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SCHOOL REFORMS, CULTURE WARS, AND NATIONAL CONSOLIDATION: URUGUAY AND
BELGIUM, 1860s-1915¹

ABSTRACT

Uruguay is a prime example of how a peripheral country creatively digested foreign experiences and became not only Latin America's first welfare state democracy, but also a pioneer of free, compulsory, and lay education, the work of two political generations, positivist *varelistas* and Krausist *batllistas*. This article, based on new archival sources, contemporary newspapers, official publications, and monographs by protagonists argues that one of their consistent reference points, largely ignored in historiography, was Belgium, a country founded almost at the same time as Uruguay and admired for its liberal constitutionalism. Uruguayan reformers' fascination with Belgium, but also their risk awareness, increased when, from the 1860s, both countries implemented conflictual secularizing school reforms that aimed at belated cultural nation-building.

Keywords: Uruguay, Belgium, late nineteenth century, early twentieth century, culture wars, school reform, nation-building, positivism, Krausism

RESUMEN

Uruguay es un ejemplo paradigmático para mostrar cómo un país periférico digirió creativamente las experiencias extranjeras y se convirtió no solo en la primera democracia del Estado de bienestar en América Latina, sino también en un pionero de la educación gratuita, obligatoria y laica, obra de dos generaciones políticas: los varelistas positivistas

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y los batllistas krausistas. Este artículo, basado en nuevas fuentes primarias, periódicos contemporáneos, publicaciones oficiales y monografías de los protagonistas del proceso, argumenta que uno de sus puntos de referencia constantes, en gran medida ignorado por la historiografía, fue Bélgica, un país fundado casi al mismo tiempo que Uruguay y admirado por su constitucionalismo liberal. La fascinación de los reformistas uruguayos por Bélgica, pero también su conciencia de riesgo, aumentó cuando, a partir de la década de 1860, ambos países implementaron conflictivas reformas escolares secularizadoras que apuntaban a una tardía construcción cultural de la nación.

Palabras clave: Uruguay, Bélgica, fines del siglo XIX, comienzos del siglo XX, guerras culturales, reforma escolar, construcción nacional, positivismo, krausismo

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INTRODUCTION

The years from 1868 to 1915 witnessed Uruguay's transformation from a fragile state, which doubted its capacity to survive in the persistent battle for hegemony between its two powerful neighbours Brazil and Argentina, into a stable liberal-democratic polity with a cradle-to-grave welfare system. It offered access to education to all its citizens independent from their income, sex, and religious beliefs. The school reform was the work of two political generations, headed by the Varela brothers and José Batlle y Ordóñez, respectively. It started in 1876, when José Pedro Varela, who, eight years previously, had founded the Sociedad de Amigos de la Educación Popular (SAEP)², accepted the office of National Inspector of Public Instruction. Disappointed with the failure of previous civilian governments to establish a public school system, José Pedro Varela and some of his followers, amongst them his sibling Jacobo who would replace him after his death in 1879 and remain in office for a decade, were willing to serve the reformist military men who governed Uruguay from 1876 to 1890 and undertook significant efforts at state formation. José Batlle y Ordóñez never forgave *varelistas* for this collaboration: instead of implementing incremental changes in schools, they should have focused on bringing about representative democracy, and this would be the objective of his administrations as president (1903-1907 and 1911-1915) and that of Claudio Williman, the caretaker president between these two terms.

Both political generations also adhered to different political philosophies: while José Pedro Varela, initially propagating rationalism, embraced English positivism, Batlle's reform project included, as a key component, the organic state theory of Heinrich Ahrens, the most important disciple of German idealist Karl Christian Friedrich Krause. However, not only did *batllistas* continue the Reforma Valeriana; both generations also considered

² Society of the Friends of Popular Education.

education to be instrumental to nation-building and wished to emulate Switzerland³, another country that was squeezed between two great powers and yet able to stand its ground for its investment in the culture of its people, rather than the folly of military might.

Historians have highlighted the overt interest of Uruguay in the Alpine country⁴. However, with few exceptions, they have overlooked another European nation, which Uruguayans observed closely⁵ and which itself had an eagle eye on Switzerland: Belgium⁶. Both European countries represented progenies of the French July insurrection and considered themselves to be crossroads of intellectuals and ideas. The tackling of the "social question", including the reform and secularization of public education after 1848, was indeed a pan-European and even trans-Atlantic phenomenon, and societal initiatives by critical intellectuals, in their majority rationalists, preceded state-led reform policies. These activists, as recent research has demonstrated, were interested in building not only local, but also transnational, expert networks, which would strengthen their cause⁷.

³ See José Pedro Varela's admiration for Switzerland in José Pedro Varela and Carlos María Ramírez, *El destino nacional y la universidad*, Montevideo, Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Previsión Social, 1965 vol. 1, p. 161. For José Batlle y Ordóñez, there was "not a happier nation in Europe" than the tiny Swiss federation with its collegial government. See his "El P. E. Colegiado", in *El Día*, Montevideo, December 18, 1911. This article is extensively cited in Milton I. Vanger, *The Model Country: José Batlle y Ordóñez of Uruguay, 1907-1915*, Hanover, NH, University Press of New England, 1980, p. 161. One of Batlle's allies, educator Francisco Simón, went further. In his pamphlet *El ejecutivo colegiado*, Montevideo, Partido Colorado, n.d. [1916?], he took readers through "Swiss" history from its beginnings, when tribes roamed the land, to the transformative years after 1848 when the Radikale Partei (Radical Party) mobilized the young generation and built a modern and cultured nation. Uruguay's Colorados, he wished to convey, would follow their example.

⁴ Numerous academic treatises on Uruguay's transformation and journalistic articles emphasize the reformers' ambition to construct a South American Switzerland, though often in a critical retrospective. See, for instance, Carolina González Laurino, *La construcción de la identidad uruguaya*, Montevideo, Universidad Católica del Uruguay/Taurus, 2001, pp. 17-40; David Altmann, "Collegiate Executive and Direct Democracy in Switzerland and Uruguay: Similar Institutions, Opposite Political Goals, Distinct Results", in *Swiss Political Science Review*, vol. 14, n.º 3, Oxford, 2008, pp. 483-520.

⁵ Apart from Susana Monreal's publications on Krausism (cfr., note 8), these exceptions include Jorge Buscio, *José Batlle y Ordóñez: Uruguay a la vanguardia del mundo. Pensamiento político y raíces ideológicas*, Montevideo, Fin de Siglo, 2004, pp. 55-58; Carlos Demasi, *La lucha por el pasado: historia y nación en Uruguay (1920-1930)*, Montevideo, Trilce, 2004, p. 63; and in particular Benjamín Nahum in the introduction to his edition, based on research by Jorge Balbis, *Informes diplomáticos de los representantes de Bélgica en el Uruguay*, Montevideo, Departamento de Publicaciones de la Universidad de la República, 1998, vol. 1, p. 8. Nahum points to a report, which Brussels's top diplomat in Montevideo, Henri Ketel, sent to the Belgian Foreign Minister Henri Jaspar on February 21, 1921. Here the envoy establishes analogies between Uruguay and his own country, both of which had remained geopolitically vulnerable. He concludes that Uruguay "is the Belgium of South America" (see p. 211).

⁶ Eminent *belle époque* jurist and writer Edmond Picard (1836-1924) considered his country and Switzerland, both demographically diverse and politically neutral, to be natural precursors of the United States of Europe. Daniel Laqua, *The Age of Internationalism and Belgium, 1830-1930: Peace, Progress, and Prestige*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2013, p. 20.

⁷ Carmen van Praet and Christophe Verbruggen, "'Soldiers for a Joint Cause': A Relational Perspective on Local and International Educational Leagues and Associations in the 1860s", in *Low Countries Historical Review*, vol. 130, n.º 1, Amsterdam, 2015, pp. 5-6; Amandine Thiry, Thomas d'Haeninck and Christophe Verbruggen, "(Re-)Educational Internationalism in the Low Countries, 1850-1914", in Christoph de Spiegeleer (ed.), *The Civilising Offensive: Social and Educational Reform in 19th-Century Belgium*,

The foundation of the Belgian Ligue de l'Enseignement in 1865, with Krausist Guillaume Tiberghien, a student of Heinrich Ahrens and twice rector of the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), playing a significant role in this process, and the Uruguayan SAEP three years later are testimony to that; both associations swiftly appointed domestic and foreign corresponding members and attended international expositions and conferences. Yet, while the indirect impact of Brussels' Krausists on Latin America, most notably José Batlle y Ordóñez, was uncovered in groundbreaking research by Susana Monreal in the 1990s⁸ and three important monographs on secularization in Uruguay⁹ and one major study on the European links of the Ligue¹⁰ have been published, a comprehensive study of how the champions and opponents of a secular school in Uruguay reacted to the evolving conflicts in Belgium is still missing. This article is to fill the lacuna. Apart from a wide-ranging secondary literature, it draws on contemporary newspapers, monographs by protagonists and close observers, official publications, and unpublished primary sources, mainly files from the archives of the Ligue and SAEP and diplomatic correspondence¹¹.

Oldenbourg, De Gruyter, 2019, pp. 189-216. Less than a decade ago, Belgian historians criticized that, ironically for a contested nation, "the national mode of thinking and writing history has not really been challenged". Maarten van Genderachter and Geneviève Warland, "How Regional, National, and Transnational History Has (Not) Been Written in Belgium: Reflections Within a European Perspective", in Matthias Middell and Lluís Roura (eds.), *Transnational Challenges to National History Writing*, Houndsmill, Basingstoke, and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 404. Yet, at the time this was written, research into societal movements and expert communities that transcended the nation-state and questioned it as an analytical category had begun. Gita Deneckere, Daniel Laqua and Christophe Verbruggen, "Belgium on the Move: Transnational History and the Belle Époque", in *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire - Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenes* (hereafter *RBPH-BTFG*), vol. 90, n.º 4, Brussels, 2012, pp. 1213-1226.

⁸ Susana Monreal, *Krausismo en el Uruguay: algunos fundamentos del Estado tutor*, Montevideo, Universidad Católica del Uruguay, 1993. As Monreal highlights in a previous article, Guillaume Tiberghien left no original philosophical system or academic school, but he was instrumental in propagating Krause's philosophy in an easily understandable form. See Susana Monreal, "Les Krausistes 'belges'. Contribution à l'étude de leur influence en Amérique latine", in *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis - Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine* (hereafter *BTNW-RBHC*), vol. 23, n.º 3-4, Brussels, 1992, pp. 465-467.

⁹ Jaime Monestier, *El combate laico: bajarrelieve de la Reforma Vareliana*, Montevideo, Ed. El "Galeón", 1992; Gerardo Caetano and Roger Geymonat, *La secularización uruguaya (1859-1919)*, vol. 1: *Catolicismo y privatización de lo religioso*, Montevideo, Ed. Santillana, 1997; Gerardo Caetano, Roger Geymonat, Carolina Greising and Alejandro Sánchez, *El "Uruguay Laico": matrices y revisiones (1859-1934)*, Montevideo, Taurus, 2013.

¹⁰ Christina Reimann, *Schule für Verfassungsbürger? Die Bildungsligen und der Verfassungswandel des späten 19. Jahrhunderts in Belgien, England und Frankreich*, Münster, Waxmann, 2016.

¹¹ Both the Belgian Ligue de l'Enseignement and the Uruguayan Sociedad de Amigos de la Educación Popular (SAEP) have survived to the present day and continue to play an important role in shaping education in their countries. The former's institutional archive was repeatedly transferred, first from the École Primaire "Charles Buls" in Brussels to the Liberaal Archief in Ghent and later from there to its present home: the Archive of la Ville de Bruxelles. There is no inventory; all files are kept in chronological order. Though this is an extensive archive, correspondence with Latin American partners is rare. A complete collection of the Ligue's *Bulletin*, which also lists foreign associates, can be found in the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique and some little-known texts by and on Guillaume Tiberghien also in the Archive de la Université Libre de Bruxelles. SAEP's Archivo Histórico, hosted in the Escuela y Liceo "Elbio Fernández" in Montevideo, is superbly organized; the inventory not only lists all documents individually, but also provides brief descriptions of their content.

These sources show that both José Pedro Varela, right at the start of his term as National Inspector, and later the governing *batllistas* displayed an interest in exchanges with the Ligue, but it was barely mutual. This, I argue, is due to pronounced ideological shifts by Uruguay's protagonists; the radicalization of politics in Belgium, leading to the 1879-1884 *guerre scolaire*; and phase displacements in the reform process. After placing the Belgian case into its transnational context, this study will explore the Ligue's agenda and international contacts from its foundation to the end of the "school war". This will then be juxtaposed with SAEP's struggle for education reform, highlighting the lessons *varelistas* and their opponents learned from observing Belgium. The last section will analyse why, with the decline of Krausism at the ULB, Uruguay experienced a surge of these spiritualist ideas of Belgian origin, and in what way *batllistas*, when in power, employed them to secularize school and public life.

EUROPE'S CULTURE WARS: TRANSNATIONAL DIMENSION

With the end of the Industrial Revolution in England and its spread to other parts of Europe, notably Belgium, and the United States, an era of economic and demographic growth, rapid urbanization, profound changes of social structures, and the development of new means of communication began. Nineteenth-century liberals felt the need to prepare the emerging "masses" for the inevitable, though slow, extension of suffrage, fearing they could otherwise undermine the existing social order. Schools would not only provide general literacy training but also become factories to produce future citizens moulded on the ideals of the hegemonic societal sectors, and agencies to forge national culture and cohesion. However, to achieve that, the State would have to establish a national school system under its control. The 1860s, when societal groups self-organized to make such demands, were "a watershed for the whole of Europe", Jürgen Osterhammel points out, adding that before

This includes information about the Society's network of corresponding members abroad. The *Anales de Instrucción Primaria*, published by Uruguay's Dirección General de Instrucción Primaria from 1903 onwards, are available in Montevideo's Biblioteca Pedagógica Central "Maestro Sebastián Morey Otero". Together with the National Inspectors' *Memorias*, they provide detailed insight into the evolving pedagogies and policies of SAEP pioneers and their keen interest in processing foreign experiences. For an investigation into historical reflections in the *Anales*, see María Guadalupe López, *La presencia de la historia en los Anales de Instrucción Pública: primera y segunda época, 1903-1971*, Montevideo, Biblioteca Pedagógica Central, Montevideo, 1998. Belgian diplomatic correspondence regarding the River Plate countries can be found in the Archives Diplomatiques of the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères in Brussels. Its holdings on the period under consideration in this study consist of three boxes titled "Correspondence Politique Argentine - Paraguay - Uruguay", of which the first and third, covering the years 1851-1892 and 1900-1914, respectively, are relevant. Until 1912, Belgian diplomats to Buenos Aires were also responsible for Uruguay, meaning that some of their reports enable a broader contextualization of the conflicts. Individual documents from Uruguay's Archivo General de la Nación, the Archivo Histórico of Montevideo's Institutos Normales, Chile's Archivo Nacional Histórico, and various online archives, of Belgian laws and parliamentary debates, complement the source base of this article.

“only Prussia had come close to the goal of completely eradicating illiteracy”¹². This is in consonance with Osterhammel’s broader argument that the “long nineteenth century” should not be understood as a period of “sharply defined hiatuses”, but one with “an inner focal point, stretching roughly from the 1860s to the 1880s, when innovations with a worldwide impact came thick and fast, and many processes running independently of one another seemed to converge”¹³. This impact would soon be felt in Latin America.

The liberal activists’ plea for state-led education during this time pitted them against the Roman Catholic Church and its religious orders, which played an important, and often dominant, role in the school sector. Secularization, which had receded after the antagonisms of the 1789 Revolution and begun to produce religious revival during the Romanticist period, entered a new stage. Though Catholic power declined after 1859, when Austria and France could no longer protect the Papal States and the only remaining European theocracy disappeared in 1870, due to the combined effects of the *Risorgimento* and the Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian Wars, Pope Pius IX still managed to align the various episcopates to the authority of the Holy See¹⁴. Pius’s 1864 encyclical *Quanta Cura*, with an attached syllabus of eighty errors, including any suggestions to open popular schools under state control to children of all classes (art. 47) and, more generally, to constructively engage with liberalism (art. 80)¹⁵, had paved the way for the First Vatican Council in 1869-1870, which defended the infallibility of the Holy Father. The pontiff’s waning temporal power was accompanied by an offensive, across Europe, to retain control over institutions like marriage, family, cemeteries, and, crucially, schools, because, as the driving force behind a French Ligue de l’Enseignement, Jean Macé, expressed it: “whoever is in charge of the school, controls the world”¹⁶. Numerous new Catholic orders, associations, mass parties, and newspapers emerged and collided with those nation-states that aimed at reducing ecclesiastical power to the spiritual sphere.

Yet, Christopher Clark warns against considering Europe’s Catholics as a unified force, despite efforts by the Roman Curia to homogenize the Church. Ultramontanes, representing the ultra-conservative right, fought not only against their liberal and Protestant opponents, but also less intransigent members of lay networks and eventually the social Catholicism of Leo XIII who replaced Pius IX in 1878 and tried to reign in extremists. Clark suggests we should proceed from the existence of different national Catholicism and explore the culture wars, a loan translation from the German *Kulturkampf*, in all their complexity within the different nation-states in which they were

¹² Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 789.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p. xviii.

¹⁴ In 1862, no less than 255 bishops followed a call to Rome. *Op. cit.*, p. 901.

¹⁵ “The Syllabus of Errors: Pope BI. Pius IX - 1864”, Papal Encyclicals Online. Available at <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9syll.htm> [Accessed: November 7, 2022].

¹⁶ Jean Macé, “Une conférence de M. Jean Macé”, in *La revue pédagogique*, vol. 4, n.º 1, Paris, 1884, p. 555.

fought. It was especially Catholic newspapers that linked these related and overlapping, yet distinct, conflicts in imaginative and effective ways¹⁷.

The scope of the anticlerical camp was even broader, as Wolfram Kaiser has highlighted. Initially at least, it united moderate bourgeois liberals, middle-class freemasons, and freethinkers from more humble backgrounds with militant radical democrats and socialists, but these groups, with at times overlapping discursive toposes, also found allies in liberal Catholics in a Montalembertian tradition, non-conformist Protestants, and religious minorities. Liberals defended universal principles and collaborated closely with kindred spirits in other countries¹⁸. In their counter-mobilization, they represented themselves as defenders of the nation and Catholics, especially ultramontanes who tried to divide the imagined community, as alien to it. In practice, though, Catholics were often more successful in galvanizing the deeply religious population, especially in rural areas¹⁹.

The foundation of the Belgian Ligue was part of the historical conjuncture of the 1860s. It was modelled after the Dutch Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen (Society for Public Welfare, hereafter Tot Nut), an Enlightenment-inspired philanthropic association that, from 1784 onwards, had engaged in disseminating education through schools, textbooks, and libraries. It had built an entire network of local branches in the northern Netherlands but faced resistance from Catholics in the south. Yet, this changed in the early 1860s, when, simultaneously with Catholic gatherings, progressive professionals met at congresses of the Association Internationale pour le Progrès des Sciences Sociales to discuss how to tackle the "social question" with expert knowledge and prevent a revolution. The 1864 congress in Amsterdam allowed for a closer study of the Dutch experience, which, as Carmen van Praet and Christophe Verbruggen argue, was considered to be "an example of setting up European movements on public education as an emancipatory cause"²⁰. Belgium's delegate, the 26-year-old Charles Buls, returned to Brussels to pursue it in his country.

¹⁷ Christopher Clark, "The New Catholicism and the European Culture Wars", in Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser (eds.), *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 12-13 and 27-35, esp. pp. 33 and 35.

¹⁸ Wolfram Kaiser, "Clericalism - That is our Enemy! European Anticlericalism and the Culture Wars", in Clark and Kaiser (eds.), *Culture Wars...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-76.

¹⁹ Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, "Introduction: The European Culture Wars", in Clark and Kaiser (eds.), *Culture Wars...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

²⁰ Van Praet and Verbruggen, "'Soldiers for a Joint Cause'...", *op. cit.*, pp. 6-17. The citation is from p. 6. On the Association, see Christian Müller, "Designing the Model European - Liberal and Republican Concepts of Citizenship in Europe in the 1860s: The Association Internationale pour le Progrès des Sciences Sociales", in *History of European Ideas*, vol. 37, n.° 2, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2013, pp. 223-231. During his trip to the Netherlands, Charles Buls also visited various mixed and lay schools and studied modern teaching methodologies. See Roland Perceval, "La Ligue de l'Enseignement et de l'Éducation Permanente, 1864-2014: 150 ans de lutte pour la défense de l'enseignement officiel", in *Cahiers Bruxellois - Brusselse Cahiers: Revue d'Histoire Urbaine - Tijdschrift voor Stadsgeschiedenis*, vol. 47, n.° 1, Brussels, 2015, pp. 249-250 (note the erroneous date of the Amsterdam congress in this source).

LIGUE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT AND GUERRE SCOLAIRE:
BELGIUM'S CULTURE WAR

Of the thirteen founding members of the Ligue, who met in Brussels on December 26, 1864, twelve were members of the rationalist society Libre Pensée, and most of them, including Guillaume Tiberghien, also had links to freemasonry and the ULB. The Libre Pensée had been set up the previous year and placed the secularization of education high on its agenda²¹. That same year, freemasons' Grand Orient de Belgique declared that the promotion of compulsory and lay education would be a moral question for its affiliates²². The ULB, created by liberals and freemasons in 1834 in response to the refoundation of a Catholic university that same year (first in Mechelen and, from 1835, in Leuven, where such an institution had existed from 1425 to 1797), was independent from State and Church and represented a stronghold of religious and philosophical freethinking, upholding the freedom of teaching. Therefore, it soon attracted foreign scholars, such as Hanoverian political exile Heinrich Ahrens, who taught Krausism in the Faculties of Philosophy and Letters and of Law²³.

²¹ Jacques Lory, *Libéralisme et instruction primaire (1842-1879)*, Leuven, Nauwelaerts, 1979, vol. 1, pp. 325-335; Susana Monreal, "Krausistas y masones: un proyecto educativo común. El caso belga", in *Historia de la Educación: Revista Interuniversitaria*, vol. 9, Salamanca, 1990, pp. 73-74, Available at <https://revistas.usal.es/index.php/0212-0267/article/view/6890/0> [Accessed: November 14, 2022]. As Monreal states in this article (pp. 66-67), not all Liberals in 1860s Brussels were Krausists, but all Krausists were liberals and many freemasons. One Belgian historian points out that almost all of Brussels's mayors during the first seventy-nine years after independence were freemasons. Moreover, all Great-Masters of the Grand Orient from 1842 to 1886 were liberals from the capital city, and all but one were professors or administrators at ULB. Marc D'Hoore, "Franc-maçonnerie, enseignement et politique à Bruxelles au XIX siècle: l'exemple de la Ligue de l'Enseignement", in *Cercle d'Histoire de Bruxelles*, n.º 80, Brussels, 2003, p. 5. Regarding the affiliation of founding members of the Ligue and of those who joined it briefly after its creation, see André Uyttebrouck, "Les grandes étapes d'une histoire de cent vingt-cinq années", in André Uyttebrouck (ed.), *Histoire de la Ligue de l'Enseignement, 1864-1989*, Brussels, Ligue de l'Enseignement et de l'Éducation Permanente, 1990, pp. 11-13. Guillaume Tiberghien was initially a member of the lodge L'Avenir and would later join Amis Philanthropes.

²² Antolín C. Sánchez Cuervo, *El pensamiento krausista de G. Tiberghien*, Madrid, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2004, pp. 339-343.

²³ Catholics were inspired by Pope Gregory VI's 1832 encyclical *Mirari Vos*, which aimed to contain liberalism and religious indifferentism. Hence, liberals and masons, in their majority Deists, defended the right to freely interpret texts and founded the Université Libre de Belgique, which, in 1842, took the new name ULB. Professors were recruited as a matter of urgency, and it was by some accident that not only Heinrich Ahrens, but also other scholars, like his fellow student and revolutionary from Göttingen Friedrich Wilhelm Theodor Schliephake and the native Luxemburgian Jean-Jacques Altmeyer adhered to Krausism. This further fuelled conflicts with Catholics. Hervé Hasquin, "G. Tiberghien, discípulo de Krause: librepensamiento y teísmo en la Bélgica del siglo XIX", in Pedro Álvarez Lázaro (ed.), *Librepensamiento y secularización en la Europa contemporánea*, Madrid, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 1996, pp. 132-134. See also Pierre F. Daled, *Spiritualisme et matérialisme au XIX^e siècle: l'Université Libre de Bruxelles et la religion*, Brussels, Université de Bruxelles, 1998, pp. 54-88. Daled has challenged the long-standing view that materialism entered the University only at the end of the century; in medicine and the sciences it would have been present from the beginning.

Given the temporary significance of this rationalist philosophy in Belgium and Uruguay, a closer look at its major tenets is appropriate. The philosophy of Krause, a freemason, acknowledges reason as an analytical cognitive force but embeds it in a spiritualist realm, called pantheism, which allows for harmonious syntheses of opposing phenomena, variety within unity. Leuven's neo-Thomists decried it as pantheist with atheist effects²⁴, but in reality pantheism provides a middle path between Catholic monotheism, which considers God and the world to be two different entities, and pantheist philosophies, for which they are identical. For Krausists, the infinite divinity constitutes both the transcendent and unbounded source of life, the *Urwesen*, and the all-encompassing principle of being, the *(Or)Wesen*, that is immanent and intuitively sensed in the phenomenal world, where it permeates nature and spirit as well as Humanity, their perfect crossover. Yet, neither does the *Urwesen* externally intervene and limit liberty, as God in Catholic orthodoxy, nor does the *(Or)Wesen* prescribe a fatalist course of events, as with many pantheist paradigms. Instead, Krausists leave the "door open for life to develop itself in autonomy and to supersede itself endlessly"²⁵.

This metaphysics echoes in Heinrich Ahrens, for whom society, a function of Humanity, represents a self-governing organism. The State, its legal organization in consonance with divine order, would have to guarantee the autonomous and harmonious coexistence of all spheres of sociability, including religion, science, and education, and provide the conditions for their *free* development and interaction. This precludes arbitrary state interventionism and the imposition of any religious or secular doctrine²⁶. From there

²⁴ For this battle, which outlasted the *guerre scolaire* and even involved students from both universities, see Sánchez Cuervo, *El pensamiento krausista...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 377-389. As late as 1905, Monseigneur Désiré-Joseph Mercier, the head of the Institut Supérieur de Philosophie at Leuven, an institution that aimed at reconciling the Catholic doctrine with modern science, gave an interview to the *Journal de Bruxelles*, in which he depicted Krausism as a short-lived pantheist aberration. The interview was then reprinted in the document section of a journal led by Mercier. See Édouard Ned, "Le mouvement philosophique en Belgique depuis 1830", in *Revue Néo-Scholastique*, vol. 12, n.º 47, Leuven, 1905, p. 351.

²⁵ For Krause's construction of the Absolute, see Claus Dierckmeier, "Eastern Principles within Western Metaphysics: Krause and Schopenhauer's Reception of Indian Philosophy", in F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo, Roxanne Burton and Ed Brandon (eds.), *Conversations in Philosophy: Crossing the Boundaries*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008, pp. 70-71 (citation from p. 71). On Tiberghien's rejection of atheism, pantheism, theological dualism, materialism, fatalism, determinism, positivism, agnosticism, experimental psychology, sterile individualism, and communism, see Léon Leclère, *Guillaume Tiberghien, 1819-1901*, Brussels, A. Lefèvre, 1902, pp. 22-23, 25 and 27. In his first publication, in a student yearbook in 1840, Tiberghien even then constructed a Hegelian dialectic triad: historically original Christianity, a philosophical religion or religious philosophy (thesis), had got lost with the institutionalization of Rome's Church that had made philosophy the maiden of theology (antithesis); now it was necessary to reconcile spirit and reason, and for Tiberghien Krause offered such synthesis. Guillaume Tiberghien, "Christianisme et philosophie", in *Annuaire de la Société des Étudiants de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles*, Brussels, J. Verhasselt, 1840, pp. 82-133. Available at <http://www.lib.ugent.be/catalog/ser01:000090419> [Accessed: November 7, 2022]. Though published online, this revealing source has been largely ignored.

²⁶ Heinrich Ahrens, *Naturrecht oder Philosophie des Rechts und des Staates auf dem Grunde des ethischen Zusammenhangs von Recht und Cultur*, Vienna, Carl Gerolds Sohn, 1870, vol. 2, pp. 285-303. Regarding Ahrens's innovative concept of state-society relations, but also its limits, see Michael Sonenscher, "Krausism and its legacy", in *Global Intellectual History*, special issue "Theology and Politics", vol. 5, n.º 1, Abingdon-

it follows, as Heinrich Ahrens and Guillaume Tiberghien emphasized, that, first, schools should be run by teachers and supported by elected committees at municipal level; second, the State had a particular responsibility for the provision of obligatory and universal primary schooling as the precondition for further education, a moral and dignified life, and the exercise of civil and political rights; and, third, schools had to be non-confessional and neutral. With regard to the second imperative, the State was not allowed to violate the freedom of teaching, but it could require official exams to enforce the implementation of what was considered to be a right of the minor: the equal opportunity to attain all faculties of life. Such course of action would not run counter to the freedom of conscience, because the State had no intention of replacing fathers or tutors; these could still decide whether their offspring should go to a public or private school, as long as sciences could be taught without clerical interference. Yet, to curb the influence of the Catholic clergy, especially in rural areas, Tiberghien was eventually willing to interpret Krausism more flexibly and allow for limited assertion of state power: he suggested appointing, rather than electing, members of school committees by municipal authorities and also involving public officials. At the same time, attempts at equating lay education with atheism were rebutted. Not only would the cults to which students adhered be respected; Tiberghien also wished non-dogmatic natural religion to be introduced in the classroom²⁷.

Liberals, and in particular Krausists, would have had no difficulty in defending both the individual's absolute right to education and the relative freedom of teaching, if calls for the protection of the latter against lay legislation had not come from ultramontanes. The Roman Church had actually benefited from what article 2 of the Ligue's statutes, adopted in 1865, claimed were unconstitutional laws that restricted the freedom of conscience and equality of citizens and therefore needed to be revised²⁸. The Ligue referred primarily to the 1842 Jean-Baptiste Nothomb Law and related it to article 17 of the 1831 charter, which stipulated: "instruction is free, any preventative measure is forbidden; the punishment of offences is regulated only by law. Public instruction, given at the State's expense, is also regulated by law"²⁹. This text could be read in different ways:

on-Thames, 2020, pp. 20-40. Syntheses of Ahrens and Tiberghien's *œuvre* can be found in Academie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, *Biographie Nationale*, 44 vols., Brussels, various publishers, 1866-1986. For Ahrens, see Jean Paumen's entry in vol. 39, Brussels, Établissements Émile Bruylant, 1976, cols. 7-24; and for Tiberghien, Léon Leclère's in vol. 25, Brussels, Établissements Émile Bruylant, 1930-1932, cols. 229-237.

²⁷ For Ahrens's definition of the State's duty with regard to popular education, see his *opus magnum*, *Naturrecht*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 295. Tiberghien's interventions into debates on school reform are explored in Sánchez Cuervo, *El pensamiento krausista...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 330-335 and 353-363. In 1872, Tiberghien established a syllogism: if the Law is binding and access to primary instruction a right (in Natural Law, and it would be high time to recognise this in positive legislation), then primary instruction is compulsory. "Assemblée Générale de la Ligue, Bruxelles, 16 mars 1872", in *Bulletin de la Ligue de l'Enseignement* (hereafter *BLE*), n.° 3, Brussels, 1871-1872, p. 43.

²⁸ For the full statutes, see the appendix to Monique Marchal-Verdoodt, "L'organisation de la Ligue", in Uytendaele (ed.), *Histoire...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-52. Art. 2 can be found on p. 49.

²⁹ "Belgique: Constitution du 7 février 1831", in DigiThèque des matériaux juridique et politique, Université de Perpignan, Available at <https://mjp.univ-perp.fr/constit/be1831.htm> [Accessed: November 7, 2022].

liberals placed emphasis on the government's legislative power, which would allow them to expand public and limit confessional schooling, while Catholics stressed the freedom of instruction and considered the State's role in education to be merely supplementary³⁰. The vagueness of the article was not accidental. One year after independence, both camps were interested in a compromise to consolidate a still fragile Belgian nation-state and shared power. Catholics felt relieved after having been on the receiving end of enlightened (absolutist or revolutionary) and secularising policies under the preceding Habsburg, French, and Dutch rulers, and liberals hoped for the realization of their ideals of civil liberty, the rule of law, and economic freedom³¹.

The Nothomb Law renewed this compromise during a political crisis, which had undermined Catholic-liberal unionism. For that reason, most liberals passed the law, despite their marginalization in parliament and the capitulation of the State to the clergy. ULB co-founder and freemason Pierre-Théodore Verhaegen, one of only three deputies who voted against this legislation, expressed his frustration in the parliamentary session on August 29, 1842:

“some honorable friends, moved by motives of conciliation, had presented certain modifications to the project, which seemed to be able to rally all the votes: all these modifications were rejected, and I must say out loud, our opinion did not obtain any kind of satisfaction in this discussion [...] there can no longer be any shadow of doubt as to the very clear, very definite intention of the clergy to completely take over primary education, to the detriment of civil authority”³².

The Law required the offer of religious instruction in the Catholic doctrine, supervised by the clergy, in all public schools, but exempting Protestants and Jews; at least one primary school in each municipality, though local authorities were allowed to “adopt” a private school; and, if necessary, the support of these private schools by central and provincial governments³³. This allowed the Catholic clergy to extend its influence in the educational sector, even using public funding, and in 1854 the State, still too weak to occupy this space, also conceded to them the inclusion of two hours of religious instruction for Catholic students in secondary schools³⁴. Yet, with industrialization picking

³⁰ Gita Deneckere, “Les turbulences de la Belle Époque (1878-1905)”, in Michel Dumoulin, Vincent Dujardin, Emmanuel Gerard and Mark van den Wijngaert (eds.), *Nouvelle Histoire de Belgique*, Brussels, Ed. Complexe, 2005, vol. 1: 1830-1905, tome 3, p. 31.

³¹ Education reforms before William I's reign over the United Kingdom of the Netherlands focused on secondary and higher education. Charles L. Glenn, *Contrasting Models of State and School: A Comparative Historical Study of Parental Choice and State Control*, New York and London, Continuum, 2011, pp. 38-39 and 68-70; Ernst Heinrich Kossmann, *The Low Countries, 1780-1940*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978, pp. 123-129.

³² “Chambre des Représentants de Belgique (1831-1848), séance du lundi, 29 août 1842”, in Database Unionisme, Available at <http://www.unionisme.be/ch18420829.htm> [Accessed: November 7, 2022].

³³ “Loi Organique de l'Instruction Primaire du 23 Septembre 1842”, in Database Unionisme, Available at <http://www.unionisme.be/loiorganiqueinstructionprimaire.htm> [Accessed: November 7, 2022]; see also Deneckere, “Les turbulences...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

³⁴ Glenn, *Contrasting Models...*, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

up and strengthening the bourgeoisie and middle classes, Liberals, organised in their own party since 1846 and in power from 1857-1870, were no longer willing to support unionism, though they now also faced a radical-democratic, socially progressive, and anticlerical extra-parliamentary opposition which required from them a confrontation with ultramontanism. The Ligue was part of it³⁵.

The other aim of the Ligue, which appears in its full name (Association pour la Propagation et le Perfectionnement de l'Éducation et l'Instruction en Belgique), consisted in the propagation and improvement of education and instruction. Charles Buls initially wished for decentralisation, and, following the example of Tot Nut, no less than twenty-five local circles had been formed by 1870³⁶. However, the Ligue had difficulties in recruiting more than two thousand to four thousand members, which set limits to the enhancement of its cause³⁷. By 1883, local branches seem to have disappeared altogether. For Christina Reimann, this was due to the elitist social position of activists, the hierarchical structures and lack of internal democracy, and the focus on Wallonia and therefore neglect of Flemish, but primarily to the rural population's dependence on the local clergy and to the fear of retaliatory measures by the Catholic Church³⁸.

In the Ligue's international activities, ambivalences can be detected as well. Buls's propagation of Dutch, German, and English models and his efforts to establish a transnational network aimed at providing protagonists with an additional source of legitimacy. Foreign collaborators could equally benefit from such a strategy, as Macé's frequent references and contacts to the Belgian Ligue in his own endeavour to create a national counterpart in France show³⁹. Christina Reimann explores the facets of this European network, ranging from regular correspondence and the exchange of documents, pedagogical works, textbooks, and periodicals to attendance at foreign congresses and transnational affiliations. The Belgian Ligue's *Bulletin* reported on its own work and, until 1884, also on foreign developments. Here it could rely on its corresponding members. However, Reimann concludes that the primary drive to give legitimacy to these associations' projects, while also competing with each other, prevented the realization of plans to set up an international league⁴⁰.

³⁵ Els Witte, "The Battle for Monasteries, Cemeteries, and Schools: Belgium", in Clark and Kaiser (eds.), *Culture Wars...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-118.

³⁶ Jacques Lory, "Les sociétés d'éducation populaire de tendance libérale, 1860-1880", in *BTNW-RBHC*, vol. 10, n.° 1-2, Brussels, 1979, p. 223. In 1872 debates, Tiberghien enlightened local communities about what they could do for the improvement and secularization of schools without violating existing legislation. "Travaux généraux de la Ligue: réformes susceptibles d'être introduites dans l'enseignement primaire sous le régime de la loi de 1842", in *BLE*, n.° 2, Brussels, 1872-1873, pp. 22-30.

³⁷ Uyttebrouck, "Les grandes étapes...", *op. cit.*, p. 13.

³⁸ Christina Reimann, "Putting the Rural World on the Road of Progress? Experiences of Failure by Local Activists of the Belgian Education League (c. 1865-1884)", in De Spiegeleer (ed.), *The Civilising Offensive...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-129.

³⁹ Reimann, *Schule für Verfassungsbürger...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 54 and 64-70. See also Jean Macé, *Les origines de la Ligue de l'Enseignement (1861-1870)*, Paris, Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1891, pp. 203-220.

⁴⁰ Reimann, *Schule für Verfassungsbürger...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-130.

The differentiation, common at the time, between education and instruction, with the former denoting the socialization and moralization of students and the latter the dissemination of knowledge, points to the two functions of the elementary school. These were interrelated, and Catholics, back in power in 1870, feared radical-liberal plans to enhance scientific instruction, including that of girls and adults, because it undermined the religious foundations education should have in their view. The Ligue did, indeed, aim at overhauling curricula and methodology. This required the training of teachers in a high-quality normal school. However, it took until 1875 before, through public fundraising and private donations, the Ligue could open a model primary school, the *École Modèle*, which, after 1881, would become part of a new *École Normale*. It taught courses in sciences, history, geography, arts, and gymnastics, and replaced the traditional bookish culture with John Amos Comenius's "intuitive-active" learning. This was to be supported by school libraries, museums, and excursions⁴¹.

When, in 1878, Hubert Joseph Walthère Frère-Orban, the author of the Liberal Party's founding charter, became prime-minister and set up a Ministry of Instruction under the lead of Ligue pioneer and former Great-Master of the Grand Orient de Belgique Pierre van Humbeeck, Liberals had the power to abrogate the Nothomb Law and thereby, as they claimed, restore the Constitution. The so-called Van Humbeeck Law, promulgated the following year, showed that the State would no longer accept its passive role in education. It prescribed that each municipality had to maintain at least one public and "neutral" (non-confessional), not an "adopted" private (usually Catholic), primary school. The government was to supervise these schools and approve their programs and textbooks, and their teachers would have to hold an official diploma. Religious education by priests, if expressly required by parents, could take place only outside the regular hours. Private schools could no longer count on public funding⁴².

Though government did not establish a fully secular state, move towards de-Christianizing morality, and require the removal of crucifixes and other religious symbols from all classrooms, as radical freethinkers would have hoped⁴³, the Catholic press thundered that public schooling "is not constitutionally compulsory; it is simply tolerated, in flagrant violation of the entire constitutional theory that proclaims the incompetence of the State in the intellectual, moral, and religious fields"⁴⁴. Bishops went on the offensive, condemning schools as godless, ostracizing and even excommunicating teachers, officials,

⁴¹ Perceval, "La Ligue de l'Enseignement..." , *op. cit.*, pp. 251-254; Roger Desmed, "L'école modèle et le musée scolaire", in Uyttebrouck (ed.), *Histoire...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-138. Lory attaches special importance to the Ligue's pedagogical innovations; see his *Libéralisme...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 794-795 and 798-799.

⁴² For the concluding, very controversial debate, see Sénat de Belgique, "Annales, Séance du 18 juin 1879", Available at https://www.senate.be/www/?Mlval=/index_senate&LANG=fr&MENUID=24400 [Accessed: November 7, 2022].

⁴³ Just after the passing of the Van Humbeeck Law, in 1879, Tiberghien penned a Krausist textbook on morality, *Morale universelle à l'usage des écoles laïques*, for the higher grades of primary school. Leclère, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁴⁴ "L'État hors de l'école: réponse à L'Étoile Belge", in *Le Bien Public*, Brussels, January 21, 1879, p. 1.

normal school students, and parents who engaged with them, and collecting funds for the foundation of Catholic schools. The new Pope, Leo XIII, failed to reign in the episcopate. In response, radicals pressed government to break diplomatic relations with the Holy See in 1880, provide more funding for state schools, and extend anticlerical legislation to secondary schools in 1881⁴⁵. The quick escalation of the conflict led to the rapprochement of moderate Catholics and ultramontanes, but also divisions within the liberal camp over the rights of the individual. For doctrinaire liberals and Krausist harmonious rationalists, the reform had become too centralist, but for radicals state interventionism should have gone further and, as with the 1881-1882 Jules Ferry Laws in France, also implemented compulsory and free education. Such legislation, suggested in 1883 by them, would pass parliament only in 1914. The fact that it had not been a priority for moderates on either side of the socio-cultural divide was due not only to economic constraints, but also their fear of undermining the social status quo, as does the slow extension of suffrage at national level⁴⁶.

In the June 1884 elections, Catholics won a landslide victory. One month later, the new government, led by Jules Malou, restored relations to the Holy See, abolished the Ministry of Instruction and, under the Minister of the Interior, Victor Jacobs, prepared legislation to restore the status quo ante 1879. Despite efforts by Charles Buis, since 1881 mayor of Brussels, and other moderates to first find a compromise and then contain the ensuing mass mobilization by radicals from both ideological camps, protests turned violent in early September, forcing the king to intervene. While approving Jacobs's Law, he avoided repression and appointed a new, moderate-Catholic government which made some gestures of reconciliation⁴⁷.

Even so, Liberals had suffered a historic defeat⁴⁸. With the renewed decentralization of popular education, municipalities resisted the financial burden of maintaining public schools, many of which, after the mass exodus of teachers and students during the Liberal interregnum, stood empty anyway⁴⁹. From 1878 to 1880, the percentage of "free schools"

⁴⁵ On the Van Humbeeck Law and its impact on Belgium and its relations with the Vatican, see Deneckere, "Les turbulences...", *op. cit.*, pp. 34-39; Glenn, *Contrasting Models...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-146. For detailed accounts of Catholic resistance, see Jacques Lory, "La résistance des catholiques belges à la 'loi de malheur' 1879-1884", in *Revue du Nord*, vol. 67, n.° 266, Lille, 1985, pp. 729-747; Jean-Luc Soete, "La résistance catholique face à la loi Van Humbeeck dans l'arrondissement de Tournai", in *BTNW-RBHC*, vol. 11, n.° 1-2, Brussels, 1980, pp. 370-395; "Les curés de la ville de Namur à leurs paroissiens", appendix to René Robbrecht, "Pierre van Humbeeck (1829-90) ou la grande illusion de la laïcité", in *Éduquer*, n.° 41, Brussels, 2002, p. 19.

⁴⁶ Jacques Lory, *Libéralisme...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 792-794 and 800-802; Glenn, *Contrasting Models...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-151; Sánchez Cuervo, *El pensamiento krausista...*, *op. cit.*, p. 368-369; Thiry, D'Haeninck and Verbruggen, "(Re-)Educational Internationalism...", *op. cit.*, p. 215.

⁴⁷ Deneckere, "Les turbulences...", *op. cit.*, pp. 39-49; Witte, "The Battle...", *op. cit.*, pp. 121-125. Catholic newspapers rejected Liberals' smearing of their demonstrators as "bribed people, hired mercenaries, and solicited congregants"; rather they aimed to represent the nation, thereby defending liberty, the Constitution, and the King. See: "Manifestation du 7 de Septembre", in *Journal de Bruxelles*, Brussels, September 6, 1884, p. 1.

⁴⁸ For a Catholic retrospective, see Pierre Verhaegen, *La lutte scolaire en Belgique*, Ghent, Siffer, 1906, pp. 300-312.

⁴⁹ Glenn, *Contrasting Models...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-147.

had already risen from thirteen to sixty-one, in the Flemish provinces even to eighty⁵⁰. By 1884, Catholics had founded 3,385 new schools⁵¹, many of which were now again "adopted" by municipal councils. The Ligue's attempts to support new lay schools, with active support by Guillaume Tiberghien, had little success⁵². As a team of scholars led by Mark Depaepe has highlighted, major pedagogical innovations failed to materialize either. Those new subjects that had already been taught at Brussels's *École Modèle* were introduced in schools, but the curriculum was not guided by a philosophical or psychological doctrine (and remained largely intact until 1922). Johann Friedrich Herbart's didactics, a belief in Ernst Haeckel's recapitulation theory, and Herbert Spencer's discipline of consequences prevailed⁵³.

After 1884, rationalist Ligue pioneers faced not only ultramontanes, who, with the Franz Schollaert Law in 1895, further strengthened their grip on schools, but also the political-ideological realignment of radical liberals who began to embrace positivism, socialism, and anarchism⁵⁴. Moderates, like Guillaume Tiberghien who adhered to Krausism until the end of his university career, found themselves marginalised⁵⁵. Yet, the new currents soon realized that militant anticlericalism complicated mass mobilization and transnational collaboration. By the end of the century, socialists no longer focused on the religious question in order to unite all their followers behind the goals of political and social participation, and freemasons equally noticed its divisive power in their dealings with the pro-religious Anglo-American wing of their movement⁵⁶. As a consequence of these shifts, the Ligue, an umbrella organization, became weaker, though, especially after its rebirth

⁵⁰ Kenneth Douglas McRae, *Conflict and Compromise in Multilingual Societies: Belgium*, Waterloo, Ont., Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986, p. 219. In Flanders, public schools taught some subjects in Dutch, while "free schools" used French, the language to which the clergy showed more affinity.

⁵¹ Lory, "La résistance des catholiques...", *op. cit.*, p. 743.

⁵² Uyttebrouck, "Les grandes étapes...", *op. cit.*, pp. 22-24.

⁵³ Mark Depaepe et al., *Order in Progress: Everyday Educational Practice in Primary Schools - Belgium, 1880-1970*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2000, esp. pp. 59-60 and 157-183.

⁵⁴ Spencer's 1860 *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical* was introduced to the Ligue in 1886. "De l'éducation par Herbert Spencer: conférence donnée par M. le professeur Émile Sigogne à la Ligue de l'Enseignement", in *BLE*, n.° 3, Brussels, 1886, pp. 9-12 and n.° 4, Brussels, 1886, pp. 13-15. For Émile Sigogne, a professor at the University of Liège and freemason who later seemed to have moved from positivism to socialism, Spencer was the "greatest English philosopher" who "has constructed the most complete philosophical system". These citations are from the above-mentioned issue n.° 3, Brussels 1886, p. 9. Also, the 1894 electoral reform, establishing compulsory universal male suffrage for those over the age of 25 significantly increased the number of voters and undermined the unity and hegemony of liberal and Masonic elites in Brussels. D'Hoore, "Franc-maçonnerie...", *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁵⁵ Tiberghien, who had played an active role in local and regional politics since 1858, began to concentrate on his academic career. Yet, the old professor had become relatively isolated even within academia in Belgium. Monreal, "Les Krausistes 'belges'...", *op. cit.*, p. 464; "Discours de M. Tiberghien", in *Manifestation jubilaire en l'honneur de M. Guillaume Tiberghien, Professeur de Philosophie à l'Université Libre*, Brussels, Impr. Bruylant-Christophe, 1897, pp. 25-32.

⁵⁶ Deneckere, *Les turbulences...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-51; Glenn, *Contrasting Models...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-149 and 152; Jeffrey Tyssens and Petri Mirala, "Transnational Seculars: Belgium as a Forum for Freethinkers and Freemasons in the *Belle Époque*", in *RBPH-BTFG*, vol. 90, n.° 4, Brussels, 2012, pp. 1353-1372; Sánchez Cuervo, *El pensamiento krausista...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 342 and 369.

in 1905⁵⁷, it continued to be engaged in translational exchanges with other national and international advocates of education reform through correspondence, publications, and conference attendance and could find common ground with Catholics in charitable projects of child protection and re-education⁵⁸.

SAEP AND THE REFORMA VARELIANA: BELGIUM AS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The absence of Uruguay in studies on the impact of the European culture wars on Latin America⁵⁹ may be attributable to the weakness of the Roman Catholic Church in the River Plate country, once the periphery of the last viceroyalty the Spanish founded in the New World, always dependent on Buenos Aires, and threatened by both Portuguese and independent Brazil. The Provincia Oriental, which, two years after the 1828 Preliminary Peace Convention, constitutionally organised itself as the Estado Oriental del Uruguay, literally the “state on the eastern bank of the river Uruguay”, witnessed late colonization, remained scarcely populated, and was characterised by nomadic pastoralism. When, in 1859, the Holy See appointed Jesuit-trained Jacinto Vera as Apostolic Vicar, Uruguay had only twenty-six parishes, twelve chapels, and eighty-four mainly foreign priests. Establishing strong ecclesiastical structures became Vera’s sacred mission, and he would not shun challenging the State’s *patronato* over the Church. Pius IX promoted his loyal steward to bishop *in partibus infidelium* in 1865 and of a newly created diocese in 1878⁶⁰. The dates are telling. Vera’s first promotion followed a successful battle against freemasons within Catholicism and the emergence of a new “enemy”: in 1864, young Uruguayans who lived in Buenos Aires and adhered to Chilean exile Francisco Bilbao’s Deism, a blend of the ideas of Hughes-Felicité Robert de Lamennais, Edgar Quinet, Jules Michelet, and Ernest Renan, published a “Profession of Rationalist Faith”⁶¹. The ensuing propagation and institutionalization of rationalism north of the River Plate after 1868 coincided with the First Vatican Council, which Jacinto Vera attended, witnessing the disappearance of the Papal States. He and two young men in his company, Inocencio María Yéregui and Mariano Soler, who would become his successors in 1881-1890 and 1890-1908, respectively, returned to Montevideo with the determination to halt the secularization

⁵⁷ That year, after a severe decade-long crisis, the Ligue merged with the newly founded Union Nationale Pour la Défense de l’Enseignement Public and, until 1914 under Buls’s renewed leadership (he had already been president of the original Ligue from 1880-1883), resumed its campaign for compulsory and free primary education and embarked on new educational projects. *BLE* reappeared regularly. Uyttebrouck, “Les grandes étapes...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-33.

⁵⁸ Thiry, D’Haeninck and Verbruggen, “(Re-)Educational Internationalism...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-200.

⁵⁹ A rare collection of essays that spans the Atlantic, but ignores Uruguay, is Austen Ivereigh’s, *The Politics of Religion in an Age of Revival*, London, Institute of Latin American Studies, 2000.

⁶⁰ Caetano and Geymonat, *La secularización uruguaya...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 48, 55-61, 63 and 66 (figures on p. 48).

⁶¹ Arturo Ardao, *Racionalismo y liberalismo en el Uruguay*, Montevideo, Publicaciones de la Universidad de Montevideo, 1962, pp. 63-66 and 131-139.

process, which gained further momentum with the separation of positivists from the rationalist movement during the mid-1870s⁶². No wonder the pontiff reacted by establishing a national Church in 1878.

The Reforma Vareliana, which was initiated during the political vacuum that followed the assassination of the leaders of the country's two main parties, the oligarchic-liberal Colorados and the conservative Blancos, on February 19, 1868, and propelled young idealistic intellectuals into prominent political and societal positions, became a catalyst of tensions between Catholics, rationalists, and positivists. The intellectual trajectory of its architect José Pedro Varela, who received his first education in a school run by the Scalopi Fathers to later convert into Uruguay's most ardent disciple of Bilbao and eventually of Charles Darwin and Spencer, epitomised the increasing challenges ultramontanes faced. Yet, this was a gradual transformation⁶³. While it is true that a large percentage of the 206 founding members of SAEP, created on September 18, 1868, in Montevideo's University Club, were organized freemasons and rationalists –of which some would sign a second, distinctly anticlerical "Profession of Rationalist Faith" in 1872–, Catholics, like Francisco Bauzá, also supported the cause of popular education⁶⁴. The, then, 23-year-old José Pedro Varela, who had just returned from a journey to the United States where he had been under the spell of Argentina's envoy and later teacher-president Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, convinced these young men that it was no longer tenable that, based on figures from 1867, only thirteen thousand of Uruguay's sixty thousand school-age children in a total population of three hundred thousand received elementary instruction. The eradication of ignorance and improvement of all social classes, he emphasized, would be a key to erase violence and despotism and produce responsible citizens. This had to be a supra-partisan issue, which could not be left to government alone but needed the support of civil society⁶⁵. Therefore, the question of whether religious instruction should be taught in SAEP's own Escuela Elbio Fernández, founded one year later as a private school

⁶² For the visit to Rome, see Monestier, *El combate laico...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 237-238.

⁶³ Ardao, *Racionalismo...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-155.

⁶⁴ Diosma Piotti, *El Elbio, una institución privada con vocación pública: la historia de la Escuela y Liceo Elbio Fernández y la Sociedad de Amigos de la Educación Popular, 1868-1998*, Montevideo, SAEP and Escuela y Liceo "Elbio Fernández", 2000. In this book, Piotti provides the names of all "founders", that is, of all members who had joined SAEP by October 9, 1868 (pp. 243-245). Another historian speaks of 150 members. Approximately one third of those would have been affiliates of Masonic lodges, including Elbio Fernández, the director of the laboratory school named after him, the later university rector Alfredo Vásquez Acevedo, and future education minister Carlos de Castro. See Alfonso Fernández-Cabrelli's "Iglesia y masonería en la reforma de la escuela uruguaya", in *Historia de la Educación: Revista Interuniversitaria*, vol. 9, Salamanca, 2010, pp. 110-111, Available at <https://revistas.usal.es/index.php/0212-0267/article/view/6893> [Accessed: November 10, 2022]. There is no evidence that José Pedro Varela was a mason, but he shared some of the fraternities' beliefs and used their terminology. Jorge González Albistur, *José Pedro Varela: el hombre y el mito*, Montevideo, La Plaza, 1997, p. 115. His relation to rationalists was equally ambivalent. He approved of the enthusiasm of the signatories of the second "Profession" but felt that in the current crisis he should not participate in philosophical speculation. Monestier, *El combate laico...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 250-251.

⁶⁵ Diógenes de Giorgi, *El impulso educacional de José Pedro Varela (orígenes de la reforma escolar)*, Montevideo, A. Monteverde, 1942, pp. 57-59. The figures are from p. 58.

that was to become a laboratory for the reform of public schooling in the country, was controversially debated. José Pedro Varela sided with those who rejected the teaching of the Catholic doctrine as part of the regular curriculum but warned against making the school a secularist battleground⁶⁶.

Yet, this did not prevent ultramontanes from anathematizing rationalists and freethinkers and defaming their schools as immoral⁶⁷. The 1873 draft law by radical rationalist Agustín de Vedia, who wished to completely ban religious instruction, fomented Jacinto Vera's campaign. Such an act by parliament would violate the 1830 charter, which, in article 5, declared Roman Apostolic Catholicism the State's religion, he thundered. Parliamentarians had to back down⁶⁸, and SAEP wrote to the bishop that they had no intention to "de-Catholicize the people", as he claimed, hoping, in vain, that the prelate would stop undermining their work, especially in the rural interior, where, similar to Belgium, the clergy exerted considerable pressure on local organisations, teachers, and parents⁶⁹. For the Catholic press, "instruction was a mere accessory in the full development of the religious, social, and moral man"⁷⁰. In his 1874 *La educación del pueblo*⁷¹, José Pedro Varela reiterated that public schools could not teach any positive religion, which would have to be left to families and priests, but their lay character should not be equated with atheism, but, similar to the Netherlands and the United States, simply non-sectarianism⁷². Parents of whatever beliefs had the duty to respect the right of their offspring to free and lay education:

"the education the State provides and requires does not aim at affiliating the child in one or the other religious communion, but to prepare it adequately for a citizen's life. For this purpose, it certainly needs to know the moral principles that underpin society, but not the dogmas of a particular religion..."⁷³.

In a country, like the United States and Uruguay, where approximately two thirds of the population were descendants of immigrants, freedom of religion was all the more important, Varela added⁷⁴.

⁶⁶ Francisco A. Berra, *Noticia de José Pedro Varela i de su participación en la reforma escolar del Uruguay*, Buenos Aires, Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1888, pp. 22-23.

⁶⁷ Caetano and Geymonat, *La secularización uruguaya...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 65; "Educación religiosa práctica", in *El Mensajero del Pueblo*, Montevideo, July 10, 1871, pp. 162-163, and September 17, 1871, pp. 178-180 (both articles have the same title).

⁶⁸ Fernández-Cabrelli, "Iglesia y masonería...", *op. cit.*, pp. 112-113.

⁶⁹ Monestier, *El combate laico...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 256-258. On local conflicts, see Emilio Penza to SAEP, Durazno, February 18, 1875, Sociedad de Amigos de la Educación Popular, Archivo Histórico, Montevideo (hereafter SAEP-AH), doc. 0142; Giorgi, *El impulso educacional...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-125.

⁷⁰ "El señor obispo y los amigos de la educación popular", in *El Mensajero del Pueblo*, Montevideo, March 8, 1874, pp. 166-169. The citation is from p. 168.

⁷¹ Education of the People.

⁷² José Pedro Varela, *La educación del pueblo*, Montevideo, Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Previsión Social, 1964 [1874], vol. 1, pp. 97 and 105.

⁷³ *Op. cit.*, p. 98.

⁷⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 101.

In 1876, after reform-minded military had stepped in to end the political crisis and embark on a conservative modernization, José Pedro Varela accepted their invitation to act as National Inspector and lead the Dirección General de Instrucción Pública (DGIP⁷⁵). In his *La legislación escolar*⁷⁶, published that year, he presented a draft education law, which, just like the early Belgian League under Charles Buls, aimed at decentralizing the administration of primary instruction and stipulated that schools should provide a course in General Principles of Morality and Natural Religion (art. 57). In addition to this obligatory subject, district commissions might allow for the teaching of the Roman Catholic religion or Catholic catechism on the express wish of a parent, but then this instruction would have to take place outside regular hours and no child could be forced to attend these classes "against the will or without consent of their parents, tutors or guardians". These had the right to appeal all the way to the National Inspector and National Assembly, if commissions dared to break the law (art. 59)⁷⁷. Varela, referring to the lessons that had to be learned from Vedia's failed doctrinaire approach and the likely resistance of a largely Catholic populace, admitted that this was a pragmatic law for the currently "possible", not for an "ideal" republic. Progressing further would require more public consciousness-raising⁷⁸.

However, when a General Education Law was passed the following year, it concentrated the governance of schools, the certification and supervision of teachers, and the adoption of study programmes firmly in the hands of the State. The exception made in the draft bill had been turned on its head: religious instruction was no longer an "opt-in"; parents now had to signal if they wished to exempt their child from it (art. 18)⁷⁹. Though the latter change represented a semi-victory for Vera's ultramontanes⁸⁰, they went on the offensive. Through their newspapers *El Mensajero del Pueblo*⁸¹ and *El Bien Público*⁸² and numerous pamphlets, they combated all elements of the reform: the alleged state monopoly, which violated the freedom of teaching; the laity of the official curriculum, now bolstered by the scientism of English evolutionism and positivism which *La legislación escolar* had introduced; the concept of co-education, which would convert schools from temples into harems; and the compulsory and free character of education that would infringe on parents' right of choice and place private and confessional schools at a competitive disadvantage in relation to state institutes⁸³. Even less intransigent Catholics, like Francisco

⁷⁵ General Directorate of Public Schooling.

⁷⁶ The School Legislation.

⁷⁷ José Pedro Varela, *La legislación escolar*, Montevideo, Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Previsión Social, 1964 [1876], vol. 2, pp. 110-112. The citations are from pp. 110 and 111, respectively.

⁷⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 147-149. The quote is from pp. 147-148.

⁷⁹ This decree-law of August 24, 1877, can be found in D. Matías Alonso Criado, *Colección Legislativa de la República Oriental del Uruguay*, Montevideo, Impr. Rural, 1878, vol. 4, pp. 632-646.

⁸⁰ The Catholic press expressed satisfaction with this change in the law. "Ley de Educación Común", in *El Mensajero de Pueblo*, Montevideo, August 30, 1877, p. 143.

⁸¹ Messenger of the People.

⁸² The Common Good.

⁸³ Fernández-Cabrelli, "Iglesia y masonería...", *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115; Susana Monreal, "Libertad de enseñanza en Uruguay: cuestionamientos y debates (1868-1888)", in *Ariadna histórica: lenguajes, conceptos, metáforas*,

Bauzá, now separated from SAEP, tried unsuccessfully to modify the General Education Law, and eventually embraced an alternative project of religious, gender-segregated, non-compulsory, and fee-based schools headed by Mariano Soler. In 1876, the Liceo de Estudios Universitario⁸⁴ was inaugurated, in 1882 the Universidad Libre⁸⁵, and in 1884 the Instituto Pedagógico⁸⁶ and its network of primary schools⁸⁷. Regarding higher education, it is worth noting that, in contrast to Brussels's Université Libre, Uruguay's new *alma mater* was to be "free" from rationalism and positivism under the auspices of an ever stronger, more active, and more secularizing State.

Belgium had attracted the attention of both reformers and ultramontanes from the start of Varela's reform. In 1876, one of the leading voices of eclectic spiritualism⁸⁸, SAEP pioneer Carlos María Ramírez, stressed in a public speech that he admired those free universities, like ULB, "which owed all their reputation and strength to the excellence of their methods [and] rigor of their exams, both developed and demonstrated in the sustained struggle with rival establishments"⁸⁹, which he despised for their official and exclusionary character. He remembered that, when he was appointed to the Chair of Constitutional Law at the university in 1871, he had already praised the benefits of free competition and the absolute freedom of teaching, embodied by ULB and other such institutions⁹⁰ and he also introduced students to Heinrich Ahrens⁹¹. José Pedro Varela himself, in his *La educación del pueblo*, extensively cites Belgian liberal Émile Louis Victor de Laveleye, whose monograph *De l'instruction du peuple*, published in Paris in 1872, portrayed the movement

n.º 5, Bizkaia, 2016, pp. 135-142, Available at <https://ojs.ehu.es/index.php/Ariadna/article/view/16076> [Accessed: November 14, 2022]; "Las escuelas mixtas y sus sostenedores", in *El Mensajero del Pueblo*, Montevideo, August 9, 1877, pp. 91-92. From the beginning of the Reforma Vareliana, *El Mensajero del Pueblo* regularly reported about the European *Kulturkampf* and its unfolding in Belgium (see for example: June 7, 1872, pp. 13-14; August 14, 1873, p. 98; January 28, 1875, pp. 57-58; January 1, 1876, p. 5; March 25, 1876, pp. 198-199; August 1, 1878, p. 70), including in education (October 3, 1872, pp. 212-214; March 13, 1873, p. 168; May 25, 1873, pp. 338-340).

⁸⁴ Lyceum of University Studies.

⁸⁵ Free University (a Catholic institution).

⁸⁶ Pedagogical Institute.

⁸⁷ Susana Monreal, *Universidad Católica del Uruguay: el largo camino a la diversidad*, Montevideo, Universidad Católica del Uruguay, 2005, pp. 38-61; and, by the same author, "Francisco Bauzá: un proyecto educativo alternativo", in *Prisma*, n.º 14, Montevideo, 2000, pp. 72-95, esp. p. 88.

⁸⁸ French spiritualism was just about to renew itself, as Carlos María Ramírez noticed. In his contestation of Varela's positivism six years later, he referred to Paul Janet whose writings challenged Victor Cousin's Eclecticism, which had been the prevailing philosophy at Montevideo's University of the Republic, but not the validity of spiritualism. The Frenchman admitted that this school of thought needed to engage more with the natural sciences. It had placed too much emphasis on distinguishing between mind and body, psychology, and physiology, instead of providing a synthesis. Ramírez then quoted Janet: so far spiritualism "has shown God outside the world and the world outside God, but it has not sufficiently shown God in the world and the world in God". Varela and Ramírez, *El destino nacional...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 274. For the original, see Paul Janet, "Le spiritualisme français au XIXe siècle", in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 2nd period, vol. 75, Paris, 1868, p. 383.

⁸⁹ Varela and Ramírez, *El destino nacional...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 44.

⁹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁹¹ Monreal, "Les Krausistes 'belges'...", *op. cit.*, p. 479.

for popular education as an unstoppable historical phenomenon. Like José Pedro Varela, Laveleye was impressed with the progress the United States had made in providing free literacy training to all its citizens of whatever class or cult, understanding that education represented the basis for prosperity, democracy, happiness, and unity of the nation. Yet, significant deficits remained, and United States policymakers recognized the need for the State to establish compulsory primary schooling. All of Europe, except three countries, had introduced it, as Laveleye pointed out. Amongst the exceptions was his native Belgium; yet, popular education, the war flag of the two dominant Belgian parties, would not cease to get public attention⁹².

SAEP tried to win Uruguayans living abroad and foreign friends to actively support its mission by providing information and didactic material⁹³. On March 1, 1875, the Society's corresponding member in Paris, Antonio María Márquez, who had previously praised France's tradition-steeped Société pour l'Instruction Élémentaire⁹⁴, sent a detailed report on the aims and activities of the Belgian Ligue de l'Enseignement, pointing, amongst other things, to its foci on the religious and political neutrality of schools, its campaign for compulsory instruction, network of local circles, and impact on many other countries where similar associations had been founded⁹⁵. Two years later, José Pedro Varela sent a circular letter to the Ligue, in which he expressed the wish of DGIP to learn from successful practices in other countries. Uruguay's new pedagogical weekly *El Maestro*, a copy of which he attached, would include a special section that contained all documents with regard to popular instruction. Varela then suggested an exchange of official publications that would help "mutually publicize in both countries the regulations, which have been adopted in the field of education"⁹⁶. Yet, there is no indication that such regular exchange started before the late 1880s⁹⁷, which may also be due to the irregular appearance of the *Bulletin* during that decade.

Moreover, it seems that the Ligue showed little interest in Uruguay. In its rubrics "L'exterieur" and later "Chronique de l'étranger", the *Bulletin* never referred to Uruguayan publications during the period studied here, and the *Revue Pédagogique Belge*, published

⁹² For these usually overlooked references, see Varela, *La educación...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 60-61, 74-81 and 88-91. Varela cites from pp. 3-4, 32, 335-341 and 375-379 of Laveleye's *De l'instruction du peuple*, Paris, Hachette, 1872. The situation of Belgian education is explored by Émile Louis Victor de Laveleye on pp. 177-189, but he places his country in a comparative context throughout the book. His admiration for the United States was already apparent in an article he had published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1865. Timothy Verhoeven, *Transatlantic Catholicism: France and the United States in the Nineteenth Century*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 45.

⁹³ Comisión Directiva de la SAEP to Uruguayans abroad, n.d. [1868?], SAEP-AH, doc. 0032.

⁹⁴ Antonio María Márquez to José Pedro Varela, Paris, January 10, 1875, SAEP-AH, doc. 0140.

⁹⁵ Antonio María Márquez to José Pedro Varela, Paris, March 1, 1875, SAEP-AH, doc. 0144.

⁹⁶ José Pedro Varela to the Director of the Belgian Ligue de l'Enseignement, circular n.º 3, Montevideo, September 29, 1877, Archive de la Ville de Bruxelles, Archive de la Ligue de l'Enseignement, Brussels (hereafter AVB-ALE), box 1877, folder 605.

⁹⁷ Montreal, *Krausismo...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-160.

between 1885 and 1895, only twice briefly mentioned the South American country⁹⁸. In *La educación del pueblo*, José Pedro Varela, the admirer of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, had already corrected Émile Louis Victor de Laveleye for pointing to progress in popular education not only in Chile, a recognized pioneer in this area due to its post-independence stability, but also Brazil: “in the Argentine Republic, we would say”, he countered⁹⁹. Yet, the Ligue seemed to share Laveleye’s judgment. In 1876, it appointed the secretary of Chile’s Academy of Fine Arts, Eduardo de la Barra, and that country’s plenipotentiary minister to Buenos Aires, Diego Barros Arana, as its apparently first Latin American corresponding members¹⁰⁰, and in 1886 it published an uncritical report about primary and secondary education in Brazil, where it would represent a priority for the emperor¹⁰¹. It would take until 1906, before, in Francisco A. Berra, who had served as SAEP’s president four times before his return to his native Buenos Aires in 1894, a protagonist of the Reforma Vareliana was appointed as corresponding member¹⁰². This should not surprise, given that, still in the 1880s, Uruguay offered to foreign observers no more than “the appearance of a republic” that might not survive¹⁰³.

With the electoral victory of the Liberal Party, Belgium became a counter-model for *varelistas*’ opponents. In July 1879, *El Bien Público* commented on the ongoing laicization of teaching in France and Belgium and reproduced the Belgian episcopate’s pastoral letter of June 1, which warned against the “dangerous and harmful character” of such legislation, “an attack on the faith, piety, and religious rights of the Belgian people”¹⁰⁴. In a pamphlet, also published that year and revised and extended by Mariano Soler in the following decade, Uruguay’s ultramontanes accused the Grand Orient de Belgique of using compulsory irreligious education as a vehicle to de-Catholicize the youth of the whole world. For this purpose, it would have mobilized freemasons, created the Ligue with its

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Varela, *La educación ...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 61. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁰⁰ “Membres correspondants de la Ligue”, in *BLE*, n.º 1, Brussels, 1876-1877, p. 23. Other Latin Americans appointed in 1906, according to *BLE*, were Swedish-trained physical education pioneer Joaquín Cabezas from Santiago de Chile, Cuban feminist and nationalist educator María Luisa Dolz, and Belgian national and founding director, in 1905, of Peru’s first normal school Isidore Poiry.

¹⁰¹ J. Kesler, “Chronique de l’étranger: Brésil”, in *BLE*, n.º 1-2, Brussels, 1886, p. 7.

¹⁰² “Membres correspondants étrangers”, in *BLE*, n.º 3, Brussels, 1906, p. 96.

¹⁰³ Eduardo de la Barra, Chilean Charge d’Affaires in Uruguay, to Luis Aldunate Carrera, Chilean Minister of Foreign Relations and Colonization, Montevideo, October 13, 1882, Archivo Nacional Histórico de Chile, Fondo Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, vol. 245. Belgium’s consul-general/chargé d’affaires to Buenos Aires and Montevideo expressed similar concerns about Uruguay’s volatility. See Jean-Ernest Bruyssel to Prince Joseph de Riquet de Caraman-Chimay, Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Montevideo, August 28, 1886, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères de Belgique, Archives Diplomatiques (hereafter MAEB-AD), Correspondance Politique Argentine - Paraguay - Uruguay (hereafter CP-APU) I: 1851-1892.

¹⁰⁴ Cited in Monestier, *El combate laico...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 346-347. In December 1879, *El Siglo*, which supported Varela’s reform against ultramontanes, reported on the Belgian bishops’ decision to deny parents the sacrament of penance, if they sent their children to the State’s lay school, where there was a Catholic alternative. See p. 347 of Monestier’s monograph. For the context and original text of the pastoral letter, the third since Van Humbeeck had embarked on his reform, see Lory, “La résistance des catholiques...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 732-735, esp. p. 734.

international offshoots, and gained influence in parliaments¹⁰⁵. The nomination, in 1879, of university professor and diplomat Carlos de Castro as leader of Uruguay's own Gran Oriente and the replacement of José Pedro Varela, after his early death that same year, by his brother Jacobo could only confirm their fears. Castro would become the government minister two years later, and DGIP's new National Inspector was a founding and committed member of SAEP and had also converted to positivism¹⁰⁶.

In his first *Memoria*, published in 1881, Jacobo Varela echoed his predecessor in rebutting the alleged antagonism between lay school and Catholic religion. He admitted that he was never a mason and had no intention to fight any religious beliefs. Yet, he would not allow for the proselytization or political agitation of minors¹⁰⁷. Moreover, if clerical elements referred to the Constitution and demanded entrusting public instruction entirely to municipalities, without any centralised oversight, they knew very well that local juntas were not yet prepared for such mammoth task. As a consequence, ecclesiastics would be in charge, and recent debates on the implications of the Nothomb Law in Belgium would have shown to what abuses this could lead, Jacobo Varela argued, then citing numerous examples¹⁰⁸. In the *Memoria*, he makes the following interesting, but so far largely overlooked, observation:

"The particular thing is that in the República Oriental clericalism pretends this predominance in the school since the Constitution recognizes the Catholic Religion as that of the State, while in Belgium it claims the same right precisely because the Constitution of the Belgian people completely separates Church and State. In Belgium, clericalism also sustains the independence of communes or districts to run education, since there as here, without inspectors, with schooling being entirely handed over to local initiative, the priest is the lord and master of the schools of the State, with the latter ultimately having no other mission but to pay"¹⁰⁹.

In both Uruguay and Belgium, the clergy refused the compromises, which legislation offered, Varela emphasized¹¹⁰. He concluded that, while for fervent Catholics terrestrial

¹⁰⁵ Fernández-Cabrelli, "Iglesia y masonería...", *op. cit.*, pp. 115-117. The historical role of Rome's Church in education and freemasons' alleged war on Catholicism are discussed in Mariano Soler, *Católicos y masones: la masonería y el catolicismo. Estudio comparado bajo el aspecto del derecho común, las instituciones democráticas y filantrópicas, la civilización y su influencia social*, Montevideo, Andrés Rius, 1884, pp. 161-171. The direct reference to Belgium is on pp. 165-166.

¹⁰⁶ On Carlos de Castro, see Efraín Cano Roa, "Nacimiento y desarrollo de la masonería uruguaya en el siglo XIX", in *Revista de Estudios Históricos de la Masonería Latinoamericana y Caribeña*, vol. 8, n.º 2, San José [Costa Rica], 2016, pp. 63-66. Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.15517/rehmlac.v7i2.22690> [Accessed: June 28, 2023]. Regarding Jacobo Varela, see his keynote "La educación de la mujer" at the 1882 American International Pedagogical Congress in Buenos Aires, published as an appendix to Luis María Delio Machado, *Historia de la formación docente: la enseñanza normal nacional desde sus orígenes hasta la instalación del Consejo Nacional de Enseñanza Primaria y Normal*, Montevideo, Cruz del Sur, 2009, pp. 191-216. In this speech, the National Inspector reveals the inspiration he took in Herbert Spencer and Alexander Bain.

¹⁰⁷ Jacobo A. Varela, *Memoria correspondiente a los años de 1879 y 1880*, Montevideo, Imprenta de *La Idea*, 1881, vol. 1, pp. 292, 295 and 297-298. See also pp. 311-312.

¹⁰⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 298-299. See also his warnings on pp. 306-307.

¹⁰⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 299-300.

¹¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, pp. 301-303 and 307.

life might be no more than a preparation for eternal afterlife, making them display more concern for the purity of the soul than the improvement of society, he wanted to use the means and methods of modern science to overcome anarchy and ignorance and form citizens of a democratic polity and consolidated nation¹¹¹.

This report is significant not only for what it says about progress in popular education in Uruguay, the focus of most historical studies, but also for showing that Jacobo Varela was a shrewd observer of Europe's culture wars. He would have certainly benefited from a direct exchange with Belgian Liberals. Yet, Uruguay was not in a position to send a delegate to the International Education Congress, which the Ligue organized in Brussels in 1880 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Belgium's independence. It was the first truly international meeting of its kind, though the very specific problems of Latin America did not figure on the wide-ranging agenda¹¹².

These were discussed two years later, when the Argentine government convoked the first regional meeting of educators, the American International Pedagogical Congress in Buenos Aires, and the role that SAEP and DGIP played at this event proved to be crucial. Only ten of the 320 participants were foreigners, though they delivered seven of the nineteen keynotes and made-up half of the executive committee. The five Uruguayans were the strongest faction, and Jacobo Varela was elected as vice-president and Carlos María Ramírez as secretary. Since the Argentine government had made the attendance of all normal school directors and head teachers of Buenos Aires's public schools obligatory, invited other teachers, and gave them the right to speak and vote, SAEP and DGIP representatives, all professional educationalists and, with the exception of rationalist Ramírez, positivists, faced a phalanx of schoolmasters who were primarily interested in thwarting attacks against their individual and corporate interests. Moreover, protests against secularization threatened to paralyze debates. In this situation, the Uruguayans were instrumental in making sure that pedagogical, rather than purely administrative, questions were discussed and that the controversial issue of lay education, understood by them as laity, rather than laicism, was excluded from further debate¹¹³.

¹¹¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 309-310.

¹¹² Ligue Belge d'Enseignement, *Congrès International de l'Enseignement, Bruxelles, 1880: rapports préliminaires*, Brussels, Office de Publicité, 1880; and, also by the Ligue, *Congrès International de l'Enseignement, Bruxelles, 1880: discussions*, Brussels, Office de Publicité, 1882. Only one educator from Latin America, Chilean Abelardo Nuñez, actively participated in discussions, see pp. 45-46, 151, 156-157 and 174.

¹¹³ The reports by SAEP and the DGIP to Uruguay's government appeared before the official and incomplete minutes by Argentine organizers and provide a superb evaluation of the event. See Francisco A. Berra, Carlos María de Pena and Carlos María Ramírez, "Informe sobre el Congreso Pedagógico Internacional Americano de Buenos Aires"; Jacobo Varela and Alfredo Vázquez Acevedo, "Informe sobre el Congreso Pedagógico Internacional celebrado en Buenos Aires", both in Agapo Luis Palomeque (comp.), *Obras de José Pedro Varela*, Montevideo, Poder Legislativo/Cámara de Representantes, 1991, vol. 4, pp. 319-403 (esp. 321-335) and pp. 406-453 (esp. 411-415), respectively. See also Hugo E. Biagini, *Educación y progreso. Primer Congreso Pedagógico Interamericano*, Buenos Aires, CINA, 1983, p. 58; and Agapo Luis Palomeque, "Laicismo y laicidad", in Jorge Bralich and Myriam Southwell (eds.), *Reflexiones sobre el Congreso Pedagógico Internacional de 1882*, special issue of *Cuadernos de Historia de la Educación*, vol. 1, n.º 1, Montevideo, 2013, pp. 72-73.

Even so, Varela's keynote, which focused on the feminization of teaching, could all but satisfy ultramontanes at home. Uruguay's National Inspector reported about the long tradition and steep increase of mixed schools and the advantages of co-education in his country; the rise in female teachers since 1877 by 120 percent; and the excellent experiences with the appointment of female head teachers in girls', mixed, and even boys' schools. He also pleaded for a uniform curriculum, including sciences, history, and citizenship, for female and male students. Given that more than three quarters of schoolmistresses were born Uruguayans, compared to only one third of their male counterparts (who were often Catholics), these women would also be agents in the assimilation of immigrant children¹¹⁴. No wonder that, in 1882, Jacobo Varela inaugurated Montevideo's Internato Normal de Señoritas, a boarding school that trained female teachers for rural schools (a male counterpart would follow only in 1891)¹¹⁵.

Debates on lay education might have been silenced during the Congress, but they continued throughout Argentina. In 1883, the bishop of Córdoba, the country's Catholic stronghold, imitated his Belgian counterparts by penning a pastoral letter, in which he admonished parents not to send their offspring to the local normal school under a Protestant head teacher, an intervention which attracted much attention in Uruguay's ultramontane press¹¹⁶. Yet, unflustered by such turbulences and certainly inspired by France's legislation, one year later the Argentine parliament passed Law 1420, which followed the Varelas in making primary instruction lay, free, and compulsory, but allowing extracurricular religious instruction by ministers of the various faiths within school buildings. As a consequence, the Vatican's representative to Buenos Aires, Monsignor Luis Matera, fuelled the flames of conflict, leading to his expulsion. Belgium's Conservatives, back in power in 1884, focused for the first time on this culture war in the River Plate, as a set of so far unknown primary sources in the Diplomatic Archive of Belgium's Ministry of Foreign Affairs shows. On October 17, Brussels's consul-general to Buenos Aires, Ernest-Jean van Bruyssel, a historian and prolific author who also penned monographs on Argentina and Uruguay, reported on the case, providing extensive documentation¹¹⁷. One month later Argentina's Ministry of Foreign Relations felt prompted to directly inform foreign governments, including Belgium's, about what had led to its drastic decision. Argentine envoys forwarded the copy of a circular letter, which they had received, and further evidence of Matera's attempts to publicly undermine

¹¹⁴ Varela, "Educación de la mujer...", *op. cit.*, pp. 191-216.

¹¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of the two *Internatos*, see Machado, *Historia...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-80 and 129-136.

¹¹⁶ Monestier, *El combate laico...*, *op. cit.*, p. 289 n. 203, p. 347; Ardao, *Racionalismo...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 219-221.

¹¹⁷ Ernest-Jean van Bruyssel to Chevalier Alphonse de Moreau, Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Buenos Aires, October 17, 1884, MAEB-AD, CP-APU I. On Bruyssel, see H. Vander Linden's entry in *Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Biographie Nationale...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 26, Brussels, Établissement Émile Bruylant, 1936-1938, cols. 221-223. The above-mentioned monographs by Bruyssel are *La République Argentine: ses ressources naturelles, ses colonies agricoles, son importance comme centre d'immigration*, Brussels, T. Falk, 1888; and *La République Orientale de l'Uruguay*, Brussels, Librairie Européenne C. Muquardt, 1889. These book-length reports introduced Belgian policymakers, businessmen, and other interested readers to the River Plate countries.

the State's lay school legislation, prevent the recruitment of United States normal school teachers, and contribute to a climate of religious intolerance, altogether thirty-one pages¹¹⁸.

Monsignor Luis Matera first sailed to Montevideo. Yet, he would not have found a calmer long-time domicile there. In 1885, Uruguay's military-led administration decreed the inspection of all schools and convents and tightened up earlier laws on the secularization of cemeteries (1861) and on civil birth, legitimacy, marriage, and death registers (1879). New legislation stipulated that only civil marriage was legally recognized and had to precede any religious ceremony. Government also required the authorization of convents and other ecclesiastical establishments and warned clergymen that a critique of government and legislation could result in prison sentences. Mariano Soler had to escape the anticlerical climate by spending two years in Europe. No wonder Rome's Church would support the Quebracho revolt one year later¹¹⁹. This was a cross-party campaign against militarism which was later stylised as the identitary platform for *batllismo*.

In the following decade tensions between Church and State in Uruguay eased. On the one hand, eclectic rationalism, and positivism, and with them SAEP¹²⁰, had passed their zenith. On the other, Mariano Soler, who became bishop in 1890 and archbishop in 1897, now shared Leo XIII's concern for social justice, embodied by the Pope's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, and his recognition that Catholics had to work through political institutions. While remaining opposed to freemasons, rationalists, positivists, secular liberals, and socialists, Soler reached out to society, supporting the foundation of a corporatist Catholic Civic Union, Catholic workers' circles, and a Catholic youth federation¹²¹ and castigating capitalist greed¹²².

THE RISE OF *BATLLISMO*:
THE IMPACT OF "BELGIAN" KRAUSISM, AND ANTICLERICALISM

When, from the late 1870s, positivism began to permeate all levels of the education apparatus, in its shadow a counter-hegemonic project emerged. The military's closure of the Chair of Philosophy at the University of the Republic in 1877 prompted the university youth, led by the then 24-year-old graduate Prudencio Vázquez y Vega, to teach the subject in the Ateneo del Uruguay, founded that same year (from 1886, Ateneo de Montevideo)¹²³.

¹¹⁸ Copy of a circular by Argentina's Ministry of Foreign Relations to the country's diplomatic community, Buenos Aires, October 14, 1884, and copies of all correspondence with regard to Matera's interference in Córdoba, enclosures to Delfin D. Huerzo, Legation of the Argentine Republic, to Prince Joseph de Riquet de Caraman-Chimay, Brussels, November 22, 1884, MAEB-AD, CP-APU I.

¹¹⁹ Caetano and Geymonat, *La secularización uruguaya...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 56-58, 67 and 71-75; Monestier, *El combate laico...*, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

¹²⁰ Between 1886 and 1889, SAEP lost executives and members. See Piotti, *El Elbio...*, *op. cit.*, p. 94. At the end of this period, Jacobo Varela stepped down as National Inspector. While SAEP survived, it had lost its combative character.

¹²¹ Caetano and Geymonat, *La secularización uruguaya...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 79-81.

¹²² Monestier, *El combate laico...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 313-314.

¹²³ Vázquez y Vega started Philosophy teaching in the Ateneo from 1878, others taught in the University Club

Yet, it was no longer only French spiritualism that guided the curriculum; Vázquez y Vega also introduced his fellow students to the ideas of Heinrich Ahrens and Guillaume Tiberghien and thereby Karl Christian Friedrich Krause. Second-year students had to read Tiberghien's prize-winning debut work *Essai théorique et historique sur la génération des connaissances humaines dans ses rapports avec la morale, la politique et la religion*¹²⁴, and almost all other works by the Belgian could be found in Montevideo's libraries, mostly in their translations by Spanish Krausists¹²⁵.

For Prudencio Vázquez y Vega, the Roman Church had long lost its once progressive character by setting itself against the power of reason and conscience and, as an ally of absolutist regimes, also against liberty and social development¹²⁶. Yet, as he stated in 1881, two years before his premature death, Spencerian positivism, which recognised the existence of a metaphysical residual, the Unknown, but ultimately aimed at explaining morality through natural laws and thereby neglected altruism in the evolutionary process, could not provide a viable alternative. Only a renewed spiritualism would combine the sciences of nature and spirit and replace the positivists' soulless morality of utility by one of duty¹²⁷, *i.e.*, by the rational pursuit of the Good for the Good itself¹²⁸. It was the former, utilitarianism, he conveyed in his doctoral thesis that same year, which made *varelistas* collaborate with military potentates¹²⁹. What was needed, Vázquez y Vega and his followers insisted, was a "new [liberal, emancipatory] spirit", and in 1878 they founded the short-

and private institutions. Arturo Ardao, *Espiritualismo y positivismo en el Uruguay*, Montevideo, Ministerio de Educación y Cultura, 2008 [1950], pp. 188-189 and 229. For the reverence for Vázquez y Vega, see pp. 204-206 in the above-mentioned book, and also "Recuerdos añejos", Paris, August 5, 1927, Archivo General de la Nación, Montevideo, Archivo Particular de Pedro Figari, caja 1, encuadernación 5, fs. 1-8.

¹²⁴ Ardao, *Espiritualismo...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-208. Regarding Tiberghien's essay, see O. Carlos Stoetzer, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause and his Influence in the Hispanic World*, Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna, Böhlau, 1998, p. 70.

¹²⁵ Monreal, *Krausismo...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-122, and appendix 1.

¹²⁶ See the 1876 lecture "La Humanidad", in Prudencio Vázquez y Vega, *Escritos filosóficos*, Montevideo, Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Previsión, 1965 [1877-1882], pp. 41-42. José Batlle y Ordóñez shared these ideas until the end of his political career, as a speech given in 1919 shows. Milton I. Vanger, *Uruguay's José Batlle y Ordóñez: The Determined Visionary, 1915-1917*, Boulder, CO, and London, Lynne Rienner, 2010, p. 80.

¹²⁷ Prudencio Vázquez y Vega, "Crítica de la moral evolucionista", in Vázquez y Vega, *Escritos filosóficos...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-145, 154-155 and 158-161. For the combination of nature and spirit, empirical sciences, and philosophy, see his 1879 lecture "La filosofía en la época actual", in the same book, pp. 49 and 53-54.

¹²⁸ Monreal, *Krausismo...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-179. In a posthumous publication, liberally translated and adjusted by Tiberghien in an effort to resuscitate morality in Latin countries after France's defeat against Prussia and reviewed in *BLE*, n.º 2, Brussels, 1872-1873, pp. 74-75, Krause developed his own system of commandments, defining duties to God, nature, reason, oneself, fellow-men, and mankind at large. In his preface, Guillaume Tiberghien turns against ultramontanes as well as preachers of class struggle. For him, the social question was primarily a moral one, and a morality based on natural religion, a religion in consonance with reason, was superior to all positive religions. See Guillaume Tiberghien, *Les commandements de l'Humanité ou la vie morale sous forme de catéchisme populaire d'après Krause*, Brussels, Gustave Mayolez, 1872, pp. 5-25.

¹²⁹ Prudencio Vázquez y Vega, "Una cuestión de la moral política", in Vázquez y Vega, *Escritos filosóficos...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-139.

lived journal *El Espíritu Nuevo*¹³⁰, well in line with the rationale of Krause's son-in-law Baron Hermann Karl von Leonhardi's journal *Die Neue Zeit*¹³¹ (1869-1875) and Quinet's book *L'esprit nouveau* (1875)¹³².

The young José Batlle y Ordóñez, an intimate friend of Prudencio Vázquez y Vega, had made his own intellectual journey from Catholicism to harmonious rationalism. As another of his long-time companions revealed, Batlle always believed in the "existence of a creative, almighty, and supremely intelligent force"¹³³, but in his Deism there was no place for God's terrestrial personnel and the meaningless rituals it had invented¹³⁴. In 1879, he helped draft a third and final "Profession of Rationalist Faith", which was philosophically underpinned, drawing, amongst other sources, on Guillaume Tiberghien¹³⁵. Through Vázquez y Vega, José Batlle y Ordóñez had become familiar with Krausist moral philosophy¹³⁶. He was determined to secularize it and, after the 1886 Quebracho, embark on the "reorganization of the political collectivity" or "legal reconstruction of the Republic"¹³⁷. In this endeavour, Ahrens's *opus magnum*, the *Cours de droit naturel*, which envisaged an organic, solidaristic, and developmentalist State, served him as a guide, as he stated in 1913¹³⁸. It offered a third way between doctrinaire liberalism and collectivist socialism. The State would shape collective conscience, support associative efforts, protect the weak and public goods, and integrate and homogenize the populace¹³⁹. Integral and universal education figured prominently on the agenda of all Krausists, given that man's permanent material and moral improvement was for them the

¹³⁰ The New Spirit.

¹³¹ The New Time.

¹³² Batlle y Ordóñez's grand-nephew Jorge Batlle foregrounds these connections in his prologue to the 1988 reprint of the Ateneo journal. República Oriental del Uruguay/Poder Legislativo/Cámara de Representantes (hereafter ROU/PL/CR), *José Batlle y Ordóñez, Documentos para el estudio de su vida y de su obra*. Serie 1, 1856-1893: *El Espíritu Nuevo, 1878-1879*, Montevideo, Tradinco, 1988, p. xxi.

¹³³ Domingo Arena, *Batlle y los problemas sociales en el Uruguay*, Montevideo, Claudio García Cía. Editores, 1939, pp. 252-255; the citation is from p. 254. See also *Escritos y discursos del Dr. Domingo Arena sobre el señor José Batlle y Ordóñez*, Montevideo, 1942, pp. 216-219; Carlos Manini Ríos, *Anoche me llamó Batlle*, Montevideo, Letras, 1973, p. 79.

¹³⁴ See Batlle y Ordóñez's poem: "Como se adora a Dios", in ROU/PL/CR, *José Batlle y Ordóñez...*, *op. cit.*, Serie 1: *El Espíritu Nuevo*, p. 111 [vol. 1, n.º 14, February 16, 1879]; Caetano, Geymonat, Greising and Sánchez, *El "Uruguay Laico"...*, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

¹³⁵ Ardao, *Racionalismo...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 195-202.

¹³⁶ Arturo Ardao, *Batlle y Ordóñez y el positivismo filosófico*, Montevideo, Números, 1951, pp. 39-45.

¹³⁷ Luis V. Anastasia *et al.*, *Batlle y El Día*, Montevideo, Serie Fundación Prudencio Vázquez y Vega/Ingenio Comunicación y Marketing/Fundación Hanns Seidel, 1989, 2nd part and appendix. The citations are from the editorial of June 16, 1886, on p. 167.

¹³⁸ Ardao, *Batlle y Ordóñez...*, *op. cit.*, p. 166. Batlle had already read Heinrich Ahrens in 1880. See Vanger's, *The Model Country...*, *op. cit.*, p. 287, n. 8-9 (Vanger quotes from Batlle's private papers, which are in possession of the former president's family and to which only the author and one other historian have ever had access).

¹³⁹ Vanger, *The Model Country...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-292; Susana Monreal, "Influencia de los Krausistas 'belgas' en la redefinición de las funciones del Estado en el Uruguay, 1875-1915", in *Estudios de Ciencias y Letras*, n.º 22, Montevideo, 1992, p. 15; González Laurino, *La construcción de la identidad...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 93, 170 and 266-267.

prerequisite of historical progress¹⁴⁰. Batlle shared with Vázquez y Vega disgust for the *varelistas'* collaboration with a military regime; they should have rather inculcated civic responsibility and abnegation in students¹⁴¹.

The prevalence of positivism waned after 1890, when eclectic rationalist Julio Herrera y Obes reestablished civilian Colorado rule, appointed a Catholic as Minister of Justice, Religion and Public Instruction, and tried to stamp out materialism at the university and thereby, given the latter's normative role in the education reform, also at primary and normal school levels. José Batlle y Ordóñez had supported Herrera y Obes's election and the restitution of spiritualism, which included the adoption of Janet's *Traité élémentaire de philosophie à l'usage des classes* as official philosophy textbook at the university¹⁴². However, he could not approve of the aristocratic nature of this and subsequent administrations, which led to divisions within the governing party, stirred opposition from Blancos, and reignited bossism on the northern frontier¹⁴³.

The economic and political crisis the country was facing caused budgetary constraints, limited state infrastructural power, and made the Varelas' reform stagnate¹⁴⁴. It had been successful in increasing the number of pupils who received primary education in public schools from 26,169 in 1882 to 52,474 in 1900, compared to a modest rise from 19,244 to 22,276 in the private sector during that same period, and it was especially in the scarcely populated hinterland where state schools (78%) dwarfed their profit-oriented counterparts at the end of this period¹⁴⁵. In 1902, Uruguay had the second-highest public school enrollment rate in Latin America and was surpassed only by Argentina. Yet, these 7.86% could not satisfy¹⁴⁶, especially when taking into account that 90% of pupils dropped out in the first three grades and attendance was low¹⁴⁷.

¹⁴⁰ *El Espíritu Nuevo* pleaded for the creation of a League of Education within the Ateneo that would promote the establishment of schools. ROU/PL/CR, *José Batlle y Ordóñez...*, *op. cit.*, Serie 1: *El Espíritu Nuevo*, p. 305 [vol. 1, n.º 33, June 29, 1879].

¹⁴¹ José Batlle y Ordóñez, "¡Sí, Varela tráfuga!, 2 Aug. 1881", in ROU/PL/CR, *José Batlle y Ordóñez...*, *op. cit.*, Serie 1: *El Joven Batlle, 1856-1885*, Montevideo, Impr. Vinaak, 1994, pp. 203-204.

¹⁴² Ardao, *Espiritualismo...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 309-318. During his first stay in Europe between October 21, 1879, and February 2, 1880, Batlle appears to have attended lectures by Paul Janet (in his correspondence, he refers to "Paul Zané"), though they had no lasting impact. "Carta de José Batlle y Ordóñez a su padre Lorenzo Batlle, Paris, Marzo 7 de 1880", in ROU/PL/CR, *José Batlle y Ordóñez...*, *op. cit.*, Serie 1, *El joven Batlle*, p. 86.

¹⁴³ Juan José Arteaga, *Breve historia contemporánea del Uruguay*, Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2008, pp. 102-108; Milton I. Vanger, *José Batlle y Ordóñez of Uruguay: The Creator of His Times, 1902-1907*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1963, p. 24.

¹⁴⁴ Ministerio de Fomento/Instrucción Pública, *Mensaje proyecto de ley sobre reforma a la ley vigente y reorganización de la enseñanza*, Montevideo, Imprenta de *La Nación*, 1900.

¹⁴⁵ Emilio Mareñales and Gladys Figueredo, *Internatos Normales de Montevideo*, Montevideo, Impr. Somerver, 2002, pp. 102-103 (tables 1-2).

¹⁴⁶ ROU/DGIP, *Memoria correspondiente a los años 1902-1903, presentada a la Dirección General de Instrucción Primaria y al Ministerio de Fomento por el Dr. Abel J. Pérez, Inspector Nacional*, Montevideo, A. Barreiro y Ramos, 1904, p. 169 (table 4).

¹⁴⁷ Eduardo Rogé, "Estadística escolar de las naciones europeas: estudio comparativo con la de la República O. del Uruguay", in *Anales de Instrucción Primaria* (hereafter *AIP*), vol. 2, [January-December 1904], n.º 6-7 [January-May 1904], Montevideo, A. Barreiro y Ramos, 1904, pp. 33-34.

Batlle's rise to power coincided with the deaths of Jacobo Varela in 1900, Herbert Spencer in 1903, and Francisco Berra in 1906. Rigid or "bad positivism" had found its biological end. The term was coined by philosophy professor Carlos Vaz Ferreira, the figurehead of a new generation of intellectuals¹⁴⁸ who embraced an "experience-based philosophy that retained from its positivist source the marks of empiricism, naturalism, evolutionism, scientism, rationalism, and agnosticism, but mixed with a cautious metaphysical expectation and an Idealist concept of action and values"¹⁴⁹. Krausopositivism was one of the philosophical-political mergers. This meant that, in contrast to Argentina and with more political potency than in Belgium, Uruguay had a spiritual alternative to Catholicism. Rome's Church was not needed as a moralizing force for society, and after the death of archbishop Soler in 1908, with the post remaining vacant for eleven years, it was further weakened and unable to influence elections¹⁵⁰. Therefore, *batllistas* propagated their own "civic religion"¹⁵¹ and pursued an aggressively anticlerical agenda by breaking diplomatic relations with the Holy See (1911-1939); first halving and then eliminating the annual subsidy for Montevideo's archiepiscopal seminary; setting up a secular charitable commission; prohibiting religious imaginary and compulsory religious practices in public institutions; offering younger nuns the chance to leave convent; repealing legal honours, exceptions, and prerogatives to religious persons and symbols and forbidding flag salutes to them; prohibiting the attendance of the army at religious ceremonies; ruling out the death penalty as an amoral punishment that would, according to Catholics, temper a more severe one in heaven; abolishing the requirement of presidents and parliamentarians to take an oath on the Holy Book; and allowing for divorce on the sole will of the wife, investigations of paternity, and inheritance rights of so-called illegitimate children¹⁵². This anticlericalism opened rifts within the Colorado

¹⁴⁸ Carlos Vaz Ferreira, *Lecciones sobre pedagogía y cuestiones de enseñanza*, Montevideo, Talleres Gráficos de Curbelo y Cia., 1963 [1918], vol. 2, pp. 72-73.

¹⁴⁹ Arturo Ardao, *Etapas de la inteligencia uruguaya*, Montevideo, Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación de la Universidad de la República, 1971, p. 395. In this endeavour, Carlos Vaz Ferreira also felt inspired by the process philosophy of Henri Bergson, one of the last French spiritualists who worked on overcoming rational and teleological understandings of evolution by placing emphasis on multiplicity, motion, and duration. Intuition was for him the method to grasp reality as a spontaneous and creative process of 'becoming' rather than a static state of 'being'. Bergson also influenced another of Vaz Ferreira's intellectual sources, American Pragmatist William James, who, despite some disagreements, shared Bergson's rejection of pure intellectualism. Cornelius Krusé, "Personalism in Latin America", in Thomas E. Buford and Harold H. Oliver (eds.), *Personalism Revisited: Its Proponents and Critics*, Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, 2002, p. 151.

¹⁵⁰ The national census that year showed that the number of Uruguayans who confessed to being Catholics had fallen by one quarter since 1889, while that of self-declared liberals had quintupled. Religion was practiced privately, despite ardent battles for public space. Caetano and Geymonat, *La secularización uruguaya...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 128. On Catholics' declining political influence, see also Vanger's, *The Model Country...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 94 and 280; and his *Uruguay's José Batlle y Ordóñez...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78.

¹⁵¹ Gerardo Caetano shows how turn-of-the-century liberals, including *batllistas*, created an armory of surrogates for religious terms and practices. See his *La república batllista*, Montevideo, Banda Oriental, 2011, pp. 189-197.

¹⁵² The contested implementation of Batlle's legislation is described in detail in Vanger's trilogy *José Batlle y Ordóñez...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-171, 200-203, 239, 247-250, 253 and 259-260; *The Model Country...*, *op. cit.*, pp.

party, with religious liberal writer José Enrique Rodó accusing José Batlle y Ordóñez of Jacobinism¹⁵³, and made Blancos portray themselves as defenders of religious tolerance¹⁵⁴. Yet secularization was not a determining party-political issue.

With the pacification of the country by 1905, schools were taken to the most remote corners of the country, with teachers being depicted as "soldiers of a noble cause"¹⁵⁵. Most of them were female, and opening education at all levels to women figured prominently on Batlle's political program, not least to remove them from the influence of the Roman Catholic Church (yet, as Gerardo Caetano and Roger Geymonat point out, given that liberals, just like Catholics, were not so sure who would benefit most from giving women the vote, such legislation was delayed until 1932, another parallel to Belgium¹⁵⁶). In 1909, during the Claudio Williman administration, parliament passed a law prohibiting religious instruction in public schools¹⁵⁷, and by 1911, 392 new, mostly rural, public primary schools had been created and enrolment had risen by another 17,079 pupils¹⁵⁸. Six rural normal schools, *liceos* in all provinces, and the female section at Montevideo's University were inaugurated during Batlle's second term, and, in 1916, Uruguay became the first country to declare education free from kindergarten to doctoral studies. Laity had become a way of life: "[t]o be batllista [...] implied to send one's children to the public and lay school, to marry in a civil ceremony and reject a religious wedding, and accept the emancipation of the woman by helping her gain access to secondary and university studies"¹⁵⁹.

Belgium had not lost its attraction to Uruguayans after the Varelas left the political stage. In 1892, Enriqueta Compte y Riqué was placed in charge of Uruguay's first kindergarten after having studied the pedagogy of Krause's close friend Friedrich Wilhelm

17, 114, 119, 173-176 and 271; and *Uruguay's José Batlle y Ordóñez...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 100, 167-168, 208, 251 and 264-265. See also Caetano and Geymonat, *La secularización uruguaya...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 91-105.

¹⁵³ José Enrique Rodó, *Liberalismo y jacobinismo*, Montevideo, Librería "La Anticuaria", 1906.

¹⁵⁴ In the build-up to the centenary of Uruguay's independence, the Catholic establishment, and the majority of Blancos, organised as the National Party, attacked *batllistas* for their anticlericalism and cosmopolitanism and portrayed themselves as stewards of the country's religious and nationalist tradition. Caetano, Geymonat, Greising and Sánchez, *El "Uruguay Laico"...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-58.

¹⁵⁵ Abel J. Pérez, "Instrucciones que deben observar los inspectores de escuelas (circular n.º 1)", in *AIP*, vol. 2, n.º 8-10 [June to October 1904], Montevideo, A. Barreiro y Ramos, 1904, p. 661.

¹⁵⁶ Caetano and Geymonat, *La secularización uruguaya...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 239. Soler's conservative heirs in Uruguay were keen to mobilize women for their cause. See pp. 94, 96 and 217-244.

¹⁵⁷ "Ley por la que se suprime toda enseñanza y práctica religiosa en las Escuelas públicas primarias del Estado" [March 31, 1909], in ROU, *Legislación escolar vigente, 1906-1918: Recopilación cronológica de acuerdos, circulares, decretos, leyes, programas, reglamentos, y otras disposiciones relativas a la Instrucción pública primaria*, vol. 7, Montevideo, Imprenta de *El Nacional*, 1921, pp. 176-177.

¹⁵⁸ *Mensaje del Presidente de la República Dr. D. Claudio Williman á la H. Asamblea General al inaugurarse el 1º período de la XXIV Legislatura, 15 de febrero de 1911*, Montevideo, Talleres Gráficos Barreiro y Ramos, 1911, p. 72. Public schools continued to outnumber private institutes. ROU/DGIP, *Memoria correspondiente al año 1901, presentado a la Dirección General de Instrucción Pública por el Inspector Nacional de I. Primaria*, Abel J. Pérez, Montevideo, A. Barreiro y Ramos, 1902, p. 59.

¹⁵⁹ Arteaga, *Breve historia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 129. The creation of the Section for Secondary and Preparatory Education for Women at the University had to be implemented against protests from both conservative-Catholic groups, for whom this was a dangerous step, and feminist and socialist activists, who were against the separation of sexes. Caetano, Geymonat, Greising and Sánchez, *El "Uruguay Laico"...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 362-364.

August Fröbel in Belgium, where such institutions had prospered after their prohibition in Prussia, in 1851, for allegedly breeding socialist, atheist, and subversive thought¹⁶⁰. Their introduction in Belgium had already figured prominently in the Ligue's pedagogical program¹⁶¹. The kindergartens of Brussels, Liège, and Antwerp became the models the young Uruguayan wished to emulate¹⁶², though the "biographies" of 1,816 children and their physical, intellectual, and moral features she produced in Montevideo until 1900, long before Alfred Binet's experimental psychology, signal a characteristic mixture of Krausism and positivism¹⁶³.

In 1909, Batlle's loyal National School Inspector Abel J. Pérez, in charge from 1900 to 1916¹⁶⁴, resumed contacts with the Ligue de l'Enseignement, requesting the exchange

¹⁶⁰ Diana Franke-Meyer, *Kleinkinderziehung und Kindergarten im historischen Spannungsfeld zwischen Bildungspolitik, Familie und Schule*, Bad Heilbrunn, Julius Klinkhardt, 2011, pp. 116-129; James C. Albisetti, "Froebel crosses the Alps: Introducing the Kindergarten in Italy", in *History of Education Quarterly*, vol. 49, n.º 2, Cambridge, MA, 2009, pp. 159-169; for Belgium see pp. 163-164 and 169.

¹⁶¹ Uyttebrouck, "Les grandes étapes...", *op. cit.*, p. 18; Lory, *Libéralisme...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 795. This program was influenced by Pierre Tempel's, *L'instruction du peuple*, Brussels, Lacroix and Verboeckshoven, 1865.

¹⁶² Enriqueta Compte y Riqué, "El Jardín de Infantes de Montevideo: informe remitido a la Inspección General de Instrucción Pública de Chile", in *AIP*, vol. 4 [July 1906 - April 1907], n.º 1-5 [July 1906 - April 1907], Montevideo, Impr. de *El Siglo Ilustrado*, 1907, pp. 290-294.

¹⁶³ Agapo Luis Palomeque *et al.*, *Historia de la educación uruguaya*, Montevideo, Ediciones de La Plaza, 2012, vol. 3, pp. 216-224.

¹⁶⁴ Pérez's political-pedagogical philosophy was also inspired by leading educationalists of France's Third Republic and combined republicanism, laicism and social reformism. He aimed at the formation of patriotic citizens who were guided by civic values and lay morality. See Caetano, Geymonat, Greising and Sánchez, *El "Uruguay Laico"...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 312-334; Caetano, *La república batllista...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 225-229. An important French text that influenced the education establishment in Uruguay was Jean-Marie Guyau's *Education et hérédité: étude sociologique*, Paris, Félix Alcan, 1899, published posthumously by his spiritual mentor, Alfred Fouillée, and translated into Spanish in Paris in 1905. Uruguayans followed Guyau in his emphasis on "suggestions" as the basis of the education process, which precluded any corporal punishment, and in his imperative to inculcate in children faith in themselves, their own power, their will. This, the Frenchman stressed, would contrast with religious morality that proceeds from the impotence of the will without grace. Luis María Delio Machado, "El aporte de la corporación de juristas en la constitución, gestión y orientación de las políticas educativas nacionales (1830-1930)", in *Revista de la Facultad de Derecho*, n.º 22, Montevideo, 2003, pp. 55 and 57-58. Pérez was impressed with Jules Ferry, Ferdinand Buisson, and Paul Bert's reforms, not least of teacher training, as he expressed in his *Motivos de una educación común*, Montevideo, Imprenta de *El Siglo Ilustrado*, 1915, pp. 45, 77-78 and 80. He closely collaborated with Carlos Vaz Ferreira and, after 1904, both recommended new textbooks to Montevideo's normal schools. These included the Spanish translations of the *Cours de pédagogie théorique et pratique* (1883) by Jules Gabriel Compayré, a liberal Protestant who proposed more empirical research into child psychology, and the *Cours de Morale* (1904) by Jules Payot, another proponent of lay education. Abel J. Pérez, "Resolución relativa á obras que deben conocer los aspirantes á maestros normalistas y libres, para el examen de pedagogía", in *AIP*, vol. 2, n.º 6-7, Montevideo, p. 155; Abel J. Pérez to María Stagnero de Munar, Montevideo, March 13, 1905, Institutos Normales de Montevideo, Archivo Histórico de Montevideo, Colección Internato e Instituto Normal de Señoritas, "Comunicados Recibidos, 3/1/1905-10/12/1905". For Compayré and Payot, see Daniel Tröhler, "State Formation and Function of Education in Continental Teacher Education Curricula", in *Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies*, vol. 2, Cambridge, MA, 2006, Available at <https://doi.org/10.14288/jaaacs.v2i0.187646> [Accessed: November 11, 2022]; and David Saville Muzzey, "State, Church, and the School in France III: The Separation of Church and School", in *The School Review*, vol. 78, n.º 1, Chicago, 1911, p. 323.

of Uruguay's new pedagogical journal *Anales de Instrucción Primaria*¹⁶⁵ for the Belgian *Bulletin*, in order to make teachers familiar with laws, regulations, and advanced pedagogical doctrines and didactics¹⁶⁶. Yet, just like under José Pedro Varela, this exchange remained unsteady¹⁶⁷.

In that same year, 1909, Uruguay's government decreed that teachers for its new agricultural and technical schools, a focus of Williman's educational agenda, were to come only from England, Belgium, and the United States¹⁶⁸, a clear testimony to the respect for these nations' economic progress, from which Uruguay wanted to benefit. In 1912, Belgium became the destination of a Uruguayan delegation of teachers who, with a grant from their government¹⁶⁹, were to study technical schools. However, these scholarship holders also visited kindergartens, primary and normal schools, schools for so-called "abnormal" children, and pedagogical research institutions in Liège, Leuven, Ghent, and Antwerp. These were the foci of their report, in which two observations stand out. On the one hand, they were impressed with what the head teachers of Antwerp and Liège's special needs schools, the latter a disciple of physician, educator, and freemason Ovide Decroly, a leading social reformer who had studied both Fröbel and Binet¹⁷⁰, told them about the application of new methodologies that drew on medical, sociological, and pedagogical expertise. On the other, they conveyed admiration for the liberal spirit of Belgian communes, but in this context, they also highlighted that,

"given that they are not rich enough to sustain their schools with their own resources, it is necessary to submit to official regulations in order to receive subsidies; these regulations stipulate that a course in religion, conducted by a pastor, is provided in any school where there are children who request it, no matter whether few or many"¹⁷¹.

Only prosperous Antwerp had enough revenue to decide which curriculum it wanted to offer in its public schools and could therefore bar religious ministers from entering them,

¹⁶⁵ Annals of Primary Instruction.

¹⁶⁶ Abel J. Pérez to Ligue de l'Enseignement, Montevideo, February 1, 1909, AVB-ALE, box 1909 B, folder 605.

¹⁶⁷ Abel J. Pérez to Ligue de l'Enseignement, Montevideo, July 21, 1909, AVB-ALE, box 1909 B, folder 605; and Montevideo, January 31, 1912; and March 8, 1912, both AVB-ALE, box 1912 B, folder 605.

¹⁶⁸ James C. Knarr, *Uruguay and the United States, 1903-1929: Diplomacy in the Progressive Era*, Kent, OH, Kent State University Press, 2012, pp. 66-64.

¹⁶⁹ In 1909, Uruguay's parliament legislated that bursaries were to support study trips to the United States and Europe. ROU/DGIP, *La instrucción pública primaria en la República Oriental del Uruguay: noticia escrita para la Exposición Internacional de Turín de 1911*, Montevideo, A. Barreiro y Ramos, 1911, pp. 45-46; "Documentos oficiales [Sesión de 19 de enero de 1911]", in *AIP*, vol. 9, n.º 7-14 [July 1910 - March 1911], Montevideo, Imprenta de *El Siglo Ilustrado*, 1911, p. 1050.

¹⁷⁰ Belgian education reformers engaged in the testing and observation of children's abilities and behavior, not dissimilar to Comte y Riqué. Thiry, D'Haeninck and Verbruggen, "(Re-)Educational Internationalism...", *op. cit.*, p. 99; Angelo van Dorp, "From Special to New Education: The Biological, Psychological, and Sociological Foundations of Ovide Decroly's Educational Work (1871-1932)", in *History of Education*, vol. 34, n.º 2, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2005, pp. 135-150.

¹⁷¹ Argile Cayssials, "Misión escolar en Europa: informe colectivo correspondiente al mes de enero de 1912", in *AIP*, vol. 11, n.º 1-15 [April 1912 - June 1913], Montevideo, Impr. de *El Siglo Ilustrado*, 1913, p. 275.

the author of the report added¹⁷². It is obvious that this grantee noticed, with some pride, that Uruguay had progressed further in secularization than Belgium.

The River Plate nation had also made a giant step forward in literacy training, even though it had not yet attained the desired core status. By 1910, Uruguay had the highest literacy rate in Latin America (57.6%), while Belgium brought up the rear of the more developed countries in Europe (85%)¹⁷³. Brussels acknowledged Uruguay's achievements in primary education by awarding it a Grand Prix at the 1910 Exposition Universelle et Internationale¹⁷⁴, and in 1913 a book by Law professor and statistician Charles de Lannoy praised the country's educational establishments, which had survived in what he still considered to be an unconsolidated nation¹⁷⁵.

Commercial interests increasingly guided politics. Belgium and Uruguay hoped to secure a sustainable export market for their industrial and agro-pastoral products, respectively¹⁷⁶. When, in January 1912, Brussels established a legation in Montevideo, the first, interim *chargé d'affaires*, Charles Renoz, and President José Batlle y Ordóñez hailed their nations' economies as prosperous and complementing each other. Batlle, in a private conversation, added that he knew Belgium well¹⁷⁷. This was certainly an exaggeration, given that he seemed to have only passed the country after attending the Second Hague Peace Conference in 1907¹⁷⁸. Yet, the appointed *chargé d'affaires*, and soon minister, Henri Ketel, struck a much more critical note in his reports to Brussels's Ministry of Foreign Affairs later that year. Never had Belgium shown such interest in the small River Plate nation than when José Batlle y Ordóñez planned a constitutional reform, which included the full separation of Church and State. Henri Ketel now labelled the Colorados "radical" and "socialist" and their Blanco opponents "Catholic", though he admitted that the majority

¹⁷² For the full report, see *op. cit.*, pp. 274-286.

¹⁷³ For Uruguay, see ROU/DGIP, *La instrucción pública...*, *op. cit.*, p. 54. More schools were under construction; the estimated rate for 1911 was 62.6%. The figure for Belgium is taken from Osterhammel, *The Transformation...*, *op. cit.*, p. 788.

¹⁷⁴ ROU/DGIP, *Memoria correspondiente a los años de 1909 y 1910, presentada a la Dirección General de Instrucción Primaria y al Ministerio de Industrias, Trabajo e Instrucción Pública por el Doctor Abel J. Pérez, Inspector Nacional*, Montevideo, A. Barreiro y Ramos, 1911, pp. 379-380. This seems to have been the first prize Uruguay's education establishment won at a major European exposition, though SAEP had previously won awards at regional expositions in Santiago de Chile in 1875, Buenos Aires in 1883 and 1885, and Rio de Janeiro in 1884, and it received praise at an 1893 exposition in Chicago. Piotti, *El Elbio...*, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

¹⁷⁵ Charles de Lannoy, *L'enseignement dans la République Argentine, l'Uruguay et le Brésil* [Extrait de la *Revue de l'Instruction Publique en Belgique*], Brussels, H. Lamertin, 1913, p. 239.

¹⁷⁶ As statistics from both 1906 and 1924 show, Belgium was one of the top four destinations of Uruguayan exports, especially wool. See Knarr, *Uruguay and the United States...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 32 and 131. For Belgium, South America represented "undoubtedly one of the most important regions of the globe from the point of view of our commercial expansion", Brussels's Consul-General in Buenos Aires emphasized. Charles Renoz to Julien Davignon, Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Montevideo, December 26, 1912, MAEB-AD, CP-APU III: 1900-1914.

¹⁷⁷ Charles Renoz to Julien Davignon, Buenos Aires, January 21, 1913, MAEB-AD, CP-APU III, and enclosed newspaper cutting "El nuevo Ministro de Bélgica: su recepción en la Casa del Gobierno. Los discursos", in *El Día*, Montevideo, January 17, 1913.

¹⁷⁸ Vanger, *The Model Country...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-37.

of the population supported the abrogation of article 5 of the 1830 charter and Rome fought a lost battle in Uruguay¹⁷⁹. Batlle himself, in Ketel's view highly unpopular, would govern with heavy hand, barricade himself behind the walls of his home, make his self-declared democracy a "military dictatorship", and even show communist tendencies¹⁸⁰. When the president gained a large majority of votes in the Lower House, though not in Senate, the Belgian diplomat could interpret the election to the Constituent Assembly as nothing but a "farce"¹⁸¹. Relations between both countries would only improve, when one year later World War I broke out and Batlle's government highlighted Uruguay's neutrality –until 1917, though even before it sided with the Allies¹⁸²– and José Enrique Rodó, in a moving speech, strongly condemned the German Reich and praised Belgium's heroic resistance against imperialisms throughout its history¹⁸³.

CONCLUSIONS

Jürgen Osterhammel is certainly to be agreed with when he argues that the nineteenth century was Europe's, due to the worldwide assertion of its power, influence, and desirable innovations, but this did not mean, as he qualifies, that non-European protagonists who wished to appropriate the achievements of the West had no alternative beyond capitulation¹⁸⁴. Uruguay is a prime example to show how a peripheral country creatively digested foreign experiences to build its own model polity, and education reform was crucial to qualify the workforce and generate national allegiance at a time of mass immigration. The United States, who had learned from Europe, especially Prussia, themselves, remained the yardstick for the Varelas, not least because the separation of state and Anglican Church after United States Independence did not result in anticlericalism or sectarianism. The State stood above

¹⁷⁹ Henri Ketel to Julien Davignon, Montevideo, March 11, 1913, MAEB-AD, CP-APU III. These characterizations also appear in other letters by Ketel.

¹⁸⁰ Henri Ketel to Julien Davignon, Montevideo, July 15, and November 4, 1913, MAEB-AD, CP-APU III. The citation is from the first letter.

¹⁸¹ Henri Ketel to Julien Davignon, Montevideo, December 5, 1913, MAEB-AD-AD, CP-APU III.

¹⁸² See Ana María Rodríguez Ayçaguer, "Unos neutrales aliadófilos", in *Revista Lento*, vol. 2, n.º 18, Montevideo, 2014, pp. 22-24; Alfred Mitchel Innes, British minister to Uruguay, to Edward Grey, United Kingdom Secretary of State, Montevideo, November 6, 1914, in Benjamín Nahum (ed.), *Informes diplomáticos de los representantes del Reino Unido en el Uruguay*, Montevideo, Departamento de Publicaciones de la Universidad de la República, 1993, vol. 2, pp. 89-91. In this confidential report, London's diplomat wrote that, "when Antwerp fell and the Belgian minister [Henri Ketel] expected to have difficulties raising money, he [José Batlle y Ordóñez] sent him a message, telling him that he would be free to withdraw funds from the State Bank [of Uruguay]". The citation is from p. 90.

¹⁸³ Baltasar Brum, Uruguay's Minister of Foreign Relations, to Henri Ketel, Montevideo, August 6, 1914, enclosure to Ketel to Julien Davignon, Montevideo, August 11, 1914, MAEB-AD, CP-APU III; and "Una página notable de José Enrique Rodó: himno de justicia y de admiración a Bélgica. Discurso leído anoche en la velada franco-belga-inglesa del Urquiza", newspaper cutting, enclosure to Ketel to Davignon, Montevideo, November 30, 1914, in the same file.

¹⁸⁴ Osterhammel, *The Transformation...*, *op. cit.*, pp. xx and 912-913.

the multiple denominations, and its offices and schools were open to new arrivals of all beliefs. Though Uruguay's 1830 Constitution had stipulated that Catholicism would be the official religion, laity, or non-sectarianism, was to guide its own education reform.

Belgium was another consistent, but overlooked, point of reference for Uruguayan state- and nation-builders. Like the United States, it had separated State and Church in its 1831 charter, but, similar to Uruguay, remained ethnically, linguistically, and religiously divided for many decades after independence. The difference between both countries consisted in the relative power of Rome's Church, which was significant in Belgium and weak north of the River Plate. This explains the discrepant vehemence and long-term outcomes of the culture wars that accompanied both countries' school reforms.

Uruguay's reformers wished to be part of a transnational network, in which the Belgian Ligue de l'Enseignement figured prominently. Contacts were established on the eve of the Reforma Vareliana, but no serious interaction ensued. For the Ligue, links to other associations were to give its own project legitimacy, and it could gain little from a trans-Atlantic exchange with SAEP. The Varelas' gradual move from rationalism to positivist scientism, which preceded similar developments in Belgium, undermined the previously existing ideological communion with their counterparts in Brussels. Furthermore, the polarization of Belgian society between intransigent Liberals and ultramontane Catholics during the Liberal Party's 1878-1884 reign served as a warning sign. Notwithstanding that both were minorities, their agitation led to violent clashes over the place of religion in schools and eventually a crushing defeat of reformers. Uruguay's own ultramontane prelates could exploit the *guerre scolaire* for their own purposes, and *varelistas* moderated their demands for lay education. Belgium demonstrated how an aggressive pursuit of secularization, which the Santos government also tried in the mid-1880s, could undermine modernization and nation-building efforts.

Yet, a militant anticlericalism surfaced after President Batlle's rise to power and the death of Archbishop Soler, the last powerful stalwart of ultramontaniam in Uruguay. Batlle had taken inspiration in Belgium's Krausist school of thought by studying the works of Ligue co-founder and philosopher Guillaume Tiberghien and then applying Ahrens's organic state theory to his envisaged reconstruction of the Republic. However, his ethics were not grounded in the former's coherent theological system and his reforms blurred the boundaries between public and private sphere and thereby departed from the latter's suggestion of a society-centred polity with intermediate institutions and mechanisms between individual and government. *Batllistas* did not follow, but proactively shaped, public opinion. They continued the Reforma Vareliana (and also resumed contacts with the Belgian Ligue and Belgian educational institutions), but public schools became synonymous with state schools and the forceful inculcation of laity in future citizens. This new political generation did not show the *varelistas'* restraint towards the Roman Catholic Church and, in 1919, almost post-facto and without major conflict, separated it from the State.