In the literature on the origins of the welfare state in France, family policy analysts are still at odds to characterize it: "ambiguous," "ambivalent," and "conservative" are frequently used terms. I would like to add another dimension to this already complex construction, which is that of religious compromise. Focusing on the experience of one women's organization, the Conseil national des femmes françaises (CNFF), composed mainly of Jewish and Protestant women, I want to show how this feminine philanthropy played an important role in defining the scope and type of welfare policies affecting mothers and children in France in the first half of the twentieth century. Impregnated with reformist ideals, the CNFF sought to translate into practice the morale laïque that they were promoting as their own version of the morale religieuse. After secular public schooling, family reform served as one of the best arenas where Jewish and Protestant women could expand their influence.

Philanthropies, often said to represent the interests of class fractions of the bourgeoisie and the nobility struggling over control of social affairs, had been at the forefront of social relief throughout the twentieth century. Organized essentially by and for women to serve their own religious communities, they had established, as Kathleen McCarthy has shown for American philanthropies, parallel power structures to the Church and the state. Within secular organizations and via charitable works in the parishes, women of the Catholic elite worked voluntarily to moralize poor families and perform charity duty in orphanages, preschools, and the various associations and medical institutions linked to the Church. But there were also privately funded, humanitarian and
charitable organizations that found increasing success during the nineteenth century, in opposition to the religious foundations, that were neutral and non-missionary. The religious minorities who were active in the midst of such groups found that the confessional neutrality guaranteed by the republic made it possible for them to loosen the Church's stranglehold on the social sphere to promote their own agenda. With the 1905 laws separating the church from the state, and those of 1901 granting the right of association, philanthropic organizations promoting the social good in a secular environment flourished all the more. When the Third Republic adopted a number of measures to promote state welfare, they were interpreted as measures reducing the influence of the Church. Whereas Catholic associations worked for the welfare of the poor as a religious endeavor, secular ones mainly promoted state welfare as a social policy. Did the religious question thus recede behind the social question?

We will try to assess this issue by concentrating on family policies, one of the first and most important social welfare measures adopted by the republic. As birth rates plunged, the question of depopulation was deemed crucial, and protection of mothers and children became the number one social concern. According to Rémi Lenoir, the construction of familialism as a voluntary state policy had become the focus of French nation-building under the Third Republic, opposing fractions of the liberal bourgeoisie to Catholic notables. He argued that state welfarism was a result of the battle led by state familialists against the all-powerful proponents of Church familialism. Both protagonists of familialism had been trying to control not only family morals and their symbolic representation but their overall ramifications in the labor market (the sphere of production) and population growth (the sphere of reproduction).

Although conflicting views emerge from the historiography on republican social policies aimed at the family, Rachel Fuchs's essay offers an excellent review and synthesis of most of the crucial arguments. Addressing gender as a central element in the analysis of welfare policies, she stresses their scope, their maternalist and paternalist aspects, and the extent to which France has been an exceptional case. She revisits the usual dichotomies, women against men, classes against each other, and public versus private, to introduce important nuances. And rather than stating that republican family reforms were all patriarchal and conservative, she showed that some were more liberal than others. Still, some questions were left unanswered. For instance, how can we account for the exception française? How were those policies both liberating for women and at the same time instrumental in keeping them subordinate in the home? Rather than pursue these questions, however, I wish here to examine the one question that remained relatively absent from this framework, that is, what role did the different religious denominations continue to play in shaping welfare measures during the Third Republic? What was their role in defining the meaning of laïcité for social policies at this time?

Within the confessional and gendered origins of family policies, two main tendencies can be distinguished amongst the variety of individual positions
and groups active in this field. The first and most important one is linked to the overpowering Catholic Church, which we will call, following Lenoir, Church familialism. With the emergence of the Third Republic, the Catholic Church, which had been the dominant force in what was considered its private playing field, had to partly withdraw from less important areas concerning family matters. Lenoir notes that Catholics tried to keep everything related to marriage (heritage) and filiation (education and health care), while Protestants, Jews, and Freemasons found room to deal with the remaining problems, such as family allowances, work, and social insurance. Although social Catholics challenged the traditional role of women within the family, in the wake of the encyclical Rerum Novarum in 1891, the traditional conservative view remained dominant. Church familialism could be then defined as promoting the home as the center of women's activity, against women's work, and refusing any intervention of the state in family affairs. The family was a complete social unit (corps social) that preceded the development of the social classes and remained emblematic of the corporatism advocated by the Church.

The second position, which we will call state maternalism, was promoted mainly by religious minorities and some nonreligious feminists who wanted state intervention in protecting mothers and children. These committed republicans sought to change family laws and improve family morals, seen by them as corrupted by industrialization. As maternalists, they regarded women's rights deriving primarily from women's roles as mothers.

In the wake of the Dreyfus affair and the nationalist upsurge, Protestants and Jewish philanthropies, active in separate charities, heard the call for collective action to defend their views of the republic and of gender roles. The creation of one such organization offers a vantage point from which to analyze their impact on family policy. I will argue that many of the republic's family reforms were largely due to this alliance of female-run Protestant and Jewish philanthropies, whose efforts helped to shape a progressive republican agenda in the 1910s and 1920s and to form a style of state maternalism and a new kind of morale laique. However, they were actively opposed by those with more conservative Catholic views on the family, who, in alliance with state familialists, eventually controlled the content of the family allowance laws of the 1930s.

How did a Judeo-Protestant feminist association such as the Conseil national des femmes françaises participate in this debate? How did the point of view of these active reformers and social thinkers shape family policy? And why did they fail to have a bigger impact on social legislation when the big leap to a national family allowance system was established in 1932?

The Role of Women Philanthropies in Family Policies

Republican anticlerical measures deeply transformed the organization and delivery of welfare and of the philanthropies tied to it. The law of July 1901
put the religious orders under strict state supervision and tutelage, therefore questioning the central place female religious congregations had played in the system of social assistance and charity. This process was completed with the law of December 1905 separating the state from the church. One result was an explosion of nonprofit associations, which, according to Évelyne Diebolt, were the result of women’s activism in social philanthropy. Under the new laws, Protestant and Jewish associations benefited from international (essentially American) help, while Catholics created numerous organizations to offer their services to mothers and children. Gathered in separate confessional groups, their rhetoric was also distinct.

For Catholic women’s associations, procreation, family values, and opposition to women’s wage work was the predominant position; as Karen Offen has shown, supported by Anne Cova’s study of Catholic associations, they favored natalism as a national anthem. Groups such as Marie Maugeret’s Union nationaliste des femmes françaises and its journal Féminisme Chrétien did not welcome the intervention of Jews in family matters and promoted anti-Semitic and nationalist positions to secure their hold on family values, which meant Catholic and French values as opposed to republican ones. This position was contrasted with that of social Catholics, who advocated reforms for poor and working-class mothers. Even more moderate associations inspired by social Catholics, such as the Union féminine civique et sociale (UFCS), defended state-sponsored legislation to help poor mothers. Together with natalists, they sought to raise fecundity levels, as well as to Christianize and moralize families. The Alliance nationale pour l’accroissement de la population française in 1896 became their main advocate. The tensions within the many versions of Church familialism attested to the diversity of positions held by concerned Catholic women.

As for religious minorities and activists of laïcité, both Jews and Protestants strongly favored the intervention of the state to help poor mothers, demanded wages for mothers, and promoted social services as professional services. Scientifically-based studies convinced these reformers that it was the state’s duty to help mothers and children in order to defend the republic (on which depended both the production and the reproduction of the nation). They defined what they hoped would become a unified feminist vision of welfare, where women could be recognized both as mothers and as individuals. They introduced a number of changes into family policies and challenged the Church’s prerogative on all matters regarding the family, including marriage reform and divorce laws (with Alfred Naquet’s successful crusade introducing the divorce law in 1884).

Their idea of providing an extra wage to mothers as a way to compensate them for having children redefined the role of the state towards women and children. With this they introduced the idea that the state had a duty towards families. The debate around a family wage or family allowances found its way practically with a decree adopted in 1899 extending these benefits to state
employees (around 84,000 of them received family allocations in 1900). Unlike major groups on the labor Left, they did not exclude extra wages for mothers and accepted women’s work outside the home. Champions of the social question, such as the socialists, the CGT, and the Bourses du Travail, saw these measures as encroaching on their fight for higher salaries for workers. In fact, they did not think much about family policy, leaving it quite open to the intervention of feminine philanthropies and voluntary associations. Active in the field, these feminist groups provided care and services to the needy. Numerous journals and philanthropic networks attested to the transformation of this organized relief, from private and charitable care to a service provided by the state. The reformer’s duty was to transform voluntary benevolence into a responsibility of the state. Centered on practical concerns for mothers, Jewish and Protestant philanthropies were quite successful in delivering services to poor mothers, insisting on the new morals of hygiene (with breastfeeding and crèches for working mothers) and the protection of children (with the establishment of the first milk depot in 1894 in Normandie). Himself a prominent member of philanthropic activism as a solidarist, the Jewish journalist, later minister of social affairs, Paul Strauss worked on several laws to lower the high rate of child mortality and prevent infanticide and child abandonment. His views of social welfare programs, based on the conviction that welfare to mothers would improve an infant’s right to life, illustrated the shift from optional charity to obligatory welfare, as François Ewald characterized it. Originating as initiatives at the municipal and departmental levels, the legislation preventing infant mortality became a national program aimed at fighting depopulation while promoting the cause of nationalism and national defense.

State Maternalism as Promoted by the Conseil national des femmes françaises

In a period when the Third Republic was denounced by the Catholic Right as the “République juive,” or the “République des Juifs, des Protestants, et des Franc-maçons,” reformers were at work promoting their ideals of laïcité as the new morale républicaine. Paradoxically, the founders of the école laïque, such as Ferdinand Buisson and Félix Pécaut, collaborators of the free-thinker of Catholic origin Jules Ferry, were devoted to an ultraliberal Protestantism. Buisson, who wrote the articles “Laïcité,” “Neutralité Laique,” and “Neutralité scolaire” in both the 1882 and 1911 editions of the Dictionnaire de pédagogie et d'instruction primaire tried to establish this morale on two main principles: neutrality and laïcité, and the construction of a nondogmatic religion. But they were admittedly quite isolated within the movement in favor of laïcité. The anticlerical laïcité of Protestant origin is different from the laïcité of the agnostics of Catholic origin, such as that of Jules Ferry, which is in turn different from the Protestant anticlericalism of someone like Edmond de Pressensé.
promoted *laïcité* as a secularized religion, for which they tried to define all the moral, philosophical, and religious consequences. The agnostics in their midst advocated the separation of church and state and considered that believers were free to develop and express their own positions on religious questions, independently from their churches. They saw religion as an individual belief and civic engagement; they hoped for a reformed Christianity adapted to the modern world. As for the Jews involved in the secularization process, they added to the separation of church and state their own version of *morale laïque*. Grounded in enormous confidence in the value of scientific inquiry and professional endeavor, this moral vision embraced the Durkheimian idea that there could be such a thing as a *morale laïque* that not only would be opposed to the *morale catholique* but would encompass the republic's social policy.

Both groups saw *laïcité* as the best way to fight against the growth of anti-Semitism and anti-Protestantism, and they created several organizations with this goal in mind. For instance, Protestant women, who founded the Œuvres de la Chaussée du Maine in 1871 (organizing work houses, health clinics, and *colonies de vacances*), wished their programs to be available to people "sans distinction de culte." The Société philanthropique de l'Asile Israélite de Paris, founded in 1900 by Russian and Roumanian Jews, was designed to serve poor people, whatever their religious or national background. In 1896, René Bazin and André Spire, both graduates of the École Libre de Science Politique, created a nonconfessional Société des Visiteurs pour le relèvement des familles malheureuses as a way to oppose the Catholic Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. The Lazard family helped create the nonconfessional Union pour le sauvetage de l'enfance, and Max Lazard often worked with the social Catholic Abbé Viollet in several pluriconfessional benevolent organizations.

The Conseil national des femmes françaises emerged from this active reformist movement to promote pluri- or nonconfessional social services. With the CNFF, Protestant and Jewish women, who were already active in several philanthropies, sought to build a network of women's associations to influence republican family policies. They wished to combine their strength, built during those years of activism within the parallel philanthropic structure, to promote their social and reformist work in the public realm. They hoped that even Catholic women would participate in an effort to build a feminist alliance to implement their vision of a unified, secularized family policy. They sought to bring women together across all religious groups so as to create a single feminist alliance, much advocated by the International Council of Women. In doing so, they also hoped to consolidate their philanthropic and charity organizations as social policy advocates.

After two initial congresses, the Conseil national des femmes françaises was formally inaugurated in 1901 but did not succeed in gathering all the groups initially invited to join. Catholics and the radical feminists refused; they rejected the aegis of the International Council of Women, as well as the predominant role of Protestant and Jewish women in the organization. The
Catholics founded their own associations, the Ligue des femmes françaises (1901) and the monarchist, ultra-Catholic, and anti-Semitic Ligue patriotique des françaises (1902). The latter aimed at creating an elite of French rural women that could lead the fight against anticlericalism and circulated a petition of 4 million signatures against the separation of church and state during the debate preceding the adoption of the 1905 law. The Ligue gradually added a social agenda to its program with the creation in 1910 of forty écoles ménagères, fifteen maternal assistance services, and ten mutual associations, plus several day care centers for children. It was preoccupied with the protection of children under the care of their mothers (preferably working inside the home) and the sanctity of the family as the main unit for society's stability. Its membership rose steadily from 300,000 in 1905 to 580,000 women in 1914, making it one of the leading women’s organizations in France at the time.

Gathering thirty organizations under its umbrella, the CNFF fought for equality for women while considering that mothers were the heart of any successful family policy. Thus the CNFF promoted both equality and distinct gender roles. Its first executive was composed of an impressive array of people with diverse views: in addition to Sarah Monod and Julie Siegfried, one found Maria Pognon, member of the Ligue des Droits de l’Homme, journalist Avril de Sainte-Croix, Marie Bonneval, member of the Conseil supérieur du travail, Gabrielle Alphen-Salvador, founder of the École professionnelle d’assistance aux malades, and Eugénie Weill. They were joined by well-known personalities such as Maria Vérone, and the future undersecretary of state in the Blum government and president of the Union Française pour le suffrage des femmes, Cécile Brunschvicg.

Fighting for legislative reforms, the CNFF believed that the protection of motherhood and the family were fundamental to the republic. Deeply committed to republican values, the CNFF, through its monthly journal L’Action feminine, published from 1903 to 1913, promoted equality, morality, and social progress, and it defended a democratic and antihierarchical culture. Its views attracted the ire of some radical feminists who accused it of being under the influence of Anglo-Saxon feminism and who doubted its commitment to pacifism and women’s suffrage; some radicals even denounced it as an instrument of a Judeo-Protestant conspiracy. Nevertheless, the Council represented an influential array of women’s organizations, whose members numbered about 28,000 and which embodied the hope of feminists to speak with one, albeit moderate, voice. The CNFF embraced maternalism as a comprehensive vision of women’s politics. Based on gender difference, four elements defined CNFF’s maternalist policy: social reforms, judicial reform (of the Civil Code), women’s work and professions, and the right to vote.

Mothers’ or Family Allowances? The Protestant Ethic and Catholic Social Reform

The CNFF, like many other European feminist associations, viewed mothers’ allowances as a way to improve the lot of women and children. If Catholic
social reformism backed familialist and natalist movements (such as the Association pour l’accroissement de la population française, founded in 1896), Protestant movements promoted the just wage and mothers’ allowances to improve the lot of women and children as individuals. For the former, state support should be directed to families based on a male breadwinner, an essential organ of a corporatist state, whereas the latter wanted state support for mothers as individuals within the family. They also differed on how to implement these policies.

In a context of strong natalist preoccupations, the protection of mothers and children became, in the eyes of the CNFF, a national responsibility. The Section d’Assistance, founded in 1902 by Eugénie Weill, launched its first public campaign in favor of aid to children and the poor. The promotion of family hygiene, for these pioneers of social work, began with the education of families, the prevention of illness, and the inspection of schools. The CNFF promoted cooperation between public assistance and private charity to fight infant mortality. This incursion on the public scene was matched by a demand made by the CNFF in 1907 to have women appointed to the Conseil supérieur de l’assistance publique (CSAP). The CNFF also called for an allowance for pregnant women and for poor mothers. Although these measures no doubt served to increase the birth rate, the CNFF’s main intent in promoting them was to develop hygiene as part of a vast network of social services instigated by Paul Strauss. For Strauss, CSAP director, the alliance of charity and public assistance was essential. Likewise, the CNFF also regarded the alliance of men and women as crucial to the success of public health policies. The CNFF called for the extension of the allowances to all mothers, vacations for women who were about to give birth, and the development of hygienic services as an indispensable complement of maternal and infantile support.

**Women’s Work and Family**

With more than 30 percent of the female population gainfully employed in the 1930s, and a significant increase in female literacy (due to compulsory schooling), women’s work was an essential ingredient of the CNFF’s family policy. CNFF’s policies on work targeted two main categories: the ascendant middle classes and the working class.

The rise of the service sector expanded employment opportunities for women. By the 1930s women held up to 50 percent of the positions in education, and they found work in banking, insurance, and retail. Families with women in these professions also benefited from generous allowances during pregnancies and after childbirth. The CNFF was therefore clearly addressing its message to the educated middle-class women who were politicians, journalists, and new members of the liberal professions, as well as bourgeois wives, daughters, and sisters. It participated in giving a public voice to this literate category and promoted the advancement of women into administrative positions. With the nomination of Isabelle Bogelot and Madame Pérouse to the
CSAP, CNFF’s leaders gained access to new positions of responsibility in the civil service. They also participated in the feminization of the professions of the inspectorate in schools, prisons, and factories.\textsuperscript{24}

Moreover, the CNFF encouraged the development of female occupations as an acknowledgement of the expertise of women in various fields. Thus, it demanded in 1911 the recognition of midwives, and in 1913 of social work, and it established associations of visiting nurses. From the Council’s perspective, the maternal function ought to be validated as a form of expertise that was crucial to the well-being of the entire nation. The CNFF’s efforts to promote the work and expertise of women proved successful in many ways: philanthropic activity integrated the CNFF into existing power networks within the larger reform movement; it allowed the CNFF to position itself as the legitimate interlocutor of women on social policy with the government administration; and, through its call for public recognition of women’s maternal qualities, the CNFF facilitated women’s claims to expertise. The Council thus contributed to the construction of a public advocacy role and professional opportunities for women based on the presumed functions of motherhood. By taking over the social domain and feminizing it, the CNFF consolidated its legitimacy as an organization devoted to obtaining equal rights for women on the basis of their responsibilities.

For the working classes, the CNFF encouraged the work of women while its rhetoric focused upon domesticity. This approach derived from its desire to protect women at work, particularly working mothers. The labor committee of the CNFF, founded in 1902 by Madame Oster, called for recognizing the value of work by married and unmarried women alike and encouraged the creation of women’s unions and of regulatory laws protecting working women. The CNFF gradually came to adopt more radical positions. In tandem with the Ligue française des droits des femmes (LFDF) and the moderate Catholic UFCS, the CNFF requested before Parliament’s labor commission that women be consulted in the drafting of the Labor Charter; the Council also demanded equal salaries for equal work, the improvement of working conditions, and special measures for the protection of motherhood. The French concern with helping unwed mothers, for instance, debated as early as the 1880s and implemented during the 1920s, placed social legislation well in advance of other European countries. Only Switzerland had such programs. The Council’s position was a complex one: the demands in favor of the equality of women were almost always associated with a demand to recognize their specific contribution (difference). In assessing this difference, the CNFF played with a reconstructed gendered identity to inscribe it in social policy. The CNFF’s genuine contribution to French feminism lay precisely in its ability to promote both equality and difference, and to gather under its umbrella groups as diverse as their proponents.

But gradually, it became more difficult to hold both views, as the difference perspective became widely shared by most natalist, antifeminist organizations. Within the feminist movement, it also became a highly sensitive issue
when some radical feminists denounced it as a possible threat to the suffrage movement. This debate took place during the two congresses held by the CNFF in 1929 and 1931, with the hope that they would be the "Estates-General" of a unified French feminism. With its 150,000 members in 1929, the CNFF was in the perfect place to be such a unifying force. What kind of feminism should the CNFF promote? Should it continue to stress its social agenda as its primary goal or fight to obtain women's suffrage?

For radical feminists, the CNFF's social agenda could not be implemented if women were still excluded from the right to vote, and that is why they thought that only the right to vote could give women more access to equal treatment. But the CNFF's majority was still convinced that its maternalist politics was the best way to implement equality. By favoring women's careers and female qualities, such as home care and the protection of children, it hoped to consolidate women's work: "Par la carrière sociale, la femme retrouve son véritable rôle, elle soigne l'enfant à la pouponnière, elle l'instruit au jardin d'enfant, elle recrée pour la collectivité l'atmosphère du foyer."^25

The importance of these careers as an opportunity for women to obtain paid and autonomous work made it hard to discard the progressive aspect of the CNFF's policy. Thus the CNFF's maternalism constructed gender difference as a strategy to implement social policy and a broad array of measures for women's equality. And many suffragists participated in this strategy, even if they debated it often, especially during the 1929 congress.

Reform of the Civil Code: Protection of Women and Children

The demands pertaining to the reform of the Civil Code were also consistent with the CNFF's maternalist stance. If marriage was still considered to be the basis of society, the CNFF proposed improvements to legislation that would give women the right to preserve the family unit in the case of divorce or if the husband could no longer support his family. In 1907, it also obtained the right of working women to dispose of their own income and attempted to obtain the maximum of rights for women, particularly mothers. During its 1929 convention, the CNFF reiterated its position on the reform of the Civil Code: it called for the annulment of the civil incapacity of married women, the establishment of the separation of goods in common law, and a shift from the concept of paternal authority to one of parental authority.

The Equal Right to Vote

In 1906, the CNFF began a campaign for suffrage, based on the same maternalist principles. The CNFF declared itself in favor of the right to vote in local elections. During the First World War, the CNFF claimed this right in terms of women's responsibility to the nation. From 1921 to 1930 CNFF activists regarded the right to vote as a condition for the improvement of the social condition of women, public hygiene, and the protection of mothers and children. During the 1929 congress, the right to vote became emblematic of the
woman question: all other questions were subordinated to it. Women's work, the status of mothers, morality, political and civic rights, hygiene, and public assistance would be discussed in terms of this right. For the CNFF, women had to be granted the right to vote in order to exercise their social role. Equal rights for women supported gender differences: "Par le sérieux des études et des discussions qu'on entendra sur les réformes qu'il est urgent d'obtenir, ces séances prouveront la nécessité, pour le bien de la nation, d'admettre la participation des femmes à la vie publique." "Féministes, nous sommes pour la famille. ... Nous sommes pour la famille parce que nous trouvons que la véritable cellule sociale n'est ni l'homme ni la femme, mais l'homme et la femme réunis pour fonder un foyer et avoir des enfants."26

But those two positions became impossible to hold together: radicals like the LFDF, led by Maria Véronèse, dissociated themselves from what they saw as the excessively moderate position of the CNFF and announced their withdrawal from the 1930 convention because the right to vote was not on the agenda. In fact, the right to vote was mentioned, but the question of equality had disappeared. In 1931, the right to vote was discussed in the context of colonial questions.

This split between a moderate feminism and a more radical one happened at a crucial moment in French history. It coincided with a major natalist campaign, led by all major Catholic organizations, in favor of the family. Maternalism was then viewed as leading to familialism and conservatism. It meant that within the CNFF, the maternalist strategy became too compromising; it could no longer be a unifying feminist strategy. The rift between those who believed that citizenship derived from maternal roles and those who favored strict political equality between men and women became a major point of dispute. This rift was crucial in breaking the relatively unified maternalist vision into two opposite rather than complementary strategies: one dealing with formal politics (with the equality issue and the vote), the other focusing on social questions. This cleavage had lasting consequences because the weakening of the feminist alliance made it easier for Catholics and state familialists to prevail. It marked a weakening of the CNFF's position on social issues as well as political ones.

But Protestant and Jewish secular republicanism, which was at the heart of the CNFF's maternalist politics, was not overpowered by Catholic familialism. The latter meant a return to charity and devotion for women within the family and social services, as the very conservative Union Catholique du personnel des services de santé (UCSS) recommended. The CNFF's maternalism advocated professionalizing social and caring services and maintaining them as prerogatives of the state. Moreover, Protestant and Jewish activists were extremely sensitive to any influence the Church might have within their own ranks. The invitation of Catholics missionaries to the CNFF's 1931 congress prompted a strong reaction from some of its leaders. Cécile Brunschvicg withdrew from the organizing committee, insisting that it should reiterate its belief in secularism and remain free from any religious interference.27
Therefore, it was the active rivalry between the religious minorities and the dominant Catholic Church that gave French family policy its unique configuration. Maternalists found their major ally in the republican state, which had to overcome Church familialism and allow a genuine maternalist vision to remain within a global familialist policy. It was the shift in favor of state familialism (rather than Church familialism) that offered maternalists the influence they needed to tame France's patriarchal welfare policies.

The Victory of State Familialism over Maternalism in the Thirties

At the same time, deprived of its egalitarian rationale, the CNFF's maternalist stance became more congruent with the social Catholic vision of the family. This shift allowed maternal feminists to remain active in defining a compromised version of social policy. Reflecting the predominance of the social Catholic vision of the family, the family provisions that had first been adopted by diverse caisses de compensation across the country were scattered (covering only 7 percent of the work force) and not very generous. Aside from state employees, workers had recourse only to contractual agreements within the enterprise. First established by the paternalist initiatives of business leaders, influenced by Le Playist sociology and social Catholicism, family allowances benefited from a widespread prise de conscience of the French demographic crisis after the Great War. The war ushered in an increase in state interventionism in various areas; with regard to social policy, new allowances were given to the wives of soldiers. However, the most important initiative was the brainchild of a businessman from Grenoble. Émile Romanet, a manager of the Établissements Joya, was a devout Catholic long active in various social Catholic activities. Romanet took a special interest in the welfare of his employees. Following the results of a study that he had undertaken, he decided to distribute family allowances to those employees who were eligible. Romanet was an avowed practitioner of a social paternalism shaped by his social and political convictions; moreover, his social and philanthropic activities were also a reflection of his religious beliefs. This initiative was soon replicated throughout the region and the country. By the early 1930s, French business leaders had established more than 250 caisses de compensation, which paid out the given allowances.

As Susan Pedersen has noted, employers used the allowances to brake wage inflation and control their workforce. This strategy was consistent with their efforts in the 1920s to modernize the French economy. Taylorization and the reduction of the costs of production were supposed to render domestic industry more competitive with its foreign rivals. However, the rhetoric used by the employers reiterated many of the arguments put forward by natalists and social Catholics. The Comité central des allocations familiales, the organization at the helm of the network of the caisses de compensation, stressed the importance of the family and presented motherhood as a social obligation.
The great novelty was that they accepted that it was to be paid by the state, rather than by private charities. With economic depression looming, Catholics insisted on keeping women at home, to help men. So when the moderate UFCS joined in the more orthodox Catholic organizations, it emphasized their campaign against maternity as a social function. And if they eventually agreed that the state should intervene in family affairs, and that women could work for a wage, they should do so at home to keep the family alive. When Jean Lerolle proposed the first project of a general and compulsory family allowance program in 1929, he used the Catholic rhetoric: the state was only helping men's work and men's breadwinning families. As for mothers, they had to submit a special application if they wanted to be the beneficiaries of the allocations, which otherwise went automatically to the male head of household. A new 1932 law added a chapter on family allowances to the Labor Code, rendering it universal.

Even though the family allowance legislation of 1932 was the product of a diverse set of institutional and ideological origins, it was closely associated with the conservative Right by many historians. More recently, feminist historians such as Susan Pedersen and Françoise Thébaud have shed different light on it: for them, the French system of family allocations and of protection of mothers emerged as one of the most advanced in the world. In 1923, all families with three or more children, independent of their income, became entitled to family allocations, creating a new social right. In 1932, all employers were bound to give this allocation to their workers. Timothy Smith's work on Lyon's municipal social reform points to this period (1920-40) to illustrate the extent of the changes that led to the establishment of a mini-welfare state. Local resistance to state intervention was transformed into an active request for more resources and money for securing numerous aid programs and institutions; social spending rates in Lyon rose sixfold, paving the way for more departmental and municipal taxes and power. A consensus emerged among all political parties, who agreed on state intervention, both at the local and national level, in social matters. That left little space for private charities, essentially the Catholic ones, as they could no longer compete with public funding. Rather than continuing their opposition to state's expenditure, then, Catholic associations progressively joined in, trying to get their share of state subsidies. This consensus accounted for why France became the first European state to establish a full-fledged family policy. By the outbreak of the Second World War, allowances formed part of an ambitious set of policies supported by a multiparty consensus, symbolized by the Code de la Famille of 1939.

The link between maternalism, familialism, and conservatism should then be reconsidered in the light of the religious rivalries at play in the politics of social reform. Catholic familialists joined natalist movements in instrumentalizing women as mothers bearing long-awaited children for the nation. Their conservative view of the family prevailed both in the way women's interests were characterized in the debate and in the legislation that was passed.
Religious minorities, who had been trying to build a feminist consensus around maternity as a vital social function (Mother's Day was first introduced in 1920), had won a major point with the acceptance of state intervention in family affairs. But their unambiguous recognition of women as individuals, which meant that equality demands went together with family policies, was actively undermined by the strong attacks of familialists. Isolated in their defense of women's equality, Jewish and Protestant activists were pushed aside by the natalists who gained control over the writing of the law.

However, if Catholic familialist principles were predominant in the family allowances law, Protestant and Jewish maternalist ones were also at the root of the early welfare initiatives of the first three decades of the century. Moreover, both Church familialism and state maternalism concurred in protecting mothers and children through a comprehensive family policy. This partly explains the extensive character of French family policies, placing them at the forefront of European welfare initiatives in support of women and children. The Jewish and Protestant commitment to blending gender equality and maternalist social policy found its way into the reform vision that General de Gaulle's government implemented in 1944 during the Liberation (when women acquired the right to vote), and it remains a legacy to this day.\(^{31}\)

Was the CNFF's maternalism feminist? It may be that the leaders of the CNFF internalized social norms on gender, as historians Jennifer Dale and Peggy Foster have suggested.\(^{32}\) But they also questioned the natalist movement from the perspective of women. Many CNFF leaders, moreover, took up key positions in the state administration and in politics. Cécile Brunschvicg, for example, who as undersecretary of state under the Blum government became one of the first female politicians, believed that these various reformist initiatives could be included in a wide-ranging progressive agenda. For CNFF leaders, this expansive redefinition of citizenship that included women was possible through the gradual recognition of their social rights. The language of rights was an outgrowth of a notion of responsibility, and the Council viewed maternity to be the nexus of the feminist campaign for equal rights. While the CNFF rejected the traditional republican ideal of abstract citizenship, it promoted a discourse of rights and responsibilities that was consistent with both inherited and contemporary interpretations of republicanism.

Were the innate qualities of women that maternalists believed in a basis upon which to construct programs for social reform? Many analysts, including Susan Pedersen and Denise Riley, have rejected such a strategy, arguing instead for social policy based on the principle of gender equality. But for groups like the CNFF (and there were many in Europe and in the US), the practical gains that could be achieved with maternalist strategies were important. Where French maternalists in the CNFF differed from their European and American counterparts is that they shared a common language with other reformists. The socialization of the private sphere, which opened the family realm to state intervention, was widely advocated by many reformist factions in France.
They used the secular language of the republic to become integrated into the power structures of the state. Protestant women's associations, as well as Jewish philanthropic associations, gave a social meaning to those universal republican values of liberty, equality, and justice.

**Conclusion**

During the first thirty years of the twentieth century, the CNFF voiced its support for reform initiatives that centered on the protection of mothers and children and on their equal treatment as citizens. Its vision was certainly shared by many doctors and politicians who had vested interests in developing scientific health care and social control of the poor and working classes. A vast array of policies attest to its success in promoting them: child welfare (milk depots, day care centers) and family policy, a combination of social reforms that provided mothers with pre- and postnatal care, medical care for childbirth, well-baby clinics, health visits, mothers' pensions, caisses de maternité, maternity leaves and benefits, and health and hygiene initiatives as well as the development of social insurance. By allowing and even calling for state intervention in private domains such as the family, the CNFF and other reformist philanthropies contributed to the blurring of the lines between private and public, politicizing the private. In this process, the CNFF was adamant in trying to remove the confessional aspect of such policies to promote entirely secular and neutral ones according to its republican principles.

This goal was probably one of the most elusive for most of the reform movement, since its religious roots were never very far from the surface. As we have shown, most CNFF leaders who participated in the secularization process did not present themselves as Protestants or Jews: they defined a nonconfessional feminist agenda for the republic and all its citizens. They tried to implement this secular morality, which Émile Durkheim understood to be their interpretation of a religious morality. But in Catholic France, their secularism was impregnated with religious rivalry. Therefore, despite their adamant commitment to laïcité, religious identity still informed their approach.

The enthusiastic and genuine declarations of religious neutrality by Protestants and Jews allowed them to play a part in the state's expanding social policies. They understood that the discourse of liberal rights and state intervention was the only way to secure their reforms and promote their agenda. They contributed to the design of family policies and gained some power within the state bureaucracy. As such, the republic was the salvation for religious minorities. Their influence on the Third Republic's social policy, however, in turn fueled the anti-Semitic and anti-Protestant rhetoric of the Catholic Right. When Catholics saw how damaging those reforms could be to their effort to keep women confined to traditional roles, they immediately used religious rhetoric to destabilize them. They denounced the reforms as the
result of a Jewish-Protestant conspiracy, undermining their newly gained power. They scared Catholic women into withdrawing from the maternalist alliance and prompted them to sign numerous petitions in order to keep the French family alive, that is, the French Catholic family.

Social reforms under the Third Republic were impregnated with confessional and religious assumptions, as well as gender-based ones. Some historians have said that they resembled communitarian ideologies, with family allowances finally taking the form of the organicist and familialist views of social Catholicism, while French social insurance was the result of solidarist rhetoric. The obsolescence of classical liberalism was confirmed by the emergence of these ideologies, and statist interventionism was consolidated despite the resistance of various pressure groups.

The intricate connections between the social and the political, the religious (of several denominations) and the secular (women's associations), the public and the private were tightly intertwined in the path to the first family policies. We gain a fuller understanding of French family policy when we take this analysis of religious rivalry into account.

Notes

1. A preliminary version of the three articles on social reform presented in this issue were part of a panel discussion on reformism and welfare policies in France in the 1930s, organized by Yolande Cohen and Eric Jabbari for the Fiftieth Annual Meeting of the Society for French Historical Studies, held in Paris in June 2004. I want to thank Philip Nord, who invited me to give a first version of this paper at the European history seminar at Princeton University, Herrick Chapman, who brought invaluable additions to the many revised versions that followed it, and Patrick Cabanel and André Encrevé, who gave me important insights on Protestant history in France.


3. Sources for the CNFF include: Archives de la préfecture de police, dossier BA1651 (Féminisme); Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Dos396Con (statuts et dossiers divers); Cédias-Musée Social, Dossiers Pichon Landry (dossiers from 1901 to 1933); and CNFF, *Cinquante années d'activités 1901-1951* (Paris: La célébration du cinquantenaire, 1952). See also Claude-Audrey Picard, *Le Conseil national des femmes françaises et son implication dans l'action sociale (1900-1940)* (mémoire de maîtrise, Université du Québec à Montréal, 1998).


7. See Lenoir, *Généalogie*.


10. Theda Skocpol defined the US welfare state as coming close to forging a maternalist state, "with female dominated public agencies implementing regulations and benefits for the good of women and their children" (Soldiers, Mothers and Welfare [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993], 2); she considered the French welfare state to be paternalist. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel defined maternalism as a "set of political discourses and strategies focusing on maternal and child welfare. It exalted women's capacity to mother and applied to society as a whole the values they attached to that role: care, nurturance, and morality. Policies were maternalist when women transformed motherhood from women's primary private responsibility into public policy" (Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States [New York and London: Routledge, 1993], 4).

11. Most studies of family law and reforms during this period concluded that they belied a conservative and antifeminist stance, reiterating the view of the republic as a patriarchal welfare state. See Christine Bard, Les Filles de Marianne: Histoire des féminismes français, 1914-1940 (Paris: Fayard, 1995). Rachel Fuchs, Évelyne Diebolt, and Michèle Zancarini-Fournel stressed the fact that those policies were very extensive and quite comprehensive in their coverage of mothers' needs and interests, when compared with European or American ones. Thus, Fuchs concluded that they were in many ways exceptional, whereas Diebolt explained this exception française as the result of the American or Anglo-Saxon influence on French policies.

12. See Diebolt, "Women and Philanthropy in France."


15. Born into an Alsatian Jewish family (his uncle was a rabbi), Paul Strauss (1852-1942) had been a leading figure of the republican reform movement. See Rachel Fuchs, "The Right to Life: Paul Strauss and the Politics of Motherhood," in Accampo, Fuchs, and Stewart, Gender and the Politics of Social Reform, 83-105.


19. It is interesting to note that the members of the Durkheimian school, for some secularized Jews, were the ones who replaced the Protestants in the Nouveau Dictionnaire de Pédagogie et d'enseignement primaire (2 vols., 1911), to give their own definitions of laïcité and religion. Even if the Dictionnaire was still directed by Buisson, the Durkheimian group clearly won this battle.

20. The rapprochement of Protestant philanthropic organizations and moderate feminist groups was accomplished during the Versailles congress of 1891 on the basis of joint action against the injustices committed against women. The feminist Isabelle Bogelot, a member of the Ligue française pour le droit des femmes, supported the positions of Sarah Monod, a member of the Congrès des œuvres et institutions féminines. The call for gender equality was to be conciliated with the responsibilities

21. Canadian political scientist Naomi Black argued that the CNFF was resolutely engaged in the social debate and associated its work with social feminism, reformism, and the promotion of women's autonomy; see Naomi Black, *Social Feminism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

22. The CNFF believed that the Roussel law for the protection of children, adopted in 1889, would permit organizations such as itself to intervene more effectively in favor of mistreated children or those in need.

23. He adopted the concept of the complementarity of the sexes, also developed by the CNFF, to bring about these social reforms: "[I]l doit y avoir association de la femme et de l'homme pour combattre les maladies et les vices évitables, pour concourir à l'assainissement du logis, à la sécurité des foyers et l'amélioration du sort du peuple" (*Progrès du Nord*, 10 June 1913).

24. As demonstrated by Linda Clark in her study of the careers of women in the French civil service, they also held, before ENA's creation in 1945, many high-ranking positions within the state bureaucracy, in ministries such as social work, hygiene, and child welfare. CNFF lobbied actively, publicly and privately, for this to happen. See Linda Clark, *The Rise of Professional Women in France: Gender and Public Administration Since 1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

25. See the Dossiers Pichon Landry for 1930 at Cédias-Musée social.

26. See the Dossiers Pichon Landry for 1931 at Cédias-Musée social.

27. The Protestants Juliette Delagrange, Julie Siegfried, Marguerite de Witt-Schlumberger, and the laïques Geneviève Coulon and Pauline Kergomard opposed the Catholic Germaine Malaterre-Sellieron on this question. For them, feminist activism should steer clear of religious interference; see Cécile Brunschvicg, "Celles qu'on ne remplace pas," *La Française*, 2 October 1937.


