

The Third Republic

The French Kulturkampf

From its first days, the Third Republic had problems with the Roman Catholic Church. Most clerics (Churchmen) were anti-Republican for many reasons. In addition, many Republicans simply hated the Church as a house of anti-Republican intrigue or as a gigantic Superstition Club.

Some initial reforms had begun in France prior to the Dreyfus Affair, but the heat and passion of the Affair had created problems that would take years to sort through. Most clerics were anti-Dreyfusards and blamed the Republic for the spy Dreyfus. However, after Dreyfus was rather clearly vindicated, Republicans turned a jaundiced eye toward the Church. Since the Church was so involved in the Dreyfus Affair, Republicans now made their payback.

Catholic Education becomes a huge target for Republicans as it “turned the young against the Republic.”

1. Jules Ferry was an anti-cleric Premier who led early attacks on Catholic Education.
2. Prior to the 1880s the Church dominated Primary and Secondary Education
3. Half of boys and nearly all girls attended Parochial Schools
4. Most public school teachers were priests, monks or nuns
5. Catholic education was a threat to the Republic

Ferry’s reforms before the Dreyfus Affair (1880s)

1. Religious instruction in public schools forbidden
2. No clerics allowed to teach in public schools
3. Huge amounts of money spent on new public schools and normal schools for training new teachers
4. NO public money could be used on parochial schools (after centuries of support)
5. Catholic Teaching Orders say this is only a first step to create an “atheistic public school system.”

Action against Catholic Teaching Orders following the Dreyfus Affair

1. Assumptionist Teacher-priest order was dissolved by the government (Assumptionists were very anti-Republican) in early 1901
2. **The** Associations Act of 1901 allowed Catholic Orders to exist only if they were formally authorized by Parliament and no member could teach in France unless his order was authorized by Parliament.
3. Catholic orders complain loudly and lead anti-Republican efforts in the 1902 elections. They fail.
4. Waldeck-Rousseau resigns when he sees Republicans do not want to be tolerant of Catholic orders after the elections. They want to destroy influence of the Teacher-priests.

Emile Combes—Catholic Hater and new Premier

1. Emile Combes is the new Premier and he *hates* the Roman Catholic Church. He “wanted to settle accounts once and for all with the Catholics” (Bill Shirer)
2. In June, three weeks after taking office, he closes all primary schools for girls run by nuns. The Sisters are unemployed.
3. One month later, Combes gives the remaining 3,000 Catholic schools in France eight days to close—permanently.
4. Parents, students, priests and nuns defied the order, but the police were called out to enforce the law. Rioting broke out and Combes called out the army. The schools were closed.
5. Combes now got Parliament to refuse to authorize *any* Catholic Teaching Orders. Every Catholic Teaching Order in France which applied for authorization was destroyed and 20,000 Catholic Teacher-priests were denied the right to teach in France. Many of the Teacher-priests flee abroad.
6. In July of 1904, Combes completes the liquidation of the Teaching Orders when he passes a law “forbidding the teaching of any kind by any Religious Order.” The 16,000 priests and nuns left as teachers in France were officially denied the right to teach.

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Combes and the Pope

1. Since Napoleon's day France and the Vatican had a Concordat which said that the French Government was allowed to choose (and pay) Bishops in France with the approval of the Pope.
2. In 1904, the French President visited the King of Italy in Rome. Napoleon III had prevented Rome from falling to the Italian Nationalists (Italy without Rome) and thereby reserving it as Church land. In 1870, with the defeat of Napoleon III, the Italians had invaded Rome and took all the land from the Church except for 104 acres around the main offices of the Roman Catholic Church in the area of Rome known as the Vatican. The Vatican never recognized the "illegal" Italian Occupation of Rome.
3. So, when the French President went to Rome it looked as if France supported the Occupation of Rome. The Pope complained the French were recognizing the Italian Occupation.
4. Combes called the Pope's comments an "intolerable" interference in French Foreign Policy and recalled the French Ambassador to the Vatican.
5. A few months later, France denounced the Concordat and proclaimed the Separation of Church and State.
6. Combes lost power after this, but NOT due to his anti-Catholic Crusade.

Battles over the Separation Announcement (1905)

1. The Pope reacted by condemning the law, forbade French Catholics from accepting it, and excommunicated every deputy who voted for it (341 of them)
2. The French Government reacted by confiscating all Church property in France (Just imagine: The Cathedral of *Notre Dame* could no longer be used by a priest and no longer belonged to the Church!). All priests, bishops and nuns were removed from the public payroll. Priests were forbidden, by law, to conduct Church services and rites.
3. Church services are only allowed to be conducted by associations of Catholic laymen, but no priests or nuns may participate.
4. A ministry, the "Ministry of Cults" is put in charge of enforcing the law.

A Solution?

1. For nearly three years strife, rioting, violence, and division were the order of the day in France.
2. Finally, a Socialist, Aristide Briand who had been Minister of Cults, made a compromise: Priests could again *use* Church buildings and the French Catholic hierarchy could again resume authority over Church affairs. The difference was that, for the first time in history, Church officials would have no interference from the State in the internal workings of the Church (at least until another Combes came along).

Fallout from the Struggle

1. Catholics would never forget the outright persecution by the state.
2. Catholics were essentially prevented from participating in public life involving politics.
3. Republicans remained suspicious and hostile toward the Church.
4. Freemasons, though not many of them, kept an eye on the Church and were quick to squelch attempts by Catholics to become involved in politics. This made Catholics hate and despise the Masons.
5. The Minister of War, André, secretly enlisted the aid of Masonic lodges to rid the Officer Corps of Catholics.
6. Fortunately for France, André lost his job when the Masonic angle was discovered. This saved France from firing all its most able Generals (who were almost completely Catholic and Royalist). France would need those men in only a few years.
7. Nevertheless, the Army was horribly weakened by the Church-State wars as the Army was as divided as was France. In addition, many able officers were forced out of the Army to be replaced by Republican Officers. As a group, the officers absolutely abhorred the Republic for what it had done to their Army and their Faith.