place for religion was to give it validity within the individual using the methods of positive science in place of belief. While that was one way to laicize religion, the sociologists of religion would pursue a different approach, which argued that sociability gave rise to religion, thereby reversing the long-standing view that religion was needed to serve as a foundation to society. This dissertation argues that the trajectory of secularity in nineteenth-century France is best understood as a reconfiguration and transposition of religious concepts and practices rather than a subtraction or partitioning. In proposing such a view, the story told here also gives a history of “the secular” that reveals an alternate configuration between faith and reason, between religion and science, that is not mere bifurcation.⁷¹ Faith and reason, religion and science, will be seen to operate more in partnership than in opposition.

⁷¹ The authors of the following special forum call for new configurations between the terms faith and reason. Jonathan Sheehan, Henning Trüper and Mario Wimmer, “Beyond Secularized Eschatology Introductory Remarks,” *Modern Intellectual History* 19 (December 2022): 1182-90.

Chapter 1 begins in the Restoration, the period when August Comte first elaborated positive philosophy, and presents two findings: (a) the meaning of the qualifier “positive” when applied to a body of knowledge that will allow us to understand its uses in subsequent chapters, and how the sciences of religion could later claim to be positive science; (b) the qualifier “positive” gained currency because of the post-revolutionary debate over society’s organization and a desire to move away from the abstract political theories that had led France astray during the revolutionary decade. Chapter 2 delves into the effort in the early Third Republic to abolish the Catholic faculties of theology, The Second Empire reaffirmed the value of the Catholic theology faculties, but after the fall of Napoleon III, they soon became a target of republicans who wished to establish a laic state. Surprisingly, the abolition of the Catholic faculties of theology (1885) provoked greater divisions among republicans and took longer to achieve passage than the laic reform of the primary school (1882). The primary school reform did not spark fears that the government was preparing to abrogate the Concordat and separate church and state, as was the case for the theology faculties.

Abolition of the Catholic faculties was soon followed by the creation of the Fifth Section in the Sciences of Religion. What exactly was taught in the Fifth Section and what its disciplinary practices were will concern us in Chapter 3. This will also be where we see how the study of religion counted a positive science and how historical study of religions supported a secular rational religiosity centered in the individual. The sciences of religion have been portrayed as a majority liberal Protestant affair, but we will find as well that the new field owed just as much to orientalist. In Chapter 4, we continue our study of the Fifth Section into the first decade after 1900, the period in which sociologists of religion joined the faculty. While the sociologists never outnumbered the historians at the Fifth Section, the new approach to the

phenomenon of religion had wide influence beyond the École Pratique given that it was one branch of Durkheimian sociology. As mentioned above, the emergence of the sociology of religion had significance in the history of instituting *laïcité* because it offered a way out of the post-revolutionary debate over the origin of society's institutions, in particular those that derived from religious teaching. The cohesive function of religion was, in effect, laicized and attributed to acts of association themselves. The final chapter also tries to show that, in terms of their use of historical materials, the sociologists were more in continuity with the practices of critical scholars of religions than has been previously appreciated. The difference was that sociologists used their positive textual facts to identify a religious object that was social in origin and not individual.

Chapter One

The Semantic Field of Positive Science

The abolition of the Catholic theology faculties and their replacement by the sciences of religion were preceded in 1880 by the addition of a new chair at the Collège de France in the general history of religions. Public pressure to incorporate the history of religions in universities had initially come from the liberal Protestant scholar Maurice Vernes, but Émile Littré, who was at the time positivism's most visible representative, lent his support to the project.¹ Littré agreed with Vernes that by adopting the methods of historical criticism, theology could become a positive science. The critical scholar would treat theology according to the diverse forms that religion had taken over the course of humanity's evolution, and would describe its "birth, development, influence and decline" on the basis of natural causes and not supernatural ones. And with its emphasis on historical texts and institutions, the new critical study of religion could be compared to positive theology in the Catholic tradition, which was concerned with "the study of Holy Scripture, ecclesiastical history, the decisions of the Fathers, popes and councils." However, critical scholars of religion would be free to judge texts independent of orthodoxy or ecclesiastical superiors; in fact, the method of criticism counted as an "experimental method," Littré contended, because its practitioners ascertained the facts and determined what inductive conclusion could be made from them. For all these reasons, theology pursued as the history of religions would be "a fully positive study."²

¹ Maurice Vernes, "La théologie considérée comme science positive et de sa place dans l'enseignement laïque," *Revue scientifique* 2nd. ser., vol. 16 (1879): 734-6.

² Émile Littré, review of "De la théologie considérée comme science positive et de sa place dans l'enseignement laïque" by Maurice Vernes, *La Philosophie positive*, 2nd ser., vol. 22 (1879): 365-66.

Littre's endorsement of laicized theology as a positive science is perplexing for several reasons. If the scholar of religion applied historical criticism to texts and past institutions, how, then, did he employ the experimental method in the way that a chemist or physiologist would in their laboratory? A chemist or physiologist might not agree on what exactly the experimental method was, but there must be a broader understanding of basic criteria among speakers who refer to positive science.³ Additionally, what was the object of study in a laic, experimental theology if, as Littre admitted, God was an "incognizable" entity? Littre hinted at an answer when he explained that studying the "similarities" and "dissimilarities" among all religions would shed light on the common character of institutions that were "born and developed within different social contexts." For Littre, then, the positive history of religions contributed to knowledge of the factors that determined social phenomena, the final and most important body of knowledge to develop in the positivist hierarchy of the sciences. For Vernes, by contrast, remaking theology to be a positive science should lead to deeper religious understanding. Once the techniques of criticism were no longer "the weapon any philosophical or religious doctrine," he wrote in 1876, "only then might the true meanings and teachings of Scripture be brought to light."⁴

Vernes, who later joined the Fifth Section, and his fellow scholars of religion believed that they were doing positive science. What entitled them to label their activity in that way and have others understand it? "Positive science" was a widely used concept in the second half of the nineteenth century, among individuals like Littre who were positivists and individuals who were

³ Claude Bernard and Louis Pasteur famously held different views on hypotheses in the experimental method. Bernard typically began experiments with hypotheses that had little or no support and discarded them as he encountered new, unexpected results. In contrast, Pasteur rarely investigated by way of unexpected outcomes, but thought carefully about his hypotheses and used experiments to verify his initial intuitions; if a test failed to validate a hypothesis, he generally did not explore that avenue further. Mirko D. Grimek, *Le Legs de Claude Bernard* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 344-47.

⁴ Maurice Vernes, "Critique religieuse," *Revue politique et littéraire*, 2nd. ser., vol. 7 (1874): 513-16.

positivists by degrees or not at all. This chapter will leave aside the question of determining positivism's exact contribution to a category called positive science and instead treat positive science as its own semantic field whose association with positivism was generally acknowledged even if actors departed from positivist doctrine. For example, in the early 1870s, Pierre Larousse, who edited and published the widely-circulated *Grand Dictionnaire*, explained that the different sciences used to be seen as parts of a "whole called philosophy." However, by attempting to "banish psychology and metaphysics from the scientific domain," positivism had forced a divorce between the experimental sciences and philosophy. After doing so, the experimental, or positive, sciences "reserved the name 'science' for themselves."⁵ A semantic field is structure of signs that gives meaning to actions and ideas.⁶ Actors only understand the action they are taking or the thought they are expressing with reference to set of signs that structures their meaning. One of suggestions of the present chapter is that, in origin, during the Restoration, appeals to positive knowledge, or to making something positive, were responses to political circumstances that often also advocated a given solution. The invoking of positive knowledge later in the century would retain its socio-political dimension. This chapter equips us to preserve an actor's perspective when discussing the scientific production of Fifth Section scholars.

The Meaning of 'Positive' about 1820: Between State Administration and Civil Society

In 1817 two separate initiatives were set in motion in Paris to promote positive knowledge. In April, Henri Saint-Simon published a prospectus entitled *L'Industrie* in which he

⁵ Larousse added that positive science was being unjust when it denied that "demonstrated psychic facts, subject to defined laws, could not constitute a true science." Pierre Larousse, s.v., "Science," *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle*, vol. 14 (Paris, 1875), 394

⁶ On the idea of remaking semantic fields, see Keith Michael Baker, introduction to *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth-Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

announced that the work of the new century was not “to tear down,” as the previous century had done, but “to lay the foundations of a new edifice (‘construction’) . . . [such that], “in a word, liberty would be no longer an abstraction, society no longer a fiction (‘roman’).”⁷ In addition to the prospectus, Saint-Simon distributed over the coming months several circulars, including one that he sent to Chateaubriand in June. In the June circular, he explained that a central part of erecting the new social edifice would be to give the system of collective ideas a new “imprint.” Over centuries the clergy had built up for the people a system of ideas that the eighteenth century had torn down. In its place, a new “terrestrial moral system” needed to be constructed, and to that end, “writers of all types, from philosophers proper to songwriters (‘chansonniers’), will have in the 19th century the common goal of making all ideas positive (‘rendre toutes les idées positives’).”⁸

Then, in October, a royal order instituted an annual prize in statistics to be awarded by the Academy of Sciences. Prior to the order, the Academy had appointed a committee to study the question of a prize, whose impetus had come from an anonymous donor who had approached Pierre-Simon Laplace. In a report authored by Joseph Fourier, the committee explained to the king’s ministers the interest that a prize could have: “[statistical] understanding has been regarded as important and even necessary by all enlightened governments. It began to flourish in the same period that the Academy of Sciences was founded, that is, during the ministry of Colbert.” Fourier’s report went on to make clear that, while the Academy’s prize would encourage statistical research by individuals, who could potentially have subversive views, “the Academy itself will always have as its primary aim to second the views of the government by

⁷ Henri Saint-Simon, “Prospectus” (April 1817), vol. 2 of *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2012), 1444.

⁸ Saint-Simon, “Opinion qui sera émise dans le troisième volume de L’Industrie,” vol. 2 of *Oeuvres complètes*, 1447.

adhering to the general plan that it has outlined.” The following year, in a brochure printed to announce the details of the prize competition to the public, Fourier again wrote: “the Academy will have satisfied the intentions of the government and those of the benefactor if, from the beginning, it will have revealed the true principles of [statistical] science, and promoted its understanding; inspired greater taste for positive studies (‘le gout des études positives’); and guided research that is devoted to public utility towards a common goal.”⁹

Although they were separate efforts, one undertaken with official sanction, the other as a private citizen, Saint-Simon’s project and the statistics prize both sought to encourage positive knowledge for similar reasons. They were responses to the same socio-political situation: Napoleon had been deposed and the monarchy restored, but the turmoil of ideas sparked by the Revolution persisted. In the second volume of *L’Industrie*, in an essay concerning the three political opinions that currently divided France, Saint-Simon observed: “since 1793 the French nation has entered into a state of disorganization that, to my eyes, has not yet ended. During this time, [the nation] has given memorable examples of all the virtues, as well as all the crimes. . . . Occupied in the search for a new principle, a new basis of organization, the French have pushed every experiment all the way to its final limit.”¹⁰ The current state of disorder would continue so long as the work that liberal opinion had partly accomplished through the Revolution remained incomplete. Liberals had successfully overthrown the old “feudal and theological institutions,” a fact proven by the inability of troops from the rest of Europe to restore the French clergy and nobility to their “old status and importance.” However, the second component of what liberals had tried to achieve remained unfinished: “a plan for a new system of order that would replace

⁹ Joseph Fourier, “Rapport sur le programme” (1818), quoted in Eric Brian, “Le prix Montyon de statistique à l’Académie royale des sciences pendant la Restauration,” *Revue de synthèse*, 4th ser., vol. 2 (Apr-Jun 1991): 217.

¹⁰ Saint-Simon, “Septième lettre” in vol. 2 of *L’Industrie*, vol. 2 of *Oeuvres complètes*, 1491-92.

the old, the establishment of an administration of common interests ('intérêts communs') that was organized according to the wisdom and insight of the time." Even though the old institutions had been toppled, they, and the opinions attached to them, would persist "until the day when a new conception of social organization had been produced, a conception that was of a nature to strike as evident ('frapper d'évidence') any right mind."¹¹

Similarly, the statistics prize sought to help France move out its period of tumult and give a stable order to society. Charles-Étienne Coquebert de Montbret, a member of the Academy's committee that recommended the prize, recalled in 1828 the motivations that had led to the founding of the prize ten years earlier. The prize's benefactor "had seemed to say to the generation that was coming up: the time of vague theories and ardent passions is over. The century that lies before you will be one of considered examination of the general interests ('les intérêts généraux'). . . You must weigh all that happens, this opinion or that opinion, using this scale." In order to read profitably books that attracted a wide audience, "you will need to have nourished your mind with positive understanding ('connaissances positives'). Such understanding, statistics will give you. . . . Attested facts will triumph little by little over false systems, all opinions will accede to them, and if you are not initially clear on the conclusions to be drawn from them, a more attentive examination of the same facts will rectify erroneous inductions."¹²

In the initiatives of both Saint-Simon and the Academy of Sciences, the rationale behind promoting positive knowledge was to help end the revolutionary period, to take ideas about proper governance or society's organization out of the realm of debate by making them things

¹¹ Saint-Simon, "Septième lettre" in vol. 2 of *L'Industrie*, vol. 2 of *Oeuvres complètes*, 1494-95.

¹² Charles-Étienne Coquebert de Montbret, procès-verbaux du 9 juin 1828, quoted in Brian, "Le prix Montyon de statistique," 217.

that were incontestable and created consensus. Both Saint-Simon and Coquebert de Montbret referred to this reconciling aspiration for positive knowledge in their respective phrases: “a conception that was of a nature to strike as evident any right mind,” and “attested facts will triumph little by little over false systems, all opinions will accede to them.” Something that is evident and demonstrated, as opposed to imagined or probable, is one of the two principal meanings of positive in this period. We have also encountered the second meaning in our two authors. In his prospectus and circular, Saint-Simon contrasted society in which liberty was an abstraction with the new edifice he would build, one founded on a “terrestrial moral system.” Similarly, Coquebert de Montbret opposed the earlier time of “vague theories” with the current time of careful examination of facts. Something that is of the actual or worldly domain, as opposed to speculative or eternal realm, is the second principal meaning of positive. Although we are beginning our story in the Restoration, the period in which positivism was first developed into a philosophical system, we will find that the two principal meanings of *positif* remain consistent with time.¹³ Despite the aspiration of Saint-Simon and others that making ideas positive would end debate and create consensus, the reality was, and would continue to be, that matters pertaining to the ordering of society or its moral systems were very much contested. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, there would be a recurring desire to make religious or social principles positive precisely because of persistent debate.

¹³ Two additional instances of the speculative-positive distinction in the Restoration occur in geology: “géologie positive, ou géognosie, and géologie conjecturale, ou géogénie *Dictionnaire classique d’histoire naturelle*, vol. 7 (Paris: Rey et Gravier, 1825), s.v., “Géologie.” Benjamin Constant distinguished between the speculative and positive actions of the legislator/state: “Les fonctions positives du législateur sont d’une nature infiniment simple; et dans leur exercice, l’action du pouvoir n’est ni équivoquée ni compliquées . . . [ses fonctions spéculatives] n’ont point de bases fixes, de limites certaines; elle ne s’exerce point sur de faits.” Constant, pt. 1, ch. 9, *Commentaire sur l’ouvrage de Filangieri* (1822), vol. 26 of *Oeuvres complètes*, Kurt Kloocke and Antonio Trampus, eds. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 149.

Although Saint-Simon and the academicians believed that encouraging positive knowledge would end the years of conflict and revolution, the new regime of the Restoration itself offered reasons to be concerned with solidifying what society's "common interests" were. In the years 1816-1818, there was lively debate about the nature of the cabinet in a constitutional monarchy and in whose interests the ministers served. The Charter of 1814 had only stipulated that ministers were "responsible." But to whom? To the king, the parliament, the electorate? And was a cabinet to be merely a royal council of ministers or was the king only to endorse decisions made by the ministers? The questions became more acute after royalists won a majority of seats in the first elections of August 1815. Two influential royalist writers contended, on one hand, that ministers should come from the parliamentary majority since it was the Chamber that articulated the will of the electorate, but on the other, that the king had the power to call for new elections if he was unsatisfied with a cabinet.¹⁴ Liberals, who had greater representation in the cabinet than in parliament (a source of ire to royalists), tended to uphold royal prerogative over that of the parliamentary majority, seeing in the king the guarantee of France's new direction. Each faction, then, interpreted the constitution according to their own interests and past grievances.¹⁵ In such a context, it is understandable that the Academy of Sciences would be careful to note that it was not attempting to rival ministerial authority in promoting a science associated with "enlightened administration" but that it would always adhere to the "general views outlined by the government."¹⁶ Alternatively, the royal household appears to have

¹⁴ The two authors were Eugène Arnaud de Vitrolles and François-René de Chateaubriand. Both are summarized in Rosanvallon cited in the note immediately below. Vitrolles, *Du ministère dans le gouvernement représentatif* (Paris: Dentu, 1815); Chateaubriand, *De la monarchie selon la Charte* (Paris: Le Normand, 1816).

¹⁵ Pierre Rosanvallon, *La monarchie impossible: les Chartes de 1814 et de 1830* (Paris: Fayard, 1994), 80-5.

¹⁶ Eric Brian finds that inscribing the statistic prize in the legacy of Colbert also served to assuage royal officials. The "enlightened administration" and "political arithmetic" of Turgot or Condorcet were still too closely associated with the Revolution. Brian, "Le prix Montyon de statistique," 213-15.

encouraged separately from the Academy's prize statistical surveys of departments so as to have greater familiarity with local needs, productive capacities and legal regimes.¹⁷

If Saint-Simon and the Academy prize shared the aim of advancing reflection on society's common interests, they began to depart from one another when it came to where the direction of collective activity originated. Saint-Simon's project was closer to administration "from below," or at least not from among the classes of elites that had previously given society its organization, the clergy and the nobility. By contrast, the statistics prize was more in line with administration "from above," from among the notables, be they official savants or prefects. This divergence in how positive knowledge was to be operationalized aligns with a distinction that the Comte de Mirabeau made in the first year of the Revolution: "there is this essential difference between the instructor of the people and the political leader ('administrateur politique'), the one thinks only of what is and the other, only what can be."¹⁸ Although Mirabeau did not use the qualifier *positif*, his delineation mirrors the opposition that we have been tracing in the meaning of positive: things that are speculative versus things that are actual or positive. For Mirabeau, only the statesman or administrator operated in the positive realm. We may read Saint-Simon in 1817 as aspiring to make the principles of the instructor of the people positive, no longer those of the metaphysician.¹⁹ In this way, the Saint-Simonian vision of giving society a common direction and a new basis converges with the process of society becoming laic, which is to say, the process of establishing society as the source of its own instructors of the people. The conception of

¹⁷ The two surveys reviewed in the following articles were dedicated to the Duke of Angoulême, the nephew of Louis XVIII. *Le Moniteur universel*, 24 September 1818 and 27 October 1818.

¹⁸ Mirabeau, "On the Name to be Assumed by the Assembly" (15 June 1789), in vol. 1. of H. Morse Stephens, ed., *The Principal Speeches of the Statesman and Orators of the French Revolution, 1789-1795* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), 71.

¹⁹ Mirabeau contrasted the statesman to the metaphysician in the passage cited above from the speech of 15 June 1789: "Il est cette difference essentielle entre le métaphysicien, qui, dans la mediation du cabinet, saisit la verité dans son énergiue pureté, et l'homme d'état, qui est obligé de tenir compte des antécédents, des difficultés, des obstacles." Mirabeau, *The Principal Speeches*, 71.

society that Saint-Simon was opposing was that in which the classes that sat atop the social hierarchy legislated society's collective system of ideas. In *L'Industrie*, a new collective system of ideas was to come from and encourage the cooperation of manufacturers ('industriels') and savants working in the sciences of observation, since these two groups contributed the most to public prosperity and general welfare.²⁰

Saint-Simon was not alone in responding to the circumstances of the early Restoration and seeing in the spread of positive knowledge the key to giving society common direction and coherence. Between 1818 and 1823, a series of new periodicals emerged that shared a very similar aim: to allow members of the reading public to kept abreast of all the developments in the sciences, arts and letters and to appreciate their interconnection, or the "mutual aid" ('secours mutuel') that each field lent the other fields in a common enterprise of investigation and improvement.²¹ In October 1818, Marc-Antoine Jullien circulated a prospectus of a new bibliographic review journal, the *Revue Encyclopédique*. It was in reality a restructuring of an existing journal, the *Annales Encyclopédiques*, on the basis of a philosophy of the sciences, or rational "system of all human knowledge" that showed the relations among all its branches. A new "analytic bibliography" based on that system would "establish among men who are engaged in the sciences and letters reciprocal and regular communication, exchanges of readings and researches that were pursued in the same spirit and directed toward a common goal despite their being in different spheres."²² Although in the prospectus Jullien only referred to the benefit of showing the relations between advances in knowledge and perfecting the social order, he had in an article a few months earlier written more frankly about the importance of reestablishing a

²⁰ Saint-Simon, "Prospectus," *Oeuvres complètes*, 1444

²¹ Along with the two journals discussed in the text, there was the *Bulletin universel des sciences et de l'industrie* founded in 1823 by the Baron of Férussac.

²² "Prospectus," *Le Moniteur universel*, 18 October 1818.

sense of a common direction in society after years of tumult: “Everything holds together (‘tout se tient’). Reparative epochs come shortly after epochs of convulsion and tempest; creations follow disasters, and are built upon the ruins.”²³ He also addressed his adversaries (presumably royalist): “If instruction is less free and less dispersed, you will have less enlightenment (‘lumières’), less wealth, less benefit from advancement and well-being . . . You, who are trying to return us to systems that have been exhausted by the use of time and destroyed by the movement of things, have you carefully considered the state of degradation and misery into which the accomplishment of your mindless wishes would lead us?”²⁴ Like Saint-Simon, Jullien believed that coordinating activity to reinforce a new social edifice was the best defense against a return to disorder or, even, the old institutions.

In 1820, another bibliographic review journal appeared, under the title *Tablettes Universelles*. Even though the *Tablettes* was more universal in scope—“a repertory of events, news, and all that concerns history, the sciences, literature and the arts”—its editor also related the usefulness of a such publication to the current political moment: “Everything holds together (‘tout se tient’), everything is coordinated in a representative government. The merit of this arrangement of powers is to advance all knowledge, to connect to a common center all the branches of human knowledge so that, mutually seconded one by the other, they are conducive to the goal of every society: the happiness of its members.”²⁵ Unlike Jullien at *the Revue Encyclopédique*, who appeared more committed to future progress than constitutional monarchy per se, the *Tablettes* sought to reinforce the current form of social organization: “under this regime, instructing the people, dispersing enlightenment to all classes, is to usefully serve

²³ Marc-Antoine. Jullien, “Esquisse d’un essai sur la philosophie des sciences, contenant un nouveau projet de division générale des connaissances humaines,” *Annales encyclopédiques* 6 (1818): 348.

²⁴ Jullien, “Esquisse,” 354-55.

²⁵ “Introduction,” *Tablettes universelles, ou résumé de tous les journaux et bibliographie générale* 1 (1820): ii.

society; it is to be a friend to constitutional laws; it is to be worthy of one's country."²⁶ While the *Revue* and the *Tablettes* might not have entirely overlapped politically, they both recognized that promoting the spread of knowledge and coordinating activity were efforts that involved the whole reading public. This was a shift from the earlier genre of general review journal that was intended for savants. For example, in 1810, when the Société Philomatique of Paris released a new series of its *Bulletin des Sciences*, a review in the *Magasin Encyclopédique* recalled that, from the beginning, "the principal goal of the Société Philomatique [had been] to facilitate communication among savants" who worked in their own fields of research and could not read the other specialized journals that covered the other fields in the study of nature, such as, "mathematics, physics, mechanics, natural history, medicine, agriculture."²⁷ Now, through the bibliographic review journals of the early Restoration, the sciences were starting to become a social enterprise—one that reinforced a new social organization—and not only an enterprise of cooperation among savants.²⁸

In the *Revue* and *Tablettes*, fields such as morality, theology or ecclesiastical history had their own bibliographic divisions and were thereby incorporated into the synthesis that was being created for readers. By contrast, Saint-Simon, as we have seen, envisioned a different kind of synthesis, a terrestrial moral system to replace the older moral system instituted by the clergy and nobility. The institution of a new moral system was also why Saint-Simon believed that he was productively building rather than only tearing down, as the eighteenth-century had done. This same sense of building up would also figure in Auguste Comte's early writings on establishing a

²⁶ *Ibid.*, ii.

²⁷ "Nouveau Bulletin des Sciences, par la Société Philomatique de Paris," *Magasin encyclopédique, ou journal des sciences, des lettres et des arts* 2 (1810): 369-70.

²⁸ Denise Phillips similarly traces shifts in membership of the reading versus learned public in early nineteenth-century Germany. Phillips, *Acolytes of Nature: Defining Natural Science in Germany, 1770-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

“positive science of politics.” Comte, who began in 1817 as Saint-Simon’s private secretary and co-authored the third and fourth volumes of *L’Industrie*, wrote several essays on his own in 1819 on how to make politics a positive science as well as Condorcet’s contribution to such a politics. Similar to his mentor, the study of the common interest served as the basis for a set of principles to govern social organization. For Comte, making fundamental changes to political science was necessitated by “the changes in the order of things,” or the new ordering of societies that issued from the Revolution and Napoleonic wars. European nations now found themselves in a state in which “the law of the strongest must disappear from social aggregates, and in which the law of the common interest, which had only played a subaltern and modificatory role, must become the single rule of all social relations.” The common interest had only played a subordinate role because until the current period “all political theories had been essentially founded on theology,” an arrangement that coincided with the primacy of the law of the strongest since “a social order based on strength could not maintain itself without the aid of superstition, that is, without a ruse.”²⁹

Comte argued that the way to break with the political theories based on theology was to give politics a new aim, the public good, and to change the way in which political questions were treated. By making the common interest the sole aim of politics, Comte was giving it a positive object, a thing belonging not to the heavenly or theological realm but to the actual or worldly domain. And he was not simply proclaiming a purpose for politics but was giving primacy to a principle that existed historically and had been considered marginal in earlier societies. In this way, Comte’s science of politics would be positive in contrast to the political theory of absolute monarchy and the principles of 1789. Comte considered “the declarations of the rights of man of

²⁹ Auguste Comte, “Ce que c’est que la politique positive” (1819), in Paulo E. de Berrêdo Carneiro and Pierre Arnaud, eds., *Auguste Comte: écrits de jeunesse, 1816-1828* (Paris: Mouton, 1970), 467-68.

the last century” to be founded on a “remnant of theology.” Although Comte did not explain what that remnant was, the political system based on the rights of man did not have “observed facts” as its foundation, and the same was true for the political system based on divine right, whose principles were “admitted without examination, inaccessible to our means of verification and [were things] about which discussion was forbidden.” Now in the postrevolutionary order of things, no obstacles stood in the way of founding a positive political theory that would “have no other goal but to research the most advantageous mode through which men may combine their efforts, and [would be] treated uniquely by the method employed in the other sciences, which is to say, by the method of observation.” If so pursued, politics would “take its place among the sciences and be regarded, not as equally advanced, but as equally positive as astronomy, chemistry and physiology.”³⁰ Comte’s opposition to the political system of the Old Regime did not mean that he was an advocate of a democratic system founded on rights of the people, and subsequent generations of positivist republicans would have to refashion Comte’s ideas to align them with the Republic.³¹

In another 1819 essay on Condorcet’s contribution to political science, Comte revealed that building a new social edifice relied on the study of history and not arithmetic or statistics. Condorcet had developed the idea of basing “social science on a mathematical theory” but his more insightful contribution was to conceive of a history of the progress of the human spirit.³² In so doing, he had helped to prepare the beginning of a positive theory of politics, since it was only from “the general facts concerning the march of civilization and the resultant law of its improvement” that a positive theory could be elaborated. However, even though he took the first

³⁰ Comte, “Ce que c’est que la politique positive,” 468-69.

³¹ A point also made by Claude Nicolet, *L’idée républicaine en France, 1789-1924: essai d’histoire critique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).

³² Comte, “Sur les travaux politiques de Condorcet” (1819), in *Comte: écrits de jeunesse*, 483.

step, his attempt missed the mark. Condorcet's history of the human spirit remained almost exclusively in the mode of critique, of "judging the past by comparing it to present knowledge ('lumières')." He was consequently unable to see things that he should have, namely, "that the institutions of each epoch are and should be in harmony with the corresponding state of enlightenment such that a very harmful institution in a certain period could be very useful in a less advanced stage of civilization." In a long footnote to this passage, Comte gave the "most surprising" example of an institution that had exercised in an earlier period a beneficial influence and that Condorcet had missed: Christianity. He saw only in the "establishment of Christianity the triumph of a superstition, one that he regarded as quite inferior to Greek superstition." How could he have seen, Comte asked, "in the triumph of Christianity the sign and even the cause of the complete decadence of the sciences and philosophy when, by contrast, the facts proved that the wisest philosophers of that period hurried to bring about the definitive establishment of Christianity, which they regarded, and with reason, as the most liberal project that their century could undertake?" It must have been because Condorcet judged earlier centuries according to the state of knowledge attained in his own. Otherwise, he would have seen that "the principle of universal fraternity, which was introduced by Christianity, was an immense refinement of Greek and Roman morality, and that theism was incomparably superior to polytheism."³³

We encounter in Comte's long footnote about Condorcet a prelude to the debate over the contribution of the Christian religion to modern civilization that would play out in the works of orientalist and historians of religion later in the century. Even apart from Comte's conception of positive politics, which required determining the laws of progress from changes in the series of historical events, the question of the Christianity's role in society was a subject of political

³³ *Ibid.*, 488.

debate in the Restoration owing not only to an active the royalist party but also to the seemingly conflicting position articulated in the Charter of 1814. Article 5 preserved the freedom of religion proclaimed during the Revolution but then asserted in Article 6 that “the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman religion was the religion of state.”³⁴ To understand this peculiar position, we need to go back to the motivations that led Napoleon to sign a Concordat with Rome in 1801 and institute a system of recognized religions in which Catholicism was deemed the “religion of the majority of the French people.” Even though the restored Bourbon monarchy took the additional step of making Catholicism “the religion of state,” the Charter preserved the regime of the Concordat in which the state protected organized religion because of its beneficial role in society.³⁵ We will encounter in the rationale for the Concordat another use of positive, now applied to religion instead of the sciences and industry.

Negotiated over almost a year between 1800 and 1801, the Concordat represented the centerpiece of Napoleon’s effort to reconcile with the Catholic Church after the Revolution, seeking to enlist its help in pacifying society and imposing order. No society could exist without morals, he told the clergy of Milan in 1800, and morality could only be ensured by religion. In the agreement ultimately reached a year later, confiscated ecclesiastical property would remain with its new owners but the state would now pay the salaries of all clergy, ending the penury into which many Catholic priests had fallen after refusing to adhere to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in 1790. Bishops would now be appointed by the state and then canonically installed by the Pope. Clergy had to swear obedience to the Consuls and encourage loyalty to the government by saying the prayer, “Lord, save our Republic,” at the end of each Divine Office. Like the

³⁴ “Charte constituonelle du 4 juin 1814,” appendix to Rosanvalon, *La monarchie impossible*, 252.

³⁵ Article 7 stipulated that all ministers of recognized religions would be paid by the treasury of the state.

Concordat of 1516, the agreement of 1801 gave the French state greater rights in policing and regulating the affairs of the Church.³⁶

Even though signed in 1801, the Concordat was not officially promulgated in France until April of the following year, at which point one of Napoleon's counselors, the jurist Jean-Étienne-Marie Portalis, explained to the legislature the purpose of entering into an agreement with Rome. Portalis' justification rested on a similar premise to Napoleon's words in Milan: a stable political body needed morality and morality could not be instituted or respected without religion.³⁷ But Portalis also explained the importance of religion to a well-ordered society in relation to laws. Both laws and morality were needed because "men do not only follow their reason; they are naturally inclined to hope and to fear, and the founders of nations thought it necessary to usefully implement these means to guide men to well-being and virtue." However, laws and morality were not sufficient on their own to preserve order and required the additional influence of religion: "law regulates only certain actions, [but] religion embraces them all; law only stops the arm, [but] religion rules the heart." The force of a law derived not just from its "goodness" but also from the fact that it was "a decision, not a simple thesis but a fact." Apart from their theological truth-value, which did not concern the public administrator, religions had the same concrete merits as laws since "a religious morality, which amounted to formal commands, necessarily had a force that no philosophical morality could have." Portalis elided the matter of affirming the divine truth of a given religion by asserting that, despite the diversity in their external rites and dogmas, "the principal articles of natural morality constituted the substance

³⁶ William Roberts, "Napoleon, the Concordat of 1801, and its Consequences," in Frank J. Coppa, ed., *Controversial Concordats: The Vatican's Relations with Napoleon, Mussolini and Hitler* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999).

³⁷ "Corps législatif. Séance du 15 germinal," *Le Moniteur universel*, 16 Germinal Year X (6 April 1802).

(‘fonds’) of all positive religions.” By that common basis, “[moral] maxims and virtues are everywhere placed under the safeguard of religious sentiment and conscience.”³⁸

By making positive religion the guarantee of moral conduct that extended beyond the reach of laws, Portalis was employing the two senses of positive that we have traced in the early Restoration. Positive things are evident and demonstrated, on one hand, and actual and worldly, on the other. In Portalis’s account, it was moral rules that became evident and demonstrated because they were attached to a positive religion, and like Saint-Simon’s criterion “to strike as evident,” a positive religious moral precept had obligatory force through the watchful action of conscience, acquiring “a character of energy, fixity, and certainty that sciences of man could not give it.” The intellect assents in Portalis’ positive religion, but it is not strictly the author of the positive object as it would become in Saint-Simon and Comte.³⁹ Regarding the actual or worldly sense of positive, we have already seen that Portalis avoided the matter of theological validity, but he also treated positive religion as a worldly object by defining it according to external actions and customs. A great advantage of positive religions,” Portalis maintained, “was to link morality to rites, ceremonies and practices that then became its reinforcement . . . Morality is not a speculative science; it does not uniquely consist in the art of thinking well, but in that of doing well (‘bien faire’).” By contrast, “a natural religion” that was purely intellectual had the great weakness of “never becoming national or popular.” To become common to all members of the polity, a religion needed to have “forms of public worship (‘un culte public’), i.e., a religion needed to be positive. For these reasons, “human governments had an interest protecting

³⁸ “Corps législatif. Séance du 15 germinal,” *Le Moniteur universel*, 6 April 1802.

³⁹ Portalis did not think that knowledge from the sciences could be as widely efficacious as positive religion: “L’instruction est un besoin de l’homme; elle est sur-tout un besoin des sociétés. . . La science ne sera jamais que le partage du petit nombre; mais avec la religion, on peut être instruit sans être savant.”

religious institutions since it was through them that conscience intervened in all affairs of life.”⁴⁰

The social utility of organized religion, then, resulted from the fact that its moral codes were not a matter of speculative theory but the result of clearly prescribed actions and observances.

With the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, the Concordat regime of state protection of religious institutions remained in place. However, new defenses of the social function of religion were deployed when church-state relations became a matter of marked discussion in 1818 following a controversial publication by the former archbishop of Malines, Dominique Pradt. Pradt’s work itself came after the government had refused the draft of a new Concordat that Rome had sent to Paris in 1817.⁴¹ In a three-volume history of past Concordats, Pradt contended that mixing the spiritual and temporal powers had only resulted in “an inconvenience” for both sides and that it was better to fully separate them. A string of articles and brochures quickly appeared to refute Pradt’s views and reaffirm the social necessity of religion and the proper relations between church and state.⁴² Among the several conservative authors who took up their pens was Félicité de Lamennais, at the time a regular contributor to the journal *Le Conservateur*. “[Pradt] would like society to banish God from its laws and institutions by divorcing itself from all religions,” Lamennais wrote, and “place the entire [social] order under the protection of atheism.” That course of action would only result in the “legal destruction of the foundation of rights and duties,” and ultimately, “the dissolution of society.” Civil society only endured because “it was, first of all, religious society, and that is why we find from the

⁴⁰ “Corps législatif. Séance du 15 germinal,” *Le Moniteur universel*, 6 April 1802.

⁴¹ Pradt reprinted the draft document in volume three and along with an analysis of why it failed. The 1817 draft would have abrogated the 1801 agreement and restored the 1516 Concordat signed with François I. Pradt, *Les quatre concordats, suivis de considérations sur le gouvernement de l’Eglise en general, et sur l’Eglise de France en particulier, depuis 1515* (Paris: F. Béchét), 3 vols. in-8.

⁴² Joseph de Bernadi, *Observations sur les quatre Concordats de M. de Prat* (Paris: A. Egron, 1818); Genoude, review of *De la liberté des Cultes selon la Charte, avec quelques réflexions sur la doctrine de M. de Prat, et sur les bienfaits du Christianisme* by l’abbé Barande de Briges, *Le Conservateur*, vol. 3, no. 34 (1818): 337-35.

origin of the world a public religion in all peoples. Religion is not only necessary to society [but] is society itself; there could never be a national body without individuals who had common beliefs that supported common duties.”⁴³ Although Lamennais did not use the qualifier positive, he was in effect saying that having a public religion was a demonstrated general fact of history. We begin to understand what was at stake for Comte in establishing general facts of history to support a new science of social organization.

Although the uses of “positive” in Comte, Saint-Simon and Portalis share the senses of certain and worldly things, there was a semantic transition taking place between Portalis’s time and that of Comte. For Portalis, religion was positive insofar as it had moral codes that were attached to external practices and observances, but it was also positive in opposition to a natural religion and natural morality whose precepts were the substance of all positive religions. In Portalis, then, the opposed terms were positive and natural; whereas in Comte and Saint-Simon, they had become positive and speculative (or metaphysical). Portalis, as we have seen, treated religions as moral codes that seconded civil codes. As such, he was treating positive religion much like Enlightenment deists and rationalists who held that religions had been constituted by laws or commands and were essentially moral rules.⁴⁴ Comte and Saint-Simon would retain a similar view of religion as morality even as they sought to build a new moral system to replace religion’s. Curiously, there is a third point of convergence in the uses of positive in Portalis and Saint-Simon/Comte that will remain important to the positivist concept of positivity. Portalis

⁴³ Félicité de Lamennais, review of *Réponse aux quatre Concordats de M. de Prat, ancien archeveque de Malines* by M. l’abbé Clausel de Montals, *Le Conservateur*, vol. 3, no. 36 (1818): 440.

⁴⁴ Garret Green, “Positive Religion in the Early Philosophy of the German Idealists” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1971), 2. Green only discusses the eighteenth century but seventeenth-century rationalism and natural law theory likely also contributed to view of religion as moral law or code. Such an exploration is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but one naturally thinks of Francisco Suárez’s *On Laws and God the Lawgiver* (1612) and *Defense of the Catholic and Apostolic Faith against the Errors of the Anglican Sect* (1613) and Hugo Grotius’ *The Truth of the Christian Religion* (1629).

bracketed the question of the theological or divine validity of religious moral codes because this was inherent to the Enlightenment idea of positive religion: the term designated “the actual religions of the world, all of which were understood to derive their authority from some historical occurrence, usually an original teacher or founder.”⁴⁵ The theological validity of positive religion could be bracketed because it had been revealed at some point in history and there were large numbers of people who had assented and attested to its truth.⁴⁶ Saint-Simon would be equally interested in things that were certain and commanded assent—that “struck as evident any right mind”—but they would not be produced by revelation or a religious institution. To understand how Comte and Saint-Simon were adapting the concept of positivity within an existing semantic field while also retaining the sense of something demonstrated and requiring assent, we turn now to the origins of the term positive in jurisprudence and theology, and its later incorporation into natural philosophy.

The Semantic Field of Posited Things in Law, Theology and Natural Philosophy

One might begin a historical recovery of the term ‘positive’ by consulting dictionary definitions. According to the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* (1743), *positif* meant: “that which is certain and reliable (‘effectif’); that which is placed in evidence as something constant and assured.”⁴⁷ In the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d’Alembert, a positive fact was a fact that was

⁴⁵ Green, 3. Positive religion was, in effect, a synonym of revealed religion.

⁴⁶ Malbranche gave an argument for the certainty of religious truth on these grounds, the factual evidence of the original witnesses to revealed truth in history (viz., the Israelites). This argument used “sensible or factual proof” (*preuves sensibles, preuves de fait*) as opposed to “metaphysical proof” (*preuves métaphysiques*). See “Preuves de la religion par des faits certains” in Entretien VI of *Conversations chrétiennes*, vol. 1 of Malbranche, *Oeuvres*, ed. Geneviève Rodis-Lewis (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 1244-46.

⁴⁷ *Dictionnaire universel françois et latin de Trévoux*, vol. 5 (1743), s.v., “positif.” The University of Chicago, The ARTFL Project, Web.

“articulated very clearly and precisely, and not in equivocal terms.”⁴⁸ The sixth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française* (1832) kept the earlier meanings of “certain, constant, assured” but included an explanation of the phrase, “a positive mind” (‘un esprit positif’): “a mind that likes exactitude, that searches for certainty and fidelity in all things.”⁴⁹ While these definitions add further evidence to the first sense of positive that we have identified in the Restoration—things that are evident and demonstrated—we gain very little about how things became positive, or why they were treated as certain and evident such that an individual assented or conformed their opinion to them. To understand the concept of positivity that Saint-Simon and Comte would adapt and redeploy, we need to examine other areas in the landscape of European learning and their development over time. Although a full tracing of the changes in the meanings of positive across the jurisprudence, theology and natural philosophy would be too great a task for this chapter, it is possible, through a select number of examples, to identify several properties that the uses of Comte’s era have conserved—the three listed below—and that permit us to arrive at a concept of positivity that is applicable to the new disciplines claiming positive status in nineteenth-century France.

It will be shown that the properties are: (i) showing epistemological modesty, or the recognition that we do not have access to the ultimate causes or essential natures of things; (ii) formulating conclusions that are not arbitrary, doubtful or vague but are assured, constant and precise because the influence of biases or imagination has been restrained; (iii) producing rules or statements that have the status of laws—either civil or natural—and are accepted as evident and valid even though they have not been demonstrated to be morally or necessarily true. The

⁴⁸ *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. 13 (1765), s.v., “positif.” The ARTFL Project, Web.

⁴⁹ *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, 6th ed. (1832), s.v., “positif, ive.” The ARTFL Project, Web

rules are, in other words, treated as being “posited.” In this sense, rules or statements that are “posited” in positive knowledge share the meaning of the verb “to posit” in our contemporary ordinary use. A posit is something advanced as a helpful starting point or assumption in an argument but “that is not necessarily known to be true.”⁵⁰ For the philosopher Willard Quine, claims in positivist science are posits because they specify objects that we say exist and treat as real even though they are not literal descriptions of external reality.⁵¹

Let us begin with jurisprudence, the first field to employ the qualifier ‘positive.’ ‘Positive’ in the legal context derives from the past participle *positus* of the Latin verb *ponere* (to put, place, lay down).⁵² A positive law (*ius positivum / legis positiva*), then, is a law that has been laid down or “posited” in a community, generally by a lawgiver (*legis positor*). Despite its Latin etymology, however, the concept of positive law as an independent category dates only from the twelfth century, in the period of renewed legal inquiry set off by the recovery of the second compilation (*Digest*) of the Justinian *Corpus*.⁵³ The Roman jurists of antiquity had primarily operated with three categories of law: law of the state (*ius civile*), law of nature (*ius naturale*), and law of nations (*ius gentium*). *Ius civile* designated the body of laws belonging to a specific polity, and in the case of the laws of Rome, they were only applicable to Roman citizens. Foreigners who lived in Rome were seen to remain subject to the civil law of their home polities. However, foreigners did have rights under the law of nations and could seek redress before a special praetor, or judge. Since the law of nations was understood to be a set of norms that “could fit any person of any community or legal tradition,” special judges were charged with

⁵⁰ Simon Blackburn, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (2016), s.v. “posit,” Oxford Reference Web.

⁵¹ Robert Kirk, *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich, 2nd ed. (2005), s.v. “posit,” Oxford Reference Web; Michael Liston, “Scientific Realism and Antirealism,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Accessed November 20, 2021.

⁵² Green, 2.

⁵³ John Finnis, “The Truth in Legal Positivism,” chap. 7 in Robert P. George, ed., *The Autonomy of Law: Essays in Legal Positivism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

identifying the legal principles shared by all peoples. Over time, *ius gentium* was thought, on the one hand, to “represent human reason and the nature of things” and, on the other, to embody the law of nature. That is to say, it was seen as a law or rule that was “so reasonable and compelling that nature, rather than human convention, was responsible for its creation.”⁵⁴

By the thirteenth century, medieval jurists and philosophers had worked out a similar relationship between positive and natural law to that between *ius gentium* and *ius naturale*. On its own, the positive law laid down by a prince or law-giver contained nothing in it that compelled individuals to follow it. Medieval jurists developed two solutions to this problem. In the first, the obligatoriness of positive law resulted from that fact that it was traceable to a moral precept contained in the law of nature authored by God.⁵⁵ In the second solution, the obligatory force of positive law derived from the will of the prince since the prince’s will was “held to be reason” (*pro ratione voluntas*). This solution did not win the same degree of acceptance as the first since not all jurists were prepared to acknowledge that the will of a single prince could represent human reason or produce a rule so reasonable that only nature or God could have created it. Since it only reflected the will of the prince who had laid it down, positive law was understood to vary from place law while the law of nature was thought to be immutable.⁵⁶

Owing to the Reformation and Wars of Religion, the relation of positive to natural law began to change again as a new approach in legal theory—legal positivism—developed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Interestingly, scientific positivism also has its roots in the same period, roughly 1650 to 1800. In the parallel development of legal and scientific

⁵⁴ Tamar Herzog, *A Short History of European Law: The Last Two and a Half Millennia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 26-7.

⁵⁵ Finnis, “The Truth in Legal Positivism,” 197-200.

⁵⁶ Kenneth Pennington, *The Prince and the Law, 1200-1600: Sovereignty and Rights in the Western Legal Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 44-5.

positivism, we encounter the third property of positivity, which, although it was the first to appear historically, comes last in our list. In legal theory, by the end of eighteenth century, divine ordinance, or the law of nature authored by God, would lose its validity as the source of obligatoriness in positive law. Similarly, by the late eighteenth century, natural philosophes would cease to refer to God as the legislator of nature in order to guarantee the status of empirically-based laws of nature that described objects. In both fields, a rule or statement that held the status of law was accepted as real and valid even though it had not been demonstrated to be morally or necessarily true. The rule or empirical statement was thus treated as being “posited” and not requiring additional explanation.

As will be recalled, positive law was understood in the medieval period to rely on a connection with the moral precepts of natural or divine law for part of its force as a rule of conduct. The development of legal positivism entailed the decoupling of positive law from its normative link with higher forms of law and the moral precepts they contained.⁵⁷ Up to about 1650, Jan Schröder explains, a law was considered a law if it was just; generally the law of nature that had been “placed” by God provided the just system of right conduct behind positive law. However, between 1650 and 1800, the concept of law underwent several changes and lost its coherence as a just rule. First, the law of nature expanded to include a physical law of objects and not solely a moral law among humans. Second, following religious schism and war, jurists dropped the expectation that positive law had to be reasonable or align with natural law in some way to have obligatory force. This may be seen as a victory for the *pro ratione voluntas* (“will is held to be reason”) principle of positive law since an existing legal system—even one that was

⁵⁷ Jan Schröder, “The Concept of (Natural) Law in the Doctrine of Law and Natural Law of the Early Modern Era,” chap. 4 in Lorraine Daston and Michael Stolleis, eds., *Natural Law and Laws of Nature in Early Modern Europe: Jurisprudence, Theology, Moral and Natural Philosophy* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2008).

the arbitrary will of the prince—was preferred to “protracted dispute over actual legal and moral truth.”⁵⁸ Instead of having a connection to a moral ordinance, positive law became an obligation, or to use Hobbes’ famous phrase, the command of a superior will. Now that positive law had lost its criterion of being a just rule, the idea that God was the legislator of the law of nature receded in importance; instead of being “written” in our hearts by God and evident to our minds, the law of nature was discoverable through reason applied to “the nature of man and things.”⁵⁹ As a result of these changes in the concept of law, a greater contrast existed between positive and natural law by the end of the eighteenth century.

Given that Schröder’s history of legal positivism treats primarily the German lands, let us now briefly turn to exploring the similar change in the concept of law in the French context. In the first volume of his influential *Les lois civiles dans leur ordre naturel* (1689), the legal theorist Jean Domat began his inquiry by offering a demonstration of the two first principles of all law. Even though the Christian religion had revealed the two first principles, which “God had established to provide the foundations of order in human society and [to serve as] the sources of all rules of justice and equity,” it was possible to discover the principles without the light of religion since “they [were] engraved deep in our nature.”⁶⁰ By the light of reason, the desired first principles would be evident in “our nature” once the purpose for which man had been made had been established, i.e., the end toward which his purpose carried him. Nothing in this world could serve as the end of man’s activities, Domat argued, because everything in this world was an “instrument” (*appareil*) for our needs and would perish when the world ceased. Only God could be the object toward which all human activities tended since only He was “capable of

⁵⁸ Schröder, 64.

⁵⁹ Schröder, 67.

⁶⁰ Jean Domat, *Traité des lois*, in *Oeuvres complètes de J. Domat*, Joseph Rémy, ed., vol. 1 (Paris: F. Didot et C. Béchét, 1828), 1-2.

filling the infinite void of the mind and heart” in a truly enduring way. Therefore, given what was evident in our nature and taught to us through religion, the first principle of all law was to seek and to love the supreme good of humanity, or God. Domat’s second principle followed from the first: to live in society and to love each other, since men were only worthy of receiving the supreme good, which was given to all men in common, after they had joined themselves with others who were seeking that end and showing love towards their neighbors.⁶¹

By the first decades of the nineteenth century, the kind of preliminary demonstration of first principles that Domat had undertaken had become superfluous. The obligatory force of laws no longer needed to be justified in terms of their dependence on self-evident principles or the moral system legislated by God. The act of the public authority or sovereign will was now sufficient on its own to be the source of law’s obligatory force. As the Paris professor of law Alexandre Duranton wrote in 1825, the only thing that varied was the kind of government, but in every case, law was a “rule that an authority established and that we are required to obey.”⁶² Similarly, the editors of the 1813 edition of the *Répertoire universel et raisonné de jurisprudence* held that law was “an act of the sovereign will that either commands certain things, permits them under specific circumstances, or prohibits them, [and] does so in an absolute way or with reservations.” It is not surprising that the emergence of the positive concept of law by the turn of the eighteenth century coincided with the movement to codify the laws of European states. As was true for the French *Civil Code* of 1804, the new law codes were intended to enshrine principles of natural reason as the source of law. In practice, however, the codes tended to contribute to the opposite result: natural law receded in importance and the will of the public

⁶¹ Domat, 3-6.

⁶² Alexandre Duranton, *Cours de droit français suivant le Code civil*, vol. 1 (Paris: Nève, 1825), 21.

authority came to be seen as the only source of obligation in law.⁶³ We encountered a similar aspiration in Portalis to claim that all religious moral codes depended on natural morality but, in practice, the obligatory force of moral codes need to be supplied by the rites and dogmas of positive religions, an external authority that seconded the civil power.

The qualifier “positive” was also used in theology, but appeared more recently than in its use in jurisprudence. About 1500, following both the late medieval nominalist controversy and the humanist criticisms of the dialectic method of doing theology, the theologian John Major in Paris drew a distinction between treating questions “positively” and “scholastically” in an effort to separate theological doctrine from speculative philosophy.⁶⁴ The positive approach would now give an exposition of the points of doctrine based on the faith articulated by the Fathers and early doctors of the Church prior to the medieval Scholastics. The Reformation only increased the desire for a departure from Scholastic dialectic because the reformers had called into question the “fidelity of the Church to its sources.” In addition to the Patristic sources already in use, Catholic practitioners of positive theology also began to incorporate Scripture and the documents produced by early ecclesial councils. In this way, practitioners explicated the contents, or “givens,” of the faith professed by persons whose understanding and authority were taken to be indisputable. They sought, thereby, to show the conformity of dogma and current teachings of the Church with its ancient sources.⁶⁵ Although it could be argued that articles of faith were treated as having been laid down by the Fathers and authors of Scripture, it is not known whether sixteenth-century positive theologians were originally using “posited” in such manner.

⁶³ J. M. Kelly, *A Short History of Western Legal Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press of Oxford University Press, 1992), 312.

⁶⁴ Tshishiku Tshibangu, “Melchior Cano et la théologie positive,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* [Louvain Journal of Theology and Canon Law] 40 (October 1964): 326-28.

⁶⁵ Yves Congar, *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, vol. 15 (Paris: Letouzey, 1946), s.v., “Théologie. Spécialisations,” 427-29.

We still find the distinction between positive and Scholastic theology in the late seventeenth century manual on monastic studies by Jean Mabillon, a learned monk in the Benedictine Congregation of Saint-Maur. Founded in France in 1618, the Saint-Maur congregation gained a reputation for its erudition and obligation of intellectual labor. Saint-Maur monks made trips to libraries housed in various monasteries, compiled and ordered their materials using techniques of criticism, and wrote multi-volume histories of French provinces and the Benedictine order. Mabillon was among the monks who supervised the study of documents once they were brought back to the central abbey of Saint-Germain des Près in Paris.⁶⁶ In his *Treatise on Monastic Studies* (1691), Mabillon wrote, concerning the approaches in theology: “there is this difference between Scholastic and positive theology; the latter relies only on Scripture and the tradition of councils and Father, [but] the Scholastic, by contrast, gives itself a larger field, adding the aid of human reason, philosophy and other sciences.” Some authors had maintained that the Scholastic method had introduced “corruption” into theology, but Mabillon found that the use of reason should not be “condemned absolutely.” Supposing revealed truths and then appealing to reason or philosophy to “illustrate them” was not in itself wrong so long as it remained “limited and held itself to rules.”⁶⁷ Although not rules, Mabillon did give recommendations to guide his fellow monks in the study of positive theology. Mabillon recommended beginning with “the third, fourth and fifth books of Irenaeus; the book that Tertullian wrote about the prescription against the heretics; and then the *Commonitorium* or Notice of Vincent of Lérins.” Next, concerning the Fathers, in general, it was more practical and

⁶⁶ Gérard Michaux, *Dictionnaire du Grand siècle*, ed. François Bluche (Paris: Fayard, 1990), s.v., “Saint-Maur.” Mabillon did make research trips himself under the sponsorship of Colbert.

⁶⁷ Jean Mabillon, *Traité des études monastiques, divisé en trois parties, avec une liste des principales difficultés qui se rencontrent en chaque siècle dans la lecture des Originaux et un catalogue de livres choisis pour compléter une Bibliothèque ecclésiastique* (Paris: Charles Robustel, 1691), 208.

useful to read their writings according to subject. Mabillon then listed texts in each of the major subjects of doctrine: the Trinity, the Incarnation, Grace, the Sacraments, the nature of the soul, ecclesiology, the testimony of the Apostles. However, for a “general idea of religion,” several of Augustine’s books were valuable: “his Christian doctrine, his treatise on true religion, and that of the mores of the Church, with his *Enchiridion*.” Equally profitable was Eusebius’ “preparation and demonstration of the Gospel.”⁶⁸

A century after Mabillon, on the eve of the Revolution, the abbé Nicolas Bergier similarly acknowledged two methods in theology but was more emphatic than Mabillon about the merits of positive over Scholastic. Bergier had written popular works of apologetics in reply to Voltaire, Rousseau and d’Holbach and was called upon to write the theology dictionary of the *Encyclopédie Méthodique*.⁶⁹ Bergier explained that positive theology was the method of “proving the truths of religion by tradition and Holy Scripture . . . [and] since Christian doctrine was a revealed doctrine of God, theology was not a science of invention but of tradition; consequently, positive theology was the only true theology.”⁷⁰ For Bergier, the Scholastic method had crumbled under its own deficiencies: “For a long time, theologians produced nothing else but Commentaries on the Master of the Sentences [Peter Lombard], which was what earned him the title of Father of Scholastic theology.” Not only did his “disciples treat an infinite number of useless, frivolous, and often ridiculous questions, they pushed to excess the subtleties of Logic and Metaphysics; they preferred to prove the dogmas of the faith by the maxims of Aristotle more than by Scripture and tradition; they created barbarous and unintelligible terms to

⁶⁸ Mabillon, 187-90.

⁶⁹ On Bergier’s life and career, see Sylviane Albertain-Coppola, *L’abbé Nicolas-Sylvestre Bergier (1718-1790): des Monts-Jura à Versailles, le parcours d’un apologiste du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2010).

⁷⁰ Bergier, *Encyclopédie méthodique. Théologie*, vol. 3 (Paris: Panckoucke, 1790), s.v., “Théologie.”

express their ideas.”⁷¹ For Bergier, then, theology was positive in the senses of certain and laid down because it was based on tradition, or the received (via texts) testimony of authoritative witnesses to the contents of revealed doctrine. An authoritative witness included the authors of Scripture, who had been divinely inspired, but also the Fathers, who had lived in the centuries immediately following the death of Christ and were understood to correctly testify to the faith of the body of followers in that period. The reasoning here was similar to the rationalist account of positive religion.

Regarding natural philosophy, the properties of positivity began to appear over the course of the eighteenth century, prompted initially by the debate over Newton’s theory of universal gravitation around 1730. Two ways of reaching a general conclusion were at issue: deductive versus inductive conclusions, or a principle that had been necessarily demonstrated versus a statement of observed regularity that was called a law. Although initially the supporters of Newton combined an inductive approach with a theistic view of nature, the *philosophes* in France later adopted a Newtonian position that mirrored the concept of law that developed as part of legal positivism. In the decade following the publication of the *Principia* in 1687, Newton’s theory of universal gravitation, as well as the idea of action at a distance, was criticized. Newton himself recognized the problems in his theory, writing that it seemed absurd that “gravity should be innate, inherent and essential to matter, so that one Body may act upon another at a Distance thro’ a Vacuum, without the Mediation of anything else.”⁷² Although Newton moved between two possible accounts of gravity, he never relented in his position that an explanation of gravity as a force was not needed to “guarantee the validity” of what he

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Newton, *Letters to Bentley*, quoted in Keith Michael Baker, *Condorcet: From Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 87-8.

believed he had adequately demonstrated, namely, that the effects of gravity could be expressed mathematically and shown to explain the observed, regular behavior of phenomena (i.e., the orbit of planets).

To the critics of Newton's theory, principally Leibniz and the French Cartesians, it was not enough that he had "furnished an adequate and satisfactory description of phenomena" using mathematical relationships derived from empirical generalizations. It was also necessary that gravity be explained "in accordance with rational and intelligible laws, grounded in the nature of things."⁷³ Until gravity could be explained by rational laws, Leibniz wrote, it was no more than "an occult quality or perpetual miracle." In reply to Leibniz, the English philosopher Samuel Clarke insisted that, irrespective of whatever the cause of gravity might be, "its existence as a regular and constant phenomenon of nature had been proven beyond doubt on the basis of observation of fact and by the mathematical demonstration of its effects."⁷⁴ Clarke maintained, then, that the regularity expressed mathematically as the law of gravity was evident and empirically demonstrated, and as before, the rationalist, Cartesian critics were reluctant to accept that constancy and regularity alone were sufficient justifications for a truth of nature.

The rationalist objections to Newtonian theory retained much of the requirements that had been formulated under the Aristotelian ideal of demonstrative science. The demonstrative ideal required that, in order to be true knowledge, a statement about the make-up of nature had to explain why a phenomenon was so and not otherwise.⁷⁵ The law of gravity failed to meet the demonstrative or rationalist criteria of knowledge because, as Fontenelle put it, an understanding

⁷³ Baker, 88.

⁷⁴ Baker, 89.

⁷⁵ Even though the Aristotelian ideal endured, there was, in fact, sustained debate throughout the medieval period over whether this ideal could be achieved in the sciences of nature. See Eileen Serene, "Demonstrative Science," chap. 24 in Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny and Jan Pinborg, eds., *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

of why gravity “is as it is” was needed to satisfy reason.⁷⁶ For the rationalist natural philosopher, only truths of reason produced scientific knowledge, and a truth of reason was achieved by starting from clear and distinct ideas that were evident in the nature of things. These clear and distinct ideas signified a fundamental nature or immutable essence of a thing and were “independent of its existence.” Thus, when it could be demonstrated that a clear and distinct principle was the cause of an observed effect, a truth of reason had been established. By contrast, when an observed effect had been shown to be a constant and regular feature of experience, the rationalist philosopher concluded that only a truth of fact had been achieved.⁷⁷ Newton’s theory of gravity was no more than a truth of fact so long as gravity could not be explained by a necessary principle. Put differently, as regular and constant as its effects were, the law of gravity itself was, in the words of Etienne Simon de Gamaches, based on “the data of experience,” and these were “always limited.” That is to say, the data could be otherwise, and were not certain and necessary.

If the law of gravity was not necessary, then it was contingent. Newton recognized in writings separate from the *Principia* that “there was no particular *reason* why the planets revolved around the sun in one direction rather than another; there was no particular reason why the gravitational force of two mutually attracting bodies should be in direct proportion to their masses and in inverse proportion to the square of their distance.”⁷⁸ The orbital direction of planets or the proportionality of gravitational force was contingent and could be otherwise. The only way to explain the regularities of nature was, in the Newtonian view, to see them both as the “voluntary choice of a divine will” but also the result of “continued intervention by the Creator”

⁷⁶ Fontenelle, *Théorie des tourbillons cartésien*, quoted in Baker, 89.

⁷⁷ Baker, 97.

⁷⁸ *Isaac Newton’s Papers and Letters* (1958), quoted in Baker, 95.

to ensure that the regular, ordered motion of bodies in the universe did not collapse or spin out of control.⁷⁹ Consequently, the Newtonian view of a voluntary agent meant that the laws of nature were contingent both in respect to God and in respect to phenomena. Laws were contingent with respect to God because He could have chosen different laws, and they were contingent with respect to phenomena because bodies needed the voluntary and immediate action of God to ensure that their law-like regularity was maintained. Curiously, then, even though Newtonians insisted that a cause of gravity was not needed to justify the universality of its effects, their view of God as a voluntary agent who intervened to sustain the universe provided the means to account for gravity as a contingent effect, even if not a necessary one.

The *philosophes* who defended Newtonianism did not retain the view of God as the source of gravity's contingency. In his *Traité de dynamique* of 1758, d'Alembert redefined the terms of the debate. The question was not whether laws of nature could be imputed to God; rather, the task was to "determine what the rational laws of nature [were] in matter abandoned to itself," i.e., without a legislator of nature or a voluntary divine agent. D'Alembert agreed with the Newtonians that laws of nature were contingent, but he argued that laws could be necessary if sense experience could be shown to be "in accordance with the laws rationally implied in our conception of matter and motion."⁸⁰ An example of a rationally implied principle was the impenetrability of bodies. It was impossible for us to conceive of matter in motion without supposing impenetrable bodies, d'Alembert reasoned. Consequently, three fundamental and necessary laws of motion could be deduced from the implied principle of impenetrability. That said, the certainty which could be achieved in the science of motion resulted from the fact that mechanics dealt with simple objects that allowed for a grasp of implied principles that were true

⁷⁹ Baker, 96.

⁸⁰ Baker, 100.

and evident in themselves.⁸¹ Other, less simple objects could only yield contingent principles that had the certainty of experience. For d'Alembert, the law of gravity possessed only this lower degree of certainty despite all the measurements and calculations that supported it. Nevertheless, it was still a surer approach in natural philosophy to abandon the search for a cause or nature of the force producing an effect than to suppose a cause or principle that could not be supported by the facts (e.g., the Cartesian tourbillon that had tried to explain gravity in terms of impulsion). Effects, or the data of experience, were the only suitable objects in the sciences outside mechanics since effects were “the only things in our grasp.” Here, d'Alembert was reiterating the position of Voltaire, Condillac and others who had insisted that the first step in attaining reliable knowledge was to accept the limits of human knowledge. Ultimate causes and essential natures would always be hidden from our grasp. Hence, for d'Alembert, particular effects in nature could only be explained in terms of general effects, and a general effect was “the reducing of a large number of facts to a single one that was their principle.” Or, to put it in the terminology used in the present chapter, a general effect was an empirical generalization (a law of nature), and since the search for an explanatory cause or essential nature was now abandoned, the general effect or law of nature was treated as “posited,” as evident and valid even though it had not been demonstrated to be necessarily true. Similarly, in legal positivism, the positive law enacted by the public authority was treated as an evident and valid rule for conduct even though it had not been demonstrated to be true using a higher moral principle or divine command.

An outcome of the debate over Newton's theory of gravity and the status of laws of nature was the practice of epistemological modesty, or the recognition that we do not have access to the ultimate causes of things. We saw this position articulated when the *philosophes* who

⁸¹ Baker, 101.

defended Newton claimed that he had been successful in demonstrating the universal effects of gravity precisely because he had not sought to determine the cause of gravity but had accepted that he was ignorant of it. “Man succeeds best in discovering the truths of nature when he first recognizes the limits of his own knowledge.”⁸² The position that causes in nature were hidden from us became a recurring cry among Voltaire, Condillac, and d’Alembert. Moreover, it was precisely the utility of Newtonian natural philosophy that compensated for the limited knowledge which resulted from its inquiry. As Condorcet wrote, “what better way of compensating for this uncertainty [in knowledge] than following the encyclopedic program of making man the center of all that is and pursuing the sciences whose goal was the benefit and happiness of mankind?”⁸³ Accepting our ignorance of causes not only yielded principles that were “posited,” or based in observed regularities, but also contributed to improving the lot of humanity.

The eighteenth century also witnessed the development of our second property of positivity: reaching conclusions that are not arbitrary, doubtful or vague but are assured, constant and precise because the activity of imagination has been restrained, either through the use of instruments or a disciplining of the self. This practice grew in tandem with the increasing use of experiments in natural philosophy. In a 1782 paper read at the Academy of Sciences, the chemist Antoine Lavoisier reported his results from experiments on the gas released during putrefaction. “Given that all of the experiments that I have just presented were made with a balance and scale in hand,” Lavoisier noted, “we may regard the experiments as rigorous and not susceptible to arbitrariness in the way that experiments that rely on the sole judgement of the senses are.”⁸⁴ In another paper the following year, on the combustion of sulfur and phosphorous, Lavoisier wrote

⁸² Baker, 90.

⁸³ Baker, 94.

⁸⁴ Antoine Lavoisier, “Mémoire sur la nature des fluides élastiques aériformes,” in *Oeuvres de Lavoisier*, vol. 2 (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1862), 609.

that chemists who defended the theory of phlogiston had only given a “very confused idea of what it is.” By contrast, Lavoisier’s experiments gave a more exact idea of the “acidifying constituent” (*principe oxygine*) released during combustion since his interpretations were not “contradicted” by the facts.⁸⁵ The concept of phlogiston grouped together facts that were conflicting, and as such, could not account for all the facts related to it. Several years later, Lavoisier called phlogiston “an imaginary entity.”⁸⁶ Phlogiston was no better an explanatory principle than the Cartesian concept of tourbillon.

Although Lavoisier did not use the term *positif* to qualify the methods he promoted, he is considered by current historians, and by Comte, to have changed chemistry by making it a science grounded in experimental and instrumental techniques, separate from natural history or physiology.⁸⁷ Along with instruments, disciplining the self was an important reason why the empirical results of positive science were considered more assured, constant and precise than results obtained by other approaches. Lavoisier implored his readers to “rid themselves of all prejudice, to see in the facts only what they present, to banish all that reasoning has supposed.” To banish, that is, anything *a priori* or imagined from one’s attempt to make sense of the gathered facts. Later, Lavoisier insisted that it was time in chemistry “to dissect from the facts that which reasoning and prejudice has introduced.” While instruments provide factual information that is independent of an individual observer and, hence, a way to eliminate prejudice, Lavoisier’s exhortation has another sense as well, one having more to do with the attitude and self-awareness that the observer employs while analyzing the data of experience.

⁸⁵ Lavoisier, “Nouvelles réflexions sur l’augmentation de poids,” in *Oeuvres*, vol. 2, 621-22.

⁸⁶ Lavoisier, “Réflexions sur le phlogistique,” in *Oeuvres*, vol. 2, 654.

⁸⁷ Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent and Isabelle Stengers, *A History of Chemistry*, trans. Deborah van Dam (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 89-91; Auguste Comte, “General View of Chemistry,” in *The First System: Cours de Philosophie Positive*, part 2 of *Auguste Comte and Positivism: The Essential Writings*, ed. Gertrud Lenzer (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 155.

Ridding oneself of prejudice so as to observe more accurately becomes something more akin to self-denial.

The practice of self-discipline appears more clearly in two accounts by French savants after Lavoisier of the method that should be followed in the sciences. In 1801, the philosopher Antoine Destutt de Tracy commented on the philosophy of Kant in Germany and whether there was an equivalent national system of philosophy in France. Tracy replied that no comparison could be made since there was no school of philosophy in France, only a method that recognized no system. What was this method? “It consisted in observing the facts in the most scrupulous manner, in not drawing conclusions without full assurance, in never assigning the consistency of fact to simple suppositions . . . in frankly admitting what one does not know, and in constantly preferring absolute ignorance to any assertion that was only believable.”⁸⁸ Although Tracy has listed a set of behaviors, the emphasis has been put on what the observer does not allow himself to do or refrains from doing. The idea that the savant adhered to a strict set of rules was not just an individual practice but a collective one. Consider, Tracy continued, a new observation that has just been made: “our savants convince themselves of it in the smallest details; they repeat with minute care; they perform thousands of related experiments to identify with precision what may be seen in the fact and what may be concluded.”⁸⁹ The individual experimenter scrupulously checked and rechecked his observations, but others in the scientific community would do the same to determine whether the reported results were indeed constant and regular, and not something that had been imagined.

⁸⁸ Antoine-Laurent-Claude Destutt de Tracy, “De la métaphysique de Kant,” in *Essais philosophiques*, vol. 2 of *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Joly (Paris: J. Vrin, 2017), 227.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

The physicist Jean-Baptiste Biot reiterated the centrality of working minutely and with restraint in his 1816 *Traité de physique expérimentale et mathématique*. Biot had two aims in writing his *Traité*: first, to outline a method that was shared among the various branches of natural knowledge and give to all of them a “common direction” so that all the branches could “lend aid” to one another; second, to reply to the British accusation that French savants relied too heavily on mathematical expressions, putting them at risk of operating with abstract statements and not ones that were based in physical reality.⁹⁰ Concerning the use of mathematical expressions, Biot argued that they were advantageous because they could be used to determine if new data could be admitted as properties of phenomena or as laws of nature. Moreover, expressions were a kind of heuristic, something that allowed the savant to test and validate working hypotheses, something against which new and different results could be compared. By testing the expression against more and more results, the savant could arrive at a piece of knowledge that was reliable, of which he could be “assured.”⁹¹ To put it in the terminology of the present chapter, using mathematical expressions allowed the savant to produce knowledge that was not arbitrary but was constant and regular—i.e., knowledge that was “placed,” or evident and valid. Yet the advantages of mathematical expressions also augmented the requirement that experiments needed to be conducted with great care and exactitude. “This might be the most important point to recommend,” Biot wrote. “After all, if the formula is false, observation will soon make it known; on the other hand, if the data provided by experience are false, the mathematical analysis has almost no way of identifying it.” As a result, the exactitude and repeated verification of all observations was a rule to which every savant must strictly hold

⁹⁰ Jean-Baptiste Biot, *Traité de physique expérimentale et mathématique*, vol. 1 (Paris: Deterville, 1816), vi-xi.

⁹¹ Biot, xii-xiv.

himself (*s'astreindre sévèrement à cette condition*).⁹² Without this self-discipline, observations would lack the requisite “elements of certainty” and could not serve as “sources of truth.” It was not only instruments that added to the constancy and reliability of positive knowledge, but the epistemic virtues of the experimenter as well.

The adjective “positive” had a long history before Comte’s positive philosophy made it famous in the nineteenth century. The earlier uses of positive in jurisprudence, theology and natural philosophy shed light on what positivity entailed for a body of knowledge (such as history of religions) claiming positive status in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. During the eighteenth century, legal theory and natural knowledge converged on the criteria needed for a law or generalization to be considered “posited.” Both fields moved away from justifying a rule or statement by referring to God as the legislator of nature and laws. A rule or statement came to be validated by a social-fact source on its own, either the legislative authority or the witnesses of an experiment, without need for further demonstration of its validity. This property of positivity was closely associated with the development of a further practice: renouncing knowledge of the ultimate nature of things, or epistemological modesty. The practice of modesty was more specific to natural knowledge and scientific positivism than to legal theory or positive theology. One held that knowledge was positive, or assured and precise, because of the constant methods involved in producing the knowledge, in particular the observer’s disciplining of imagination or preconceived ideas.

The History of Religions as Positive Knowledge of the Self

⁹² Biot, xviii-xix.

In the 1860s, four decades after Comte's first articulated positive philosophy, a handful of scholars, with Ernest Renan in the lead, began to claim that the history of religions was a positive science. As will be recalled from the opening to this chapter, that claim required satisfying certain method or practices and defining an object that could be considered positive. The practices that allowed the history of religions to have positive status will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 3 and only brief discussion of those methods will be given here. In the following section, we turn our attention primarily to how early scholars of religion reconciled the twin difficulties that God or divinity was not an admissible object in positive science, and neither was sentiment or interiority.

In terms of the properties of positivity described in this chapter, historians of religion observed epistemological modesty in disallowing the supernatural as a causal factor or object of consideration. As Renan, the controversial author of the best-selling *Life of Jesus*, put it, the historian does not "accept miracles as a factor in explaining human affairs, no more than the savant does in the order of events in nature."⁹³ Renan did not believe that the question of whether revelation or miracles were true had been definitively resolved, only that nothing reliable or scientific could be said about such questions. A contemporary of Renan, and fellow historian of religion, Albert Réville, dismissed a common earlier approach to the history of religions on the very same grounds. The claim that a primitive revelation by God was the source of all subsequent religions in humanity could not serve as basis of "true history," Réville argued. Nor was it any more permissible to claim that God had created humans such that at a given moment in their historical development, they acquired the ability to know religious truth as a result of God awakening an original but hitherto unused capacity in them. "We take man as he is

⁹³ Renan, *Études d'histoire religieuse*, 7th ed. (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1864), vii.

normally,” Réville explained, and not with an organization that can be modified by God.⁹⁴

Similar to excluding God as legislator of nature or God as a voluntary agent intervening to hold the universe together in scientific positivism, explanations that appealed to supernatural factors were excluded from the positive history of religions on the grounds that they were beyond the bounds of historical knowledge.

Along with epistemological modesty, historians of religion believed the results of their work to be constant and precise because of the critical method they employed when studying documents or artifacts. In his 1887 manual, Vernes began by acknowledging the new discipline’s debt to philologists, the scholars whose knowledge of original languages and method of criticism had allowed “the classifying and ordering (*dépouillement*) of religious documents.” Without philological scrutiny, it would be impossible for historians of religion to raise an edifice of knowledge on “bases that were unverified and contested.” They could have no “confidence or security” in their work.⁹⁵ In other words, critically examined sources using philological techniques provided a reliable or positive foundation for inductive generalizations about religious history. To build a verified and certain basis, scholars rigorously ordered “the totality the documents relative to a religion, with a particular attention to determining the dates [of the documents], their provenance, and the circumstances of their production, all of which permit [the scholar] to use with confidence or require him only to accept with caution information and indications of any kind.”⁹⁶ Criticism, then, entailed authenticating and dating the authorship of documents, preparing their manuscript or transmission history, and determining how reliable they were as testimonies of the past. Once a scholar employing criticism had examined a source

⁹⁴ Albert Réville, *Prolégomènes de l’histoire des religions* (Paris: G. Fischbacher, 1881), 52-4.

⁹⁵ Vernes, *L’Histoire des religions: son esprit, son méthode et ses divisions, son enseignement en France et à l’étranger* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1887), 8.

⁹⁶ Vernes, *L’Histoire*, 28.

and deemed how much of it was valid, the source was considered “posited,” or valid fact, and could serve as the basis of claims about the past.

As it was, the idea that criticism yielded a positive foundation to historical knowledge bore much similarity to the way in which religious sentiment was incorporated into the positive history of religions. Réville may here again serve as an illustrative example. A friend and fellow savant of Renan, Réville was also a liberal Protestant minister who, even though he lived and served at a church in Rotterdam, regularly wrote articles in French periodicals of the mid-century period, including the *Revue des deux mondes*. The writing of his that will concern us here is an article that he wrote in the final number of the *Revue de Strasbourg*. Launched in 1850, the *Revue de Strasbourg* had been the organ of the extreme liberal Protestant circle within French Protestantism. Since the era of charismatic revival of the 1820s, French Protestants had been divided into conservative, or evangelical, and liberal groups. Conservatives emphasized the authority and inerrancy of Scripture while liberals emphasized the authority of inner experience and a personal relationship with Christ. Liberals also generally welcomed the use of Biblical criticism to deepen one’s understanding of Scripture’s teachings, but extreme liberals went further and proposed using criticism and history to develop a rational faith. In fact, in an echo of Comte’s famous initial phrase for sociology, “social physics” (‘physique sociale’), the editors of the *Revue de Strasbourg* proclaimed in their first issue that theology was “a religious physics” (‘physique religieuse’) consisting of two parts, history and philosophy. Those two disciplines no longer needed to be seen as conflicting since the formulation of dogma was simply “philosophy treated by a Christian, [or] more specifically, it is the philosophy of history, the explanation of religious facts.”⁹⁷ Eventually, a schism occurred in the Reformed Church of France in 1872

⁹⁷ Colani, “Avant-propos,” *Revue de théologie et de philosophie chrétienne (Revue de Strasbourg)* 1st. ser., vol. 1 (1850): 5-6.

owing to the inability of moderate liberals to break with the extreme liberals whose rational faith conservatives denounced.⁹⁸

Even though the *Revue de Strasbourg* project declined and ultimately ceased publication, Réville's final contribution of 1869 is nevertheless useful to understand the integration of religious sentiment into positive historical study. Réville remained optimistic about the possibility of rational faith but addressed directly the obstacles that he and like-minded individuals faced. First among the obstacles was giving credibility to religious sentiment itself in the current age. "We must pity the men of our day," Réville wrote, "who, habituated by their education to found all their faith on some supernatural authority, sense the unique basis of their spiritual life vacillating, and who know of no other sure ground where they stand, even if a temporary shelter, to meditate and await the return of a better light."⁹⁹ Now that the model of "faith by authority" had been relegated to the past, the modern Christian who was not prepared to abandon religion could find sure ground by looking to history to supply the new foundation to their beliefs, "a basis other than the recognized authorities." A new basis emerged through knowledge of religious sentiment, which history revealed to be inherent to human nature, a seeking that was "permanent and universal." By understanding its perennial nature, the modern Christian understood that religious sentiment was not imaginary but a felt experience with a real referent; otherwise, religious sentiment would not have persisted in humanity: "one does not adore own's own creation." The historical fact of religious sentiment's permanence became, then, the "positive base on which the enlightened man of our day places, as on a foundation, the unshakable edifice of his beliefs." So founded, religious sentiment in the modern individual

⁹⁸ André Encrevé, *L'expérience et la foi: pensée religieuse des hugenots au XIXe siècle* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2001), 80-2.

⁹⁹ A. Réville, "Du sentiment religieux considéré comme fondement de la foi," *Revue de théologie et de philosophie chrétienne (Revue de Strasbourg)*, 3rd. ser., vol. 7 (1869): 251

could now “attest to the immediate rapport, the spiritual contact between man and God.”¹⁰⁰ To use the terminology advanced in this chapter, Réville’s history instructs the consciousness in the valid sentiment of a “posited” God that make the place of religious belief. As we will see when we return to this conception of a rational faith, sustained study of religious history nurtures the same sentiment of connection with the higher spirit that human consciousness seeks and has sought throughout the ages.

By suggesting that the individual needed to look outside the self to history to gain an understanding of an element of interiority, Réville was avoiding the introspection that a positivist would eschew, but that approach need not be limited to positivism. In the early part of the century, the Arabist Antoine-Issac Silvestre de Sacy, whose reader, the *Chrestomathie Arabe*, became the model for university manuals to Eastern languages, described the value of looking to history when he welcomed the chairs in Chinese and Sanskrit that had been created at the Collège de France in 1815.¹⁰¹ “If it is true that of all studies, the study of man and his moral faculties is the most important and difficult,” Silvestre de Sacy wrote, “it is not less certain that it is rather by observation of facts instead of abstract meditations and theoretical systems (‘théories systématiques’) that we can arrive at knowing the master work of creation . . . But to know man it is not enough to enter into oneself.” To arrive at a human science, to have wisdom and self-knowledge,

one must see man at all degrees of civilization, from the savage stage, which is but the forgetting of his social nature, all the way to heights of culture, which is but the corruption [of that nature]; one must grasp man in all epochs of history, under the influence of all climates, under the direction of all religious or political systems; one must follow him through the immense number of varied combinations, some more favorable to developing the imagination, others to wise meditations.

¹⁰⁰ A. Réville, “Du sentiment religieux,” 263-68.

¹⁰¹ For Silvestre de Sacy’s role in developing a new approach to orientalist learning that was separate though not entirely divorced from Biblical scholarship, see Sylvette Larzul, *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française*, s.v., “Silvestre de Sacy, Antoine-Issac.”

However, such a study “could only yield real fruit” for the person who had devoted himself to “long and laborious preparations.” These preparations could take the form of linguistic study or travel, although Silvestre de Sacy suggested the latter was of little use without the former, which also had the merit of obviating the inconvenience of travel.¹⁰²

Renan, himself a Hebraist, evoked similar ideas to Silvestre de Sacy about the educative purpose of historical study in 1848.¹⁰³ Renan, who had recently left Catholic seminary, contended that in the current age, Christian asceticism could no longer provide the model of the contemplative life, of a life devoted to seeking truth, beauty and moral goodness. It now fell to philology as the science of spirit, Renan felt, to define the new ideal that gave purpose to human activity: “If we conceive of the individual soul in the manner of Leibniz, as a mirror in which the universe is reflected, then it is through science that the soul can contemplate a smaller or larger portion of what it is to approach its end, which would mean to be in perfect harmony with the universal order of things.”¹⁰⁴ Analogous to Réville’s history, Renan’s philology uncovered the stages of spirit’s development, allowing the modern individual to contemplate the end toward which the varied expressions of spirit had been directed.

Réville’s history of the religious sentiment was conceived to establish positive ground on which to place one’s belief in the divine such that one’s sentiment of being in relationship with God could not be dismissed as imaginary. Réville’s use of positive then corresponds to the principal senses of that qualifier that we have traced in this chapter. Even though the senses of positive knowledge associated with the writings of Comte would continue to be opposed with

¹⁰² Silvestre de Sacy, “Observations sur les cours de sanskrit et de chinois créées au Collège de France,” in *Mélanges de littérature orientale* (Paris: E. Ducrocq, 1861), 63-5.

¹⁰³ I quote here from the passages the Renan wrote in 1848 even though he published the final work decades later, in 1890. Ernest Renan, *L’avenir de la science: pensées de 1848*, in vol. 3 of *Oeuvres complètes de Ernest Renan*, ed. Henriette Psichari (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1949).

¹⁰⁴ Renan, *L’avenir*, 741.

speculative and synonymous with certain and evident, the concept of positive religion would also endure into the second half of the nineteenth century, in large part because the Concordat system of recognized religions persisted as well. If, as Portalis explained, state protection of religions under the Concordat regime was meant to preserve the salutary and tempering influence of conscience guided by positive religious codes, actors in the early Third Republic would attempt to end the regime of state protection of religion by arguing that moral codes were positive in the individual and in society.

Chapter Two

The Politics of Abolishing the Catholic Faculties of

Theology and Creating the Fifth Section

In 1890, four years after opening its doors, the Fifth Section received an application from the abbé Jules Deramey. A Catholic priest in the diocese of La Rochelle and a specialist in the religious history of Abyssinia, Deramey had earned a doctoral degree from the Sorbonne Faculty of Theology before its funding had been suspended in 1885 along with that of the four other Catholic theology faculties of the University. Deramey had also studied Ethiopian with a former student of the orientalist Joseph Halévy who taught in the neighboring Fourth Section in Historical and Philological Sciences. Deramey was not applying to be a regular faculty member but a visiting lecturer (*conférencier libre*) on Ethiopian Christianity in late Antiquity. When the Fifth Section's Council of Professors met to discuss his application, one professor, François Picavet, expressed his concern that the presence of a priest would "create difficulties." A colleague replied that Deramey still had standing in his diocese and was not suspended. Others felt that, while they would prefer to see a more focused and less general syllabus, they were willing to offer him the position for year and then "observe him at work" before making a longer-term decision.¹ The Council went on to approve Deramey's visiting lectureship and he would give courses each year until his death in 1914.

The sensitivity of professors to provoking polemic would recur throughout the Fifth Section's early decades. In some cases, the faculty's reluctance proved too great and an

¹ Meeting of 9 November 1890, in Section des sciences religieuses, *Procès-verbaux des séances du Conseil: Cahier no. 1, du 16 février 1886 au 17 juin 1906*, Fonds historique de l'EPHE, AN. The fonds historique collection is not yet fully processed or listed in public inventories, but the register of Council minutes is available using the temporary record locator, 20190568/49. Hereafter abbreviated *PVCSR*.

application was declined. When the Catholic modernist priest Albert Houtin applied to give a visiting course in 1907, one professor wondered if it was “appropriate to allow someone who had created controversy to teach a topic such as ‘The Origins of the Papacy.’” Another did not wish to run the risk of having an “authority alien to the École” compel Houtin to stop his course. Despite the fact that Jean Réville noted that “men like Houtin could spread the results of historical criticism in places to which we do not have access,” the Council invited Houtin to submit a new syllabus on a topic pertaining to “religious questions in the 19th century” and not the papacy.² To understand why sensitivity to causing polemic became a part of the Fifth Section’ ethos as a laic institution, we need to appreciate the political circumstances of its founding and the reasons why the plan to abolish the Catholic faculties of theology proved so controversial in a period when other laicizing reforms were being implemented. The historian Émile Poulat contends that abolishing the Catholic faculties proved a difficult policy goal to achieve because of insoluble problem of the Catholic faculties’ canonical status and poor enrollment: they belonged to the state, but the Vatican had persistently refused to canonically institute them, rendering their degrees of little practical use to priests.³ While the problem of their status was certainly a factor in the legislative impasses, the reasons why elimination finally succeeded in 1885 had far more to do with the disagreements among republicans over anticlerical strategy.

² Houtin later declined, in turn, saying that he did not have enough time to prepare a new course. Meetings of 20 January and 17 March 1907, *PVCSR*. Modernism was a liberal movement within the Catholic Church about 1900, and was condemned by Pope Pius X in the encyclical *Pascendi* of September 1907. On modernism, see François Laplanche, *La crise de l'origine: la science catholique des Évangiles et l'histoire au XXe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2006).

³ Émile Poulat, “L’institution des ‘sciences religieuses,’” in *Cent ans de sciences religieuses en France*, eds., Jean Baubérot, Jacques Béguin, François Laplanche, et al. (Paris: Cerf, 1987).

The Faculties of Theology under the Second Empire and within Catholic Education

Similar to the question of schools, the Catholic theology faculties became a political issue in the response to the 1848 Revolution. Following the February uprising, urban elites called for a return to moral and religious education, believing that a cause of the revolt had been Christianity's weakened hold on the urban masses.⁴ The emerging consensus around a religious reeducation of the people contributed to passage of the Falloux Law in 1850 that formally authorized religious congregations to operate public secondary schools. In response to the law, the historian Edgar Quinet argued that there could not be a truly national education that supported a laic and democratic society without national schools that barred clergy and religious teaching.⁵ After the coup of December 2, 1851, the regime of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte strengthened the entente with the Catholic Church to instruct the people and maintain moral order.

Since the assembly called to draft a new constitution was also considering whether to change the state's recognition of organized religions, there was a brief period before a new executive was established in December 1848 when the existence of the Catholic theology faculties was in doubt. In an address as President of the Second Republic, Louis-Napoleon affirmed that the government would pursue negotiations with the Vatican to preserve and reorganize the faculties. Several months earlier, Henry Maret, a priest and instructor at the Paris faculty, published an essay on the "necessity of the faculties of theology." If clergy were to be "educated and learned [and] capable of defending the holy truths entrusted to them," then properly organized faculties of theology needed to be established; "only then could the clergy be

⁴ *La Liberté* (Rouen), 3 July 1848, quoted in *Documents on the French Revolution of 1848*, ed. Roger Price (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 105

⁵ Edgar Quinet, *L'enseignement du peuple* (Paris: Chamerot, 1850), 210-32.

guardians of morals and laws, and effectively second the action of an intelligent and just government.”⁶ Maret’s essay had in fact been written three years earlier and shared with the Archbishop of Paris. Both men had collaborated to improve the status of the Catholic faculties, and Maret now seized the moment in August 1848 to press his case anew and publicly. The Catholic faculties would indeed be items to which Louis-Napoleon gave attention, both as President and later Emperor.

Each of the recognized religions under the Concordat regime had its own faculty in the state university system. In 1848, there were two Protestant faculties, one Rabbincal School and five Catholic faculties. The Catholic theology faculties had been state institutions since the organization of the University in 1808. Catholics had long criticized the University’s monopoly to award secondary and higher degrees, and when they campaigned for freedom of education, as they had leading up to the Falloux Law, it was to establish schools independent of the state system.⁷ Prior to the University, in 1804, Napoleon had planned to create ten national seminaries to serve as centers of excellence for young priests coming out of the system of local seminaries, but with the founding the University four years later, the ten seminaries were replaced with Catholic faculties of theology, of which only five remained by the advent of the Second Empire: Aix, Lyon, Bordeaux, Rouen and Paris.⁸

When Maret was appointed to teach dogma at the Paris faculty in 1841, the institution functioned and offered public lectures, but it remained a far cry from the renowned Sorbonne theology faculty of the Old Regime. That faculty had been swept away by the Convention in

⁶ “Des facultés de théologie,” *L’Ère nouvelle*, 28 August 1848. Maret was a director of the newspaper.

⁷ The campaign for freedom of education vis-à-vis the University was not new 1848-1850, and had characterized both prior regimes, the Restoration and July Monarchy. The conservative reaction of 1848 had merely given new urgency to the “problem of education.” Agulhon, 162-3.

⁸ Odéon-Jean-Marie Delarc, *De l’enseignement supérieur de la théologie en France* (Paris: Adrien Le Clere, 1871), 14-15.

1793, but since its reconstitution in 1808, the Paris faculty had suffered from insufficient personnel. Posts went unfilled for long periods since bishops and state ministers did not share the same opinion of candidates. There were also few candidates who possessed the requisite credentials. By the Restoration, deaths had significantly reduced the number of priests who had earned a Doctor of Theology before the Revolution. Candidates who were qualified often had little interest in the Sorbonne faculty because they would be joining an institution that was not canonically recognized by the Vatican and placing themselves under the supervision of the Minister of Public Instruction along with their bishop. Conversely, priests who did follow a course of study at the Paris faculty would earn a degree that was not valid in the eyes of Rome and would not entitle them to various posts in France. When Mgr. Affre became Archbishop of Paris in 1840, he undertook to revive instruction at the Paris faculty and attract a larger student body. Working in concert with the Ministry of Public Instruction, Affre announced changes in pedagogy at Paris: the Scholastic method would be abandoned and lectures would be given in French instead of Latin. Affre also made a concerted effort to recruit talented and reputable professors who could, in turn, fill more seats in lecture halls. Maret, who had won acclaim for his *Essay on Pantheism* (1840), was among this crop of new professors brought to the Sorbonne.⁹

Within a few years of his appointment, Maret began to recognize the importance of achieving canonical recognition. Affre had taken initial steps toward that goal, too, but recognizing that there was little interest in Paris or Rome in canonical institution, he had pursued along with regenerating the Sorbonne faculty the project of creating an École des Hautes Études

⁹ Claude Bressolette, *L'abbé Maret: le combat d'un théologien pour une démocratie chrétienne, 1830-1851* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977), 106-114, 133-136

Ecclésiastiques.¹⁰ Maret sent the essay quoted above to Affre and travelled to Rome more than once in the 1840s to build support and gauge interest among the Curia. After Louis-Napoleon became Emperor, the government did begin formal negotiations and came close to an agreement with Rome in 1853-54 before talks ceased entirely in 1856. Maret had worked as an intermediary in the hope of bringing the initiative to fruition, but after 1856, he proved unable to persuade either side to reopen negotiations. In 1858-59, he reflected on why the attempt had ultimately collapsed, even considering himself to have been an obstacle. For one, he did not agree with his ecclesiastical peers that retaining exclusive control over theological education would be better than cooperating with the state: “it is a perilous illusion to believe that a school of higher theological study could be founded at Carmes or elsewhere.” Negotiations might also have failed because the Holy See could not consent to allowing the Ministry to still have a share in overseeing the faculties if canonically valid degrees were to be awarded. Alternatively, a few of the French bishops disliked the faculties because they feared that, if regularized, they could create difficulties in the governance of their dioceses. Thirdly, and perhaps most seriously, “the extreme party” in Rome had fostered “a lack of confidence in the staff of the faculties, and even possibly uniquely, the Dean of the Faculty of Paris. A new man would be more acceptable to the Holy Father and a certain number of important and influential bishops.”¹¹ It is not known why Maret changed his mind about resigning. He continued in his post until his death in 1884, and after the fall of the Second Empire renewed his attempts to secure canonical recognition, writing to successive republican governments and the Curia.

¹⁰ This project, which had ministerial support, also faltered given that it would be entirely under the auspices of the state. Bressollette, 112. To fill some of the instructional need, Affre did create the École des Carmes in 1845. See Brigitte Waché, “L’École des Carmes, 1845-1875,” *Revue de l’histoire d’Eglise de France* 81 (1995): 237-53.

¹¹ Untitled manuscript, Fonds Maret, carton 12, dossier “1858, 1859, Négotiations pour l’institutions des facultés,” Archives de l’Institut catholique de Paris.

Although French bishops of Maret's time preferred the seminaries in their own dioceses, from which they could send candidates to Rome for advanced theological degrees, some bishops did share Maret's analysis of the dearth of opportunities for higher theological study in France. The Archbishop of Reims and the Bishop of Orléans, Mgr. Dupanloup, personally approached the Curia about the matter and Dupanloup was granted permission by the Holy See to award two of the three theology degrees in his diocese. The doctorate, however, would remain the purview of La Sapienza in Rome. An editorial in the ultramontane daily *L'Univers* welcomed this option since it obviated the inconvenience of relocation to Rome for French students. Nevertheless, the advantage of going to Rome continued to be "preserving instruction in theology and canon law in an unassailable purity and the utmost orthodoxy."¹²

The degrees awarded in Dupanloup's diocese would be canonically valid, unlike those of the state faculties, but his pastoral letter that explained how the new degrees would be incorporated offers a glimpse into the organization of education for Catholic clergy beyond the five state faculties.¹³ Within a diocese, there were local minor seminaries (*petits séminaires*) that then sent students to a major seminary (*grand séminaire*). The curriculum at minor seminary consisted of classical studies that were intended to prepare students for "sacred science" at major seminary. Sacred science included: Holy Scripture, dogmatic and moral theology, canon law, liturgy, ecclesiastical history, and sacred eloquence. For admission to the major seminary in the Orléans diocese, the candidate had to perform a sight translation of a Latin passage from Cicero's *De officiis* and a Greek passage from the Book of Acts. A course of study at the major seminary was four years in length.¹⁴ Students at the major seminary were eligible to write the

¹² *L'Univers*, 6 August 1855, F¹⁹ 4090, AN.

¹³ Mgr. Félix Dupanloup, "Instruction et réglemens de Monseigneur l'Évêque d'Orléans relatifs aux études ecclésiastiques dans son diocèse" (Orléans: Imprimerie Alphonse Gatineau, 1855), F¹⁹ 4090, AN.

¹⁴ Dupanloup, "Instruction," 21-5.

examination for the *bachelier* degree after three years, and the *licence* degree after four. For the examination, students had an oral hearing on treatises of the Church (for the *bachelier*), or topics in moral theology (for the *licence*), followed by a defense of their Latin thesis which they had submitted to examiners two weeks prior. Students who had earned a *licence* and were held in high regard by their examiners could present themselves to the bishop to discuss arrangements for studying in Rome. Lastly, Dupanloup's pastoral letter reveals why theology degrees had become a matter of concern in Maret's time: the degrees were required for pastoral and ecclesiastical positions and even entitled a holder to preferences. A doctor in theology would be preferred to all other candidates.¹⁵

Dupanloup also described the value of higher theological education to the mission of the clergy, and he gave similar reasons to Maret in 1848: a more theologically learned clergy was better prepared to benefit and guide the people. Dupanloup began by quoting a verse from the Book of Malachi (2:7 in the Vulgate):

The lips of the priest will be custodians of knowledge ('science'), and it is to him that people will come, like an angel to the Lord, to seek understanding of the law. But how, dear partners, can we respond about the law, if we are ourselves ignorant of it; and if divine knowledge does not illuminate the mind of the pastor, how could he make it shine on his lips for the instruction of the people? The priest without knowledge would be, in the night of this world, only a blind guide, leading the sightless amid the darkness; people and priest would fall together into the abyss; but since the priest would be incomparably more at fault than the people, he being charged by God with leading them in justice and truth, it would be for him a crime manifestly without excuse to not know the way.¹⁶

This view of the role of the clergy in society won wider support among elites in the wake of 1848, but when republicans came to power after the Second Empire, they would increasingly challenge the idea that moral education was the purview of religion and that, consequently, society needed the guidance of priests to ensure solidarity and orderly conduct. Republicans

¹⁵ Dupanloup, "Instruction," 40-1.

¹⁶ Dupanloup, "Instruction," 2.

would equally question why the state needed to maintain Catholic theology faculties to better prepare clergy to guide society.

1879: Republicans Control Government and the First Attempt to Cut the Faculties

The republican deputy Paul Bert initially called for eliminating the Catholic theology faculties in 1872, following the humiliating defeat to Prussia two years earlier. On the one hand, Bert believed that theology should be eliminated to focus limited resources on the human and natural sciences, which were to play a key role in national renewal. On the other, the state had no business being charged with theological instruction, and to his mind, retaining the theology faculties was a sign of the continued influence of the Catholic Church in the nation's education.¹⁷ At the time, Bert's ideas had little chance of success in a National Assembly controlled by conservatives. In 1879, when he renewed his proposal to cut the Catholic faculties, the political landscape had significantly changed. In-fighting between legitimists and constitutional monarchists had progressively weakened the conservative ruling majority, and republicans won control of the Chamber of Deputies in the elections of 1877 and then the Senate in 1879. Lacking the support upon which he had hitherto relied in the Senate, the leader of the conservative coalition, General Mac Mahon, resigned as President of the Republic on January 30, 1879.¹⁸ Republicans were now able to pursue many of the goals of their political platform, chief among which was to institute a secular education system that did not permit members of religious orders to serve as teaching staff or inspectors—an arrangement the Falloux Law had allowed and that

¹⁷ Paul Bert, *Projet de loi sur l'enseignement supérieur* (Paris: Germer-Baillière, 1872). Bert dedicates the printing of his bill proposal to Gambetta: "one of the politicians of our time who best understands the necessity of a significant reorganization of higher education and the role that science must play in modern democratic society." Bert also observes that the state's responsibility is unequally applied since there are no Jewish theology faculties.

¹⁸ André Encrevé, *La France de 1870 à 1914: les succès de la République* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2006), 35-41.

the government of the Second Empire had tacitly encouraged by turning a blind eye to growth of religious congregations that operated rural, municipal schools. In principle, abolishing the Catholic faculties of theology aligned with the republican secular education program, but would prove difficult to achieve in practice.

Republicans controlled government in early 1879, but they were far from united politically despite many shared commitments. Most republicans were committed to a profound reform of society that would give individuals greater autonomy in directing their lives and judging for themselves. To achieve that goal, most republicans were in agreement that the individual needed to be liberated from the three elites that had controlled French society since the Empire and Restoration: the political class of notables, the haute bourgeoisie and the Catholic clergy.¹⁹ However, the question of how to oppose the influence of clergy would prove one of the principal fault lines dividing republicans once they held the reins of power in 1879.²⁰ The radical left of the republican majority, which included radical republicans and socialists, tended to advocate an aggressive anticlerical strategy, demanding that church and state be separated immediately and the budget supporting recognized religions be eliminated. By contrast, the center-left of the republican coalition supported a moderate anticlerical strategy in which the rights of the clergy in education would be challenged immediately but separation of church and state would be postponed until a time when a larger share of popular opinion was ready to accept it. Moderates also felt that the Church benefited from too much sympathy and influence among the population to be granted full liberty from state oversight; doing so might serve to undermine the Republic.²¹ Because they favored delaying separation until a more opportune time, when it

¹⁹ Encrevé, 67.

²⁰ James McMillan, "Consolidating the Republic: politics, 1880-1914," chap 1 in *Modern France: 1880-2002*, ed. James McMillan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12.

²¹ Lalouette, *La separation des Eglises et de l'Etat*, 322.

would not foment social discord, the moderates of the center-left were called “opportunists” or “republicans of government” by the radicals. As we shall see below, disagreements between radicals and opportunists would intensify when the matter of abolishing the Catholic faculties was proposed because it directly related to the separation question.

When Bert renewed his proposal to cut the faculties of theology in 1879, he did so with the benefit of not only a republican ruling majority but also a campaign in learned print culture that called for secularizing theology by replacing it with history of religions in university faculties. Maurice Vernes, a liberal Protestant scholar of Hebrew Scripture, initiated the campaign in February 1879 with an essay that he addressed to the editor of the weekly *Revue scientifique*.²² Vernes, who had studied in the Netherlands, had been for several years making the French public aware of the manuals and general introductions in history of religions that Dutch scholars were producing.²³ In 1876, the Dutch Parliament had formally separated the theology faculties of the four state universities from the Dutch Reformed Church, and even though the new non-confessional entities were still called faculties of theology, many liberal Protestant professors on the faculties understood their task to be transforming theology into the history of religions—or what they called the “science of religion,” a term used interchangeably with “history of religions” in France and elsewhere.²⁴ Vernes shared the view of his Dutch colleagues and believed that the secular reform of education in France should also involve remaking theology along the lines of history of religions. In February 1879, he outlined how theology

²² Maurice Vernes, “La théologie considérée comme science positive et de sa place dans l’enseignement laïque,” *Revue scientifique* 2nd. ser., vol. 16 (1879): 734-6.

²³ See, for example, Vernes, “Critique religieuse,” *Revue politique et littéraire*, 2nd. ser., vol. 7 (1874): 513-16. On Vernes and Dutch liberal Protestantism, see Patrick Cabanel, “La création de la section des sciences religieuses,” in *L’École pratique des hautes études*, 107-8.

²⁴ Arie L. Molendijk, “Transforming Theology: The Institutionalization of the Science of Religion in the Netherlands,” in *Religion in the Making: The Emergence of the Sciences of Religion*, eds. Arie L. Molendijk and Peter Pels (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 89.

could be remade as a secular discipline. The key was for theology to become a positive science by adopting “the exact methods of philosophical and historical criticism” and applying them to “the facts and ideas of religious history.” As Vernes understood it, then, a secular education did not have to be anti-religious. In fact, religion had been an important part of the intellectual history of humanity and if its study were not retained in laic education, the historical sciences of man would be incomplete. To that end, Vernes proposed adding chairs in history of religions to the faculty of letters in the state university system and a chair at the Collège de France.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the leading positivist intellectual of the period, Emile Littré, endorsed Vernes’ proposal.²⁵ Littré agreed that by adopting the methods of historical criticism, theology could become a positive science. The historical critic would treat theology according to the diverse forms that it had taken over the course of humanity’s evolution, and would describe its “birth, development, influence and decline” on the basis of natural causes and not supernatural ones. Littré also agreed that state education could not ignore any of the “essential” elements in the history of humanity, and very few things had been more “essential” than the various religions of the earth. Although he had previously drawn attention to the absence of chairs in history of religions in France without making specific proposals, he now fully supported Vernes’ idea to create a chair at the Collège de France and chairs in the faculty of letters.²⁶

In between the articles by Vernes and Littré on secularizing theology, a republican daily newspaper, *La République française*, published on March 30 an editorial supporting the

²⁵ Émile Littré, review of “De la théologie considérée comme science positive et de sa place dans l’enseignement laïque” by Maruice Vernes, *La Philosophie positive*, 2nd ser., vol. 22 (1879): 365-74.

²⁶ In September 1878, Littré noted the “lacuna” in French higher education at the end of a book review but had not made the specific proposals that Vernes now put forward. See Émile Littré, review of “La religion d’Israël jusqu’à la chute de l’Etat juif” by Abraham Kuenen, *La Philosophie positive*, 2nd ser., vol. 21 (1878): 200-216.

proposed legislation by Bert to eliminate the Catholic faculties of theology. The editorial contended that there should be nothing to surprise anyone in Bert's bill.²⁷ With the exception of Maret, no scholars of distinction were members of the state faculties of theology. They were mostly filled with elderly bishops who had been given positions so that they could earn a living wage in retirement. The poor condition of the faculties merely reflected the desiccated state in which Catholic learning in general had found itself for decades. It had produced "no savant, no litterateur, no orator." Yet, while Catholic scholarship was "a tree that no longer produced any fruit," the lectures professed in the faculties were still a threat to the Republic because Catholicism itself had evolved. Any remaining clergy with sympathies for Gallican Liberties had bowed to papal authority in 1870, when the doctrine of papal infallibility had been declared. Catholicism was now overrun by ultramontaniam. "How many adversaries of our society," the editors asked, "had emerged from the lecture halls of these venerable institutions?" The state could not be expected to keep paying for such lectures, and worse still, by funding the faculties, it was showing a preference toward Catholicism that it did not extend to Protestantism or Judaism since neither of these two religions had equivalent institutions. There were state-funded Protestant faculties of theology and a Rabbinical School but these institutions trained future clergy, unlike the Catholic faculties where "few ecclesiastics ever tread" because the institutions did not have canonical status. Its graduates were in no way educated to be ministers under the Concordat system in the way that Protestant pastors and Jewish rabbis were. The Catholic faculties were averse to the state and to modern learning, and they deserved a place in "an antiquities museum," the editors concluded.

²⁷ *La République française*, 30 March 1879.

Although the editors of *La République française* portrayed Catholicism with a broad, anticlerical brush—any member of the Catholic Church was now ultramontane and supported surrendering their personal autonomy—Maret felt he needed to reply in writing and rebut how the faculties had been presented. On April 11, his letter appeared in *La République française* and was followed by a new comment from the editors.²⁸ Maret retorted that the author had not taken the time to gather sufficient information about the faculties before condemning them. If the author had done so, he would have observed the members of the faculty who were not old men and who were producing respected works of scholarship. Nor were the lecture halls mostly deserted. At the Sorbonne faculty, some 500 persons attended the public lectures each week. In addition, the Paris faculty had awarded 243 degrees since 1853 (both bachelor's and doctor of theology). Regarding the doctrine proclaimed at the Vatican Council in 1870, Maret could only conclude that the original author was simply ignorant of the theological debates within the Catholic Church. Even though the Sorbonne faculty remained committed to the unity of the Church and respected the doctrine of papal infallibility, the Sorbonne professors had never ceased adhering to the traditions of the French clergy and “the spirit of the Declaration of 1682—while acknowledging, of course, the criticisms that had been made against the famous [Gallican] articles.” In concluding his rebuttal, Maret reiterated his view of the proper relations between the laic state and the Catholic Church: “No honest and sensible democracy could endure without the support of the Gospel, of Jesus Christ and his Church.” In their new comment that followed Maret's letter, the editors left out his support for a republican form of government—albeit one with an alliance with the Church—and instead highlighted Maret's phrase about the faculty's sincere commitment to Catholic unity. With those words, the editors insisted, Maret had only

²⁸ “Les Facultés de théologie catholiques,” *La République française*, 11 April 1879.

demonstrated all the more why the faculties needed to be eliminated: “they were as hostile to the public spirit as they were onerous to the Treasury.”

Not long after Maret’s editorial reply in early April, a former student of his, Ernest Menuisier, also took up the cause of defending the Catholic faculties but did so by writing directly to Paul Bert and enclosing a copy of the pamphlet that he had just published.²⁹ A sincere Catholic, Menuisier was also a committed republican. He consistently used “we” in his note to Bert, and confided that his “strong desire to see the Republic secure and unshakable” had motivated him to write.³⁰ Eliminating the Catholic faculties would only “worsen the condition of the state by diminishing its rights,” Menuisier began. Rather, the state should do more to enhance the activity and influence of the faculties and, “if needed, organize the Catholic seminaries around the faculties by force (emphasis in the original).” Given the terms of the Concordat, the state was “the protector of religion” and should in that capacity “assert the Republic and its rights over the ministers of religion.” Elimination of the faculties would be seen as an attack against religion at a time when republicans should be doing the opposite to reinforce the new regime. “We should be attempting to place democracy in religion and religion in democracy,” Menuisier explained. “This was not to undertake clericalism but good and sound politics” since, socially, the clergy remained strong and would always be so. Republicans needed “to extend their hand” to clerics and show them that “the Republic was ready to do more for them than previous regimes.” “You cannot easily imagine the spirit of emancipation, almost a spirit of revolt, I would say, that breathes among the clergy,” Menuisier disclosed. They suffered under the “occult despotism” of the episcopate, and had been waiting for half a century for a liberal regime to

²⁹ Ernest Menuisier, *Les Facultés de théologie devant la République: lettre ouverte à M. Paul Bert, député* (Paris: A. Lahure, 1879).

³⁰ Menuisier to Paul Bert, Paris, 19 April 1879, fonds Paul Bert, 1S⁷ 214, Archives municipales d’Auxerre,

make them an overture. Supporting the idea of a Christian democracy was the way to bring the clergy “under our banner.” In return, the Republic would receive “the consecration of divine right” and would “disconcert monarchist hopes.” And divine right, Menusier added, was the right that “would soon brave all the others.”

Menusier’s justifications for keeping the faculties aligned with the moderate republican position but did not entirely overlap with it, either. Menusier was in favor of deploying the resources of the Concordat system to control and contain Catholic claims to public authority. As he explained to Bert, by eliminating the faculties of theology, the Republic would be losing a powerful lever of influence over the Catholic Church, specifically, the education of its clergy, if the state chose to use its power to reorganize the seminaries. In his pamphlet, Menusier went a step further, arguing that the state should not forgo an opportunity to educate “religious civil servants,” or clerics who were educated like magistrates in public law and operated in society as “religious jurisconsults.”³¹ Presumably, these religious jurisconsults would also belong to the members of the clergy whom Mensuier believed could be rallied to the republican cause and provide the regime with the sanction of divine right in return. A governing alliance with religion was needed even in the laic République because no society had endured without “the concord of religion.”³²

Most moderate republicans would have had difficulty accepting Menusier’s view of an alliance between democracy and religion because, as they understood it, the rights of the laic state depended on the will of an autonomous civil society that did not need the sanction of religion or a clergy to guide it, even if as “religious jurisconsults.” As Ferry would explain in early July, the purpose of keeping the Concordat was to ensure civil society’s autonomy by

³¹ Menusier, *Les Facultés*, 13-14.

³² *Ibid.*, 3.

asserting the rights of the state. Ferry gave this explanation when he spoke before the Chamber of Deputies as part of introducing the government's bill on freedom of education (*liberté d'enseignement*). The legislation was intended to undo the exception that had been created for Catholic universities in 1875 and return to the state sole authority to grant academic degrees. The bill also contained the (in)famous Article 7 against schools operated by religious orders. Although the Senate did not ratify Article 7, many Jesuits and members of teaching orders were forcibly removed from their lodgings when Article 7 was carried out by executive decree in 1880. In explaining the article's intent the year before, Ferry insisted that, in barring teaching congregations, the government in no way desired "to declare the clergy outlaws." The government was only requiring that "clergy respect the law." Members of religious orders were not respecting the law of the Republic when their teaching "spread calumnies against the government and civil society that directed the young minds" in their charge. The "civil power," Ferry assured the Chamber, was not seeking to wage war against the "ecclesiastical power." There was already an accord between these two powers, the Concordat, and the government would maintain it because it offered "the surest and best rampart to thwart the enterprises of a certain part of religious society against the independence of civil society."³³

Despite the actions of Maret and Menusier to defend the faculties, Bert went forward with introducing his bill to the Chamber, combining it with a budgetary amendment to create a chair in the history of religions at the Collège de France. The budget committee included Bert's amendment in the Public Instruction budget that the full Chamber adopted on July 28. Later, in December, when the Senate reviewed the proposed budget, Senator Paris expressed his concern that a history of religions chair would have no other purpose than to "submit all religions to a

³³ Séance du 8 juillet 1879, *Annales de la Chambre des députés*, in vol. 8 of *Annales du Sénat et de la Chambre des députés: session ordinaire de 1879* (Paris: Imprimerie du Journal officiel, 1880), 126.

systematically hostile criticism that would treat them as fables.” To show that his concerns were warranted, Senator Paris referred to the original document that Bert submitted to the budget committee on July 9. Originally, Bert had requested eliminating the five faculties of theology in addition to creating the history of religions chair. For Senator Paris, these two items revealed the “spirit of the amendment, which, in turn, merely reflected the two qualities that were joined in its author, a savant and a man of combat.”³⁴

Despite the opposition of several conservative senators, the amendment to create a history of religions chairs passed the Senate in December, and in early 1880, Albert Réville was officially named to the new chair. The proposal to eliminate the faculties of theology never made it beyond the budget committee. Bert’s attempt against the faculties of 1879 most likely failed because committee members were aware that there would be little support for elimination among the moderate republicans who controlled cabinet and in the full Chamber. As we will see in following sections, discontinuing the faculties was understood by participants on both sides to signal an intent to separate church and state and abrogate the Concordat—a move that moderate republicans were desperate to avoid given the turmoil it could unleash. Even Littré, whom one might expect to have a more radical view, lent his support in September to maintaining the Concordat. To break it would be a “grave error,” Littré wrote, as it would “disrupt the peace of French Catholics” and amount to “a declaration of war.”³⁵ The moderate republican leadership would likely have wanted to leave the matter of the Concordat, as well as the Catholic faculties, for another time so that neither would impede the other pieces of secularizing legislation that moderates wished to pursue in summer 1879. In June and July, the moderate coalition, with

³⁴ Séance du 11 décembre 1879, *Annales du Sénat*, in vol. 2 of *Annales du Sénat et de la Chambre des députés: session extraordinaire de 1879* (Paris: Imprimerie du Journal officiel, 1880), 77-8.

³⁵ Littré, “Le catholicisme selon le suffrage universel,” *La Philosophie positive*, 2nd ser., vol. 23 (1879): 237.

Ferry and Bert at their head, introduced two significant pieces of legislation. The first initiative was the bill on freedom of education, which, as will be recalled, included Article 7 against teaching congregations, and the second was a bill to reorganize the Conseil Supérieur de l'Instruction Publique (the body that oversaw teaching at all levels of the University and, since 1850, had included bishops). In both initiatives, moderate republicans would deploy their understanding of the laic state and its rights over education. These justifications would again be used in their signature primary school reform of 1882.³⁶

Before moving on to Bert's second attempt against the faculties in 1882, it is worth briefly examining the counterarguments of conservatives to the proposal to create a history of religions chair since they articulated objections that would be repeatedly marshalled against the discipline right up to the creation of a dedicated history of religions faculty in 1885. The same objections also figured into the conservative reply to the claim that the laic state had the right to exclude religious personnel and curricula from schools: by enforcing the exclusions, the state was not respecting religion and its privileged role in society. On July 28, when the Chamber of Deputies reviewed the proposed Public Instruction budget that included Bert's amendment for a history of religions chair, Deputy Blachère objected on the grounds that such a chair would exist only to combat and denigrate religious beliefs. Its mere existence would be an outrage to the recognized religions because its occupant would place the religions of civilized countries "on equal footing with the mythologies of India and Greece and those of the savage peoples of Polynesia." Under the Concordat, the state had the obligation to protect the free exercise of

³⁶ Bert in fact drafted an initial report outlining laïcité in primary schools in December 1879. "Rapport fait au nom de la commission chargée d'examiner la proposition de loi de M. Barodet et de plusieurs de ses collègues, sur l'instruction primaire, par M. Paul Bert, député," Annexe no. 1981, in *Annales du Sénat et de la Chambre des députés: session extraordinaire de 1879*, t. 2 – du 27 novembre au 20 décembre 1879 (Paris: Imprimerie du Journal officiel, 1880).

recognized religions and could not sponsor a teaching that would subject those religions to attack. Deputy Blachère implored his colleagues to heed the words of the British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli: “society has a soul just as much as it has a body; its religious faith is a part of its existence just as much as agriculture, commerce and industry.”³⁷ Republicans might not have agreed with each other when to separate church and state but they could agree on the necessity of challenging the conservative view of religion’s function in society. Society had things that held it together, like a soul in relation to a body, but religion was no longer one of them.

1882-83: A Second Attempt to Cut the Faculties and Growing Pressure for Separation

Bert renewed his attempt to win passage of a bill that would eliminate the faculties of theology in early February 1882. Charles Boysset, a radical deputy, introduced legislation against the Catholic faculties at the same time. The bills differed in that Boysset sought simply termination of the faculties and the subjects they taught while Bert planned to transfer the teaching of canon law and church history to faculties of letters.³⁸ In a further difference, Boysset concurrently introduced legislation to abrogate the Concordat. Although the two projects were linked in Boysset’s eyes, moderates remained reluctant to pursue separation, and both bills stalled in the legislative process, failing to reach a vote in the full Chamber in either 1882 or 1883.

Our knowledge of the 1882 attempt and its outcome comes from two sources apart from the stenographic transcripts of the *Journal officiel*. The first source is the notebook of minutes from the legislative committee that was appointed in May 1882 to review the two bills on the

³⁷ Séance du 28 juillet 1879, *Annales de la Chambre des députés*, in vol. 9 of *Annales du Sénat et de la Chambre des députés: session ordinaire de 1879*, 233-34.

³⁸ Séance du 7 février 1882, in vol. 1 of *Annales de la Chambre des députés: débats parlementaires, session ordinaire de 1882*, 132.

faculties.³⁹ The second is the set of notes that Maret wrote after each of his conversations with members of the faculties committee in June 1882. Maret's notes are contained in his collection of personal papers at the Institut Catholique of Paris.⁴⁰ The historian Bruno Neveu referred to both sources in his comprehensive study of the almost century-long existence of the state faculties of theology.⁴¹ In his annotated bibliographic repertory, Neveu raises the concern that actors appear to be portrayed in different lights in the Maret notes and the committee minutes. I believe the apparent inconsistency can be resolved by applying the techniques of criticism to the Maret sources. Indeed, Neveu produced his comprehensive repertory in the hope that a future scholar would provide a more detailed analysis than he could of certain parts of the faculties' history.

We may resolve Neveu's concern if we regard one of the documents in the Maret collection as untrustworthy and rely only on the remaining set of notes. The Maret conversation notes are written by hand on small sheets of paper. However, the first page of the stack of notes is unlike the rest. It is a list summarizing the views of the committee members, whether they are for or against maintaining the faculties. On the one hand, the positions of members are indeed inconsistent with what one finds in the committee minutes, but on the other, their positions as recorded on the list are also inconsistent with the portrayals of members in the set of notes that follow it in the stack of small sheets. For example, Marcon, the committee president, is listed as "hostile," but in the notes of their conversation, he tells Maret that he is in favor of keeping the Sorbonne faculty. The difficulty here is that the list uses only the unclear designations

³⁹ Commission des facultés de théologie catholique, nommée le 16 mai 1882, C 3380, AN.

⁴⁰ The notes themselves were presumably written by Maret's assistant, as they are not in his hand, and given his advanced in age, there other letters in the folder that dictated to an assistant. *Project de suppression des facultés de théologie 1882*, fonds Maret, carton 13, dossier "Facultés de Théologie 1873-1883," AICP.

⁴¹ Bruno Neveu, *Les facultés de théologie catholique de l'Université de France, 1808-1885*, (Paris: Klincksieck, 1998). Neveu sees the state faculties as institutions that were reflections of their time but also shaped by the legacy of struggles among monarchy, papacy and corporate university bodies from the Middle Ages to the eve of Revolution.

“favorable” and “hostile.” We do not know if the favorable designation means that a deputy was prepared to support Maret’s effort to save the Catholic faculties or if the deputy expressed favorable views about the Catholic faculties during the committee deliberations. If we take the designation to mean the latter, then Marcon should not be listed as “hostile” since in both the committee meetings and in conversation with Maret he expressed support for keeping the Sorbonne faculty. Another member, Steeg, expressed the same position as Marcon in both the minutes and the notes but is instead listed as “favorable pour la faculté de Paris.” Alternatively, the label “hostile” for Marcon is equally unclear if compared to Boysset, who is also listed as “hostile.” Boysset was the most anticlerical of the members, the original sponsor of the bill to eliminate the faculties, and the staunchest critic of the faculties. Marcon might have been ready to cut the provincial faculties in order to keep the one at the Sorbonne, but he was in no way as hostile to them as Boysset.

Now that we are able to leave aside the untrustworthy document, we can reconstruct a reliable portrait of the committee debates and the different views of its members by reading comparatively the committee minutes and the Maret sources. By comparing the information in each source, we arrive at a larger portrait of what was at issue in debating the faculties question than we could produce from either source alone. In fact, in producing such a larger portrait, we find that the two sets of sources agree with one another in how they present members, and a source in one collection can be used to fill in gaps that appear in the other. Lastly, newspaper articles and documents contained in separate ministerial archives will also serve to corroborate information in the two sets of sources and clarify ambiguities.

The Chamber of Deputies organized a special committee in May 1882 to study the elimination bills that Bert and Boysset had introduced in February.⁴² From the committee's first meeting on May 17, the differing republican views about anticlerical strategy were present, as well as the issue that would prove a persistent point of contention during the ensuing months: the status of the Protestant theology faculties.⁴³ Three members supported eliminating all five Catholic faculties and keeping the two Protestant faculties. Another three were in favor of eliminating all Catholic faculties but only provisionally in favor of keeping the Protestant faculties until the matter of how Protestant ministers were trained could be studied. A further two were provisionally on the side of maintaining the Protestant faculties until minister training had been examined, but they felt that only the Catholic faculties in the provinces should be cut (the Paris faculty would be retained). Lastly, as in 1879, the idea of introducing the history of religions was never far afield in the debate over the theology faculties. Deputy Courmeaux wanted to abolish all the faculties because the laic state had no business paying for the teaching of any religious dogma. However, unlike his colleagues, he then proposed that university chairs in history of religions be created so that "religious teaching based on criticism and not dogma" could take place.

Sometime between late May and mid-June, one of the members, Deputy Corentin-Guyho, proposed an amendment that the Protestant faculties also be abolished along with their Catholic counterparts. Corentin-Guyho argued that, by retaining the Protestant faculties and not the Catholic ones, the state would be showing a preference to the Protestant religion that it was not extending to the Catholic religion: "equality requires recognizing a general principle that permits

⁴² Séance du 13 mai 1882, in vol. 2 of *Annales de la Chambres de députés: débats parlementaires, session ordinaire de 1882*.

⁴³ Séance du 17 mai 1882, *Procès-verbaux de la commission relative à la suppression des facultés de théologie catholique*, C 3380.

no exceptions.”⁴⁴ He also felt that the state should not be involving itself in “religious instruction” of any kind, a domain in which the laic state had not competence.⁴⁵ Corentin-Guyho pressed for a vote on his amendment at a meeting that Ferry, as Minister of Public Instruction, attended. Ferry had come to make the case for maintaining the Catholic faculties, and after he retired, the committee proceeded to vote.⁴⁶ The amendment concerning the Protestant faculties was defeated but a second vote on the Catholic faculties alone passed.⁴⁷

Despite the vote to abolish all the Catholic faculties in June 1882, the committee did not submit a report to the full Chamber until February 1883. A newspaper reported in December that the fate of the Protestant faculties continued to be stumbling block. When the committee convened on 9 December, it was to discuss the report recommending elimination of the Catholic faculties that Deputy Boysset had at last prepared. Courmeaux and Corentin-Guyho were again opposed to that action: either the Catholic and Protestant faculties should both be abolished or they should both be maintained, without showing a preference to one religion that was not shown to the other. By contrast, Deputy Bousquet approved of Boysset’s recommendation, and hoped that the committee, along with the full Chamber, would acknowledge what was evident: the Catholic faculties were nothing like the Protestant faculties. Concerning the other members present, there was sufficient reluctance or resistance to Boysset’s report for the committee to put

⁴⁴ Undated session, *Procès-verbaux de la commission*.

⁴⁵ In addition to saying this in a committee session, two other members reported that Corentin-Guyho held this view in subsequent conversations with Maret. “Conversation avec M. Steeg, 24 juin” and “Conversation avec M. Marcon, 26 juin,” fonds Maret, carton 13.

⁴⁶ Ferry attended a meeting of the committee in early June. The entry for that session is undated but at one point Ferry urged the committee to “take the perspective of maintaining the Concordat regime (*régime concordataire*).” Undated session, *Procès-verbaux de la commission*. Jules Steeg also later told Maret that Ferry had come and that he had left before the voting.

⁴⁷ It was this decision that prompted Maret to have conversations with individual committee members: Corentin-Guyho, Marcon, Steeg and Boysset. Notes from each are conserved in fonds Maret, carton 13.

off a final vote until a later meeting.⁴⁸ We know from the eventual report submitted to the Chamber that the issue of the Protestant faculties ultimately resulted in a fracturing of the committee. A majority sided with Boysset on abolishing the Catholic faculties, but a dissenting minority decided to prepare a separate, rival piece of legislation that would address the Protestant faculties. Boysset also justified the majority decision in the report, contending that elimination would not be an unjust or biased action towards the Catholic faculties. A person could not become a pastor in the Protestant Church without a bachelor's degree in theology, which they could only earn at one of the Protestant faculties of theology. The Protestant faculties were, then, the equivalent of Catholic seminaries. However, the Catholic faculties could be abolished because they had no canonical purpose or role in preparing new members of the clergy. And since the Concordat would remain in place for the time being—its abrogation was “neither permissible nor universally agreed upon”—the Protestant faculties had to be maintained and treated as equal to the Catholic seminaries.⁴⁹

As was true in 1879, actors in print culture were not far removed from the debates within the committee rooms of the legislature. Here, too, the issue of the Protestant faculties surfaced but so too did the matter of the Concordat. In the opinion of certain Catholics—though not all—the move to spare the Protestant faculties confirmed what they already believed: the anticlerical politics of republicans was really an effort to stamp out the Catholic faith. When Boysset originally introduced his bill against the faculties in February 1882, an editorial under the name

⁴⁸ *L'Express: journal quotidien républicain indépendant*, 10 December 1882, in F¹⁷ 13238, AN. I also quote from the digitized version of *L'Express* that is available in the Gallica database, albeit under the periodical entitled *Le Patriote français*. The two newspapers published the same printed content from 28 May 1882 until both ceased in February 1883.

⁴⁹ Charles Boysset, “Rapport fait au nom de la commission des facultés de théologie catholique, séance du 13 février 1883, Chambre des députés, session de 1882, impression no. 1701,” F¹⁷ 13238.

of “Giovanni” appeared in *La Défense sociale et religieuse*.⁵⁰ Giovanni observed that the burden of theology faculties on the state budget could easily be resolved if the state were willing to work out a joint administrative regime that would keep the Catholic faculties under the protection of the state but place them under the supervision of the bishops. “The state was not a theologian,” and needed to defer to the “wisdom of the episcopate,” which had justly refused to hand over its sole jurisdiction in matters of doctrine to the state. Under such an arrangement, the state would be offering its “patronage to the body of knowledge (‘la science’) that had contributed the most to the progress of the human mind.” Giovanni then denied the claim made by Boysset that Catholic theology was the “enemy of modern civilization, the negation of scientific knowledge (‘la science’).” The desire to combat the Church because of progress in knowledge and in society was no more than a pretext for a desire to “erase God from the world.” Like other anticlerical proposals, the bill to eliminate theology “had only one motive, which its authors should admit: the hatred of Catholic religion.” The fact that the Protestant faculties were to be left untouched merely served as “clear proof” of the republican intention to attack the very things that “constituted the life, force and liberty of the Catholic clergy.” Although Giovanni’s editorial does not discriminate between the radical anticlericalism of a Boysset and the moderate position of a Ferry, it is worth noting that the current question of whether secularism in France is synonymous with irreligion is not new and dates at least from the late nineteenth century.

On the other side of the political spectrum, the question of the Concordat’s place in the laic Republic figured prominently in the disagreements that republicans had with each other over what to do about the Catholic faculties. Writing in November 1883, in the daily *Le Voltaire*, Bert told his readers that he wished to clarify his motivations for seeking the termination of the

⁵⁰ “Les Facultés de Théologie Catholique,” *La Défense sociale et religieuse*, 13-14 February 1882, fonds Maret, carton 13.

Catholic faculties but not the Protestant faculties.⁵¹ Many had seen in his bill “proof of a particular predilection for the Reformed Church and a systematic hostility toward the Catholic Church.” They were wrong, Bert insisted, and “the true reasons” for proposing elimination had only to do with ensuring that the rights of both the state and church were respected. The “hybrid” nature of the Catholic theology faculties distinguished them from their Protestant equivalents because they placed state and church in a contradictory situation. The French state “provided the upkeep of the Catholic theology faculties, appointed the professors, and gave a few of them a place in the governing council of the state university [the Conseil Supérieur de l’Instruction Publique].” The Pope not only refused to recognize the theological degrees that graduates of the state faculties legitimately possessed but participated in establishing rival faculties of theology at the recently created Catholic universities. That the Church was not respecting the authority of the State was understandable; “it could not be otherwise,” Bert explained. The papacy could not “grant canonical recognition to a faculty and the degrees it awarded unless it was absolute master over its teaching, able to appoint and dismiss professors, and possess an authority over the institution that gave it every guarantee from the perspective of doctrine.” Could the French state continue to support the “teaching of theology that was unsanctioned by the Church but still claimed to be its voice?” It would border on the “ridiculous” for the state to maintain the teaching of doctrine that placed professors in contradiction with their ecclesiastical superiors. In the interests of their “dignity,” both state and church needed to separate themselves from this “false situation” by closing the faculties of theology.

Bert elaborated his view of the proper relations between civil and ecclesiastical powers that should determine the fate of the faculties when, in concluding his article, he disqualified the

⁵¹ Paul Bert, “Les Facultés de théologie,” *Le Voltaire*, 15 November 1883, F¹⁷ 13238.

position that we encountered in Menuisier's 1879 plea for keeping the faculties given the state's responsibilities under the Concordat. By terminating the Catholic faculties, Menuisier argued, the state would be losing the capacity to educate a clergy that was less ultramontane, more tolerant of religious pluralism, and more respectful of the republican form of government. "The people who claimed as much evidently mistook their desires for reality," Bert wrote.⁵² The real question was whether one could still reasonably hope for a clergy that was "liberal, Gallican and national" after the declaration of papal infallibility in 1870. To ask that the state support the faculties so as to have clerics who were political allies was to ask the state to articulate an opinion on doctrinal conformity and to intervene in what was a matter of "internal discipline." When "French kings were anointed by God and were the eldest sons of the Church," Bert explained, the state could imagine that it had a right to an opinion in questions of doctrine and regulation. In modern times, however, "the state regarded religion as an organism in whose internal functioning it did not involve itself." Instead, the modern state limited itself to "inspecting, warning and reprimanding the encroachments that threatened its own rights and the liberty of other social organisms." For republicans like Bert, society was now an organism consisting of multiple organized bodies, of which religion was but one, no longer having claim to privileged status or mission over the rest. This same conception of religion as a part of the social organism meant that laic state only intervened in religious affairs to protect the freedoms of the other, independent components of society.

Bert replied to Menuisier's reasons for keeping the Catholic faculties but there were other moderate republicans who, like Menuisier, felt that the Concordat regime required the government to preserve the faculties. When Bert had introduced his bill in early 1882, he had

⁵² Bert, "Les Facultés," *Le Voltaire*.

faced stern criticism from the editors of the moderate but more conservative leaning daily, *Le Temps*.⁵³ The editors specifically objected to the reasoning that Bert used in 1882 and would then reassert in late 1883: by maintaining the faculties, the French state would be supporting professors in a contradictory position vis-à-vis their ecclesiastical superiors. The *Le Temps* editors retorted that such a view played directly into the hands of ultramontane Catholicism and left the Republic without any means to restrain its influence. The Concordat gave the State “rights and prerogatives” that it was not be possible to abandon without invalidating the agreement itself. If the Concordat regime were to be applied according to Bert’s new policy, the editors would be among the first to demand abrogation, since the Concordat would be, then, “a sham, promoting in effect that which its mission had been to contain and stop.” When it was enacted, the Concordat had drawn inspiration from the old doctrines of the Gallican Liberties in order to prevent the triumph of ultramontane Catholicism. The Concordat could not now be applied in a way that gave “official consecration” to those ideas by abandoning the faculties of theology. Even though the faculties were not formally stipulated in the agreement with Rome or the subsequent Organic Articles, they remained, like other elements of the Concordat regime, “a means by which the State acted positively on teaching and the direction of the Catholic Church.” As the *Le Temps* editors understood it, a laic state meant retaining the Catholic faculties so as to employ the apparatus of state regulation to control and put pressure on the Catholic Church. Bert wanted, by contrast, to relax the regulatory prerogatives of the state provided under the Concordat—allowing the Church to be free in conducting its own affairs—but, at the same time, the laic state’s right of intervention when necessary.

⁵³ *Le Temps*, 23 February 1882, F¹⁷ 13238.

Bert's 1883 article also reveals that no action had been taken in the months since the faculties committee had submitted its report in February. Bert was now returning to the tactic he had tried in 1879: eliminating the faculties by a budget amendment rather than achieving passage of a stand-alone law. He timed his article in *Le Voltaire* to come just before his fellow deputies took up the faculties question in the budgetary review that was to begin in the Chamber. Ultimately, however, the proposed Public Instruction budget for 1884 was discussed and adopted without any changes to the allocation for the faculties.⁵⁴

That the faculties were left untouched in the 1884 budget is understandable. Given the connection between the faculties and interpretations of the Concordat, the moderate-led government of 1883 presumably wished to delay discussion of terminating the faculties since it would almost certainly lead to the separation debate. Indeed, when it came time to review the budget for recognized religions ('budget des cultes') in November 1883, Ferry replied to a deputy of the far left that discussion of separation would happen one day but that, at present, it would "not be a wise reform."⁵⁵ As they had done the year before, in 1882, and in each year since 1879, radicals used the occasion of review of the religions budget to demand separation and an end to the Concordat regime. In the review of November 1882, Armand Fallières, who was then Minister of Interior and Religions, told radicals that the government's position was to remain "within the confines of the Concordat ('sur le terrain concordataire')" and asked his fellow deputies to pass the religions budget while leaving the Concordat debate for another time.⁵⁶ The following year, in November 1883, Deputy René Goblet similarly urged his colleagues to vote the religions budget without a debate on the Concordat, but unlike Fallières,

⁵⁴ Séance du 3 et 5 décembre 1883, *Journal officiel: débats parlementaires, Chambre des députés*.

⁵⁵ Séance du 22 novembre 1883, *Journal officiel, Chambre des députés*.

⁵⁶ Séance du 11 novembre 1882, *Journal officiel, Chambre des députés*.

Goblet was a proponent of separation. To his mind, it was more important that the Chamber “continue the work it had already begun to establish l’état laïque,” in primary education, for example. Various “preparatory measures” were needed before separation could take place, and until then Goblet would vote for the budget so that priests would continue to be paid.⁵⁷ In such a climate of reluctance to have the Concordat debate, it is not surprising that the report of the faculties committee never received a hearing in the full Chamber. As we have seen, the committee members were divided by different understandings of what the Concordat regime required in terms of educating ministers and what to do about the Protestant faculties.

1884-85: Elimination of the Faculties Passes and the Threat of a Conservative Reaction

When the faculties question did reach the legislative docket of the full Chamber at the end of 1884, during preparation of the budget for 1885, republicans still disagreed with each other over anticlerical strategy, but that debate was now taking place in a different context from 1879 or 1882-83. All parties, on the left and the right, were well aware that pivotal elections loomed on the horizon: some seats in the Senate would be decided in January 1885, and all seats in the Chamber later in the year. The record of republicans under opportunist leadership was now on the ballot, so to speak, and came under intense scrutiny from both radicals and conservatives. A focal point of criticism was the secular reforms of the previous five years but so too were the opportunists’ colonial and economic policies. In December 1884, France was in its second year of a significant economic downturn. Agricultural yields had been poor and industrial output was stagnating.⁵⁸ With the specter of a credit crisis looming, rivals of the opportunists were growing

⁵⁷ Séance du 22 novembre 1883, *Journal officiel, Chambre des députés*.

⁵⁸ For awareness of the worsening economic circumstances and fears of a credit crisis among deputies, see the séances du 23 juillet 1882 et du 26 novembre 1883, *Journal officiel, Chambre des députés*. Another factor

resistant to the costly colonial expedition in the Gulf of Tonkin (northern Vietnam). Making matters worse, the expedition was turning more violent. As we will see, all of these factors would converge in the process of voting for the state budget for 1885. Moderates found themselves caught between radicals who demanded more assertive secularizing reform and conservatives who called on voters to act before republicans led the country into greater disharmony. The faculties of theology, as well as the budget for recognized religions, sat at the center of these disputes and the ensuing budgetary impasse that arose in December 1884 and would not be resolved until March 1885, when elimination of the faculties at last passed in the Senate.

The Chamber initially adopted the budget that cut funding for the faculties on 23 December 1884, but proponents of elimination had laid the groundwork several months earlier, during the meetings of the Chamber's standing budget committee. As in 1882-83, the problem of the Protestant faculties again proved a source of disagreement among republicans in summer 1884. However, that matter would be eclipsed later by a fiscal dispute between the two houses of legislature. In addition, Bert and Boysset now had an ally on the budget committee, the radical deputy Antonin Dubost, who had also been charged with reporting the proposed budget for Public Instruction to the full Chamber. On 16 June, the committee considered the chapter concerning the faculties of the state university system.⁵⁹ Deputy Jules Roche moved that the line item for both Catholic and Protestant faculties be removed. He recalled that an earlier effort to cut the faculties had been made, but that the earlier approach was not the only possible one. Since the faculties were not "the product of an organic law," according to Roche, the committee

contributing to the economic downturn had been the collapse of the Union Générale bank and a large sell-off of stocks in early 1882. See chap. 3 in Arnaud-Dominique Houte, *Le triomphe de la République, 1871-1914* (Paris: Seuil, 2014).

⁵⁹ Meeting of 16 June 1884, *Procès-verbaux de la Commission du budget pour l'exercice 1885*, C 3305, AN.

could proceed with eliminating them by a budget reduction. Deputy Sarrien agreed, adding that elimination by reduction was what circumstances dictated “insofar as Rome refused to recognize the degrees awarded by the faculties.” Although the committee decided to consider the Catholic and Protestant faculties separately, the decision mattered little as both cuts passed with a large majority.

Five months later, in mid-November, a petition from the Consistory of the Reformed Church of Paris prompted the budget committee to reconsider its initial vote and restore the line item for the Protestant faculties. The leaders of the Reformed Consistory of Paris argued that if their state-funded faculties were eliminated, they would be “forced to recruit pastors from among the students of foreign faculties” since the law reorganizing the Reformed Church in 1879 required that all pastors have a bachelor’s of theology.⁶⁰ At the same time, French Protestants would not have anywhere to go in their own county to obtain the required degree. A narrow majority in the committee now agreed and voted to restore funding to the Protestant faculties on the grounds that the Reformed Church could not be deprived of its only means to educate new pastors.

If the Protestant faculties were now to be maintained, by mid-December, the fate of the Catholic faculties had still not been decided, but neither had the entire proposed budget for 1885. On December 13, the Minister of Finances presented to the budget committee the government’s request that one-fourth of the proposed 1885 total be approved so that necessary services would continue uninterrupted in the first trimester of 1885. The minister regretted that they were behind schedule and conceded that obtaining passage of the full budget by the end of December would be an “impossibility.”⁶¹ He and the other members of cabinet thought it more prudent to ask for

⁶⁰ Meeting of 13 November 1884, *Procès-verbaux de la Commission du budget*.

⁶¹ Meeting of 13 December 1884, *Procès-verbaux de la Commission du budget*.

one-fourth in the knowledge that senators would be in their home districts in early January ahead of the elections at the end that month. Deputy Wilson also regretted the delay; better organization of the committee's work would have been desirable, but so too would have greater cooperation from the government, which had shown "little will to find compromises on the reductions requested by the committee."

Although in mid-December the government did not expect the Senate to pass a budget by the end of the month, that did not prevent the Chamber from moving ahead in its review of the full proposal while the one-fourth request was being discussed in sessions of the budget committee. Following the committee's votes earlier in the year, the version of the budget that the Chamber adopted on December 23 included elimination of the Catholic faculties. However, by approving elimination, the Chamber was not finally rendering a decision on the bill that Bert and Boysset had put forward in 1882 to terminate the faculties. Rather, the Chamber was vindicating the new tactic that opponents of the faculties had adopted while they were waiting for a hearing on the stand-alone bill: terminating the faculties by removing their budgetary line item, which had not been successful in 1883 but was being attempted again in 1884. The day after the Chamber's vote on December 23, Bert penned a new article in *Le Voltaire* defending the right of the deputies to eliminate "by budgetary means" ('voie budgétaire') an institution that had been "founded by law."⁶² He would have preferred to cut the faculties by enacting a new piece of legislation that would overturn the organic decree of 1808 that had established the University. Regrettably, successive moderate-led governments had delayed and resisted action on a stand-alone piece of legislation, and the matter of how to provide a pension for the theology professors who would lose their salaries would have to be settled separately. The Chamber had been

⁶² Bert, "La suppression des Facultés de théologie catholique," *Le Voltaire*, 24 December 1884, F¹⁷ 13238.

“entirely in its right” to terminate by budgetary means, Bert added, since it had recently exercised the same prerogative when, with the cooperation of the War Ministry, it had cut military chaplaincies.

Bert’s defense of elimination by budgetary means was a reply to not just other republicans but also conservatives. As the Chamber went forward with its review of the full budget in mid-December, the Catholic newspaper *Le Monde* published an almost daily litany of rebukes.⁶³ On December 17, the editors lent their hearty support to Deputy Freppel’s action in the Chamber to forestall adoption of the chapter that included the reductions concerning the theology faculties.⁶⁴ Termination by budgetary means was “a legal outrage,” and this latest anticlerical measure, just like all the others, only served to show that Catholics were being singled out because of a hostility toward their faith. “To republican eyes, the crime of the Catholic faculties of theology was,” the editors observed, “that they professed Catholic theology.”⁶⁵ The day before commenting on Freppel, on December 16, the editors were in disbelief that the government was preparing to request a one-fourth provision. It was “unthinkable” to be in the midst of an economic crisis and not yet have a budget passed to address the deficit that had accrued under republican leadership. Worse still, the government wanted to continue “an adventure in the Far East” (i.e., in Tonkin) at such a time. One of *Le Monde*’s columnists on the 16th continued the editorial assault: “if one wanted to find the reasons for the deficit, one had to look no further than the Public Instruction budget and recall the different secular reforms in primary and secondary education.” Erecting new facilities and

⁶³ Reflecting the spectrum that existed on the right, just as on the left, *Le Monde* was Catholic and monarchist in orientation but was less ultramontane than the other leading Catholic daily *L’Univers*. In fact, the editorial leadership of *Le Monde* had split from *L’Univers*.

⁶⁴ Freppel was a bishop in Finistère and a professor of rhetoric and eloquence at the Sorbonne faculty.

⁶⁵ *Le Monde*, 17 December 1884.

hiring new teachers had been costly.⁶⁶ Later, in a special opinion column on the 20th, a former deputy called on Catholics to take action in the upcoming elections. After all the republican attacks on “religious liberty” and “the rights of the father,” it was their duty to make their voices heard.⁶⁷

The issue of elimination by budgetary means had been a counterargument of conservatives, but it would also prove a sticking point among republicans on the budget committee as they considered the government’s request of a one-fourth provision. Still dissatisfied with the fact that passing a budget was now delayed, the committee invited three ministers—Ferry, Martin-Feuillée and Tirard—to its meeting on December 27 so that they could further explain the one-fourth request. At issue for members of the committee were the reductions approved by the Chamber four days earlier but on which the Senate had yet to render a decision. The Catholic faculties were one of those reductions, and several others belonged to the Religions budget, for example, the retired bishops who constituted the Chapitre de Saint-Denis (another institution decreed by Napoleon). The reductions concerned services that “existed by virtue of a law,” and the committee members wanted to know whether the one-fourth request would amount, in the Senate, to a vote on the services that had been cut by Chamber when it adopted the full budget.⁶⁸ Ferry explained that they were not asking the Senate to decide on the reductions but only to “adjourn them.” The services concerned by the reductions would be maintained, he said. If the Senate later voted to restitute those services, then the government would ask the Chamber to approve a supplementary allocation. Deputy Ribot protested, insisting that the cut services needed to be included in the one-fourth provision if they were going to be

⁶⁶ *Le Monde*, 16 December 1884.

⁶⁷ Keller, “Le devoir des catholiques,” *Le Monde*, 20 December 1884.

⁶⁸ Meeting of 27 December 1884, *Procès-verbaux de la Commission du budget*.

maintained; otherwise, spending would take place without participation from the two houses of legislature. Deputy Wilson agreed, adding that “a service that existed by virtue of a law could not be considered maintained if it had not been given an allocation for the entire year.” Tirard understood their concern but explained that the government was trying to respect “the rights of the Chamber and those of the Senate.” Despite the reservations of Ribot and Wilson, the committee voted to grant the one-fourth request. However, in its recommendation to the full Chamber, the committee explained that it was only supporting the wishes of the government but did not condone the temporary provision as sound fiscal management since the cut services would continue.

The Senate approved the one-fourth provision shortly after the Chamber at the end of December, setting the stage for a face-off over the full budget in early March 1885. In the meantime, however, resurgent conservatives and radical republicans continued voicing their grievances against the moderate government. At start of January 1885, a republican deputy, Dugé de la Fauconneire, announced that he was joining the new Union of the Right.⁶⁹ A former Bonapartist, Dugé de la Fauconneire had rallied behind Léon Gambetta four years earlier on the promise that his moderate Union républicaine would put an end to religious intolerance. Dugé was now leaving because, through the secular reforms of schools, republicans had only worsened religious tensions. Radicals, too, were dissatisfied, but, unlike Dugé, they believed that moderates had not gone far enough on the anticlerical offensive. Bert, too, left the Union républicaine in January 1885 to join ranks with the radicals. The move against the faculties “by budgetary means,” which Bert had defended in December, may be seen as part of larger effort among radicals to demand a more aggressive politics that would dismantle the Concordat regime

⁶⁹ *Le Monde*, 4 January 1885, but also in *Le National* and commented upon in all the moderate papers, *Journal des débats*, *République française*, and *Le Temps*.

and deal a fatal blow to the Catholic Church in France. To that end, in early February, Bert sponsored a bill that called for abolishing various state-owned facilities that were “inconsistent with the Concordat” (‘non-concordataire’) and used by the Catholic Church, namely: episcopal residences, major seminaries and buildings that were owned by congregations but functioned as minor seminaries. After the bill’s defeat in the Chamber, the editors of the opportunist *Journal des débats* welcomed the outcome, noting that, as a radical, Bert had become the leader of a politics that called itself “pro-Concordat” (‘concordataire’) but was, in reality, against it.⁷⁰ An agreement “intended to preserve peace could not be turned into a weapon of war.” Over the next two months, as we shall see, moderates would again find themselves having to oppose the criticisms of conservatives while distancing themselves from the radical campaign to undo the Concordat regime by budgetary reduction.

Alongside changes of party affiliation among republicans, conservatives presented a return to monarchy as the only form of government that could restore the social unity that anticlericalism had eroded. Conservatives also found fault with the moderates for having yielded to “men of combat,” for having handed over public administration (in particular, the local officials who had to enforce anticlerical policies coming from Paris) to the Radical and Extreme Left.⁷¹ A week before the senatorial elections on January 25, two cabinet ministers went on the road to rally voters and reply to the charges being made against the government. In a speech in Rennes, Minister of Interior Waldeck-Rousseau accused radical republicans of being uncompromising and only seeking short-term electoral gain rather than policies that were achievable. To conservatives, he downplayed their forecasts of victory on the 25th. He remained

⁷⁰ *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, 4 February 1885.

⁷¹ The *Débats* editors discussed the conservative claims in their comment on the ministers’ speeches that I describe in the rest of the paragraph. However, unlike *Le Siècle*, they did not publish a transcript of the speeches. *Journal des débats*, 20 January 1885.

confident that voters would affirm their support for republicans and the Republic, giving “a new consecration to the institutions that were founded in 1870.”⁷² In the end, Waldeck-Rousseau’s confidence did not prove misplaced. Monarchist conservatives lost 22 seats and republicans increased their majority to three-fourths in the Senate. Among republicans, about 30 moderates and centrists won seats, but a roughly equal number of radicals won their races.⁷³ Although generally received as a victory for republicans, the loss of two republican senators to monarchists (in Arras and Lille) served as a reminder that a conservative reaction would remain a possibility until legislative elections in the fall.

Now that elections had taken place in the Senate, legislative sessions in both houses could resume, and the moderate government could return to the task of passing the budget for 1885. On February 28, the Senate adopted a revision of the full budget that Chamber had passed two months earlier. The Senate’s version included multiple amendments to the Religions budget that would again prove a battleground, as it had been in December when discussing the services that would continue under the one-fourth provision. Although under a separate ministry, the Senate restored the allocation for the Catholic, but not Protestant, faculties of theology. The *Journal des débats* editors applauded the Senate’s revisions, affirming, as they had when commenting on Bert’s new politics, the moderate anticlerical position.⁷⁴ The matter of reductions in the Religions budget hinged, the editors wrote, on the question of whether “the legal relations that existed between Church and State would be conserved, or would the Church be given its full independence and allowed to organize itself, live and develop outside the domain of public law.” If the latter route of separation were pursued, both Church and State would be “exposed to the

⁷² *Le Siècle*, 20 January 1885.

⁷³ *Journal des débats*, 26 January 1885.

⁷⁴ *Journal des débats*, 26 February 1885.

greatest of perils.” The seminary scholarships provided in the Religions budget were not stipulated by the Concordat but they were “consistent with its spirit.” So long as there was “a political law governing the Church, the State should take an interest in recruitment of clergy, and, to a certain degree, provide for it.”

On 4 March, the budget committee of the Chamber convened to discuss what action it would now take in response to the Senate’s amendments. Although there was considerable disagreement among members, the deliberation may be summarized as a consideration of three positions.⁷⁵ Allain-Targé, the Minister of Finances, put forward the first position. While the government and Chamber had found themselves in the previous December in a face-off with the Senate over the budget, “circumstances were now different.” He conceded the right of the Senate to “take away allocations but not that of restoring them.” This did not mean that he denied “the Senate the right to protest”; rather, it should only do so “as a check against excessive spending.” For its part, the Chamber should adhere to amendments made by the Senate “each time that it reduced or took away an allocation.” Unfortunately, Allain-Targé continued, the Senate was not currently employing its right of objection as it should. There was “a new presumption” that was beginning to gain ground in the polemics of the press following a special committee that had been appointed in the Senate. If the special committee’s aims were achieved, it would impose “an obligatory budget” on the Chamber.

In reply to Allain-Targé, Deputy Ribot advanced the deliberation’s second position. There could only be two possible “ways of thinking” (‘systèmes’), Ribot observed: either the Senate did not have the right to amend a budget proposal, in which case, budget bills could be sent to the Senate without the Chamber having to deliberate beforehand; or, like any other piece

⁷⁵ Meeting of 4 March 1885, *Procès-verbaux de la Commission du budget*.

of legislation, a budget bill went from the Chamber to the Senate, and “if this way of thinking were to predominate, then each amendment [from the Senate] should be reviewed by the Chamber.”⁷⁶ Ribot believed that, if disagreement arose between the two houses over a budgetary matter, it was not any simpler to extricate themselves from a budgetary impasse than with other kinds of legislation. As a result, he recognized the right of the Senate to modify allocations by restoration or reduction, which meant that the Chamber had to consider anew the amended articles and vote on them one by one. Allain-Targé observed that Ribot’s position would mean “a back-and-forth without end” (*‘la navette indéfinie’*) and would give superior fiscal power to the Senate, which would always have “the last word.” It was not a matter of which body held “budgetary power” but which had “political power,” since Ribot’s reasoning could be used against the government to transfer greater fiscal power to the Senate. To Allain-Targé’s mind, the committee needed to “preserve the final word in budgetary matters for the Chamber and reject the right of the Senate to restore allocations that had been cut.”

After the exchange of views between Allain-Targé and Ribot, Deputy Roche introduced a third position. If this were the first time that the Senate had restituted allocations already cut by the Chamber, Roche would be of the opinion that the Senate was transgressing its powers under Article 8 of the Constitution.⁷⁷ The Senate should be able “to invite the Chamber to review again” certain parts of the budget, but such action by the Senate should not be “by means of restoring allocations and sending a proposal back to the Chamber.” The problem was at once “political and constitutional” and simply had not been resolved since it first arose in December 1876. At the time, Roche recalled, the Senate’s Committee of Finances had concluded that the Senate did not have the right to restore allocations that were not originally contained in the

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Meeting of 4 March 1885, *Procès-verbaux de la Commission du budget*.

budget adopted by the Chamber. The question before them now was, by what right could the Senate reject the Chamber's reduction for a second time and still respect the fact that the Chamber had "the last word" in budgetary matters? If the Chamber reviewed anew each amended article and rejected them one by one, as Ribot suggested, the Chamber would be conceding the Senate's right of protestation. Instead, Roche recommended initiating a discussion of the revised budget from the Senate but then rejecting the amended articles "as a whole," which would have the effect of affirming the Chamber's final fiscal prerogative.

Before voting on those three views, two committee members observed that more was at stake than constitutional prerogatives. What the Chamber communicated to the Senate could have more immediate consequences for the republican majority in an election year, in a moment when conservatives were contending that the inability to pass a budget and the increased social disharmony were signs of all that was wrong with republican leadership. Deputy Etienne cautioned the committee that they did not need to behave as the Chamber had in 1876.⁷⁸ At the time, republicans had had to contend with a Senate that was "hostile to the Republic." The Senate was now controlled by republicans, and it would be "supremely impolitic to reject as a whole the allocations that the Senate had restored." Deputy de Roys was of a similar mind to Etienne, and asked whether it would be prudent, "with elections approaching, to have the country witness the spectacle of divided public powers after having given the people hope of union between them." Etienne and Roys were not alone in their reservations about stoking political tensions, as the eventual vote proved tight. By a narrow margin, the committee adopted Ribot's position, which had been to proceed with a new deliberation of the articles that Senate had amended, as would be the normal legislative process. However, to indicate that a second

⁷⁸ Séance du 4 mars 1885, *Journal officiel, Chambre des députés*.

deliberation in the Chamber remained an unusual circumstance, the committee resolved that, in the eventual report to the Senate, it should be communicated, “with all the courtesy possible,” that the Senate “had exhausted its power of objection” and the Chamber’s second vote would be definitive.

On March 11, the first day of deliberation in the full Chamber on the amended budget, Deputy Gustave Levavasseur, who was a center-leaning moderate, echoed the reservations of Etienne and Roys on the budget committee. Tensions were running high, and the government was losing support “among large parts of the population who felt confronted by a resolutely irreligious politics.”⁷⁹ Concerning the contested reductions in the Religions budget, he pleaded with his fellow republicans that they not “pursue a policy that was in contradiction with the opinion of the country.” Most French people no longer had “belief in the orthodox sense,” but that did not mean that they were prepared to go along with the materialists in rejecting religion altogether. “The population remains strongly impregnated with religious sentiment,” he continued, and “you go against the national sentiment when you attack the religious sentiment that is one of its guarantees.” This was all the more to be regretted because “a war was being waged against the religious idea just as was being done in China—without a declaration of war.” Levavasseur concluded with a warning: by continuing to show hostility toward religious sentiment via progressive budget reductions, republicans risked alienating moderates in the center, who “are slow to leave but once they have left, they are hard to get back.”

After Levavasseur’s opening plea in the Chamber, discussion of the amended budget articles proceeded one by one until March 12, when the deputies passed a second version of the full budget that again restored the reductions in Cults and for the faculties of theology. With the

⁷⁹ Séance du 11 mars 1885, *Ibid.*

new restitutions, matters appeared to be headed toward further confrontation with the Senate. However, like the deputies on the budget committee, the senators hoped to strike a balance, finding a way out of the impasse while asserting as much of their fiscal rights as possible. On March 19, the Senate's Committee of Finances presented its report to the full body of senators on the second version of the budget.⁸⁰ In a "spirit of conciliation," and in the hope of establishing a precedent to resolve future disputes, the committee recommended that a distinction be made between ordinary allocations for services and allocations for services that existed by law. The Senate could only exercise its fiscal right of remonstrance for the second kind of allocation, even if doing so meant a recurring back-and-forth between the houses. For all other ordinary allocations, the Senate would be bound to acquiesce to the will of the Chamber if that body voted in a second deliberation to restore line items that the Senate had amended during its first deliberation. The finances committee felt that allocations for services that existed by law warranted special treatment since, if one house acted without consent of the other to eliminate the services by budgetary means, the action would amount to "implicit abrogation [of a law] that the other house would have the right to refuse."

In the proposed budget for 1885, the committee highlighted three allocations that "assured the execution of special laws" and on which a compromise honoring both houses needed to be reached. These were for the Chapter of Saint-Denis, seminary scholarships for all three recognized religions, and the faculties of theology—all existed because of laws that

⁸⁰ "Rapport fait au nom de la commission des finances chargée d'examiner le projet de loi, adopté par la Chambre des députés, adopté avec modifications par le Sénat, adopté avec modifications par la Chambre, portant fixation du budget general des dépenses et des recettes de l'exercice 1885, par M. Dauphin, sénateur," annexe no. 85, séance du 19 mars 1885, in *Journal officiel: documents parlementaires, Sénat* (Jan-Dec 1886), Bibliothèque des Archives nationales.

Napoleon decreed between 1806 and 1808.⁸¹ Although the committee was prepared to concede elimination of the Chapter of Saint-Denis, it was only prepared to do so for seminary scholarships on the condition that the scholarships be honored for those students who currently received them. Concerning the faculties of theology, the committee felt that the Senate was most within its rights to insist that the law of 1808 be respected and the services that it required not interrupted. The committee proposed that the Sorbonne faculty be maintained since only the four provincial faculties could be eliminated without a significant reorganization to higher education, an action that would require new legislation. In addition, the decreed law of 1808 was upheld by the recent 1880 law that had reorganized the Conseil Supérieur de l'Instruction Publique and had placed one professor of Catholic theology and one professor of Protestant theology on that body. In sum, to the members of the finances committee, cutting the Catholic faculties by budgetary reduction would unduly impact “the principle of higher education” (‘le principe de l’enseignement supérieur’) and its operation.

Over two days, after Dauphin’s presentation of the committee report, a long debate ensued in the Senate. Senators from the right and center, including Jules Simon, accused the committee of ceding the rights of the Senate too easily; their conciliatory spirit would effectively “nullify” the Senate and represent “an abdication” of the house’s powers and dignity.⁸² On March 21, the second day of debate, Baron de Ravignan also opposed the recommendation to cede to the will of the Chamber, but on different grounds. Ravignan argued that “a certain tendency and way of thinking” had to be resisted, which was to progressively do away with the

⁸¹ “Rapport fait au nom de la commission des finances,” séance du 19 mars 1885. Senator Dauphin, the rapport’s author, also summarized its conclusions and recommended actions before the full Senate. Many passages overlap. See séance du 19 mars 1885, *Journal officiel: débats parlementaires, Sénat*.

⁸² Séance du 20 mars 1885, *Journal officiel, Sénat*.

Cults budget by making a handful of cuts each year.⁸³ Ultimately, the aim of this tendency in the Chamber was to sap the regime of the Concordat and “habituate minds to the violation of this pact,” a pact that had, “for almost a century, assured order, security and public prosperity.” There could be neither security or prosperity in a country in which “sectarian passions threatened the convictions and rights of conscience.” Then, switching from the Chamber to addressing the government, which had claimed that it did not control the actions of the deputies, Ravignan demanded: “tell us how you understand religious peace in this country, how you conceive of justice for Catholics. The nation desires that this justice find its expression [either] in the formal adherence and execution of the engagements of the Concordat, or in a committed renunciation that would give the Church all the capacities and liberties necessary to its life and the accomplishment of its mission.”

As President of Cabinet, Ferry was present for the second day of discussion in the Senate, and his reply to Ravignan’s harangue illustrated the difficult position in which the moderate republican government now found itself, caught between having to distance itself from the so-called “pro-Concordat” politics among radicals and having to hold the line against conservatives. Ferry believed that the issue of elimination by budgetary means came down to two questions: the anticlerical, or “ecclesiastical,” politics pursued by the Chamber, and the relations of the two houses of legislature and their respective powers.⁸⁴ Ferry did not condone the politics of a certain part of the Chamber that consisted “in lessening each year the total size of the Cults budget in order to ultimately expunge it.” As he elaborated on why he was against that politics, Ferry reaffirmed the moderate anticlerical strategy that insisted on retaining the Concordat and using the power of the state to resist the influence of the Church over society while preserving the

⁸³ Séance du 21 mars 1885, *Journal officiel, Sénat*.

⁸⁴ Séance du 21 mars 1885, *Journal officiel, Sénat*.

peace as much as possible. The government had always considered the “tendency” of elimination by progressive reduction in the Chamber to be “supremely impolitic,” and had never faltered in explaining to the “audacious interpreters of the Concordat that their way of thinking was not in the logic of the Concordat itself, which could have no sense or influence it was not a contract of religious peace and sound accord between Church and State.” If the duty of the republican majority, Ferry went on, “had been to free civil society from certain usurpations, certain encroachments, of the ecclesiastical power that were introduced into our laws 30 or 40 years ago, and to give the State better boundaries vis-à-vis the Church,” the idea was “to keep those boundaries once they had been drawn, to not transgress them, and to leave the priest in the temple and not tread on religious consciences in any way.” However, refraining from treading on consciences did not mean that certain public actions of the Catholic Church, namely, in education, could not be restricted, and after replying to radicals, Ferry turned his attention to conservatives. They claimed that the Cults budget existed by virtue of the function that recognized religions performed in society, and as such, its allocations were above modification. That could not be the view of “laic society,” Ferry asserted. In other words, that could not be the view of an autonomous civil society that no longer needed the Catholic religion to guide it or ensure its cohesion. In the end, even as Ferry upheld the Concordat regime and certain services that were provided by the state through the Cults budget, he implored senators not to enter into open conflict with the Chamber by approving restored allocations for a second time.

After Ferry’s intervention in the Senate debate, voting took place on each of the contested allocations at the center of the fiscal dispute: closing the Chapter of Saint-Denis, ending the seminary scholarships and abolishing the Catholic faculties of theology. Ravignan and other

conservatives made motions to restore each them, but they were all defeated.⁸⁵ The Senate's final act of the session on March 21 was to adopt the full budget for 1885 in which the Catholic faculties lost their funding. Even with a larger republican majority in Senate after the January elections, the specter of a deepening conflict between the houses in an election year likely proved too great for moderate-minded republican senators who might have voted to keep the faculties in 1879 or 1882 but now voted in favor of abolition. Now was the time to reassert the republican project and its institutions in the face of renewed opposition, even if that meant conceding some ground to radicals.

The Fall of the Ferry Government and the Creation of a Faculty to Replace Theology

After the Senate's vote on March 21, the budget for 1885 went back to the Chamber for adoption, but the lower house was never able to act on it because the Ferry government soon found itself in a new crisis. Moreover, both sides found fault with the moderates for wasteful spending on a colonial expedition in the Gulf of Tonkin (present-day northern Vietnam) at a moment when France's own fiscal house needed to be put in order. On March 29, news reached Paris that French forces in the Gulf of Tonkin had suffered a defeat to a larger Chinese force.⁸⁶ The colonial adventure that radicals and conservatives had resisted for months was now costing French lives and epitomized, as they saw it, the moderate government's mishandling of state finances and anticlerical reforms. On March 30, when Jules Ferry requested that the Chamber make a supplementary allocation of 200 million francs to reinforce operations in Tonkin, radical republicans and conservatives joined to oppose him. He tendered his resignation later that day.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Séance du 21 mars 1885, *Journal officiel, Sénat*.

⁸⁶ *Journal des débats*, 30 March 1885.

⁸⁷ *Journal des débats*, 31 March 1885.

Over the ensuing week and a half, the task of forming a new government would reveal that disagreements among republicans were higher than they had been in the previous four years. Early attempts to name a new government failed because it was difficult to produce a list of names that all republican factions would accept. Finally, on April 7, Henri Brisson, who had been President of the Chamber and would become Prime Minister, was able to negotiate a resolution to the impasse. For the purposes of our story, there would be notable change at the Ministry of Public Instruction. René Goblet, who was an independent but voted at times with radicals, would now take charge of that ministry along with Cults. Nevertheless, several administrators who were on the ministerial staff under Ferry would continue, notably Louis Liard, the Director of Higher Education.⁸⁸ With the brief ministerial crisis behind him, Brisson went on to make conciliation the guiding theme of his cabinet, refusing to sanction in early June a resolution that would have formally found fault with the Ferry government.⁸⁹

If the budgetary dispute, the venture in Tonkin and the fall of Ferry had all made republican leadership appear vulnerable, moderates had an additional reason to feel that they were in a delicate position as the new cabinet set about its work: the Ferry government had been preparing an electoral reform bill that was to be put in place for the legislative elections of mid-to-late 1885; in fact, the bill had passed in the Chamber while the Senate was deciding the fate of the theology faculties.⁹⁰ Conservative activism to curtail laicization had been steadily building in anticipation of the elections, but the reform bill now enhanced fears of a conservative reaction

⁸⁸ Liard would later recall that he had been initially unsure of the changes Goblet might make given that he had voted to remove Ferry on March 30. As it was, he and Goblet developed a fruitful working relationship and several of the university reforms that had been in preparation under Ferry were enacted by Goblet, namely the July 1885 order that paved the way for individual faculties to have more autonomy relative to the Ministry. Louis Liard, "René Goblet: Ministre de l'Instruction Publique," *Revue politique et parlementaire* 46 (1906): 225-43.

⁸⁹ *Le Temps*, 6 June 1885.

⁹⁰ The Senate had not had time to deliberate on the bill before the transition in government. It would only do so in late May 1885.

because the new voting system could give conservative candidates an absolute majority in certain districts if the republican vote were split among competing factions. The bill would replace the system of single-member constituencies (*scrutin uninominal d'arrondissement*) that had been in place since 1875 and reintroduce the system of multi-member constituencies (*scrutin de liste départemental*) that had been devised in 1848 but then abandoned during the Second Empire.⁹¹ Under the single-member system that had been used in the elections of 1877 and 1881, the constituency corresponded to an administrative *arrondissement* and returned only one representative. Since electors voted for one candidate, the system favored the local networks of influence held by magnates and clerics, and gave greater weight to rural constituencies, which outnumbered the urban *arrondissements* that contained larger populations. By contrast, under the new multi-member, or *scrutin de liste*, system, the department would replace the administrative *arrondissement* as the constituency and would return a given number of deputies based on its population. The more proportional format meant that rural constituencies would still outnumber urban districts, but unlike the prior system in which a single candidate was chosen, electors would now cast votes for the candidates who appeared on lists that were generated by each parliamentary faction. Electors could vote for candidates on different lists, they had as many votes as there were seats to fill, but they could not cast more than one vote for a given candidate.⁹²

In anticipation of the change to the electoral system, the editorial staff of moderate and radical newspapers maintained a steady exchange of views on the best list strategy to adopt in

⁹¹ I give the French terms that occur in the sources as well as in French scholarship on electoral systems, but use the English terms from Campbell's classic study of French elections. Peter Campbell, *French Electoral Systems and Elections since 1789*, 2nd ed. (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1965); Thomas Marty, *Une histoire sociale de la réforme électorale sous la Troisième République, mobilisations politiques et expertise électorale: la question de la représentation proportionnelle* (Clermont-Ferrand: Fondation Varenne, 2012).

⁹² Campbell, 69-79. Although Campbell gives the figure of one deputy to 70,000 residents, the figure that I encountered in sources was 60,000; see *Temps*, 10 June 1885.

response to the “peril on the right.” Moderates pushed for unified lists, but radicals demanded that they commit to certain policy goals if radicals were going to join a single republican list.⁹³ Unsurprisingly, separation of church and state proved to be one of the policy goals that stood in the way of an agreement. As they had in the final months of the Ferry government, radicals called for a more aggressive pace of secular reform—leading to separation sooner rather than later—but moderates favored caution and delay, not wishing to provoke open conflict with Catholic opinion in the countryside.⁹⁴ Even though the new electoral law was enacted on June 17, republicans still had not decided on an electoral strategy. It could be argued that they were not ultimately successful in devising one, since the October elections brought electoral gains for conservatives that General Boulanger would then swiftly turn to his advantage. Republicans, who never lost their governing majority, changed the electoral system back to the single-member, *scrutin d’arrondissement*, format in 1889.⁹⁵

Ironically, it was into this context in which republicans were seeking to restore harmony among themselves ahead of elections but still stumbling over how far to push anticlerical reforms that the idea for a laic sciences of religion became a matter of public discussion. The idea appeared first in June, when it was presented to the budget committee of the Chamber and, second, in July, when it was considered by the full Chamber during review of the state budget for 1886. The *Temps* reported in early June that Goblet had come in person to a budget committee meeting to clarify certain parts of the Religions and Public Instruction budgets. He explained that the Religions budget—which had in previous years always prompted the question of separation—would remain largely unchanged from the current year since, with elections

⁹³ *Le Temps*, 26 April, 12 May and 23 June 1885.

⁹⁴ *Le Temps*, 28 and 30 June 1885.

⁹⁵ Campbell, 79-80.

approaching, republicans should not “push any further the war against the clergy.” As for Public Instruction, there would be a slight change, an increased allocation to create a section in “comparative religion” at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE), and that would be placed under the direction of “either Ernest Renan or Ernest Havet.”⁹⁶ Renan and Havet were both professors at the Collège de France and respected historians of religion, although Renan was as celebrated as he was controversial following his 1864 best-seller, the *Life of Jesus*. In the wake of Catholic denunciations of the book, Renan had been suspended from the Chair of Hebrew at the Collège and would only be reinstated six years later in 1870.

The plan to create a sciences of religion section was again discussed publicly when deliberation in the Chamber took up the government’s request for a budgetary increase of 30,000 francs to establish the section. This time, on July 1, the *Temps* ran a lengthy editorial that sought to explain to the public what the sciences of religion were (since they were unfamiliar to many) and why they should have a place in higher education. It is worth giving closer attention to the editorial since its author gives replies to behind-the-scenes discussions of the plan among officials and deploys several of the principal themes that would recur in the language that they used to defend the new section against charges that its teaching would be irreligious. The defunct Catholic faculties of theology could be said, the editorial began, to have taught the sciences of religion, but they did so “imperfectly, as the confessional interest won out against the scientific interest.” However, taking away the confessional identity of the sciences of religion did not mean that the government was being contemptuous of organized religion. Rather, by giving the non-confessional sciences of religion a place in higher education, the government was showing respect for “the place that religion has had in the history of humanity and of civilization.”

⁹⁶ *Le Temps*, 5 June 1885.

While advocates of the laic sciences of religion could agree on its value, the *Temps* author continued, there were differing views on how best to incorporate them into the university system. It is here that the editorial broaches the question of creating chairs at the Paris faculty of letters and the faculty of law instead of at the EPHE, which, as we saw earlier, was the view that Renan favored. Lectures given in the existing faculties could “easily degenerate into a new kind of anti-religious sermonizing,” but placing the sciences of religion at the EPHE would mitigate such deterioration since it was an institution dedicated to erudition. If the government had intended to establish “an institution for anti-religious propaganda, it is not in the small rooms of the Sorbonne library” that officials would have put the sciences of religion faculty. The EPHE “is a school *pratique*,” which was to say that its “students become familiar with sources, learn proper methods of research and strive for precise conclusions: nothing is given to passions or even sentiment.”⁹⁷ There was, then, according to the *Temps* author, no room for antireligious hostility in the laic sciences of religion housed at the EPHE.

The issue of replacing theology with irreligious teaching again resurfaced during discussion of the budget in the Senate.⁹⁸ A conservative senator, the Baron de Ravignan, remarked that he could not foresee how canon law could be taught in the new section. Instruction in canon law required canonists, and Ravignan was “convinced that the professors whom the ministry would appoint to the new faculty would be the resolute adversaries of canon law.”⁹⁹ Goblet, who was present to defend his proposal, replied to Ravignan: “I am in no way the adversary of religion. On the contrary, I believe that I am honoring the value of the religious

⁹⁷ *Le Temps*, 1 July 1885.

⁹⁸ There was equally discussion in the Chamber on June 29. Mgr. Freppel, a deputy from Brittany, feared that the “section in sciences of religion would be nothing other than theological instruction turned against us . . . a faculty of anti-Catholic theology.” See séance du 29 juin 1885, *Journal officiel, Chambre des députés*.

⁹⁹ Séance du 31 juillet 1885, *Journal officiel, Sénat*.

sentiment in advancing the idea that the history of religions and their influence in the world are one of the branches of knowledge that should be studied.”¹⁰⁰ Very much like the suggestion made in the *Temps* piece, Goblet argued that the ethos and methods of scholarly criticism would function as guarantees against the new teaching devolving into combat and polemic. Similarly, offering a study of religion sponsored by the state was meant to signify that the state honored religion. To disrespect religion, Goblet suggested, would have been to leave it out of university instruction all together after theology had been suspended.

Of course, even though Goblet maintained that the government was being respectful of religion by creating a sciences of religions faculty, conservatives understood the action differently, representing instead a failure to protect recognized religions under the terms of the Concordat. Goblet’s justification represents, then, a hybrid position itself between the moderate anticlerical strategy held by Ferry and the aggressive strategy of the radicals. The Concordat would be left in place, as moderates wished, but the Catholic faculties, considered a symbol of church-state relations, were ceded to the radicals to signify enforcement of the emerging boundaries of the laic state. In the conception of the laic state described by Ferry on March 20 in the Senate, the state drew established domains of jurisdiction with the Catholic Church but left the consciences of the faithful untouched. Or, to use a phrase encountered repeatedly in this chapter: for certain moderate republicans, claiming that society was autonomous and no longer needed the clergy to guide it did not have to mean attacking religious belief. That thinking would receive an institutional expression in the ethos of the Fifth Section. The sensitivity of professors to causing or inviting polemic, which we saw in the opening to this chapter, was a reflection of the moderate anticlerical position.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Chapter Three

The Culture of Knowledge at the Fifth Section and the Approaches to Non-Christian Religions

Throughout the six-year effort to pass legislation that would abolish the Catholic faculties of theology, there had been repeated proposals to replace theology in university instruction with the history of religions. Those calls came to fruition when the fiscal law of 8 August 1885 promulgated a budgetary allocation to create a new section in the ‘religious sciences’ (*sciences religieuses*) at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris.¹ Although there was political support for replacing theology with a laic approach to the study of religion, there was less agreement on what the new domain of teaching should be called or what it would include. Ministerial officials used the term ‘religious sciences’ from the start in their preparation of the budget that was eventually passed, but the scholars who were involved in the project employed multiple terms to refer to what they were undertaking.² In February 1886, Albert Réville, who would serve as president of the new section, wrote to his friend and fellow historian of religion Ernest Renan about the progress that had been made in organizing subjects for the “Section in Religious History and Criticism.”³ Renan had been consulted by ministerial officials the year before, and even though he gave them a plan of subject areas for the new section, he in reality favored distributing a handful of teaching chairs across multiple faculties of the university

¹ Loi des finances du 8 août 1885, *Journal officiel de la République française: lois et décrets*, 9 August 1885.

² Chapter 10 of the Public Instruction proposal contained a request for an increase of 30,000 francs for a section in “sciences religieuses.” Meeting of 1 May 1885, Chambre des députés, *Procès-verbaux de la Commission du budget pour l’exercice 1886*, C 3306, Archives Nationales de France (hereafter AN).

³ Albert Réville to Ernest Renan, Paris, 4 February 1886, appendix to Patrick Henriët, “Les premières générations de l’EPHE: à l’ombre de Renan?,” in Jean-Luc Fournet, ed., *Ma grande église et ma petite chapelle: 150 ans d’affinités électives entre le Collège de France et l’École pratique des hautes études*, (Paris: Collège de France, 2020), 37-8.

system since the instruction that had taken place in “sacrosanct form at the faculties of theology fell into what we call Letters.”⁴ The term ‘religious sciences’ itself was an additional “inconvenience” to Renan’s mind since “it attributes to religion an objectivity that it does not have.” The issue of subjects that could be seen to belong in letters also concerned Hartwig Derenbourg, the Arabist who would occupy the chair in History of Islam, but he devised another solution. Derenbourg used the beginning of his inaugural lecture to explain how the new study of religion “borrowed from philology, ethnology and archeology” but remained separate from them. Yet, Derenbourg called the new field that he was delimiting the “science of religions” (‘la science des religions’).⁵

The unsettled usage of ‘religious sciences’ reflected several developments of the period. By the 1880s the term ‘religious sciences’ asserted much more of a distinction, even a hostility, at times, vis-à-vis the disciplines of theology than it had in the mid-century period, where it functioned both as a synonym of the older term ‘sacred sciences’ (*sciences sacrées*) but also as a signal that theological topics would be treated using historical methods and situated within the larger history of religions.⁶ Despite inconsistent use among scholars, ministerial officials might also have chosen ‘religious sciences’ so that the new section’s name would align with the four existing sections at the École Pratique: mathematical sciences; physical and chemical sciences; natural and physiological sciences; historical and philological sciences. There is, however, a third factor that may account for the unsettled usage in ‘religious sciences.’ The final third of the nineteenth century was itself an unstable period in the disciplines of the human and historical

⁴ Ernest Renan, Rosmapamon, to Marcellin Berthelot, Paris, 11 July 1885, in *L’École pratique des hautes études: invention, érudition, innovation, de 1868 à nos jours*, Patrick Henriët, ed. (Paris: Somogy, 2018), 111.

⁵ Hartwig Derenbourg, *La science des religions et l’islamisme: deux conférences faites le 19 et le 26 mars 1886, à l’École des Hautes-Études, section des sciences religieuses* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1886), 21, 30-1

⁶ François Laplanche, introduction to *Les sciences religieuses: le XIX^e siècle, 1800-1914*, vol. 9 of *Dictionnaire du monde religieux dans la France contemporaine* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1996), v-vi.

sciences. There had been immense growth from mid-century in archaeology, comparative philology and study of Asian languages, and after the 1870s, new social science disciplines would soon emerge alongside a professionalized history discipline.⁷ As we shall see, members of the religious sciences section would employ a variety of historical-critical approaches that they had adapted from the philological fields just listed. While five of the eleven founding members of the section were liberal Protestants who had been educated in seminaries and Protestant faculties of theology—a fact emphasized in contemporary studies of the new section—it is equally worth observing that the six remaining members had done their training in one of the fields that studied ancient languages and literatures, i.e., Classical or Eastern philology and Egyptology.⁸ What connected all of these disciplines, including those of the former seminarians, was the practice of textual criticism informed by geography and archeology. Members of the new section did not all take the same approach to their inquiries but what allowed this conglomeration of approaches to hold, at least initially, was criticism of texts and artifacts, which in some cases then led to synthetic comparisons among religions. By the end of the period covered in this chapter, the emergence of sociology of religion would introduce a new approach while also keeping a number of the practices from criticism.

⁷ In 1865, Jules Mohl, Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Paris, reflected on the impact of the renaissance in “studies of the Orient” on historical disciplines. Literary histories and ethnologies of nations could now be revised or properly written with better knowledge of Asian languages. “The history of religions, which depends entirely on [Eastern] studies and is today in large part to be remade.” Mohl, “Année 1864-1865,” in vol. 2 of *Vingt-sept ans d’histoire des études orientales: rapports à la Société asiatique de Paris de 1840 à 1867* (Paris: Reinwald, 1880), 668-69. For the marked involvement of liberal Protestants, see Patrick Cabanel, “L’institutionnalisation des ‘sciences religieuses’ en France (1879-1908): Une entreprise protestante?” *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français* 140 (March 1994): 33-80. On the rise of history as a professional discipline, see William Keylor, *Academy and Community: The Foundation of the French Historical Profession* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

⁸ Havet, Classics; Lefébure, Egyptology; Bergaigne, Sanskrit; Derenbourg, Arabic; and de Rosny, Japanese. Meeting of 16 February 1885, in Section des sciences religieuses, *Procès-verbaux des séances du Conseil: Cahier no. 1, du 16 février 1886 au 17 juin 1906*, Fonds historique de l’EPHE, AN. The ‘fonds historique’ collection is not yet fully processed or listed in the public inventories, but the register of Council minutes is available using the temporary record locator, 20190568/49. Hereafter abbreviated *PVCSR*.

The blurred disciplinary lines between the sciences of religion and Asian philology adds further evidence to what others have shown in reply to Edward Said's portrayal of orientalism. In the case of nineteenth-century Germany, which did not have an overseas empire until the 1880s, orientalist were less interested in "othering" the East than they were in questions about their own cultural identity and the place of Biblical history in the European narrative of origins.⁹ By contrast, in the case of France, which expanded its colonial dominions in the nineteenth century, current scholars of orientalism insist that "the East was not a career," as in the Saidian caricature, but a heterogeneous body of actors who cut across disciplines and operated in different capacities and contexts, some in libraries and art studios in Europe, others as adventurers and idealists on the ground whose interests were not always those of imperial administration.¹⁰ Even though in the French sphere of institutionally-affiliated orientalist colonial imperatives could and did motivate scholarship, the scholars of religion whom we will encounter in this chapter and who did not come out of a Protestant seminary were representatives of a strand of French orientalism whose concerns were more metropolitan and religious than they were imperial.¹¹ At the same time, we will find that the study of Islamic history represented an exception to that trend, remaining intertwined with concerns of colonial governance, perhaps because of the complex relationship with Algeria given that it was administered as a department of France.

⁹ Suzanne Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 64-68.

¹⁰ François Pouillon, "Avant-propos," *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française*, François Pouillon, ed. (Paris: Karthala, 2008), xvii-xviii.

¹¹ There was in the French case a notable strand of orientalist work imbricated with empire. After the conquest of Algeria in 1830, the government of the July Monarchy funded research into North African languages and history and established the Scientific Commission of Algeria. Mohl, "Année 1840-1841" and "Année 1845-1846," in vol. 1 of *Vingt-sept ans d'histoire*, 15, 212. Later Joseph-Toussaint Reinaud argued that under Augustus there had been a plan, never disclosed and later abandoned, for Roman imperial conquest to extend to India and China. Reinaud, "Mémoire sur les relations politiques et commerciales de l'Empire romain avec l'Asie orientale," *Journal asiatique*, 6th ser., vol. 1 (1863): 93-234, 297-441.

The case of Islam notwithstanding, the interpretation of German orientalism that Suzanne Marchand has given may serve as a useful framework for appreciating not only why producing knowledge about the religious history of humanity was deemed a worthy pursuit in nineteenth-century France, even one meriting public investment, but also why the enterprise proved controversial. After German classicists established an independent, secular study of Greco-Roman civilization and languages about 1800, German orientalists continued thereafter to study questions related to the Bible and took on the task of inquiring into the relationship between Greece and Asia, a determination that had significant ramifications for whether Europe was “fundamentally Judeo-Christian and religious” or “rooted in the Enlightenment and secular.”¹² In France, there, too, was the question of Europe’s civilizational origins and modern identity, but there was also the question of the origin and identity of the French nation—a recurrent issue since the Revolution but one that had become acute in the 1880s as republicans undertook laicizing reforms of state institutions. As will be recalled from the previous chapter, Ernest Menusier, who pleaded with Paul Bert to preserve the Catholic faculties, believed that France remained a Christian nation in its soul and, as such, needed to keep the faculties of theology as a symbol of the legitimating function that religion performed in society. Similarly, Deputy Gustave Levasseur entreated his republican colleagues not to vote against the faculties on the grounds that religious sentiment remained vital to national solidarity. Abolishing the theology faculties did not settle the issue, and René Goblet, the Minister of Public Instruction, again recognized in August 1885 “the divergence of our judgements on the principles that should guide our social and political organization.”¹³

¹² Suzanne Marchand, “La cassure du continent humaniste: une histoire géologique de la philologie allemande,” *Revue germanique internationale* 14 (2014).

¹³ Goblet was speaking here at the cornerstone ceremony for construction of the New Sorbonne. *Le Temps*, 4 August 1885.

Many of the scholars in the new religious sciences, orientalists and Protestant seminarians alike, were not at ease about a French society that was becoming laic (as it should, in their view) but that was guided in its progress by exclusively atheist or materialist ideas. Some of the things that religion had provided should not be left behind and scouring the religious past might unlock new understandings of what religion was, its essential nature or teachings, and permit a new set of religious ideas, compatible with progress, to be envisioned. Even though Renan, who was one of France's most renowned orientalists and historians of religion, remained on the periphery of founding the religious sciences section, he had been a leader in looking to the past to grasp religious ideas anew. His famous "Prayer on the Acropolis" had tried to integrate the inheritances of Greece and Asia, the "Jewish miracle" (monotheism) and the "Greek miracle" (philosophy) in the universal history of civilization—while also recapitulating in a new form, it should be noted, much of the supersessionism of Christian tradition.¹⁴ My aim in this chapter is to give a picture of the various approaches that scholars of religion employed, the kinds of conclusions they reached, and the socio-political implications of their work. Although some were eager to identify the stages of religious development in humanity, some more cautious about making synthetic comparisons across religions, and others more willing to do so, the different approaches shared one feature in common: they represented an effort to make religion positive in the individual, or a reconfiguration of religion compatible with laic society since it obviated the authority of clergy who were needed to instruct individuals in matters of faith. The view of religion as emanating from the individual corresponded with the liberal Protestantism of the

¹⁴ Renan referred to the two "miracles" in the preface to his poem. *Prière sur l'Acropole* (Paris: Pelletan, 1899). The same reconciliation figured into Renan's *Histoire générale et système comparée des peuples sémitiques* (1855). François Hartog has called this kind of history "seeing the past from the future." *La nation, la religion, l'avenir: sur les traces d'Ernest Renan* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015). One of the chapters in the book develops a paper that Hartog gave at the University of Chicago in April 2018, entitled "Les apothéoses d'Ernest Renan."

period but was also an inheritance from orientalists who considered religion to have originated in the mythopoetic faculty of humanity.¹⁵ A concurrent variant of that theory held that the same spontaneous faculty that had produced language in primordial humans had also been the source of religion.¹⁶

A second, related aim of this chapter is to describe the extent to which the sciences of religion differed from Catholic theology. While tracing the degree of divergence of the two fields is helpful to understanding what the secularizing process entailed, the question was also one that arose twice during the review of Minister Goblet's proposal to create a new section by the budget committee of the Chamber of Deputies.¹⁷ On the second occasion, in June 1885, the committee invited Goblet to attend in person. "The new section could be seen," Deputy Jules Roche began, "to revive, in another form, the theological instruction that we abolished." Goblet responded in somewhat vague terms that "the new instruction would in no way resemble" that of the theology faculties. Desiring more detail, committee members requested a plan of what the areas of study and teaching chairs would be, and Goblet assured them that he would send them his plan in writing after the meeting.¹⁸ The draft organizational plan that Réville later sent to Renan suggests that the details of the number and subjects of chairs took some time to work out between August 1885 when the fiscal law passed and March 1886 when the Fifth Section opened.¹⁹

¹⁵ François Laplanche, "L'histoire des religions en France au début du XXe siècle," *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome, Italie et Méditerranée* 111, no. 2 (1999): 625.

¹⁶ See, for example, Renan, *De l'origine du langage*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Michel-Lévy, 1858), as well as Albert Réville, chap. 3 of *Prolégomènes de l'histoire des religions* (Paris: G. Fischbacher, 1881).

¹⁷ Meetings of 1 and 18 May 1885, *Procès-verbaux de la Commission du budget pour l'exercice 1886*, C 3306, AN.

¹⁸ Meeting of 3 June 1885, *Procès-verbaux de la Commission du budget*.

¹⁹ This was the same communication cited in the opening to this chapter. Renan to Berthelot, Paris, 11 July 1885, in *L'École pratique des hautes études: invention, érudition, innovation*. Louis Liard, the Director of Higher Education, had consulted with Renan in June 1885 about a plan for subjects and teaching chairs, but it is not known how much of that earlier suggestion was retained in the organization that the Fifth section had when it opened in early 1886.

I have up to now used ‘religious sciences’ to translate *sciences religieuses*, in part to facilitate appreciation of the symmetry with ‘sacred sciences’ but also to show the instability in its usage arising from the diversity of learned practices that had been brought together in a new configuration: religious criticism (*la critique religieuse*), history of religions (*l’histoire des religions*), comparative study of religion (*l’étude comparée des religions*), and science of religion (*la science de la religion*). However, an inconvenience of the translation ‘religious sciences’ is that for many readers of English it suggests the merging of two domains that are generally thought to be unrelated: religion and science. Some of this connotation is mitigated in French by the fact that ‘science’ can still mean a disciplined form of knowledge about some subject that does not have to be in the natural sciences. Hereafter, I will use the term ‘sciences of religion’ to refer to the scholarly enterprise that was housed in the newly-created section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE) even though contemporaries had multiple terms at their disposal to designate what they were doing. In addition, I should note that the sections of the EPHE were typically referred to by an ordinal number as a shorthand. The two sections that will concern us in this chapter were the Fourth, the Section in Historical and Philological Sciences, and the Fifth, in Religious Sciences. I will also at times use the ordinal shorthand for simplicity.

Organization of Teaching at the Fifth Section and the Ethos of Criticism

Sylvain Lévi, who would occupy the chair in religions of India from 1887, explained to an audience at the Guimet Museum in 1911 that “orientalism had created the comparative science of religions just as it had created the comparative science of languages . . . The texts of Egypt and Assyria had pushed back the past of humanity to what appeared to be its cradle . . . All

the effort of faith exerted and expended itself to reconcile Babel and the Bible.”²⁰ Lévi captures well the notion that comparative philology had allowed European scholars to go back further in time than earlier generations of historians, which, in turn, destabilized the place of Biblical ethnology in the universal history of nations while also requiring new accommodations. But Lévi left out a key part of the story of the sciences of religion: scholarship in Biblical criticism. We will find strong influences from both disciplinary domains, Eastern philology and Biblical criticism, in the organization of teaching at the Fifth Section as well its methodology.

When the Fifth Section offered its first courses in March 1886, there were eleven faculty chairs that were divided evenly between Christian and non-Christian religions.²¹ The chairs concerning Christianity were further divided into history of canon law, history of dogmas and doctrines, Church history, history of Christian origins, and “Christian literature” (New Testament), which had two occupants. The six non-Christian chairs dealt with the history of Greco-Roman religion, Egyptian religion, and the major Eastern religions. This last category mirrored the broad range of peoples and languages outside of ancient Greece and Egypt that had been loosely gathered under the title “studies of the Orient.”²² At the Fifth Section, former orientalist domains became two chairs in “religions of the Semitic peoples” (Judaism and Islam), one chair in religions of India, and a final chair in religions of the Far East (China and Japan, primarily).²³ In 1890, the chair in history of Christian origins was converted to “religions of non-

²⁰ Sylvain Lévi (1911) quoted in “Discours de M. Alexandre Moret,” in *Célébration du cinquantième de la section des sciences religieuses de l'école pratique des hautes études* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1937), 6.

²¹ Meeting of 16 February 1885, *PVCSR*.

²² See the grouping of fields in Joseph-Daniel Guignaut’s report to the Minister of Public Instruction for the 1867 Paris Exposition. Hebrew, Arabic, Phoenician, Assyrian, Armenian, Syriac, Ethiopian, Mongol, Tibetan, Chinese, Sanskrit and Pali were languages of the “Orient.” *Progrès des études relatives à l’Égypte et l’Orient* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1867). This arrangement corresponds to what Marchand identifies as the distinction between the languages of *Kulturvölker* in Greece and beyond it (Asia). *German Orientalism*, xxiv.

²³ Originally, “Semitic Religions” did not include the Islam chair, but after Maurice Vernes expressed his concern that the designation was imprecise, it was changed to “Religions of the Semitic Peoples” and divided into

civilized peoples” after the death of Ernest Havet, the chair’s first occupant.²⁴ Six years later, to expand treatment of “Eastern religions” (‘religions orientales’), a new chair was added in “Talmudic and rabbinical Judaism,” bringing the total number of teaching areas to twelve.²⁵ Between 1899 and 1902, the end of the period covered by this chapter, three chairs would be created in Religion of pre-Columbian America (Ancient Mexico, specifically), Christian Byzantium and Primitive Religions of Europe.²⁶ However, since those decisions had bearing on the entry of two protagonists in the sociology of religion, we shall return the matter of those teaching chairs in the next chapter.

Ironically, while instituting the sciences of religion was seen to introduce a “laicized theology” into higher education, the organization of subjects concerning Christianity at the Fifth Section proved to involve only small changes relative to the division of subjects that existed in Catholic theological instruction. Prior to 1885, at the Catholic faculty of theology in Paris, instruction had been organized into seven teaching areas: dogmatic theology, moral theology, ecclesiastical history, ecclesiastical (or canon) law, sacred eloquence, Holy Scripture and Hebrew.²⁷ This organization of subjects at the state faculties mirrored the distribution at many of the Catholic diocesan seminaries across France. To those eight principal subjects, the seminaries typically added courses of study in liturgy, philosophy, mathematical and physical sciences, and some other subject, which varied from diocese to diocese (e.g., pastoral administration,

“Hebrews and the Western Semites,” and “Islam and the Religions of Arabia.” Meeting of 27 October 1886, *PVCSR*.

²⁴ Meeting of 9 March 1890, *PVCSR*.

²⁵ After the retirement of Massibeu, the Ministry preferred to keep two occupants in Christian Literature, considered “organic” to the section’s instruction, and would find funds to add a new chair. The Council eventually decided on Talmudic Judaism as the subject of the new chair, after considering Assyrian religion. Meetings of 16 December 1894, 9 February 1895 and 14 February 1896, *PVCSR*.

²⁶ Meetings of 9 December 1899, 11 February 1900, and 18 June 1901, *PVCSR*.

²⁷ Affiche of courses at the Faculté de théologie de Paris, Année 1860-1861, premier semestre, Fonds Maret, carton 13, dossier “Facultés de Théologie 1854-1872,” Archives de l’Institut catholique de Paris (hereafter AICP).

ecclesiastical duties, archeology).²⁸ In addition, not all seminaries offered Hebrew, which at the Paris theology faculty had included study of both the Hebrew language and the books of the Old Testament. In sum, the Fifth Section omitted moral theology and sacred eloquence but kept the six other principal subjects that had been taught in Catholic institutions, turning them into ‘history-of’ fields, e.g., history of canon law.

Alongside the main teaching areas, the Fifth Section could address gaps in its regular offerings or add new ones as new fields of research emerged through the option of *cours libres*, or courses taught by a visiting instructor for up to two terms and that could be renewed. The chair in religion of non-civilized peoples that was added in 1890 had originally begun as a *cours libre* taught by Léon Mariller, who later became the chair’s first occupant. The Talmudic and rabbinical Judaism chair had also begun as a *cours libre*, first in 1888 and then in 1895, but when it became a regular course offering, the Section hired a new person, Israël Lévi. The initial *cours libre* instructor, Isidore Loeb, a professor at the state-funded Rabbinical School in Paris (as was Lévi), proposed to examine the controversies between Christians and Jews in Medieval Spain through an analysis of Hebrew and Latin texts.²⁹ Loeb’s course attracted a larger audience than the section’s regular course offerings, and so did the *cours libre* that the abbé Jules Deramey began in 1891.³⁰ A priest in the diocese of La Rochelle and a specialist in the religious history of Abyssinia, Deramey had earned a doctoral degree in theology from the now defunct Sorbonne faculty and had studied the Ethiopian language with Joseph Halévy in the Fourth Section. For his initial *cours libre*, he gave analyses of documents pertaining to Ethiopian Christianity in late

²⁸ Replies to a survey of grand séminaires conducted by the Institut Catholique of Paris in March 1879 as part of a project to open its own theology faculty. Série F₁ (Fondation et débuts), dossier 24, AICP.

²⁹ Meeting of 18 March 1888, *PVCSR*.

³⁰ Albert Réville noted that Deramey’s courses had “gathered a considerable number of auditors, in particular, a category of person who had not until now come to the Section in Sciences of Religion.” Meeting of 25 January 1891, *PVCSR*. For Loeb’s course, see the meeting of 28 June 1888.

Antiquity. Although he never became the occupant of a titular chair, Deramey would continue teaching a *cours libre* in Abyssinian religion and the Eastern Church every year until his death in 1914.

If the organization of teaching subjects had similarities with theological instruction, the composition of the student body showed that the sciences of religion had begun to move away from a primarily ecclesiastical audience even though clerics and seminarians from non-Catholic faiths would remain a regular presence. The majority of students who attended the section's courses each year were auditors from the general public, and only a small proportion of them would be then formally admitted as students, requiring recommendation by a faculty member and a favorable vote by the Council of Professors. In principle, this meant that admission to the Fifth Section was open to anyone who attended courses and showed sufficient dedication and ability. The discretion given to faculty members in deciding whom to admit could also function to make advanced coursework open to persons who might not otherwise have such an opportunity. When the question of admitting women arose in the section's initial year, professors were divided in their opinions, and in the end, the matter was left to the judgement of each individual professor.³¹ In the opening year of 1886-87, there was one woman among the 36 admitted students (a Mlle Talbotier), and over the ensuing years, the number of women increased but never represented more than a quarter of the admitted student total.³²

Over the Fifth Section's first fifteen years, 1886-1901, the students who were formally admitted had generally pursued the study of history, languages or theology at another institution, often where a Fifth Section faculty member held another appointment. Common institutions

³¹ Meeting of 16 February 1886, *PVCSR*.

³² There were, for example, nine women out of 49 admitted students in 1896-97. The yearly figures are given in letters to the Ministry by A. Réville in F¹⁷ 13618, "Élèves" folder, AN.

were the École des Chartes, the École des Langues Orientales Vivantes, the Protestant Faculty of Theology and the Jewish Rabbinical School. In certain years, a few Catholic priests would be admitted as students but they were generally not listed as having come from a seminary or the Institut Catholique of Paris, which became home to the canonically recognized faculty of theology in 1889.³³ Alongside the various French nationals, the section also regularly admitted a number of foreign students, typically from a European country (Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, England, Romania, or Sweden) but also from the Ottoman Empire. American students were consistently represented as well, including Arthur Lovejoy who spent two years in Paris in after completing his master's degree at Harvard.³⁴

We have seen that in terms of teaching chairs the Fifth Section conserved a number of subjects that would have been familiar to a Catholic theology student, and that in terms of students, there was a regular stream of Protestant and Jewish seminarians along with a Catholic priest or two in one year and perhaps not another. While we have a growing picture of what teaching the sciences of religion involved and whom it would have interested, we have not yet fully answered the question that was posed by members of the Chamber's budget committee: how, exactly, would the sciences of religion differ from the instruction about religion under the aegis of Catholic theology? To members of the Fifth Section, the feature that most distinguished their endeavor from Catholic learning was disinterested criticism, which was both a set of practices for studying texts and artifacts and an ethos. In the eyes of its partitioners, disinterested criticism permitted explorations of certain topics that could not be pursued in the Catholic sphere, and it allowed scholars of different faiths to work together on questions of religious

³³ Pierre-Louis Péchenard, *L'Institut catholique de Paris, 1875-1901* (Paris: Charles Poussielgue, 1902), 103.

³⁴ Annual letters to the Ministry by A. Réville in F¹⁷ 13618, "Élèves" folder, AN. For mention of Lovejoy, see Réville's letter for the year 1899-1900.

history and interpretation of sacred texts. Maurice Vernes, a scholar of Semitic religions who later became president of the section, alluded to the ethos of tolerance in his remarks following the death of the abbé Deramey, the *cours libre* instructor in Abyssinian religion. Even though he was a member of the Catholic clergy, “we did not ask of him any more than we asked of anyone of our teachers. A sincere scientific confraternity in which the use of critical methods are applied to the literary documents of the past: that is the spirit of our house and allows us to undertake a common enterprise despite the veritable differences of our ideas.”³⁵ Vernes also alluded to the ethos of their methods, of criticism, which was equally the basis of the sciences of religion’s claim to being scientific knowledge, i.e., not merely opinion or dogma but disciplined observation and judgement on the basis of rules.

It should be observed at the outset that the Fifth Section’s ethos of disinterested criticism was not entirely its own and was already well implanted in the Fourth Section. The historian Gabriel Monod reminisced that the Fourth Section had been the “older sister of the Fifth” and shared the same guiding ideals: “the practice (‘culte’) of disinterested science is your law as it is ours.”³⁶ At the same time, the ethos of disinterested criticism at the EPHE reflected the context of the institution’s founding in 1868, when Minister of Public Instruction Victor Duruy had sought to redress France’s relative lack of facilities for scientific research. To that end, the EPHE would prepare *savants*, or specialists who generated new knowledge and transmitted disciplinary practices to future savants.³⁷ Given these circumstances—a moment when France had become

³⁵ Maurice Vernes, “Histoire de la section,” in *École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses Rapport sommaire sur les conférences de l’exercice 1913-1914 et le programme des conférences pour l’exercice 1914-1915* (1914): 67. Persée database, *Annuaire de l’École pratique des hautes études*, Web.

³⁶ Gabriel Monod quoted in “Histoire de la Section,” *École pratique, Rapport sommaire sur les conférences de l’exercice 1910-1911*: 84.

³⁷ Victor Duruy, “Rapport à l’empereur à l’appui de deux projets de décret relatifs aux laboratoires d’enseignement et de recherches et à la création d’une École pratique de hautes études” (1868), Bibliothèque de l’École Pratique des Hautes Études, Archives de IVe Section, Archives de la présidence Gaston Paris, folder 0002.

acutely aware of falling behind Germany in scientific research—there has been for much of the EHPE’s history the view that its methods and ethos were effectively importations of the German seminar. However, the approaches to instruction at the EPHE have recently been shown to have just as much of a French lineage, owing a large debt, in particular, to the dialogical pedagogy and use of individual exercises honed at the École Normale Supérieure (ENS).³⁸ Even as they borrowed from the ENS, scholars of the Fourth and Fifth Sections also consistently described their institutional ethos and purpose by way of contrasts with the ENS. For Léon Renier, the first president of the Fourth Section, the adjective “pratique” encapsulated the new institution’s distinctiveness: “the École [pratique des hautes études] pursues, as its name indicates, a goal that is at once scientific and practical: a scientific goal, since it does not claim, as do the École Normale or the École des Chartes, to prepare [students] for the specific positions of professor or archivist, but to encourage the work of pure erudition, contribute to the progress of knowledge, without any other interest than that of knowledge itself.” The EPHE pursued a “practical goal” since its faculty members prepared “a small number of dedicated students for the work of erudition through individual exercises, by slow and minute investigations; to teach them not knowledge, but scientific methods; to furnish them not with results ready-made, but with the instruments that permit them to discover new results.”³⁹ In other words, the EPHE prepared students to generate new knowledge.

³⁸ Gabriele Lingelbach, “La IVe Section de l’EPHE, un pendant français des institutions d’histoire allemands?,” in Céline Trautmann-Waller, ed., *De la philologie allemande à l’anthropologie française: les sciences humaines à l’EPHE, 1868-1945* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2017), 94-5.

³⁹ “Rapport sur les travaux de la 4e Section,” F¹⁷ 13617, AN. The report is unsigned but based on its handwriting, the author is almost certainly Léon Renier, the first president of the Fourth Section. Renier has several signed documents in the same box.

The practice that most exemplified the model of instruction at the EPHE was the *conférence*, or colloquium.⁴⁰ When the Fourth or Fifth Section announced each term the courses that would be offered, it was announcing the topics and schedule of colloquia. In these weekly meetings, faculty members showed students “the best ways of working” and gave “them practice in the most exact and efficient methods, in certain and wise criticism.” In addition, working in groups accustomed students to “scientific discussion [of results]” and exchange of perspectives with others in their field.⁴¹ In sum, the colloquium model of instruction was organized around interaction and learning by doing, either by undertaking oneself the kinds of practices that a scholar would employ or by observing someone perform them. For example, in the linguist Michel Bréal’s colloquium of 1868, he led students in “the explication of an ancient text in Latin (the ‘Sénatus consulte des Bacchanales’) from the perspective of describing the origin of Latin’s grammatical forms.” Students each took turns preparing the lesson, and when it was not their turn, the other students discussed and commented on the presentation. Students were also assigned “individual projects in which they researched a grammatical form or translated part of a secondary work.”⁴²

Colloquia in the Fifth Section similarly focused on instilling the practices of disinterested criticism. Albert Réville, the section’s president, reported at the end of its opening year that instructors and students had worked in small groups and devoted an entire term to one or a few sources in a given religious tradition. For example, Auguste Sabatier’s colloquium in Christian Literature focused on a close reading of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians and Chapter 15 of the

⁴⁰ I use ‘colloquium’ to translate *conférence* so as to avoid the association of the term ‘seminar’ with the German research university. The *conférence* and seminar were similar but they were also understood as reflecting a French tradition, too, as I mention in the text.

⁴¹ Renier, “Rapport sur les travaux.”

⁴² Renier, “Rapport sur les travaux.”

Book of Acts. Alternatively, in the Religions of Egypt course taught by Eugène Amélineau, “three selections were chosen to reflect the three genres of religious texts in Ancient Egypt: legends, hymns and conjurations. The selected documents were translated, annotated, and explicated, in such a way as to illustrate the resources but also the obstacles that different kinds of religious texts present.” In Hartwig Derenbourg’s colloquium on “Islam and the Religions of Arabia,” he twice took students to the Louvre Museum where they studied artifacts that were being considered for acquisition and had not been the subject of any scholarly study. The Academy of Inscriptions and Belles Lettres also lent Derenbourg some materials from the “inscriptions that had been found at San’â,” which the students explicated according to the order adopted in the *Corpus Inscriptorium Semiticarum*, a repertory for Semitic inscriptions published by the Academy.⁴³

Criticism Applied to the Christian History of Errors and the History of Nations

To better appreciate what was distinctive about the ethos of disinterested criticism in the sciences of religion, it is useful to contrast the practices of Fifth Section scholars with those of Catholic instruction and scholarship. Mgr. Maurice d’Hulst served as Rector of the Institut Catholique of Paris from 1880 to 1896 and several of his seminary notebooks from the 1860s survive.⁴⁴ Even though d’Hulst’s notebooks are not exactly contemporary with the early years of the Fifth Section, it is unlikely that the nature of Catholic teaching changed very much between the early 1860s and the late 1880s. In fact, when d’Hulst became rector, he unsuccessfully tried to introduce current methods of criticism into the teaching and research at the Institut Catholique.

⁴³ Albert Réville, “Rapport des travaux présenté à M. le Ministre de l’Instruction publique, des Beaux-arts et des Cultes. Année 1886,” F¹⁷ 13618.

⁴⁴ In addition to the Trinity notebook used below, several others are held in the Fonds d’Hulst, dossiers 3 to 41, AICP.

Doing so would have been an element in his program to develop “Christian Science,” or scholarly knowledge that met critical and historical standards but still adhered to “the authority of tradition and of the Church.”⁴⁵ In a controversial 1893 article in *Le Correspondant*, d’Hulst proposed a path to reconciling the imperatives of criticism and tradition, in what he called the “Broad School.” If the dilemma for Catholic scholars amounted to employing current philological methods while complying with the declaration of Vatican I that Scripture was authored by God and inerrant, the “Broad School” represented a middle ground since it accepted modern criticism, and therewith biblical errors, but it delimited the purview of inspiration to “matters of faith and morals,” which the Bible taught correctly despite occasional errors in the text. Outside of that terrain, the techniques of criticism could be applied without compromising tradition or the teachings of the Church. Pope Leo XIII, however, did not agree with d’Hulst and condemned the “Broad School” in the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* of November 1893. Leo reaffirmed that theology should guide criticism and that it was wrong to restrict inspiration to certain parts of Scripture.⁴⁶

One of d’Hulst’s courses at Saint-Sulpice Seminary concerned the doctrine of the Trinity.⁴⁷ The course was arranged in the manner of an ordered demonstration, having parts, sections, chapters and propositions, each lower unit substantiating and elaborating a higher one. This style of instruction had more in common with the magisterial oratory that the founders of the Fifth Section linked with the presentation of results “already made” in lectures at the Faculty of Letters. Although d’Hulst’s seminary course was modeled on a rational demonstration, it

⁴⁵ D’Hulst also adduced the case of Renan to support his program: if Renan had been taught modern philological methods, he might not have abandoned his seminary education. Renan famously left Saint-Sulpice in 1843. See Harvey Hill cited below.

⁴⁶ Harvey Hill, “Leo XIII, Loisy and the ‘Broad School’: An Early Round of the Modernist Crisis,” *Catholic Historical Review* 89 (January 2003): 41-7.

⁴⁷ Maurice d’Hulst, “Cours de M. Renaudet: Traité de la Trinité (octobre 1863),” in fonds d’Hulst, dossier 40.

began with a discussion of the place of belief in understanding the Trinity. As a mystery, the Trinity was “a truth that was indemonstrable to human reason.” However, it could still be grasped indirectly and present “a clear idea to the mind” through the contents of revelation. This revelation had been recorded in Scripture and served as credible evidence of a mystery because of “the infallible authority that had certainly revealed it to us.” That is to say, Scripture was credible evidence because it was God, the infallible authority, who had revealed truths through the authors of Scripture. In this approach to a religious text as authoritative testimony, the text was taken to allow indirect understanding of mysteries because the reader believed the textual contents to originate with God and be signs of God’s truth. As d’Hulst’s instructor explained, “even though it is from the authority that reason solicits teachings on mysteries, reason may nonetheless seek, in the conceptions and analogies that it discovers in the authority, the relations of truth that it believes.” D’Hulst then wrote in parentheses Anslem of Canterbury’s famous dictum: faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*).⁴⁸

After the opening remarks about belief undergirding the entire exposition, d’Hulst’s instructor discussed the importance of a correct understanding of the Trinity and then presented the five most common errors in the history of the Church. The consequences of incorrectly understanding the Trinity were indeed grave. All mysteries “revealed to us the being itself and the life of God,” both of which were needed to properly know what religion was, namely, “the whole of the relations between God and humanity.” But none of the other mysteries that “assumed the multiplicity of [divine] persons (the Incarnation or the Redemption)” would be intelligible to us without an understanding of “God in three persons.” As such, there was virtually no other truth whose incorrect understanding could have “such perilous consequences.”

⁴⁸ D’Hulst, “Cours de M. Renaudet,” preliminaries.

At the same time, fewer truths had been as fertile in generating alternative accounts as the Trinity. This propensity to error could be attributed to several factors having to do with the groups that comprised the early Church: there were “Jews who still adhered to the divine unity; converted pagans who, filled with polytheist notions, tended to exaggerate the consequences of the distinction among three persons; and philosophers (Platonists and Gnostics) who sought to accommodate the doctrine to their metaphysical conceptions.” Errors about the Trinity did not cease after the fall of the Roman Empire but later errors could still be assimilated to the heresies of antiquity.⁴⁹

All errors about the Trinity, d’Hulst’s instructor continued, could be grouped into one of three classes: “modalism, subordinationism, and a mixture of the first two.” Modalism and subordinationism signified “the extreme terms” of a continuum at whose center resided the correct understanding of the Trinity. Modalism erred because it “only regarded the three persons as three forms of the divinity,” but in subordinationism, the error resulted from “establishing among the persons substantial diversity and subordination.” (That is to say, modalism denied any real distinction among the persons whereas subordinationism considered them to not be equally of the divine substance, such as in the Arian Controversy, in which the Father created the Son but the Son was not co-eternal with the Father).⁵⁰ As an example of a mixed error, the instructor discussed Gnosticism, “a transcendental rationalism that sought for more than three centuries to corrupt Christian dogma.” The “father of the sect” had been Simon Magus, who “presented himself as an incarnation of the divinity, having appeared as Father to the Samaritans, Son to the

⁴⁹ D’Hulst, “Cours de M. Renaudet,” pt. I, art. A.

⁵⁰ D’Hulst’s instructor gave Arians and Macedonians as examples of subordinationism. Modalism is still a term used in Anglophone academic theology but the ideas characterized as subordinationism tend to be discussed as part of the Arian Controversy of the fourth century. See Ian A. McFarland et al., eds., *Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), s.v. “Arian Controversy,” “Modalism” and “Trinity.”

Jews and Spirit to the Gentiles.” However, it would be Valentinus who would become the “principal author of the Gnostic system,” a system that he built by “borrowing (‘puiser’) from Platonic, Jewish and Christian sources.” After leaving the errors of antiquity, the instructor made only brief mention of the sixteenth-century heresy Socinianism since it was “no more than a revival of ancient pure modalism.” A longer treatment was given to a final modern error, “rationalism,” which could be divided into two currents: those who insisted that recognizing three persons in a unique God was “absurd” (d’Holbach) and those who claimed that the Trinity in fact reflected three “metaphysical concepts” of being (Hegel).⁵¹

For the purposes of our comparison with the Fifth Section, the final part of the Trinity course that will concern us is the treatment of the mystery’s existence. This part, which came after the history of errors, now gave a positive statement of what the doctrine of the Trinity was: “There is in God three distinct persons who possess an identical divinity.” Proof of that statement, the instructor continued, could be found in “Holy Scripture, Tradition, and Prescription.” The last two sources, tradition and prescription, had considerable overlap since the ordinances of councils against heresies (the prescriptions) had been made on the basis of tradition, or the testimony and teachings of the Church Fathers. The Council of Nicaea, then, served as a proof of the Trinity because its pronouncement had “testified authentically to the faith of the universal Church of the time about the Trinity. Hence, the faith of Nicaea had been that of all the preceding ages” and was something that could not have been introduced in the decades leading up to the Council in 325. Some had tried to attribute the doctrine of the Trinity to Athanasius, but “this doctor maintained that he had received it from the Fathers and invited all the faithful to form their belief only on earlier tradition.” Moreover, the instructor continued, the

⁵¹ D’Hulst, “Cours de M. Renaudet,” pt. I, art. B.

prescription of Nicaea had merely followed “the process that the [early] Church had consistently employed in condemning heresies. When the faith of a man became suspect, one examined only one thing, namely, whether or not he was in accord with the tradition of the Fathers. In such a manner, Paul of Samosata had been condemned by the Council of Antioch [in 260].”⁵² What d’Hulst’s instructor did not mention, as it might have been familiar to seminarians, was that Paul of Samosata was condemned for teachings about the Trinity that fell in the modalist category of error. We will return to this topic below in the Fifth Section’s treatment of Trinitarian theology.

At this juncture, several differences may be observed in the approaches to learned inquiry and teaching at Saint-Sulpice and the Fifth Section. Although the Trinity course made use of textual evidence in places as a Fifth Section scholar might do, the Sulpician course opened with a discussion of the role of belief in warranting the use of Scripture as authoritative testimony to the truth that God had revealed. This was precisely what a scholar of the Fifth Section would reject: the authoritative testimony of a sacred text was not warranted by belief; rather authoritativeness was something that the laic scholar determined using the methods of criticism. The colloquium model was expressly designed to help students learn the critical practices of judging the features of a text or artifact to determine its degree of authority as historical evidence. Evaluating evidentiary testimony by trying to adhere to rules and disciplining personal impressions was one of the practices that made scientific criticism disinterested to its practitioners. The second practice was disallowing treatment of supernatural entities, which would include employing a text as an index to divine mysteries. When Fifth Section scholars did discuss supernatural things such as God, divinity or the Trinity, it was the ideas that humans had *about* God, divinity or the Trinity. Hence, the object of study in the sciences of religion was no longer divine teachings and

⁵² D’Hulst, “Cours de M. Renaudet,” pt. II, ch. 1.

everything that followed from them (e.g., rites, observances) as in Catholic instruction, but the object became the historical conceptions that humans had had of the divine or their rituals that reflected their understanding of the divine.

One final observation should be made before moving to study of the Trinity among Fifth Section scholars. The practice of judging a text's degree of authoritativeness commonly involved a large amount of painstaking work to collate copies, compare variant readings and verify authorship before anything could be said about what a text contained or meant. This preparatory task was generally diminished for scholars of Christian Literature since a collective undertaking to produce a critical, or more original, edition of the Greek New Testament had been underway in Europe since the sixteenth century (with important breakthroughs by German scholars between 1730 and 1850).⁵³ Nevertheless, the philological principles used to establish a critical text contributed much to the practices of evaluating documents for their historical testimony, as we can see in a doctoral thesis by Henry Labrosse on the life and works of Nicolas of Lira (c. 1265-1349).⁵⁴ Although Labrosse was a student enrolled at the École des Chartes, he went to colloquia with two Fifth Section faculty members, François Picavet and Israel Lévi, both of whose methodological influence he credited in his thesis. Labrosse selected the corpus of Nicholas of Lira in order to produce an analysis of scriptural exegesis in the High Middle Ages. However, before offering any exposition of Nicolas' approach to exegesis, Labrosse produced a catalogue of all the manuscript copies and fragments that concerned Nicolas or were written by him. The materials were arranged in chronological order but also placed in a hierarchical classification according to their historical value or authenticity. For example, in Part 2 of the

⁵³ The important breakthroughs to which I am referring were those made by J. A. Bengel, J. J. Griesbach, and K. Lachmann. See Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 158-171.

⁵⁴ Henri Labrosse, thèse et notes, archives de l'École des Chartes, 93AJ/283, AN.

thesis, a study of Nicolas' corpus, Labrosse established three categories of historical value: writings that were "(a) authentic, (b) doubtful and (c) falsely attributed to Nicolas."⁵⁵ At another point in the thesis, when Labrosse was trying to establish biographical facts about Nicolas, he produced a family tree, or *stemma*, of the manuscript copies of an epitaph on his tomb at a convent in Paris.⁵⁶ Even though the original transcription had been lost, he concluded that a copy made by Gonzaga prior to 1631 and held in Rome (B₁) was the source from which several other extant copies had been made (B₂, B₃ and B₄, ranging in dates from 1638 to 1833).⁵⁷ We find, then, in Labrosse's thesis an important practice of disinterested criticism: presenting a bibliographic description of one's source materials, attesting to the parts of it deemed most trustworthy, and showing that one's conclusion rested on the reliability of the evidence as opposed to some other factor, such as tradition or divine authorship.

Despite the controversy surrounding the founding of the Fifth Section, it did not take long for its scholars to take up a topic as central to Catholic doctrine as the Trinity. Albert Réville, who, along with serving as president of the section, occupied the chair in history of dogmas, devoted a colloquium each semester to the topic between 1886 and 1888. The series of colloquia began under the title, "History of the dogma of the Trinity during the first seven centuries," but they later became more specific: "History of Trinitarian dogma in the period of the first Council of Nicaea (325) and in succeeding periods, up to the first Council of Constantinople (381)," and "History of Trinitarian dogma from the Council of Ephesus in 431 to the apparition of the

⁵⁵ Labrosse, *Recherches sur la vie et l'oeuvre de Nicolas de Lire, de l'Ordre des Frères Mineurs (vers 1264 - d. 1349): contribution à l'histoire de l'exégèse au Moyen-Age* (Diss. Ecole des Chartes, 1906), 60, 93AJ/283.

⁵⁶ Although genealogies of texts were not new, Lachmann's *stemma* synthesized a set of precise rules. See Rens Bod, "The Importance of the History of Philology, or the Unprecedented Impact of the Study of Texts," chap. 2 in Ton van Kalmthout and Huib Zuidervaart, *The Practice of Philology in the Nineteenth-Century Netherlands* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 30.

⁵⁷ Labrosse, *Recherches*, 81-86.

symbol ‘...’.”⁵⁸ The colloquium might have been new, but Réville’s interest in the Trinity was not likely to have been. In addition to studying at the Strasbourg Faculty of Theology, he had been a Protestant minister, serving at a church in Rotterdam for two decades, but later resigned from ministry in the Protestant Church of France when he was named to the newly-created chair in the general history of religions at the Collège de France in 1880 (out of respect for laïcité).⁵⁹ He also had written an article for the *Revue des deux mondes* on the history of Unitarianism in 1868.⁶⁰

While student notebooks from Réville’s colloquia on Trinitarian doctrine have yet to be located in archives, we may form a fairly good picture of what was explored in his courses from the article that he published in the Fifth Section’s tenth anniversary volume (1896), entitled “The Christology of Paul of Samosata.”⁶¹ The article situated Paul of Samosata’s understanding of Christ’s divinity within the different, competing strands of thought that characterized the early history of the Church, which, as was true in the colloquia series, spanned the first seven centuries CE. To give an overview of the factors and trends that shaped those centuries, Réville made several statements in the opening pages that were highly condensed and would have required significant research, such as: “The major reason for the interminable debates that agitated the first seven centuries of the Church in the area of Christology must be found in the conflict that necessarily arose between the monotheist principle that Christians so proudly opposed to traditional polytheism, on the one hand, and, on the other, in the admiration, the enthusiasm, let

⁵⁸ Meetings of 27 October 1886, 27 March 1887, 16 October 1887, and 18 March 1888, *PVCSR*.

⁵⁹ André Encrevé, ed., *Les Protestants*, vol. 5 of *Dictionnaire du monde religieux dans la France contemporaine* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1993), s.v., “Réville, Albert.”

⁶⁰ Albert Réville, “Le christianisme unitaire au troisième siècle: Paul de Samosata et Zénobie,” *Revue des deux mondes*, 1 May 1868, 73-106.

⁶¹ A. Réville, “La christologie de Paul de Samosate,” in *Études de critique et d’histoire: deuxième série, publié par les membres de la Section des sciences religieuses à l’occasion de son dixième anniversaire* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1896), 189-208.

us say the worship of which the person of Jesus Christ was the object from an early date.”⁶²

Based on these details about the kind of history he was undertaking, we may already at this junction note a key difference in the approach to instruction at the Fifth Section vis-à-vis Saint-Sulpice. There were no errors in Réville’s treatment of the Trinity, only debates owing to alternative understandings of Christ’s degree of divinity and manner of relationship to God. If one conception won out over another, this would be explained historically rather than by adducing the revealed teaching contained in Scripture or the understanding passed down via tradition from the Church Fathers. Indeed, Réville announced in his opening to the article that his critical study of Paul of Samosata would present a different picture of him than “the one that tradition would have us believe.”

Réville’s study of Paul of Samosata exhibits several other hallmark practices of disinterested criticism and the historical treatment of religious objects like the Trinity. After brief remarks about who Paul of Samosata was and why he was of interest—a third-century bishop of Antioch who had “laïque tastes and inclinations” but remained “profoundly religious on the basis of a rationalism rare for his time”—Réville began with a description of the extant sources and their degree of reliable testimony. The historical evidence concerning Paul of Samosata’s life and ideas were largely recorded in works written by his orthodox adversaries or in documents produced by councils. These works included Eusebius of Casearia’s *Ecclesiastical History*, Epiphanius of Salamis’ *Haereses*, Justinians’s *Against the Monophysites*, the Acts of the Council of Ephesus of 431, and two additional writings from the fifth and tenth centuries. Réville added that credible historical information about Paul of Samosata could still be retrieved from these sources if one kept in mind that his opponents were writing after he lived and presented him in

⁶² A. Réville, “La christologie,” 191.

such a manner as to combat Nestorianism such that the later teachings were “renewals of an error which had been combated sixty years earlier.”⁶³ (Nestorianism, the teaching condemned at the Council of Ephesus, held that Christ was both fully divine and fully human, i.e., of two natures and two distinct entities, as a result of the divine Son “indwelling” in the human Jesus of Nazareth).⁶⁴ Two extant sources, however, did not withstand critical evaluation. A “Letter by Six Bishops to Paul of Samosata” was found to be of “dubious authenticity” and another letter mentioned in Eusebius, by Denis of Alexandria, had been fabricated.

With the evidentiary grounds of his historical analysis now established, Réville could move to a discussion of the causal factors behind the evolutions in Trinitarian doctrine. As was common in philologically-informed histories of the period, Réville located a moment of origin and showed how the causal factors that would guide subsequent development were initially present in germ. Here, what was present in germ was not a linguistic or mental structure but differing opinions on how to regard Christ in relation to divinity. The New Testament bore witness to one set of opinions among the first-century disciples who possessed “an enthusiasm for Jesus” and tended to “place him atop the chain of being, verging on, in some cases, apotheosis.” Similarly, the Apostle Paul saw in Christ “the man of spirit” who occupied in heaven, at the head of humanity, a position “opposite to that of the old Adam, terrestrial, carnal, sinful.” The heavenly preexistence of Christ, which would later become a matter of intense debate, was, Réville observed, “implied in the Pauline Christology.” By contrast, the community of Jewish Christians formed another set of opinions and were reluctant to go as far as Paul or the disciples in regarding Christ as “existing before time with the Father and then coming down to

⁶³ A. Réville, “La christologie,” 190.

⁶⁴ The orthodox position adopted at Ephesus was that Christ was of two natures in one distinct entity or reality (*hypostasis*) and, as such, worshiped as Lord and not also as a human being. See *Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, s.v., “Hypostasis” and “Nestorianism.”

earth.” Rather, Jewish Christians considered Christ’s birth and spiritual perfection as a human to be “miraculous events, the result of the Spirit working in the womb of the Virgin Mother.” Both sets of opinions coexisted in the early decades of Christianity, and together they served as evidence of the disagreement in Trinitarian views that would only increase in succeeding centuries. One could “already see,” Réville noted, “the functioning of the law that would dominate the entire Christological evolution: out of two opinions the one that attributed to Christ the most perfection would be the one that finally achieved the allegiance of the majority and, ultimately, the whole Church.”⁶⁵ While identifying laws to explain historical development was common practice in philology, observing law-like regularities that functioned as causes also qualified the sciences of religion, and of language, as positive science.

The differing views among Christ’s earliest followers would experience important evolutions in the second and third centuries, but the general law that Réville had identified still held: the opinion ascribing the most perfection to Christ gained preponderance, which in the second and third centuries would manifest as “the rapid and growing success of the theory of the Logos, or Word, incarnate in Jesus.” The Logos doctrine had been originally “in its premises an Alexandrian-Jewish theory of Philo and would obtain by way of the Fourth Gospel its great letters of naturalization in the Christian Church.” (Critical scholars in this period considered the Gospel of John to have been written about a hundred years after the first three Gospels, sometime in the late second century).⁶⁶ The spread of the Logos doctrine resulted in a new version of the opinion that had originally inclined toward enthusiasm and deification of Christ: “the human self (‘moi’) of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels [was substituted] for a divine self that,

⁶⁵ A. Réville, “La christologie,” 191-2.

⁶⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 470.

out of love for men, assumed human nature . . . but that underneath the outer human form conserved all the prerogatives of divinity.”⁶⁷ In response to the idea of the incarnate Logos, the alternate opinion of the first century—the one that had resisted the tendency to place Christ in heaven before all time—held fast to the “oneness of God, to the principle of monotheism,” maintaining that God the Father was “the absolute source of being and that the Son, no matter how elevated, derived everything from [the Father] and was subordinate to him.” However, the opinion that the Son was subordinate to the Father remained “poorly defined” and did not satisfy those who found that subordinating Christ created “two unequal divine persons.” This dissatisfied group believed that they could resolve the difficulty “by regarding the Son as a modality or impersonal and temporal emanation of the divine substance (Sabellianism).” Still others, who rejected the Sabellian solution because it “made the historic Jesus a passive instrument, without human consciousness,” preferred to return to “primitive Unitarianism.” For them, Jesus had been “above all a man like us, non-preexistent, but more and more inspired, and who had raised himself by the courageous and continuous perfectioning of his moral character to that status which earned him the dignity of Son of God.”⁶⁸ This second dissenting opinion from the incarnate Logos position could be called “adoptionism,” Réville explained, but was in effect a Unitarian position whose last premodern representatives were Elipandus of Toledo and Felix of Urgell in the eight century. Opinions would remain divided among the adoptionist Unitarians, the Sabellians and the partisans of the incarnate Logos until the ultimate triumph of the Logos doctrine by the late third century.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ A. Réville, “La christologie,” 192.

⁶⁸ A. Réville, “La christologie,” 193.

⁶⁹ A. Réville, “La christologie,” 194.

Réville's history of competing Trinitarian opinions in the first three centuries ultimately served to provide the context within which he situated Paul of Samosata and his particular Trinitarian teachings. Bishop of Antioch, in the eastern part of the Church where adoptionism continued to be prevalent, Paul of Samosata entered the narrative as the head of a new Unitarian strand that drew upon the earlier adoptionist opinion and would inspire the later Arianism of the fourth century (the heretical teaching that the Council of Nicaea was convened to combat). Paul of Samosata continued the adoptionist trend of giving preference to Christ's moral superiority as a human being but his opinion represented an evolution because he incorporated the Logos doctrine into his teaching, something that earlier adoptionist Unitarians had been reluctant to do, wishing to remain true to monotheism. According to Réville, Paul of Samosata's innovation was to argue that the divine Logos had inspired Christ and given him wisdom as it had done for earlier prophets, but it remained in God, producing "a conjunction" between divine Logos and human Jesus but "not an incarnation." Instead of assuming human form, the Logos had inspired Christ "from above" while the man had come "from below." Thus, in Paul of Samosata's teaching, the Logos resided in Jesus as "a power of God," and he had attained moral perfection because of the "divine action exerting itself on him."⁷⁰ By establishing that elements from above and below had joined, Paul did anticipate the later Arian Controversy in that his teaching, too, denied that Christ was co-eternal with the Father. That is to say, his teaching excluded the preexistence of Christ from the beginning of time, who then came down from heaven as incarnate Logos.⁷¹

⁷⁰ A. Réville, "La christologie," 197.

⁷¹ Reaching similar conclusions, a modern scholar has studied Paul of Samosata on the basis of few sources that Réville did not use, such as the *Ecclesiastical Theology* of Eusebius. These other sources report Paul as having taught: "Christ is from all eternity in 'predetermination' but is in actual existence known only as the one from Nazareth." John Behr, "Paul of Samosata and the Council of Antioch," chap. 8 in *The Way to Nicaea*, vol. 1 of *The Formation of Christian Theology* (Crestwood, NJ: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 215.

In addition to a discussion of Paul of Samosata's Trinitarian opinion, Réville also attempted to offer through historical conjecture a portrait of the person of Paul. Even though certain of his habits, such as a penchant for composing of hymns, appeared likely, Réville avowed that none of it could be fully supported with evidence. Rather, what could be reliably said was that "his manner of understanding the relations of Christianity with society in general and the conduct of Christian clergy among the Christian people was in opposition to the ascetic and sacerdotal current that had increasingly invaded the Church." Réville slipped in here a short but significant statement given his own late-nineteenth century context and the founding of the Fifth Section. Paul of Samosata, whom we have already been told was of a "laic spirit," keeping both his civil and ecclesiastical functions in Antioch, now appears here not only as an opponent of having a priesthood in Christianity but also as a model for how ecclesiastics should carry out their role in the community. "His adversaries portrayed him," Réville continued, "as lacking dignity and moral seriousness, but that was not the view of the people whom he served." The Christians of Antioch "remained devoted to him" even after his fellow bishops condemned his teachings. The merits of Paul of Samosata could not, then, have been "appreciated in the whole of Christendom as they might now be today in the light of another religious ideal."⁷² Along with presenting Paul of Samosata as an antecedent to modern Unitarianism, Réville's account also gave the "laic spirit" a history, which became not merely a novel modern idea but one whose antecedents could be identified in Christianity's early history—albeit now recovered along Protestant lines with Paul of Samosata as a model of rational, individual religiosity.⁷³ One of Réville's students would later continue both the study of errors and the writing of the laic spirit's

⁷² A. Réville, "La christologie," 195.

⁷³ The final sentence of the article reads: "Modern Unitarianism salutes in Paul of Samosata one of its distant precursors." A. Réville, "La christologie," 208.

history, arguing in a doctoral thesis that the twelfth-century heterodox ideas leading up to the Albigenian heresy revealed laic society beginning to gain “consciousness of its moral development and action independent of the clergy.”⁷⁴

Alongside presenting one’s sources and discussing their authenticity or historical value, a final practice of disinterested criticism was scientific restraint, or recognizing what one’s evidence could support and not pushing one’s conclusions any further than those limits.⁷⁵ Here again the practice of restraint was already firmly established in the Fourth Section, where the practice had acquired increasing emphasis in response to two concerns in the field of comparative philology. The first concern had to do with the social consequences of the prevailing linguistic theory among early-to-mid nineteenth-century philologists, namely, that language reflected the essential categories or structures of a people’s thought and that their linguistic or religious development was guided by that structure, often in a pattern of degeneration from a pristine origin.⁷⁶ For the leading Jewish scholars of the Fourth Section, Michel Bréal and James Darmesteter, such a view of language meant that the Jewish people could not escape from being treated as perennially backward owing to the simple and rigid structure of their language. Instead, Bréal and Darmesteter advocated for a study of the meaning of words over time and not their form, or intrinsic nature, which introduced the possibility that languages could progress.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Paul Alphandéry, *Les idées morales chez les hétérodoxes latins au début du XIIIe siècle* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1903), xiv-xv.

⁷⁵ The term ‘scientific restraint’ comes from Lorraine Daston in her account of objectivity as a shared practice in the humanities and sciences of the nineteenth century. Lorraine Daston, “Objectivity and Impartiality: Epistemic Virtues in the Humanities,” vol. 3 of *The Making the Humanities*, Rens Bod, Thijs Weststeijn and Jaap Maat, eds. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 31-32. Project MUSE, Web.

⁷⁶ The term that Renan had used for this essential structure was “mold” (‘moule’). See *Historie générale et système comparée des peuples sémitiques*, 4th ed. (Paris: Michel-Lévy, 1863), 18. Mohl also used “mold” when describing the importance of ancient Indian languages to the history of humanity. They were the “mold in which the philosophic spirit” of later peoples had first formed. Mohl, “Année 1847-1848,” in vol. 1 of *Vingt-sept ans*, 308).

⁷⁷ Perrine Simon-Nahum, “Une ‘autre’ histoire des langues et du langage: le rôle des savants juifs dans la constitution des sciences de l’homme en France,” in Trautmann-Waller, ed., *De la philologie allemande à l’anthropologie française*, 285-99.

The second concern, which was not unrelated to the first given its racial implications, was to distinguish rigorous or learned scholarship from merely speculative or popular works. The 1850s and 1860s witnessed a growing number of books that attempted to reconstruct an ethnological history of the primitive Aryans or show the primitive unity of Indo-European languages and peoples in contrast to the diversity of languages among the other ethnological groups that populated Europe. When learned French orientalists and later members of the Fourth Section reviewed these works, they highlighted the weak evidentiary bases to such general claims, observing that explanations other than shared ancestry could account for languages that had forms, sounds or numerical systems in common.⁷⁸ As Bréal, who also occupied the chair of comparative grammar at the Collège de France, explained in his early lectures, “the theories of general linguistics, the views of the whole, the great historical insights, all these grand treatments that we like in France, and with good reason, will ultimately exhaust themselves or distance themselves from the truth if we look down on the study of the facts of language, and if we cease to wield ourselves the instrument of verification and examination (‘contrôle’).”⁷⁹ He later compared in another lecture the careful study of facts in philology to statistical surveys in political economy. Observing “the exterior forms of language” was only the start of comparative grammar; observed facts need also to be “related to the principle that produced them.” The same obligation held for “the facts that belonged to statistics: lists had to be drawn up without any preconception other than the most scrupulous exactitude . . . [before showing] the cause of the

⁷⁸ Reviews lamenting works that made general ethnological claims but were more speculative than scientific recur in the *Journal asiatique* and the *Revue critique* edited by scholars of the Fourth Section. See for example, Jules Mohl, review of *Unité et confusion des langues* by Michalowski, *Journal asiatique*, 5th ser., vol. 11 (1858), 288; Mohl’s comment on *Les origines indo-européennes, ou les Aryas primitifs* by Pictet, “Année 1858-1859,” in vol. 2 of *Vingt-sept ans*, 266-67; Abel Bergaigne, review of *Die Sprachverschiedenheit in Europa an den Zahlworten nachgewiesen* by Pott, *Revue critique d’histoire et de littérature* vol. 3, no. 2 (1868), 33.

⁷⁹ Michel Bréal, “De la méthode comparative appliquée à l’étude des langues” (1864), in *Mélanges de mythologie et de linguistique*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Hachette, 1882), 210.

facts and numbers so gathered.”⁸⁰ For Bréal, then, it was not that general histories based on linguistic facts should be abandoned, only that a sufficient number of facts had to be gathered, ordered and checked before a general conclusion could be ventured. It was very much in this vein that Abel Bergaigne, who had studied Sanskrit with Bréal before joining the Fourth Section, presented his study of Vedic religion as “index” and “methodological exposition” of the ideas in the *Rig Veda*.⁸¹

Even though the sciences of religion included an approach that sought to make general, comparative claims about religious development in various peoples and in all of humanity, scholars of this approach presented their project as adhering to the scientific restraint and careful gathering of facts that Bréal and others had outlined. When Réville wrote the preface to the French edition of the Dutch scholar Cornelius Tiele’s *Comparative History of Ancient Religions: the Religions of Phoenicia and Egypt*, Réville used a phrase that Bréal had also used in cautioning against “knowledge that is fully made” (‘science toute faite’): “the history of religions is not made, but is being made.”⁸² And in place of an analogy with statistics in political economy, Réville preferred astronomy and geology: “certain persons content themselves a little too much in the idea that this kind of study should only aim to record the picturesque, poetic or bizarre elements that contained in nearly all religious systems. Such persons resemble those who admire the marvels of astronomy but who shy away from verifying the least calculation used to discover those marvels.” One could only arrive at a legitimate history of religions after “having

⁸⁰ Bréal, “De la forme et de la fonction des mots” (1866), in *Mélanges*, 265.

⁸¹ Abel Bergaigne, *La religion védique d’après les hymnes du Rig-Veda*, vol. 1 (Paris: F. Vieweg, 1878). He would later be an inaugural member of the Fifth Section before stepping aside in 1886 to honor his commitments in the Fourth Section and the Faculty of Letters.

⁸² A. Réville, preface to Cornelius Tiele, *Histoire comparée des anciennes religions de l’Égypte et des Peuples Sémitiques*, trans. G. Collins (Paris: Fischbacher, 1882), ix. Tiele, a fellow liberal Protestant, was a professor at the theology faculty of Leyden University and the original title was *Vergelijkende geschiedenis der oude godsdiensten*, 2de stuk, 2de deel: *De Godsdienst von Fenicië en Israël* (Amsterdam: P.N. Van Kampen, 1872).

patiently dug into the ground, examined up close each of the layers of which it was composed, [and] analyzed its constituent parts.”⁸³ Ten years earlier, in reviewing Tiele’s original Dutch edition of 1872, Réville had similarly cautioned against the risks of using the linguistic character or spirit of a people to make general claims concerning religious history, in this case, that of the Jewish people: “saying simply that monotheism is the spontaneous fruit of the semitic genius is to appear to have silently passed over a mass of phenomena of contradictory appearance and to have failed to point out all those that conflicted with a preconceived opinion.” Although Réville recognized all of these pitfalls, he was not prepared to abandon a general statement about the “close relationship between popular monotheism and Semitism.” Rather, what was needed was further examination, “to study up close the concrete forms of Semitic religions in order to conceive an exact idea of their actual relations with the monotheism that emerged from them.” It was for this reason that Tiele’s work was timely, a careful study of the neighboring people to the ancient Hebrews who also spoke a Semitic language.⁸⁴ Restraint also applied when making general comparative claims among religions, a practice that Réville’s eventual colleague in Egyptian religion at the Fifth Section, Émile Amélineau, employed in his study of the similarities between the funerary customs in ancient China and Egypt. Amélineau identified a similar cause behind the customs in both places—the “cult of Ancestors”—but he then made it clear that he was not “suggesting that in some period the Egyptians had borrowed their funerary usages from the Chinese, or vice versa.” To make that claim he would have to argue that such a borrowing had taken place in a period anterior to the period recorded by the documents. He left it to the reader to “conclude what they will,” but his task had only been to attest to the similarity among

⁸³ A. Réville, preface to Tiele, *Histoire comparée des anciennes religions*, xiii-xiv.

⁸⁴ A. Réville, “La religion des phéniciens,” *Revue des deux mondes* (15 May 1873), 373-74.

the facts, from which it could be inferred that the “human spirit had followed its path” in both peoples.⁸⁵

The practices of disinterested criticism and scientific restraint marked a boundary with not just Catholic theological teaching but also certain forms of orientalist scholarship. Even if a blurred separation from theology can be seen in the Fifth Section’s organization of subjects and the profile of its students with theology, the kind of history written by Réville more squarely placed the work of the Fifth Section in the secularizing reforms of the 1880s. The laic spirit not only acquired a history but was linked with Protestant conceptions of religiosity. Here, figures like Réville exemplified the group of liberal Protestants of a “Unitarian cast” to whom republicans turned so that the laic society they hoped to build would have a “lay religion” that was compatible with science and progress but was also “suitable for citizens in the making who came from a variety of religious backgrounds.”⁸⁶ The difficulty with such view of a lay religion is that it would not have brought religious sentiment or the insights of conscience into the domain of positive science as many historians of religion hoped, in particular the extreme liberal Protestants with whom Réville associated. As I argue in the next section, the sciences of religion may be regarded as a rational religiosity since they were conceived as an activity that educated the self in the positive contents of religion. They gave, in other words, positive ground to religious sentiment.

History as a Laic Religiosity and the Treatment of Non-Christian Religions

⁸⁵ Émile Amélineau, “Les coutumes funéraires de l’Égypte ancienne comparées avec celles de la Chine,” in *Études de critique et d’histoire: deuxième série*, 33.

⁸⁶ Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 113.

When Renan published his *Studies in Religious History* in 1857, he outlined in his preface how the critical history was meant to “elevate and purify” religious sentiment. Far from invalidating that sentiment, “the philosophical history of religions, which shows us the constant faith of humanity in a celestial principle and a supreme order, leads to faith . . . to that faith which in order to believe in the ideal does not need to believe in the supernatural, and that, following the idea of Saint Augustin, sees the divinity better in the immutable order of things than in the dispensations of the eternal order.”⁸⁷ Curiously, Renan inverted the Augustinian model of using sciences such as grammar, and being guided by faith, to study the signs in Scripture so as to grow in wisdom (*sapientia*) and love of divine truth. Now the scholar would read, via the historical sciences, the signs in the world so as to gain an enjoyment of divine truth and a rational faith.⁸⁸ Several scholars of the Fifth Section similarly understood the critical study of religions to be a path to a laic, rational religiosity that did not rely on belief in the supernatural. Since these histories as laic religiosity embraced all past generations of humanity and their religious forms, we will also consider in this final section the treatment of non-Christian religions by Fifth Section scholars.

Aside from the six teaching chairs in Eastern religions, the other place in which we find non-Christian religions in the work of the Fifth Section is in the general histories of religious development that liberal Protestants produced. In his early lectures at the Collège de France, four years before the Fifth Section opened, Réville explained that a general history of religion showed the continuity among all religions by identifying their germ, or “substantial principle,” and

⁸⁷ Renan, preface to *Études d'histoire religieuse* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1857), xix.

⁸⁸ Augustine outlined his model of sapiential study in *De doctrina christiana* (*On Christian Teaching*). The specific passage to which Renan alluded is in I, 4: “nous devons user de ce monde, mais non pas en jouir, afin de contempler les biens invisibles de Dieu, que les choses créées nous font comprendre, c’est-à-dire afin de saisir, à partir des réalités physiques et temporelles, les réalités éternelles et spirituelles.” *La doctrine chrétienne*, trans. Madeleine Moreau, pt. 2 of vol. 11 in *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Institut d’Etudes Augustiniennes, 1997).

explaining their diversification over time. The germ of religion in human history was a “spontaneous function of the living organism” called the “religious sentiment” (‘sentiment religieux’). As the human organism’s conscious faculties developed, religious sentiment referred to “the awakening, the starting up, of a feeling sui generis that pushes the intelligence to represent to itself the object of that feeling in forms that correspond to its degree of understanding.” Even though the object that produced the feeling was “by definition mysterious” in primordial humans, the experience of the sentiment itself could still be “very fervent, very positive, and still associate itself with notions that are quite erroneous about the object itself.” By “positive” Réville meant that the feeling, independent of its object, was definite and not imagined or doubtful. In this respect, primordial humans were like modern infants: they had actual conscious feelings that were “intermixed” with a mass of mental images, many confused but a few clearer.⁸⁹ Part of Réville’s task as a critical historian would be to disentangle the positive conceptions from the obscure ones and relate them to subsequent mental representations that had become clearer as humanity matured.

After identifying the germ of religion within human consciousness, Réville then moved to describe the different classes of religion that had appeared in humanity’s history. The first form of religion involved “personification of material things and attributing capacities to them [naturism].” Naturist notions had to have preceded “animism and fetichism,” in which the personified natural things became associated with spirits who were then worshiped instead of the material things. Fetichism, which was “cruder,” arose in turn, or before animism, because “there is no separation between the spirit and the object where it is believed to reside.”⁹⁰ Despite that distinction, animism and fetichism together constituted the second class of religion in the

⁸⁹ A. Réville, *Prolégomènes de l’histoire des religions* (Paris: G. Fischbacher, 1881), 94-5.

⁹⁰ A. Réville, *Prolégomènes*, 127-29.

mythological period and were followed by polytheism, or the “dramatization of nature.” Some peoples produced “a poor, undramatic mythology, the Semites, for example,” while other were capable of a “great mythology” and developed polytheism, such as the Greeks. It was also in the mythological stage that “the peoples of the Orient and Occident” began to diverge from one another because the peoples of the East believed that dramatizing nature was imaginary and negated the legitimacy of natural knowledge (‘étude scientifique de la nature’) that also emerged in this period. They even pursued nature’s negation “into man himself,” leading to “Buddhism and its terrifying asceticism.”⁹¹ In some polytheistic nations, the connection between religion and morality began to develop, giving rise to a new religious kind: legalism. Legalist religions “imposed strict observations and prompted the believer to think he was forever condemned” if he did not remain observant. Religions that were polytheistic and legalist constituted a fourth mythological class which included Brahmanism, Zoroastrianism and Confucianism. Interestingly, Réville considered Buddhism to be a special case: it was polytheist but “presented several characteristics in common with Christianity, being like it a religion of redemption.”⁹²

The mythological period and its four classes came to a close when peoples passed from the concept of one or more superior spirits or gods to the conception of a single absolutely sovereign entity that was apart from nature and ruled over it. And as before, there was a hierarchy of classes in the monotheistic period. Judaism, which was “monotheistic, legalist and national,” came before Islam, which was “monotheistic, legalist and international.” (The religious class “national” reflected the same concern that we encountered above about the

⁹¹ A. Réville, *Prolégomènes*, 114-16.

⁹² A. Réville, *Prolégomènes*, 129-41.

adequacy of language to determine common lineage among peoples).⁹³ Although monotheistic like its Abrahamic sister faiths, Christianity stood atop the classification because it was not only international but a “religion of redemption . . . the supreme evolution of an anterior monotheism that does not suppress nature and life but transfigures and intensifies it.”⁹⁴ Réville’s personal religious commitment emerged here in presenting Christianity as the fulfillment of an earlier monotheism—a not so subtle reference to Judaism and its having been superseded by the Christian Gospel. This lapse in disinterestedness was not unique to Réville. The stadial history and classification that Tiele produced around the same time also culminated in Christianity despite employing different properties to establish its categories. Tiele obviated the broad groupings of mythological and monotheistic religions, but he did mark the same transition to conceptions of a single deity by distinguishing between “naturistic” and “ethical” periods. In naturistic religions, the gods whom communities worshiped were “the mighty powers of nature, be they demons, spirits, or man-like beings.” By contrast, in ethical religions, the “old nature-gods” receded and “all nature now [stood] under the control of one supernatural ruler in whom the supremacy of moral law [was] personified.” Once in the ethical period, religions passed through two stages, “national nomothetic” and “universalistic,” and it was in the latter group that Buddhism, Islam and Christianity were placed—albeit with the caveat that the three were not on equal footing: “If religion really is the synthesis of dependence and liberty, we might say that Islam represents the former and Buddhism the latter element only, while Christianity . . . the pure

⁹³ The Oxford Sanskritist Max Müller had suggested in his 1879 *Lectures on the Science of Religion* that language groups should serve as the basis of classifying religions. The American Dwight Whitney pointed out the problems of such an assumption, and proposed the groups “national or race religions” and “religions ‘proceeding from an individual founder.’” Tiele agreed with Whitney and used the categories ‘national’ and ‘founder’ in his morphological classification of religions. See C. P. Tiele, *Encyclopedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and General Literature*, 9th ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1886), s.v., “Religions.”

⁹⁴ A. Réville, *Prolégomènes*, 140-43.

and unalloyed at least, has fused dependence and liberty, the divine and the human, religion and ethics into an indivisible unity.”⁹⁵

If, on the one hand, the privileging of a Protestant view of Christianity in classifying all religions might seem to undermine the claim that general histories were disinterested, doing so may be seen, on the other, as consistent with the spiritual purpose of the investigation, i.e., to support a rational religiosity that was Christian, laic and positive.⁹⁶ When one of Réville’s fellow liberal Protestants at the Fifth Section, Auguste Sabatier, who occupied the chair in Christian Literature, published another general history of religious development in 1897, he wrote candidly about its spiritual purpose: “let us, then, enter this history of religion on earth with a great sentiment of piety. No study is more proper to enlarge and strengthen our religious conscience; no study can better make us see whence we have come and whither we are going.” They would encounter on their voyage through time “places where they might be humbled or find encouragement, but all the while they must not look with indifference at strange lands where their heart had no attachment; rather, let us recommence in thought the ageless voyage of humanity as pious pilgrims (‘pèlerins pieux’) who wish to retrace the steps of our fathers, to stop and contemplate at each of the stations where they adored, to recover some of their emotions and profit from their experiences.” While Sabatier reminded his readers of the spiritual purpose of their exploration, he was also reaffirming the value of the general history of religions genre. As he went on to explain, the genre was a young form of knowledge akin to “a virgin forest.” Certain courageous pioneers had “without doubt indicated paths and uncovered clearings but no

⁹⁵ Although they were not on the same level, the three universalist religions were so grouped because they were no longer communities bound by “the common belief in national traditions, but by the common belief in a doctrine of salvation.” Tiele, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v., “Religions.”

⁹⁶ The general histories of Réville and Tiele may be seen to be continuing an approach developed by French extreme liberal Protestants that we discussed in Chapter 1.

one had travelled across all of it, no one had embraced it as a whole.”⁹⁷ The “systems of classifications” that had been proposed were rejected “one after the other for being too narrow and arbitrary.” Yet, even if religions seemed to defy classification, with the paths that nations traversed “crisscrossing each other, coming and going ad infinitum,” there had been “undeniable progress” on the whole, from “ignoble beginnings” to the “great summits that have been attained,” and that evolution was worth beholding and could be if one followed it along “four or five points.”⁹⁸

When Réville described the feelings that the scholar both brought to and experienced while traversing the history of humanity, he, like Sabatier, used religious terminology, speaking of admiring and adoring, of being pious and reverent. But he also consistently described the observer as being guided by a love of truth in travelling through time and thereby gaining a firmer grasp of religious sentiment’s divine object. In 1889, in the introductory essay to the inaugural publication of the Fifth Section, Réville explained that it had been in the spirit of admiration for the progressive seeking of religious sentiment that the sciences of religion had been introduced into higher education. The spirit of the reform had not been one of polemic or combat. Rather, state officials had hoped to “bring into this specialized field of inquiry the independent and pure love of truth, animated, sought and studied for itself; to reveal [truth] in its serene majesty; to unfold the annals of religious humanity, here puerile, sublime, terrible and charming, there, tragic, atrocious and ideally beautiful.”⁹⁹ Near the end of his career, in the

⁹⁷ Auguste Sabatier, *Esquisse d’une philosophie de la religion d’après la psychologie et l’histoire* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1897), 108-9.

⁹⁸ Sabatier, *Esquisse*, 110-11. In the rest of bk. 1, ch. 4, Sabatier went on to outline the general “orientation” of religious development along those four or five points. The trajectory went from particularism to universalism, “cults that were those of a tribe or clan” became “national,” or those of a people, and finally they became “universal,” addressing the “whole of humanity.”

⁹⁹ A. Réville, introduction to *Études de critique et d’histoire religieuse par les membres de la Section des sciences religieuses* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1889), x. This volume was meant to inaugurate the series of works published by the Fifth Section, called the Bibliothèque de l’École des hautes études, Sections des sciences religieuses.

opening address to the 1900 History of Religions Congress in Paris, Réville permitted himself to relax some of his earlier disinterested reserve and disclose that, to his mind, “love of God” was a version of the “love of truth” that motivated scholars in their historical research and gave their lives a higher purpose.¹⁰⁰ Alternatively, in private correspondence, Réville had been more candid about how he envisioned history of religions as a religious pursuit, one in which he and his fellow lovers of truth represented a body of disciples. In 1884, he replied to Ernest Havet, who had sent him a copy of the final volume of his *Christianity and Its Origins*: “I do not know if I will always have the pleasure of agreeing with you . . . [but] there is always benefit for adorers of truth (‘adoreurs du vrai’)—and you are one of its devotees—to compare their judgements with those of their coreligionists (‘co-religionnaires’).”¹⁰¹ Or, in 1902, he told the abbé Albert Houtin, a Catholic historian: “I think that, in the domain of the Holy Spirit, a bond of reciprocal fraternity unites all independent and sincere researchers of the truth. From this perspective, it matters little the corner of the theological horizon from which one departs.”¹⁰²

Liberal Protestant general histories, which treated all manifestations of religion’s substantial form in order to support and cultivate a rational religiosity, might also be called philosophies of religion, or efforts to reach via reason the same truths of religious belief. The orientalist who occupied the chair in Far Eastern Religions, Léon de Rosy, aspired to a similar enterprise but he did not treat religious sentiment as the essence of religion and the ground of his inquiry. Rather, Rosny felt that he had, through his studies of Buddhism and by adopting the methods of eclectism, arrived at a syncretic philosophy that reconciled Buddhist, Christian, and

¹⁰⁰ A. Réville, “Discours d’ouverture,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 42 (1900): 194.

¹⁰¹ A. Réville, Paris, to E. Havet, 14 April 1884, Correspondence et papiers d’Ernest Havet, NAF 24478, f. 36, Département des Manuscrits, Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF).

¹⁰² A. Réville to Albert Houtin, 4 June 1902, Papiers d’Albert Houtin. XIXe-XXe s., NAF 15729, f. 28, BnF.

positivist doctrines.¹⁰³ This kind of religious synthesis represented the real value of studying Asian languages and religions for Rosny, and he had been working in that vein for more than a decade by the time he joined the Fifth Section faculty. He wrote in an 1868 article that gave “a panoramic view” of the East: “the religious idea, having spread across the old continent and taken everywhere its deepest roots, saw philosophy arrive and challenge it, fighting blow for blow, for rule of the world. The contest begun 3,000 years ago continues . . . [but] there will be no victor; the religious element, no more than the philosophical element, can perish because the one and the other derive from the God of eternal beauty, goodness and truth. The future will conciliate the one and the other, and opening eyes that prejudice would have long kept closed, it will reunite the combatants, exhorting them with its soft and persuasive voice, ‘Love one another.’”¹⁰⁴ Curiously, Rosny expressed here a belief in the unlimited moral progress of humanity, similar to a Condorcet or a Comte, but unlike them, religion continued to play a role in reaching a peaceful future state and was not supplanted by science or philosophy at some earlier stage. Moreover, Rosny understood the study of Buddhism, in both its historical and present forms, to be a key activity in helping to bring about his hoped-for conciliation of philosophic reason and religion. He alluded to that aspiration at the end of his inaugural Fifth Section lecture in 1886: “was Buddhism destined to extend its impact all the way to Europe and take its place there alongside certain modern scientific doctrines with which it presents so many points of contact and affinity?”¹⁰⁵ Whether that outcome would come to pass, he did not know, but he

¹⁰³ Rosny described his debt to Buddhism and his use of eclecticism in a letter to a friend. Rosny to Élisée Reclus, 30 April 1894, quoted in Bénédicte Fabre-Muller, Pierre Leboulleux, and Philippe Rothstein, *Léon de Rosny, 1837-1914: De l’orient à l’Amérique* (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2014), 158-59.

¹⁰⁴ Léon de Rosny, “L’Orient,” in *Variétés orientales: historiques, géographiques, scientifiques, bibliographiques et littéraires*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Maisonneuve et Cie., 1872), 11-12. First edition, 1868.

¹⁰⁵ In wondering whether Buddhism could take root in Europe, the present form of the religion to which he was referring was a “Neo-Buddhism” that had recently emerged “in certain East Asian islands” and that locals called a “scientific religion” even though they did not have “well defined principles.”

remained confident that “the severe and rigorous criticism of Buddhism (‘sa critique’) can open unexpected paths in the domain of positive science, moral philosophy and reason.”¹⁰⁶

Rosny’s ambition to produce a syncretic rational religiosity, harmonizing science, philosophy and Christianity, continued to be reflected in the colloquia that he taught in the early years of the Fifth Section. For consecutive terms in 1886-87, he taught on “Buddhist theories of diverse schools, in their relations with transformist theories and the current findings of physiological science.”¹⁰⁷ As was true with Réville’s study of Trinitarian history, we may begin to form a picture of what Rosny presented in his colloquia from later published writings. The idea of Buddhism’s conformity with current natural science was discussed in a book that Rosny published in 1891, shortly after he had given a series of popular lectures in the Salle Gerson of the Sorbonne on his “Eclectic Buddhism.”¹⁰⁸ In *La morale du bouddhisme*, he observed that Buddhism offered a solution to an enduring problem of religions in general. “Doing good in this life in the hope of reward in the next life, such is the precept of nearly all religions,” he wrote. However, the problem was that doing good for future reward affronted human dignity since doing good could not be pursued for self-interested reasons. “The desired corrective” was to be found in Buddhism, “where it was taught that one should do good because the good is necessary to accomplishing the great work of nature.”¹⁰⁹ This moral imperative was not only a feature of Buddhism but equally the source of Christian morality, since all notions of “the good, the

¹⁰⁶ Rosny, *Les religions de l’Extrême-Orient: leçon d’ouverture faite à l’École pratique des hautes-études* (Paris: Maissonneuve frères et Ch. Leclerc, 1886), 35-6.

¹⁰⁷ Meetings of 27 October 1886 and 16 October 1887, *PVCSR*.

¹⁰⁸ For the Salle Gerson lectures on “Eclectic Buddhism”, see Fabre-Muller, et al., *Léon de Rosny*, 155-59. It has been observed that Rosny’s syncretic Buddhism represented a “distant” interpretation in the Buddha’s teachings and reflected more of his own philosophical interests, in particular the problem of “individuality in relation to the Great Whole,” which he had unsatisfyingly discussed with three Japanese monks who had visited Paris in 1872. Horiguchi Ryoichi, “Léon de Rosny et les premières missions bouddhiques japonaises en Occident,” *Cipango: cahiers d’études japonaises* 4 (1995): 122-39.

¹⁰⁹ Léon de Rosny, *La morale du bouddhisme* (Paris: Geroges Carré, 1891), 13-4.

beautiful and the true derived from the eternal perfection [in nature].” That is to say, all moral truths—in so far as they were good, beautiful and true—ultimately agreed with one another because they were manifestations of the same essential form, eternal perfection. And satisfying the moral law instituted by eternal perfection meant that a person became part of the eternal operation of nature, or, specifically, “the evolution of beings along the path of return into the Pantos, the Great Whole.” The individual who achieved nirvana so placed themselves in the great mechanism of return, ending “the cycles of transformation,” and thereby “accomplish[ed] their temporal mission.”¹¹⁰ Rosny departed here from earlier generations of orientalists who had concluded that Buddhist moral teaching was “individualist” (‘égoïste’) because it taught removing oneself from others to seek nirvana, or “emptiness.”¹¹¹ At the same time, we can see Rosny’s harmonizing syncretism in his account of nirvana, which now became just as moral as Christianity (in expressing the law of eternal perfection) but, unlike Christianity, revealed that being moral satisfied a law of nature instead of divine command. Presumably, this is where Rosny found Buddhism to be in accord with positive science, but one can imagine other scholars of positive science rejecting his reliance on “the eternal perfection” as a metaphysical or quasi-divine essence.

If combing religious history allowed liberal Protestant scholars to gain sensitivity to and confidence in religious sentiment within themselves, or allowed Rosny through Buddhist history

¹¹⁰ Rosny, *La morale*, 9-13.

¹¹¹ “Emptiness” or “annihilation” were the two terms often used to describe nirvana by French orientalists. Many of the prevailing conclusions of Rosny’s time originated in Eugène Burnouf’s path-breaking *Introduction à l’histoire du buddhisme indien* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1844). He discusses the individual ascetic ideal on p. 227 and 355 and finds the Buddha’s teaching on nirvana to be, in contrast to Brahmanism, “a morality without God and an atheism without nature,” p. 521. While Burnouf calls the Buddhist view of the universe “nihilism,” he also acknowledges that it is difficult to determine what was the teaching of Sakyamuni (the Buddha) or the addition of latter schools, p. 522. Burnouf’s student, Théodore Paive, shed his teacher’s qualified statements and found Buddhism to be “atheistic” and call men to live in isolation, “enveloped in individualism (‘égoïsme’): Paive, “Études sur l’Inde ancienne et moderne: VII. Çakya-mouni, la société hindoue pendant la période bouddhique et l’invasion musulmane, *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 January 1858, 262, 272.

to elaborate a conciliation of religion, philosophy and natural science, the history of Islam and Muslim nations proved an exception to the pattern of the sciences of religion as a laic religiosity along broadly Christian lines. The study of Islam did, however, align with the interests of French Jewish scholars who were not so much trying to develop a rational faith as they were trying to demonstrate the relevance of Judaism in the history of modern civilization (which, as we have seen, included narratives that attempted to relegate the Jewish religion).¹¹² Hartwig Derenbourg began his inaugural lecture in the chair of Islam and Religions of Arabia by observing that the Muslim faith offered certain problems and advantages to the critical historian of religion. It had been the “last religious creation of mankind and, in many respects, the least original,” but unlike Judaism, Buddhism, or Christianity, the origins of Islam were not shrouded by “the accumulation of legends,” leaving very little, in other words, for disinterested criticism to unmask.¹¹³ Even though he was borrowing from Renan, who would have been just as familiar with scholarship outside of France, the “least original” qualification hinted at the influence of German Jewish scholars whom Derenbourg would cite and who had developed the view that Islam was an offshoot of Judaism.¹¹⁴ In 1833, Abraham Geiger had suggested a parentage between the two religions based on a critical analysis of the Qur’an that revealed verses corresponding to passages in the Talmud and surprising parallels between Jewish and Muslim religious prescriptions. In 1842, Gustav Weil built upon Geiger’s more sympathetic portrait of Muhammad as an inspired prophet (rather than a deranged seer, as most other Europeans portrayed him) and proposed that, in light of evidence in the Qur’anic text, Muhammad’s divine revelation could be divided into

¹¹² On French Jewish scholars of this period, see Aron Rodrigue, “Totems, Taboos, and Jews: Salomon Reinach and the Politics of Scholarship in Fin-de-Siècle France,” *Jewish Social Studies*, n.s., vol. 10 (Winter 2004): 1-19.

¹¹³ Hartwig Derenbourg, *La sciences des religions et l’islamisme: deux conférences faites le 19 et le 26 mars 1886, à l’Ecole des Hautes-Etudes, section des sciences religieuses* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1886), 38-9.

¹¹⁴ Susannah Heschel, “The Philological Uncanny: Nineteenth-Century Jewish Readings of the Qur’an,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 20, no. 3 (2018): 193-213.

three Meccan periods.¹¹⁵ Apart from being significant to understanding the studies of Islam at the Fifth Section, the contributions of Weil are still regarded today as marking the beginning of the modern academic study of Muhammad's life and the chronology of the Qur'an.¹¹⁶

In his inaugural colloquium, Derenbourg, like Geiger, described the influence that other religious traditions had exerted on Muhammad's ideas; unlike Geiger, he enlarged the group of prior religions beyond Judaism. An orphan who was raised for a time by his grandfather, Muhammad struggled to earn a regular living until, at the age of twenty-four, he married the wealthy widow Khadija. So "delivered from material worries," Derenbourg explained, "he allowed himself to become more and more imbued with his taste for religious meditation and his aversion to the polytheism of his compatriots. Little by little . . . he found himself attracted to the monotheism that was penetrating all parts of the Arabian peninsula by [diverse] routes, some that were visible and overground, others that were hidden and subterranean."¹¹⁷ Jewish monotheism was already present in the region owing to Jewish control of Yemen, a fact supported by "the testimony of tradition" even though their arrival in Arabia had not yet been precisely dated by critical scholars. In addition to the received documentary testimony, Geiger had shown "linguistically how much Muhammad borrowed from Judaism." Christianity, too, had penetrated Arabia and could claim "numerous followers" in the north near al-Hira, in the center near Yathrib, the future Medina, and in the south in the bishopric of Nedjran. Alongside the two revealed monotheisms, "associations of men who were Muslim before Islam" had begun to form. Members of such groups were "called *hanif*, which in Hebrew or Syriac meant 'heretic' and in Arabic, 'he who leaned toward a good side, or an orthodox.'" Even with all of these surrounding

¹¹⁵ Heschel, 196, 200.

¹¹⁶ Harald Motzki, *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), xi.

¹¹⁷ Derenbourg, *La science des religions et l'islamisme*, 40-1.

influences, “a powerfully talented man [who] knew well enough how to gain the upper hand” was needed to bring “cohesion to heterogenous tendencies, unity to a confusion of poorly hatched ideas that were destined to disappear before maturing.”¹¹⁸ This was not to say that Derenbourg believed that the Muslim faith owed its character to its founder, only that given the confluence of factors, his contribution had been “preponderant.”¹¹⁹

Derenbourg incorporated Weil’s division of Muhammad’s prophecy into three Meccan periods, but again, he innovated slightly, adding a fourth, the Medina period. Even with the benefit of scholarship produced since Weil’s initial chronology, Derenbourg observed that the task of ordering the 140 suras, or chapters, of the Qur’an remained difficult since “allusions to contemporary events” were typically vague, proper names were frequently omitted, and chapters, especially long ones, appeared to be “arbitrary assemblages of disparate pieces.”¹²⁰ Nevertheless, enough evidence had been gathered to divide the years before Muhammad’s flight to Medina into three periods: “First. Celestial visions and hallucinations, around 610 or 612 [CE]. . . Second. Struggle of the prophet against the opposition of the Quraysh, the majority of whom refuse to ‘walk in the path of Allah.’ . . . Third. Homilies filled with rabbinical, Christian and Arab legends that were intended to propagate the new faith among Jews, Christians and pagans of Mecca.” Derenbourg provided a discussion of the textual interpretation that supported each period, but for our purposes, considering the critical discussion for the third period may serve as representative: “About fifty suras belong, in their essential parts, to the incessant effort, [combined] with a rare perseverance, that the Prophet demanded of himself in order to have his, if not temporal, then spiritual supremacy prevail in Mecca. The teacher and orator have killed the

¹¹⁸ Derenbourg, *La science des religions et l’islamisme*, 42-3.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 44. Derenbourg was disagreeing with the Dutch historian of religion Abraham Kuenen who had published article on Muhammad in the *Revue de l’histoire des religions* in 1882.

¹²⁰ Derenbourg, *La science des religions et l’islamisme*, 47-8.

poet.” Allah’s words in these suras “have calmed down [and] are no longer uttered in vehement apostrophes that are full of exaltations and enthusiasm and are preceded by nervous crises accompanied by cerebral distress.” Now, in Muhammad’s final years in Mecca, “it is by cold persuasion, by reasoning, by able pleas in favor of his cause, that the Prophet tries to attract those who remained unmoved by his earlier exhortations and imprecations.”¹²¹

Once Muhammad emigrated to Medina, Derenbourg considered Muhammad’s ten years in that city to be a fourth period in his prophecy. As with the earlier periods, the fourth was supported by a textual group: “primitive Muslim code and political proclamations in the twenty suras promulgated in Medina, which, in the Qur’an, represent the years between the Hijrah, 20 September 622, and the death of the Prophet, 8 June 632.” Muhammad entered Medina as a “conqueror”; the time for “calls of conciliation had passed.” The new faith had been reserved for “privileged members of a tribe,” but it would now become “the national religion of the Arabian Peninsula.” In accomplishing that great task, “the infinite mental resources of Muhammad permitted him to play a three-part role: he has been the prophet of a new faith; he becomes the general of its growing legions, and at the same time, the arbiter of an ever-increasing population that accepts him, willingly or by force, as their spiritual and temporal leader.”¹²² Later, in the closing section of his lecture, Derenbourg gave an indication as to why the addition of a fourth Media period had been of value: “the intimate union of the temporal and spiritual has been historically the hallmark of Muslim propaganda and still animates their resistance to our ideas, our language, our dominion.” Derenbourg contended that colonial officials who would one day

¹²¹ Derenbourg, *La science des religions et l’islamisme*, 58-9.

¹²² Derenbourg, *La science des religions et l’islamisme*, 61-2.

govern in Muslim territories needed to know the religion in addition to Arabic if they were going to “confront their adversaries with equal arms.”¹²³

Derenbourg was not alone among French orientalist in portraying Muhammad as a ruler who combined spiritual and temporal authority. Doing so had been a motif in nineteenth-century French orientalist scholarship, as had been the idea that Muslim society could be understood through the legal institutions laid down by Muhammad.¹²⁴ The Arabist Antoine-Issac Silvestre de Sacy, who helped give a new orientation to the institutional study of Eastern languages in nineteenth-century France, co-wrote a biography of Muhammad with a fellow member of the Asiatic Society of Paris, Hyacinthe Audiffret. The two men found that Muhammad had been proclaimed the “spiritual and temporal sovereign” eight years after the Hijra (in 630 CE), when he returned to Mecca and subdued it, ordered all idols destroyed, and walked seven times around the Kaaba. They added in concluding their article: “Muslims are under the impression that their legislator possessed knowledge of all things (‘la science universelle’), and that all political, civil and religious laws are contained, at least in principle, in either the Qur’an or the words and example of the Prophet.”¹²⁵ Four decades later, Joseph-Toussaint Reinaud, one of Silvestre de Sacy’s students, composed a new biography that followed shortly after the Academy of Inscriptions’ 1857 essay competition on the “critical history of the text of the Qur’an.” Reinaud appears to have doubted that establishing a textual chronology could be achieved given, as he explained in his biography, “the difficulties that the text presented, some of which came from

¹²³ Derenbourg, *La sciences des religions et l’islamisme*, 85-6.

¹²⁴ This legal approach was generally explicitly tied to colonial administration. See, for example, François-Alphonse Belin, “Étude sur la propriété foncière en pays musulman, et spécialement en Turquie (rite hanéfite),” *Journal asiatique*, 5th ser., vol. 18 (1861): 390-431, 477-518; idem., “Du régime des fiefs militaires dans l’islamisme, et principalement en Turquie,” *Journal asiatique*, 6th. ser., vol. 15 (1870): 187-301. Walter Behrnauer, “Mémoire sur les institutions de police chez les Arabes, les Persans et les Turcs,” *Journal asiatique*, 5th ser., vol. 15 (1860) and 5th. ser., vol. 17 (1861): 5-76.

¹²⁵ Hyacinthe Audiffret and Antoine-Issac Silvestre de Sacy, *Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne*, vol. 26 (Paris: L. G. Michaud, 1820), s.v., “Mahomet.”

Muhammed [and] others from the persons who came after him and undertook to arrange his revelations in the form of a book.” To Reinaud’s mind, Muhammad typically uttered his teachings in public and until his death, “never had the idea to make a complete account of his revelations, [likely] waiting until his ideas had matured before writing them down.” Reinaud’s doubts were presumably why he refrained from indicating that Muhammad had become a “spiritual and temporal leader” at a given moment. He did, however, make a similar observation about Muslim law to Silvestre de Sacy: “it should not be forgotten that the Qur’an occupies the place of religious, civil and military code to diverse Muslim nations, and that, developed with the benefit of the traditions of the Prophet, it serves as the rule in even the smallest details of life.”¹²⁶ Even though British and German orientalists similarly cast Muhammad as the founder of a religion and a state, the legislator of religious and civil codes, they generally did not take the additional step of referring to his joining of spiritual and temporal orders.¹²⁷

Derenbourg’s colloquia at the Fifth Section continued the focus on criticism of the Qur’an that he had outlined in his inaugural spring lecture. In fall 1886, he announced a colloquium topic that he would continue each semester for several years: “Explication of the most ancient passages of the Coran, envisaged especially from the point of view of the origins and initial programs of Islam.”¹²⁸ In 1889-1890, he moved to a study of the seventh sura, and the following year, he explicated suras 72 to 74 with the aid of a commentary by al-Baydawi. (Chief

¹²⁶ Joseph-Toussaint Reinaud, *Nouvelle biographie générale depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu’à nos jours*, vol. 32 (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1860), s.v., “Mahomet.”

¹²⁷ The British orientalist William Muir briefly noted, as he narrated the close of first year of Hijra, that Muhammad had “organized civil and religious institutions for his followers” and “riveted the hold of his theocratic government upon their minds.” W. Muir, *The life of Mahomet: with introductory chapters on the original sources for the biography of Mahomet, and on the pre-Islamite history of Arabia*, vol. 3 (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1861), 38, 64. Derenbourg’s contemporary at Halle and later Göttingen, Julius Wellhausen, found that Muhammad’s intermixing of religion and statecraft proved a detriment to the Muslim faith, since it lost “its ideality and spiritual fruitfulness” once it became “mixed up with the dross of practical considerations.” J. Wellhausen, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9th ed., s.v., “Mohammedism, Mohammed.”

¹²⁸ Meetings of 27 October 1886 and 18 March 1888, *PVCSR*.

judge, or *kadi*, in the city of Shiraz, al-Baydawi prepared sometime in the 13th century CE a commentary of the Qur'an that was a condensed and highly amended version of an earlier work.)¹²⁹ Derenbourg again used al-Baydawi in his colloquia for 1891-92 but now examined "the short and ancient suras placed at the end of the Qur'an, [which represented] in their undeniable unity, the most perfect pieces of the work." This time, however, reading al-Baydawi presented a few challenges—the text was "sometimes obscure owing to its concision"—but Derenbourg and his students "directly considered these difficulties and tried to resolve them after animated discussions and with the aid of comparisons, either with grammatical and exegetical works or with earlier passages in the same commentary that were more developed."¹³⁰ Despite adopting the nineteenth-century approaches that were less dismissive of Muhammad's inspiration, Derenbourg's critical study of Islam had not completely shed the motifs of earlier European approaches. The places in the inaugural lecture where he noted the instability and vividness of Muhammad's mental activity and his "infinite mental resources" recalled the medieval portrait of Muhammad the wily imposter. Similarly, the theme of Muhammad the author of a code and a regime echoed the seventeenth-century approach that viewed Muhammad as sound legislator.¹³¹ However, now in Derenbourg's time, the legislator would be faulted for joining the spiritual and the temporal rather than credited for laying down a religion that had helped to preserve a political order.

It is curious that the study of Islam at the Fifth Section did not lend itself to recovering a laic religiosity or a syncretic philosophy, as the histories of Christianity and Buddhism did, but

¹²⁹ J. Robson, "al-Baydawi," *Encyclopedia of Islam Second Edition Online* (E. J. Brill, 2012), Web.

¹³⁰ Derenbourg, Vichy, to Jean Réville, Paris, 20 July 1892, Archives du secrétariat, Fonds historique de l'EPHE, AN. Derenbourg was writing here a short annual report of his colloquia for the Secretary of the Section.

¹³¹ Alexander Bevilacqua argues that a new portrait of Islam emerged in period 1650-1750 among European writers that was based on establishing an analogy with Muslims as "good pagans" and allowed them to leave aside the question of heresy or forgery. Alexander Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

that it might permit its students to persuade others to adopt a laic spirit, albeit no longer in the sense of a rational religiosity but an acceptance of the separation between religious and civil authority in colonial administration. It has been suggested that republicanism was a malleable ideology in colonial territories vis-à-vis the metropole, and the laic spirit that was cultivated via history could have functioned similarly.¹³² Of course, the laic spirit as religiosity that Réville's history supported was no more insulated domestically from challenges than it might have been in the colonies (if put into practice there). To some, typically more conservative, such a religiosity was pantheistic and a negation of faith. To others, typically more radical (recall Deputy Boysset in ch. 2), it was still theistic. Apart from the matter of the contents or object of religious sentiment in the individual, which the sciences of religion tried to make positive, there was the larger, postrevolutionary debate over the source of society's institutions, the source of its guiding norms. Making religion positive in the individual—or privatizing religion—does not resolve the institutions debate, since even if the individual were able to read the correct rules or norms in their heart, there remained the matter of how those principles would become things held in common. A contemporary of Réville raised this difficulty in an article responding to liberal Protestants who believed that their faith offered the needed “religious renovation” to consolidate the democratic reform of France. François Pillon, who collaborated with the philosopher Charles Renouvier to edit the journal *Critique philosophique*, could not envision “what educational or moralizing action a Christian faith that remained entirely individual could have in a democracy . . . common sentiments could not sustain themselves, [or] provide a common will, a common

¹³² On malleability, see J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 256.

action, without common principles.”¹³³ At a ceremony for the New Sorbonne, René Goblet, the Minister of Public Instruction, made virtually the same point about having principles in common: “since, in our egalitarian and democratic society, will and action have to come together in the aggregate lest they engender disorder, it is the common principle of the large majority of the nation that has to be elucidated and made to penetrate hearts.”¹³⁴

There was one approach to the study of religion at the Fifth Section that offered a way out of the social difficulty of religion-made-positive-in-the-individual. Émile Amélineau, who occupied the chair in Egyptian religion, authored a study of the moral code of ancient Egypt based on a papyrus that recorded a funerary ritual in demotic.¹³⁵ Amélineau concluded that the origin of the Egyptian moral code had been no different than elsewhere in the history of humanity. The first families or tribes to associate could not have constituted society without laws also being created to govern their relations and determine codes of conduct. Since society gave “individuals inestimable advantages, it was entirely just that individuals be indebted to society.”¹³⁶ This had been the purpose of the deceased avowing before Osiris all the wrongs that he had committed in order to reach the afterlife: they were admissions of “wrongs against Egyptian society.” The admissions that the deceased were exhorted to make reflected moral laws that “we call today mere police [but] were considered very serious given that, if they were violated, they could result in eternal damnation—all of which serves as proof that we are witnessing the first attempts to organize Egyptian society.”¹³⁷ Amélineau’s conjectural stadial history offered a way out of the difficulty of religion-in-the-individual because society became

¹³³ François Pillon, review of *Le matérialisme et la religion dans la démocratie, lettre d’un électeur à son député* (Genève), *Critique philosophique*, new ser., vol. 4, no. 2 (1888): 276. The author of the letter was liberal Protestant asserting that their religion could provide “the religious renovation,” the conciliation of faith and liberty.

¹³⁴ *Le Temps*, 4 August 1885.

¹³⁵ Amélineau, *La morale égyptienne* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1892).

¹³⁶ Amélineau, xxxiii.

¹³⁷ Amélineau, xxxviii.

the source of the code or rule that was held in common and that the individual understood by virtue of being in society. In other words, the norm was an organic outcome of sociability itself. Or, as Amélineau put it, a moral code emerged on its own in a “well-made society” for the simple reason that “one cannot do without others, and it was necessary to remember as much in the rules of daily life.”¹³⁸ Although Amélineau does not appear to have been a Durkheimian, the sociologists of religion who would join the Fifth Section would attempt to develop an account of religion in relation to society that was similar to his. We turn now to exploring the sociological approach in the next chapter.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Amélineau, xxiii.

¹³⁹ Amélineau may have developed his sociological approach after reading 1887 book, *L'irreligion de l'avenir: étude sociologique*, by the philosopher Jean-Marie Guyau that prompted a good deal of conversation in learned circles and the reading public. Durkheim, who had a more social realist position, disagreed with Guyau. See Durkheim's review in *Revue de philosophie de la France et de l'étranger* 23 (Jan-Jun 1887): 299-311. Jean Réville of the Fifth Section (chair in Church History) also wrote a review in *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 15 (1887): 347-54. See also Michael Behrent, “Le débat Guyau-Durkheim sur la théorie sociologique de la religion: une nouvelle querelle des universitaires?,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 142 (Apr-Jun 2008): 9-26.

Chapter Four

The Advent of Sociology of Religion at the Fifth Section

Paul Alphandéry, whose thesis on twelfth-century heterodox ideas and the emergence of a laic consciousness we encountered in the last chapter, joined the faculty of the Fifth Section in 1907 shortly after completing his doctoral training. In fact, similar to one of his student peers, Marcel Mauss, who joined the faculty in 1901, Alphandéry had already been teaching in the section by the time he was appointed to a chair in History of Dogmas.¹ Unlike Mauss who is still widely read today in several fields, Alphandéry has remained largely forgotten—except perhaps among a very few historians of the history of science who might recognize him as one of Alexandre Koyré’s teachers.² Alphandéry and Mauss also embody the two different approaches to the sciences of religion that characterized inquiry at the Fifth Section in the decades after 1900: the critical history of religions that was presented in the previous chapter and the sociology of religion, a new entrant that asserted itself as a central piece of Emile Durkheim’s sociology.

Alphandéry offered a glimpse into the intradisciplinary rivalry of the period in a set of notes that he wrote in the early 1920s as he prepared for a series of colloquia on the rational account of religion (*la science de la religion*). He began with the definition of religion advanced by his generation of teachers, the generation of Renan and Réville, but also that of earlier

¹ Alphandéry was formally appointed on 4 January 1907. He had begun leading a few meetings of the colloquium directed by his advisor, François Picavet, in the same year that Mauss had been temporarily charged with leading the colloquium of a professor who was on sabbatical leave. Meetings of 2 December 1900, 17 March 1901, and 20 January 1907, *PVCSR*.

² Koyré famously wrote a study of the seventeenth-century scientific revolution: *From the Closed Word to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957). He began as an enrolled student (‘élève titulaire’) at the Fifth Section in 1921. In his first three years, he took colloquia with Alphandéry on 15th-century prophetism and the mystical system of the Cathars. See the *Annuaire*s cited in the next footnote. Koyré later wrote a remembrance of Alphandéry: “Les travaux de Paul Alphandéry: Notice Bibliographique,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 105 (1932): 149-57.

nineteenth-century historians, such as Edgard Quinet, whom Alphonse Halévy cited: “The religious sentiment issued from the individual. The sentiment of an individual is an aggregate of highly variable sentiments: it is evident that the religious sentiment of a Marcus Aurelius was not the same as that of Papus, that the religious sentiment of a Michelet or an Edgar Quinet was not the same as that of a devotee of the Sacred Heart or a Jew who would think himself [...] because he smoked a cigarette on Saturday.” Next, Alphonse Halévy broached the questions that the sociology of religion had introduced but, curiously, he expressed them using the language of sentiment belonging to the earlier approaches to religion: “of what is the religious sentiment of the collectivity composed? A sentiment of dependence on the divinity? No, since there are religions without god, there are religions in which the gods are below the priest, there are religions where the god is [the idol?] of the believer . . . Hence social definition, the Durkheimian def. of religion is confounded with society, and how does religion become indistinguishable? The first associations: the totem . . . the ritual interdictions, the taboo . . . the sacred and non-sacred confounded with the just and the unjust, the pure and the impure.”³ In a further indication that Alphonse Halévy was well versed in the different approaches, he related individual and collective sentiment in same way that Mauss’ collaborator, Henri Hubert, had done when insisting that religious sentiment be considered a “social fact” and not a psychological one.⁴

The almost seamless move from individual to collective sentiment in Alphonse Halévy’s notes might seem to the present-day reader a less than natural transition, but the move takes us directly into the matter of situating the advent of the sociology of religion not only relative to the critical

³ Paul Alphonse Halévy, “Conférence sur la religion,” 726 AP, carton 15, Archives nationales de France (hereafter AN). For the colloquia on the science of religion, see the *Annales* for the years 1919-20, 1922-23, 1923-24 in *Annales de l’Ecole pratique des hautes études*, Web, Persée database, <https://www.persee.fr/collection/ephe>.

⁴ For Durkheim’s argument that invokes religions without the idea of God, see E. Durkheim, “De la définition des phénomènes religieux,” *Année sociologique* 2 (1898-1899): 1-28. For Hubert’s case for religious sentiment as a social fact, I cite from Mauss’ review and summary; M. Mauss, review of H. Hubert, preface to *Manuel d’Histoire des Religions* by P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye (Paris: Colin, 1904), *Année sociologique* 8 (1903-1904): 223-24.

histories of religion but also to the human sciences of the period. The advent of the sociology of religion at the Fifth Section is usually seen as a smaller quarrel within the larger contest between Durkheimian sociology and academic, scientific history at the turn of the nineteenth century. In this telling, Mauss and Hubert at the Fifth Section functioned as representatives of the fin-de-siècle revolt against the positive, scientific history that sought only to catalogue and verify sources without producing any explanations or theories since the facts “spoke for themselves.”⁵ Beyond the Fifth Section, Henri Berr led another group that called for history to have greater methodological connections with theoretical disciplines such as philosophy or psychology. For their part, as the story goes, academic historians resisted the emergence of sociology because they understood history to be the “queen of the sciences of man.”⁶ In addition, there were reasons internal to the sciences of religion that motivated the revolt of the Durkheimians: to oppose the Christian apologetic agenda of the liberal Protestants, whose laic rational religiosity had adopted a more consciously theological orientation in the work of Jean Réville, the son of Albert Réville, before the son’s untimely death in 1908.⁷

This chapter departs from the usual narrative of sociology versus history because it takes issue with the portrait of scientific history as a passive form of knowledge production that lacked explanations. As will be recalled from the account of disinterested criticism in Chapter 3, the textual facts that scholars catalogued were indeed treated as having considerable truth-value, as

⁵ Ivan Strenski, “The Ironies of *Fin-de-Siècle* Rebellions against Historicism and Empiricism at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*, Fifth Section,” in Arie L. Molendijk and Peter Pels, eds., *Religion in the Making: The Emergence of the Sciences of Religion* (Boston: Brill, 1998), 159-79; idem., “Durkheim, Disciplinarity, and the ‘*Sciences Religieuses*,’” chap. 5 in Amanda Anderson and Joseph Valente, eds., *Disciplinarity at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁶ William Keylor, *Academy and Community: The Foundation of the French Historical Profession* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 107-11.

⁷ Albert Réville had only just recently died in 1906. His son succeeded him in the chair of the general history of religions at the Collège de France. For Jean Réville’s theological program, itself a response to scientific history, see Strenski, “The Ironies” and “Durkheim, Disciplinarity.”

possessing a kind of self-evidence such that they “spoke for themselves,” but the historian only treated them as such *after* they had been critically evaluated and judged to be positive, that is, to be authoritative testimony and assured facts. Making judgements about evidentiary value or hierarchically classifying sources required an active, not passive, mind. Scholars equally employed an active mind when they assessed how large a general claim or explanation the facts permitted them to make—that is, when they practiced scientific restraint. It was not the case that historians of religion were foregoing explanations, only that they were not explaining the object that interested sociologists. For critical historians, religion was a phenomenon that expressed individual sentiment or spirit. Hence, historians of religion were interested in explaining the pattern of development of a religious idea over time (recall Albert Réville’s historical law of Trinitarian doctrines), or in comparing peoples and explaining why a religious form had progressed in one place and not another. By contrast, for sociologists, religion was a phenomenon that reflected collective ways of thinking and acting. Hence, they sought to produce a new explanation of religion’s origin, moving it out of the realm of interiority and into the domain of collective life, or what was termed “social reality.” But to achieve their new account of religion, sociologists would continue to rely on textual material and make judgements about what was reliable information, albeit now to establish a different kind of fact.

Critical history and sociology of religion did represent different approaches, but the opposition between them, I suggest, has been made to appear larger than it was in practice. If outside the EPHE, advocates of each group vied with each other for the title of science of society, practitioners of the two approaches coexisted relatively peaceably within the Fifth

Section.⁸ A recent study has even highlighted the significant support for Hubert and Mauss among existing Fifth Section faculty when they were both elected to chairs in 1901, and has proposed that the historical and sociological approaches were closer than has been generally appreciated.⁹ The author of that study sees both approaches as reflections of the delicate political moment of the early decades of the Third Republic, when republican elites were attempting to acknowledge the importance of religion while also trying to institute a laic democracy, i.e., take away some of the Church's authority. The problem with that view is that it collapses history and sociology into a single effort to subsume religion under science. Indeed both critical history and sociology sought to turn religion into a positive, scientific object, but they did so differently, resulting in the disagreement over what religion was and how to explain it. This disagreement amounted to, I suggest, two different conceptions of how laic society could operate: either religion was grounded in the individual or in society itself. The methodological dispute was just as much of epistemic problem as it was a political one.¹⁰

The political dimension of sociology's account of religion also sheds light on why Durkheim gave an important place to the study of religion in his version of sociology.¹¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, a student of Mauss, later remarked that a peculiar feature of the rise of academic sociology in France was the discipline's close relationship with anthropology and sociology of

⁸ Terry Clark makes brief mention the Fifth Section, saying that it was soon overrun by Durkheimian sociologists. Clark, *Prophets and Patrons: The French University and the Emergence of the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 45-7. On the science of society quarrel, see Keylor and Georg Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography*, new ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1984).

⁹ Patrick Cabanel, "Ve Section de l'EPHE vs Année sociologique: une querelle intellectuelle au coeur de l'institutionnalisation des sciences religieuses," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 180 (Oct-Dec 2017): 35-50.

¹⁰ For a seminal articulation of the claim that epistemological problems are political problems, see Steve Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

¹¹ The space devoted to "religious sociology" appeared questionable to a contemporary reviewer of the first volume of *Année sociologique*.

religion. Lévi-Strauss believed that these close relationships arose from the fact that sociology and anthropology emerged within an already long-standing “social commentary” tradition among thinkers in France, in contrast to Great Britain or the United States where sociology and anthropology had separate disciplinary identities.¹² There is much truth in Lévi-Strauss’ observation if we consider that eighteenth and nineteenth-century French authors who commented on the state of society very often had something to say about religion.¹³ However, if we consider the competing sociologies to the Durkheimian variety, namely those associated with Gabriel Tarde or René Worms, then Lévi-Strauss’ observation proves less helpful in explaining why the other sociologies gave far less attention to religion as an object of study. Here, again, the individual-vs-collective psychology distinction proved decisive.¹⁴ Durkheim’s insistence that explanations derive from elements of collective thought led him away from Tarde and Worms but also towards religion, since he hoped to identify collective norms of behaving (i.e., “social facts) that exerted a binding force in us and could be described externally.¹⁵ The earliest historical forms of those social facts, Durkheim reasoned, could be uncovered by studying the earliest religions. Hence, the phenomenon of religion played a key role in making possible the kind of science of collectivity or “social aggregates” that Durkheim envisioned. Of course, an alternative reading of Durkheim’s interest in studying religion is that he was doing what other French Jewish scholars of his intellectual milieu were doing (namely, James Darmesteter, Hartwig Derenbourg or Salomon Reinach): firstly, reinserting Judaism into the history of modern civilization by studying the phenomenon of religion, and secondly, supporting the universalism

¹² Claude Lévi-Strauss, “French Sociology,” chap. 17 in Georges Gurvitch and Wilbert Moore, eds., *Twentieth Century Sociology* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1945), 505-08.

¹³ We may think here of Voltaire, Rousseau, Chateaubriand, or Comte, among others.

¹⁴ René Worms explained as much in a lecture at the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques; see Worms, “Psychologie collective et psychologie individuelle,” *Revue internationale de sociologie* 7 (1898): 249-52.

¹⁵ Among the several places where Durkheim describes the social fact, see *Règles de la méthode sociologique*, 7th ed. (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1919), 6-8.

of the principles of 1789 while also resisting categories of otherness.¹⁶ My analysis coincides with that reading since to turn the collective norms of religion into something objective, something positive (around which there could be consensus), is to make those social elements universal. The lack of objectivity would be a recurring fault that Durkheim found in alternative approaches to social science. We now turn to an examination of how Durkheim developed his sociological approach before moving to a discussion Mauss and Hubert at the Fifth Section.

Social Facts and Religion in Durkheimian Sociology

In addition to his more well-known French dissertation, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1892), Durkheim wrote a Latin thesis that examined Montesquieu's contribution to the development of a science of society. He began by asking: Were the objects of social science laws, mores and religions? Although he did not immediately mention Montesquieu, it would have likely been evident to his readers that laws, mores and religions had been Montesquieu's objects of study as they had also been for many thinkers since then, including orientalists writing in the history of nations genre. The problem with this existing approach to society was that it considered things in the social realm to be "consequences of the human will." But For Durkheim, a true science of society needed to be like the sciences of nature and consider phenomena to be things linked together in an ordered reality.¹⁷ A social science would then uncover the laws of those dependent relations, or ultimately, the laws of collective life. The old objects of laws, mores and religions would now become effects of underlying social facts that the sociologist would identify. As Durkheim put it in one of his first Bordeaux lectures, "institutions are not

¹⁶ Aron Rodrigue, "Totems, Taboos, and Jews: Salomon Reinach and the Politics of Scholarship in Fin-de-Siècle France," *Jewish Social Studies*, n.s., vol. 10 (Winter 2004): 1-19.

¹⁷ Durkheim, "La contribution de Montesquieu à la constitution de la science sociale," in Georges Davy, ed., *Montesquieu and Rousseau: précurseurs de la sociologie* (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1966), 29-38.

established by decree but result from social life and do no more than translate it externally by visible symbols.”¹⁸ The task now was to lay out what the “things” or “facts” of social reality were and the method by which one could describe them. Durkheim gave an initial account of that method in his Latin thesis but would later produce more developed exposition in his famous *Rules of Sociological Method* (1896). In this section, we explore why Durkheim insisted on his particular definition of the social fact as collective thought or representation and why he gave attention to the sociology of religion. As we saw above in Alphandéry’s notes, society and religion became difficult to distinguish in the sociological account, but the reason for their parallelism was that, in Durkheimian sociology, at least, religion was thought to contain the earliest forms of collective ways of acting, which is to say, the earliest social facts.

The term “social fact” had currency in different branches of the nineteenth-century human sciences before Durkheim gave it a new sense in the 1890s. He hinted at those earlier senses in his Latin thesis when he claimed that the prior studies of society had all assumed social phenomena to depend on the human will. Given that he went on to observe that knowledge of society had historically informed the social or political art, we may read the human will as a reference to the will the legislator who founded or ordered society. But we may also place the philologists’ approach to society in the same class of social knowledge if we consider the will to mean the faculties of soul or spirit. For the orientalist whom we encountered in the previous chapter, describing the organization or constitution of society was just as much a part of describing of a people’s “moral world” as was their language or religion—all which were understood to reflect a people’s spirit. A common lament of Arabic authors was that they tended to be silent on the social characteristics that orientalists used in their developmental histories of

¹⁸ Durkheim, “Cours de science sociale: leçon d’ouverture,” *Revue internationale de l’enseignement* 15 (1888): 45.

nations. Referring to a recent translation of a Muslim history of northern Africa up to 1681, Jules Mohl, the secretary of the Asiatic Society of Paris wrote:

the great defect of this book, and nearly all those of the same kind, is the narrow point of view that characterizes Muslim historians; they are content to record the most striking material facts; beyond that, they are only concerned with that which directly pertains to their religion; they speak only accidentally of the changes that time has produced in civil society, of the mores of subdued or enemy peoples, of the workings of commerce and the causes of prosperity or decadence in the countries that they treat, in a word, all that we call today social facts ('faits sociaux').¹⁹

A peer of Mohl, the Arabist Joseph-Toussaint Reinaud found a group of Arabic geographic dictionaries to be of considerable value despite their “defects” owing to the narrowness (*l'esprit étroit*) of Muslims who “disliked travelling to countries that did not profess their religion” and typically sending Jews or Christians to be the diplomats in European kingdoms.²⁰ Originally based on an interpretation of the features of the Arabic language, the narrowness of the Muslim spirit was a commonplace of orientalist scholarship that could also be used to explain facts and general patterns observed in the social and moral world of Muslim peoples.²¹

Even though Alexis de Tocqueville rarely based his analyses of society on “social facts,” he, like orientalists, sought to grasp society by way of various expressions of spirit: ideas, sentiments, mores, etc. In this respect, he departed somewhat from what his friend, Francisque de Corcelle, understood to be the conventions for studies of political societies. Commenting in 1853 on what was an early draft of *the Old Regime and the Revolution*, Corcelle observed that only half of Tocqueville’s study had been concerned with the institutions of Old Regime society.

¹⁹ Jules Mohl, “Année 1845-1846,” in vol. 1 of *Vingt-sept ans d’histoire des études orientales: rapports à la Société asiatique de Paris de 1840 à 1867* (Paris: Reinwald, 1879), 212-13.

²⁰ Joseph-Toussaint Reinaud, “Notice sur les dictionnaires géographiques arabes,” *Journal asiatique*, 5th ser., vol. 16 (1860): 72-3.

²¹ An example of the narrowness commonplace in a study of poetry: “The spirit is stationary in a people whose mantra is ‘Beware of innovations!’” A. Cherbonneau, “Lettre à M. J. Derenbourg sur les poésies arabes de l’Afrique,” *Journal asiatique*, 5th ser., vol. 15 (1860): 419. Cherbonneau was a teacher in Constantine, Algeria.

Tocqueville replied that, as he saw it, institutions were “not even half” of what he trying to portray:

“Do you not know my ideas well enough to know that I only grant a secondary influence to institutions on the destiny of men? I wish to God that I believed more in the all-powerfulness of institutions. I would be more hopeful about our future, since one day chance could lead us to stumble upon the precious paper that contained the answer to all of our ills, or upon the man who knew the answer. But, alas, it is not to be, and I am firmly convinced that political societies are, not what their laws make them, but what they are prepared to be by the sentiments, beliefs, ideas, habits of the hearts and spirit of the men who live in them, [as well as] what nature and education have made the men to be.”

His conviction about the force of people’s sentiments, ideas, and habits of mind over their institutions should “emerge from all parts of the book,” Tocqueville added.²² The other thesis to emerge from the eventual book, of course, was that the sentiments, ideas and beliefs of the Old Regime had contributed much to the shape of the postrevolutionary social order up to Tocqueville’s time. However, he would only go up to “the edge of that vast domain and glimpse it from afar.”

A contemporary of Tocqueville, Frédéric Le Play, who had studied and then taught at the École des Mines for engineers, had a similar interest in examining the new society that emerged from the Revolution, but Le Play hoped to uncover what the principles that guided the new social order should be. Additionally, by the advent of Durkheimian sociology in the 1890s, the terms “sociology” and “social facts” were equally likely to be associated with Le Play and his organ, the Société des Etudes Pratiques d’Economie Sociale, founded in 1857.²³ If Tocqueville had gleaned the ideas, sentiments and habits of the people from administrative archives (of the *intendants*), Le Play apprehended the same qualities through direct observation of working-class

²² Alexis de Tocqueville to Francisque de Corcelle, 17 September 1853, in Françoise Mélonio, ed., *Lettres choisies, Souvenirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003).

²³ The first sociological chair in France (1894) was in fact a chair in “the history of social economy” at the Sorbonne. The donor whose gift established the chair, Comte Adelbert de Chambrun, was familiar with Le Play’s social science. Durkheim applied but the position went to Alfred Epinas. George Weisz, “L’idéologie républicaine et les sciences sociales: les durkheimiens et la chaire d’histoire d’économie sociale à la Sorbonne,” *Revue française de sociologie* 20 (January-March 1979): 94.

communities in different regions across Europe. Direct observation was preferable to statistics, Le Play explained in his 1855 publication, *European Workers*, because statistical facts could not render “the intimate nature of man” and allow comparison of his “moral and intellectual states” or identification of disparities between the “institutions and morals” of society.²⁴ Rather, by placing himself in “intimate contact with the population he was to study,” the observer was “initiated little by little into the understanding of their language, habits, needs, sentiments, passions and prejudices.” Le Play called his approach the “monographic method” since the social facts that he and his collaborators recorded while living among workers were compiled and then presented in a “family monograph” that gave an assessment of their physical and moral well-being. The monograph had a strict format and specific rules for the household and environmental facts that were to be obtained.²⁵ The observer initially chose a family that was representative of “average conditions [in the locality], being neither above nor below others in their material situation or morals.” The family needed also to consent to participate and host the observer, who, in turn, was expected to earn their trust. Trust became of particular importance when the observer would interview the worker about his household income and expenses. The observer equally got to know other members of the locality who “either had known the family for some time or had influence on their existence through relations of patronage.” Lastly, Le Play insisted that observers “collect the facts without immediately drawing conclusions.” Only after having completed their study of a family and having “arranged the observations in the adopted structure for monographs” could they attempt a general conclusion.²⁶

²⁴ Frédéric Le Play, *Les ouvriers européens* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1855), 11. Gallica.

²⁵ Le Play, *Instruction sur la méthode d'observation dite des monographies de familles, propre à l'ouvrage intitulé “Les ouvriers européens”* (Paris: Société d'économie sociale, 1862), 14. Gallica.

²⁶ Le Play, *Instruction sur la méthode*, 15-16.

Le Play's commitment to the method of direct observation derived from his reading of the advances attained in the natural sciences. In much the fashion of a Comtean (though Le Play was not ideologically a positivist), he believed that the way out of the morass of competing programs and theories was a scientific study of social systems: "The debates concerning the organization of labor, property or exchange are nearly as thorny as those, in the previous century, used to be concerning the transmutation of metals, the universal panacea and phlogiston." The reform to be carried out was not likely "to spring from the mind of a single thinker." Rather, to reach consensus on a plan of reform, studies of society needed to "go further, and with greater method, along the way of observation," applying the method of "astronomy, physics, chemistry and natural history" to "the observation of social facts ('faits sociaux')." The mistake of many current theories of society was that they were "incompatible with the facts" and could not be applied.²⁷ The purpose, then, of comparing his monographs of families across Europe was to reach a general conclusion about principles of reform that was aligned with the facts and were not merely the product of "preconceived ideas." Even though Le Play presented his method as allowing experience to guide the observer, he also relied on a "moral rule" to comparatively judge how well a society provided for the well-being of workers. He believed that he was not violating his commitment to rigorous observation since the standards of well-being were characteristics that were "universally recognized" and consistent with the received wisdom of prior generations. Hence, a family would be deemed to live in "good conditions when its head, showing moderation in his tastes and fairness and affection toward his dependents, obtained through regular work the assured means of subsistence; when the wife, faithful to her duties as mother and spouse, maintained order and cleanliness in the dwelling and clothing; when the

²⁷ Le Play, *Les ouvriers*, 10.

children were respectful to their parents; when everyone gave the elderly, the infirm and the sick the respect, affection and care that they were due.” Any social system that compromised “the security of the family” as measured by these moral standards would be considered “defective.”²⁸

Le Play’s social economy gained a following, eventually splitting into rival factions upon his death in 1879.²⁹ Durkheim is thought to have not made mention of Le Play’s method for observing social facts until 1900 when he said that Le Play’s system had “as a fundamental postulate a religious assumption.”³⁰ However, in one of his initial Bordeaux lectures on the sociology of the family, Durkheim described the inadequacy of Le Play’s comparative method before beginning to outline his new approach to social facts.³¹ [I then go on to discuss various parts of the lecture, namely the criticism of Le Play (it assumes an objectivity that it does not have) and the use of documents, “many documents,” Durkheim says.]

As a science of the facts of collective life, sociology needed to identify the origin of such facts, and Durkheim believed that religion contained the primitive components of collective life that would later become the “things” of human reality in different societies over time. Already by the *Rules of Sociological Method*, Durkheim held up religion as a phenomenon that revealed something about the properties of a social fact. His thinking about an account of religion dates roughly the same period, albeit a little earlier. Durkheim began in his post in Bordeaux in 1887 and gave his first lecture on religion in 1894-95. Mauss also spent part of that academic year in

²⁸ Le Play, *Les ouvriers*, 11.

²⁹ The two factions each had journals. *La réforme sociale*, and *La science sociale*.

³⁰ Two studies refer to the 1900 comment by Durkheim in “La sociologie en France aux XIXe siècle,” *Revue bleue*, 4th ser., 13. See Antoine Savoye, “Durkheim vu par les collectifs leplaysiens, 1893-1926,” *Durkheimian Studies* 24 (2020): 100; and Remi Lenoir, “Durkheim et la famille: entre sociologie et politique,” in *Pour une histoire des sciences sociales: homage à Pierre Bourdieu*, eds. Johan Heilbron, Remi Lenoir, and Gisèle Sapiro (Paris: Fayard, 2004), 38. Neither author appears to have been aware of a second Bordeaux lecture used below. Savoye refers only Durkheim’s 1888 inaugural Bordeaux lecture in the *Revue internationale de l’enseignement*.

³¹ Durkheim, “Introduction à la sociologie de la famille,” *Annales de la Faculté de lettres de Bordeaux* (1888): 257-81.

Bordeaux, and he along with Durkheim would later recall the 1894-95 year as seminal to their sociological approach to religion. During the part of that year when Mauss was in Paris, Durkheim asked his nephew to obtain a copy of a new book from the publisher Felix Alcan. Alcan had just printed a French translation of Eugene Goblet d'Aviella's Hibbert Lectures of 1891, *Origin and Growth of the Conception of God as Illustrated by Anthropology and History*.³² Goblet d'Aviella contended that existing attempts to show a pre-historic origin of religion had been able to do so in an adequate manner. Comparative philology, archeology and folk-lore (anthropology) had all given accounts that were no better than conjecture.

[I intend to discuss here the 1898 article in *Année* on "Definition of Religious Phenomena" and the Sacrifice article by Hubert and Mauss, to show the linkages between the two as well as how they identify social facts on the basis of documents.]

Given that orientalist approached societies or nations as members of a group who shared patterns of thinking, a spirit, one might wonder why Durkheimian sociology rejected language as the locus or seat of social facts, of collective representations. A study of the debate between Durkheim and Tarde on extra-mental social facts reveals that Durkheim remained closer to the philologist side of the spectrum.

The Shifting Terrain of the Human Sciences: Mauss and Hubert Join the Fifth Section

From the perspective of today, Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert came to the Fifth Section as sociologists of religion, as representatives of a new discipline, but from the perspective of their time, "religious sociology" (*sociologie religieuse*) overlapped with other fields in the

³² Eugene Goblet d'Aviella, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of the Conception of God as Illustrated by Anthropology* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1892). The French edition was *L'idée de Dieu d'après l'anthropologie et l'histoire* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1892). The Hibbert Trust had begun funding annual lectures on the origin and growth of religion in the late 1870s. Albert Reville delivered the lecture in 1886.

human sciences such that the two new scholars were recognizable to Fifth Section members as having expertise in practices and subjects of their discipline, in particular, the ability to critically judge texts. Additionally, the years around 1900 were a period in which the subfields within the sciences of religion were being reconsidered. Christian Literature, or New Testament, had been considered “organic” to the Fifth Section in the mid-1890s, but the primacy of that subfield would now be challenged, with professors asking whether the range of subjects should be expanded.³³ There was, then, at the turn of the nineteenth century, a slight loosening of the theological arrangement in teachings areas that was presented in the last chapter.

Ethnography was the recognizable human science field with which the religious sociology of Mauss and Hubert overlapped. At the time, ethnography did not refer to a certain methodology, as it does today, but to the study of the language and customs of so-called “primitive peoples.” By 1900, several members of the Fourth and Fifth Sections were already actively involved in ethnography: the orientalist Jules Oppert and the Egyptologist Gaston Maspéro in the Fourth; André Berthelot, Léon Marillier, and Léon de Rosny in the Fifth.³⁴ Berthelot occupied the chair in Religions of Greece and Rome, and Marillier, the chair in Religions of Non-Civilized Peoples.³⁵ More than his two colleagues, Rosy, whose syncretic approach to Buddhism was discussed in the last chapter, exemplified the connections between the sciences of religion and ethnography. Rosy had been the secretary of the Society of American

³³ In 1894, the Ministry preferred to keep two occupants in Christian Literature, considered “organic” to the section’s instruction, and would find funds to add a new chair, which turned out to be Talmudic and Rabbinical Judaism. Meetings of 16 December 1894 and 9 February 1895, *PVCSR*.

³⁴ With the exception of Marillier, all of these scholars participated in the 1889 Congress of Ethnographic Sciences organized by the Société d’ethnographie. See *Congrès international des science ethnographiques, tenu à Paris du 30 septembre au 7 octobre 1889: procès-verbaux sommaires* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1889).

³⁵ For one of his colloquia in the 1890s, Marillier led an investigation of “religious interdictions, specifically taboo,” in Oceania, which built upon his study begun the previous year of the “institutions and customs in New Zealand.” L. Marillier, undated annual report on “Religions des peuples non-civilisés,” Archives du secrétariat, item no. 158.

and Oriental Ethnography since the late 1850s. He would also play a role in advocating for the addition of a chair in Ancient Mexican Religion for his Society colleague Georges Raynaud. We will return to Raynaud's entrance to the Fifth Section below as he would be a candidate along with Mauss and Hubert.

The Society of American and Oriental Ethnography was broadly interdisciplinary and applied the practices of philologists, naturalists and geographers to developing a general anthropology. In this respect, the Society reflected a key aspect of the distinct French path toward disciplinarization in anthropology. In other countries, Alice Conklin explains, physical anthropology developed alongside the socio-cultural approach to anthropology that in France would be called ethnography, or the scientific study of the languages and civilizations of "primitive" peoples. Late nineteenth-century French scholars became leaders in the physical study of human traits while the ethnographic approach gained traction more slowly. Despite difficulties in defining boundaries and the lack of a single, forceful figure, French scholars still continued to aspire to the early nineteenth-century ideal of unified science, or a general science of man. That ideal resulted in two prevailing paradigms. The group around Paul Broca sought a general anthropology but privileged the physical techniques of anthropometry, racial science and paleoanthropology. Another group at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle also aimed at a general anthropology but combined physical and ethnographic material.³⁶ Although not formally attached to Muséum group, the Society for American and Oriental Ethnography shared their approach of considered races, customs and languages together.

In an 1873 lecture, Rosny called ethnography the "physical, moral and intellectual study of man," but the Society's orientation away from a strictly physical general anthropology may be

³⁶ Alice L. Conklin, *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850-1950* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 19-22.

seen for its founding in 1858. The Castaing report (1860) begins by observing that ethnography is an ancient science.³⁷ Chapter 10 of *Genesis* offers the earliest attempt to produce an ethnography and remains a model. Hippocrates' synthesis added natural knowledge to the account and was the "most complete exposition that his period could rightly attain." Strabo and Pliny continued in the same manner as Hippocrates. Lost during the Middle Ages, ethnographic knowledge again returned to greatness during the age of the eighteenth-century naturalists: Linnaeus, Buffon, Daubenton and Cuvier. The committee was tasked with defining ethnography so that collective efforts would have a common goal and their work would not be misunderstood by the public (7-8). Ethnography is conceived as an almost divine science, a body of knowledge that "sensibly emanates from the supreme omniscience" and that the committee will try to render as closely as possible, which is why seeking a definition had to be a group effort lest one person imprint "the accidental and contingent form" of their own mind (9). Of the two ancient terms for the knowledge they seek, ethnography and ethnology, ethnography is the name the society has chosen, and they will attempt to discover the "reality that is hidden beneath the word." (11) [An esoteric approach to knowledge and language.] The commission accepts that man is a member of the order of mammals and should be studied as a member of nature. However, anthropology, the study of man in all aspects, physically and in society, does not have the same ultimate aim as ethnography. A branch of natural history, anthropology seeks representative or general types that are characteristic to the species. "Anthropology is the description of man considered from his type and species, [and] is a natural science. Ethnography is based on the results of natural science but is also something else, relying on other studies and other principles." Assumption is that language and intelligence are not constituents of the physical world, hence man cannot be

³⁷ "Rapport de M. Castaing," *Actes de la Société d'ethnographie américaine et orientale* 2 (1861): 6-37.

studied on his physical or organismal properties alone. Anthropology treats man as an animal alone, but man is more than that: “man is a being in which a principle made in the image of God manifests itself by means of animal organs that are appropriate to this destination.” The principle that comes from God is reason, capacity to speak and think using words. “Blessed with all the characteristics of animals, man is not enclosed in the circle of their manifestations. Because of language, which places him in continuous communication with each of his fellows, there is among all members of the species a reciprocation action that is not only a powerful means of modification but also the indispensable condition of the proper evolution of humanity” (17). [Ultimately the argument is that man is not subject to only physical laws of nature, but laws owing to their mutual action on each other through language.] As we then learn, evolution in the human species does not take place only in the domain of physical properties, but there is a spiritual or immaterial change that must also be tracked in the study of man; hence, the need for ethnography, and its collaboration with philologists. “Chaque intelligence est ainsi appelée à produire, à son tour, une certaine proportion de ces émanations que nous appelons des idées et qui, survivant à l’individualité dont elles sont les filles, vont se confondre dans le courant générale, où elles donnent naissance à celle qui suivent, comme elles mêmes furent produites par leur devanciers. Ce courant, toujours croissant en force et en étendue . . . c’est la vie de l’humanité” (18). The epistemology or ontology of language as emanations from some source, almost a collective, metaphysical mind of which our own ideas are but reflection, processions to which they return.

Hence, anthropology cannot produce the desired account of man in light of the collective spiritual life or reality of man since it regards humans as isolated individuals that are reduced to types. Each individual person is a “fraction of the species” and cannot be considered separate

from its whole (form or substance, we might even say). To study man, then, in relation to larger whole of which he is a part, the collective entity from which ideas originate and to which they return, man has to be studied over time and not just in space. For this, ethnography has recourse to the historical sciences. (19) In the subsequent contrast with historical science, we learn that ethnography seeks to describe humanity as a thing that exists across time and space and evolves, not the works of humanity over time, its expressions or productions (i.e., what the philologist traces). (20) Truly a universal science, borrowing from all other fields of natural and historical knowledge.

Later in 1873, in a lecture given at the Collège de France, Rosny positioned ethnography as a study of man that went beyond either anthropology or linguistics alone.³⁸ The religious conceptions of the earlier Société report remain: ethnography resists the specialized approaches of anthropology and linguistics; a “synthetic method” is needed, a “farsighted criticism (‘critique à longue vue’) to gather together these facts of the same kind lest they result in increasing the general disorder in the science of humanity.” Rosny presents ethnography as solution to the shifting nature of defining anthropology in this period. And the unified ideal, although here the justification comes from God. Since all of humanity and its evolution originate in Providential design, in God’s wisdom, the science of man must be a unified totality as well. Any knowledge that is to be truly a science must “possess bases that are essentially logical, essentially true, certain like laws of mathematics, and those bases must serve to construct a monument that will be the most brilliant justification of Providence and the grandeur of his designs.” So a teleological reasoning here. Unified ideal stems from all things moving towards a single end

³⁸ Léon de Rosny, “De la méthode ethnographique pour servir de l’introduction à l’étude de la race jaune: leçon faite au Collège de France le 12 juin 1870,” *Actes de la Société d’ethnographie américaine et orientale*, 2nd ser., vol. 3 (1871-1873): 41-60.

that will reveal the intentions of the Creator. “Those bases are the Promised Land of human knowledge.” A little while later the religious overtones are explicit: Autre étoile de Bethléem, sans cesse, lumineuse au milieu des profondes obscurités des nos incertitudes scientifiques, l’ethnographie nous guidera et nous servira de point d’appui dans toutes les investigations que nous avons à entreprendre, à l’effet de saisir la raison, le principe et la fin de l’oeuvre éternelle de la Création.” (44) Later, evidence to support Conklin: “Les sciences qui ont fait jusqu’à present le plus d’efforts, dans le but de poser les jalons pour la classification des divers groupes de l’humanité, sont l’anthropologie et la linguistique.” (45) Ethnography for Rosny is then a racial science; indeed the method of ethnography that he is outlining here is to study the “Yellow Race.” He began the lecture by citing a definition of ethnography as “the physical, moral and intellectual study of humanity,” which strictly speaking would be the description of peoples. However, just like geology has expanded to include various adjoining sciences, so too has ethnography expanded to include ethnology, or discussion of the formation and development of races, ethnogenesis, or study of origins, anthropology or natural history of man, élément des races [?], linguistics, or the science of language.” (41-2). [It would seem that the Société was advancing a variant of racial science that they called ethnography, which aspired to be universal, synthetic in the way that neither anthropology or linguistics alone could be, or the older study of languages and customs of peoples.]

About 1900, when the Fifth Section began expanding its subfields, an area of ethnographic inquiry at the Society would be one of the two subjects that became formal chairs: ancient Mesopotamian and ancient Mexican religions. In 1896, Georges Raynaud, who had been teaching a *cours libre* in Religions of Ancient Mexico, made a request that his subject become a chair. In the ensuing meeting of the Council of the Section, Derenbourg cautioned against adding

a chair that would not come with much compensation (something that had been done previously given the section's constrained finances). In response to the concern that studies of ancient Mexico were not "sufficiently mature" to warrant a new colloquium, Rosny assured his colleagues that the subfield "possessed a sure method, which he had inaugurated." Sabatier felt that the subfield of Assyro-Chaldean Religion was a "more urgent" need. Various other faculty members also had reservations about putting their support behind ancient Mexican religion when there were other subfields that they wished to see added to the section's offerings. In the end, a majority voted to move forward with making a request of Liard's office for a chair in Ancient Mexican Religions.³⁹ Liard replied, however, that there were insufficient funds to add a new conference or chair.

The matter of a chair in Ancient Mexican Religions would lay idle for two years, until, in November 1899, Liard and Gabriel Monod of the Fourth Section approached Albert Réville about the possibility of creating a new colloquium in the "Religious History of Byzantium," which would also come a monthly salary of 2,500 francs. Liard and Monod also had a person in mind, Gabriel Millet, since their original idea had been to create a chair in the Fourth Section in "Byzantine Archeology." Réville conveyed his disappointment that they were now being offered a chair after their prior requests concerning ancient Mexico had been refused. After Réville relayed events to the Council, a professor wondered if the allocation of 2,500 francs might be split between Byzantine religion and another subject given that "the religious history of Byzantium was inseparable from political history and did not, on its own, furnish sufficient material for a permanent conference."⁴⁰ Liard replied by granting a supplemental allocation of 1,000 francs for the colloquium in ancient Mexican religion that had been requested three years

³⁹ Meeting of 8 November 1896, *PVCSR*.

⁴⁰ Meeting of 5 November 1899, *PVCSR*.

earlier. The Council ratified the appointment of Millet to the chair in Byzantine Christianity but then discussed whether they were bound by their previous decision add a conference in ancient Mexican religion or another subject.⁴¹ One faculty member suggested that some of the funds could be used to bring the salary of one of their colleagues (I. Lévi) up to the standard level and the remaining funds applied to a partial colloquium. Concerning a partial colloquium, Derenbourg presented two letters that he had received from potential candidates: the *cours libre* instructor in Christian Hagiography requested a permanent colloquium in that subject, and Henri Hubert proposed a new colloquium in “Religious Prehistory.” The Council then asked Liard that they be allowed to determine the partitioning of the 1,000 francs. Liard approved a salary increase for Israel Lévi but replied that the 1,000 francs must go to a colloquium in ancient Mexican religion.⁴² The Council relented and Geroges Raynaud was named to the chair in Religions of Pre-Columbian America in February 1900.⁴³

We find further evidence of the shifting status and arrangement of subjects when the Council discussed where Gabriel Millet’s colloquium in Byzantine Christianity should be listed on the public notice of course offerings. Millet maintained that his colloquium had been created “not as a complement to the study of the history of the Christian Church but to make room for Byzantine studies [as a study of classical culture].” Albert Réville responded: “our section is specifically devoted to the history of religions; the new colloquium was admitted because Byzantine studies pertained almost entirely to Byzantine Christianity. Hence, Byzantine Christianity was a part of the history of the Christian Church.” Any reader of the notice would not understand why a separate heading had been created for Byzantine Christianity apart from

⁴¹ Meeting of 3 December 1899, *PVCSR*.

⁴² Meeting of 11 February 1900, *PVCSR*.

⁴³ Meeting of 25 March 1900, *PVCSR*.

Christian Church History. A majority of Réville colleagues agreed and Millet's colloquium remained under the heading "History of the Christian Church."⁴⁴

Although Hubert's name had been put forward in early 1900 when the Council was considering whether it still wanted a colloquium in ancient Mexican religion, he would soon receive another opportunity when the death of Auguste Sabatier in April 1901 left one of the Christian Literature chairs vacant. The Fifth Section members again discussed whether they wanted to maintain that colloquium or introduce another subject. Maurice Vernes held that "the exegesis and criticism of the New Testament" were "an essential element of our program," and that the abbé Alfred Loisy (who had recently lost his post at the Institut Catholique of Paris) would be an "excellent successor" to Sabatier. Jean Réville agreed with Vernes, emphasizing that the purpose of the section was "the critical study of religious documents. It would be inadmissible that the documents which were the most widely attested in our Western world were not studied when in all other countries [they] were the subject of multiple courses." Léon Mariller did not dismiss the importance of the Christian New Testament but observed that there were already "three members of the section who were presently tasked with treating [that subject]." Rather, it was an opportune moment to "create a conference on an important part of our field that was not represented, namely, Assyro-Babylonian Religion." Albert Reville was of the same opinion: they should find a way for the current professors in Church History or Christian Literature to cover Sabatier's teaching so that the section could add a subject that was "currently neglected or had to be put aside given insufficient resources." Following procedure for

⁴⁴ Meeting of 25 March 1900, *PVCSR*. Seven years later, Millet would be successful in having his colloquium placed under its own heading on notices, apart from History of the Church. It would come under Byzantine Christianity and Christian Archeology. Meeting of 20 January 1907, *PVCSR*.

appointment decisions, an ad hoc committee was named to recommend a candidate and a course of action regarding a subject.⁴⁵

Even though the ad hoc committee was now discussing what to do with the vacant chair, Hubert had already submitted an application that proposed a colloquium in a new subject: Primitive Religions of Europe. Another applicant, Charles Fossey proposed Assyro-Babylonian Religion. The two remaining candidates were scholars of Christian Literature: Loisy and Monceaux. In his application letter, Hubert gave an outline of topics comprising the Primitive Religions of Europe: “(1) Prehistory. Study of sepulchers and funeral rites. Sites of worship. Idols and symbols. (2) History of Celtic, Germanic and Slavic religions. Mythology and epic poetry. (3) Introduction of Christianity. The modifications it underwent. Local sanctuaries. Worship of saints. Calendar. (4) Problem of survivals and popular religion. Festivals. Agrarian and pastoral rites. Beliefs. Genies of the forest and fallow.”⁴⁶ When the committee met to discuss the candidates, Mariller, who occupied the chair in Religion of Non-Civilized Peoples, felt that Hubert’s proposed teaching in folklore and popular beliefs would likely be redundant with his own colloquium. His fellow members appeared to have been swayed, as the committee decided to recommend Fossey and the creation of a chair in Assyro-Babylonian Religion.⁴⁷

Surprisingly, when the Council convened to hear the committee’s findings, the full body of professors did not follow its recommendation. Three faculty members immediately noted that Hubert had more noteworthy publications than Fossey and was a “graduate of the section” held in high esteem by his instructors. Derenbourg added: “though not a Celticist or Germanist,

⁴⁵ Meeting of 9 June 1901, PVCSR.

⁴⁶ H. Hubert to A. Réville, Paris, 6 June 1901, “Lettres de candidatures à la succession de M. Sabater,” Archives du Secretariat, item no. 431.

⁴⁷ “Rapport de la commission chargée de préavisier le Conseil de la Séction des Sciences Religieuses sur les candidatures à la succession de M. Sabatier,” Archives du Secretariat, item no. 430.

[Hubert] was very capable of evaluating (‘contrôler’) the texts that he uses.” Conversely, Raynaud, who had only been appointed the year before, shared the view of A. Reville that Assyro-Babylonian Religion would be a valuable addition, fulfilling an absence that had been “recognized for some time.” In a close vote, the Council chose Hubert over Fossey.⁴⁸ One of the original chairs in Christian Literature was replaced with Primitive Religions of Europe.⁴⁹ Hubert’s colleagues had referred to his contributions to *Année Sociologique* in their deliberations, but, to them, he was just as much a scholar “devoted to the study of religious history.”

As it was, Mauss would have his turn to join the Fifth Section faculty only several months after Hubert. Léon Marillier died unexpectedly on October 15, 1901 from injuries sustained in a maritime accident. As before, a committee was formed to study whether to maintain or change the chair that Marillier occupied in Religion of Non-Civilized Peoples.⁵⁰ Durkheim wrote a letter of support in which he highlighted Mauss’ expertise in “religious ethnography,” the section of *Année* that he had been tasked with directing.⁵¹ For his part, Mauss drew attention to his fellowship in “religious ethnography” in Holland and England before proposing the following teaching and research topics: “the collection and criticism of ethnographic material” that Marillier had begun; “study of the diverse categories of religious facts”; a colloquium on “prayer in the Melanesians and Australians” and another on “criticism of ethnographic documents concerning magic in the Melanesians.”⁵² The committee that reviewed applicants did not find that Mauss had conveyed a precise sense of what he intended to teach and

⁴⁸ Meeting of 18 June 1901, PVCSR.

⁴⁹ Although he had not been selected for a titular chair, Alfred Loisy did begin teaching a cours libre in the History of Biblical Literature. His course for the autumn term was: “Study of the Gospel Parables.” Meeting of 18 June 1901, PVCSR.

⁵⁰ Meeting of 10 November 1901, PVCSR.

⁵¹ Durkheim, Bordeaux, to Albert Réville, 18 November 1901, Archives du Secrétariat,

⁵² Mauss to A. Réville, Paris, undated, Archives du Secrétariat.

one member (Vernes, we later learn) raised the concern that Mauss would consider the post as a “chair in methodology, in the general comparative history of religion. He was, above all, a sociologist.” That reservation aside, the committee did note Mauss’ critical acumen: “he had taught himself Sanskrit, Hebrew and Zend to be able to read documents himself. No one was more prepared than he [to teach].” The other two candidates were Louis Duvau, who taught in the Fourth Section but was proposing a colloquium for the Fifth in “History of Germanic and, particularly, Scandinavian Religion,” and Ernest Bertrand, who proposed that the chair become “History of Protestant Dogma.”⁵³

In the meeting of the Council, Hubert was asked, before any deliberation, to describe what exactly he intended to cover in his newly created conference in Primitive Religions of Europe. The concern was that Duvau’s proposed conference on Scandinavian religions would be redundant with Hubert’s on the religions of European peoples before contact with Greco-Roman civilization and Christianity.⁵⁴ Regarding Mauss, Vernes clarified that he had initially been concerned about Mauss introducing methodological theorizing but that his subsequent conversations had “fully reassured him.” Jules Toutain, who like Vernes was also partisan of criticism combined with rigorous modesty, found that none of the candidates, including Mauss, fulfilled the desired capacities for the religious history of non-civilized peoples and preferred that they convert that chair to Religions of Assyria-Babylon. Sylvain Lévi quickly came to Mauss’ defense, observing that he had ably filled in for Foucher in the colloquium on religions of India and that he had “for several years oriented his research towards ethnography.” Ultimately, very few professors were persuaded by Toutain, and Mauss was elected to the chair in Religions of

⁵³ “Rapport de la commission chargée de préavisier le Conseil sur les titres des candidats à la succession de M. Marillier,” Archives du Secretariat, item no. 451.

⁵⁴ Hubert’s first conference had been, in fact, later than prehistory: “Magic in the Middle Ages.”

Non-Civilized Peoples by a large margin.⁵⁵ He was also a sociologist, but he had more than respectable credentials as a critical scholar of Asian languages and an ethnographer of religion.

The death of Albert Réville in October 1906 offered another chance for the Section to diversify beyond its core studies of Christianity, but this time the Council decided to retain the chair in History of Dogmas, permitting Paul Alphandéry, whom we discussed at the start of this chapter, to join the faculty formally.⁵⁶ However, the broadening of subfields and methods away from the Section's original arrangement and focus may also be seen in the range of *cours libres* that were added in the same period after 1900. For these instructors, the Council was prepared, up to a point, to relax the standard of evaluating texts that it had sought to uphold when adding new chairs. In 1902, Nahum Slouschz, a student of Derenbourg and Israël Lévi who now was preparing a doctoral thesis for the Faculty of Letters, proposed to teach a *cours libre* entitled "Questions of Religious History and Modern Hebrew Literature."⁵⁷ Various faculty members respected Slouschz's work but felt that the "subject did not have sufficient distance to be treated in a strictly historical manner," or it did not "lend itself to the technical character of colloquia of the École [Pratique]." Hubert believed that it would be more appropriate at another institution. The Council did not approve Slouschz's request.⁵⁸ Two years later, Eugène Bernard Leroy, a medical doctor, fared better in his request to teach on the "Psychology of Mystics" even though similar concerns arose. Leroy was currently giving a *cours libre* on the topic at the Faculty of Letters but wished to transfer it to the Fifth Section so that he could "study in a more technical

⁵⁵ Meeting of 1 December 1901, *PVCSR*.

⁵⁶ The committee appointed to study what to do with Réville's chair unanimously recommended keeping his conference in History of Dogmas, adding the word "Doctrines" to the title, and naming Alphandéry as his replacement. The Council agreed with all parts of the recommendation. Meeting of 23 Dec 1906, *PVCSR*. The ministerial order confirming the appointment came later, on 4 Jan 1907.

⁵⁷ Nahum Slouschz later published his thesis, *La Renaissance de la littérature hébraïque, 1743-1885: essai d'histoire littéraire* (Paris: G. Bellais, 1902).

⁵⁸ Meeting of 26 October 1902, *PVCSR*.

manner the phenomena of religious ecstasy as they were described by St. Theresa and John of the Cross.” Two faculty members saw nothing to indicate that Leroy “knew who to apply the historical method and perform the critical interpretation of texts.” Mauss, however, intervened to recall that “we constitute a Section in the Sciences of Religion. [Leroy’s] religious psychology is just as appropriate here as historical criticism.” Mauss’ opinion convinced enough of his peers, and the course was approved.⁵⁹

When the abbé Alexandre de Meissas applied to teach a *cours libre* at virtually the same time as Leroy, he proposed a topic within the study of Christianity, but the novelty in his case would be ideological rather than academic. Meissas, who had a doctorate in theology, had been for many years the Catholic chaplain (*aumônier*) at the Collège Rollin.⁶⁰ The *cours libre* that he offered the Section was entitled: “Researches on the Roman Ecclesiastical Senate Mentioned by St. Jerome in His Letter to Paula about Origen.” Derenbourg thought that the course should be approved: “it is an interesting subject and M. de Meissas was a man of independent spirit.” Two other faculty members had reservations about his credentials, but another believed he should be given a chance “to show that he was capable” by authorizing him for a probationary term. The opinion that appears to have been most persuasive was that of Sylvain Lévi, which had more to do with the cultural politics of the sciences of religion as a laic discipline. “Our section would benefit,” Lévi said, “from having, by our side and among us, men who are at the bounds of dogmatic inquiry and historical inquiry, and who can contribute to spreading the scientific habits of mind in places where it is easier for them to have access than it is for us.” Meissas’

⁵⁹ Meeting of 13 March 1904, *PVCSR*.

⁶⁰ In addition, Meissas appears to have been a candidate to the episcopate in 1890s. There is dossier for him along with many other candidates in F¹⁹ 2364. Using the pseudonym “Jean Vrai,” he published *Ephémérides de la papauté* (Paris: E. Nourry, 1904) that was placed on the Index in January 1909. In *Ephémérides*, Meissas contended that official Church history was a falsification and that the Papacy has tried for centuries to keep the clergy in darkness. See the review that points out faults but gives qualified support to the call for reform in *Revue du clergé français* 42 (1905): 80-2.

exploration of the Patristic period certainly did not add much in terms of Christianity, but what he did bring was a chance to spread scientific thinking among liberal Catholics. The possibility of a kind of laic, scientific proselytizing won the day, and Meissas' course was approved.⁶¹

[Discussion of Mauss' role in the acquisition of the Protestant theology funds after the law of 1905.] A professor at the soon-to-close Protestant Faculty of Theology called on the state to establish a laic teaching of sciences religieuses following the separation of Churches and State. Vernes read a passage from the professor's address at meeting of the Council: M. Ménégos, "insiste sur la nécessité, pour l'Etat, d'organiser un enseignement laïque des sciences religieuses et considère la Section des sciences religieuses comme l'amorce des futures Facultés des sciences religieuses." [So is he calling for the sciences of religion to have their own faculty in the university system? Surely, Ménégos, would have been aware of the Fifth Section, or did he meant a laic version of a more Protestant-inflected sciences religieuses? (Meeting of 22 January 1906).

The ambiguity in Ménégos is resolved in the next meeting. Senator Lintilhac has unveiled a plan to create new chairs in the Faculty of Letters corresponding to teaching areas at the Protestant Faculty, and to transfer the funding of the latter to the former. In fact, A. Réville called a special meeting of the Council to address the urgent matter. He began the meeting by distributing a pamphlet that came out of a "Study Group and rationalist propaganda" and that called from teaching history of religions at all school levels. J. Réville reported on his meeting with the Director of Higher Education, Bayet, who confirmed that the ministry had a plan to create seven new chairs at the Faculty of Letter using the Protestant theology funds: Hebrew and Semitic Languages, History of Christian Literature, Ancient Ecclesiastical History, Medieval

⁶¹ Meeting of 24 January 1904, *PVCSR*.

Philosophy, History of Christian Art, History of the Relations between Church and State, and High German. These areas were thought to represent the non-confessional subjects of the Protestant Faculty and merited being conserved in university instruction. Although the rationale given was at once similar and different from 1885 creation. Like then, there would be a “gap” in university teaching, i.e., certain subjects could not be left out of programs. Unlike then, the subjects concerned at the Protestant faculty figured into university curricula everywhere else, i.e., France would lag behind. The sciences of religion were still too new in 1885 to make that kind of argument. But we perhaps find the real reason: the ministry wanted “the new courses to be accessible to the public and were not an exclusively technical teaching that was reserved for a small number of students, as was the case in the colloquia at the École des Hautes Études.” This was the inverse of the justification given in 1885: technical instruction for a small number of students was the guarantee that the government did not have religious combat in mind. Now, the government wished the sciences of religion to have a wider audience, to have the new ideas confront existing views about religion. Given the climate post-1901, after the Dreyfuss Affair, all of which contributed to separation, it is understandable that the government would want to go more on the offensive, to be less concerned about engaging in polemic, than in 1885. That was one ministry’s attitude, at least. Mauss reminded the Council that all was not lost. The new Minister of Public Instruction was “more favorable to us” and the Senate commission that had proposed the new allocations to the Faculty of Letters “overstepped its powers, since it advanced the budget revisions without consulting the Chamber. With 593 auditors currently, the Section was already attracting the public and could do more if the ministry would only grant them greater resources. Furthermore, the new teaching areas were already represented at their Section and would be redundant. If the ministry were not willing to reconsider then, the best outcome would

be to incorporate the Section into the Faculty of Letters. (6 April 1906). The Council decided to see a delegation of faculty members to meet with Lintilhac, Briand and other officials: Vernes, S. Lévi, Hubert and Mauss.

After the 1905 law put an end to the regime of recognized religions, abolishing public funding of religious institutions, the Fifth Section campaigned to have the funds of the Protestant Faculty of Theology applied to their section. It was hoped that an increase to their budget would allow the section to address the depressed salaries that several professors had had to endure owing to a chronically strained operating budget. When Albert Reville wrote on behalf of the Council to formally request the Protestant faculty's funds, he pointed out that the Fifth Section had historically been "treated less favorably" than its neighbor, the Fourth Section, which did not have the uniqueness of the Fifth Section's program: that of the Fourth "only mirrored instruction that was given elsewhere, in the Faculty of Letters, the College de France and the Ecole des Chartes." By contrast, the Fifth Section, now in its twentieth year, was "the sole seat of the sciences of religion in France." Reville went on to observe that in the Fourth Section, 20 of the 36 faculty members earned a salary of 2,200 francs or more per month; in the Fifth, that figure was only 2,000 francs, for eleven of the 16 faculty members.⁶²

On April 7, 1906 a group of professors went to the Senate to meet with Senator Lintilhac, a member of the finances committee charged with the budget of Public Instruction. The current version of the budget recommended giving all of the Protestant faculty funds to the Paris Faculty of Letters. Evidently the Fifth Section delegation has come to find out what happened between the current budget and the actions taken by Section members in the preceding months. Lintilhac explained that Liard's office had informed him that arrangements had been made by the previous

⁶² A. Reville to the Minister of Public Instruction, 17 February 1906, F17 13618, Personnel folder. There is another copy of the document in Archives du Secretariat, item no. 591, Fonds historique de l'EPHE, AN.

Minister, Bienvenu Martini, and that the new Minister, Briand, had considered the question resolved, i.e., the funds would go to the Faculty of Letters. While they were meeting with Lintilhac, a message arrived from the Minister to say that he would call on him in the afternoon to find a partitioning of the funds between Letters and the Fifth Section before the Senate began to review the proposed budget. In the end, Minister Briand never met with Lintilhac; the other ministerial budgets that were to be discussed were not ready and the Senate proceeded to review of Public Instruction. The group of professors only learned of this outcome when they arrived at the Minister's office at 5:00 pm later the same day. Mauss was personally acquainted with Briand and members of his staff and had been able to secure the meeting. The group had to wait but were ultimately able to see Minister Briand when he returned from the Senate discussion. He had intervened there to maintain that the new chairs in Letters that the current budget specified were only a "general orientation," leaving the Ministry with the power to make a final decision. Briand thought that this left the door open for the Fifth Section to receive some of the funds, but would also communicate the budget committee of the Chamber that the Senate was not deciding a matter before the other body had a chance to deliberate. [As in 1885, legislative elections were the issue; some wanted to have the Cults budget dispensed with by then, Briand mentioned]. Later in April, the Section learned that Deputy Cochery, chair of the budget committee, had met with Briand and worked out an agreement: it would be left to the new Chamber that issued from the elections to determine where the funds would go; a part of them would go to the Fifth Section, they were assured.⁶³

⁶³ Jean Réville, "Rapport pour la séance [du Conseil de la section] du 13 mai 1906," Archives du secrétariat, item no. 591, Fonds historique de l'EPHE, AN.

Ultimately, the Fifth Section did receive funds that were formerly allocated to the Protestant faculty of theology in the state budget that was passed on July 20, 1906.⁶⁴ A sum of 1694 francs was made available to the Section (announced at Meeting of 14 Oct 1906). At the same, meeting the Council adopts the ministry's proposal a permanent conference in Assyro-Babylonian Religion be created using the newly allocated funds (1,000 francs out of the total). At long last, after repeated requests, Fossey becomes the occupant of a regular chair (Ministerial order of 3 December 1906;

Following their appointments, Mauss and Hubert settled into the regular rhythm of teaching during the fall and spring semesters, typically offering two weekly conferences each term. The two had already collaborated on articles for the *Année sociologique* and the project that they had recently begun on magic at the time of their elections was reflected in their early conference topics. For consecutive terms in 1902, Mauss taught on "Critical and analytical study of documents concerning magic in the Melanesians." Hubert continued his study of "Magic in the Middle Ages" in the first term of 1902, but then switched to "Survivals of Germanic religions in Gaul under the Merovingians" for the second term.⁶⁵ Their interest in magic rituals emerged out of their study of religious rituals, particularly, sacrifice. They concluded in their 1898 article that sacrificial rites put "notions of the sacred" into use in society, such that the sacred had a force and was real in collective life. However, given sociology's ambition to classify all social forms and identify their causal relations, they wondered if their findings about religious rituals applied to other rituals. Magic presented itself as the natural place to explore non-religious rituals and work towards a general theory of rites. Despite the possibilities, an examination of magic

⁶⁴ See exchanges between A. Réville and the Director of Higher Education dated 3 August and 17 October 1906 in F¹⁷ 13618, "Personnel" folder, AN

⁶⁵ Meetings of 16 March and 22 June 1902, *PVCSR*.

also presented a conundrum: magical rites tended to be performed in isolation. If a notion of the sacred entered collective life by way of religious rituals, how then did individual magician grasp the sacred? Was the sacred in fact an individual notion and not a collective one? (Their fellow critical historians and orientalist at the Fifth Section would have said yes). Mauss and Hubert would try to answer this question by searching for magical rites that took place in a social context.⁶⁶

Unlike in their 1898 “*Essai sur le sacrifice*” in which they relied on texts that a critical historian would have used—*Samhitas*, *Brahmanas* and *Sutras* in Sanskrit and the Five Books of Moses—their study of magic relied on a different kind of material: the reports and studies of (primarily British) anthropologist and ethnographers.

⁶⁶ Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, “Esquisse d’une théorie générale de la magie,” *Année sociologique* 7 (1902-1903): 2-4.

Conclusion

In the preface to volume two of *Année sociologique*, Durkheim wrote: “Religion contained within itself, from the beginning but in a confused state, all the elements that, in dissociating, becoming defined and combining with each other in a myriad of ways, gave birth to the diverse manifestations of collective life . . . Kinship started as a bond that was essentially religious; penalty, contract, gift, homage are all transformations of sacrifice, penitential, contractual, communal, honorary.”¹ Durkheim, on the one hand, explains here why the phenomenon of religion would occupy an important place in his conception of sociology. On the other hand, he reveals the similarity between sociology and one of the fields that it rivaled, philology. As we have seen, philologists would similarly argue that understand some present phenomenon in the human (language, poetry, philosophy) one needed to give a genetic history, starting with the original historical form and going all the way through the diverse manifestations or evolutions of that germ. However, for Durkheim, the transformations no longer represented a degeneration but a beneficial outcome. The value of the original form did not matter since the various current forms and relations of social life functioned on their own, independent of the germ—the causal factors of social relations were posited, to use the sense of that term developed in this dissertation.

Those factors could also be said to be organic to sociability, and the Durkheimian account of religion would describe the origin of religion in social terms: rites, rules and representations that emerged as a part of associative acts, of living in society. Such account of religion opened the way for a laic society, as Durkheim also explained in the *Année* preface,

¹ Durkheim, preface to *Année sociologique* 2 (1898-1899): iv.

albeit in a footnote: “the importance that we attribute to religious sociology in no way implies that religion should, in actual societies, play the same role that it did in earlier times. In a sense, the opposite conclusion would be more credible. Precisely because religion is a primitive fact, it should increasingly cede its place to the new social forms that it has engendered.” Durkheim added that the same was true in the individual: “given that sensation is the primitive fact out of which superior intellectual functions emerged by way of combinations, it does not follow that the mind of a cultivated adult, today especially, should be composed only of sensations.”

Durkheim’s description of the maturity of social forms is analogous to the developmental scheme in positivism: the crude, confused and inaccurate notions about the operation of nature of the theological mind are replaced, or abandoned, by more reliable and precise conceptions in the positive mind. But what is the relationship of the primitive to the mature form? Would natural knowledge have gotten off the ground without fetichism? For the historians of religion that we have traced in this dissertation, the answer was no: a purer understanding of God would not have been possible without the crude, primitive form. In fact, for a figure like Albert Réville, part of the beauty of tracing all the transformations of the original form was to admire the process of increasing purification and clearer grasp of God. That trajectory educated the self in the contents of religious sentiment, giving it positive ground. By contrast, in the Durkheim scheme of social forms, the historical trajectory educated the modern observer that more evolved form was no longer religious even if originally so.

The sociological account of religion provided the framework for a reply to the conservative argument about the social necessity of religion that we have encountered multiple times in this dissertation. In Chapter 1, Lamennais argued that religious society had instituted civil society; without religion there could not be common duties or a cohesive national body. In

Chapter 2, liberal and conservative elites joined in reaffirming the social value of religious beliefs: they educated citizens in their duties and respect for institutions. Henri Maret would add that theology faculties were a critical ingredient in clergy carrying out their role as “guardians of morals” and instructors of the people. In the 1880s, when republicans would contest the view that instructing people in their duties required religious education, a reply among conservatives was to claim that educating children without also instructing them in a religious faith would result in an atheist society, and there had never been such a society in the history of nations: “Numa [Pompilius] in Rome, Solon in Athens, Lycurgus in Sparta, Zoroaster in Persia, Confucius in China, [they all], like Moses in Israel, placed religion as the first stone of their society, and all legislators since had followed their model.” Even though man was “born for society, his nature and all his needs requested it, society was impossible without a power that supported and guided it.”² Durkheimian sociology conceded that earliest social forms were contained in religious practices, or vice versa, but it rejected the claim that the continued operation of those social forms required religious beliefs or institutions. A society that had not been founded by atheists but that functioned both thanks to religion and, now, without it. Viewed in relation to Comte, Durkheim achieved a social science treated that “the human species as having its own impulsion” and not merely limited to “receiving what the legislator wished to give them.”³

This dissertation has shown that the resources that positive knowledge made available to Durkheimian sociology and the sciences of religion in instituting a laic conception of society. Along with positivism, the other ‘ism’ that plays a visible role in the story traced here is

² J. M. J., *L'enseignement athée et le livre de M. Paul Bert* (Paris: Librairie Haton, undated), 16-19, in fonds Paul Bert, 1S⁷ 210.

³ Comte, “Le rôle de l’observation et celui de l’imagination dans la politique” (1821), in Paulo E. de Berrêdo Carneiro and Pierre Arnaud, eds., *Auguste Comte: écrits de jeunesse, 1816-1828* (Paris: Mouton, 1970), 573.

orientalism or orientalist philology. A recent study by Mohamad Amer Meziane places orientalist scholarship about Islam squarely within the imperial process that he calls secularization. For Meziane, secularization (in the English sense) was an attempt to realize the medieval Christian concept of imperium, which after the failed attempt of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V to establish a universal monarchy, was transferred to colonial and ecological dominion. Through those endeavors to become God's representatives on earth, Western nations mobilized a discourse about themselves in which Islam and Muslim lands became justifications for conquest—they needed to be brought into the secular order. Meziane follows the secular discourse into the nineteenth century when it was mobilized by Napoleon in Egypt and then by the republican historians Michelet and Quinet after the French conquest of Algeria.⁴ Similarly, Gil Anidjar equates orientalism with secularism since the former was the means by which Christianity invented a representation of itself that masked its continued pertinence. Anidjar writes: “Christianity deployed a peculiar discourse about itself and as it understood its history . . . [it] actively disenchanted its own world by dividing itself into private and public, politics and economics, indeed religious and secular.”⁵

We have seen in the preceding chapters, European scholars working to define the phenomenon of religion in laic institutions. This dissertation agrees that the concepts “laic” and “religious” are “codependent and inform each other” but has also shown that the divisions that Anidjar assumes were more blurred and difficult to fully separate. The sciences of religion replaced theology, for example, but the new discipline retained a good deal of the theological organization of subjects. A shortcoming of both Anidjar and Meziane's claims is that they flatten the portrait of Christianity or Western Christian culture, often treating it as a singular bloc.

⁴ Meziane, *Des empires sous la terre*.

⁵ Anidjar, “Secularism.”

Orientalist scholarship did generate representations of Islam that served colonial interests, but studies of the religions of the East (often beyond Muslim lands) could be used to oppose orthodox understandings of Christianity. In other words, there were competing versions of the Christian religion within European orientalist scholarship that could also be mobilized in support of a Christian religiosity that was not the faith of a Catholic communicant or but highly rationalist in orientation.

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