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Advisor: Chris Waters
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Second Advisor:
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Introduction

Let us go! Son of the republic
The day of the vote has arrived!
The ignoble banner has been lifted.
The ignoble banner has been lifted!
Do you hear all of these odious people
Croaking their stupid songs?
They still want, these brigands,
To soil our women and our children!

To the polls, citizens, against the clericals!
Let us vote, let us vote, so our voices
Scatter those crows!

La Marseillaise anticléricale by Léo Taxil (1881)¹

France has been referred to, in modern history and likely before, as the “eldest daughter of the Catholic Church,” in popular contexts and sometimes by the pope himself.² In his 1919 decree announcing that Catholic warrior and French medieval hero Joan of Arc was to be canonized, the Italian Pope Benedict XV said that he “regretted not being French by birth, but [was] still French at heart.”³ Since the baptism and conversion of the pagan Clovis, who is seen as the great patriarch of modern France for having united the Frankish tribes in the fifth and sixth centuries, French and Catholic history and lore have been greatly intertwined.⁴ Whether or not France can be considered the “eldest daughter,” the expression speaks to the deep connection between France and Catholicism, whose history is as fraught as it is long.

¹ “Allons ! fils de la République, Le jour du vote est arrivé ! // L’oriflamme ignoble est levé. // L’oriflamme ignoble est levé ! // Entendez-vous tous ces infâmes // Croasser leurs stupides chants ? // Ils Voudraient encore, les brigands, // Salir nos enfants et nos femmes ! // Aux urnes, citoyens, contre les cléricaux ! // Votons, votons et que nos voix // Dispersent les corbeaux ! » The French oriflamme translates loosely to the English “banner,” but it has particular French and religious connotations. The Merriam-Webster dictionary writes that “[t]he original oriflamme was the banner of Saint Denis, a patron saint of France who is said to have been the first bishop of Paris.…From the 12th to the 15th centuries, French kings carried the banner into battle as a way of inspiring their troops.” Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “oriflamme,” accessed April 4, 2019, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/oriflamme
² Anthony Brennan, Pope Benedict XV and the War (London: P.S. King, 1918), 39-41.
Benedict XV’s laudatory statement was made in a crucial moment of that history, as France was only beginning to recover from one of the most traumatic events it had ever faced. World War I permeated all aspects of French life, but had an especially profound impact on the nature of the connection between France and Catholicism. It was during this immediate post-war period, in 1920 and 1921, that the diplomatic relationship between France and the Vatican that had been discontinued in 1904 was restored, the French embassy at the Vatican was officially reopened, and a Vatican representative was sent back to Paris. In the months leading up to this decision, politicians, religious figures and commentators on all sides pulled the war into the current setting, imprinting their arguments for and against the reopening of the embassy on their chosen interpretations and framings of the war. In so doing, they attempted to control and manipulate the narratives that the French were still in the process of constructing about the war. The matter at hand in 1920 was simply whether or not the French embassy at the Vatican ought to be reopened, a matter not inherently related to the war in any obvious way. The powerful figures in the government, Church and press who dominated public discourse intentionally drew connections between the diplomatic question of reopening the embassy and the conflict that continued to dominate French thought in an effort to persuade the populous to support the embassy project or reject it. In this way, influencers of policy and public opinion attempted to use their understanding of the pervasiveness of feelings and stories about the war in the French consciousness to their advantage.

Through the prism of this *reprise or ralliement*, as the re-establishment of the relationship between the French state and the Vatican was known, and the debates against and in favor of such a move, I will investigate the way the war was remembered and invoked. I will analyze how those memories were activated in the public dialogue, and the way in which they can be situated in a complicated history of religion and anti-clericalism that existed in France.

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long before the Great War. I will try to demonstrate the ways in which budding French understandings and conceptions of the war, not quite yet “history” only two years after its end, were simultaneously used and shaped by powerful figures in politics, in the Church and in the press, who spoke and wrote about the reopening of the embassy. The manipulation of powerful collective memories in 1920 France serves as a case study not only on the way that history can function as a political tool, but also on the way that history itself develops. On the heels of the most unthinkably destructive event in France’s history, its people needed a rubric to tell them what to make of it; what they received at this impressionable post-war moment is irremovable from the broader political and social context. Insofar as French ways of remembering the war were dependent upon that which they consumed, their conception was shaped by discussions about the war that were politically motivated, immutably coloring them.

In 1904, the Church viewed the French government’s new secular legislation at the beginning of the twentieth century as conflicting directly with its rights and practices. Despite its deep Catholic history, the French state had begun to define itself as a religious in the 1880s. Politicians continued to show their commitment to pure, secular republicanism over the next twenty years, passing legislation that progressively curtailed the power of the Church in French society along the way. A flurry of laws passed at the turn of the century had become, for Pope Pius X and the French clergy, too onerous to bear by 1904. Negotiations about the appointment of French bishops turned sour and resulted in the severing of ties between France and the Vatican. The embassy at the Vatican was closed, and the nuncio, the pope’s representative, was recalled from Paris.

By 1920, many French politicians viewed the Vatican as a useful center for international post-war diplomacy, and thought a rapprochement might smooth over religious tensions in the country. Meanwhile, Pope Benedict XV, Pope Pius X’s successor, recognized that the secular French republic was thoroughly entrenched. He acknowledged that many of Pope Pius X’s battles were lost, and that the basic secular legislation would not be undone. He preferred to
have at least some power to negotiate and better the condition of the Church within the bounds of those laws, and thus sought to restore the Franco-Vatican relationship. The two parties negotiated over the course of 1920, and by the end of the year, the Chamber of Deputies, the popularly elected political body of the Third Republic, voted to approve financial credits to reopen the embassy. In May 1921, Paris and the Vatican exchanged representatives, and the diplomatic relationship was resumed.

The reopening of the Vatican embassy, which can be found only in a footnote to most histories of the French Third Republic or French Catholicism, represents a fertile ground for analyzing the presence of the Great War in French minds. The pope’s disputed role with respect to France in the war, the valorous fighting on the part of French priests, the deeply Catholic character of the disputed Franco-German territory of Alsace-Lorraine, and the dominant Protestant nature of France’s wartime enemies—all to be explored within this study—rendered the war’s presence inevitable when discussing a rapprochement between France and the Catholic Church. The relationship between the Great War and the reprise constitutes the heart of this study, which will treat, as the historiography does not, the centrality of the war to the debate about the Vatican. It will illuminate the way in which the invocation of the powerful and painful memories surrounding those four years allowed prominent figures to convince others of their perspective about restoring the relationship with Vatican, and in some cases to broaden the conversation about the reprise, retooling it to their own ends.

At the core of these conversations is the question of laïcité, a French term that loosely translates to secularism, and which the Larousse dictionary defines as “the conception and organization of society founded upon the separation of the Church and the State…which excludes churches from the exercise of any political or administrative power.” It was under the

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banner of laïcité that all of the secular legislation so abhorrent to the Church was passed. The term laïque came to help define the Third Republic, and its use engendered conflict with Catholics and the Church throughout the Republic’s duration. But the battle between Catholicism and laïcité began long before the Third Republic’s birth in 1870. The legacy of the struggle between laïcité and Catholicism in France, beginning with the French kings of the ancien régime, informed the twentieth-century conversation. The discussion about the reprise was rife with references to the past injustices in the history of this conflict, and any understanding of the nuances of the 1920 discussion is dependent on an understanding of that history.

A defining characteristic of the French monarchy of the ancien régime was its state religion of Catholicism. As described by Harry Paul, whose work The Second Ralliement: The Rapprochement between Church and State in France in the Twentieth Century is central to this study, the French kings were presented as God’s representatives, holding the power to appoint bishops and other members of the French clergy, the pope only bestowing spiritual authority upon the appointees after the fact. Papal bulls required the approval of the monarch before being published in France, and, unlike in some other countries, secular courts claimed jurisdiction over church affairs in legal matters. The state of the Catholic Church in France under the monarchy has been termed “Gallicanism,” which describes its pseudo-independence from traditional Roman Catholicism and papal authority, though a (sometimes tenuous) connection between the two was a constant.

Along with the rest of French society, this relationship changed dramatically in the 1790s. The fall of the French monarchy represented a massive blow to the position of the

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7 During the monarchy, the concept of laïcité was likely not yet known by the same name, but anti-clerical and secular sentiments still existed.
Catholic Church in France. Revolutionaries turned against the clergy, who they considered aristocrats associated with the monarchy they were working to destroy. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy in 1790 essentially severed the link between the French Catholic Church and the Vatican, placing all appointments under the direction of the government. Many French clericals objected strongly to this and were aggressively persecuted; they were exiled, imprisoned and even killed. As a result, many clericals came to align themselves more closely with monarchism and conservative groups, which provides part of the historical explanation for the general association, continuing into the twentieth century, of French Catholics with those forces more broadly. The nature of the Revolution itself was highly anti-clerical, or at least anti-Catholic, the cults that many of its leaders created and joined being hardly canonical.

Under Napoleon Bonaparte, with the Concordat of 1801, the relationship between the French state and the Church would be defined for the next century. The agreement, describing “Catholicism as ‘the religion of the majority of Frenchmen’ but not as the religion of the state,” rendered the Church “not even a quasi-independent body: it was the paid auxiliary of the government,” with clergy serving as employees of the state and appointments either made directly by the state or requiring its approval. In some ways, the Concordat formalized many parts of the unofficial Gallican state of affairs during the monarchy, but the agreement in fact represented the end of Gallicanism both in that there was no longer any official state religion, and in that the agreement was welcomed by the pope, who was satisfied with his investiture power over French bishops.

The relationship among the French state, the Church and the Vatican vacillated over the next seventy years (and even deteriorated over the course of Napoleon’s reign). But it is at the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian war in 1871 that the immediate background for the episode that is the subject of this study can be said to begin. The war was massively embarrassing for

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9 Ibid., 2.
10 Ibid., 4.
France, because of its outcome, its short duration, the capture of Napoleon III, the seizure of Alsace-Lorraine by Germany, and the Paris Commune of 1871, an internal threat only made possible by the external one. The Paris Commune was stridently anti-clerical: its governing body insisted on the separation of church and state and the seizure of Church property, and communards executed an archbishop and twenty priests in retaliation for nationalist executions. These steps foreshadowed those that would be taken by French anti-clericals a decade later, but also likely fueled the reactionary government that took power after the war ended, which served as the first governing body of the new Third Republic.  

This government, with Catholic and even monarchist sympathies, did not remain long at the helm, and a government run by radical republicans soon took its place. The republicans, firm believers in *laïcité*, began drawing lines in the sand. The French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war is often attributed by historians to strategical and technological deficiencies by the French, who were seen as somewhat “backwards” compared to Germany. But the new, radical-republican leadership of the Third Republic determined that it was partially the country’s Catholic connection that caused the disaster that was the *année terrible*, as the year of the war was termed, and took steps to weaken that connection.  

The legacy of the Franco-Prussian war did not only extend to a general anti-clerical attitude. The forfeiture of Alsace-Lorraine, which would not be regained until the Great War was won, had a profound impact on the French psyche. To have lost it was shameful, and Paul gives a sense of how great a symbol the region was to French people when he sardonically describes “the fetish made by France of the great joy supposedly felt by the Alsatians and Lorrainers on being delivered out of the bondage of Germany” almost five decades later. The region would come to play an important part, too, in the debate on the re-establishment of relations with the

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11 Ibid., 7.
Vatican. Alsace-Lorraine was not French between 1871 and 1918, and thus not subject to its laws, which meant that the laïque legislation that was passed during that period (discussed below) was argued by some not to be valid with respect to that territory. Two of the effects of this legislation were to change the process of papal appointments in France, in which the pope now appointed bishops directly without the consultation of the French government, and to terminate public subsidies of Church activities. Whether or not this legislation ought to apply to Alsace-Lorraine, left in a juridical gray area because it was German when the laws were passed, was bound to arise when a rapprochement with the pope was under consideration. Arguments about Alsace-Lorraine brought back into the discussion appeals to the bravery and strength showed by the French in fighting the Central Powers for Alsace-Lorraine’s liberation during World War I, thus turning the conversation back to the Great War, as so often occurred.

On the heels of the Franco-Prussian war and the ascension to power of a truly republican and secularly-inclined government, the 1880s was a time of strong mass sentiment and mobilization against the Church. Attempts by the pope and certain French clericals to draw France and the Vatican closer together during that decade and the next (the first ralliement alluded to by Harry Paul’s book) were a failure. The period saw the flourishing of the anti-clerical press, which published cartoons mocking the clerical courbeaux, the French term for “crow” used to mock priests. It is during this period that Léo Taxil wrote his anti-clerical satire of the French national anthem, the Marseillaise, calling for the populace to vote for deputies who would defend laïcité. Significant anti-clerical (or, perhaps more aptly, laïque) legislation was passed, specifically in the realm of education. Laws written in 1881 and 1882 by Minister of Public Instruction Jules Ferry abolished school fees, and formalized the mandatory and secular nature of education in France. In 1886, a law was passed forbidding religious figures from teaching in public schools and barring members of the clergy from teaching at universities.\textsuperscript{14} The passing of these laws is crucial to understanding French Catholics and their position in

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 7-8.
society a generation later, during the Great War and in the post-war period. The young men fighting and dying in the trenches during the war, and those entering the spheres of politics and journalism in the following years, were the first generation raised under the new, universal, laïque public education system. The system not only reared a more informed and better educated French generation, but it also gave its members common points of reference and developed in them a new kind of patriotism founded on a devotion to secular, republican ideals not incomparable to a religion. That the Church, for the most part, threw its lot in with the anti-Semitic anti-Dreyfusards in the divisive Dreyfus affair of the 1890s, in which a Jewish officer was charged with treason based on forged evidence, further hurt its image and flamed anti-clerical fires. Some even argued that the anti-clerical legislation of the following years was passed in direct response to the Dreyfus affair, conceived of “as a revenge against the anti-semites and the Catholics” for the role they played in it.\textsuperscript{15}

The turn of the century brought further abridgements of the rights of Catholics and the Church in France. With Association Law of 1901, religious orders could only be founded with the sanction of the Chamber, and the government began to close schools run by religious figures and seize Church property. Further minor laws presaged more dramatic change when, in 1904, a law made it illegal for those orders that were permitted to exist to do any kind of teaching. Moreover, crucifixes were removed from French courts in the same year.\textsuperscript{16} In 1905, the Law on the Separation of the Churches and the State formally brought an end to Napoleon’s Concordat of 1801. Its two main tenets were that “the Republic assured liberty of conscience and guaranteed the free exercise of religions,” and that “no recognition, salary, or subsidy was given to any religion.”\textsuperscript{17} While this rendered the Church mostly independent of the French government, it also lost it its subsidy of thirty-five million francs annually, forcing it to rely on donations. Perhaps even worse for the Church, the law prohibited organizations like the Church

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 11. Paul cites Georges Sorel, writing in the Revue Socialiste in 1901.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 15; Fabrègues, “Re-establishment of Relations,” 165.
\textsuperscript{17} Paul, The Second Ralliement, 18-19.
from owning “any property ‘extraneous to religion,’” instead instituting groups called *associations cultuelles*, run by a majority of lay people, to administer and manage Church holdings.\(^{18}\) These *associations* would be the source of some of the fiercest debate around Catholicism in France, and the pope refused to recognize the law or the *associations* as valid, viewing them as directly antithetical to the lawful hierarchy of the Church and issuing a formal interdict.\(^{19}\) The laws passed between 1901 and 1905 addressing the position of religious organizations in predominantly-Catholic France were the catalyst for the termination of the relationship with the Vatican, and the conversations surrounding them were thus rehearsed incessantly when the *reprise* was under consideration after World War I. In 1920, some argued that these laws did not apply to Alsace-Lorraine, asserting that Napoleon’s Concordat still ought to be in effect because the territory was not French during the years in which they were passed.

It was during this period, in the early 1900s, that the diplomatic relationship between France and the Vatican collapsed.\(^{20}\) The general air between the two was very hostile, as the preceding paragraph suggests, but the precise issue over which the split occurred was the process of nominating bishops. Prime Minister and anti-clerical Emile Combes would not yield symbolic power over the nominations to Pope Pius X, insisting that the French government appoint bishops instead of submitting nominations for papal approval. Combes refused even to give the names of his appointees to the pope. The pope, of course, was not enthusiastic about this state of affairs, and the ill will intensified when President Émile Loubet visited the Italian king

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\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.

\(^{20}\) The reigns of four popes are relevant to this study, among which Pius X’s reign and Benedict XV’s reign are central. Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) was considered a “political pope and a liberal pope,” whose policy towards France was reconciliatory despite the passing of the Jules Ferry laws and other anti-clerical legislation during his reign. Pope Pius X (1903-1914) was unwilling to compromise with the French government, particularly on the issues of the Law on the Separation of the Churches and the State and on the appointment of bishops. It was he who issued the interdict against the forming of *associations cultuelles*, and it was under his reign that the diplomatic relationship between France and the Vatican was severed. Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) served as pope during World War I and was criticized by the French for his neutrality. He actively sought a rapprochement with France, both during the war and after it. During his reign, the interdict against the associations was lifted, and the diplomatic relationship with France restored. Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) continued the policies of Pope Benedict XV with respect to France, issuing the encyclical *Maximam Gravissimamque* in 1924, which formally instituted diocesan associations, modifications of the *associations cultuelles* which were more favorable to the church because they gave more agency to French bishops and allowed them to manage church property directly. See Adrien Dansette, *Religious History of Modern France*, vol. II, trans. John Dingle (Freiburg: Herder, 1961), 58-60, 207-248, 327-343.
in 1904, which was viewed by the Vatican as tacit support of the state which they believed had been illegally occupying Rome, the rightful possession of the Vatican, since 1871. The pope snubbed the French president by not inviting him to the Holy See, causing the French ambassador to be recalled to Paris. When, in response, the pope summoned two French bishops to the Vatican without consulting the French government, France formally severed all ties with the Vatican.\footnote{Fabrègues, “The Re-establishing of Relations,” 165.}

A decade later, the war, the Church, the Vatican and the French carried out a complex \textit{pas de quatre}. On the political side, what then President Raymond Poincaré termed the \textit{union sacrée}, or sacred union, described the political unity among the various parties and factions that had been at odds for decades, and particularly that between anti-clericals and Catholics on the right, who put aside their differences in the country’s time of need to join forces behind the moderates. The \textit{union sacrée} also brought the French left back into the fold; the \textit{Section française de l'internationale ouvrière} (SFIO), which was the French section of the Second Communist International, had originally opposed the war among capitalists. After the assassination of its leader Jean Jaurès, however, the party caved to public pressure, unanimously voting to join the \textit{union sacrée}, vowing not to call any strikes over the course of the war.\footnote{Sean Larson, “The Rise and Fall of the Second International,” \textit{Jacobin}, July 14, 2017. https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/07/second-international-bernstein-rosa-luxemburg-unions-world-war.} The term came to apply to the French people, too, among whom tension between anti-clericals and Catholics was temporarily dissolved, as the two groups fought side-by-side in the trenches for a French victory. Though the \textit{union sacrée} was surely tested and underwent some mutation over the course of four years of conflict, Poincaré was ultimately correct in saying that ““\textit{[n]othing would break the sacred union of the French people,}” at least while the war continued to rage.\footnote{Kevin Passmore, \textit{The Right in France from the Third Republic to Vichy} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 180.} The \textit{union sacrée} has been argued to have been a kind of \textit{rapprochement} in and of itself, meaning that, by the war’s end ““a spiritual fraternity between Catholics and}
unbelievers’…[was] one of the dominant features of post-war France.\textsuperscript{24} What is certainly true is that French people of all persuasions widely respected the service of the clergy during the war. Though some were appointed non-combatant chaplains (who were still exposed to great risk), most of the clergy had to serve in the combat forces just as other Frenchmen did as a result of the laws of the preceding decades, which had removed their privileged status as religious figures with respect to the state; they suffered immense losses of life and witnessed the destruction of much Church property, and were greatly decorated for their brave service.\textsuperscript{25}

There was, however, a less rosy side to these relationships. The \textit{rumeurs infâmes}, or infamous rumors, propagated by French anti-clericals made accusations of all kinds against Catholics. At their most virulent, they accused the pope of being a secret Germanophile, conspiring with Germany to start the war and fight it successfully. More tepidly, they attacked the pope for not clearly enough decrying the actions of the Germans and Austrians, condemning him and even the French clergy for trying to profit from the war, using its miseries to bring people into the fold.\textsuperscript{26}

On balance, the impulse of historians is to argue that the war brought the religious and the non-religious closer together in post-war France. The French, in this view, sought only common ground, collective healing, and peace, both foreign and domestic. In her foundational work on gender in France at the end of the war and in the post-war period, \textit{Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France 1917-1927}, Mary Louise Roberts discusses the state of total destitution in France after World War I. Financial ruin, the massive destruction of land and property, and social instability dominated the landscape, and she writes that “\[u\]nder these conditions, a ‘return to normalcy’ became both a fierce desire and a frustrated dream.”\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{24} Fabrègues “The Re-establishing of Relations,” 163.
\textsuperscript{25} Kenneth Scott Latourette, \textit{Christianity in a Revolutionary Age: A History of Christianity in the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} Century} (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1973), 131.
What Roberts describes is echoed by Jay Winter as the central theme of his seminal study of post-war collective memory, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, which he defines as “the powerful, perhaps essential, tendency of ordinary people, of many faiths and of none, to face together the emptiness, the nothingness of loss in war.” If true, this sentiment was surely not universal, at least as it concerned the feelings of Catholics towards anti-clericals and vice versa. But that a general reconciliatory spirit did indeed exist to a degree goes some way in explaining the events that unfolded in the three years after the war, during which time France renewed its diplomatic relationship with the Vatican. Beginning in 1919, France was led by the *Bloc national*, the conservative controlling coalition of moderates and conservatives in the Chamber, which “represented the first shift to the right in parliament since 1871.” Much as the *union sacrée* was founded in large part in response to leftist opposition to the war, Paul writes that the *Bloc national* was a “hodgepodge…thrown together by the war and the post-war horror of Bolshevism.” In the *Bloc national*, it is likely that more than half of the deputies were practicing Catholics, as D.W. Brogan notes, which possibly contributed to the desire to return to the Vatican under the guise of reconciliatory spirit.

The story of the re-establishment of relations with the Vatican in the post-war period has been examined by historians before. Beyond the odd paragraph about the reopening of the French embassy at the Vatican in 1921 in larger studies devoted to the Third Republic, French Catholicism or post-war Europe, the re-establishment of diplomatic relations is typically written about in the context of the history of secularism and *laïcité* in France, and of the Law on the

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29 Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes*, 93.
Separation of Churches and the State of 1905. These studies often posit the event as a symbolic step on the road to a repaired relationship between France and the Vatican, in much the same way that the canonization of Joan of Arc, on May 16, 1920, six months before the Chamber voted to approve credits to establish the embassy, is also seen.\footnote{Paul Airiau, “Autour de la reconciliation franco-vaticane (1918-1924),” Reuve d'histoire diplomatique, no. 2 (2009), 177-189.}

Diplomatic ties between France and the Vatican were neither severed nor restored explicitly because of the war, which likely explains the lack of scholarship focused directly on the war’s relevance to the reprise. The most important work devoted to the subject of the re-establishing of relations between France and the Vatican in the post-war period is by Harry Paul, who was a historian at the University of Florida. His book has a chronological scope broader than my own in this study (which will largely concern the period of time leading up to the reopening of the embassy at the Vatican in 1921), covering the relationship as it developed throughout most of the 1920s. Paul devotes his third chapter to “The Renewal of Diplomatic Relations between France and the Vatican,” and the surrounding chapters also touch upon the topic.\footnote{Paul, The Second Ralliement, 37.} Paul’s focuses can be described as the political and the logistical; he answers the questions of “why?,” politically, and “how?,” logistically, France re-established relations with the Vatican. Neither is the direct focus of my own study, but knowing the answers, or range of possible answers, to those questions is fundamental to understanding the ways in which the war was invoked in the debates about Franco-Vatican relations in 1920 and 1921, which is the subject of this work. The following basic framework outlines the “how” and “why” behind the vote that established the Vatican embassy, which represents the foundation of the study of the arguments for and against it.

The Chamber of Deputies voted on granting financial credits to reopen the French embassy at the Vatican in November 1920. Though President Alexandre Millerand asked for the vote on March 11, 1920, the matter only came to the floor with a serious chance of passing on
November 16. Part of the reason for the delay was the desire to wait until the nature of the new prospective relationship became clearer, which it would at the conclusion of the negotiations between chargé d’affaires Jean Doulcet and Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri, who had been in negotiations since March. When Doulcet did finally return in June, some guidelines had been established, though many details of the prospective relationship were left somewhat amorphous. A few specific points had been outlined: an ambassador would be sent to Rome; a nuncio would be sent to France within a year of the ambassador’s arrival; and the Church would continue to support France in its protection of Roman Catholics in the Near East (and the rights of the state’s representatives in those regions would be reaffirmed). In the negotiations, Doulcet also “express[ed] the wish that specific support be given in the application of the Treaty of Versailles,” using the pope’s international “moral power.”

The most important catalyst in the negotiations occurred on November 25, 1920, when French Minister of Justice Maurice Colrat informed the Chamber of Deputies that the Vatican was willing to lift its interdict on the 1905 separation law. Benedict XV’s Congregation of Extraordinary Affairs “had decided that…there were no grounds for ‘maintaining the interdict against the law passed in France,’” which had been instituted by Benedict XV’s predecessor Pius X. The subsequent vote in the Chamber, which eventually took place on November 30, 1920, proposed financial credits to reopen the French embassy at the Vatican, to the tune of 236,812 francs. It passed by the significant margin of 391 for and 179 against. The bill would

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34 Ibid., 51, 56.
35 Ibid., 54. On the subject of French influence abroad, “[i]n the Near East,” wrote Paul, over 80,000 children were being educated by French citizens, seventy-five percent of whom were in religious orders....one of France’s prized prerogatives was its ancient albeit increasingly anachronous right of protection over all Catholic orders in the Near East, no matter their nationality.” Paul, The Second Ralliement, 44-45.
36 Known, at times, by his ceremonial title of “Keeper of the Seals.”
37 Fabrègues, “Re-establishment of Relations,” 169.
39 Journal Officiel De La République Française, “Débats Parlementaires,” November, 1918, 3410. Hereafter “JO” followed by the relevant page number. Citations from the Journal Officiel will appear in the text in translation, with the full citation in the original French in the footnotes. The Journal Officiel records the reactions of the rest of the Chamber to the comments made by its deputies—these will not appear in the text proper (except when deemed relevant), but will be left in the footnotes in the parentheticals in which they originally appear. The speaker will be
not technically pass into law until approved by the more anti-clerical senate over a year later on December 18, 1921. Nevertheless, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Astride Briand, appointed an ambassador-extraordinary to the Vatican by decree on May 18, two days after which a nuncio was sent to Paris.⁴⁰

Aside from a nebulously favorable social climate in which French people in historically opposed camps sought peace and reconciliation after living together through the horrors of war, what was the impetus for the re-establishment of Franco-Vatican relations? From the perspective of the French republicans, appeasing Catholics, whose service and sacrifice during the war only made louder their demands for governmental concessions in their favor, was easily worth the only tangible downside to the move, which would have been to upset the anti-clericals. Some felt, too, that there was material gain to be had in the sphere of international relations from having a negotiating seat at the Vatican, where almost all countries in Europe were represented. But why, from the Vatican’s perspective, was this move desirable, and why lift the interdict on a law that, without question, directly conflicted with Church hierarchical practices? For one, Benedict XV may have viewed the rejection of the law of separation as somewhat of a lost cause. Reconciliatory spirit or not, the twentieth-century French Republic was not likely to make the kinds of massive concessions to the Church that Pius X had hoped for. Beyond that, France’s role as a victor in the war gave it significant power in negotiating what peace in Europe would look like, and it was certainly in the Vatican’s interest to be as great a player in that conversation as possible. The pope was also concerned with the future of the Catholic Church in France and likely figured that, in his effort to facilitate favorable circumstances for the Church in the land of his “eldest daughter,” having an open channel of communications was preferable to the hostility of the last two decades.⁴¹ Not all members of the

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indicated in the text proper; speakers will only be indicated in footnotes when excerpts from multiple speakers are included in the same citation.

⁴⁰ Fabrègues, “Re-establishment of Relations,” 169.
clergy were aligned on this issue—many French clerics disagreed with the pope, counting themselves forsaken by his lifting of the interdict, which they viewed as the last bargaining chip of the Catholic Church in the struggle to win a more tenable and dignified position for French priests and bishops in terms of appointments and Church ownership of property. Though constrained in their protests by the strict hierarchy of the Church, in which direct and public disagreement with the pope was rare, priests and bishops made their feelings known to him, their voices joining the cacophony of opinions about re-establishing of diplomatic relations from French Catholics, French anti-clericals, the Vatican, and other groups.

Paul frequently cites contemporaneous Catholic publications, newspaper and journal articles in the popular press, and the debates held in the Chamber of Deputies—sources also used in this study. Neither his work nor that of other scholars, though, focuses explicitly on the arguments found in these sources, opting instead to address the process of the ralliement in a linear, event-focused manner. Paul says little on the invocation of the war as an argumentative strategy, thereby missing both the war’s importance as a tool to a political end and the effect such rhetoric had in helping to shape French narratives about the war. I will treat the arguments made about the reopening of the embassy directly, looking closely at how, why, and to what effect these sources bring the war into their discussions of the reprise. I will show that the broad conversation about the re-establishment, directed by politicians, religious officials and the press, drew upon French thought about the war and knowingly transformed French conceptions about the conflict in the process.

Over the course of this study, the presence of the war will be felt in varying degrees. It was at times invoked in explicit and detailed ways, whose effect and intention were somewhat easy to divine. At other times, the war’s presence was much subtler, only tangentially visible in secondary and tertiary references and meanings. I include these, too, in an attempt to show the entire canvas of war-related rhetoric and discussion within the context of the reprise; to only

42 Fabrègues, “Re-establishment of Relations,” 171-172.
address the explicit would be to miss some of the cleverest, the most manipulative, and the most unconsiously revealing attempts to leverage or even manufacture common histories and beliefs on the part of the French for particular purposes. Wherever and however obviously this rhetoric appears, its prevalence speaks to the powerful grip the war still had on the French psyche in 1920, to the shrewd understanding of that fact by those who tried to leverage memories about the war, and to the way the popular history of the war was shaped and developed in the years following its conclusion.
Chapter One

Weapons of Peace: Debates in the Chamber of Deputies

The entire spectrum of debate about the reprise can be said to surround the vote in the Chamber of Deputies on November 30, 1920, which approved the credits for the French embassy at the Vatican. The voices of those in the Chamber of Deputies in France, who were popularly elected to represent the people (though suffrage was far from universal as women did not win the right to vote until 1945), may provide the best representation of their constituents’ points of view, and, conversely, could certainly have influenced them.¹ Though the speeches on the floor of the Chamber were made in large part to convince other deputies, excerpts and even full reproductions were widely printed. In fact, much of the writing in the Catholic and popular press that exists on the subject of the reprise concerns the November debates in the Chamber leading up to the vote—newspapers and journals printed quotes from the politicians, celebrating certain points and decrying others in their editorials. Because of the dependence of much of the general discussion on that which transpired on the floor of the Chamber, this first chapter will treat the Chamber debates directly.

Arguments used in the debate on re-establishing relations with the Vatican in political circles give us an idea not only of that which parliamentarians felt about the matter, but also of that which they believed would be effective in convincing their political colleagues and the general public. Across most of the political spectrum, from the conservative (and often Catholic) right to the socialist radical left, World War I was key to the discussion. While not directly related to the issue of a rapprochement between France and the pope, the war still seemed to serve as

a fulcrum around which swung the debate about the renewal of Franco-Vatican relations. In
political circles, its impact can be seen on a number of levels, from explicit and obvious
expressions to subtle linguistic hints. Although it is not possible to establish a causal link
between such rhetoric and the outcome of the final vote, the fact that it features so prominently
in the speeches on the Chamber floor is itself revealing.

This chapter will illuminate the various ways in which politicians weaved collective
recollections about the war into their contentions for and against the reprise. Whatever their
reasons for supporting or rejecting the proposed rapprochement, incorporating the war into their
rhetoric was the common denominator among the deputies’ speeches. I will argue that the
broader effect of these invocations, beyond the intended persuasion about the diplomatic issue
with the Vatican, was to thrust upon listeners and readers the deputies’ historical interpretations
of the war, which became distorted when employed to further this specific agenda. The forms
these arguments took were many, and were rehearsed in the religious and popular press time
and time again. This chapter, therefore, will also serve as an outline of the kinds of arguments
that will recur throughout this work, and as a framework through which to understand them.
Various kinds of arguments have been delineated by theme herein, but as will be seen, the
branches of discourse were highly interrelated, and themes found in any given section are often
to be found in others as well. A larger portion of this chapter will be devoted to the arguments in
favor of the re-establishment than to those against it. The imbalance is a function of the
composition of the Chamber itself; the final vote of 391 in favor of the credits for the embassy
and 179 against speaks to the overwhelming support for the reprise on the part of the
representatives.²

In normal circumstances, the rhetoric might never have had an opportunity to be heard
in the Chamber, as the vote would not have been brought to the floor in the first place. In posing

a vote for the credits with which to establish an embassy, President Alexandre Millerand was implicitly asking the Chamber to vote on whether or not this relationship should exist at all. Logistical embassy affairs were typically up to the discretion of the President of the Republic, and it seems that Millerand could have named a new ambassador to the Vatican, and maybe even invited a nuncio to Paris, under existing law, only asking for the logistical support, like the necessary finances, afterwards. Some deputies even expressed the wish that he had done so. Millerand likely knew that the majority in the Chamber would have found no fault in his acting unilaterally on an issue that found much of its support in conservative circles—the coalition constituting the political element of the *union sacrée* was technically no more, replaced by the *Bloc national* in the November 1919 elections, which Paul categorizes as “a distinctly conservative offspring of the *union sacrée.*” But Millerand did not choose to act independently on the issue of the embassy at the Vatican, perhaps because he knew how divisive the topic would be, and thus how acting without consulting the Chamber would be viewed, based on the contentious history of religion, Catholicism and anti-clericalism in France.

Though this section will focus almost exclusively on those arguments made on the floor of the Chamber in which World War I and narratives incorporating and surrounding it were central, these arguments certainly did not comprise the entirety of the verbal battle. Times in which deputies either intentionally leveraged the war or genuinely invoked it to make their points

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3 *Journal Officiel De La République Française*, “Débats Parlementaires,” November, 1918, 3256-3257. Hereafter “JO” followed by the relevant page number. Deputy Georges Mandel explained that, under normal circumstances, the president does not pose such matters to the parliament. He cited the fact that the Chamber was not consulted after the war, when diplomatic relations were resumed with Germany, Austria and Bulgaria, for example. He, for one, would have preferred for the Chamber to have been presented with a *fait accompli*. « Le Gouvernement vous en a laissé pleine et entière responsabilité…J'avoue que, pour ma part, j'aurais de beaucoup préféré qu'on nous mît purement et simplement en présence du fait accompli. C'eût été plus conforme aux traditions parlementaires. (Mouvements divers.)…On n'a pas consulté le Parlement, -- M. l'abbé Lemire le rappelait très Justement — lorsqu'on a repris les relations avec l'Allemagne, l'Autriche, la Bulgarie. On ne nous a pas consultés lorsqu'on a envoyé des représentants à Prague, à Varsovie, ou lorsqu'on a reconnu le général Wrangel…comme [avait fait Gambetta], il a nommé les ministres et sollicité les crédits après. Pourquoi n'a-t-on pas agi de même en ce qui concerne la reprise des relations avec le Vatican ? » ; JO 3250. Jules Lemire echoed the sentiment: “To send or recall an ambassador is a power of the executive branch. We were not consulted for Munich or for Berlin.” « Envoyer un ambassadeur ou le rappeler, c'est un acte du pouvoir exécutif. (Applaudissements sur divers bancs à gauche et au centre.) On ne nous a pas consultés pour aller à Berlin ou à Munich. »


5 The matter was also discussed in the Senate, but this study will focus exclusively on those debates held in the Chamber of Deputies, as those held in the Senate were much less extensive.
are more fertile ground for my analysis, but an understanding of the nature of the rest of what was said is useful for framing these arguments. There were many who were convinced that the re-establishment of relations with the Vatican was a wise political move, pure and simple. Paul summarizes the most common justifications of this belief: “In the immediate post-World War I period, those favoring the re-opening of a French embassy at the Vatican proclaimed the necessity of this diplomatic démarche on the basis of the relaxation of Church-State tensions in Italy, the need to negotiate with the pope on Alsace-Lorraine, the inestimable value of papal aid in foreign relations, and the need for a juridical status for the Church in France.”\(^6\) Each of these points appears in the debate records in many iterations, often argued straightforwardly and dispassionately. An analysis of these political arguments and their practical implications is the subject of parts of Paul’s study, but this chapter will describe the way that the war functioned as a rhetorical tool within the arguments that were made about Franco-Vatican relations in the Chamber. It will show that, in submitting points about the value or harm inherent in reopening the embassy, the politicians attempted to buttress or reconfigure certain ways of thinking about and remembering different facets of the war. The most common format this rhetoric took was one that reminded listeners of the unity showed by the French during the war and called for its continuing into the future.

**Solidarity and the *Union Sacrée***

In broad terms, many of the deputies in favor of the *ralliement* used arguments relating to the war in an effort to revive the spirit of togetherness and cooperation that arose between 1914 and 1918 in French society and in political circles as a response to the immense threat

that the war represented to all French people. The unifying effect of war is not unique to France or to World War I, but the brand of unity appealed to by the deputies was in many ways particular to France during this period. In this sense, some in the Chamber presented the war almost as a solvent to the internal struggles between laïcité and Catholicism that had come to define pre-war life in France in the twentieth century. A moderate centrist representing the Seine region, Paul Chassaigne-Goyon, for example, expresses the desire to hear “[n]o more classical reminiscences of our epic struggles of yesteryear, at a time when we French did not love one another as we do today.” He spoke of the “real anxiety in seeing the awakening, from a lethargic sleep into which the war plunged them, of clerical and anti-clerical passions, and of all the old quarrels between Gallican or ultramontane Catholics and free thinkers, among most of whom, since 1914, the desire to maintain national unity, and the firm will to show themselves to be good Frenchmen first and foremost, dominates all sentiment.” “Yesteryear” refers to the pre-war period, and the fact that during it the “French did not love one another as we do today,” the argument implies, is a result of the unification of the French resulting from the war. Within Chassaigne-Goyon’s statement is both a celebration of the way things had been during the war, and could still be, and a warning about the way things might be heading. To grant the credits for the embassy, he implied, was a step towards preserving the spirit of 1914, in which differences were forgotten and French people banded together towards a common end, and projecting it into the future. Whether that feeling of togetherness really had “dominated all sentiment” is more dubious—in this claim we see the spores of a constructed narrative that fetishizes certain elements of the war, accentuating and romanticizing them in an effort to sway the opinions of others about the rapprochement with the Vatican.

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7 This, of course, is a gross simplification. The supposed unity was often fractured during the war, as will be examined below in discussions of the “infamous rumors.”

8 JO 3297. «…plus de réminiscences classiques de nos luttes épiques d’antan, à l’époque où les Français ne s’aimaient pas encore comme aujourd’hui, que d’inquiétude réelle de voir sortir du sommeil léthargique, dans lequel la guerre les a plongées, les passions confessionnelles et anticonfessionnelles et toutes les vieilles querelles entre catholiques gallicans ou ultramontains et libre penseurs, chez qui depuis 1914, pour la plupart au moins, le désir de maintenir l’union nationale, la ferme volonté de se montrer en toute circonstance bons Français d’abord, domine tout sentiment. »
The celebrated Astride Briand, a once and future prime minister of France who was serving as a deputy from the Loire-Inférieure region in 1920, adopted a similar position, putting an emphasis on the importance of holding on dearly to the silver lining of the war that civic peace and unity represented. He put forth an argument likely made all the more convincing because of the nature of his own political background. Almost two decades earlier, he had served as the Chamber’s spokesperson on the divisive subject of the separation of the churches from the state. He was instrumental not only in creating and arguing for the various pieces of legislation that comprised the laws of separation, but also in their implementation and enforcement. The Assemblée Nationale’s online biographical resource for French politicians, many of whose entries are pulled from journalist and historian Jean Jolly’s Dictionnaire des parlementaires français de 1789 à 1977, indicates that Briand was well-liked by politicians on both sides of the aisle and respected as a rhetorician, and that his commitment was to social peace, order and welfare more than to ardent anti-clericalism. This meant that, when he argued for the re-establishment of relations with the Vatican in 1920, he did so against some of his former comrades who had probably fought with him for the separation laws on firmer ideologically anti-clerical grounds.\(^9\) He addressed the Chamber with a clear and simple message: “It must be said that, when the war broke out, these problems were settled, and the war created a great current of solidarity to which we must hold on as much as possible without eliminating that which is the strength of a great country like France: the free expression of ideas, which can oppose each other, and an environment in which strongly voiced opposing ideas do not have dire consequences.”\(^10\) A true diplomat in a way that some of his colleagues would not necessarily prove to be later on in this analysis, his was a measured but strong assertion. Like


\(^10\) JO 3378. « Il faut bien dire que, lorsque la guerre a éclaté ces problèmes étaient réglés et qu’elle a créé un grand courant de solidarité, dont il faudrait garder la plus grande partie possible (Applaudissements à droit, au centre et sur divers bancs à gauche), sans éliminer ce qui fait la force d’un grand pays comme la France : les idées, qui peuvent s’opposer les unes aux autres, dans des conditions telle qu’il n’en résulte pas des conséquences irréparables. »
Chassaigne-Goyon, the thrust of Briand’s appeal was that, along with its destruction, the war brought to France the “great current of solidarity” that he references, which the French must make every effort to sustain. A failure to vote for the resumption of diplomatic relations with the Vatican, by his logic, would be to forfeit that gain so expensively won.

Marc Sangnier, who spent his life encouraging a rapprochement between Catholicism and the French republic, echoed similar sentiments. The Catholic deputy, also representing the Seine region, founded the movement Le Sillon, which fought for an improved relationship between anti-clericals and Catholics, and promoted a brand of French Catholic socialism. Its stances were non-dogmatic, for which the group was condemned by Pope Pius X in 1910. Sangnier opined on the great potential the reprise had in consolidating war-time harmony, and healing the religious tensions within France: “I believe that we are very close to a great reconciliation, that we have never been as close as this…. We must take lessons from the war: for five years, all French people found themselves united; today, that union must endure. However, that union must be founded not only on patriotism, but also on republican and democratic ideals, and if we re-establish relations with the Vatican, this will be much more easily accomplished.”

Despite the direct condemnation of his movement by the pope a decade earlier, he argued strongly for the reopening of the embassy. His rhetorical gestures to patriotism and to the war would have carried extra weight among his colleagues in the Chamber: he had received the Croix de guerre and the Légion d’honneur, the highest possible French honors for his services in the war. Politicians like Chassaigne-Goyon, Briand and Sangnier embedded their arguments in supporting the embassy in a worldview that looked

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12 JO 3392. « Je crois, quant à moi, que nous sommes tout près de la grande réconciliation, que jamais nous n’en avons été plus près. On nous a dit qu’entre 1905, et 1920 il y avait eu la guerre. C’est vrai. Encore faut-il que nous sachions en tirer les leçons : pendant cinq ans, tous les Français se sont trouvés unis ; il faut aujourd’hui que cette union demeure. Or, cette union doit se faire, non pas seulement sur le terrain patriotique, mais sur le terrain républicain et démocratique, et si nous reprenons les relations avec le Vatican, cela deviendra singulièrement plus facile. »
almost nostalgically back at the war, at a time, according to their narrative, when all the French were as one.

Deputies engaging in the discourse about togetherness during the Great War were aided by the fact that a story about this moment of unity had already been named for them. Discussion of national unity in the face of adversity was likely a common thread in political post-war Europe, but the concept of the union sacrée, mentioned in this study’s introduction, denoted a specific brand of French unity, with specific accompanying rhetoric and narratives. The political truce described by the same name was no more, but many in favor of the reprise argued that the spirit of the union sacrée endured, or ought to endure, into the post-war period. To the end of engendering support for the reopening of the embassy, deputies appealed to the popular, and not the explicitly political, connotation of the term described by historian Kenneth Scott Latourette as “a truce…declared between clericals and most anti-clericals.”13 It is a particularly interesting phrase in the context of this discussion because of three specific ideas its use invokes. First, it can be seen as an explicit reference to the war and France’s role in it (as the war was its raison d’être). Second, it calls to mind the unity of the French people and of French political parties. Third, it raises questions about the implications of uniting Catholics with anti-clericals, and about using the term “sacred” in and of itself, by a country so committed before the war to an official policy of state secularism, especially since its diplomatic break with the Vatican in 1904 and the passage of the Law of Separation of the Churches and the State in 1905.14

No member of the Chamber fought more resolutely for the re-establishment of relations with the Vatican than did Georges Noblemaire, and none employed a narrative invoking the union sacrée more effectively. Noblemaire was the secretary of the Chamber’s finance committee, a military attaché to Rome during the war, and a representative from the Hautes-

Alpes region. He made an explicit appeal to emotion, and not to reason, in a speech supporting the vote for the financial credits to establish the embassy. In a speech he made on November 16, 1920, the first day of extensive Chamber discussion about the *reprise*, Noblemaire stated:

First I will pose a purely sentimental argument, but for us, sentiment often makes more sense than reason…: make French Catholics happy! (“Very good, very good!” on the right). Certainly they do not ask for any favorable treatment; they know that many others, everyone of all confessions and conditions, did just as well as they during the war, but they also know that no one did better than they, and they thus deserve from their compatriots this brotherly gesture that will perpetuate the *union sacrée*.16

In the excerpt of Noblemaire’s speech, evidence of each of the three associations with the term *union sacrée*, enumerated above, can be discerned: he spoke directly of the war, of French unity, and of French Catholics. At this early stage in the debate, not yet dominated by technical discussion of the ways in which an embassy at the Vatican would violate or comply with the laws of separation, or the multifarious foreign policy implications of the contemplated move, Noblemaire’s plea was for the perpetuation of the *union sacrée* out of a feeling of *fraternité* towards French Catholics. His employing of the foundational notion in the conception of the French Republic was likely no accident, but brotherhood, in an abstract sense, did not much bear upon the diplomatic démarche at hand. Using rhetorical devices like the *union sacrée* and brotherhood, Noblemaire effectively turned the conversation about the *reprise* into an entirely different one. Who could argue, after all, that the French should not be united, or that they should not treat one another in a brotherly manner?

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16 JO 3225. « Un argument de pur sentiment d'abord, mais, chez nous, le sentiment a souvent bien plus raison que la raison, et je pense que l'ingénuité même de ma formule va lui valoir votre faveur: faire plaisir aux catholiques français ! (Très bien ! très bien ! à droite.) Certes, ils ne demandent nul privilège ; ils savent que beaucoup d'autres, que tous les autres, de toutes confessions et de toutes conditions, ont fait aussi bien qu'eux pendant la guerre, mais ils se rendent aussi témoignage qu'il n'en est pas qui aient fait mieux, et qu'ils ont donc mérité de leurs compatriotes ce geste fraternel où va se perpétuer l'union sacrée. (Applaudissements au centre et à droite.) »
Noblemaire united the religious and the patriotic even more explicitly as he continued his speech, which turned its focus to French missionaries abroad. He argued their mission would be helped by a strengthened relationship with the Vatican:

It is not without emotion…that your thoughts should cross the seas, where this piece of news would evoke happiness everywhere, among the French missionaries whose patriotism rivals that of the pioneers of secular France, and where it will inflate their chests upon which rest that other cross…and cause the disinherited populations there to bless the magnificent and sweet name of France.17

Uttered directly after the preceding excerpt, Noblemaire’s words represent a subtler war reference nested within an unrelated argument. The “other cross” to which he refers is likely the Croix de guerre, or Cross of War, the same awarded to Sangnier and the other great heroes from the First World War. The designation in some ways parallels the union sacrée in that the award was created as a result of or a response to the war, and in that it has a religious quality to it. By no means was the Croix de guerre explicitly related to Catholicism, but the reference to a cross, in both its name and shape (similar to a Greek cross with arms of equal length) is unavoidable. Noblemaire’s narrative invited an association between war heroes and Catholic missionaries, each of whom bore crosses. In this way, he again imbued his narrative about the war, centered around ideas of French unity and valor, with a religious overtones, and even incorporated a message about spreading the glory of France to foreign lands. The union sacrée rhetoric was picked up Xavier de Magallon who, like Sangnier, actually received the war medal to which Noblemaire made reference in his speech.

De Magallon portrayed the union sacrée as the only route to a bright French future. The deputy from the Hérault region in southern France had volunteered to fight in the war and won the Croix de guerre for his service.18 Though de Magallon was a war hero, Jolly quotes a description of his platform, which lobbied for a France fighting “no more war, either external or

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17 Ibid. « Et ce n'est pas sans émotion, j'en suis sûr, mes chers collègues, que votre pensée, franchissant les mers, évoquera, partout où, rivalisant d'ardeur patriotique avec les pionniers de la France laïque, sont des missionnaires français, la grande joie qui, à cette nouvelle, va gonfler des poitrines voisine avec l'autre croix, ou qui va faire palpiter d'aise les ailes de cornettes perchées sur les misères de populations déshéritées et leur faisant bénir le magnifique et le doux nom français. »
In defense of the *ralliement*, he said on the floor of the Chamber that “[t]he *union sacrée* is only a banal term for those whom it bothers. We must give it back its full meaning to make it shine! It will be the formula of our salvation and of our grandeur in peace as it was in war if we make it a living and fertile truth!”

Echoes of French grandeur and glory, like that in de Magallon’s speech, reverberated through the Chamber whenever the *union sacrée* was invoked (and often even when it was not). The original “meaning” of the *union sacrée*, to which de Magallon insisted that his colleagues permit France to return, was presumably one in which squabbles over matters like the reopening of the embassy would never had occurred, as the French would never have opposed one another in such a way. When he says that the *union sacrée* “will be the formula of our salvation and of our grandeur in peace as it was in war,” he not only bolstered the perspective of a totally united France from 1914 to 1918, but went so far as to suggest that the very reason for the French victory was this unity.

Allusions to general unity and the *union sacrée* crop up in many different kinds of arguments in favor of the *reprise* both in the Chamber debates and in the Catholic press and the popular press in the chapters to follow. In each case throughout this study, the effect is similar to that of the examples provided by Chassaigne-Goyon, Briand, Sangnier, Noblemaire and de Magallon—the arguments presented the impossible choice to their opponents of acquiescing to the reopening of the embassy at the Vatican or of undoing French unity, which was one of the only positive results of the war. The arguments rested upon a specific interpretation of the war, in which French people of all creeds and persuasions were united, that should not be assumed to have been reflective of the reality. Auxiliary implied interpretations were also pushed in these excerpts from the deputies: that the most important outcome of the war was the increased cohesion among French people, for example, or that the reason for the winning of the war was

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19 Ibid. « Les grands titres de son programme étaient : “un gouvernement qui gouverne, plus de guerre extérieure, plus de guerre intérieure.” »

20 JO 3304. « L’union sacrée n’est un mot banal que pour ceux qu’il importune. Il suffit de lui rendre son plein sens pour lui rendre son éclat. Elle sera la formule de notre salut et de notre grandeur dans la paix comme dans la guerre si nous en faisons une réalité vivante et féconde, une vérité ! (Vifs applaudissements à droite et au centre.) »
the unity between Catholics and anti-clericals. In using that unity as the underlying assumption of their argument, the deputies cited herein were in fact contributing to creation of a specific narrative about World War I, which rejects any histories of internal strife or discord and insists that the French were at their best and their most united when fighting the Central Powers.

A Debt to Repay and Alsace-Lorraine

Already visible within this chapter in excerpts of deputies’ speeches is another of the most dominant strands of the arguments that were heard in the Chamber: the idea that there existed a debt in France that needed to be or ought to be repaid. The debt stemmed from the war, but the question was to whom it was owed. Those in favor of the ralliement argued that French Catholics, both through their brave actions in the war and because of the great extent to which they had suffered, had a right to some kind of recompense. Though, in his discussion of the union sacrée excerpted above, Noblemaire argued that French people of all creeds and persuasions fought equally well in the war, he planted seeds of an argument incorporating an outstanding debt in saying that French Catholics “deserve from their compatriots this brotherly gesture that will perpetuate the union sacrée.” Catholics did indeed play a great role in the war effort, and Paul writes in his book that “the clergy acquitted themselves extremely well in the war.” Latourette sets the stage for what some may have felt earned French Catholics thanks in the post-war years:

Out of the 32,699 priests mobilized, 4,618 were killed. The discipline, courage, and patriotism of the clergy who served as common soldiers elicited praise, even from rabid anti-clericals....9,378 were awarded the Croix de guerre....Many of the officers, including some of the generals, notably Marshal Foch, were devout and unabashed Roman Catholics. By their courage and patriotism, they won respect for their faith. In regions invaded by the German armies, the clergy...helped to keep up morale, and sought to protect the church buildings....Bishops and clergy led in prayers for victory and peace.

21 JO 3225. « ...ils ont donc mérité de leurs compatriotes ce geste fraternel où va se perpétuer l'union sacrée. »
23 Latourette, Christianity in a Revolutionary Age, 131.
Reminding others of Catholic conduct during the war was a useful strategic lever for politicians to pull—the numbers cited above were indisputable, and Catholics who had been decorated with the *Croix de guerre* and the *Légion d'honneur* even sat in the Chamber.

The sacrifice and service that Latourette describes was compounded by the utter decimation of Church property in France during the war, which abbot and deputy Jules Lemire from the Nord region described before the Chamber. Ordained in 1878, Lemire had a long and celebrated political career; he described himself as a Catholic socialist, differentiating himself from most French Catholics, who were frequently on the political right. In the matter of the *ralliement*, though, he and they likely found themselves on the same side, as in his arguments he used the great losses of French Catholics to suggest that they were owed the comparatively small compensation of a closer relationship with the pope. He described the losses, saying that 3,004 churches had been destroyed, and that the buildings were “without bell towers, without roofs, without clocks, without altars. Is it not possible for any of you,” he asked, “by a sentiment of pity, to give to any of these churches any offering…any gift? No messieurs. The churches can receive neither gift nor bequest. Is there order in that?”

Lemire seems to have referred to the secular legislation from the beginning of the century, which prevented the Church from receiving any funds from the government. In citing statistics about Church losses and describing the devastation of Church property as he witnessed it, he changed the criteria for the evaluation of arguments, from ones that evaluated the impact of reopening the embassy at the Vatican to ones that judged both the sacrifices of Catholics during the war and the injustice of the separation laws that prevented the government from providing aid to the Church. He posited

24 AN: Jules Lemire, [http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/fiche/(num_dept)/7752](http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/fiche/(num_dept)/7752).
25 JO: 3250. « Et nos églises ? Ont-elles quelque droit ? Est-ce l'ordre pour elles ? Il y a le long du front 3,004 églises détruites, dans les castel, sans clocher, sans toit, sans murs, sans autel. Est-ce qu'il est possible à l'un d'entre vous, par un sentiment de pitié, d'envoyer à une de ces églises un objet quelconque, de lui donner d'une manière léga le vieu missel venu de Marseille ou de Bordeaux, un calice offert par Lyon, une chasuble de prêtre, cadeau de ceux qui en ont deux ! Est-ce possible ? Non, messieurs. [Applaudissements à droite et au centre.] Ces églises ne peuvent recevoir ni un don ni un legs. Est-ce l'ordre cela ? (Très bien ! très bien ! au centre et à droite. — Interruptions à l'extrême gauche.) »
the reprise, in a way, as a substitute recompense for Catholics, who could not receive direct aid from the government.

Lemire also delved more specifically into the events of the war, and turned the discussion acutely personal: “There are 1.5 million victims of the war, of which a million are practicing Catholics. Can I, a Catholic like them, a parent of one of those poor fallen soldiers, be certain that every year at Mass he will be remembered? Can I be sure that every year there will be a solemn service, a visit to his grave? No. This is not civil order.”26 The link between ensuring that there would be services for fallen Catholic soldiers and reopening an embassy at the Vatican was not clear, though, again, he may have been making reference to the pecuniary relationship between Catholic churches in France and the French state. What is clear is that his invocation of the war, and specifically of the great suffering of Catholics in the war, is pointed, and meant to elicit a sense of guilt among those planning to vote against the opening of the embassy and the reconnection between France and the spiritual center of the Catholic faith. Lemire’s tactic is the strategic mobilization of one aspect of the war for a specific political end. His discourse assumed a history of the war in which French Catholics made a sacrifice over and above the sacrifice made by their countrymen for the patrie, for which they must be paid back, helping to spawn and fuel the flames of that very particular way of thinking about this history of the war in French minds.

The question of debt, and particularly of a debt towards Catholics, was often intimately connected with the question of Alsace-Lorraine. Not only was the region deeply Catholic, but it was argued by some to have suffered even more than the general French population, in that its older inhabitants, who were originally French citizens, had lived under German rule for almost fifty years. It was thus, according to the deputies employing this rhetoric, owed a great deal, of

26 Ibid. « Il y a un million et demi de victimes de la guerre, parmi lesquelles il y a, je puis le dire, un million de catholiques pratiquants. Est-ce que j'ai la possibilité, moi catholique comme eux, moi parent d'un de ces pauvres soldats tombés, d'obtenir que, tous les ans, au prône de la messe on rappelle sa mémoire ? Est-ce que j'ai la possibilité d'obtenir que tous les ans il y ait pour lui un obit solennel, une visite à sa tombe ? Non. Ce n'est donc pas l'ordre. (Très bien ! très bien ! ait centre et sur divers bancs à droite.— Bruit à l'extrême gauche.) »
which the reprise would only constitute a small part. Isidore Méritan, deputy from the Vaucluse in southern France, made the connection to Alsace specifically in one of his addresses to the Chamber on the subject of the reconnection with the Vatican. Jolly makes note of the politician’s persuasive powers and the important role he played in this discussion. He points out that Méritan was deeply Catholic, perhaps becoming more so over time, and that he became the leader of a branch of the fédération nationale catholique, a group which attempted to fight against secular elements in French society, after his retirement from politics in 1924. It is with this in mind that Méritan’s commentary on the Chamber floor should be read:

And our well-loved brothers in Alsace, who are just as French as we, and maybe even more French than we, for they have proven their fortitude through the trials they underwent, and since, more than we, they have suffered, having waited for half a century in mourning under the German yoke. Will we not have to, and have we not already had to speak for them, for them and for ourselves, in their interests as in our own, forever mingled? What a point of shame— and I do not just mean one of regret—it would be for them to be the involuntary reason for a sad misunderstanding of which they, these well-loved brothers finally recovered, would be the innocent victims! And for us all, gentlemen, what a poignant anguish and what a painful conflict it would be! The inevitable conclusion emerges from these events, too rapidly unfolding: we must meet with the pope, and work with him.

Méritan’s words stand out for the direct links they drew among the war, the suffering of those living in Alsace-Lorraine, and the matter of the ralliement. We cannot know what motives the deputy had in his heart, but whether or not his emphatic expression was a genuine example of Paul’s observed “fetish made by France of the great joy supposedly felt by the Alsatians and Lorrians on being delivered out of the bondage of Germany,” it would appear that there was

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28 JO 3307. « Et nos bien-aimés frères d’Alsace, ceux-là Français comme nous, Français presque plus que nous, puisque sacrés par les épreuves, puisque, plus que nous, ils ont souffert, nous ayant attendus inébranlablement durant un demi-siècle dans le deuil et sous le joug. (Vifs applaudissements.) N’aurons-nous pas, n’avons-nous pas eu déjà à parler d’eux, pour eux et pour nous, dans leur intérêt comme dans le nôtre, à jamais confondus ? Quel sujet de désolation — je ne dis pas seulement de regret — ce serait pour eux, d’être la cause involontaire ou l’occasion de tristes malentendus dont ils seraient peut-être aussi, ces bien-aimés frères retrouvés, les innocentes victimes ! (Applaudissements.) Et pour nous tous, messieurs, alors, quelles poignantes angoisses et quels douloureux conflits ! Une conclusion inéluctable, irrésistible, se dégage de cette course trop rapide à travers quelques-uns seulement des terrains où, par la force même des choses, nous sommes invinciblement amenés à nous rencontrer avec le pape et à travailler avec lui. »
some intentionality in his speech.²⁹ Though Méritan was not himself from Alsace-Lorraine, it is not difficult to imagine the deputy's playing off, at least to some degree, this popular fetishizing that Paul describes in order to further the re-establishment effort. That the most dramatic part of this fifty-year “occupation,” as the French described it, occurred during the conflict, and that it was the war itself which led to the ultimate liberation of Alsace-Lorraine, necessarily tethers arguments of this kind to the war, a fact of which the deputies deploying this kind of rhetoric certainly would have been cognizant.

Alfred Oberkirch, member of the right-wing Entente républicaine démocratique and representative of the Bas-Rhin region in Alsace, combined rhetoric about the union sacrée with an argument about a French debt owed to his native Alsace-Lorraine as he called for the ralliement.³⁰ Describing him as “profoundly attached to Alsace,” Jolly notes that the deputy dedicated his political service to the reintegration of the reclaimed territories into France, and expressed his “ardent patriotism” in the very debates which are the focus of this analysis.³¹ Oberkirch proclaimed that:

Alsace and Lorraine…ardently desire the re-establishment of relations with the Vatican. We would greet it with great joy, like the advent of a new era: an era of the religious pacification so necessary, even indispensable, for successfully leading the national re-adoption of our populations…[a cause] which has become the touchstone for demonstrating that victorious France, master of her destiny, will continue henceforth, in the union sacrée, on the glorious path of its historical mission....During these long years of exile….we have always defended France, especially in front of the enemy, for the marvelous fullness and richness of its intellectual and moral heritage...concerned only with her grandeur, her prosperity and her national security.³²

³¹ Ibid.
³² JO 3375. « L'Alsace et la Lorraine…désirent ardemment la reprise des relations avec le Saint-Siège. Nous l'avons saluée, en effet, avec une très vive joie, comme l'avènement d'une ère nouvelle : ère de pacification religieuse si nécessaire, indispensable même pour mener à bonne fin l'œuvre de réadaptation nationale de nos populations (Applaudissements sur divers bancs)...œuvre surtout...devenir la pierre de touche susceptible de nous démontrer que la France victorieuse et maîtresse de ses destinées allait continuer désormais, dans l'union sacrée, la voie glorieuse de sa mission historique....Durant ces longues années d'exil….[n]ous avons toujours tenu à la défendre, surtout devant l'ennemi, dans toute la plénitude et dans toute la merveilleuse richesse de son patrimoine intellectuel et moral (Nouveaux applaudissements) soucieux exclusivement de sa grandeur, de si prospérité et surtout de la sécurité nationale de la France. (Nouveaux applaudissements.) »
In the short excerpt from Oberkirch, a fairly complex but linear argument was sketched out: he established that Alsatians and Lorrainers wanted the reprise to be carried out in order to achieve “religious pacification,” that religious pacification was crucial to the “re-adoption” of Alsace-Lorraine into France, and that the process of re-adoption had become the “touchstone” by which victorious France should be judged in the post-war period. He alluded at the end to the manner in which residents of Alsace-Lorraine had always defended France against its enemies. In these few brief sentences, Oberkirch laid out an entire interpretive narrative of the relationship among the war, Alsace-Lorraine, and the reprise. The conclusion, following the train of his logic, was that in order to be successful and “continue on its historical mission,” France must engage in a rapprochement with the Vatican. To jumpstart that logical train, though, Oberkirch insisted that those in Alsace-Lorraine deserve this political action, because of the way they were oppressed by the Germans and the way they defended France. Moreover, coming from an Alsatian like Oberkirch, the invocation of the union sacrée would have had a very particular meaning. The implication seems to have been that, for the union sacrée to be successful, France must make an effort to thank, or repay its debt to, its loyal and long-suffering eastern lands.

The arguments in support of the reprise that stressed the repaying of a debt towards Catholics helped to formulate a narrative that valorized French Catholics’ sacrifices over other groups. In the same way the arguments stressing the repaying of a debt to Alsace-Lorraine implied an interpretation of the war in which one of the chief outcomes, and even purposes, was the region’s liberation. That this historical perspective on World War I is of questionable merit is immaterial; its dissemination to the French public through the efforts of those like Méritan and Oberkirch indicates that it was being consumed by the French, in one way or another.

Explicit and Implicit Evocations of the War
At their most evocative, and possibly most effective, deputies crafting stories about World War I in an effort to persuade others to support the reprise used vivid war imagery that actually called on their listeners to picture bullets flying and soldiers’ parents pacing in their homes. Given the context of the discussion, any amount of color or detail around a point made about the war should seem superfluous; it is not obvious that the imagining or remembering of the war in any detailed way by the deputies in the Chamber, no matter how precise or well-articulated, should have had any bearing on the diplomatic decision at hand. When great detail was employed in the politicians’ speeches, therefore, we see some of the more obvious examples of the war’s being employed as a rhetorical device, meant to convince, or more harshly, to manipulate.

Georges Mandel, a rather significant political figure as the former Minister of the Interior under Georges Clemenceau, France’s prime minister during the war, gave one such speech. An economic conservative more well-known for resisting the Nazis two decades later, the deputy from the Gironde region was in favor of the ralliement. He argued that the official distance imposed on these Catholics between them and their spiritual shepherd by the French government rendered them second-class citizens and created a rift between them and non-Catholics: “[t]he French can no longer be divided into two categories [Catholic and non-Catholic]. The German bullets did not distinguish between them in the trench.” Noblemaire, interjecting in agreement, insisted that “[t]hat is an argument that everyone can understand. Unfortunately, it is the truth.” Mandel concluded his argument, stressing the importance of “dedicating ourselves to the task of moral and material reconstruction of our country. What is important is for us to come together in a tight group, with all of our intelligence, all of our energy and all of our will.” Mandel brought the Chamber’s attention back to the war in a visceral

34 JO 3261: « M. Georges Mandel : On ne pourra pas plus longtemps diviser les Français en deux catégories, ceux du dossier Carthage et ceux du dossier Corinthe. (Applaudissements à droite el au centre.) Les balles allemandes n’ont pas connu de distinction entre eux dans la tranchée. (Applaudissements sur les mêmes bancs. — Interruptions à l’extrême gauche et à gauche.) ; M. le président : C’est une parole que tout le monde peut entendre. C’est
manner. He attempted to expose the triviality of perpetuating animosity between groups who were fundamentally the same (namely French), and whose differences in belief and lifestyle receded when one considered their members fighting together and dying together in the trenches. This language also presented the deputies with a kind of false dichotomy. The war obviously held a great place in the minds of all only two years after its conclusion, and the effect of asking the Chamber to imagine the bullets and trenches of their very recent past left them with two choices. The deputies could either honor the unity and brotherhood of these soldiers by voting in line with Mandel, or they could allow the progress that the fallen soldiers had achieved towards mutual understanding and acceptance die with them in the mud. Mandel, like others in the pro-reprise camp, molded the conversation in ways that seemed advantageous to him, choosing to fight the metaphorical battle on fields he knew would be favorable and would speak meaningfully to the largest audience.

Noblemaire also made a reference to the trenches, albeit to somewhat different effect. He stated that “I attempt only to speak truly and impartially, and I know that many French hearts have been saddened and devastated. But, I say, you who in the glorious trenches or in your anxious homes felt the beating of those hearts in equal measure, don’t you believe that it is the hearts of French Catholics who have felt the greatest pain?”

His argument was two-pronged. First, Noblemaire reinforced the idea, explored earlier in this chapter, that the Catholic pain and sacrifice during the conflict was greater than that of non-Catholics, and thus that they deserved better treatment after the war. Why he believed that French Catholics’ share of the grief stemming from the war would have been greater than that of other French people is not clear, but he certainly saw promoting this narrative as a promising avenue for convincing the French to
support the *reprise*. Second, his coupling of the “glorious trenches” and the “anxious homes” throughout France during the war would have conjured up very specific and powerful memories in the Chamber. As has been seen, some deputies served in the war and would have seen these trenches, but even those who did not likely underwent an experience analogous to sitting anxiously at home, hoping for letters from loved ones in battle.

In making very open and explicit reference to war-time realities, Mandel and Noblemaire attempted to speak to the broadest possible base. What could be more universal, in wartime France, than fighting in the trenches or of waiting nervously at home for news from the front? The hope on the part of these two deputies, it would seem, was to present arguments distantly related to the reopening of the embassy at the Vatican, but which, in and of themselves, would have sounded very appealing to almost all French people who had lived through the war. Just as often as they used explicit war-related terminology, which incorporated bullets, trenches and the like, deputies in the Chamber also used language that was more subtly and implicitly referential to the war.

Looking carefully at the diction of some of the deputies in the Chamber, one can see terminology typically associated with battles and armed struggles spilling over into arguments into which the war is not central. I have classified this as a distinct strategy because it seems intended to have recalled the war in its audience’s subconscious, and thus represents a much more indirect approach than some of the strategies mentioned above. Chassaigne-Goyon provides perhaps the most powerful example of the use of implicit, war-related terminology in service of an argument for the *ralliement* that was focused more directly on foreign policy:

> When, in the face of the agonizing problems that are rife around us, patriotism imperiously orders us to join together in a non-military sense, to use all of our means of action, all of our tools of influence, all of our weapons of peace, and to meld our wills and our souls into one, could we be forgiven for allowing ourselves once again to be at the mercy of the prejudices and the blind passions of the past in refusing to the government this diplomatic tool that is not only useful, but indispensable for the execution of our foreign policy?...To reject the granting of the credits would be to ignore the feelings and the will of the country; it would be a great and irreparable error, plunging us back into pre-war religious struggles; it would be a crime against our country and against our
dead. Gentlemen, I am sure that we will not commit such an error, and the very idea of the crime should revolt us.36

Parts of his message are by no means veiled; he drew his peers’ attention back to the war, going so far as to suggest that a vote against the re-establishing of relations would dishonor the French war dead, which certainly would have struck a universal note. But the idea that, violence and desolation behind them, the French now had to use all of the “weapons of peace” at their disposal went beyond mere reference to the war. In using this carefully-selected phrase, he asked his fellow deputies to keep in their hearts the spirit of the war, rejiggering the tools they used to achieve their aims in combat to be used instead to achieve their aims in diplomacy and politics. His aim was to instill feelings of unity and patriotism, and to encourage the pursuit of common aims, and the war was central to his method.

Chassaigne-Goyon’s linguistic felicity may have been sui generis, but there were more commonly used linguistic practices that seem to have functioned in similar ways. More specifically, the phrases guerres religieuses, or wars of religion, and paix religieuse, or religious peace, were often coupled as opposites and cropped up frequently.37 In most cases, the first term refers to the state of tension and conflict within France between Catholics and anti-clericals before the war (rather than crusades or literal religious wars), and the second refers to hypothetical resolution of that conflict that, it seems, all of the deputies hoped for. Because these terms are somewhat more general, it is difficult to know the extent to which their irrefutable prevalence is due directly to the context of the war. We can imagine, though, that

36 JO 3298. « Alors que, devant les problèmes angoissants qui, de toutes parts, se drosent autour de nous, le patriotisme nous ordonne impérieusement de ramasser en un faisceau compact, en dehors de nos forces militaires, tous nos moyens d’action, toutes nos sources d’influence, toutes nos armes pacifiques, et de fondre toutes nos volontés et pour ainsi dire nos âmes en une seule, serions-nous excusables de nous laisser reprendre et dominer par les préjugés et les passions aveugles d’autrefois et de refuser au Gouvernement un levier diplomatique non seulement utile, mais indispensable à notre action extérieure….Rejeter les crédits, ce serait aller à l’encontre des sentiments et de la volonté certaine du pays; ce serait commettre une faute lourde, irréparable. (Nouveaux applaudissements sur les mêmes bancs.) nous replonger dans les luttes religieuses d’avant-guerre; ce serait commettre un crime contre la patrie et contre nos morts. (Nouveaux applaudissements sur les mêmes bancs.) Messieurs, nous ne commettrons pas cette faute, j’en suis sûr, et l’idée d’un tel crime nous révolte tous tant que nous sommes. »
37 JO 3395; JO 3250.
their use is not totally incidental, especially considering the great extent to which the war figured into these discussions in other ways. The terms are difficult, too, because they are used by both sides to the same effect; the contingents for and against the *ralliement* both leveraged the war-focused sentiments that the terms invoked.38 There are plenty of terms that could describe what was certainly a tense but mostly non-violent relationship between Catholics and anti-clericals before the war—the fact that the deputies relied so heavily on those of weapons and battle, of war and peace, is telling both of how large the war still loomed and of what kinds of terminology they believed would be persuasive to their peers.

The rhetoric of Chassaigne-Goyon and those who used the language of war in equally subtle ways is in a sense the very bedrock of this study. Indeed, in requesting that France use its “weapons of peace” to secure the best possible position for itself in the post-war era, Chassaigne-Goyon carried out in a highly visible manner (at least in hindsight) the brand of narrative construction that I also assign to his colleagues, who were at times less obvious. He discreetly held up the war as a prism through which to view contemporaneous events, and did so with the specific goal of advancing the cause of the *reprise*. Inevitably, the process of reading the situation in France in 1920 through lenses so heavily tinted by the war refracted the images and interpretations of both the contemporaneous setting and the war. This is the precise process through which the historical interpretations highlighted in this chapter, like that of an unbreakable French unity and that of Catholics, Alsatians and Lorrainers who sacrificed more than their compatriots and thus deserved repayment, were fanned in the French psyche.

**The Anti-Clerical Response and the Rumeurs Infâmes**

38 Ibid., 3250. Lemire used his own argument about religious peace, how it was not yet attained, and how a *rapprochement* would help to bring it about in response to the argument of Edouard Herriot, a vocal deputy against the *ralliement*, who believed that such official relationship with the Vatican would make chances of religious peace minute. Herriot will be introduced more fully below.
The other side of the coin must not be ignored. Perhaps the biggest strain of argumentation from the camp opposed to the rapprochement came from the staunch republicans and anti-clericals, still a significant contingent in the Chamber, which likely included most of the socialist deputies. James F. McMillan argues that, “for political leaders of the Third Republic such as Léon Gambetta, Jules Ferry, and Emile Combes, the creation of an état laïc, a completely secular state and society, was the very raison d’être of the regime,” and the laïque inheritors of their legacy in the 1920 Chamber seem to have felt similarly. Deputy from the Seine region and leftist Louis Puech, who was in favor of the ralliement, summarized the arguments against the proposed action the better to critique them. He said that the opposition, voiced by Herriot in this case, in sum, makes three arguments: the absence or weakness of the protests of the Pope over the course of the war against the abominable atrocities committed by the Germans; the fact that the re-establishing of relations is equivalent to the recognizing of the Catholic religion as the religion of the state, contrary to Article 2 of the Law of Separation; and finally the fact that this reprise implies a change in our foreign policy, which, instead of continuing to be a policy of neutrality, liberty, generosity and progress, would become no more than a policy of proselytism, directed by the priests.

The second and third of these arguments are in the realm of the political and the practical, and were frequently rehashed by the naysayers in the Chamber. They can both be categorized as basically anti-clerical in that their underlying premise is that of the paramount need to keep official state policy with regard to religion absolutely antiseptic. Though leftists, especially radical socialists, felt very strongly about the importance of the separation of Church and State, their arguments on the subject were still relatively dispassionate. The same cannot be said for those arguments relating to Puech’s first point, which concerns the pope’s unwillingness to explicitly support France during the Great War.

40 JO 3300. « Herriot, en somme, fait valoir trois arguments : l’absence ou la faiblesse des protestations du pape, au cours de la guerre, contre les abominables atrocités commises par les Allemands; le fait que la reprise des relations équivaut à la reconnaissance de la religion catholique comme religion d’État contrairement à l’article 2 de la loi de séparation, enfin le fait que cette reprise implique un changement de notre politique extérieure qui, au lieu de continuer d’être une politique de neutralité, de liberté, de générosité, de progrès, ne serait plus qu’une politique de prosélytisme, dirigée par les curés. »
On the floor of the Chamber, many of those who were ideologically against the ralliement employed similar strategies to their opponents, generating histories that centered around the war in an attempt to convince their colleagues to vote against the re-establishment. The arguments of this kind fall into a few different categories, of which the most common was that the Vatican should not be rewarded by France for its neutral stance toward the country during the war. These arguments drew on pre-existing wartime narratives in France, which condemned the pope for his inaction, or of even graver crimes, and which had roots that predate 1914. The attacks on the Vatican are connected to a historical phenomenon of rumeurs infâmes, or infamous rumors. Extant since the French revolution, these rumors suggested that French Catholics felt more loyalty to the pope than to the republic, and that the Vatican was guilty of conspiring against France with her enemies. “It was during the First World War,” writes McMillan, “…that such scurrilous stories…were to gain even greater currency.”\(^{41}\) Four rumors specific to the World War I period were particularly popular. The first, second, and third all had the French clergy as the subjects of their ire: that the war had been started by French Catholics, the clergy funding the German and Austrian armies; that the clergy “sought to exploit the circumstances of the war for their own purposes…[and] to encourage a religious revival”; and that priests were “cowards who shirked their patriotic duty.”\(^{42}\) French politicians would have been familiar with all of these, having read the articles and heard the polemics making the accusations during the war. It is with this in mind that we turn to the fourth of these rumors, still incredibly relevant to the discussion of the reprise two years after the war’s conclusion. This rumor, which “was not confined to the anti-clerical press or local malicious gossip but expressed also in French government circles, was the one which represented the pope and the French Church as the enemy of France.”\(^{43}\) References to the Vatican’s official neutrality in the war, viewed almost universally in France as a betrayal of the “eldest daughter of the Church,” were


\(^{42}\) Ibid., 121-124.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 124-125.
employed frequently by those in the Chamber who were against the *ralliement*. This supports McMillan’s conclusion that “[o]verall French public opinion (including Catholic opinion) saw neutrality as an unacceptable position: it was widely felt that there were rights and wrongs in the conflict, and that the pope should be on the side of the right (i.e., France). Neutrality was interpreted as in effect opting for the Central Powers…”

Edouard Herriot can be found making the argument about the Vatican and its role in the war often in the Chamber’s records, alongside a number of other points. A deputy from the French Rhône district, Herriot was the vocal leader of the opposition to the establishment of the new embassy, the counterpart of Noblemaire in these debates. Though Jolly describes him as having been “profoundly impacted by the [Franco-Prussian] war of 1870,” and quotes Herriot as saying that “[a]ll my childhood was spent hearing stories of the misfortune of Alsace,” Herriot was the president of the radical socialist party in the Chamber, and like many of his comrades a serious secularist.

He said that “I will not restrict the discussion of the moral power of the papacy, gentlemen, to the distant past. Am I excessive in saying that I do not see this great moral power on display during the great struggle of the war, the awful experience of which would have brought together writers and politicians who had been opponents until then? No, I do not see it…” Herriot went on to cite a journal using a derogatory phrase to describe the pope’s role in the war, which was picked up by some of the other deputies as well. “The newspaper *Le Temps*…uses what I think is a fair term [in]… ‘malevolent neutrality,’” which (and here he quotes a different article in *Le Figaro*), “despite our respect for the nobility of the intention, is not acceptable to any French person. These are measured terms, I think. They

44 Ibid., 116.
45 Ibid., 118.
47 JO 3229. « La puissance morale de la papauté, messieurs, je ne la condense pas non plus dans le passé, mais suis-je excessif, en disant que je ne la rencontre point pendant la guerre (Vifs applaudissements à l’extrême gauche, à gauche et sur divers bancs au centre), pendant cette lute dont l’expérience aurait décidé certains écrivains certains hommes politiques, adversaires jusqu’ici ? Non, je ne la rencontre pas…”
summarize my opinion and that of many of our compatriots.” Herriot continued in vain on the last day of the debate: “I simply established the facts necessary to conclude the following: he stayed neutral towards us. So let us remain neutral towards him. That is my reasoning.” The idea of an inactive complicity would have sounded familiar to many members of the Chamber. “Malevolent neutrality” is strikingly similar to the “coupable mutisme,” or culpable silence, described by anti-clerical journal La Lanterne during the war, to which McMillan makes reference in his writing on the infamous rumors. Herriot and his fellow naysayers, though proven a significant minority after the final vote, found that for them, too, the best available rhetorical tool was the Great War and its various subplots and intrigues.

The arguments against the reprise, and especially those that concern the French people or the pope during the war, throw into stark relief the arguments made in favor of it. Seeing the rebuttals to these arguments shows us the one-sidedness of the narratives that deputies in the Chamber were trying to construct. French unity, for example, was clearly not universal, the pope’s role in the war was hotly disputed, and the idea that a debt was owed to French Catholics would obviously not have been held by those who viewed them as traitors to the French cause. Reading the narratives constructed in arguments supporting the ralliement alone allows us only to compare the rhetoric with what we can discern to have been the reality, but the direct opposition in the Chamber shows us that other conceptions about the war did exist. The deputies in favor of the reprise were not simply repeating that which everyone already believed, but were instead making a concerted effort to participate in the writing and rewriting of history.

48 JO 3230. « Le journal le Temps, le 23 mai 1915, définissait en une formule assez juste, je crois, l’impression qui se dégage de tous ces documents ; il employait les mots de “neutralité malveillante”. Et, avec un sens très délicat de la mesure, avec une modération qui sait donner de la force à la fermeté, M. Alfred Capus écrivait, dans le Figaro du 6 mars 1916, à propos d’un autre document que je ne cite pas pour ne pas allonger la discussion, à propos de la lettre au cardinal Pompil : “Les exhortations nouvelles du Souverain Pontife montrent une sorte de neutralité mystique, laquelle, malgré le respect commandé par la noblesse dé l’intention, n’est acceptable pour aucun Français.” (Applaudissements à gauche et à l’extrême gauche.) Voilà des termes mesurés, je pense. Ils résument mon opinion et celle de beaucoup de nos compatriotes.

49 JO 3373. « Je me suis simplement borné à établir les faits nécessaires pour conclure ceci : il est resté neutre avec nous. Restons neutre avec lui. C’est tout mon raisonnement. »

50 McMillan, Rumeurs Infâmes, 126.
The facts of the war and its aftermath were still very much a part of French political life by the end of 1920. Perhaps the most transformative event in world history up to that point, it is no wonder that, only two years later, the war still shaped French consciousness in political circles. It is difficult without a great deal of conjecture to know which orators on the floor of the Chamber invoked the events, injustices, and hopeful moments of the war because they were genuinely moved by them, and which did so as a practiced point of argumentative strategy. In all likelihood, most of the deputies probably fell somewhere in the middle; the simple act of having suffered, or of feeling something strongly, does not prevent the leveraging of that suffering or that feeling for new, strategic goals. In either case, or in the case of a gray area, Harry Paul seems to have missed, or opted not to treat, a fascinating aspect of the political history of the post-war ralliement. Arguments on all subjects even tangentially related to the Vatican and France’s proposed embassy there became, somehow, reflections on or extensions of the war. Chassaigne-Goyon was unknowingly self-referential when he remarked on the need for France to use all of the “weapons of peace” at its disposal to achieve its political aims; two years after the armistice, French politicians, or at least the clever ones, had weaponized the war and the countless stories and feelings associated with it, using it expertly to fight new and different battles. One of the consequences of their fighting, whether intended or not, was to propagate the deputies’ readings of the war, tailored, as they were, the better to convince, and not necessarily to represent realities.
Chapter Two
The Common Father and His Faithful: Catholics Respond

The stakes of the debates on the re-establishment of relations with the Vatican in the Chamber of Deputies were higher for no one than they were for religious figures in France. Though the deputies were simply voting on financial credits to establish an embassy, this move was seen as a symbolic step towards a repaired general relationship between France and the Holy See, one which could have a dramatic impact on the ways of life of French bishops and priests. This chapter will explore how religious figures, or those publications that represented them, felt about the reprise, and the kinds of argumentative approaches they utilized to propagate their views. The lines of argumentation of religious figures converge with those of deputies in the Chamber at many points. They are decidedly distinct, though, and thus deserve separate treatment, in that they often incorporate religious elements into the discussion in ways that politicians were not wont to do. Even when the overtly religious served only as background to the Catholic rhetoric analyzed herein, arguments stemming from bishops, priests or Catholic newspapers necessarily took on entirely different meanings than similar arguments coming from politicians, as the interests of the two groups were so divergent. I will show that religious figures, in lobbying those who opposed the ralliement, wrote their own, often religiously-linked histories of the war for French consumption. They leveraged French preoccupation with the war, contorting memories of it into justifications for reopening the embassy at the Vatican. I will focus specifically on two strands of discourse that stand out for their frequency: that which insisted upon the positive influence the pope had on the war, and that which suggested that France’s wartime enemies still posed a looming threat.
The nature of the subjects of this chapter, Catholic officials in France, poses problems that the sources for the preceding chapter and the chapter to follow do not. Religious figures were generally more guarded in their speech and writing than were politicians and writers, especially when their opinions would have conflicted with higher religious authorities. Deputies and journalists in a liberal French republic had only to answer to their superiors and constituents, with whom they would at least in theory have been ideologically aligned. For a member of the clergy to disagree with the “common father of the faithful,” as the pope was known, was another matter entirely.¹ That religious figures did not often speak against views of the pope represents a great obstacle to this analysis; whereas in the Chamber, Catholic deputies seemed invariably disposed to support the reprise, much of the Catholic French clergy actually opposed it. The reasons for which a large portion of the French clergy did not support the re-establishment of relations with the Vatican (at least under the terms that they suspected would apply) and the form that their disagreement with the pope took will be treated in the first section of this chapter. Because of their reticence, we are left with a paucity of material from dissenting clergymen, though we know that dissent existed. Without question, the historical record is distorted by the fact that only the clergy on one side of the debate, for the most part, were willing to publish their opinions. That distortion is reflected in this chapter—it will treat almost exclusively arguments in favor of the rapprochement between France and the Vatican.

Wherever possible, opinions of members of the French clergy and of Vatican officials on the renewal of relations with the Vatican have been recorded in this chapter. But because the limitations discussed above make it somewhat difficult to uncover any but the most nondescript of references by such figures, due to the complex and stifling politico-religious network surrounding them, I have largely relied on Catholic publications, most notably La Croix (The Cross). La Croix was founded in 1879 as a monthly review by the Augustinians of the Assumption, and was converted to a daily paper in 1882. This was in France the “epoch of

the laïcs,” when the education laws removed religious influence from public schools, and the paper’s leader and Catholic priest, Vincent de Paul Bailly, “took an ardent part in all of the battles that rent society in this period.”\(^2\) *La Croix* was thus born in a struggle against anticlericalism, and this struggle came to be part of its identity. In helping to found the paper, Bailly said that “I have a plan and need help to execute it. I dream of founding a journal to oppose all of the bad journals. I would like to flood France with it. Since they hunt the cross everywhere, I would like to plant the cross everywhere.”\(^3\) The paper did not officially represent the views of the Roman Catholic church, but by the turn of the century it came close to doing so. It had become “the most influential Catholic newspaper in all of France…its fraternal ties to the French [Church] hierarchy lent a quasi-official status to its utterances which was not shared by any other sector of the Catholic press.”\(^4\) It had a readership of over 200,000 people.\(^5\)

To the extent that there were ideological splits on some issues between the French clergy and the Vatican, *La Croix*’s editorial stance seems to have been in the pope’s camp, opting not to print and send out to 200,000 Catholics opinions that directly opposed his known and expressed views. Both before and after the war, “*La Croix* was ready to submit whenever the Church issued a statement—in this it was more Catholic than the extreme-right papers…Even with the Separation Law, *La Croix* prudently awaited the decision of the Pope before taking a stand.”\(^6\) Despite its editorial bent towards the official Vatican line, the paper serves as a useful resource for divining the opinion of the French clergy, whose commentary it often cited. One must keep in mind, however, its alignment to the Church and dogma; should


\(^3\) Ibid. « J’ai un plan et j’aurai besoin d’aide pour l’exécuter. Je rêve de fonder un journal pour lutter contre les mauvais journaux. Je voudrais en inonder la France. Puisqu’on chasse la croix de partout, je voudrais planter la croix partout.’ C’était, en effet, l’époque des premières lois laïques. Le R. P. Bailly, avec les journaux qu’il avait créés, prit une part ardue à toutes les batailles qui déchirèrent cette époque. »


\(^5\) Ibid.

bishops have expressed views contrary to those of the pope, they likely would not have appeared in its pages.

In La Croix’s treatment of the issue of the re-establishment of relations with the Vatican, the war played a fundamental role, both in the excerpted comments from members of the clergy and in the newspaper’s own columns. Two historical perspectives on the war recur more often than any other in the Catholic discourse of the time. The first portrayed Pope Benedict XV as a hero of the war, who worked hard to bring peace to Europe and smiled especially upon France during its duration. Not only did these portrayals push against the somewhat popular French notion that his neutrality was misplaced and damaging to France, but they also characterized the pope as a charitable peace-bringer, who indeed acted magnanimously towards France and who could have helped to bring about a swifter end to the war had the French government not refused to engage with him diplomatically. The second put strong emphasis on France’s “enemies,” whom they still defined to be the Central Powers (especially Germany and Austria), even two years after the war had ended. Catholic figures and the Catholic press postulated that the German and Austrian threats were not permanently put to rest at the end of the Great War, and only lay dormant, reduced to temporary submission. This kind of argument relied upon a lingering French fear and hatred towards these countries and their peoples, and suggested that they continued to pose a great, if undefined, threat that could be combatted with a return to a diplomatic proximity to the Vatican. Before examining these two argumentative strategies, I will first address the glaringly absent voices of the dissenting French clergy.

The Silent Clergy and the Interdict

That members of the French clergy could not often publicly disagree with the pope is somewhat self-evident. But what was the reason for the disagreement about the ralliement in the first place? In essence, the clergy feared that the pope’s willingness to restore his
relationship with France represented de facto acceptance of the secular legislation passed in the early 1900s. Many rights and privileges had been taken from the French clergy since the 1880s, but they objected most vehemently to those laws passed just after the turn of the century that formalized the separation of Church and State, and those that established the *associations cultuelles*. As outlined in this work's introduction, the latter legislation prevented the Church from owning or managing property—Catholicism was now considered just one among many religious cults, and the new laws dictated that the property of cults was to be managed by groups called *associations cultuelles*, which had to be directed by a majority of laypeople.⁷ It is little wonder that the clergy objected to having the right to manage Church property stripped from them. It is even less wonder when one considers the nature of the clergy in France at the time. Marc Minier, in a study devoted to the makeup of the French episcopate during this period and the following decades, provides a sketch:

The French bishop of 1921 is on average 64 years old, he was ordained at a young age (23 or 25 years old) and, in the 1880s, he avoided military service. While his youth and the blossoming of his career took place in a period favorable to the Church...he began his ecclesiastical career (1880-1889 for 32 of them) during the period in which the laïque education laws were passed. When he joined the episcopate he had to confront official anti-clericalism and religious modernism. Thus is formed the defensive mentality that Cardinal Baudrillart, trained as an historian, explains: “Since 1880, the reign of rationalism and positivism...has been reflected in the war waged against the Church, her doctrines and its action. Each year was marked by a new ruin. How thorny and agonizing the task of a priest and educator has become!”⁸

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⁸ Marc Minier, *L’épiscopat français du ralllement à Vatican II* (Padua: CEDAM, 1982), 4. « L’évêque français de 1921 est en moyenne âgé de soixante-quatre ans, il a été ordonné jeune (vingt-trois/vingt-quatre ans) et, dans les années 1880, a évité le service militaire. Tandis que sa jeunesse et l’éclosion de sa vocation se sont déroulées dans des périodes favorables à l’Eglise...il commence sa carrière ecclésiastique (1880-1889 pour trente-trois d’entre eux) au moment où sont votées les lois laïques sur l’instruction. Lorsqu’il parvient à l’épiscopat il doit faire face à l’anticléricalisme officiel, au modernisme religieux. Ainsi se forge-t-il cette mentalité défensive que, historien de formation, le cardinal Baudrillart explique en 1936... “Depuis 1880 le règne du rationalisme et du positivisme dans l’ordre pratique se traduisait par la guerre engagée contre l’Eglise, ses doctrines et son action. Chaque année était marquée par une ruine nouvelle... Que la tâche est épineuse et angoissante pour une conscience de prêtre éducateur!” »
The image is one of deep hostility towards laïcité and secular governance, and it is not a great leap to think that these elderly and traditional Catholics despised the separation laws, and the associations cultuelles, and would have been hostile towards any perceived condoning of them.

As early as May 1920, the French clergy had learned that the pope was entertaining a rapprochement with France, and even that he might be considering reversing his predecessor Pius X’s interdict against the associations, which were born out of the 1905 separation law. Though more direct connections with the Vatican would have likely suited most of the bishops, unless the pope were to stipulate the modification of the separation law, he could be seen as tacitly accepting them, and annulling the interdict of Pius X, by agreeing to the reopening of the embassy. Withholding diplomatic relations was the only bargaining chip Benedict XV had in trying to lift the French clergy out of their state of subjection to the secular laws, and, some felt, he was giving it away too cheaply. Rumors continued to swirl about a rapprochement between France and the Vatican, and the clergy feared that Benedict XV might end what they viewed essentially as the Vatican’s diplomatic embargo on France. As historian Adrien Dansette writes, “[i]ntransigent bishops were afraid of a renewal of diplomatic relations, not in itself but because it implied acceptance by the Holy See of the secular legislation.”\(^9\) French bishops, present at the Vatican for the occasion of the canonization of Joan of Arc, expressed these concerns to the pope in a letter on May 16, 1920, reminding him that they rejected the laws of 1905 and that they were unanimous, but for four dissenting bishops, in their “respectful resistance.”\(^10\) The clergy’s suspicions proved to have been well founded; French diplomat Jean Doulcet, who had been in negotiations with Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri since March, announced to the Chamber of Deputies on November 25, 1920, that the pope’s Congregation for


Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs had determined that the need for the papal interdict on the
*associations cultuelles* was no more.\(^{11}\)

Though we know of the May 1920 letter from the French bishops that was given to the pope, because of the hierarchy of the Church, examples of bishops and cardinals speaking out publicly against the attempt to re-establish the French embassy at the Vatican, and thus against the position of the pope, are few and far between. Some instances of declarations against the *associations* can be found, as this was not technically the matter at hand when discussing the *reprise*. The reopening of the French embassy at the Vatican and the acceptance of the *associations cultuelles* were only theoretically associated before Doulcet made public the lifting of the interdict in November 1920. Throughout most of year, therefore, one could claim that since Pius X’s interdict had not yet officially been lifted, condemnation of the *associations* was still in line with doctrine. Cardinal de Cabrières of Montpelier, for example, wrote a letter including the following excerpt to the director of the Catholic publication *Semaine Religieuse* of Montpelier on October 20, 1920:

> I can at least confirm that their [the lawyers’] conclusions were made in favor of the Sovereign Pontiff, and I can confirm that they were unanimous in their opinions, and that now, as then...our lawyers still believe that the [associations] cultuelles are opposed to the rights of the Church, and cannot be accepted by Catholics until after they are profoundly modified in letter and in spirit....All the cardinals present at Rome during the canonizations in April...protested, at the moment, with vivacity against the adoption of the Cultuelles, by which we are threatened.\(^{12}\)

Here, Cabrières not only made clear his position against the *associations*, but also submitted that the opinion was shared by the pope, in whose favor the legal conclusions against their lawfulness were made.


\(^{12}\) Anatole de Cabrières, “Lettre de S. Em. Le card De Cabrières, éveque du Montpelier,” *La Documentation Catholique*, 331. [https://archive.org/details/landocumentationc04paruoft/page/330](https://archive.org/details/landocumentationc04paruoft/page/330). « …je puis affirmer au moins que leurs [les jurisconsultes] conclusions furent pour quelque chose dans la décision du Souverain Pontife.....nos avocats estiment encore que ses Cultuelles sont opposées au droit de l’Eglise et ne peuvent être acceptées par les catholiques qu’après avoir été modifiées profondément dans leur lettre et dans leur esprit....Tous les cardinaux présents à Rome au moment des canonisations du mois d’avril...protestèrent, en ce moment, avec vivacité contre l’adoption des Cultuelles, dont on nous menaçait.... » French cardinals were, perhaps, present at the Vatican before the canonization of Joan of Arc in May, but all records indicate both that her canonization occurred in May and that the letter on behalf of the French clergy was submitted to the pope in May.
More often, critiques even of the Associations by French religious figures were highly qualified. An example in the form of a note written by Mgr. Gouraud, bishop of Vannes, is almost humorous in its protest, and then less-than-subtle conditional disavowal.

For some months, the Associations cultuelles have occupied public opinion...The discussion that they raise comes solely from the intolerable situation of the Church in France...Those who have been suffering from it for fifteen years still aspire to escape from it, but can they really believe that the late acceptance of the Cultuelles will remedy the evils from which we suffer?...So it is publicly claimed in many newspapers and journals. Many Catholics are likely shaken. It is to enlighten the faithful who trust in us that we expose our feeling, declaring ourselves ready, on the other hand, to submit our judgement to that of the Sovereign Pontiff if, in his wisdom, the head of the Church believes that the general good requires this concession. The Church remains always free to make concessions that it believes to be reconcilable with its rights and with its divine constitution. All true Catholics know this.13

It is clear from the note that those Catholic figures willing to take a public stance felt that they had to be quite careful in doing so, leaving historians looking backwards with a hazy picture of the nature and extent of their discontent. The inaccessibility of recorded dissenting opinions on the matter of the reprise from members of the French clergy forces us to rely instead on sources like La Croix. Though the newspaper’s alignment with official Roman Catholic positions effaces opinions that run counter to those of the pope, it is an invaluable resource for analyzing Catholic arguments that did, in fact, support the reopening of the embassy.

The Common Father and the War

Defending the pope’s actions during the war was an obsession of Catholic figures and the Catholic press in discussing the reprise. This was, in part, in response to attacks levied by

13 Alcime Gouraud, “Note de Mgr Gouraud, évêques de Vannes,” La Documentation Catholique, 331 https://archive.org/details/ladocumentationc04pariuoft/page/330. « Depuis quelques mois, les Association cultuelles occupent l’opinion publique; elles sont discutées dans la presse, au grand étonnement de beaucoup de catholiques. La discussion qu’elles soulèvent vient uniquement de la situation intolérable faite à l’Eglise en France….Ceux qui la subissent depuis quinze ans aspirent toujours à en sortir, mais peuvent-ils vraiment croire que l’acceptation tardive des Cultuelles remédierait aux maux dont nous souffrons ? On l’affirme publiquement dans les journaux et les revues. Plusieurs catholiques peuvent en être ébranlés. C’est pour éclairer les fidèles qui nous sont confiés que nous exposons ici notre sentiment, nous déclarant prêt d’ailleurs à soumettre notre jugement à celui du Souverain Pontife si, dans sa sagesse, le chef de l’Eglise estimait que le bien général demande cette concession. L’Eglise reste toujours libre de faire les concessions qu’elle juge conciliables avec ses droits et avec sa constitution divine. Tous les vrais Catholiques le savent. »
those opposed to the move, who asserted that his lack of outright support of France from 1914 to 1918 should not in any way be rewarded. As mentioned in the last chapter, many of the rumeurs infâmes, which accused French Catholics, French clergy and the pope himself of crimes of all kinds, were considered outlandish. But, as mentioned, James McMillan reports that some of these old rumors only grew more popular during the war, and perhaps the most widely shared had some basis in fact; many French resented the pope’s “malevolent neutrality,” or “culpable silence,” in which he did not officially side with France during the Great War. The narrative portraying the pope as malevolently neutral, or somehow anti-French, was the target of the religious figures cited in this section. At the canonization of Joan of Arc in May 1920, Bishop of Orléans Stanislas Touchet gave an address in which he enumerated the pope’s good deeds and so contradicted that characterization:

For years, the human race was destroyed….People turned on one another with a violence that overcame all inhibition….We, we looked to the Vatican….In the name of those poor people of our diocese, thank you Holy Father. You saw gravely wounded prisoners there: the blind, the one-armed and the wooden-legged….Your diplomacy, after laborious negotiations, freed them from their prisons. Thank you!...The archbishops of Reims, Paris, Rennes and other cities could talk of your goodness forever….Your heart has been the match of this global distress. In the war, you have attained three admirable peaks; a peak of courage, a peak of victory and a peak of pity stand out, so high among the clouds laden with thunder and horror….You were the good Samaritan of all humanity. Jesus Christ, your only Master, must be pleased with you; we, your sons, are proud of you. Thank you, most Holy Father, thank you!

The context of this speech totally colors its meaning. The canonization of Joan of Arc was understood both by the French government and by Catholic figures to be a gesture of goodwill by the pope to France. With negotiations about renewing relations underway, it was intended to show a readiness on the part of the Vatican to put aside years of Franco-Vatican conflict, and to

14 JO 3230.
move on in closer union. Touchet even mentioned that “[t]he Pope had ambassadors in several neutral countries and in many belligerent countries,” bringing the question of representation to the fore.16 Even before the canonization, the emphasis on the pope’s admirable war-time conduct peppered the pages of La Croix. At a moment when it appeared he was coming under fire in these debates (La Croix had, two days earlier, printed excerpts from a number of journals defending him from attacks in the context of the embassy debate), the newspaper printed a timely summary and endorsement of a book called Action of the Church During the War:

That which the Pope did during the Great War: supernatural action (calls to prayer, organization of the military chaplaincy, spiritual favors, etc.), general action (for peace and for respect of the laws of war, and in support of the victims of the scourge), and finally action concerning the belligerents....The question of the resumption of the relations with the Holy See gives to this very concise work a fiery relevance.17

La Croix seems to have gone out of its way to insert these kinds of papal endorsements in whatever form they took. Rector of the Institut Catholique, the Parisian Catholic university, Mgr. Alfred Baudrillart, who was to become a cardinal in 1935 and was referenced by Marc Minier above, made a speech before the Society for the Encouragement of National Industry on the subject of Pope Benedict XV and France. The speech was given on March 4, 1920, as the discussion of re-establishment of relations with the Vatican was burgeoning in French political discourse. La Croix, which printed excerpts of his speech, put its full support behind him. “Mgr. Baudrillart…exonerated the pope of the accusations against him and revealed, for the first time in public, his interview with Benedict XV in September 1915, from which we learn that from then on the pope, in his effort at pacification that is imposed on him as his charge, actually felt a

16 Ibid. « Le Pape avait des ambassadeurs en plusieurs pays neutres, même en plusieurs pays belligérants.... »
« Ce que le Pape a fait durant la grande guerre : action surnaturelle (appels à la prière, organisation de l’aumônerie militaire, faveurs spirituelles, etc.), action générale (pour la paix et le respect des lois de la guerre, et en faveur des victimes du fléau), enfin action concernant les divers belligérants (déclarations, libéralités, interventions en faveur de chaque Etat). Ce que les cardinaux, évêques et prélats ont fait, souffert ou reçu au cours de ces douloureuses années (listes des évêques et prélats mobilisé, aumôniers militaires, victimes de la guerre ou honorés de décoration civiles et militaires, etc. Voilà, en un raccourci saisissant, une part de l’action de l’Eglise pendant la guerre que montre, en une trentaine de pages, ‘Annuaire pontifical de 1920, et qu’on ne trouvera que là. La question de la reprise des relations avec le Saint-Siège donne à ce travail très concis une brûlante actualité.»
great benevolence for France, from which he never departed.”18 Printing the editorial and its accompanying article as its front-page feature, one sees La Croix actively engaged in an attempt to reconfigure an existing narrative about the misdeeds of the pope that had become part of the cannon of the French collective memory about the war, likely even among some of its Catholic readership. Baudrillart’s own speech can be seen as having gone even farther. He not only tried to change a very particular historical narrative, but insisted that, among all reasonable people, it had already changed.

We go to the solid and traditional institution that alone remains the highest moral authority in the universe. Everywhere, a better-informed opinion with a healthier appreciation of things has returned, except among the intractable adversaries, which yields to the correct attitude of Benedict XV vis-à-vis the belligerents while appreciating his efforts to lessen the plight of the victims of the war.19

How pervasive this “better-informed opinion” actually was is unclear, but the rhetorical effect of claiming that it was “everywhere” was to shift the paradigm of the reader, or at least to attempt to do so. To similar effect, he wrote that “[l]ittle by little, those who had been the most engaged in the war came around to the feelings of veneration [towards the pope] which had never left the neutral parties….In the face of the immense difficulties that the process of making peace encountered and still encounter, the august and pacifying influence of the Common Father of the Faithful is better understood.”20 The attempt to educate its readers on how other countries and other French people actually felt about the pope was not made in a vacuum; his speech was written with the re-establishing of relations specifically in mind, a call for reprise constituting its conclusion. La Croix’s own editorial view was that “[t]he personal

18 “Le pape Benoît XV et la France.” « Mgr Baudrillart…a vengé le Pape des accusations portées contre lui et révélé, pour la première fois en public, son entretien avec Benoît XV en septembre 1915, duquel il résulte que dès lors le Pape, dans les tentatives de pacification que lui imposait sa charge, était au contraire pénétré de la grande bienveillance pour la France dont il ne s’est jamais départi. »

19 Ibid. « On va à l’institution solide et traditionnelle qui seule demeure la plus haute autorité morale de l’univers. Partout l’opinion, mieux éclairée, est revenue à une plus saine appréciation des choses et, sauf des adversaires irréductibles, a fini par s’incliner devant l’attitude de Benoît XV vis-à-vis des belligérants, en même temps qu’elle rendait hommage à ses efforts persévérants pour adoucir le sort des victimes de la guerre. »

20 Ibid. « Peu à peu, ceux qui avaient été le plus engagés dans la guerre en venaient aux sentiments d’estime et de vénération dont les neutres ne s’étaient jamais départis….Devant les difficultés immenses que rencontrait et que rencontre encore le rétablissement de la paix, on comprenait mieux l’autoguste et pacificatrice influence du Père commun des fidèles. »
memories...prove that His Holiness Benedict XV never ceased to act with great benevolence towards France. Now the government must not leave our place at the Vatican vacant much longer.”

This article and its accompanying commentary linked the effort to bring France back to the Vatican directly not only with the war, but with a concerted attempt to mold and modify remembered histories of it, and of the way that the head of the Catholic Church figured in it.

Coupled with the insistence on the denial of any wrongdoing on the part of the pope during the war was a constant suggestion, by Catholic figures and the Catholic press, that the war could have ended sooner if France had worked more closely with the pope to secure peace. Some publications in the popular press included excerpts from peer journals and newspapers; 

La Croix had an entire daily section devoted to these excerpts, titled “That Which the Journals Say.” It was in this section that the stories about the re-establishment of the relationship with the Vatican appeared most often, with excerpts on the subject printed almost daily during stretches when the issue was much in the news. La Croix did not shy away from strident commentary itself, and often chose rather polemical pieces for its additions. It printed an excerpt from the hyper-conservative and royalist newspaper, L’Action Française, which wrote on the impact of France’s lack of ambassador at the Vatican during the war:

It is also the French government that will gain the most from the re-establishing of official relations. We have never stopped repeating it, from the beginning of the war and the new pontificate, we have urged the government to think of it; we have never stopped reiterating our reasons. It is basically uncontestable that, around March 1917, for example, at the moment when Austria contemplated peace, a French ambassador at the Holy See of Benedict XV would have rendered the most valuable services. Hundreds of thousands of men would have been spared if the regime had consented to this small sacrifice of pride.22

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22 “Ce que disent les journaux—Action Française,” La Croix, February 7, 1920. https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k260530d/ « C’est aussi le gouvernement français qui gagnera le plus au rétablissement de relations officielles. Nous n’avons cessé de le répéter dès le début de la guerre et du nouveau pontificat, nous avons adjuré le gouvernement d’y songer ; nous n’avons cessé de réitérer nos instances. Il est peu contestable que, vers mars 1917, par exemple, au moment où l’Autriche rêvait de la paix, un ambassadeur français auprès de S. S. Benoît XV aurait rendu les plus précieux services. Des centaines de milliers d’hommes auraient été épargnés si le régime eût consenti à ce semblant de sacrifice d’amour-propre. »
The dubious claim was both common and powerful. To write directly to French parents that their children, only two years buried, might have been spared could have had an enormous effect, no matter the reader’s religious persuasion. By the end of the excerpt, the argument has turned from a call to action to a direct and scathing critique of that which the government had done during the war.

The same approach was used in the featured article of the November 11, 1920, issue, on the second anniversary of the armistice, which bore the title “The Republic and Victory.” It began not by celebrating this victory, but by mocking the explanation given for it by anti-clericals: that the strong national spirit and competence in young French men born of the laïque education system propelled France to victory. Jean Guiraud, the author of the article, was careful to credit the Republic for its successes over the years, including its contribution to the creation of France’s vast colonial empire and its ultimate victory over the Central Powers in the war. But he criticized the education laws of the 1880s, and fiercely condemned the government’s conduct during the war as it related to the Vatican:

We will weigh this all tomorrow, when with the victory we will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Republic. Let our gratitude go first to the French race itself, which has resisted all of the attacks of false doctrines and bad shepherds. May it also go to the leaders who were the architects of our greatness, even when those [of our allies] who were not our own. But let not our reprobation forget those whose sectarian passions, in paralyzing our national policy, made the war longer, more deadly, and allowed it to take a greater toll on our country.  

Guiraud did not make his reference explicit, but it seems that the “sectarian passions” were the anti-clerical ones whose errors included but were not limited to the refusal to allow France to leverage the pope’s influence by sending an ambassador to the Vatican. It is thus that writers and editors for La Croix and the Catholic press more generally flipped the script on the critics of

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23 Jean Guiraud, “La République et la Victoire,” La Croix, November 11, 1920. https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k260765z. « Pesons tout cela lorsqu’il demain, avec la victoire nous célébrerons le cinquantenaire de la République. Que notre reconnaissance aiie d’abord à la race française elle-même qui a résisté à tous les assauts des mauvaises doctrines et des mauvais bergers. Qu’elle aille aussi aux gouvernants qui furent les artisans de notre grandeur, même quand ils n’étaient pas des nôtres. Mais que notre réprobation n’oublie pas non plus ceux dont les passions sectaires, en paralysant notre politique nationale, rendirent la guerre plus longue, plus meurtrière et plus lourde au pays. »
the pope, establishing him as a force for good during the war and then turning the criticisms back on the French government two-fold.

*La Croix* was not the only Catholic publication opining on these matters. An article published in *Etudes*, by Yves de La Brière, is worth examining in detail, as it serves as a representative example of the ways in which the Catholic press and many Catholic figures both rebutted arguments about the pope’s conduct in the war and insisted on the hypothetical usefulness of the embassy within the context of the war. Founded in 1856, *Études* was the “very respectable organ of the Jesuit Order in France,” differentiating it from *La Croix*, which did not technically represent any religious body.24 It has been categorized by one scholar as one of the “technical or intellectual [Catholic] publications which are 'slanted' and generally admit it.”25 La Brière wrote several times on the issue of the reprise, but his article in the November 6, 1920 issue stands out. He wrote in the aftermath of the vote in favor of the embassy by the Chamber of Deputies, but before Astride Briand had appointed the ambassador-extraordinary on May 18, 1921, and before the vote confirming the Chamber decision in the Senate on December 18 of the same year.26 Though the debate in the Chamber had already been won, a large part of La Brière’s article was devoted to rebutting the points of an anti-clerical deputy.

Edouard Herriot, the radical socialist deputy and torch-bearer of the anti-clerical rejection of *rapprochement* introduced in the preceding chapter, was the Catholic publications’ preferred effigy. In his article, La Brière wrote in direct response to Herriot’s comments on the floor of the Chamber, and his strategy in the piece was three-pronged. He argued first that even if one disagreed with the pope’s conduct in the war, it shouldn’t have an impact on the matter at hand.

M. Herriot has had great success in his political sphere by showing indignation towards Benedict XV’s circumspect attitude toward the belligerents. To great oratorical effect he spoke of the withholding of pontifical protestations against the tragic ordeals of a Catholic nation such as the martyr Belgium. But even if the brilliant radical-socialist speaker was right a hundred times, what can all of this prove against the re-establishing

24 Bosworth, *Catholicism and Crisis*, 201.
25 Ibid., 188-189.
26 Fabrègues, “Re-establishment of Relations,” 169.
of the embassy at the Holy See? An embassy is not a reward. At present, we have embassies or legations at each of the states with which France herself was at war.27

This was a practical approach more often seen from politicians than from religious figures or the Catholic press, who were more likely to want to defend the pope than to argue the irrelevance of his behavior. La Brière doubled down on this method in the second prong of his argument, turning the suggestion that the pope fell prey to German conspiracies (one of the more far-fetched of the rumeurs infâmes), or was convinced not to choose a side because of effective German representation at the Vatican, into a further argument for the embassy. If German delegates really did whisper in the pope’s ear during the war, he contended, there should be even more reason for France to be represented there. “The Germanic intrigues around the Vatican seem to demonstrate the necessity, for France, to possess at the Holy See diplomatic representation as powerful and active as that of Austria-Hungary, Prussia and Bavaria in 1914 and 1915,” he wrote.28

Ultimately, however, his discourse repudiated all implications of wrongdoing by the pope, as did that of many supporters of the reprise. His third point rhetorically rendered his first two unnecessary, because, he wrote, the pope was absolutely blameless. He condemned those against the re-establishment who cast aspersions on the pope, and went so far as to criticize even the supporters of the ralliement, in the cases where, he believed, they made too many concessions to their opponents when discussing the pope.

Among certain politicians who, to their credit, have voted in favor of the credits [for the embassy], we must admit that some points in their language exist that can undermine

28 Ibid. « Les intrigues germaniques autour du Vatican tendraient précisément à démontrer la nécessité, pour la France, de posséder, auprès du Saint-Siège, une représentation diplomatique aussi puissante et agissante que le fut, en 1914 et 1915, celle de l’Autriche-Hongrie, de la Prusse et de la Bavière. »
the clarity of the situations and principles. The two speakers, M. Noblemaire and M. Colrat, believed that they had to introduce, in their excellent pleadings in favor of the embassy, a regrettable critique of the role of the papacy during the war. M. Noblemaire was applauded for having evoked Saint Léon le Grand and Attila....But we here have some right to say that such judgements, intended to mock the politics of the reigning Pontiff, are based on an unfair and misleading presentation of the acts of the Holy See in exceptionally difficult and troubling circumstances. The authentic texts and facts show that Benedict XV said what he should have said, that he carried out all that was required of the peculiar character of his pastoral mission, and that very serious considerations account for the willful reserve that tempered his public action. In speaking of the Sovereign Pontiff, there is no need to plead guilty. ²⁹

La Brière rejected the fundamental premises of his opponents’ arguments but also engaged with them on their own terms. His article is emblematic of the mission of the Catholic press and Catholic figures at this moment: to defend the pope’s stance and the Vatican against all attacks, but also to say what needed to be said to convince readers of the necessity of the embassy and the reprise, no matter their feelings about the role of the pope during the war. If the press and religious figures attempted to change French feelings about Benedict XV, they chose other feelings, especially the most virulent ones about the Central Powers that stemmed from the war, to leverage to their advantage.

Enduring Structures of Enmity

As has been described in this chapter and in the analysis of the rumeurs infâmes in the preceding chapter, the pope had an infamously (at least in France) neutral public stance during the war, unwilling to declare any party to be the aggressor and only condemning specific and

²⁹ Ibid., 94-95. «...chez certains hommes politiques qui ont eu le mérite de voter et de faire voter les crédits, nous nous permettons de regretter quelques concessions de langage qui peuvent porter atteinte à la netteté des situations et des principes. Les deux rapporteurs parlementaires, M. Colrat et surtout M. Noblemaire, ont cru devoir introduire, dans leurs excellents plaidoyers en faveur de l’ambassade, une regrettable critique du rôle de la Papauté durant la guerre. M. Noblemaire s’est fait applaudir en évoquant saint Léon le Grand et Attila.....Mais nous avons, ici, quelque droit de dire que de tels jugements, destinés à humilier la politique du Pontife régnant, reposent sur une présentation injuste et fallacieuse des actes du Saint-Siège en des circonstances exceptionnellement difficiles et troublantes. Les textes et les faits authentiques démontrent que Benoît XV a dit ce qu’il devait dire, qu’il a persévérément accompli les démarches requises par le caractère propre de sa mission pastorale, et que des considérations parfaitement sérieuses rendent compte de la réserve volontaire qui tempéra ses interventions publiques. En parlant du Souverain Pontife, il n’y a nul besoin de plaider coupable. »
heinous acts committed over its duration. *La Croix* defended this position time and time again in its columns. But there is no mistaking whom, in 1920, the editors of *La Croix* viewed as the aggressors in the Great War. In articles written by the newspaper’s own staff, in its excerpts from other publications, and in its other interviews and editorial inclusions, a great hatred towards the countries that made up the Central Powers shone through, and particularly towards Germany and Austria. When discussing the re-establishing of diplomatic relations with the Vatican, the war was a critical argumentative lever—when using it, *La Croix* often focused on the enmity between France and Germany and Austria. A baseline fear and hatred of the Central Powers formed the groundwork for many of the newspaper’s arguments.

References to Germany and Austria and the French hatred thereof range dramatically in their subtlety. In a way, the less explicit examples are some of the most telling. In its March 13, 1920, article announcing the first time the subject of a possible re-establishment of relations with the Vatican was introduced in the Chamber of Deputies, *La Croix* pronounced itself unequivocally in favor of such an act. “At a moment when the representatives of Austria and Germany have taken back their places at the Vatican,” wrote an author signing as “Franc,” “it is indispensable that we be there too.” He did not explain why, with his own emphasis, Austria’s and Germany’s presence at the Vatican rendered France’s own indispensable. The lack of justification for such a statement indicates that for the readership, at least in the eyes of the writer, such a conclusion would have been obvious. That France’s recent enemies should be in possession of a diplomatic tool that France did not itself possess, the simple and unaccompanied statement suggests, should have raised immediate alarm.

Whatever was assumed of its readers and their presuppositions, *La Croix* did not always practice such concision and restraint. Closely reporting on and following the debates in the Chamber of Deputies, once such debates began in force in November 1920, writers for *La Croix*

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reported and editorialized in equal measure. They were aghast, the articles indicate, whenever these discussions did not go smoothly, and when arguments for re-establishment met any opposition. Jean Guiraud dedicated the featured, front-page article of the November 23 issue to his favorite villain, titling it simply “M. Herriot.” Guiraud attacked the infamously recalcitrant deputy and opponent to the reprise to be sure, but also combed through his arguments, rebutting specific points. He pointed out what he saw as inconsistencies in Herriot’s historic arguments as they related to religious minorities in enemy countries:

[Herriot] glorified Richelieu, Catholic and prince of the Church, for having supported German Protestants against the Catholic Germanic empire, and he sees in this act the manifestation of a great spirit and a policy both national and “laïque.” But, today, when the Germanic empire is Protestant, being in the hands of Prussia and no longer of Austria, and, as in the time of Richelieu, we must loosen the German unity that is always menacing, then why, the order of the factors being reversed, does M. Herriot not wish that, against a Protestant empire, France support the Catholics of the Rhineland and southern Germany? Another illogical point.31

The extent to which reopening the embassy or a general rapprochement between France and the Vatican would have struck or did ultimately strike at German unity by appealing to German Catholics near the French border is unclear to say the least. The geopolitical element was crucial, in that the Rhineland is adjacent to the long-disputed territory of Alsace-Lorraine, of similarly Catholic sentiments and under similar, somewhat ambiguously mixed Franco-German influences. The very fact, though, that such an end—“loosening the German unity that is always menacing”—was still important to French people like Guiraud, and that he would assume his readers to be sympathetic to such a view, speaks to the great staying power of the feeling of enmity towards Germany cultivated in the pre-war years and brought to the forefront of French

31 Jean Guiraud, “M. Herriot” La Croix, November 23, 1920. https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2607759/f1. « Il a glorifié Richelieu d’avoir, lui catholique, lui prince de l’Église, soutenu les protestants allemands contre l’Empire germanique catholique, et il voit dans cet acte la manifestation d’un esprit large et d’une politique à la fois nationale et laïque”. Mais quand de nos jours l’Empire germanique est protestant, étant aux mains de la Prusse et non plus de l’Autriche, et que, comme au temps de Richelieu, il s’agit de desserrer unité allemande toujours menaçante, pourquoi, l’ordre des facteurs étant renversé, M. Herriot ne veut-il pas que, contre un Empire protestant, la France soutienne les catholiques de Rhénanie et de l’Allemagne du Sud ? Encore un illogisme. » The reference is to the conduct of French statesman and cardinal Richilieu during the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), when despite his position as a Catholic leader he lent aid to Protestants against Catholics because he believed doing so to be in France’s best interest.
minds during the conflict. In light of the condition of the German state, its two-year distance from
the war having hardly repaired the economic and physical destruction that it faced, the cautious
attitude toward German unity reveals just how deep-seated was French fear and mistrust
towards their north-eastern neighbor. Here Franc’s warning about Germany and Austria
becomes all the more explicit; the upshot of Guiraud’s counter to Herriot’s argument is that
France must re-establish its relationship with the pope and its embassy at the Vatican to appeal
to Germans living in southwestern Germany, who might already be sympathetic to France due
to their proximity to the French border, thus striking at the portentous specter of German unity.

Such views were expressed in a similar manner by members of the French clergy and
La Croix was quick to print them. In Mgr. Alfred Baudrillart’s speech on the pope and France,
made before the Society for the Encouragement of National Industry, he stated the following:

It is time! France cannot long remain absent from Rome, without disregarding its most
basic interests and playing the game of its enemies. The new German Reich is
represented at the Vatican, like the old; Bavaria sent back the same representative that
they had before the war, Count von Ritter. They have resumed all of their action, and,
through Rome, have resumed it throughout the Catholic world.  

Baudrillart actually called Germany and Bavaria France’s “enemies,” and, like Guiraud,
suggested the existence of a nebulous but menacing and growing power that they possessed
(the “action” that they had been busy resuming). He named the use to which the diplomatic tool
of having representation at the Vatican might be put: exerting influence over the Catholic world.
This would have been of particular concern to French people, as many had already argued in
favor of the reprise for the sole reason that being represented at the Vatican would allow France
to preserve its historic role of “protector of Catholics in the Orient.” In the case of Bavaria, the
idea that the same representative that had been at the Vatican before the war was being sent
back hinted at a return to the pre-war period, which, of course, was one defined by great tension

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32 “Le pape Benoît XV et la France,” « Il en est temps ! La France ne peu rester plus longtemps absente de Rome, sans méconnaître ses intérêts les plus élémentaires et faire le jeu de ses ennemis. Le nouveau Reich allemand s’est fait représenter au Vatican, comme l’ancien ; la Bavière a renvoyé le même représentant qu’avant-guerre, le comte de Ritter. Ils ont repris toute leur action, et par Rome sur tout le monde catholique ». 
and ill-will between France and Germany. And the rhetoric of the German “game,” the hands that France must at all cost avoid playing into, added to the general ominous feeling, and, as will be seen, was a rhetorical device used more than once on this subject.

One example comes not from La Croix itself, but was still seen on its pages in the “That Which the Journals Say” section. The paper’s editors would sometimes editorialize on these excerpts, leaving their commentary in italics just above the borrowed text. In the July 20, 1920, issue, the editors wrote glowingly about a piece by deputy Xavier de Magallon in the journal Petit Parisien, noting that “[h]is article is perfect. He shows above all the necessity of the embassy.”

They printed an excerpt of Magallon’s article:

This issue is not at all delicate. We must only think of the destiny of the French. France is also a religion. Let go your cultuelles, your discussions, your subtleties, your laws, your rules, your convictions even, so important to you, but so insignificant that others may find them to be negligible. Leave all that, and think of the country which alone must be, at this moment in the aftermath of the war, the master of your spirit, or even better, of your heart. To break with Rome, to push away the hand [of the pope] reached out to you, is to play the game of the enemy, of Germany. Freedom of conscience for the French, for all the French, but a political bond out of courtesy with Rome—that is the formula.

In his piece, Magallon marries an anti-German narrative with a powerful call to French patriotism. La Croix’s writers would likely never have printed such an almost heretical view—that equating patriotism and a love of France with a kind of religion—under their own bylines, but in quoting Magallon, the newspaper employs his rhetoric while maintaining some distance from it.

The argument is totally areligious. It argues that for the love of France, and the love of France alone, the rapprochement must be undertaken. But it, too, makes allusion to some vague German plan, and a dangerous German threat. For not repairing relations with the Vatican to be

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34 Ibid. « Ce sujet n’est pas délicat du tout. Il n’est que de penser aux destinées françaises. La France, c’est aussi une religion. Laissez là vos cultuelles, vos discussions, vos subtilités, vos lois, vos règlements, vos convictions même, si respectables pour vous, mais si petites qu’il est permis aux autres de les trouver négligeables ; laissez tout cela, pensez au pays qui seul doit être, en cet instant, au lendemain de la guerre, le maître de votre esprit, bien mieux, de votre cœur. Rompez avec Rome, repoussez a main qu’on vous tend, c’est faire le jeu de l’ennemi, de l’Allemand. La liberté de conscience pour les Français, pour tous les Français, mais un lien de courtoisie politique avec Rome – c’est une formule. »
considered “playing the game of the enemy,” the enemy, Germany, must have had some game, some looming strategic nexus, of which France was to be the victim. The national anxiety and insecurity that these kinds of references illuminated remind one of similar feelings extant in pre-war Germany. In that instance, the feeling is now generally understood to have been one of entrapment and encirclement; France and Russia, Europe as a whole, or some other envisioned combination of powers had been plotting to strangle and overtake Germany, and action was the only way out of the trap that had been set. The French may not have felt encircled, but certainly still threatened on some level by a foe that in theory had be neutralized.

The common denominator of these references to the members of the Central Powers is their great staying power in French minds. Not as former opponents, not even as defeated enemies, but as current dangers, whose threat, if latent, was still very real. The context and implications of each of these rather direct references to Germany and Austria and the threats they posed to France would seem to suggest a kind of collective obsession with carrying the hatred and fear of these enemies into the post-war period. It is in a moment of what appears to be sympathy, also in the “That Which the Journals Say” section, that this feeling may have revealed itself most clearly. In the July 20, 1920, issue, the editors cite conservative and Catholic-sympathizing newspaper Le Journal:

Millerand…embraces with a broad viewpoint every issue where our interests are involved…above all he looks at the Rhine. He sees the German-speaking populations, of whom it is a great error to believe that all the people are necessarily our enemies, where, on the contrary, it is for us to distinguish and to bring back to us and to civilization all who can be torn from Prussian barbarity.35

To draw a distinction between civilization and German culture seems more fitting of government propaganda issued in 1917, in the heat of the conflict, than it does for a Catholic newspaper printed two years after the end of the war (even if the text was excerpted from another

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« Et surtout il voit le Rhin. Il voit ces populations de langue allemande dont c'est une grande erreur de croire que toutes sont nécessairement nos ennemies, où il y a, au contraire, à distinguer et à ramener à nous et à la civilisation tout ce qui peut être arraché à la barbarie prussienne. »
publication). That it should have seemed necessary to make a special request of its readership not to assume that everyone living on the Rhine is guilty of barbarity leads one to believe that, for the French, the default was still to assume that all Germans were barbaric. It is not happenstance that some of those people living in newly-recovered Alsace-Lorraine and the surrounding territories would have been German-speaking, having lived on technically German territory for almost five decades before the end of the war. The excerpt gives the impression of a gesture made to those Catholic peoples, some as German as they were French, or even more so, whom France so wanted to bring back into the fold, without at all compromising or qualifying the idea that the defining characteristic of Germans was their barbarity. The reference to the Rhineland, where many of the Germans would have been Catholic, also reminds one of the religious nature of the French “enemy,” which was mostly Protestant. In printing this excerpt and other articles seen in this section, La Croix may have been relying on a Catholic-Protestant antipathy in French minds interwoven with a French-German one. Fear and hatred, it would seem, were not easily overcome, and even in victory that insidious stew had only simmered to a lingering paranoia. The writers, editors, and religious figures cited herein were either victims themselves of this paranoia, or they were counting on and manipulating its presence in the French consciousness to achieve the re-establishment of relations with the Vatican. Or, perhaps, they were both at once.

**Papal Ends and Press Instruments**

The obvious voice missing from this analysis of Catholic rhetoric on the subject of the re-establishment of relations between France and the Vatican is that of the pope himself. In his position of holy authority, he was not wont to make statements often, and especially not statements that were explicitly political. On February 24, 1920, though, he wrote to Paul Deschanel, newly-elected President of the Republic, to congratulate him on his new position.
We do not doubt that Divine Providence reserves for your presidency the devoted and sincere assistance of all good French citizens, the magnificent and glorious mission of raising France out of her material and moral ruin, of bringing to your country the religious peace that will be one of the important factors in its recovery, and of contributing effectively to the pacification of peoples, after which all of humanity strives. With confidence in this, We wish divine blessings upon you, upon your family, upon the French government and all of France, whom We always love as the eldest daughter of the Church.\textsuperscript{36}

His words, in the moment when negotiations about re-establishment were soon to begin, hinted at his belief that France ought to seek reconciliation with the Vatican. The French \textit{ruines morales} for example, takes on a double meaning—one of the deflated “morale” of a people that had been mired in war and one of the “moral” ruin of a people, he could have been suggesting, so long estranged from their spiritual leader. The refrain of the “eldest daughter of the Church,” like the canonization of Joan of Arc, appears to be an olive branch. He could neither delve explicitly into the discourse about his own role in the war and France’s lack of representation during it, nor could he state the importance of the relationship to the Vatican in staving off threats from old enemies in the way that other religious figures and the Catholic press could.

An examination of the confluence of these two argumentative strands, coupled with the closeness to the Catholic Church of \textit{La Croix} and other publications cited herein (and, in the case of \textit{La Croix}, its great readership), suggests an overarching Catholic strategy with respect to the renewal of diplomatic relations between France and the Vatican: the pope himself, and his officials around him, had to remain pristine in these debates, but his influence over channels like the Catholic press allowed him access to tools of manipulation. This is not to say that the Vatican was covertly using French publications as propaganda instruments. But its indirect

\textsuperscript{36} La Brière, “Chronique du movement religieux,” 350. « Nous ne doutons pas, dit le Pape, que la divine Providence ne réserve à votre action présidentielle, avec le concours dévoué et sincère de tous les bons citoyens français, la mission magnifique et glorieuse de relever la France de ses ruines matérielles et morales, de donner à votre pays la paix religieuse qui sera l’un des importants facteurs de son relèvement, et de contribuer efficacement à cette pacification des peuples, après laquelle soupire toute l’humanité. Dans cette confiance, Nous implorons les bénédictions divines sur vous, sur votre famille, sur le gouvernement français et sur la France tout entière, que Nous aimons toujours comme la fille aînée de l’Eglise. »
messaging seems to have allowed members of the press to translate the pope’s ends into terms it believed would speak to the French people. These terms, as often as not, were those of war.

That we are stymied from tapping in to the true feelings of a large part of the French clergy on the matter of the reopening of the French embassy at the Vatican is a detriment to this analysis. Despite those lost voices, though, *La Croix* and *Études* provide intimate access to the more publicly dominant, and ultimately successful, side of the debate from the Catholic perspective. The parallels between the strategies used by the religious figures and writers in this chapter and those used by politicians in the preceding chapter are striking. In this case, Catholics attempted to convince the French public on the subject of the *reprise* on the backs of twin interpretations of the war. The first presented the pope as a great ally to France from 1914 to 1918, who strove, in his reluctant but necessary neutrality, to impose peace wherever he could, and who might even have been able to end the war sooner had obstinate French secularists not prevented a joint Franco-Vatican diplomatic effort. The second asked French people to hold on to their most hostile feelings from the war, and to imagine their old enemies plotting anew, leaning not only on enmity born of war, but also on antipathy stemming from religious differences between the French and Germans. Religious figures, as much as French politicians, crafted war stories perfectly tailored to suit their purposes, changing the way the struggle was remembered along the way.
Chapter Three

Voilà l’Ennemi! The Popular Press and the Reprise

The debates in the Chamber of Deputies give us an idea of how the decision to re-establish the French embassy at the Vatican was made, and of the discourse surrounding that decision, while the speeches of religious figures and the articles in the Catholic press allow us access to perspectives and arguments of a particular religious segment of the population. That which I call the popular press, which includes the major newspapers in France in 1920, was written for everyone. The articles in the popular press show how the issue of the reprise was presented to the average French layperson. I contend that, in arguing for and against the ralliement, the authors of articles in major French newspapers harnessed what they understood to be the public’s obsession with the war, constantly linking the discussion of the embassy at the Vatican to stories both about the war itself and about its lasting effect on France in 1920.

The concepts of clericalism, anti-clericalism, Catholicism and laïcité were no strangers to the French press at the onset of the 1920s. The ideas can even be said to serve as a rough descriptive analogue for the range of newspapers and journals that existed: a collection of publications of a conservative, often Christian, and sometimes even monarchist bent constituted the right end of the spectrum, the more moderate newspapers of record constituted the middle, and radical republican, socialist, and communist publications constituted the left. Though the newspapers had established readerships whose political views likely corresponded to those held by the publications themselves, when writing about the re-establishment of relations with the Vatican, the goal was still to convince. Reading the articles that the papers printed, it
becomes clear that the authors shared the conviction of the politicians and the religious figures and writers cited in the preceding chapters: in France in 1920, the task of convincing was made significantly easier by framing arguments within the context of the Great War.

Though arguments found in the Chamber of Deputies and in religious publications cropped up in the popular press, their treatment in the popular press took distinct forms. More planned and intentional than some of the off-the-cuff speeches and responses in the Chamber, with more flexibility and latitude than was afforded religious publications that felt pressure to conform with papal dogma, the newspapers and journals of the time used various strategies when attempting to get their points across. Often, it was activity in the Chamber or even the Senate that acted as the impetus for articles that appeared in the press. In the daily newspapers, some simply reported that which had transpired the day before in the debates about the potential re-establishment of relations with the Vatican, without any immediately discernible agenda. Others, especially in the more polemical sources, reported the facts and opined on them, or at least colored them in one way or another, in the same breath. Some, too, were outright opinion pieces. In this last case, the newspapers seemed to choose one of three options: an opinion piece written by a staffer of the publication, an editorial written by the editorial board, or an opinion piece by (or an interview with) a public figure, be it a retired politician or well-regarded academic, whose track record would have lent credence to any opinion on these matters.

In this analysis, I will use one main newspaper as a representative from each of the two ends of the ideological spectrum, supplemented by other comparable publications. I will lay out the kind of rhetoric from each side that was a holdover from the pre-war period, then analyze how those old arguments were transformed or replaced, appearing in formats that were only made possible by the war. On the conservative side, I will use the newspaper of record *Le
Figaro. Founded in 1826, the paper’s editorial line seems to have shifted somewhat over time, but was always solidly right of center. Within its arguments and those of similarly conservative publications, one can find examples of a rhetoric not specifically war-related that virulently attacked anti-clericals, presenting them not only as enemies obstructing the reprise, but also as generally violent and hateful towards Catholics. Beyond the polemics against anti-clericals, two new kinds of arguments specific to the post-war context revealed themselves in the pages of the conservative press. In the first, it threw its support behind the Vatican and its behavior during the war. In the second, it stressed a new kind of unity that the war created, distinct from the union sacrée, which would both necessitate and facilitate the reprise.

On the liberal side, I will use L’Humanité, which “was founded by [French socialist leader] Jean Jaurès as a socialist paper in 1904, and became the mouthpiece of the French Communist Party in 1920.” In its plea for readers to oppose the proposed embassy, L’Humanité and comparable newspapers also rehearsed arguments not specifically war-related, that ran almost exactly counter to those arguments invoked by the conservative press. They viewed the coming embassy vote as a referendum on the age-old question of laïcité, which, if passed, was likely to lead to further attacks on state secularism. But the war allowed the liberal press to widen the scope of its argumentation in two ways. It fought against the conservative press’s support for the pope during the war, and posited the war as a project forced upon the underprivileged French classes, which would have to pay for the new embassy with its tax dollars despite not having its basic needs provided for in their post-war state of want.

The approach of selecting specific publications to represent broad points of view is of course not comprehensive. Even with the inclusion of excerpts from articles in other

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1 I have used the terms ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ throughout. These terms are likely imprecise and anachronistic, but their intended meanings are as follows: ‘liberal’ will include those people and opinions left of center, ranging from Bolsheviks and anarchists to moderates, and would generally include proponents of laïcité. ‘Conservative’ will include those people and opinions right of center, from moderates to monarchists and royalists, and would generally include most Catholics.

publications, relying mostly on a single paper to represent an entire half of the political spectrum is necessarily skewed in one direction or another. But because both *Le Figaro* and *L’Humanité* were widely circulated and well-known, and because they often did more than just report the news, they will suffice in giving at least an impression of the landscape.

The Conservative Press

It was in the conservative press that the most enthusiastic cases made for the *reprise* between France and the Vatican appeared. Though not often explicitly religious in their discourse, one gets the impression that the writers understood the inclinations of their readership, which would certainly have trended Catholic. While the war figured centrally in these discussions, remnants of a kind of rhetoric that pre-dated the war were still plentiful. Historian Kevin Passmore provides a taste of this earlier kind of conservative, anti-secularist rhetoric in describing conservative reactions to the separation laws of 1905. He writes that, in the era of the separation laws, the conservative Progressist party, “regarded the treatment of the Catholic orders and the terms of the separation as attacks on liberty and as sign that the [reigning coalition of the] *Bloc des gauches* had ‘replaced the institutions of free peoples with the brutal force of number.’” As it did in the pre-war period, especially when tensions between secularists and French Catholics were at their zenith after the passing of the secular laws from 1901 to 1905, terms associated with anti-clericalism or any kind of abridgment of the rights of the Church seemed to operate as insults in conservative publications in 1920, necessitating no qualification or explanation. The conservative press drew on pre-existing feelings about strident secularists, who would, in the minds of its conservative readership, have borne historical associations with the murderous radicals of the French revolution in the eighteenth century, with

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the politicians who pried religion from their classrooms in the nineteenth century, and most recently, with the relegation of the Catholic Church to the status of one religious cult in France among many, stripped bare of its historical rights and privileges. It was often with terms like "anti-clerical" that the conservative papers framed the arguments being made against the re-establishing of relations with the Vatican, and "anti-clerical" and "anti-Vatican" became somewhat interchangeable.

Reminiscent of a time in France when journalists wrote without a recent war to use as rhetorical kindling, in the November 16, 1920, issue of *Le Figaro*, Marcel Boulenger wrote that now, the resumption of relations with the Vatican will be discussed. The most basic common sense demands it. But its intransigent adversaries continue to oppose it. We do not mean to seem disrespectful, or to seem to support a paradox, but are we certain that at the very bottom of the hearts of the most ferocious priest-eaters there does not hide a secret displeasure to see the cardinals dressed in red and the pontiff seated on his throne? … Who knows if these greatest adversaries of the pope are not angry at the halberds of the Swiss Guard?⁴

The direct implication was that anti-clericals were not merely proponents of *laïcité*, but were in fact anti-religious on a more fundamental and personal level. Boulenger indicated that the very sight of cardinals in red would bring anger to these "priest-eaters," and maybe that they would even like to see harm to come to the pope. The acerbic language points to the great divide still extant in French society between Catholics and secularists in 1920. But for its reference to the re-establishment of relations with the Vatican, though, the rhetoric could have just as easily been used fifteen years earlier, in the battles surrounding the secular legislation at the turn of the century. What, then, was changed by the war, and how did the war complicate the battle between Catholics and anti-clericals in the popular press since last they had raged so hotly in the pre-war era?

⁴ Marcel Boulenger, "La Trompe et la Hallebarde," *Le Figaro*, November 16, 1920, [https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2926682/](https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2926682/). « En ce moment, la reprise des relations diplomatiques avec le Vatican va être discuté : le bon sens le plus élémentaire la réclame et le retardateur. Des adversaires irréductibles s'y opposeront pourtant. Ou alors, nous serions bien foutus de paraître irrespectueux, ou de sembler soutenir un paradoxe : mais sommes-nous absolument certain qu’au fond, au fin fond du cœur de certains, parmi les plus mangeurs de curés, ne se cache point quelque chose déplaisir à voir les cardinaux vêtus de rouge et le souverain pontife porté sur la sedia? De même que les plus rudes ennemis de la vénéris en veulent aux trompes des piqueurs, qui sait si les pires adversaires de la Papauté ne sont pas courroucés contre les hallebardes des gardes-suisses? »
For one, the expansive and complicated historical terrain of the war, about which no
definite analytical or popular consensus could have been reached only two years after its end,
afforded the press many opportunities to cast the blame for some of the war’s horrors on their
opponents (anti-clericals, in the case of the conservative press). An article in Le Figaro on
March 12, 1920, began to show the transition of the old kind of rhetoric that was consumed with
deriding anti-clericals to one deeply concerned with the war. The author insisted that anti-
clericals had gone too far in breaking off the relationship with the Vatican fifteen years before,
and that their decision to do so had disastrous implications years later during the conflict.

To abstain from taking part in this debate, leaving to others the job of telling the Holy
See of our acts and our intentions, is to carry out, in a word, diplomacy in absentia, and
it is a game the danger of which has made itself sufficiently clear since anti-clerical
absolutism transformed the law of separation into a law of rupture. We lived this fault for
fifteen years. It is time for the government to listen to that which national interest
demands.\(^5\)

The idea that an “anti-clerical absolutism transformed the law of separation into a law of
rupture” certainly transcends the Vatican matter at hand, and reflects a real fear and hatred of
anti-clericals within this conservative and often religious demographic. Instead of the image of
the purest form of republic, ruled by objective and antiseptic secular law, as those on the left
envisioned their project, the article’s use of the word “absolutism” to describe what
conservatives viewed as a destructive and marginalizing intolerance of their religion by the
tyannical, laïcité-obsessed majority, would have evoked in its French readers associations with
monarchy and the ancien régime. After all, as the article continued, in a true republic, “religious
liberties are also guaranteed by republican laws.”\(^6\) The commentary on anti-clericals echoes

\(^5\) “Le Rétablissement de l’Ambassade du Vatican,” Le Figaro, March 12, 1920,
https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k292418q/.

\(^6\) Ibid. « Il n’y a même pas lieu de les mettre en cause, non plus que les libertés religieuses inscrites elles aussi dans
les lois républicaines. »
Boulenger’s rhetoric in that it decidedly attacks staunch secularists and in that is not in any way particular to its 1920, post-war context.

The other crucial element of the excerpt, however, addressed the war directly. In stating that “the danger [of diplomacy in absentia at the Vatican] has made itself sufficiently clear,” the article seems to have been making a reference similar to one recorded in the preceding chapter, in which *La Croix* excerpted an article from the hyper-conservative newspaper *L’Action Française*: that the wartime absence of a French representative at the Vatican may have negatively impacted the French war effort. The author did not expand on this idea, or even make it explicit, choosing instead to turn their attentions to attacking anti-clericalism, with which rested the responsibility for the absence of French representation at the pope’s side during the war and thus the responsibility for a share of the destruction brought upon France. The fault of the “transformation” of the law of separation also lay with anti-clericals, who created a rupture between Catholics and non-Catholics that delayed peace during World War I; it could be atoned for, the article implied, by approaching the Vatican in a conciliatory manner.

In *L’Action Française*, we can see an example of the end result of a process of transformation caused by the war in conservative rhetoric. *Le Figaro* featured a “news from this morning” section in its papers, and that which it chose to include is telling. As in the Catholic Press, Inclusions of excerpts from papers like the far-right *L’Action Française* allowed more mainstream publications like *Le Figaro* to represent strident radical viewpoints without necessarily espousing them directly. In its December 22, 1920 issue, *Le Figaro* included an excerpt from author Léon Daudet, writing in *L’Action Française* with a distinctly post-war flavor, positioning anti-clericals in the context of the war in a most unflattering light.

What matters to [anti-clericals] is the war against the Holy See, the war against priests and religious people. They would return to the German war, if necessary, as long as the war with the Vatican and the clergy continues!! The German formula, from Gambetta to
Bismarck and Henckell—“clericalism, that is the enemy”—remains their irreplaceable, their dear hobbyhorse… a hobbyhorse that is dripping in French blood.\(^7\)

The short passage betrays a great deal about Daudet’s view, which, appearing on the front page of the *L’Action Française*, one can assume was not outlandish for the paper or to its readership (and, as mentioned above, questions can be posed about the meaning of the inclusion of an excerpt in *Le Figaro*). In the passage, the association of “the war against priests and religious people” with the very real one that had concluded only two years before is itself striking. Daudet reached into absurdity in stating that this war, in the eyes of the anti-clericals, was even more important, and that they would have returned to the struggle with Germany for a victory over Catholics and the Vatican. The hyperbole, though, is telling: it implicitly situated those who did not support the *reprise*, namely anti-clericals, as the enemy, literally having his readers imagine that they would prefer to revisit perhaps the most traumatic event in the nation’s history than to give any ground to Catholics or the Vatican.

Daudet’s invocation of the phrase “Le cléricalisme—voilà l’ennemi!” was a common refrain among conservatives. A quote from politician and famous proponent of *laïcité* Leon Gambetta in a speech from 1874, the phrase was used often by conservatives and the conservative press in an attempt to make a point evoked in the *Le Figaro* article above: that these anti-clericals did not simply wish to prevent the *reprise* or even achieve the separation of Church and State, but that they were in fact against clericalism and religion in all its forms. Its use was clearly somewhat anachronistic—even the most strident anti-clerical politicians probably would not have uttered such a phrase in 1920—but its rhetorical effect was undeniable. Perhaps most strikingly, Daudet associated French anti-clerical sentiment with a “German formula”; in addition to Gambetta, he references German anti-clerical poet Karl Henckell and Otto Von Bismarck, Prime Minister of Prussia who was responsible for the

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\(^7\) Ibid. « Ce qui leur importe, c'est la guerre au Saint-Père, la guerre aux cures et aux religieuses. Revienne au besoin la guerre allemande, pourvu que continue la guerre au Vatican, la guerre au clergé !! La formule boche du Gambetta à Bismarck et à Henckell – « le cléricalisme, voilà l’ennemi » – demeure leur irremplaçable, leur cher dada…un dada ruisselant de sang français. »
Prussian *Kulturkampf* policy of 1871 to 1878, which fiercely attempted to extract all religious presence from the Prussian government.\(^8\) This rhetorical move overtly couples those opposed to the *reprise* in France with Germans, who were France’s very recent mortal enemy. Though Bismarck predated the Great War, Daudet tied the views that he stood for, carried into the contemporaneous setting by French anti-clericals, directly back into the war by asserting that their shared “hobbyhorse” of anti-clerical fanaticism was “dripping in French blood.”

Daudet’s article illustrates the way that the war caused a shift in the old anti-clerical rhetoric, and arguments directly relating the issue of the embassy to the war, incorporating the figure of the hated anti-clerical along the way, were ever-present in the conservative press.

Another strategy when making these kinds of arguments was to heap praise on the Vatican, and its role as a promoter of peace, during the war and beyond it. In the June 2, 1920 issue of *Le Figaro*, Victor Bucaille’s writing exemplified exactly that:

> Again, to bring peace to individuals, peoples and states, the voice of the papacy rises; considering human miseries, which aggravated the germs of hate left by the war, the Catholic Church retells its lesson of charity that its founder had formerly brought to the earth. To be today in perfect harmony with universal desires, the voice of the papacy, wishing for true peace, has only to repeat the same terms it used so often over the long course of the bloody days of the war.\(^9\)

This strategy may have been the one most often accompanied by religious overtones, as evidenced by Bucaille’s discussion of charity and his mentioning of the “founder” of the church.

He at once reaffirms the pope’s moral authority and the idea that he committed no fault during the war. *Le Figaro* made a practice of defending the Vatican. Others papers, however, did not.

As has been shown in earlier chapters, even some of those who supported the *reprise*

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\(^9\) Victor Bucaille, “La Nouvelle Encyclique: L’Eglise et la Pacification des Esprits,” *Le Figaro*, June 2, 1920, [https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2925011f](https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2925011f). « Encore une fois, pour exhorter à la paix les individus, les peuples et les États, la voix de la Papauté s’élève ; penchée sur les humaines misères, qu’ont aggravées les germes de haines déposés par la guerre, l’Eglise catholique redit la leçon de charité que son fondateur avait autrefois apportée à la terre. “Pour être aujourd’hui en harmonie parfait avec les désirs universels, la voix de la Papauté, souhaitant la paix veritable, n’a qu’à reprendre les termes mêmes dont elle s’est servi si souvent au long cours des jours sanglants de la guerre.” »
acknowledged that the pope had on some level forsaken France by not being more outspoken and explicit in its defense, and in not loudly enough decrying the actions of Germany. Those who did not support the *reprise* used even stronger terms, and made stronger accusations. On this matter, *Le Figaro* supported the Vatican as best it could.

Denys Cochin, writer and recently retired conservative politician, wrote a piece for *Le Figaro* documenting his experiences travelling to Rome during the war and in the months after its conclusion. In the article, he described the destruction of church property he saw in his travels, to the effect, one can imagine, of evoking some feeling of duty among the faithful to restore the houses of God to their pre-war state. One particular passage, though, stands out for the way it subtly defended the Vatican from two popular French complaints. Cochin described an interaction with Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri, with whom he seems to have corresponded regularly:

To an indignant letter, in which I noted the criminal deportations of women and children ordered by the Germans, the cardinal responded in a lively manner: “You say that the Holy See had not a word of reprobation for the deportations; are you sure of this? Are you familiar with the documents which are in the archives of the secretary of state? To find among my words any affirmation that Alsace-Lorraine ought to be German, that would be rich! You have not been the master of your pen, as you usually are.”

In the excerpt, Cochin took the opportunity to defend the Vatican and its actions during the war both in terms of its condemnation of supposed German atrocities and in terms of its views on the Alsace-Lorraine question. Though Alsace-Lorraine figured less prominently in the national press than it did in Chamber debates, it obviously still held weight for a conservative readership that, like the regained regions, was likely Catholic to a large degree. In citing Gasparri’s suggestion that the Vatican had, in fact, condemned some German acts during the war, Cochin

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attempted to portray the pope in a manner more palatable to the French than interpretations in which he remained perfectly neutral in word and action.

Beyond the enthusiastic attitude of the conservative press towards the Vatican, its support of the reprise in terms that were specific to the post-war context took what would have been another recognizable form for those familiar with the Chamber debates. The union sacrée itself was mentioned less often, but the theme of a great need for national unity shone through just as brightly. Perhaps to an even greater degree, these themes of unity were often tied either directly or obliquely to the Great War. Though not an article written by the staff of Le Figaro, the newspaper published a statement by Cardinal Louis Ernest Dubois, who would become the Archibishop of Paris just two months after the article was published, discussing the idea of the re-establishment.

The union of all of the children of France in the same love of the fatherland, in times of peace as in tragic hours, is the condition of our recovery and of our prosperity. We can no longer have pure politics, and in the clergy less than anywhere else. The war, moreover, has opened up many spirits and pacified many consciences. All of the clergy, alongside all well-informed men in this country, believe that a change is necessary: the regularization of relations between Rome and the Republic. It is necessary not only from a point of view purely religious, but from a national point of view first, and a moral one next.11

Several ideas were at play within Dubois’s statement, and what seems to tie them all together is the idea that the war changed something fundamental about French society, or at least about the way in which the French conceived of themselves and one another. That the war “opened up many spirits and pacified many consciences,” while it may not have been among the very strongest of people’s conscious feelings in the immediate aftermath, was a concept that many politicians and journalists alike seemed to share (or was, at least, a discourse that they often peddled). When he wrote of unity and collective feeling being the “condition of our recovery and

11 Louis Ernest Dubois, “Les rapports de la France avec le Vatican,” Le Figaro, October 3, 1920, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2936245/ « L’union de tous les enfants de la France dans le même amour de la patrie, au temps de la paix comme aux heures tragiques, est la condition de notre relèvement et de notre prospérité. De politique pure, il n’en faut plus, et dans le clergé moins que partout ailleurs. La guerre, a d’ailleurs ouvert bien des esprits et pacifié bien des consciences. Aussi bien, tout ce clergé comme tous les hommes avertis de ce pays, sentaient qu’une œuvre s’impose : la régularisation des rapports entre Rome et la République. Elle s’impose non pas au point de vue purement religieux, mais au point de vue national d’abord, morale ensuite… »
prosperity,” Dubois touched upon an idea that, at least in retrospect, has been much discussed by historians. It is the phenomenon that Jay Winter describes, as referenced in the introduction to this study: “the powerful, perhaps essential, tendency of ordinary people, of many faiths and of none, to face together the emptiness, the nothingness of loss in war.”

That one would seek togetherness in the state of post-war ruin in which France found itself is not hard to believe, and that a journalist or politician might play off of the knowledge that such a collective will exists to achieve their own end is perhaps even less so.

Writing of the example of deputy Louis Puech, a leftist radical representative of the Seine region, Louis Latzarus drew an equally strong conclusion about how the war had fundamentally altered the way French people saw and related to one another, and the impact those changes would have on the issue of the reprise. Puech defected from his ranks in this matter, supporting the reprise where his radical colleagues were almost all against it. Latzarus writes:

It is, in the French Chamber, a new spectacle to see a radical-socialist deputy renounce anti-clerical foolishness and speak of tolerance and justice. It took nothing less than the war to cause this phenomenon. I will not go so far as to think that M. Puech succeeded in convincing any of his friends. But to be sure, this old politician had the right sentiment, and that is what is important. Whatever may be the wish of representatives of a pre-war opinion, there is among the French a new state of mind. The old quarrels no longer interest anyone. We want only to work in order and union.

Of course Latzarus echoed the anti-clerical-bashing refrain that was the wont of the writers for Le Figaro and its peer publications, but two other points in the excerpt are of greater note. Explaining how a radical could switch sides on this issue, he wrote that “[i]t took nothing less than the war to cause this phenomenon,” indicating yet again the belief that the war brought on

14 Louis Latzarus, “Un signe de temps,” Le Figaro, November 24, 1920, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k202676n. « C’est dans la Chambre française, un spectacle nouveau que de voir un député radical-socialiste renoncer à la sottise anti-cléricale, et parler de tolérance et de justice. Il n’a fallu rien de moins que la guerre pour permettre ce phénomène. Je n’ai pas jusqu’à penser que M. Puech ait réussi à convaincre aucun de ses amis. Mais soyons sûrs que ce vieux routier de la politique a le sentiment et voilà ce qui est important. Quoi qu’en veuillent les représentants attardés des opinion d’avant-guerre, il y a, chez les Français, un état d’esprit nouveau. Les vieilles querelles n’intéressent plus personne. On veut seulement travailler dans l’ordre et l’union.... »
a serious change in French people’s conceptions of how they ought to, or how they wanted to, view and engage with one another. When he wrote of the “new state of mind” to which the war gave rise, in which “the old quarrels,” here presumably the clerical versus anti-clerical struggle that raged in the prewar years, “no longer interest[ed] anyone,” Latzarus made the case that the prevailing will among the French was so strongly in favor of preserving the unity found in war time, or achieving some new unity as yet unattained, that they were willing to forget some of the most defining societal conflicts that had consumed them half a decade earlier. To his readers he presented a bright imagined future based on the shared experience of a trying past.

In La Révue Hebdomadaire, a conservative weekly magazine interested as much in literature as it was in politics, the case that the war had changed the outlook of French people on both sides of this question was made just as directly.

It must be clearly recognized: the current government, yesterday that of M. Millerand and today that of M. Leygues, no longer has the sectarian spirit. The war has cured more than one ill and corrected more than one misunderstanding. It has brought hearts together, and converted patriotic statesmen and those sympathetic, if not to the Catholic faith, at least to the necessity of religious pacification.15

This article and those preceding it looked for a silver lining in the devastation of the war, and claimed to have found one in national solidarity across lines of faith. The “fierce desire and… frustrated dream” of a “return to normalcy,” described by Mary Louise Roberts and discussed in the introduction, was on display in the review.16 The fierce desire to return to unity and normalcy, or at least the conscious exploitation of that desire, is evident in the pages of the conservative publications. The argument of a frustrated dream, however, reveals itself when comparing these articles to those in the liberal press.

The Liberal Press


Whether the two were in some ways in conversation with each other or they were both simply responding to the same external environment and political and social discourse, the conservative and liberal press seemed to track each other somewhat closely in terms of their coverage of the reprise. On a very broad level, the two were alike in their treatment in that the war was an inescapable motif, leaned on for every conceivable purpose. The methods, language and focus obviously varied between the two, but fair analogues reveal themselves on a number of different levels. As in the conservative press, traces of an older rhetoric from before the war are present, allowing us to trace the development of that rhetoric into the post-war period. Whereas the conservative press was historically obsessed with the idea of the hateful anti-clerical and his attacks on the Church, the liberal press had been devoted to defending pure laïque ideals in the pre-war period, which sometimes manifested itself in attacking those who sought to roll back secular legislation. The liberal press tended to view the vote on the embassy at the Vatican as a referendum on the concept of laïcité itself.

The liberal press’s preoccupation with defending the secular nature of the state in the way it had done before the war was often on display in discussions of the reprise. In the pre-war era, strident remarks from the liberal press like the following one, made weeks before the passing of the separation laws in 1905, were common: “The law in hand, the government can strike at its eternal adversary who, by refusing the program offered to him, gives himself up for these blows.” The “eternal adversary” indicated by the notoriously anti-clerical newspaper La Lanterne, of course, was the Church. This kind of rhetoric was echoed in the liberal press fifteen years later. In a March 1920, interview with Charles Seignobos, a noted French historian who specialized in the history of the Third Republic, L’Humanité journalist C.-E. Labrousse posed questions on what votes for and against the resolution would say about the deputies casting

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17 “Puissance Déchue,” La Lanterne, October 18, 1905. https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k75075757/ « Le loi en main, le gouvernement peut frapper l’éternel adversaire, qui en refusant le régime de liberté qui lui était offert, se livre follement à ses coups. »
them: “In any case, will the proposal of the government have the advantage of classifying…the supporters of laïcité?” asked Labrousse. “Yes, that is my belief. No elected republican could approve of a vote for this law,” responded Seignobos. When the article appeared, Seignobos could have given such an answer with a reasonable hope that the “true” republicans of the Chamber, those committed to the pillars of French republicanism (the most recently erected of which was official state secularism), would never consider voting for such a move. But the Bloc national in the Chamber was on the whole a conservative and likely Catholic group, and vocal defenders of purist laïcité were more often to be found in the political middle and on the left. That the overwhelming Chamber majority voted in favor of the bill, by the vote of 391 for to 179 against, suggests that even some moderates were ultimately swayed.

Despite the ultimate result of the vote, Seignobos’s basic view seems to have been shared by many. L’Humanité was a fierce supporter of Edouard Herriot, the main spokesperson against the re-establishment of relations in the Chamber who has been often featured in this study. Though the newspaper and the man were not totally aligned ideologically, and Herriot made clear that he did not go so far as to support Bolshevism, he championed the secular cause better than anyone. Closely covering his frequent orations on the matter, L’Humanité often took the opportunity to insert its own supporting views, particularly when it concerned the fear that secularism would be jeopardized by the reprise. This coverage reached its zenith in the November 17, 1920, issue, in which two articles appeared discussing whether to approve credits for the French embassy at the Vatican that had been formally brought before the Chamber for the first time the day before. In that issue, Daniel Renoult wrote of Herriot’s and leftists’ insecurity about what a vote for the reopening embassy would portend for laïcité in France. “When…M. Herriot put forth the idea that the re-establishment of diplomatic relations

with the Vatican would only be the prelude to a campaign against the law of separation and the *laïque* institutions of France, he put the question in its proper arena."²¹ The point became even clearer later in the same article, in which Renoult framed the issue in the most explicit terms: “In the grand struggle between the reaction and the revolution, intermediary solutions like the parties of ‘the happy medium’ begin to disappear. Without a doubt, the *Bloc national* will go further, dare more, and even attack the republican form of government itself…”²² There exists a clear parallel between the liberal press’s preoccupation with the idea that clericals were out to destroy secularism in France and the conservative press’s great fear of anti-clericals and their anti-Catholic agenda, and both arguments stemmed from the pre-war period. In each case, the other party did not just threaten the one, but it threatened the very institution that was France. The conservative press deemed the liberals enemies of “unity,” while the liberal press claimed that its opponent “attack[ed] the republican form of government itself.” That these intentions were in reality likely held by very few hardly bears mentioning, but the clear prevalence of these kinds of thoughts provides both some context for understanding what else was said, and also an impression that these publications were tapping into real fears and anxieties latent in French society.

The liberal press went far beyond the pure defense of their old bastion of *laïcité* in its rejection of the embassy project, and used liberally-oriented views on the war to make new arguments. The question of the Vatican itself was a popular topic among the papers, their categorical decrying of its actions during the war and its moral authority just as strong as those voiced in the opposite direction by the conservative press. Because the most prominent political argument for the *reprise* centered around the practical necessity of being represented at one of

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²¹ Daniel Renoult, “Le Bloc national va payer un de ses dettes—La Reprise des Relations Diplomatiques avec le Vatican,” *L’Humanité*, November 17, 1920, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2998554/. « Quand, au contraire, M. Herriot a soutenu que la reprise des relations diplomatiques avec le Vatican ne serait que le prélude de la campagne contre la loi de séparation et les institutions laïques de la France, il a placé la question sur son vrai terrain. »

²² Ibid. « Dans la grande lutte engagée entre la Réaction et la Révolution, les solutions intermédiaires, comme le parti de « juste milieu » disparaissent de plus en plus. Sans aucun doute, le Bloc national ira plus loin, osera davantage, s’attaquera même à la forme républicaine… »
the great international centers for diplomacy that was the Vatican, the liberal press took care to respond thoroughly to the underlying assumptions of that claim. In the March 12, 1920, issue of *L'Humanité*, C.-E. Labrousse wrote that “Catholic Belgium knows from experience, after the hardships of this war, the benefit that can be had from being represented at the Holy See.”  

The excerpt is loaded with sarcasm. Labrousse made reference to the atrocities committed by the German army, some real and some exaggerated, during its invasion and occupation of neutral Belgium which set the wheels of World War I in motion. The fact that the deeply Catholic country was represented at the Vatican, he implied, did nothing to save it, and the Vatican did not take active steps to protect it. In an article in the same November 17 issue referenced above, *L'Humanité* again invoked the plight of Belgium. Again following anti-clerical hero Herriot, the journalist “Mayeras” recorded his impressions of the deputy’s actions in the Chamber.

M. Herriot revealed other texts that will not inspire future generations with a flattering opinion of the richness of the heart of pope Benedict XV. The massacre of many Belgian priests, the tragic torture of whom M. Herriot enumerated, did not succeed in moving the “common father of the faithful.”

The French *père commun des fidèles* would seem to be somewhat facetious in intent. The excerpt, then, called into question both the concrete inaction of the pope during the war and the very presumed moral authority on which his position depended. Mayeras’s excerpt represented the epitome of the strategy of his fellow anti-clericals and of their opponents; Vatican activity in the war, or lack thereof, was used to make specific arguments in 1920, and narratives and counter narratives surrounding Benedict XV were shaped and reshaped to most effectively convince the readership. When considering a question that for some was purely pragmatic, it

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23 C.-E. Labrousse, “Nos rapports avec le Vatican—Que vont faire les radicaux ?,” *L'Humanité*, March 12, 1920, [https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2996065/](https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2996065/). « La catholique Belgique sait par expérience, après les épreuves de cette guerre, le profit qu'on peut tirer d'une représentation auprès du Saint-Siège. »

24 Mayeras, “La Scéance,” *L'Humanite*, November 17, 1920, [https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2998554/](https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2998554/). « ...M. Herriot donna connaissance d'autres textes qui n'inspireront point aux générations futures une opinion flatteuse des richesses de cœur du pape Benoît XV. Le massacre de marts prêtres belges, les supplices dont M. Herriot lut la tragique énumération, n'ont pas réussi à émouvoir 'le père commun des fidèles. »
seemed still to have been arguments about and memories of the war that were believed to be most persuasive.

The virulent anti-Vatican rhetoric recurred often when the subject of the liberal press was the reprise. Not only was it felt that wartime indecision and inaction merited a boycott of the pope, but also the notion that the Vatican had any temporal power, and that having representation there actually provided any benefit to the country, was called into question. *La Lanterne* carried an interview in its January 7, 1920 issue with famous retired French statesman, freemason and outspoken anti-clerical Émile Combes. The interviewer (who signed the article J.C.), probed Combes on his thoughts about the diplomatic advantages, if any, that there were to be reaped from the return to Rome. Combes responded:

> It is certain that the development of France in the world comes from the power of France itself and not from its representation with the Papacy. The influence of the Vatican is just a lure, and we must not believe it. Republicans must not make this mistake. They must not ensnare themselves in an unfriendly trap. They would be committing a grave error if they renewed even merely diplomatic relations with that which, during the war, argued and quibbled over the crimes and villainy of our enemies.  

In one breath, Combes asserted France’s self-generative power, denied the temporal influence of the Vatican, and attacked the pope for not having spoken out more emphatically against Germany during the war. This last feature was a constant sticking point. It appears that either members of the liberal press had not moved on from what they viewed as the Vatican’s betrayal, or that this war-related tactic, tapping into a certain indignation especially among those who had no special connection to the Vatican in the first place, was viewed as the most likely to persuade effectively. Félix Hautfort, writing for *La Lanterne* on March 13, 1920, discussed the conservatives in the Chamber, who he said were ready to “declare publicly that they are ready

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to forget the past and to ‘reconnect’ with a Holy Father from whom we have been vainly waiting for an anathema against the greatest criminals who have ever desolated the world.”

The disdain for the pope among these liberal journalists was clear, and felt somewhat personal at times. If they did not admire the figure of the pope and the way he comported himself in the few years prior, they certainly had little respect for those who continued to follow him blindly. As they called into question the pure and resounding morality of the pope, they attempted to interrogate the real motivations of his supporters. In his article of November 17, 1920, Mayeras described “[t]he right, which prefers the pope and the politics of the Bloc national to the memory of priests shot by the Germans….“ Using the war as a conduit, the phrase not only questioned the priorities of French Catholics, but also turned the “unity” narrative so frequently evoked by the right on its head. The idea of not honoring priests shot in the war, be they French or otherwise, could certainly shake a Catholic’s faith that they were promoting “unity” by supporting the ralliement.

The French liberal press was not a monolith in 1920, and just as there existed a spectrum from moderate conservative to monarchist papers on the right, there existed, too, a spectrum from moderate liberal to Bolshevik papers on the left. The socialist movement at this moment in France, was formidable. These were the first among “[t]he so-called Red Years after the war—including increased strike activity and the founding of the French Communist Party [which] provoked fears that a worldwide socialist revolution was at hand.” Indeed, Herbert Tint notes that the Bloc national itself, elected in 1919, formed as a response to fears of a

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27 Mayeras, “La Scéance.”

28 Roberts, Civilization without Sexes, 5.
As Brogan writes, “The armistice had hardly been declared when the organ of the trade unions of Bourges announced, ‘The War is dead. Long live the War.’ The sacred union was over; the class war resumed.” It is difficult to know exactly how to describe the far-left group in France, as those of socialist inclinations defined themselves along a multitude of different lines; this proved to be among their many problems in attaining any significant electoral presence.

This history of changing designations comes into play in the story of L’Humanité itself. A socialist paper for the first sixteen years of its existence, it became the official newspaper of the French Communist Party with the party’s establishment in 1920, but only at the end of the year, after the articles cited in this chapter had been published. A daily newspaper that reported on whatever news there was, even including a daily sports column, L’Humanité’s socialist bent often entered into its articles. Pro-worker and pro-union opinions abounded, and anti-clericalism figured centrally in its opinion pieces. What has not yet entered this discussion, but was predictably an important feature of the writings in the left-leaning newspapers, was talk of class struggle, and very basic traditional communist and socialist principles on which the divergent brands of French socialism could agree. These concepts, interwoven with a socialist interpretation of war and its aftermath, made their way into the debate about the Vatican, or vice versa.

In some instances, the espousal of socialist thoughts took on a subtle form in discussions of the reprise and the war, with only collectivist overtones. In his extensive article, Renoult wrote that “[t]he Bloc national did not pay the debts that it incurred towards the victims of murder. All of the promises in this realm have turned into crushing taxes for the poor, and especially those who were ruined by the war. But it scrupulously fulfils its debt towards the

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29 Tint, The Decline of French Patriotism, 163.
30 Brogan, The Development of Modern France, 558.
31 Tint, The Decline of French Patriotism, 165.
church."\(^{33}\) The victims of murder, it seems, can be understood as the victims of the war, though of course the Bloc national was not yet in power at the time that those deaths occurred. The financial ruin in which France found itself was naturally felt more by those who had less, thus creating a perfect environment to discuss class conflict, an opportunity at which papers like L’Humanité leapt. The excerpt is not overtly socialist in nature, but more subtly hints at the inequality created by the war and exacerbated by the wealthy decision makers. It not only pointed out that the poor were suffering unduly, but juxtaposed the unpaid debt to the poor with the metaphorical debt being payed to the Vatican with the reprise, and, perhaps, the literal funds that France would have to spend to reopen the embassy.

Later on in the same article, Renoult became much more explicit in his terminology: “In the great battle between the old world and the new, between the proletariat that wants to conquer and the bourgeoisie that casts away its masks, the first being those of democracy and liberalism, these conflicts have an episodic character.”\(^{34}\) Echoing Charles Seignobos but with a socialist spin, the writer made the case that those “true republicans,” who Seignobos never believed could vote for such a development, were bourgeois pretenders, posing behind the concepts of democracy and liberalism, whose main goal was to suppress the proletariat using the reprise as a means to that end. Even within the rhetoric of the socialist press, the war and its resulting aftermath were fundamental; L’Humanité stressed the war as one waged on the poor by the rich, as opposed to one among nations. Despite their undue suffering in a capitalist struggle, the newspaper contended, the proletariat still had to bail out its bourgeois oppressors who now would both deploy metaphorical capital to repay some vague debt to Catholics and

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\(^{33}\) Renoult, “Le Bloc national va payer un de ses dettes.” « Le Bloc national n’a pas payé les dettes qu’il avait contractées envers les victimes de la tuerie. Toutes ses promesses en ce sens se sont changées en impôts écrassants pour les pauvres de toute sorte, surtout pour ceux qui ont été ruiné par la guerre. Mais il s’acquitte scrupuleusement de sa dette envers l’Eglise… »

\(^{34}\) Ibid. « Dans la bataille immense engagée entre l’ancien monde et le nouveau, entre le prolétariat qui veut vaincre et la bourgeoisie qui jette tous les masques, et d’abord ceux de démocratie et de libéralisme, des conflits de cet ordre n’ont qu’un caractère épisodique. »
spend real currency in reopening the embassy, instead of using either to lift the French proletariat out of its post-war ruin.

The liberal press, like its conservative counterpart, also strategically included excerpts from other publications to further its agendas. Even before converting to the newspaper of the French Communist Party, *L’Humanité* was partial to its Russian peer publications, citing them now and again. On March 26, 1920, the newspaper quoted a piece from *Izvestia*, the newspaper of record of what became the Soviet Union in 1922. In the Russian newspaper, Henri Dergman framed the issue of the *reprise* solely in terms of class struggle:

> The French bourgeoisie, in its struggle against the revolutionary proletariat, looks to find allies among the circles of the far-right...without even excluding the royalists. Already in the Chamber of Deputies a proposal for the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the Vatican has been set forth. This *reprise* is the symbol of the union of the French bourgeoisie with the agrarians and the Catholic clergy.  

Dergman described the manner in which, from the socialist perspective, the moneyed French class was selling out, aligning themselves with such right-wing fanatics as the royalists in the issue of the Vatican as a means of defending itself from the revolutionary proletariat. He goes on to engage even more directly with the French conservative rhetoric of the time:

> The situation in France is critical. The fuel crisis and the food crisis are becoming more acute. The events in Germany disrupted the shipment of goods and merchandise to France. France is covered in debts, but the bourgeoisie will hear nothing about it. The bourgeoisie believes that it has served the country well enough with its “patriotism.” We have forgotten the opinion of the worker, but there will come a day when it will be known.  

In the excerpt, Bergman mocked “patriotism” as a bourgeois construct and privilege, devised to justify war and to shirk the responsibility of the actual work required to pay for it. The attack on patriotism seems perfectly to describe leftist attitudes towards the conservative stance on the

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35 Henri Dergman, “La Russie célèbre avec éclat l’anniversaire de la commune,” *L’Humanité*, March 26, 1920, [https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k299620k/](https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k299620k/). « La bourgeoisie française, dans sa lutte contre le prolétariat révolutionnaire, cherche et trouve des alliés dans les cercles de l’extrême droite...sans en excepter les royalistes. Déjà, à la Chambre des députés un projet de reprise de relations diplomatiques avec le Vatican est déposé. Cette reprise est le symbole de l’union de la bourgeoisie française avec les agrariens et le clergé Catholique. »

36 Ibid. « La situation de la France est critique. La crise du combustible et la crise alimentaire deviennent plus aigus. Les événements d’Allemagne ont interrompu l’envoi en France de produits et de marchandises. La France est couverte de dettes, mais la bourgeoisie ne veut rien entendre. Elle croit qu’elle a suffisamment servi le pays par son ‘patriotisme’. On a oublié l’opinion du travailleur, mais il viendra un jour où la fera connaître. »
Vatican issue. They believed that conservatives were couching their desires, be they clerical or bourgeois, in phony but appealing terms of unity and patriotism, of togetherness and the patrie. Dergman was perhaps idealistic in proposing that “…next year we will no longer speak of reaction in France, because the city of the communards, Paris, will be the capital of the great commune of France.” But whether or not all French liberals would have had the same radical perspective on the imminence or necessity of a great class struggle, Dergman tapped into a feeling that the constant appeals to a brand of nationalism from the right were veneers for what were really ulterior conservative motives.

In comparing the conservative press with the liberal, one finds that the two do not lack for commonalities. In each, a central and opposite theme that rang familiar from pre-war years seemed to preoccupy the writers: anti-clericalism for the conservative press and laïcité for the liberal press. Though they framed much of what was written on the issue of the reprise, these two concepts were in 1920 only jumping-off points. On both sides of the spectrum, we can see how the war transformed rhetoric, allowing the press access to powerful pockets of French feeling that were created between 1914 and 1918. The clash between the two concepts, familiar to all French people from the era of the separation laws, was made new by the war, and each side presented the other as the villain in histories about the war and the wake it left behind. In both can be found extensive discussion of the Vatican, its role in the present day, and its actions in the near past. Each pushes various political narratives, too, with one side advancing a story about French unity and patriotism, while the other lamented the oppression of the poor during and after the war. And, in each, histories and interpretations of that which occurred or did not occur during the war are spun in innumerable ways, dominating the publications’ pages at times. Conservative and liberal publications did not hesitate to draw upon the war, and in the ink that they devoted to the issue we can see older debates about anti-clericalism and laïcité

37 Ibid. « Aujourd’hui, nous croyons, nous savons que l’année prochaine on ne parlera plus de réaction en France, car alors la ville des communards, Paris, sera la capitale de la grande commune française. »
refracted through the lens of the conflict, which they used to fight more effectively the new installment of their never-ending battle that the reprise represented. Journalists on both sides of the ideological spectrum took what was frankly a somewhat minor issue and threaded it through with memories, narratives and insinuations about the war that was still ever-present in the daily lives of so many French citizens, repurposing them for their own uses.

From these accounts, we can neither arrive at any form of conclusion as to the validity of the claims they made, nor is such an endeavor the purpose of this study. But how can we situate the fierce arguments of the press within the context that Roberts provides, of a ruined and desperate country, seeking a “return to normalcy” of any kind? It is only too easy to believe the measured tones of La Revue Hebdomadaire, and its article written about the needed change that the war imposed on the feelings of Catholics and non-believers alike:

On both sides, an evolution has taken place. The war, whatever one may say, has taught lessons that are not yet forgotten. Even among those without faith, everyone today, or nearly everyone, wants freedom for those who believe…The Catholic mentality, too, is no longer the same. The vicar and the priest who spent three or four years at the front, now used to coexisting peacefully with those who do not believe, are less disposed to let it bother them. Catholics in general…discovered that they, too, are citizens, and that they, too, deserve rights.38

That the war may have changed something fundamental about the way believers and non-believers viewed one another does not take a great deal of imaginative bandwidth. Whether such a change was powerful or widespread enough that it can be said to have been reflected in the decision to re-establish relations with the Vatican is another matter. The article continued, its author expressing his belief that the government would be acting in good republican faith and in accordance with the will of the people to go forward with the reprise, in a rather long-winded

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38 François Le Gris, “Les associations cultuelles et la paix religieuse,” La Revue Hebdomadaire, November 6, 1920, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k57334388/ « Des deux parts, une évolution s’est faite. La guerre, quoi qu’on dise, a donné des leçons qui ne sont pas encore oubliées. Même parmi ceux qui n’ont pas la foi, tout le monde, ou presque, veut aujourd’hui la liberté pour ceux qui croient, même pour les ‘curés’. La mentalité catholique, elle aussi, n’est plus la même. Le vicaire et le curé qui ont passé au front trois ou quatre ans, habitués maintenant à vivre en bonne intelligence avec ceux qui ne croient pas, sont moins disposés qu’autrefois à se laisser brimer. Les catholiques, en général…ont découvert qu’ils sont, eux aussi, des citoyens et qu’ils ont, eux aussi, des droits. »
fashion. He asked the doubtful among his readers to try an exercise of sorts, or a kind of thought experiment. "Do not look at the shadows of the painting...deliberately close your eyes so as not to see the clouds in a sky with a moon of honey, and be convinced that the current government of France is motivated by the most sincere liberalism, that it attempts to, as Millerand stated, serve the interests of the country in making peace with Rome. What must we conclude?"39 Passions were strong in debate about the reprise, and proponents of each side were not above using the war’s imagery to manipulate their audience to agree with their views. Whatever the readers of La Revue Hebdomadaire did conclude, the author’s request was a formidable one. It is difficult, reading the ways in which this issue was cast in the press, to assume the best, of the politicians or of the journalists. The painting’s shadows loom large, and the clouds obscure the moon of honey.

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39 Ibid. « Ne regardons pas les ombres du tableau...fermons délibérément les yeux pour ne pas voir de nuages dans un ciel de lune de miel et soyons convaincus que le gouvernement actuel de la France est animé du plus sincère libéralisme, qu’il entend, comme l’a déclaré M. Millerand, servir les intérêts du pays en faisant la paix avec Rome. Qu’en faut-il conclure ? »
Conclusion

The history of the Great War in France, and that which it left in its wake, can be objective only in statistics: $39.5 billion in monetary cost, and a 36.1% decline in GDP from 1914 to 1918; 5,663,800 military casualties, 300,000 civilians dead, and over four percent of the country’s population killed. The rest is up to interpretation. Innumerable events have shaped that interpretation over the last century, the struggle two decades later that turned the “War to end war” into only “World War I” being unquestionably the greatest. But before that, in the immediate post-war period, France was left only with loss and figures, and it required a story. A story to make sense of the loss, a story to justify it somehow, and a story that would allow its people to imagine a collective French future.

How the initial stories about the war were developed and used has been at the heart of this study. In the post-war period, discussion of the war can be divided into two categories: the direct and the indirect. Direct treatment of the war flooded France, in a litany of forms including books, articles and speeches. It was surely this kind of expression that created and controlled the narrative about the war, especially in its final months and its immediate aftermath, telling the French explicitly what to make of it. It is the indirect treatment, though, with which I have been concerned here, and which had a subtler but still powerful impact on French thinking. Two years after the war, when the practical issues of rebuilding the country and negotiating relationships with a new Europe and a new world may have begun to take precedence over honoring and memorializing the battles and the war dead, the war seeped, or, more intentionally, was pulled, into discussions in which its relevance was not always obvious. The matter of the re-establishment of relations with the Vatican was one such discussion.

The politicians, religious figures and journalists cited in this study all ostensibly wrote

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about the reopening of the French embassy at the Vatican and the implications and possible results of that move. To act would be to introduce a change into French society, and not to do so would represent stasis. In each case, the question was one about what France would look like in the post-war era, and the figures engaging publicly in the debate had to promise the French that what was to come would be better than what had been. That comparative analysis of the pros and cons of reopening the embassy at the Vatican required the war: how to avoid war, or how the war could have been avoided; how to defeat enemies and keep them at bay, or how enemies could have been sooner defeated; how to repay debts, or how no debts had been incurred; how to punish inaction, or how to move on together in harmony. Whether the writers and speakers were in favor of or opposed to the re-establishment of relations with the Vatican, they saw that the kind of language that could speak powerfully to their audience was one which reflected that audience’s wartime memories and fears, and its hopes for a new and better future. Their end was to convince their audience, one way or another, of their position on a diplomatic issue of relatively minor import when compared to the events of the preceding years, but the means they used not only leveraged these memories, fears and hopes, but also molded them in the process. In short, in 1920, the recent stories about World War I that were primed and deployed for the specific political purpose of the reprise changed, by their very nature, that which they purported to recount.

We are left with a story of interlacing timelines that coalesced to allow the construction of a very particular set of conceptions about the Great War. The reprise of the early 1920s, as has been shown, was only a waystation in the history of the relationship among anti-clericalism, laïcité and Catholicism in France, whose connection to the past need not be inferred—the actors cited within this study made constant reference to the secular laws of the beginning of the twentieth century, to those of the 1880s, and even to the Concordat of 1801, the French Revolution and the more distant past. The old conversations were made brand new after the conflict, the war’s insinuation into every facet of the historical and contemporaneous debate
coloring interpretations sometimes beyond recognition. The war afforded commentators
effective ways to frame and interpret the situation between France and the Vatican in 1920 for
the French people, but also allowed them to reanimate old arguments, like those about the
*associations cultuelles*, recasting them in the context of the war, and using new kinds of rhetoric
born out of it.

Arguments for and against the *reprise* invoked a litany of overlapping narratives that
relied upon specific readings and understandings of the Great War. Those in support of the re-
establishment of relations with the Vatican stressed the war’s silver lining of national unity,
which benefited all French people and would be lost if the *ralliement* was voted down.
Politicians, religious figures and journalists wrote, too, of the debt owed to Catholics and to the
religious populations of Alsace-Lorraine, both of which groups had fought so bravely and
suffered so long. They drew upon French fears of old enemies, implying that a rapprochement
with the Vatican could stave off ever-present vague and ominous threats from Germany and
Austria, and defended the pope from all allegations of wartime wrongdoing, insisting that he had
acted justly and could serve as a strong ally in post-war diplomacy. Those against the *reprise*
responded to their opponents’ arguments, leveraging the war to contend that the pope had
forsaken France and could not be forgiven. They suggested that the war was one fought against
the oppressed French classes, who should not be required to continue to bear the weight of
their oppressors on their shoulders in this newest démarche that carried metaphorical and literal
costs when they had not yet been compensated for their suffering and sacrifice. What runs
through all of these threads of argumentation is the concerted effort to hit upon those memories
about the war that were most powerful and most inextricably lodged in the French psyche, about
which the populous felt the greatest pain or the fiercest pride. Some of these issues were no
longer of immediate practical relevance to France in 1920, but a keen understanding of their
psychological staying power on the part of those who controlled the public discourse and argued
for and against the re-establishment of relations with the Vatican brought them back to the
forefront of French thought. To track that precise form of rhetoric to the present day is not possible, but the interaction between broad questions of *laïcité* and the war invite comparisons to contemporary matters.

Circumstances have changed dramatically in France since the 1920s, but a parallel can be drawn between the debates of that time and contemporary ones. While the struggle between *laïcité* and organized religion in France takes different forms today than it did a century ago, some of the issues sound familiar. Private schools, mostly Catholic, currently receive subsidies from the state under certain conditions, which angers secularists. Such schools regularly outperform public schools.\(^1\) In public, state-funded schools in Alsace-Moselle, which comprises a part of Alsace-Lorraine, students take classes on religion; remnants of Napoleon’s Concordat of 1801 are still basically in effect in the region.\(^2\) But the fiercest battle is no longer with Catholicism—*laïcité*, in some of its more perverted forms, has turned its ire toward the French Muslim community. The debate about the legality of wearing *le voile*, the general term for any traditional Muslim attire for women that covers parts of the face, especially in public areas and schools, is much in the news. In contemporary France, those who wave the battle standard of *laïcité* to contest the right of French Muslims to free expression are viewed much differently than were their *laïque* forefathers at the turn of the twentieth century and in the years after World War I. Historically, *laïque* torch-bearers were conceived of as unwaveringly secular republicans opposed to the foray of any and all religion into governmental affairs, to a fault in the eyes of some. In the current political environment, though, the stance against *le voile* is often voiced by strong conservatives, invoking the idea of *laïcité* for an end considered racist, xenophobic, and specifically Islamophobic in more liberal circles. “If *laïcité* does not belong to the historical

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values of the extreme right,” *La Croix* observed in 2012, “a part of this current of opinion has nevertheless seized it, through a ‘fear of Islamic fundamentalism.’”

Marine le Pen, president of the far-right party *Rassemblement National* and two-time candidate for President of the Republic (2011-2012, 2016-2017), is one of the nation’s chief drivers of this kind of anti-Muslim rhetoric. A few days after the terrorist attacks on the headquarters of magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015 by two Al-Qaeda-affiliated gunmen, Le Pen gave a press conference in which she, “…talk[ed] of mass immigration, an ‘unmanageable number of foreigners,’ problems of communitarianism, and of the full veil that is seen daily, as it continues to be worn by those who spurn the law.” Her rhetoric serves as an example of a trend that the *La Croix* article from 2012, written about Le Pen’s position against *le voile*, describes: “in Europe, a new extreme right is developing around three characteristics…[among which is] a discourse that is essentially Islamophobic.”

Much as the antipathy between Catholics and resolute secularists was inextricably embedded in the context of World War I in 1920, the debate between those now claiming to fight for *laïcité* and their Muslim opponents exists as a feature or a symptom of the current demographic and social context in France, and the way that some choose to interpret that context. Today, politicians and writers on the far-right use terrorist attacks rhetorically in a way that is reminiscent of the way the Great War was used to influence opinions on the rapprochement with the Vatican. Le Pen and those who share her beliefs attempt to control the

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45 De Boissieu, “Marine le Pen.” “En Europe, une nouvelle extrême droite se développe autour de trois caractéristiques : un discours essentiellement islamophobe ; une ouverture plus grande que l’ancienne extrême-droite sur les questions de société ; une politique étrangère « occidentaliste », c’est-à-dire pro-israélienne. » The article cites two other characteristics: “a broadening of older extreme right opinions on social issues; and an ‘occidentalist’, which is to say pro-Israel, foreign policy.”
narrative about the Muslim population in France, intentionally conflating peaceful ways of life and traditions, like the wearing *le voile*, with the extremism responsible for the attacks on French soil. That the fundamentally xenophobic stance is couched in terms of *laïcité* stands in contrast with the 1920s, when the secular ideal was the goal for those who invoked it, and not the pretense. The conversations of the era of the re-establishment of Franco-Vatican relations and twenty-first-century France are not totally analogous, but some of that which can be drawn from the *reprise* can be applied across time and national borders.

The story of the re-establishment of relations with the Vatican, while very specifically French and irremovable from its French milieu, has much broader implications. The tale is one of the writing of history itself, not in an academic sense, but in a public and popular one. The creation and manipulation of war narratives by the movers of popular opinion during the *reprise* suggests that the way we conceive of historical events depends as much on the political and social contexts and events in their aftermath as on that which transpired over the course of their duration. In post-war France, the *reprise* was only one of many layers of that context, one of a multitude of events, each of which also likely shaped the thinking about the war in French society in the 1920s. In that sense, this work can be said to study a brand of popular historiography: that which is generated just a short time after the termination of the subject it studies, in a particular socio-political environment that necessarily dictates the way in which it is written. This “history” is written for the public, not in the form of history as such, but rather in the form of argumentation layered on top of an implied and assumed history. The effect, in the case of France as it contemplated the *reprise*, was not only to convince readers and listeners of the arguments for and against a re-establishment of relations with the Vatican, but to reinforce the underlying historical interpretations of the Great War upon which the arguments rested, and to refashion the ideas already latent in French minds in the process.
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