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GLOBE-TROTTING With Ginny.....

French Argue About
Church School Funds

By Virginia Harris Hendricks

PARIS, France--(BP)--An argument has been raging in France, for and against government assistance to church schools. This is one more in a series of bitter controversies between government and church that have torn this nation for centuries.

Behind the story lies the distrust of a people toward the Roman Catholic administrators of a church that despoiled them for generations.

The history of Protestantism in France since the Reformation has always depended upon the ruling powers. French kings felt it was essential for the nation to have only one faith. None of the kings seems to have been sincerely religious.

In 1598, King Henry IV, who had been raised by a Protestant Huguenot mother, issued the first edict for religious toleration that had taken place in a major power up to that time. France gave a minority of citizens a limited right to have schools, publish books, hold public office, and have freedom of worship (in certain places).

When this edict was revoked 90 years later, France lost many enlightened people who were killed or migrated. The clergy gained more and more power and wealth, increasing the gulf between the church and the poverty stricken populace.

The religious leaders could not even provide the spiritual strength the suffering people sorely needed in their hard lives.

Today the Catholic Church is woven in to the fabric of French life, for it remains a strong tradition. Holidays are religious. Birth, marriage, and death are linked with church ceremonial.

But many French people are still suspicious of powerful church leadership. They are critical and often openly anti-clerical.

Even Catholic leaders in France have called France a pagan land. The majority of people seem to be without true faith. Along with other evangelical groups, French Baptists are endeavoring to bring to France the simple faith of the New Testament.

But Christian workers are finding that religious indifference in a people is often a greater deterrent to missionary efforts than religious intolerance forced upon the nation by a government.

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Enclosure: 1 picture

The outline should read: French school children.