



**International Association of Free Thought
Association Internationale de Libre Pensée
Asociación Internacional de Libre Pensamiento**

Proceedings of the international conference held in Paris on 7th and 8th of April 2023

**For the separation of Churches, Religions and States!
For the abrogation of the Concordats!
For the end of privileges in favour of the Religions!**



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Easter bells rang joyfully for the **Libre Pensée**

Christian Eyschen, General Secretary of the **Libre Pensée**
and Spokesperson of the International Association of Free Thought

The weekend of 7 and 8 April 2023 will long be remembered as a great moment for the *Libre Pensée* in particular and for secular action in general.

It began with the announcement by the **Conseil d'Etat** that it was rejecting the appeal lodged by the town of **Les Sables d'Olonne** against the removal of the statue of «*Saint-Michel*» from the public square, following rulings by **the administrative courts of first instance and then on appeal**. The town of Les Sables d'Olonne asked the **Conseil d'Etat** to annul these two decisions of the **administrative justice**.

The **Conseil d'Etat**, the highest administrative court in France, rejected this appeal, ruling that the statue had to be moved «*manu-militari*», which was logical for a statue venerated by **the Parachutists**, who did as well in **Les Sables d'Olonne** as they did in **Diên Biên Phu**.

A far-right media outlet commented: «*The secularists of the Libre Pensée can gloat this Good Friday. And like Pontius Pilate 2,000 years ago, they (the Conseil d'Etat) are washing their hands of it.*» The journalist clearly has a poor grasp of the history of Christianity, a religion that she elevates to the pinnacle of her desires. The real question **Pontius Pilate** asked **Jesus**, according to the legend embroidered for the **Christ** myth, was «*What is truth?*», a question **the Crucified One** never answered. The problem is therefore not simply a matter of washing hands.

And yes, my good lady, we have gloated and more. If you only knew...

- **We have jubilated** by organising on 7 and 8 April 2023 an **International Conference** for the Abrogation of Concordats, Official Churches, Established Religions and for the abolition of their unduly acquired privileges and property.

In front of an interested audience, representatives of the **Libre Pensée** from France, England, Uruguay, Italy and **secular associations** from Germany, USA, Norway, Greece, Russia and Lebanon presented the situation in their respective countries, under the aegis of the **European Coordination Office of the Libre Pensée** and the **International Association of the Freethought**. The place of the **14 Concordats in the European Union** was analysed and presented. The place of the **exceptional clerical status of Alsace-Moselle** was also discussed and its repeal was demanded.

Philippe Guglielmi, Honorary President of **Laïcité-Liberté**, gave a lively and accurate account of the republican contribution of **Pasquale Paoli** and secularism in the **Corsican Constitution** of 1755-1769. **Christian Eyschen**, Spokesman for the **AILP**, presented the conclusions of the work of this **international conference** by presenting the **International Declaration** (see below).

- **We also jubilated** by restoring the original statue of the **Chevalier de la Barre**, martyred by the **Catholic Church** and the **Ancien-Régime monarchy** for failing to salute a religious procession, to its original place in 1905, in front of the basilica known as the «*Sacred Heart of Jesus*», intended to atone for «*the crimes of the Paris Commune*».

The **Chevalier de la Barre** has become the **symbol of freedom of conscience** and the **Libre Pensée**. This statue, inaugurated at the **1905 Libre Pensée World Congress** in Paris at the time of the vote on the **law on the separation of Church and State**, in front of a crowd of 25,000 demonstrators, has always been unbearable for the supporters of **Reaction**.

In 1926, the **Bishopric of Paris** had it moved to the **Square Nadar** below the **Butte Montmartre**. In 1941, the **Nazis**, with the support of the **Vichy regime**, dismantled it along with all the statues of Humanists, Secularists, Philosophers of **the Enlightenment** and Freemasons, using bronze salvaged from cannons. But the statues of the «*saints*» and **Jeanne d'Arc** were spared by the fascist and corporatist fury.

A large audience of freethinkers and secularists, in front of a crowd of very interested tourists duly informed by a **Libre Pensée** leaflet in several languages explaining the meaning of the gathering, crowded in front of the statue once again erected in homage to **François-Jean Lefebvre de la Barre**.

A banner reading «**Long live the Paris Commune**» stood in front of the statue, linking the past, the present and the future, because «**The Paris Commune will be the future of the world**». There were also many Red and Black flags from the **Libre Pensée**.

Nicole Aurigny, vice-president of the **Libre Pensée**, **Jean-François Cocquet** of the **Ligue des Droits de l'Homme** in Abbeville (where there is also a monument in tribute to the **Chevalier de la Barre**) and **Marianne Feltrin** of the **Amis de la Commune de Paris** (Friends of the Paris Commune) all took the floor to pay tribute to this event, which, strictly speaking, was **HISTORIC**. It was a great moment of shared emotion.

The **Ligue de l'Enseignement**, which will welcome the Statue for permanent display at its national headquarters, greeted the Gathering with a message of support and sympathy (see below). At the **International Conference**, **Jean-François Chanet**, vice-president of the **LDE**, concluded his very detailed speech on the **Chevalier** with these words: «*The gift of the statue by the Libre Pensée commits the Ligue de l'Enseignement to secularism and to passing on to young people the meaning of the Martyrdom of freedom of conscience.*»

- **Last but not least**, we jubilated once again at the **Good Friday Banquet**, held in the magnificent **Salle des Fêtes** at the **Town Hall of the 18th arrondissement of Paris**, on the initiative of the **Union des Athées**, whom we thank warmly for this marked and remarkable **fraternity**, which will be beneficial for the future.

Under the chairmanship of **Benoît Schneckenburger**, Deputy Secretary General of the **Libre Pensée**, 80 participants made a warm «**agape**». He gave an instructive and somewhat humorous speech explaining the **religious prohibitions** of all religions that oppress humanity and the human conscience.

Then **Keith Porteous Wood**, President of the **National Secular Society** (the **English Free Thought**) and a recognised expert at the UN, gave a detailed presentation on the sexual crimes of the Catholic clergy and the fight for reparation for their crimes, through the situation in different countries. He recalled the role of the **International Association of the Free Thought** in the action so that Justice is rendered to all the victims of these ignoble crimes.

Bernard Guillon - President of the **Union of Atheists**, following **Raymond Roze des Ordon**s, brought the message of this association, which is a friend of the **Free Thought**, and detailed its analyses which could have some nuances with those of the Free Thinkers. The problem of the **Union des Laïques** would not arise if we were all the same and agreed on everything. Our differences enrich us more than they separate us.

Lastly, **Sylvie Midavaine** of the **Libre Pensée Executive Board** read a paper on **secular investigations** into the assets of the **Catholic Church**. It is known that the Church has at least 8 billion euros (without the assets of the **Congregations and Religious Foundations**) to repair the sexual crimes of clergymen. **The lay inventories** were published in **Dominique Goussot's** book on the wealth of the Church. In conclusion, she recalled the position of the **Libre Pensée**: «**The Church must pay for its crimes, the Church can pay, it has the means to do so**».

It was a good «**fat**» banquet in the historical tradition of the **Libre Pensée**.





The *far-right Reaction* wanted to turn the issue of **religious statues** into a new crusade against **Secularism** and **freedom of conscience** to mark the *clerical Reconquest* of the «territories». The least that can be said is that it has been largely hampered by the action of the **Libre Pensée** and that it is increasingly resulting in stinging defeats for the *Front Bas* and the *Goupillon throwers*. The «*Saint-Michel*» school in Les Sables d'Olonne heralds the departure of the «*Vierge*» school in La Flotte-en-Ré for exile from the public to the private sector. *Dura lex, sed lex*, so goes the **secular law**.

Two - Zero!

But since the *Reaction* wanted to make this an issue and a battle, it has to be said that the **Libre Pensée** is well ahead on points:

- The **Monument to the 639 Fusillés pour l'exemple** in Chauny (Aisne)
- The **original statue of the Chevalier de la Barre** in Montmartre, then exhibited at the headquarters of the **Ligue de l'Enseignement** in Paris

Whereas for *the far-right Reaction*, it is a defeat for all the statues, calvaries, Catholic cots in town halls, etc. that it defended against the **1905 Law of Separation of Church and State**.

The **mayors** who get involved in these hopeless affairs should think carefully about the impasse (and perhaps more, because they will have to account for their use of public funds for actions that are clearly illegal) to which the *far-right Reaction*, which is a pleonastic term, is leading them.

It's not so easy to turn the wheel of history upside down.



Welcome Speech

Jean-Sébastien Pierre,
Président de la Libre Pensée Française
Membre du Conseil international de l'AILP

Dear friends, free thinkers, atheists, humanists from all over the world,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to Paris for this international conference on the question of concordats.

Paris is a beautiful city that attracts tourists from all five continents but it is also a city that has experienced the most fierce battles for freedom. It is therefore less the Paris of postcards than this Paris of revolutionary struggles that will be, for us, the framework of this colloquium. This is the profound meaning of the re-erection of the statue commemorating the martyrdom of the young **Chevalier de La Barre** in front of the basilica of the «**Sacred Heart**», subject to the authorization of the prefecture, which we did not master.

As you know, of course, the **Paris Police Department** is very busy these days. France goes from strikes to powerful protests against a pension reform rejected by the vast majority of the population. As we are in the Christian holiday season of Easter, it so happens that a procession of the “**Stations of the Cross**” led by the bishop must pass in the vicinity of this square where the statue was first erected in 1904. We are not seeking confrontation, we are also for religious freedom, but it could be that among the processionaries there are activists who have, to put it mildly, no sympathy for **freedom of thought**, no sympathy for **freedom of conscience**. At the time of this speech I have the answer of the prefecture: This is allowed to us.

The **Paris** which is dear to us is that of the taking of the **Bastille** in 1789, of the barricades of 1830 and 1848, in the “**Spring of peoples**”, that of the **Commune** which, during its brief existence, clearly issued a **law of separation of the Churches and the State**. Inspired by a first law of 1794, but clearer and more precise, it ended the 1804 **Concordat**, due to the **emperor Napoleon 1st**, in the capital. The **reaction of Versailles**, with the horrible repression that put an end to the Parisian insurrection, re-established this **concordat** which had been piously preserved by two successive royalist restorations. The Church was once again bound to the State, and an integral part of it, despite the proclamation of the **Republic**. The Chamber of Deputies was predominantly royalist, legitimist, and Catholic.

This situation lasted until **1905**. The republican forces grew and began by freeing the school and the press from Catholicism. These were the secular laws **Ferry and Goblet**, then the Freedom of the Press Act. The secular school was founded. The church began to scream that the children were being taken away from its power – it was time. In **1901** occurred the law on associations, one of the most liberal in the world and finally in **1905**, the **great law of separation of churches and the State** putting an end to the Napoleonic concordat. “**The State at home, the Church at home**” said the great poet and Free Thinker **Victor Hugo**.

A liberal law, the **1905 law** guaranteed religious freedom through freedom of conscience, to which French free thinkers, like all free thinkers in the world, are most attached. Only the marked **separation** of religion and civil life fully permits it. It has been done in France, it has been done or will be done differently in other countries, in other nations. In the United States, **Jefferson's first amendment** ensures this separation. In Portugal, it was established by the **Carnation revolution**, but the country signed anyway a **concordat** with the **Vatican**. In many countries there are organic links between the Churches and the State or, when there is no Church, between religion and the State. When these links take the form of a treaty, they are concordats, which is the subject of our symposium.

We published a whole book on “**Secularism in Europe**”. It takes stock of that continent. There are many **concordats**, also in the rest of the world. However, on the whole planet, the secularization of societies is progressing. People break away from religious dictates. It's a social movement. It goes hand in hand with **public instruction**, which the parish priests, rabbis, imams bonzes and gurus deplore. Religious practice decreases. Churches and other temples are emptied, and at the same time the demands of breaking with religious precepts are asserted. The Iranian people want secularism! Poland, considered one of the daughters of the Catholic Church, sees massive protests for the **freedom of abortion**. Ireland,

considered a Catholic land, passes progressive laws on these subjects. Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland have more advanced end-of-life laws than our country. It's a big international movement!

As for France, we should not believe that it be free from any concordat. The 1870 and 1914 wars with Germany meant that three departments of the North East of the country were still subject to a concordat regime. **French Free Thought** never ceases to demand its denunciation. That's not all! In our residual colonies of **Guyana, Mayote, Wallis and Futuna, Saint Pierre and Miquelon, New Caledonia and Polynesia**, relations with the Church are governed by the **Mandel decree of 1939**. In French Guyana, it is an outright *royal ordinance* of **King Charles X**, the one who was driven out by the **1830 Revolution**, which continues to apply.

And our country continues to suffer the onslaught of «**Reconquista**» of the extreme Catholic right which, wherever it has edibles, installs Christian crèches in town halls, sometimes in regional hotels in , Lyon, Melun, Bézier, Nantes, statues in the public square, in Ploërmel in Brittany, in Publier in Savoie, in Sables-d'Olonne in Vendée, in Flotte-en-Ré in Charente-Maritime. We tirelessly take the case to court and win because **section 28 of the 1905 act** clearly states: “*No person shall, in the future, erect or affix any religious sign or emblem on public monuments or in any public place, other than buildings used for worship, burial grounds in cemeteries, funeral monuments, and museums or exhibitions.*”

They know it, and yet they do it and yell not at the courts that have said the **Right**, but against the **Free Thought** accused of «*wokisme*» to «*practice the cancel culture*» and of course to favour *Islam* since we do not recognize the pre-eminence of the “*Christian roots*” of France and beyond Europe. All this is gesticulation, but it is the law itself that they want to threaten and challenge.

We defend it step by step.

I won't say any more. We have a magnificent plateau and I warmly thank all the foreign delegations, all their speakers, all our comrades and friends from the **five continents** who came to speak and exchange in this symposium. It promises to be exciting. Welcome! And welcome to the fraternal banquet that will take place at the 18th arrondissement town hall, in **Montmartre**, this revolutionary high place disfigured by the abominable basilica of the **Sacred Heart** elevated as a condemnation of the **Paris Commune** after its crash. Welcome to the inauguration of the replica of the statue of the torture of the **Chevalier de La Barre** as it was erected under the chisel of **Armand Bloch** in 1906, at the very foot of the **Sacred Heart** and the day after the law of separation. This torture, perpetrated in 1745 marks the **Catholic Church**, then indissolubly linked to the absolute power of kings, with the red iron of shame. We will put this historic statue back!

I now declare the conference open!

Speakers may speak in the language of their choice. We have provided translations in three languages: French, English and Spanish for those who have submitted their texts in advance. For the others, this will be done later in the conference proceedings.



Introduction

by Michel Godicheau
on behalf of the European Coordination Office of Free Thought



Dear comrades, dear friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for being here.

Of course, during the next two days we will not be discussing for the first time the issues that we have to think about together, but it is the first time that we will be working on them at such a dangerous time for the whole world.

Armed conflicts are usually an opportunity for religions to come out and proclaim that they are for peace... blessing both weapons and combatants. This is hardly conducive to free thought.

Yet, in my opinion, and I hope that we will be able to measure this in the various coming communications, the objectives we are pursuing have advanced

in several parts of the world. In the present chaos where reigned precariousness, fear and official or unofficial armed gangs, one seek to survive rather than prepare for the future. And that's precisely why conferences like this one are important: we are indeed free and active women and men preparing for tomorrow in the social scrum.

In 2017, we held an important conference in Metz on the issue of concordats, but also on the attempts of religions to capture institutional or symbolic positions. At this conference, we reached a very broad agreement, going far beyond the **IAFT**. A common orientation text was drawn up. Let me remind you today of what we wrote:

*«National legislations are very diverse and the existence of the **Separation of Churches and State** is obviously a support for equal rights. Nevertheless, this offensive has consequences everywhere: resistance from the Lord Bishops in the **United Kingdom**, discussions on the «bioethics law» in France, on the civil status or on cremation in Greece, on freedom of movement in many countries, not to mention the horror of the **33,000 drowned victims in the Mediterranean Sea**, indirect victims of a fortress policy claimed by the most reactionary clerical protesters.*

On the other hand, if a part of the European Christian fundamentalists share or voluntarily engage in the crusade of the racist and nationalist right, another part, more intelligent and civilised but no less insidious, tries to seize the opportunity offered by the new European religious pluralism, some of whose protagonists have never had to face the secularisation and secularisation of our societies, to try to challenge and overthrow them, all the while using deceptively progressive watchwords. Unlike the formers, these fundamentalists would be willing to share their privileges with the new - more dynamic and uninhibited - religious presences because they understand that's the price for keeping them and for trying to restore the predominance of religion in the public space.

Although apparently very different, these two strategies converge with the aim of destroying secularism and the neutrality of public institutions and of restoring to believing citizens and to their beliefs a dignity superior to that of non-believing citizens and of their ways of life.»

The text I have just read to you was written in this form by the then **President of the European Humanist Federation**. Five years later, following the **international congress of the AILP** held in **Madrid** one year ago, the **European Coordination Office of Free Thought** has seized the opportunity to propose concrete actions to the parliamentarians on the issue of the school. It is of course up to the Freethinkers' associations in each country to take the necessary initiatives, but what is the objective? The aim is to formulate the institutional conditions of the freedom of conscience for which the **Chevalier de la Barre** gave his life. In some cases this allows progress to be made, in other cases it allows resistance and then resumption of progress. There are examples in Belgium, France, Greece and surely elsewhere.

Five years later, following the IAFI international congress held in Madrid one year ago, the European Coordination Office of **Free Thought** seized the proposal of concrete actions towards the parliamentarians on the issue of School. It is of course up to the Freethinkers' associations in each country to take the necessary initiatives, but what is the objective? The objective is to formulate the institutional conditions of the freedom of conscience for which the Chevalier de la Barre gave his life. In some cases, this allows progress to be made, in other cases it allows resistance and then resumption of progress. There are examples in Belgium, France, Greece and surely elsewhere.

If in this conference we could formulate an official perspective so that, after a campaign of the **Free Thought** organizations and their friends towards the parliamentarians, a delegation could meet the **presidency** of the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**, we would have taken a step forward.

Of course, our reflection is not limited to School; complete separation is the guarantee of a freedom of conscience that allows full access to the status of citizen. This separation, however, is not based on a model and is not intangible.

It is not based on a model, because the historical relationship between religions and the State is different in Iraq, Lebanon, Uruguay, Argentina, the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, Spain and Tunisia. There is no model, but everyone here knows that separation means no public funding of religions and no official religion.

It is not intangible because its opponents are constantly challenging it. And it seems that these opponents have models: theocratic models or concordat models, as the case may be. When they are in a delicate position, religions accept concordats willy-nilly, but the novelty at the end of the twentieth century was rather to demand **concordats** or agreements of the same type. Today in France, the state, over and above successive governments, but with the authoritarian stigma that characterises the **Macron presidency**, wishes to organise religions and in particular **Islam**. An apparent paradox is that these measures, which restrict the freedoms of all (including cults!), sometimes result in the extension of funding to new denominations.

But just as the conquest of **Separation** necessarily includes institutional changes that protect democratic freedoms, the domestication of cults by the State necessarily includes a challenge to all democratic freedoms. Today, some of the 500,000 French associations freely formed between citizens realise that they must submit to the so-called «**republican commitment contract**» which threatens the freedom of the press, communal freedoms, the freedom of funerals, family law...

Our conference must also allow us to exercise our duty of vigilance.

I want to see a sign in the fact that the original **statue of the Chevalier de la Barre**, melted down to make cannons, is, through its copy, called to bear witness once again in a permanent way.

I thank you for listening and wish you a good conference.



The posterity of the Chevalier de La Barre, the last Frenchman to be sentenced to death for blasphemy (1765-2023)

Jean-François Chanet
Vice-President of the Ligue de l'Enseignement



To call the fate of the **Chevalier de La Barre** a «*martyr*» could only make it appear as an inversion, unbearable in modern France, of that of the first Christians. We need only think of **Flaubert's** *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*: «*Martyrs. All the early Christians were martyred*». We know how much **Voltaire** had to do with the transfiguration of a young man of nineteen, condemned to death, tortured and tortured for blasphemy in 1766 in his home town of Abbeville, into a symbol of the arbitrariness of a justice system subject to devout zeal. Among all his posthumous defenders, **Voltaire** made the **Chevalier de La Barre** the unwilling hero of resistance to fanaticism and superstition. At the age of 72, he took up the fight for justice against his accusers and judges¹. Without this struggle, the echo of which was amplified by **Pierre Larousse's** *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIX^e siècle*, the idea would probably not have occurred to **Libres Penseurs** to honour the memory of the Chevalier at a time of **Bloc des gauches** and statuomania².

Between the end of the 19th century and the aftermath of the *Great War*, two authors consulted the memoir of the lawyer **Simon Nicolas Henri Linguet** on the defence of the Chevalier and two of his co-defendants, **Dominique Gaillard d'Étallonde** and **Charles-François Moïse - Linguet** had been the Abbeville tutor of these three boys, who were minors at the time of the events - and the documents relating to the investigation and trial held in the National Archives, to which **Voltaire** had not had access. The first of these authors is **Jean Cruppi**, a magistrate, member of parliament and then senator for Haute-Garonne, who was a minister several times between 1908 and 1912 (he was Keeper of the Seals in the **Caillaux** ministry in 1911-1912)³, the second **Marc Chassaigne**, a doctor of literature and law. This Catholic writer is committed to revisiting, in a bid to rehabilitate the Church, the cases of the victims of justice that **Voltaire** had defended: witness his *Affaire Calas* and his *Comte de Lally*, not forgetting *Étienne Dolet*, which won an award from the *Académie française* in 1930⁴.

We can guess that their common concern for accuracy did not lead these two authors to share the same point of view on the affair of the **Chevalier de La Barre**. More recently, **Jacqueline Lalouette** has clearly shown in her thesis on the *history of the Libre Pensée* that at a time when the establishment of our public secularism was gathering pace «*the martyrs of choice* [of the **Libres Penseurs** and the anticlericals] were **Étienne Dolet**, the **Chevalier de La Barre** and **Michel Servet**⁵ », before proposing a detailed study of their statues and the debates they have sparked over time⁶.

Offences...

In the 18th century, there were around fifteen crucifixes in the streets and on the bridges of Abbeville. According to **Marc Chassaigne**, the one on the Pont-Neuf parapet was «*the object of great veneration*». In the early days of August 1765, it was found with several deep gashes, which were attributed to sabre cuts. The King's Attorney, **Hecquet**, informed the

Attorney General of the **Paris Parliament**, **Joly de Fleury**, who ordered an investigation. Between 18 and 25 August, three monitories were read from the pulpit - letters sent by the ecclesiastical authorities to the faithful enjoining them to denounce, on pain of excommunication, any reprehensible acts of which they were aware. An expiatory ceremony took place on 8 September, the day of the **Virgin's nativity**. The Bishop of Amiens, **Louis-François-Gabriel d'Orléans de La Motte**, stated before the crucifix that the impious men who had mutilated it had «*thereby rendered themselves worthy of the last torments in this world and eternal punishment in the next*», which made a greater impression on the public mind than his final appeal to divine mercy for the salvation of these sinners.

Among the dozens of testimonies generated by the monitoires, one was to prove decisive, that of a master-at-arms named **Naturé**: «*The Sieur d'Étallonde, the Chevalier de La Barre and the Sieur Moïsnel were all in my weapons room, and I heard them boast that at the time of the feast of the Blessed Sacrament last year, when the procession passed in the Place de Saint-Pierre, they did not remove their hats, did not kneel down, and did so as a kind of bravado.*» The first named, **Dominique Gaillard d'Étallonde**, aged seventeen, was the fourth son of **Gaillard de Boëncourt**, second President of the Court of Aids in Abbeville⁷. **Moïsnel**, an orphan of sixteen, had as his guardian another bourgeois of the robe, Dumaisniel de Belleval, who «*had inherited the office of lieutenant in the election of Ponthieu which, without much work, gave him the appearance of a magistrate*⁸», and had made his ward join the gendarmes of the king's guard as a supernumerary.

As for **François-Jean Lefebvre, Chevalier de La Barre**, his grandfather, a lieutenant-general in the royal armies, was said to have been the true creator of the colony of Cayenne, but his father had dissipated the forty thousand pounds of rent that he had left him as an inheritance. The child was brought up with a farmer and then taken in by his aunt - in reality his cousin - **Anne Marguerite Feydeau**, abbess of Willancourt Abbey and relative of **Paul-Esprit Feydeau de Brou**, who had been Keeper of the Seals in 1762-1763. «Orphaned and poor, but very well born» was, in the words of **Jean Cruppi**, this «*nun's nephew [who] passed for a boy with a great future*». We were therefore dealing with three sons of families who wanted to enter the world of arms.

The three criminals were also accused of using blasphemous language and singing the **Madeleine** and the **Saint-Cyr**, two old guardhouse songs. Searches of the **Chevalier de La Barre's** home also revealed that he was in possession of **Voltaire's Dictionnaire philosophique** and a number of «*bad books*». The young man admitted what he had done, but pleaded extenuating circumstances: if he had not saluted the procession, it was because it was raining and he was in a hurry; it was not in reference to the Virgin Mary that he had spoken of a p..., but of Mary Magdalene before her conversion. To his misfortune, he also confessed to preferring the **Philosophical Dictionary** to libertine novels.

As in many small provincial towns, as anyone who has read **Balzac** knows, Abbeville's elite formed two clans that were enemies for various religious and economic reasons, as well as old family hatreds. The mayor, **Duval de Soicourt**, an assessor at the court acting as criminal lieutenant, was from the opposite clan to that of the young men denounced. He and prosecutor Hecquet therefore made the connection, albeit without evidence, between the defacing of the crucifix and blasphemy, and merged them into a single charge.

... and penalties

In accordance with the rules of criminal investigation in force at the time, the accused were not assisted by a lawyer in court; their defence could only be ensured by drafting briefs and soliciting outside interventions. The **lawyer Linguet** did what he could for his former students, with the help of the abbess and President **Lefebvre d'Ormesson**, who had a distant family interest in the fate of the **Chevalier de La Barre**. By whom were they first judged? Alongside **Duval de Soicourt** sat two appointed judges in the Criminal Chamber of the Seneschaussée of Ponthieu, **Lefebvre de Villers** and **de Broutelles**. If we are to believe **Jean Cruppi**, «*the first was a good man, weak and narrow-minded, who later showed himself to be desperate for the evil he had done. As for de Broutelles, he deserves a portrait of his own. He was a pig merchant, lost of reputation in Abbeville.*»

On 28 February 1766, these men handed down a sentence to the **Chevalier** that went far beyond the demands of the King's Public Prosecutor. It deserves to be quoted in extenso: «*To make reparation for this, we condemn him to make amends before the main door of the royal and collegiate church of Saint-Wulfram in this town of Abbeville, where he will be led and driven by the executor of high justice in a tombereau, and there, kneeling, bare-headed and barefoot, with the rope around his neck, signs in front and behind bearing these words: Impie, blasphemem and sacrilege execrable and*

*abominable and holding in his hands a torch of burning yellow wax weighing two pounds, say and declare in a loud and intelligible voice that wickedly and by impiety he passed deliberately before the **Blessed Sacrament** without removing his hat and without kneeling and uttered the blasphemies mentioned in the trial, and sang the two songs full of execrable and abominable blasphemies mentioned in the trial, and gave marks of respect and adoration to infamous books and profaned the sign of the cross, the mystery of the consecration of the wine and the blessings used in the Church, for which he repents and asks forgiveness from God, the king and justice, and instead have his tongue cut out, this fact taken in the same tomb in the public square and main market of this city, to, on a scaffold that will be erected for this purpose, have his head cut off and be his dead body and his head thrown into the fire in a burning pyre to be reduced to ashes and the ashes thrown to the wind⁹. »*

In his *Relation de la mort du Chevalier de La Barre*, written the day after the young man's execution and presented as a letter to the **Marquis of Beccaria**, who had just published his famous *In Des délits et des peines*, **Voltaire** commented – and this passage is quoted in the article in the *Grand Dictionnaire universel of the XIX^e century* – on the use of the words «*exécrables et abominables*»: «*Ces épithètes sont-elles de la dignité de la magistrature? An old table song is, after all, just a song. It is human blood spilt lightly, it is torture, it is the ordeal of having one's tongue torn out, one's hand cut off, one's body thrown into the flames, that is abominable and execrable.*»

The judges did not rule on **Moisnel**'s fate or that of **Douville de Maillefeu**, son of the former mayor of Abbeville, and **Dumaisniel de Salveuse**, son of his tutor **Dumaisniel de Belleval**, whom **Moisnel** had denounced during his interrogation – before recanting, which exonerated them. On the other hand, they ordered that **d'Étallonde**, who had taken refuge in Neuchâtel, then Prussian territory, and had been tried in absentia, be burnt in effigy and that the *Dictionnaire philosophique* be torn up and burnt.

The family appealed, and the case was referred to the *Parlement de Paris*. **La Barre** and **Moisnel** were incarcerated at the **Conciergerie** until the Appeal Chamber could give its verdict. On 4 June 1766, by fifteen votes to ten, it handed down its terse ruling: «*The Court says that Lefebvre de La Barre has been well judged, wrongly and without grievance*». For **d'Alembert**, the person truly responsible for La Barre's death was **Chancellor Pasquier**: «*It is he, he wrote to Voltaire on 16 July 1766, who is said to have railed against the books of the philosophers, which he nevertheless has in his library and which he even reads with pleasure, [...] because he is not at all devout*». After pointing out that the ruling had been «*handed down by the First President himself, the future Chancellor de Maupeou, who was thus paving the way for his judicial reform*», **Jean Cruppi** commented on the outcome of the trial as follows: «*It is clear that these magistrates, on the evening of 4 June, dined heartily, with a clear conscience, happy to have played a good trick on Voltaire, satisfied to have, in these difficult times, shown equal horror for the Jesuits they had just expelled and for a young Freethinker they were sending to the fire with his manual of impiety.* »

The young knight's life now depended on the royal pardon. Despite the interventions of the **Abess of Willancourt**, the **President of Ormesson** and even the Bishop of Amiens, **Mgr de La Motte**, perhaps «*seized with remorse at the sight of his work*¹⁰», **Louis XV** refused the pardon. The alleged reason was that as the **Parliament** had shown itself inexorable for **Damiens** in 1757, «*a fortiori the culprit of divine lèse-majesté should not be treated more favourably than the culprit of human lèse-majesté*¹¹». On 1st July 1766, the **Chevalier de La Barre** was therefore put on trial, then led to his death on the market square in Abbeville by **Sanson**, the Executor of High Works, who had come expressly from Paris, at great cost to the King's treasury, as can be seen from his statement of expenses. **Sanson** did not refrain from charging twenty pounds for the removal of the tongue, which he nevertheless spared the condemned man. All the accounts emphasise that the condemned man faced torture and death with great courage. His head, body and the *Philosophical Dictionary* were burnt at the stake, and **Étallonde**'s effigy was burnt on a nearby pyre. According to the Provost General of the Marshalsea of Picardy, forty brigadiers could barely contain the crowd.

Who, in truth, if not **Voltaire**, gave the condemnation and execution of the **Chevalier de La Barre** the immense symbolic value that brings us together today around the initiative of the **Libre Pensée**? However, **Voltaire** did not succeed in obtaining the rehabilitation of the Chevalier de La Barre. It was the subject of a decree by the **Convention** on 25 brumaire an II (15 November 1793), at the same time as **Chaumette** was organising the *cult of Reason* in Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris and was preparing to have the **Commune** order the closure of the churches, a few days before the publication of the Republican calendar.

The tribulations of the statue

Ninety years later, a national fund-raising campaign was launched to erect a statue of the Chevalier in his home town, which had also been the site of his execution. **Victor Hugo**, himself in his eighties, accepted the honorary presidency of the initiative committee. **Gaston de Douville-Maillefeu**, a descendant of one of the co-accused who was eventually exonerated, was appointed Honorary Vice-Chairman. The sculptor appointed by the committee, **Émile Hébert**, produced a model, but that was as far as the project went.

It was the **Central Council of the Fédération française de la Libre Pensée** which, on the hundredth anniversary of the rehabilitation in 1893, conceived the idea of having a statue erected in Paris. A committee was set up four years later on the initiative of the **Grand Orient de France**. The time was ripe for a revival of the **Dreyfus affair**. The Paris City Council, then under nationalist influence, dragged out the affair from 1900 to 1904. After the municipal elections of 1st and 8 May 1904, in which 26 socialists and 18 radicals were elected to the council, the new majority decided on 21 November to make a plot of land in front of the **Sacré-Cœur basilica** available to the committee.

The committee wanted the inauguration of the statue, to be executed by the sculptor **Armand Bloch**, a pupil of **Alexandre Falguière** and **Antonin Mercié**, to coincide with the opening of the **Universal Congress of the Libre Pensée**, on 3 September 1905. As the statue was not ready, we had to make do with the plaster model. But it was the occasion for a gathering of several thousand people, led by **Marcel Sembat** and **Jean Allemane**. **The Internationale** and **the Carmagnole** were sung, while «**the skullcap**» was booed *ad libitum*. **Armand Bloch** depicted the **Chevalier de La Barre** at the stake, tied to a post by a chain, as had been the effigy of his friend **d'Étallonde**, which is not in accordance with reality, since he had previously been decapitated. The dedication inscribed on the base - «*To the Chevalier de La Barre who was tortured at the age of 19 on 1er July 1766 for not having saluted a procession*» - referred only to one of the charges, which was undoubtedly the one to which the public of 1905 might have been most sensitive, at a time when tensions caused by the banning of processions by municipal decree were not uncommon. The bronze statue was inaugurated, so to speak, without fanfare on 4 November 1906.

Twenty years passed, and the **Great War**. In 1926, when the tensions arising from the **Dreyfus affair** and the **Separation** were easing, and **Action Française** was condemned by the **Holy See**, the statue was moved to Square Nadar, on the hillside, on the pretext that the square in front of the Sacré-Cœur was being redeveloped. As you know, fifteen years later, the mobilisation of non-ferrous metals led to its disappearance. Like the statue of **Étienne Dolet** on the Place Maubert and that of **François Arago** on the boulevard of the same name, the statue of the **Chevalier de La Barre** was dismantled and sent to the smelting works in October 1941.

A century after the initial committee was formed, in 1997, the Municipal Council of the XVIII^e arrondissement decided to replace the vanished statue with a new one, which the **Association du Chevalier de La Barre** commissioned **Emmanuel Ball** to create. The sculptor's aim was no longer to depict torture or torment; the hero is returned to his youth, insolence and pleasure in life. The statue was unveiled on 24 February 2001 by the mayor of the arrondissement, **Daniel Vaillant**, who was Minister of the Interior at the time. It was placed on the old pedestal, which was left empty, as is the pedestal of **Arago**.

In Abbeville, in the politically favourable context of the so-called «Belle Époque», the town's **Freethinkers** and **Freemasons** had finally obtained their own monument. After the failure of the first attempt, a new project was conceived in 1902. The monument was erected on land belonging to the State, on the banks of the Somme Canal, and inaugurated on 7 July 1907. It consists of a truncated pyramid, decorated with a bas-relief by **Émile Hébert** showing the **Chevalier** being questioned. The inscription reads: «*En commémoration du Martyre du Chevalier de La Barre supplicié à Abbeville le 1er juillet 1766, à l'âge de 19 ans, pour avoir omis de saluer une procession*» («*In commemoration of the martyrdom of the Chevalier de La Barre, tortured in Abbeville on 1 July 1766, at the age of 19, for failing to salute a procession*»), and higher up on the pyramid it reads: «**Monument élevé par le Prolétariat à l'Émancipation intégrale de la Pensée humaine**» («**Monument erected by the proletariat to the complete emancipation of human thought**»). Under the Vichy regime, when the bas-relief was already at Abbeville station for shipment to Germany, a railway worker took the risk of hiding it in a nearby stream. Re-installed after the **Liberation**, it remains the destination of an annual ceremony attended by the **Freethinkers** of the Somme and **secular education activists**. It should also be remembered that this monument was vandalised in June 2013 by the **Civitas** movement. Finally, **Jacqueline Lalouette**'s research shows that the memory of the

Chevalier de La Barre is also cultivated in Gruissan, where a monument was inaugurated in 1931 opposite the church, in front of which there is an annual commemoration organised by the **Libre Pensée de l'Aude**.

The posthumous fate of the **Chevalier de La Barre** is a strange and instructive one. His fate has made him a symbol that we would still like to be universal - but a symbol inscribed in an evolving topography and memory, that of his town of birth and death, of course, but perhaps even more so that of the Paris where his final sentence was handed down. From the **Second Year and the Commune of 1793**, when he was rehabilitated - a rehabilitation that was tantamount to recognition of the right to blasphemy - to the mobilisation of **Free Thinkers** under the **Third Republic**, after the crushing of the **Commune in 1871** and even more so in the aftermath of the **Dreyfus Affair**, **Le Chevalier** became a child of the Butte Montmartre. This will be confirmed by tonight's ceremony. But the gift you wish to make of a copy of the **Armand Bloch** statue has another significance. It commits the **Ligue de l'Enseignement** to cultivating knowledge of its history, to associating the memory of the **Chevalier de La Barre** with the **defence of freedom of expression**, to making him, in short, the living embodiment of an indocile youth, but aware of what motivates its commitments.

¹ Jean Goulemot, article «La Barre, Jean François Le Febvre, chevalier de», in Jean Goulemot, André Magnan and Didier Masseur (eds.), *Inventaire Voltaire*, Paris, Gallimard, «Quarto» series, 1995, pp. 783-786. See also the proceedings of the study day held at the Sorbonne in 2016 to mark the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the execution: Myrtille Méricam-Bourdet (ed.), *Revue Voltaire*, no. 17, *L'Affaire La Barre*, 2017.

² Maurice Agulhon, «La 'statuomanie' et l'histoire», *Ethnologie française*, VIII, I, 1978, reprinted in *Histoire vagabonde*, I, *Ethnologie et politique dans la France contemporaine*, Paris, Gallimard, «Bibliothèque des histoires», 1988, pp. 137-185.

³ Jean Cruppi, *Un avocat journaliste au XVIII^e siècle : Linguet*, Paris, Hachette, 1895 : <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2079050>. This book is a reprint of a study first published under the title «Linguet et le procès du chevalier de La Barre», in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. 128, 1st March 1895, pp. 123-157: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k75361n/f126.item>

⁴ Marc Chassaingne, *Le procès du chevalier de La Barre*, preface by Jean Guiraud, Paris, Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1920: <http://archive.org/stream/leprocducheva00chas#page/22/mode/2up>; id., *L'affaire Calas*, Paris, Perrin, 1929; id., *Étienne Dolet. Portraits et documents inédits*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1930; idem, *Le comte de Lally*, Paris, Société de l'histoire des colonies françaises, 1938.

⁵ Jacqueline Lalouette, *La libre pensée en France, 1848-1940*, preface by Maurice Agulhon, Paris, Albin Michel, 1997, p. 296-297.

⁶ *Id.*, *Un peuple de statues. La célébration sculptée des grands hommes* (France, 1801-2018), Paris, Mare & Martin, 2018. See also his article «Le chevalier de La Barre», *Histoire du christianisme*, n° 77, September 2015, p. 59-63.

⁷ Élisabeth Claverie, «L'affaire du chevalier de La Barre. Naissance d'une forme politique», [*Secret/Public*], 2005, pp. 217-313, p. 288 for this clarification: <http://ekldata.com/PwkDSnqldh8od3tqAIQn2agM7wI.pdf>. See also id., «Sainte indignation contre indignation éclairée : l'affaire du Chevalier de La Barre», *Ethnologie française*, nouvelle série, t. 22, n°3, «Paroles d'outrage», July-September 1992, p. 271-290.

⁸ Marc Chassaingne, *Le procès du chevalier de La Barre*, *op. cit.* p. 24.

⁹ Quoted by Marc Chassaingne, *Le procès du chevalier de La Barre*, *op. cit.* p. 155.

¹⁰ Jean Cruppi, *Un avocat journaliste...*, *op. cit.* p. 119.

¹¹ Voltaire, *Relation de la mort du chevalier de La Barre par Monsieur Cassen, avocat au Conseil du Roi, à M. le marquis de Beccaria [15 July 1766, Amsterdam, 1768]*, *Œuvres complètes*, t. XXIX, *Politique et législation*, t. II, Paris, chez E. A. Lequien, 1822, p. 355. This version is confirmed by Jean Cruppi, *op. cit.* p. 124.

Fourteen concordats in the European Union : the true nature of Vatican Europe

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Introduction

Never short of powerful formulas, **Jules Renard (1864-1910)**, the author of the famous novel of the unhappy childhood *Poil de carotte*, noted in his *Journal* on August 14, 1904 : «*Freedom of conscience is not paying a parish priest when you do not go to mass.*» In a few words, he partly summarizes the spirit of the **French law of 9 December 1905** concerning the **separation of Church and State**, then under preparation : no more than it recognizes them, the Republic does not subsidize religions or pay their ministers in order to guarantee freedom of conscience.

Despite the European intellectual sources of distancing religion and Politics, the **separation of Church and State** remains a minority choice in Europe, part of which obeys the rules of a **European Union** of Christian Democratic inspiration, the nature of which **Paul Valéry** had predicted: «*Europe obviously aspires to be governed by an American commission. His whole policy is headed there.*» However, constitutional protection of freedom of conscience is generally ensured, often with significant nuances, both in the countries with recognized religions or State religions, the most numerous, and in those that have instituted this separation. Moreover,

where it characterises the political organisation of States, major infringements limit its scope, as, for example, in France and Portugal.

The Intellectual Foundations of the Separation of State and Religions in Europe: A Limited Legal Translation

An examination of the relations currently established between States and religions in Europe shows that the emergence of a thought of the separation of religion and Politics from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century has not yet brought good results.

The demand for independence of the civil government from religions has been affirmed in Europe

If the **New Testament** enunciates the principle of the **separation of religion and Politics**, nevertheless, as **Christianity** becomes the official cult in the **Roman Empire**, the Catholic Church asserts itself as an essential pillar of the state, whatever form it takes. In the **canonical Gospels** of **Luke** (XX, 25), **Mark** (XII, 13-17) and **Matthew** (XXII, 21), to the question to pay or not to pay **tribute to Caesar**, **Christ** answers the envoys of scribes and priests who have come to set a trap for him in order to deliver him to the judges : «*Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.*» However, once Christianity was recognized as equal to other cults in the Empire by **Constantine's Edict of Milan** of 313, **Theodosius the Great**, by the **Edict of 380 of Thessalonica**, erected the new confession, in its Trinitarian version, as the only universal state religion : «*All the peoples [of the Empire] must rally to the faith transmitted to the Romans by the apostle Peter [...]*». This eminently earthly consecration will make the Church forget the principle enunciated by **Christ** reported by three of the **four canonical Gospels**, at the cost of important clashes between the **Emperor** and the **Pope** over the exercise of temporal power : the Sack of Rome by the troops of **Charles V** in 1527 undoubtedly constitutes the climax. The schismatic branches of Catholicism do not differ from the initial tree on this point : the **autocephalous Orthodox Churches** constitute, in law or in fact, an essential cog in the state (Greece, Russia); **Lutheran churches** have long been state religions in some Nordic countries (Norway and Sweden) in the manner of the **British High Church**.

Attributable in particular to the Wars of Religion, of which the **Thirty Years' War** (1618-1648) marked the apogee in some respects, the misfortunes of Europe fed the rise of a thought advocating the liberation of the civil government from religious constraint. Following the conflicts between Protestant sects that tore England apart, **John Locke** (1632-1704) sketched a clear distinction between civil and religious power in his **Essay on Toleration** of 1667 : The cult «... *does not concern my governor or my neighbour*»; In addition, the «... *The whole of the mandate, power and authority [of the magistrate] exists for no other purpose than that of being useful in the service of the good, conservation and peace of men in*

society... ». He specified it in his **Two Treatises of Government** of 1674 in which he assigned a unique role to cults: *«[.../ The end of religious society is to attain bliss after this life in another world. »*

Almost a century later, in a sort of tribute to the liberal philosopher of Oxford, although he reserved most of his talent for denouncing the fanaticism to which religions lead, **Voltaire** (1694-1778) formulated, incidentally but powerfully, the principle of separation of religion and Politics in a letter of 19 March 1765 to Pastor **Élie Bertrand** : Because the law must be the fruit of civil government alone, he concludes that it *«... must separate every kind of religion from every kind of government. »*. Last immense apostle in the gallery of illustrious thinkers of separation, which we will not go through completely, far from it : **Victor Hugo**. In a famous speech of January 15, 1850, from the rostrum of the **Legislative Assembly of the Second French Republic**, in a last-ditch effort to fight the **Falloux bill** that would hand over public schools to priests, he pronounces this formula called until today to a long posterity among the French republicans: **«The Church at home and the State at home.»** We are a long way from that.

An examination of the relations established between States and religions in Europe shows that full separation remains a minority.

Despite this construction of a European thought basing the full freedom of the individual on the separation of the religions and Politics, the spirit of the **Edict of Thessalonica of Theodosius the Great** promulgated in 380, persists in today's world and particularly in Europe. Three situations coexist and are sometimes cumulative.

On the one hand, five countries still recognize an official or State religion : Denmark, Finland, the United Kingdom, Malta and Greece. Closely intertwined with the **Orthodox religion**, the Greek state admitted an exception : civil cases of the Muslim minority in Thrace (civil status, marriages, divorces, inheritance) were obligatorily governed by **Koranic law** until 2018. The **European Court of Human Rights** (ECHR), hearing an appeal concerning the rules of succession, ruled that this situation was discriminatory on the basis of Article 14 of the **European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms** of 4 November 1950, so that **Muslim law** now applies only on an optional basis in this region of Greece. In some respects, the Republic of Ireland is in a very similar situation to that of these five countries : Article 44 of the 1937 Constitution, which invokes the **«Most Holy Trinity»**, gives a special place to the Roman Church, which is responsible for social action and primary education in parochial schools.

On the other hand, in nine other countries the Churches are separated from the State, according to more or less strict procedures in practice : France, Hungary, Latvia, Norway, Portugal, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden. For example, the Czech Parliament rejected a bill to compensate the Church whose property had been nationalized in 1948. In France and Portugal, the situation seems more complex, as we shall see. In Sweden and Norway, the **separation of the state and the Lutheran Church** occurred recently, in 2000 and 2012 respectively : pastors are no longer civil servants.

Finally, the other States live under a system of recognized religions, most often based on a concordat, in the case of the Catholic Church, and special agreements with other religions. It should be noted that the **concordat** may have taken different political meanings throughout history. When in 1516, **Francis I** imposed the **Concordat of Bologna** on **Pope Leo X**, he helped to distance Rome from the exercise of temporal power in France. In 1801, when the First Consul **Bonaparte** concluded the **Concordat** with **Pius VII**, he put an end to the **first French separation of 1795**. For example, Germany and Austria live under a concordat regime and recognize several religions constituted in the form of corporations under public law. Poland concluded a concordat as early as 1993, two years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and four years before the entry into force of the new constitution of 1997, article 25 of which expressly provides for it. Let us mention the particular case of Belgium : the organization and public exercise of religions are free. Under **article 181 of the Constitution**, the State pays ministers of the seven recognized religions and representatives of the lay family, which enjoys comparable advantages.

Freedom of conscience in Europe: protection with limits

Various supranational texts and the constitutional courts of European countries essentially protect freedom of conscience. Yet it has important limits that the separation of Church and State sometimes fails to overcome (France, Portugal).

Protection of freedom of conscience is guaranteed in Europe but has limits

First of all, several texts binding on the member States of the **Council of Europe**, which brings together forty-seven countries, and/or of the **European Union** (EU), which now has twenty-seven, protect freedom of conscience. **Article 9-1 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 4 November 1950**, reproduced in the same terms in **Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU** of 7 December 2000, provides that *«Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion ; This right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance. / 2 Freedom to manifest one's religion or belief shall not be subject to restrictions other than those prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in*

the interests of public safety, the protection of public order, health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.»

However, without prejudice to the choices of each Member State in this area, **Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU** expressly provides for institutional links between religions and the Union : «3. *Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations.»* Given the Christian Democratic origin and the political weight of the EU in the life of European nations, this provision is not purely formal. Let us recall that after the **Yalta and Potsdam agreements** and the **Marshall Plan** of 1949, which had the object and effect of containing the revolutionary wave that swept the old continent with the collapse of the fascist regimes from 1943, **Christian Democracy**, the main political ally of the United States where, in particular, the banker **Jean Monet** (1888-1979) had worked, undertook to build an economic union conceived as the first stage of a broader project of a European political federation, based on the principle of subsidiarity tending to restrict the sovereignty of nations in favor of a global entity deemed more rational.

After the fall of the **Berlin Wall** in 1989, not only did the **Community** of the time expand eastwards to stabilize the continent, but the project of the founding fathers, from the Catholic parties, **Alcide de Gasperi** (1881-1954), **Robert Schumann** (1886-1963) and **Konrad Adenauer** (1876-1967), made a very important advance : **the political and monetary union** has come at the cost of weakening nations, which no longer have budgetary or monetary sovereignty as far as the eurozone countries are concerned. This undemocratic entity, which is not yet a federal state for lack of a real armed force and diplomacy, is, on the other hand, largely under the influence of religions, the **Roman Church** maintaining a powerful permanent representation in Brussels, the **Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union** (COMECE), one of whose objectives is to «*encourage reflection, based on the social teaching of the Church, on the challenges posed by the construction of a united Europe.*»

Secondly, the **constitutional courts** of the main European countries, whether they belong to the category of States separated from religions or from that of States recognising them in different forms, generally guarantee citizens' freedom of conscience, but in terms that are sometimes not compatible with the neutrality of the State and its distancing from religions. only able to protect it totally.

Thus, in France, a separatist country, in 1977, the **Constitutional Council** (CC) raised the provisions of **Article 1 of the Law of 9 December 1905**, which «*[...] ensures freedom of conscience [and] guarantees the free exercise of religion ...*», with constitutional value, a fundamental principle recognized by the laws of the Republic deriving from **Article 10 of the Declaration of Human and Citizen Rights of 26 August 1789**. It also considered that the **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union of 2000** did not forbid the constitutional prohibition on the creation of collective rights in favour of communities or the principle of secularism. This reinforces **separation** as a condition for freedom of conscience.

In countries with recognized religions, **freedom of conscience** is also guaranteed by constitutions, but the presence of religions in the public sphere limits their fullness. In Germany, where the **Concordat of 1933** remains and whose **Basic Law of 1949** affirms, on the one hand, that «*Freedom of belief and conscience and the freedom to profess religious and philosophical beliefs are inviolable*», on the other hand, that «*The free exercise of religion is guaranteed*», the **Federal Constitutional Court** (CCF) in Karlsruhe, regardless of state neutrality, ruled that a Land's refusal to recruit a woman wearing a headscarf as a teacher, in the absence of a «*sufficiently determined legal basis*», infringed religious freedom. In Italy, whose **amended Constitution of 1947** states that «*the State and the Catholic Church are, each in its own domain, independent and sovereign*» and that «*their relations are governed by the Lateran Pacts*» of 1929, revised in 1984, the Constitutional Court has nevertheless enshrined the higher principle of equality between religions. It is a way of formally restricting, if not practically, the influence of Catholicism without guaranteeing full freedom of conscience.

In this respect, the EU texts are not of much help to Italian citizens : the **ECHR** considered that the presence of crucifixes in public schools was legal. In Spain, whose **1978 Constitution** establishes «*[...] relations of cooperation pursued with the Catholic Church and other confessions*», none having the status of «*State religion*», and protects, not that of conscience, but «*the freedom of opinion, religion and worship of individuals and communities [...]*», a ruling of the **Constitutional Court** (STC) nevertheless found legitimate the financial benefits granted to the **Roman Church** by the agreements concluded with the Holy See in 1979, superior to those granted to other religions. It also held that this difference between the Catholic Church and minority religions does not constitute an infringement of the principle of equality or the right of everyone not to declare his religion, although the distribution of the income tax proceeds reserved for religions is based on a declaratory system. In short, **freedom of conscience** remains rather theoretical in Spain.

Separation does not keep all its promises

The examples mentioned above show, essentially, that freedom of conscience, protected by binding European texts but at the same time reserving an institutional place for religions, is globally guaranteed by the constitutional courts of countries with recognized religions, under conditions however largely imperfect. Do States based on a strict separation from religions

have better results in this respect? Obviously not : many sprains tarnish the promise of **Separation**. Before examining the cases of France and Portugal, let's make a brief foray into the United States, away from old Europe : in the land of **Thomas Jefferson's First Amendment** erecting the «**Separation Wall**», the **Supreme Court** colonized by the supporters of Mr. **Donald Trump** has dealt two severe blows to freedom of conscience. By the **Dobbs and Kennedy judgments** of 24 and 27 June 2022, it offered the federated states, on the one hand, the possibility of prohibiting again, by reversing **Roe v. Wade** of 1973, abortion which nevertheless constitutes the right to dispose of one's body in accordance with one's conscience, on the other hand, the permission of prayer in public schools, unconstitutional from 1962 to 2022. Our friend **Rob Boston** will give us all the elements tomorrow.

When the Portuguese monarchy was overthrown in 1910, the provisional government installed at the proclamation of the **First Republic** hastened, on the one hand, to expel the **congregations** in favor of the reform of education by a decree of October 8, 1910, including the **Society of Jesus** whose property it nationalized, on the other hand, to promulgate the **law of 20 April 1911 on the separation of Church and State**, which preceded the adoption of a new constitution on 21 August 1911, and whose extension to the **Empire** proved complex. In 1926, due to the divisions of the Republican camp and in a climate of rising authoritarian regimes in Europe, a military dictatorship was installed that paved the way for the establishment of the **Second Republic** based on **Salazar's presidential, corporatist and national-Catholic Constitution** of March 19, 1933. In a 1936 speech, he recalled the five pillars of the new state : **God, family, work, fatherland and authority**. In 1940, the regime concluded a concordat with the **Holy See** under which the country returned to the **Roman Church** the property that the **Republic** had nationalized in 1910.

Following the **Portuguese Revolution of 1974**, which ended on 25 November 1975, a new constitution was adopted on 2 April 1976. Article 41 provides that «*1- Freedom of conscience, religion and worship is inviolable ; [...] 4- Churches and religious communities are separate from the State and may organize themselves freely, exercise their functions and celebrate their worship.*» Nevertheless, the concordat established with the **Holy See** in 1940, then renewed in 2004, the procedure for the recognition of religions by the State and the tax advantages that the latter grants them clearly temper this separation. The **Constitutional Court** inferred from the principle of the inviolability of religions that the State must guarantee religious freedom even within public schools. It increased this obligation by requiring the public authorities to provide such education not only «*by*» but «*in*» the School so as to guarantee religious freedom. Finally, in Portugal, the coexistence of a regime of **separation of the State and religions**, a concordat and various collaboration agreements between the public authorities and minority religions leads to a system of church taxes in addition to various tax exemptions.

In France, the **separation of Church and State** is imposed to the rhythm of the upheavals of the country's history. Established by a decree of the **Convention** of the second supplementary day of the year II (September 18, 1794), it consists in abolishing from public budgets, from 12 nivôse year III (January 1, 1795), the expenses incurred for the remuneration of priests and the maintenance of religious buildings. The **Concordat of 1801** and the organic articles put an end to this regime for more than a century, with the exception of an ephemeral restoration by the decree of April 2, 1871 of the **Paris Commune** which provides that «*Article 1: The Church is separated from the State. / Article 2: The budget for religions is abolished. / Article 3: The so-called deadhand property, belonging to religious congregations, movable or immovable, is declared national property.*»

Included by the **Republicans** in the **Belleville Program** of 1869, **separation** settled permanently from the entry into force of the **law of December 9, 1905** which marks the triumph of the **Third Republic** after the Boulangist crisis (1889) and especially the **Dreyfus affair** (1894-1906). It is the culmination of a process of secularization of society, secularization of institutions, including schools and public hospitals, and conquest of the fundamental rights of individuals (freedom of the press, assembly, creation of trade unions, association, funeral, divorce). The **law of 9 December 1905** sets out two fundamental principles: «*Article 1: The Republic ensures freedom of conscience. It guarantees the free exercise of religions subject only to the restrictions set out below in the interest of public order. Article 2: The Republic does not recognize, pay or subsidize any religion.*»

Three main breaches through which the cults, and especially the **Roman Church**, rush in, weaken the **Separation**. On the one hand, the **law of 9 December 1905** applies to only part of the national territory. At the end of the **First and Second World Wars**, the **Concordat of 1801** was re-established in the three departments of Bas-Rhin, Haut-Rhin and Moselle, occupied by the **German Empire** from 1870 to 1918 and from 1940 to 1944. In 2013, the **Constitutional Council** validated this territorial exception because the **constituents of 1946 and 1958** did not expressly intend to extend the **separation** to these three communities. In addition, with the exception of the departments of Guadeloupe, Martinique and Réunion, the overseas collectivities are governed by special texts, notably Guyana, which has to pay Catholic priests pursuant to a royal ordinance of 1828. The Constitutional Council ruled that the Concordat of 1801 and the **Royal Ordinance of 1828** are in conformity with the Constitution. On the other hand, the prohibition on financing religions for the purpose of absolutely guaranteeing the freedom of conscience of citizens suffers from important derogations : direct derogations introduced by the **Vichy regime** into the law itself – payment of public aid without limitation of amount to repair religious buildings ; indirect derogation through the **law of 31 December 1959** that forces the State and local

authorities to finance Catholic educational institutions under contract (twelve billion euros per year) which welcome 17% of pupils, under conditions practically identical to those of public education.

Finally, most recently, **the law of 21 August 2021**, which seriously threatens the fundamental freedom of association, calls into question the **principle of non-recognition of religions by the State** : the prefect verifies *ab initio* and every five years that religious associations, whose sole object is the public exercise of worship, have this quality. How can a liberal state, in the first sense of the term, pronounce on the religious character or not of a religious grouping in a regime of separation? This issue and, more generally, the repressive aspects of this text have been of concern and mobilization to the FNLP for two years now.

Conclusion

Although **freedom of conscience** is recognized in most European countries and has given rise to decisions by constitutional courts that ensure its overall protection, its full development nevertheless faces various obstacles. On the one hand, the **Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union** (TFEU), a political entity which, without being a **federal State**, absorbs part of the sovereignty of the nations it encompasses, recognizes an institutional role for religions, which has repercussions within the States belonging to this union. On the other hand, countries with a **State religion, concordat or recognized cults** are the most numerous. Freedom of conscience is bumping into the official presence of religions, particularly in public education, social works or changes in society. Thus, embryo research and euthanasia are strictly prohibited in Germany.

As a matter of principle, the **separation of Church and State** is the best guarantee for citizens' freedom of conscience. It necessarily implies, in a democratic country, the philosophical neutrality of the State and the prohibition of the use of taxes for particular purposes of a confessional nature. However, in practice, it does not always allow the full development of freedom of conscience in all areas. As we have seen, the Portuguese system of public education provides a forum for religious education. In France, **Catholic education** benefits from an overall public aid of about thirteen billion euros each year. Moreover, issues as important as the right to medical assistance in dying, the legal duration of abortion or the freedom of embryo research are less well dealt with than in countries with **recognized religions, state religions or recognized religions**, such as Spain, the United Kingdom or Belgium.

Therefore, it would be wrong to oppose a **separatist model** to a **concordat model** in **Europe**. Together, we must conquer, for some, or reconquer, for others, a full separation of States and religions, both in the field of education and in those where freedom of conscience is still far from having filled the entire field of civil life. In this regard, following in the footsteps of **Victor Hugo**, our common actions should lead us to make two demands: in each of our countries, let us ensure that the affirmation «**The Church at home and the State at home**» is imposed ; collectively, let us also ensure that **Europe** becomes what it has never been: «[...] *the union of liberties in the fraternity of peoples* [...]»

Thank you.



Church & State in the Nordic countries

Christian Lomsdalen,
President H.E.F. - Norwegian Humanist Association



Norway, Sweden, and Denmark are three countries in Scandinavia that have a long history of state involvement in religion. All three countries have had state churches or semi-state churches, sometimes more as a juridical reality than a rhetorical one.

In **Norway**, the **Evangelical Lutheran Church** was the *official state church*. It is arguably still the established church even though the political rhetoric concerning the church claim that it has been separated from the state. It is still mentioned in the *constitution* and have separate laws concerning it. The church receives funding from the state, but on a different scheme than the rest of the religious or lifestance communities. However, the *Norwegian constitution* guarantees freedom of religion, and other religions are allowed to operate freely in the country. In recent years, there has been a growing movement to **separate church and state** in Norway, but there is a long way ahead.

Similarly, **Sweden** has had a state church, the Church of Sweden, since the 16th century. The church was closely tied to the monarchy and played a significant role in Swedish society. However, in 2000, the Swedish government **officially separated church and state**, and it can be argued that the Church of Sweden became a semi-state church. The church still receives funding through the government. The **Humanists**

of Sweden have not been recognized in the same manner as religious communities.

Denmark also has a **state church**, the **Evangelical Lutheran Church**, which is the **established church of Denmark**. The church is funded by the state and is responsible for providing religious education in public schools. The church also conducts religious ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. However, the Danish constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and other religions are allowed to operate freely in the country. In recent years, there has been a growing movement to **separate church and state in Denmark**, but the church still plays an important role in Danish society, and is still managing the Danish popular registry.

<https://fot.humanists.international/countries/europe-northern-europe/denmark/>

<https://fot.humanists.international/countries/europe-northern-europe/sweden/>

<https://fot.humanists.international/countries/europe-northern-europe/norway/>

Paoli and secularism in the Corsican Constitution

Philippe Guglielmi
Honorary President of Laïcité-Liberté



First of all, to talk about **Paoli** and secularism in the **Corsican Constitution**, it is important to consider the political and social environment that led **Pasquale Paoli** to give concrete form to the idea of secularism in the **Corsican Republic**. Pasquale Paoli's work is marked by a great universalist desire which combines philosophy and a practical sense resulting from a great awareness of realities. All this in an 18th century marked by the *spirit of the Enlightenment*, in parallel with the collapse of an ancient world.

Pasquale Paoli was influenced by the spirit of the **Encyclopaedists** and Italian **philosophers**. His reasoning moved towards the higher regions of the mind, without ever losing touch with the society of the men and women of his time. **Paoli's** thinking is marked by a concern for what we nowadays call **human rights**.

To understand the development of the thought of **Pasquale Paoli**, born on 5 April 1725 in the hamlet of **Stretta in Morosaglia**, it is necessary to place oneself in the context of his time and to imagine this son of a charismatic leader recognised by the people. His father **Hyacinthe** was one of the leaders of the insurrection against the Republic of Genoa and took part in the national government in 1730.

This commitment forced him into exile in 1739. **Pasquale Paoli** accompanied his father who became Colonel of the **Corsica Regiment** garrisoned in Naples. The young **Pasquale** was appointed an officer a few years later, but he showed little interest in military matters and was more interested in the very rich intellectual life of the city.

Although **Pasquale Paoli** was a romantic intellectual, he was not deaf to the misfortunes of his homeland, which continued to bow under the Genoese yoke. He tended to idealise his island, which fortunately led him to envisage the best for it, but also made him vulnerable later to the betrayals to which he was subjected.

Called to Corsica by a **Cunsulta**, i.e., an assembly of the people, he returned in 1754 and was elected **General of the Nation**. He immediately proclaimed a **democratic constitution**: "*the people decide everything*". The principle of the sovereignty of the people was proclaimed 34 years before the **French Revolution**.

This is why we can speak of a **Republic** before time, if we refer to the **first year of the Republic** born of the **French Revolution**. The **Constitution of 1755** was a major act in the life of humanity on the long way to emancipation.

The only previous text guaranteeing individual freedoms, the **Habeas Corpus Act**, was promulgated in England in 1679. This helps us to understand why, in the middle of the 18th century, events in Corsica would, as **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** said, astonish the world. *

Pasquale Paoli's government was innovative and daring. In terms of defence, it opted for a people's army made up mainly of peasant militias.

In terms of education, the University of Corte was created, and a **secular school was set up in every village**. This measure was more than avant-gardist, for it would be another 130 years before **secular and compulsory State schools** were established in France. It should be pointed out that the small clergy was entirely committed to Paoli's cause and never lobbied for education to be exclusively religious.

Among other things, the Constitution guaranteed the **free exercise of religious beliefs**, putting an end to the supremacy of the Catholic faith alone. **Pasquale Paoli** encouraged Jewish families to settle in the Cortenais region, where they

developed vine cultivation. One day, he even travelled to Ile Rousse to settle a dispute in favour of a Jewish draper who had been the victim of a false trial and harassment.

Minorities were therefore particularly protected, as were the Protestants, who were few in number. Under the *Generalate*, Corsica was a veritable land of asylum, renowned in the Mediterranean and far beyond.

The proclamation of the **Constitution of 1755** highlights the exceptional nature of this unlikely combination of events, which led to the emergence of a **Corsican Republic** in the 18th century, in a Europe of absolute monarchies.

To speak of **secularism in Paoli's constitution** of 1755 is not to confine oneself solely to education, but to consider a broader concept, that of **freedom of thought**. For freedom of thought has social implications in all areas of human rights.

Paolist democracy was born of the weakening and decadence of the traditional powers of the Mediterranean basin, the strengthening of cosmopolitanism and the spread of the progressive ideas of the *Enlightenment*. **Paolian democracy** would die as the ultimate reaction before the chaos of a dying order, that of **absolute royalty**, concentrating its last forces on reducing this Lilliputian, this small island and its **Republic** that had challenged it.

For the men of the eighteenth century, **Paoli's Corsica** had a meaning, a mythical meaning, with a strength, a meaning in adapting to the new ideas of democracy and the new concept of the people.

Pasquale Paoli would be seen as the embodiment of the romantic hero and patriot fighting for the independence of his homeland against the King, and as a pioneer of the following national struggles. **Paoli** was seen throughout Europe as the glorious embodiment of the Enlightenment, capable of setting his country on the road to reform.

It is worth noting that in the early years of the **French Revolution**, the **Jacobin revolutionaries** regarded **Paoli** as their precursor. A wave of sympathy and enthusiasm swept through them.

Public opinion was closely following the fate of this small island that dared to stand up against despotism and keep it at a distance for a few years. **Catherine II** invited **Paoli** to Russia and congratulated him on "*the generous way in which you have defended your homeland*". **Frederic II** did the same. **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** speaks of the expedition to **Ponte Novu**, where **Paoli's** troops were defeated, and describes it as "*iniquitous and ridiculous, shocking all justice, all humanity, all politics, all reason*". (*Lettre à Monsieur de Saint Germain*, 17 February 1770 in *Œuvres complètes* tome 12 page 195).

General Paoli was welcomed as a triumph in Paris in 1790. He was presented by **Lafayette** to 100,000 national guards gathered at the Champ de Mars.

In a speech to the **Society of the Friends of the Constitution**, **Robespierre** declared: "*You have defended liberty at a time when we did not even dare to hope for it*". Today we must denounce the revisionism from which the history of **Pasquale Paoli** still suffers. As we have said, **Pasquale Paoli** was a supporter of the **French Revolution**, which brought him back from exile. Although he was a friend of **Robespierre**, especially of his brother Augustin, he was horrified by the excesses of the **Terror** and took a step back. He was tormented by the execution of **Jean Sylvain Bailly**, President of the **Constituent Assembly** and Mayor of Paris, who was guillotined in 1793.

However, **Paoli** will always be considered as a **Robespierriste** and he will be dragged into his downfall. When **Robespierre** was guillotined, **Paoli's** Corsican opponents had him declared an outlaw, which led to his final exile.

Pasquale Paoli's work was the result of a voluntarist intellectual approach.

It is the work of a fine scholar who was able to put his philosophy into practice by creating a State based on the principles of democracy. One of the lessons of **Paolism** is the rehabilitation of the **politician**, which he was in the truest and highest sense of the word.

He possessed those two extraordinary qualities which, in the words of **Max Weber**, are the hallmark of statesmen who act by vocation. He possessed the ethics of conviction, understood as a law rooted and argued in the generous principles that must shape public action.

Pasquale Paoli had the misfortune of exercising this political magisterium, this "**national paternity**", at a time when Kings, States and Princes inherited peoples and sold them.

For his first exile, **Paoli** went to England where he met up with his friend, the writer **James Boswell**, who in 1765 had written *An Account of Corsica* praising **Paoli's** government. **Boswell** was a high-ranking **Freemason** who integrated **Paoli** into the Lodge of *The Nine Muses* in London.

In conclusion

Pasquale Paoli was influenced from an early age by a great classical culture, the humanist stamp of which was to be felt throughout the *Enlightenment*.

He was undoubtedly one of those rare philosophers in the history of mankind who were able to put into practice the concepts they had developed. As a statesman, he was able to reconcile the higher interests of the **Nation** with those of the **common people**, to whom he was close. By proclaiming **secularism in the constitution of 1855**, Pasquale Paoli gave the people the opportunity to liberate themselves.

John Saul, in his book ***Voltaire's Bastards***, which deals with the dictatorship of reason in the West, places **Jefferson** and **Paoli** in that small group of leaders who resist structural imperatives by fiercely defending a humanist tradition. What better tribute could there be than this one?

Pasquale Paoli saw himself as the instrument of reason. His solid common sense enabled him to act reasonably, while the **forces of absolutism** - old and new - swarmed around him. In the end, he was defeated both by the **absolute monarchy** and by the **noisy new forces of nationalist reason**, which were to cause the nations of Europe to clash with a barbarity ever seen.

Pasquale Paoli understood that by instituting the **idea of secularism in the Corsican Constitution**, he was proclaiming that the men and women of his people were free and equal, because secularism is freedom!

Thanks a lot for listening.

* **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** wrote in ***The Social Contract*** in 1762: *“There is still one people in Europe capable of legislation, and that is the Island of Corsica. The valour and constancy with which this brave people has recovered and defended its freedom would well deserve that some wise man teach them how to preserve it. I have a premonition that one day this small island will astonish Europe.”*



State interference in Muslim worship in Belgium

Yves Eeckman
CLP-KVD



Since the creation of the Belgian state, public funding of religious denominations has been justified primarily by their supposed «*social utility*», but in fact by their central role in ensuring public order and social control. As a result of the secularisation of society, this security role has faded over time. However, it is making a strong comeback in relation to Muslim worship: for several decades now, the authorities have been doing their utmost to organise Muslim worship, against «Muslim» cults, outside «Muslim» cults, in the name of the fight against terrorism. For the CLP-KVD, it is up to Muslims to organise their own cults, like all cults.

What's more, wanting to create an Islam of Belgium or an Islam in Belgium is in itself a contradiction, in that it contravenes the Separation of Church and State.

The latest moves by the Minister of Justice in charge of religious affairs to regulate the Islamic faith are a violation of the autonomy of religious denominations enshrined in the Constitution. They illustrate that the Belgian State is **neither secular nor neutral**.

Since its recognition in 1974 (1), Islam has been the subject of several attempts to organise itself in Belgium under the leadership of different Ministers of Justice. It is hard to find a Minister of Justice who has not sought to «*domesticate*» Islam by borrowing **Bonaparte**'s method, for whom religions are useful in maintaining **social order**. But to do that, it was necessary to control the clergy and the organisation of religions. This is why, in addition to signing a concordat with **Pope Pius VII** for Catholic worship, **Bonaparte** imposed a hierarchical organisation in the form of a central **consistory** for the other denominations (Protestant and Jewish). (2)

Van Quickenborne after many others...

On 15 September 2022, **Vincent Van Quickenborne**, the current Minister of Justice responsible for religious affairs, withdrew the recognition of the **Executive of Muslims in Belgium** (EMB) as the representative body of the Islamic faith, and announced the appointment of a temporary body to deal with «*current affair*». Is the Minister also planning to set up a **Muslim Holy Sec**?

The neo-concordat temptation of various ministers

As a result, the various ministers in charge of religious affairs under the different governments have imposed and organised elections to elect a **General Assembly of Muslims in Belgium** responsible for electing an **Executive of Muslims in Belgium** (EMB), the official representative of the religion to the public authorities. In doing so, they were granted the land, financial and other advantages of the Belgian system for funding religious denominations.

Candidates AND elected representatives had to be endorsed by **State Security** (3). At the same time, the creation in 2017 by **J.C. Marcourt** (**Socialist Party**), Minister for Higher Education, of the **Institute for the Promotion of Training in**

Islam - dubbed the «*Marcourt Institute*» by the sharp tongues! - and the **creation of a Council of Theologians** within the **EMB** by the clerical **Koen Geens (CD&V)**, show that it is no longer just a question of interfering in the internal organisation of the Islamic faith, but also of intervening in the content of the religion. In other words, to control **Islam**, and in reality to try to impose real public supervision on this religion.

It is therefore by modelling themselves on **Bonaparte**'s action that the various governments have been working for over thirty years to organise **Islam** in spite of itself, by setting up an authentic consistory structure for Muslim worship. This interference in Islamic worship is part of a neo-colonial concept (4) that prevailed during colonialism: «*whoever has the Imams and controls them, has the people*» (5).

Is the Minister planning to convene a Council of Islam?

The most recent positions and decisions of the federal government, in particular those concerning the right to control who can be a member of the **EMB**, the (announced) appointment of a temporary body to handle «*day-to-day business*» within the **EMB**, the feminisation of the **EMB**, transparency, etc., raise the question of its compatibility with the principle of organisational and «convictional» autonomy, to which religious denominations and all other associations are entitled under articles 19 and 21 of the Constitution and the Federal Constitution. (6) raise the question of its compatibility with the principle of organisational and «convictional» autonomy, to which religious denominations and all other associations are entitled under articles 19 and 21 of the **Constitution** and **article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights** (ECHR). The very principles of absolute **freedom of conscience** and **freedom of association** are being flouted here.

Such interference in the constitution of the **representative body of a faith**, and this desire to control theological orientation, have never been used, at least to this extent, to organise the representation of other faiths or non-confessional convictions (8).

The justifications put forward by the Minister are not without surprise: combating the risk of foreign interference, feminising the **EMB**... The Minister is quick to forget that it was the various governments that organised the **EMB** on an ethnic basis and placed it under the control of **Turkey** and **Morocco**. Yet the attitude of the Minister and his predecessors is less suspicious of other faiths in this respect, for example the Roman Catholic faith.

Specific controls for Islamic worship

Need we remind you that in 1831 the **Roman Catholic Church** demanded and obtained the right, under Article 21 of the **Constitution**, «*to correspond with their superiors and to publish their acts...*», which is the recognition of Roman (**Vatican**) pre-eminence over worship; that bishops are appointed by the **Pope** and that the **Bishops' Conference** is subject to the Pope, the head of a foreign organisation? An organisation whose many servants are in trouble with the law. Need we remind you that there is no requirement for the feminisation of other faiths? By what right and on the basis of what legal text?...

There is no doubt that if the case were referred to the **ECHR**, it would find that this constituted unequal treatment and discrimination in relation to the other religions and philosophies present on Belgian territory, since the **Belgian State** does not claim to govern them, even though it funds them massively.

The implicit message is clear: «*we need an Islam in Belgium*», one that is «*democratic and modern*» to the **Government**'s liking and that would engage in useful dialogue with the public authorities. In other words, a Muslim religion that corresponds to the wishes of the political authorities.

Islam, like other religions, in accordance with the freedom of religion, is entitled to its place **IN** Belgium. To want it **IN** Belgium is a nostalgia for the colonial powers who tried to impose a religion that suited them.

Unable to play this card of the past today, successive governments have resorted to communitarianism, which in fact takes certain detours from the treatment of colonial Islam (9).

Religions and associations of all kinds must be free to organise themselves according to their own principles, as laid down in the **Constitution** and the law. Interference by any political power in religions and associations is unacceptable and contrary to democracy.

The path of secularism

It is not up to the State, or its administration, to decree what is «*good Islam*» or to disqualify «*bad Islam*», or «good» or «bad» Muslims. This is a **concordat** and **Bonapartist** approach to interference in religious matters. This is totally contrary to the principles of separation of Church and State, which the Minister of Justice himself (sic) even dares to claim in a timely and cynical manner (10).

If a religion spills over into the public sphere, the State must mobilise the coercive potential of ordinary law. The provisions of common law are sufficient to repress all liberticidal, segregationist... manifestations of any religion.

For the **Libre Pensée**, there is no such thing as a good or bad religion. They are an explanation of the world that runs counter to rationalism and the role of the human being on the road to emancipation. But at the end, the controversies surrounding the **Muslim faith** only serve to interfere with the real debates on **institutional secularism** and the **separation of Church and State**.

For the CLP-KVD, there is no reason to make a distinction between different religions when it comes to the «Separation of Church and State». All monotheistic religions are theocratic in essence. This is true of Catholicism, Judaism and Islam.

It's a question of proclaiming and mobilising for the secularity of the State and its neutrality - its indifference - towards everyone's beliefs and unbeliefs. This is guaranteed by the principle of the strict **separation of Church and State**, and the **secularity of the State** in its relations with citizens.

We must therefore denounce the actions of this government, but even more so we must campaign to ensure that the State in the broadest sense neither recognises nor subsidises churches and religions, and puts an end to religion classes in state schools and the funding of so-called «*free*» faith schools.

Defending secularism means demanding the repeal of the articles of the **Constitution**, laws and decrees that authorise the funding of religious denominations and denominational schools.

(1) The first bill recognising the «*Mohammedan religion*» (sic) in Belgium was tabled in Parliament by CD MPs in 1971&. The law was not passed until 1974.

(2) In the **politico-religious** sphere, a concordat is an agreement between the **Holy See** for the Catholic Church (the spiritual power) and a **sovereign state** (the temporal power) concerning ecclesiastical organisation and relations between church and state. The territories that made up Belgium in 1830 were French from 1794 to 1814 and Dutch from 1815 to 1830. These territories were subject to two Concordats, firstly the one signed the day after the coup d'état of 18 Brumaire between **Bonaparte, the First Consul, and Pius VII**, and then the one signed between William I, King of the Netherlands. The Concordat, signed by Bonaparte and the Holy See, recognised the Catholic Church as the religion of the «*vast majority of French people*»; provided for the appointment of bishops by the Head of State (article 14); granted a financial stipend to bishops and parish priests; required bishops and priests to swear an oath of loyalty to the Government (articles 6 and 7)...

(3) This «screening» (investigation by State Security) was carried out in the absence of any legal framework, which was only established by the law of 27 May 2005. There is no procedure for the representation of other faiths.

(4) J.P. Schreiber «*Gestion de l'Islam : un néo-gallicanisme ?*» 2015, Site Orela ULB

(5) **Fédération nationale de la Libre Pensée (FNLP)**: «*Débattre rationnellement de l'Islam*». Arguments

(6) A letter from the Minister of Justice to the President of the **Executive of Muslims of Belgium (EMB)** clearly indicates that, for the Minister, **Salah Echallaoui's** continued presidency of the EMB constitutes an obstacle to the recognition of a local Islamic community. Trib. Brussels, 1 September 2022, 21/2953/A, § II.1.2, p. 7-8.

(7) «*Freedom of worship, freedom of public worship and freedom to hold opinions on all matters are guaranteed [...] (art. 19); «The State has no right to intervene in the appointment or installation of ministers of any religion, nor to prevent them from corresponding with their superiors [...] (art. 21) ;*

(8) The only interventions recorded concern the organisation of Anglican worship in 1875 and the replacement of the Synod of the United Protestant Church of Belgium by a body extended to the evangelical churches.

(9) Organisation of Islamic worship entrusted to the **Islamic and Cultural Centre of Belgium (CICB)**; candidates classified ethnically, elections conducted via mosques, etc.

(10) «*The Minister calls on the Muslim community in our country to organise itself in a transparent, independent and pluralist manner, on the basis of religious freedom and the democratic and free nature of our society. Within the framework of the separation of Church and State, only religious communities are in a position to create a representative body as an interlocutor with the government.*» **RTBF**

The 1979 agreements between Spain and the Holy See. a concordat behind the scenes

Pablo G. Toral Europa Laica, Spain
Red by José Arias



The (non) religiosity of Spanish society

Spain has the reputation of being a very religious state, mainly Catholic. This is a long-standing cliché, but recent statistics do not corroborate it. The **secularization of Spanish society** has advanced enormously despite the great reluctance of the **Catholic Church** (which has tried to maintain its historical dominance as much as possible) to adapt to the contemporary reality of the country.

This process of secularization has accelerated greatly in the last twenty years. During this period, the proportion of religious marriages has dropped from over **75% to less than 20%**. Baptism is also declining, with less than half of all newborns now passing through the baptismal font. The number of people claiming to be Catholic

has also declined, from **77% in 2006 to 53% in 2023**. Practicing Catholics now represent less than **20% of the population** and non-believers and agnostics now exceed **40%**. This trend is even more pronounced among young people aged 18 to 24, with almost **60%**.

However, Spanish institutions are reluctant to move towards secularism. For centuries, Spain has maintained an **exclusive confessionalism** and the powers of the State have imposed the obligation to practice the Catholic religion. This complicity between the public and religious powers was maintained almost until the end of the 20th century, with extremely brief periods of **Church-State separation** (such as the **Second Republic: 1931-1936**). During the four decades of State Catholicism imposed by the **Franco dictatorship**, freedom of conscience was suppressed and generous privileges were granted to the **Catholic Church** in economic, educational and cultural matters, legal matters and assistance to the armed forces. The four agreements signed between the **Spanish State** and the **Holy See** in January 1979, which constitute a de facto **concordat** and which will be the focus of this paper, are structured around these four axes.

However, before going deeper into the implications of these agreements, we will briefly summarize the successive concordats in Spain.

Historical review of concordats in Spain

Spain has what could be considered its first concordat in the agreements of the **Council of Constance**, celebrated in 1418. However, in our country, the first agreement that officially receives the name of concordat is the one signed by King **Fernando VI** and Pope **Benedict XIV** in 1753. Its text focuses only on matters related to the Royal Patronage and does not affect other aspects of the relations **between Church and State**. Some minor agreements signed by successive kings (**Carlos III** and **Carlos IV**) were added to it, but it was not until a century later that a **concordat** directly affecting the country's domestic policy was signed.

In the first part of the 19th century there were numerous disagreements between the **Spanish State** and the **Catholic Church**, as a result of the rise of the liberal movement and the *desamortizaciones* (confiscation of ecclesiastical properties). In order to reestablish Church-State relations, the Concordat of 1851 was signed, in which important concessions were made: the Catholic Church was recognized as the sole Church of the Spanish nation and the issue of the confiscations was settled by recognizing the right of the Church to acquire and own property. This treaty allows the Catholic Church to recover the ideological and social power it had been losing in previous decades.

In addition, the **Spanish State** undertakes to financially support religious worship, it is obliged to ensure that public and private instruction conforms to the doctrine of the Catholic religion and the Catholic Church is allowed to maintain its right to censorship and its own jurisdiction over its members. It is difficult to understand why such an agreement so little advantageous for Spain was signed, except if one takes into account the consideration that the monarchy received: the

recognition of **Isabel II** as the legitimate queen of Spain in the face of the pretensions of the **Carlist movement**, which sought the rise of an alternative branch of the **Bourbons** to the Spanish throne and had already caused two civil wars (1833-1840 and 1846-1849).

The revolution of 1868, after which **Isabel II** went into exile in France, led to the signing of a **Constitution** (1869) that finally recognized **freedom of worship and conscience**, although without repealing the existing **Concordat**. But this advance was ephemeral, because the **restoration of the Bourbons** on the throne (with **Alfonso XII**, son of **Isabel II**) led to the approval of a **confessional Constitution** (1876).

These brief advances followed by serious setbacks were repeated even more tragically in the 20th century. Thus, after the new exile of the **Bourbons** in 1931, the approval of the **Constitution of the Second Republic** meant that the **Concordat of 1851** was assumed to have been repealed. Five years later, the Church supported the coup d'état that led to the Civil War (1936-1939) and the **Franco dictatorship**. In exchange for this support, a State Catholicism was established, which allowed the signing of the **Concordat of 1953**.

In it, ecclesiastical privileges were consolidated in the field of education, which considerably limited the creation of a **free conscience**, since the study of Catholic religion and morals was obligatory. Despite the fact that we are in the second half of the 20th century, this concordat includes such anachronistic principles as «**The Catholic, Apostolic and Roman religion continues to be the only religion of the Spanish nation**» or «**The State recognizes the Catholic Church as a perfect society**». An ideology that should belong to the private sphere thus invaded the public sphere, since the **concordat** also regulated, among other things, ecclesiastical censorship.

Some of the contents of the **1953 Concordat** seemed aberrant for the Church that had emerged from the Second Vatican Council. In addition, new democratic times were foreseen in Spain, which led to the renewal of this treaty after the death of the dictator in 1975.

The four Agreements of 1979

Contacts between the **Spanish State** and the **Holy See** began as early as 1976 with a first Framework Agreement, which sought to establish «*a healthy collaboration between the parties*» on «*matters of common interest*». However, taking into account «the Catholic majority of the Spanish people». As a first step, the Head of State would cease to appoint **archbishops** and **bishops** and the **clergy** would be subject to civil jurisdiction.

The path towards the 1979 Agreements began, which barely touched some key elements for the ecclesiastical power: the ideological, with the presence of the Church in teaching, and the economic, maintaining privileges in terms of financing and taxation. The negotiation of these agreements took place under a **total obscurantism** and with the criteria of a government that was still pre-constitutional, conservative and with national Catholic roots.

Thus, this negotiation took place in parallel to the drafting and approval of the **democratic constitution**, which came into force on December 29, 1978. The **agreements** were signed only a few days later, on January 3, 1979. This seems to be the origin of the serious contradictions in the **Spanish Constitution** in religious matters, which allow for different interpretations. Unfortunately, successive democratic governments have always favored the confessional reading.

The consequences of the 1979 Agreements

1) Interference in education

The «concordat» of 1979 has had a strong impact on Spanish society, with collateral effects on public education. The agreement on education and cultural affairs has favored doctrinal interference in schools, since it establishes the obligation to teach the **Catholic religion** in non-university centers. It also requires that teaching in public schools be respectful of **Christian ethics**, even if this means including obsolete dogmas that conflict with **human rights** and science. The content of the subject of religion is ideologically contaminated and is not determined by the Ministry of Education, but by the Episcopal Conference. As a consequence, this subject is a focus of activities contrary to **freedom of conscience** and **children's rights** (the organization of religious processions in kindergartens is a clear example). Moreover, the teachers in charge of the course are selected by the bishops, but their salaries are paid by the State.

2) Embezzlement of public funds

According to the 1979 Agreements, Spain was to guarantee the subsidy to the Catholic Church until it was self-financing: that is, until it «achieved by itself sufficient resources to meet its needs». 44 years later, the Church has not fulfilled its part of the treaty nor has it justified the lack of progress towards self-financing. Thus, the activity report currently presented by the **Spanish Episcopal Conference** does not justify the amounts received and their use. This was highlighted by the **Court of Auditors** in 2020, when it indicated, among other things, that there is an unjustified surplus.

Currently, **huge amounts of public funds** continue to be diverted to places of worship and to Catholic schools, media, hospitals or foundations. According to Europa Laica's calculations, the annual amount exceeds €11.6 billion. The generous tax exemptions add up to more than **2,000 million €/year** by avoiding the payment, among others, of inheritance, transfer or gift taxes. Nor are taxes paid on the sale of tickets (euphemistically called «donations») of cathedrals, museums and other buildings of historical-artistic importance and tourist use. Exemption from the payment of any kind of taxes, with the exception of value added tax (VAT), applies both to the **Catholic Church** and to all its organizations. One implication of this is that, in numerous cases, they are not paying real estate tax even on buildings that house lucrative economic activities, such as hotels. These exemptions therefore constitute state aid contrary to the EU Treaty and would require a European reaction.

The agreement on economic matters has very special clauses, such as compensation to the **Catholic Church** in the event of tax changes that force it to pay certain taxes. This clause was applied in 2008 to compensate for the application of VAT. In exchange for starting to pay this tax, the amount that Spaniards can allocate to the Catholic Church in their tax return was increased to 0.7%. This is not extra money to be paid by Catholics, but amounts that are taken from the **General State Budget**, that is, from all citizens regardless of their beliefs.

3) Privileges to a sector of society and anachronistic institutions

The **Spanish Catholic Church** has a special legal regime that allows it a civil legal personality outside the common system of associations. Thus, Catholic marriage has civil effects and the State recognizes the inviolability of the places of worship, archives and documents of the Church. **Catholic chaplains** in hospitals, universities and prisons are paid **by the State**. Those serving in the armed forces also have military rank (colonel, major, captain, lieutenant, etc.) and are also paid by the State. Public funds also finance the **Military Archbishopric**, an institution inherited from another time, whose members are «*half monks and half soldiers*», led by an archbishop appointed by the **king**, who enjoys the rank (and salary) of major general.

Assessments of the agreements from the point of view of Europa Laica

Article 16.3 of the **Spanish Constitution** states that «*No confession shall have a state character,*» but it also mandates the establishment of «*relations of cooperation with the Catholic Church,*» which calls into question the neutrality of the institutions. However, the Constitution does not establish how this cooperation should be, nor its scope or how to articulate it, and there may be multiple ways of doing so. For this reason, **the 1979 Agreements** were a way of prefixing this cooperation, establishing a game board in which ecclesiastical privileges would not be modified after the arrival of the democratic era.

The **1979 Agreements** have a clearly unconstitutional content because they violate religious freedom (by discriminating against non-religious options; article 16.1 of the **Constitution**), the non-confessional nature of the State (article 16.3), equality (article 14) and taxation (article 31).

The **1979 Agreements** have the characteristics of an **international treaty between states**. But what is agreed in the treaty does not have to do with international issues, but rather that one state intervenes in matters of domestic policy of the first, with the consequent loss of state sovereignty. Moreover, there is no reciprocity, since one of the parties receives benefits and the other only receives costs and obligations.

The last 40 years have shown that there is no political will in Spain to determine whether progress has been made in the commitment to self-financing of the **Catholic Church**. No government, not even the most progressive ones, has acted, despite the fact that the activity report of the **Spanish Episcopal Conference** does not comply with this objective or with the required transparency.

Furthermore, complicity could also be considered in the **judiciary**, given the judicial laxity in resolving this democratic distortion and questioning the unconstitutional effects of these agreements.

2023, election year

This year will be marked by the succession of municipal and autonomic elections (on May 28) and general elections (in December). However, there is no guarantee that real progress will be made in the **secularization of the State** and the **repeal of the Agreements**. It should be remembered that the **current coalition government** has not fulfilled the promises of its electoral program, which included measures of great importance for the **secular movement**, such as the approval of a *«law of freedom of conscience that guarantees the secularity of the State and its neutrality towards all religious confessions»*. In this regard, Europa Laica published its proposal for a freedom of conscience law by 2022, which is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and addresses all the issues outlined in this article, among many others.

For all these reasons, the Government seems to have abandoned its commitments to secularism and it seems highly unlikely that it will move towards the repeal of the **1979 Accords**, so that civil affairs, which are by nature internal politics, will continue to be subordinated to the interests of a foreign confessional state.

Whoever governs, from **Europa Laica** we will not tire of denouncing these Agreements and the need for their repeal as an inexcusable and necessary condition to achieve a real and effective **freedom of conscience** and **secularism** in the **Spanish State**.



Clericalism against secularism in Latin America

Elbio Laxalte Terra spoke-person of IAFI



Hello everyone, and first of all I would like to thank the comrades of IAFI for their initiative and for giving me the opportunity to speak to you.

In **Latin America**, **clericalism** has been present since the arrival of the **conquerors**: let's remember that our continent was conquered by two ways: that of the **sword** and that of the **cross**. And during the colonial era, which lasted roughly from the 1500s to the first third of the 19th century, i.e. more than 300 years, the **Catholic Church** was a key institution in maintaining the structure of domination.

In the first third of the nineteenth century, under the influence of the new ideas of the **Enlightenment** and the **American and French revolutions**, the process of independence began. However, the nascent states inherited a **Catholic Church** that extended its temporal power and moral influence over the entire population thanks to privileges and wealth accumulated during centuries of conquest and colonisation.

After independence, the first **Constitutions** of the **new republics** generally proclaimed the Catholic religion to be the official religion of the State, but the governments sought ways of subjugating the **Church**.

The most radical republican sectors, comprising **freemasons**, freethinkers and certain **Protestant sectors**, fought for the **separation of Church and State**. However, this impetus was not always linear or free of conflict, culminating towards the end of the nineteenth century in an almost **generalised secularisation of the State** and the emancipation of the Church under a regime of freedom of worship.

However, **Catholicism** put up strong resistance to **secularisation** and the **separation of Church and State**, and where it was a powerful institution, it was able to ally itself with conservative political and economic forces, putting up resistance that even took the form of real and bloody civil wars, as in Mexico between 1858 and 1860 and in Colombia between 1876 and 1877. In **Mexico**, the anti-clerical reforms remained in force, but in **Colombia** they suffered a setback with the victory of the clerical camp.

In general, from around 1880 onwards, as the movement towards the secularisation of states and policies aimed at creating a citizenry identified with **republics** gained momentum, **the Church** began to adapt, strengthening its internal position and seeing the emergence of a social movement mobilised around Catholic ideals.

The laws on **civil marriage**, the **secularisation of cemeteries**, **civil registers** and the **secularisation of public education** were all propitious moments for highlighting the varying degrees of tension between civil and ecclesiastical rulers, which often resulted in weak compromises.

In this process, it was in **Uruguay** that the most profound progress was consolidated, with the completion of its reform processes with the **Constitution of 1919**, which applied the **complete separation of Church and State**. In this process, **free, compulsory and secular education** was established, abolishing all religious teaching in schools, as well as the law on divorce, the removal of all religious images from public buildings, the elimination of the **religious oath** from public

authorities, the abolition of **military chaplains**, the secularisation of religious holidays (for example, **Christmas** is called «*Family Day*», **Holy Week** is called «*Tourism Week*», etc.).

The twentieth century saw the hegemony of the Catholic presence maintained in Latin American societies, as well as a strong presence of religious content, even in institutional aspects. In several countries, for example, the authorities still take an oath «*before God and country*». Although there are no countries with an official religion, with the exception of **Costa Rica**, many institutional documents have an ambiguous inclination to recognise Catholicism as the predominant religion.

According to statistics, during the 20th century and up until the 1970s, Catholicism was hegemonic on the continent, accounting for around **94%** of adherence among the population, with the remaining **6%** going to other religions and non-believers.

Since then, however, there have been profound changes in people's religious preferences, not unrelated to the political, social and cultural movements of recent decades.

According to the latest figures for the year **2020**, on a continental scale, which is naturally made up of diverse national realities, **Catholicism** only represents **56%**, **Protestants** and other Christians have dropped to **24%**, and **non-believers and atheists** represent almost **19%** of the population. According to some estimates, atheists as such account for between **8 and 10%**.

Apart from this last point, the most relevant is the growth of **Protestantism** in general, but in particular of the **new evangelical currents**, which are the ones that have penetrated most deeply into the social fabric, with an innovative theological idea, dynamic social activism and remarkable adaptation to the environment, which has converted them into religious sectors that are gaining more and more presence every day. In some countries, their growth has been exponential.

It is interesting to note that this strong evangelical emergence is accompanied by the «*prosperity theology*» that provides the basic ideology for this great movement.

Prosperity theology is a controversial religious belief that holds that financial blessing and physical well-being are always *God's will*, and that faith, positive discourse and donations to religious causes will increase one's material wealth, because if humans have *faith in God*, he will give them security and prosperity.

This represents a notable difference from the **salvation theology of Catholic** and other more orthodox Christianities, where salvation will come after death and in the meantime we must submit to the fate reserved for us in this life.

But what is interesting is the interweaving and coincidences of **prosperity theology** with the prevailing individualistic and neo-mercantilist postmodern cultures.

Contrary to what one might think, this trend, by having a «*horizontal*» vision in relation to Catholic verticality, and being decentralised (there are coordinations between churches, but few hierarchies, depending on the different realities), has managed to achieve a powerful social implantation, particularly among poor and marginalised populations. They have been able to adapt to different cultural environments and have channelled many people's hopes for economic and social progress.

The important thing to understand is that this theology makes a shift towards independence and individual initiative, qualities required particularly in the informal economy. In addition, **Pentecostalism** rejects the European Christian approach to suffering as exemplary; instead, it sees suffering as something to be overcome, with little distinction between spiritual, physical and material well-being. In short, it offers salvation here and now, not in the hereafter.

Culturally, it emphasises the family, support for single women and/or victims of violence, support for the rehabilitation of young drug addicts, etc., and has a distinctly conservative cultural profile. They have also sought political representation, believing that **morally upright Christians** should be placed in government. These movements have created political parties, have parliamentary groups, and thanks to the tithes demanded of their faithful, they exert a surprising economic

movement, often even investigated by national tax authorities.

For its part, the **Catholic Church**, which has seen its ideological and political power diminish substantially, coupled with a decline in membership and vocations since the 70s of the last century, is nevertheless developing new tactics to maintain its hegemony and strengthen its presence.

It should be noted that although the **Catholic Church** was once allied to the more conservative sectors generally linked to the agrarian economy, since the 70s and 80s of the last century, **Liberation Theology** has begun to emerge within it, which focuses on the relationship between the Christian faith and the struggle for the liberation of the poor and oppressed. **Liberation theologians** argue that the **Church** must be active in the promotion of social and economic justice, and in the fight against oppression and exploitation.

This movement, which grew among oppressed social sectors, forged political alliances generally with the left and took part in the struggles against the dictatorships that flourished on the continent between the 60s and 80s of the twentieth century. This liberalised **Catholicism**, which ceased to act solely as the representative of the most conservative sectors, embracing other tendencies in a relationship that was not without conflict.

Today's **Catholicism** is acting through the policies implemented by Pope **Francis** of **re-evangelisation**, without focusing on any one sector in particular, but with an emphasis on those social sectors that are most in conflict with other religious currents.

To sum up, our continent has a 500-year tradition of Catholic influence and presence, now in decline. Various religious influences have emerged (other present orientations are Afro-American religions, Islamism and other minorities) and we are also witnessing a strong dispute for the spiritual, ideological and political control of its inhabitants, as well as a greedy search for power and wealth.

To achieve this, **churches and religious organisations** in general use a variety of instruments to exert their influence in society and penetrate political power. For example:

- **Social and political leadership:** many churches and religious organisations support and promote social or political leaders who share their values and beliefs. And vice versa, vote-hungry politicians forge alliances with churches.
- **Public awareness campaigns:** churches and religious organisations often run public awareness campaigns to promote their values and beliefs, which can include demonstrations, marches and mass media advertising campaigns. We have seen them against abortion, for example.
- **Social action:** many churches and religious organisations offer community services, such as soup kitchens, assistance programmes for the homeless and programmes to help the needy. They also encourage social entrepreneurship. These services are often used to attract people to churches and improve the image of churches in the community.
- **Influencing education:** some churches and religious organisations seek to influence education by setting up schools and educational programmes that promote their values and beliefs, particularly in poorer areas, often funded by companies.
- **Attempts to occupy public space** by installing religious images or religious activities, such as public masses.
- **Lobbying:** many churches and religious organisations have public relations and lobbying departments which work to influence political decisions and the formation of public policy. They promote what they call «positive secularism», which consists precisely in demanding that the **State** accept **churches** as social partners, and in this way receive public funding for their so-called «*socially useful*» activities.

All this strongly calls into question the **separation of Church and State** and challenges secularism in places where it is more or less respected.

For this reason, **freethinkers** and secularists have clearly indicated that we must continue to act, and even considerably

deepen our presence and our preaching in all sectors of social and political life. As we have seen, there is already a general social base of 20% of the population, made up of people with no religion, **atheists, agnostics and freethinkers**, who are to be found in all political sectors, which makes it possible to have strong support for dialogue with believers so that they understand that belief is a private matter for everyone, but that its interference with power is socially negative for the common good.

For this reason, **Latin American secularists** must continue to :

- Promote strict **separation of Church and State**, and ensure that there is no backsliding where this idea has progressed. This means carefully observing and analysing that government policies and decisions are not influenced by religious beliefs or values. It means opposing public funding of ecclesiastical works, even if they are masked by other objectives. It also means reconsidering the agreements and concordats that we also have with the **Vatican**.
- Another key aspect of combating the influence of religions in politics is to promote respect for the freedom to believe or not to believe. This means that all people have the right to practise or not practise a religion and that political decisions must not be influenced by religious beliefs.
- **Fight discrimination**: It is important that small religions feel protected by the law and are not discriminated against by hegemonic religions; and that non-believers are not discriminated against by institutions of belief.
- Advocate for public policies based on the **Common Good** and evidence: **Secularists and freethinkers** must work to promote policies based on reason rather than religious belief or dogma. In this context, they provide openings for new rights, legislating on issues such as **eutanasia or assisted suicide, same-sex marriage and the legalisation of abortion**.
- Paying attention to practices such as the inappropriate funding of religious institutions and allegations of paedophilia, particularly in Catholic circles.
- And finally, the most active possible **political and social participation** to promote policies that favour the separation of Church and State, the freedom to profess the religion of one's choice or not, and equality between citizens based on a rational and consensual common good.

Thank you very much, I remain at your disposal.

The Wealth of Religious Institutions in Lebanon

Georges Saad



Introduction

As I often say (April 16, 2016 **free thought** conference) whatever the subject on which a **Lebanese** would intervene, he finds himself obliged to go back, so much does he think that the history of **Lebanon** is not well known or for him to restore himself. Let's go back: Since its independence (1943) **Lebanon** has not experienced long periods of stability. *God* could not do anything despite the insistence of the saints that **Lebanon** is a country-message.

In 1990 we signed the **Taef agreement** which put an end to the fratricidal war. This war continued with other forms. Since August 4, 2020 after the

third largest explosion in history after **Hiroshima** and **Nagasaki**, which killed **220 people** in Beirut, injured more than 6,500 without counting the thousands of displaced people, we still do not know who is responsible. We have been without a President of Republic for several months. The nature of the conflict is very complicated: interweaving of various elements where denominational affiliation, religion, subservience to religious regimes... all of this must be counted.

The religious is rather a facade, a shameful division

The religious is rather a facade hiding very political wills and a passion for domination. God is used as a tool of power. The country is currently divided between two poles, one pro-Iran, anti-Israel, pro-Russian and the other pro-Western, pro-France, pro-American and Gulf countries. Inside, community tensions persist between **Christians and Muslims**, but also between **Shiites and Sunnis**.

The revision of the **Lebanese Constitution**, carried out by the **constitutional law of September 21, 1990**, announced a process of suppression by stages of the system of sharing of political power by the communities. 22 years later nothing has been done. Since the suppression of political confessionalism only from the sphere of the public service and political representative bodies, in a country where Muslims have become the majority on the demographic level, augurs bad intentions.

There is no civil marriage in Lebanon. Every year, thousands of Lebanese wishing to marry civilly embark for foreign countries, most of the time bound for Cyprus, France or Turkey. The Lebanese judge applies foreign civil law. Extreme aberration. It applies a law that the legislator refuses to vote. A very paradoxical situation.

The religious rob the lebanese state

Let us now return to the theme of this beautiful Conference, as for all the activities organized by Free Thought, "*Ending with the Concordats in Europe and the established and official religions and the Churches' Earthly Goods and Advantages*" «. Surprise: there is a lot to say in Lebanon and much more than about the Concordats in Europe. The "**concordats**" system is an exception, whereas in **Lebanon** it is a **legal rule**, obvious, a commonplace reality, everywhere and always. Let's talk about the political and administrative cost on our public finances, resulting from the financial privileges granted to sects, and to certain legal or physical persons affiliated with them. **Lebanese religious institutions** of all denominations benefit from full and colossal tax exemptions, as well as donations from the Lebanese State (aid allocated in successive budgets for decades).

We want to say here that this sectarianism and these privileges granted to the turbaned continued at the economic level, and in particular in the **tax exemptions**, instead of canceling the evil and prejudicial decisions of the Sultan and the French Commissioner.

Of course, all these exemptions and financial aid (donations) from the State deprive the public treasury and the finances of the municipalities of significant revenues and sums of money which would be more useful if they were spent on the direction of the poor people.

Conclusion

I made a *«post»* on my facebook page today (February 7, 2023) where I say all the support, sadness and solidarity with the people afflicted in **Syria** and **Turkey** following this great earthquake. These are times when human sense must prevail over whatever remains. These are times that remind us that our space on this globe can crumble to dust at any moment of nature's wrath. And I end: This earthquake teaches two lessons to humanity: a lesson in humility for all arrogant people or person, and oh how many there are in our lagging **Arab world**; and a science lesson. Advance scientific understanding of our planet, its secrets and its activities. How does this relate to the subject of this article on religious institutions and finances? Well, all free thinkers have understood me very well.

Long live Free Thought!

Long live Solidarity among all peoples!

The Concordat in Italy

Maria Mantello, Présidente de l'Association de la Libre Pensée italienne « Giordano Bruno »
Communication red by Sylvie Midavaine



At the origin of the **Church** lay the scandal of the **Sermon on the Mount**. Today, the scandal lies in the mountain of billions that the **Vatican** accumulates thanks to the money collected from the taxes of Italian citizens, money paid to **Catholic schools**, money obtained thanks to exemptions from paying for electricity consumption and waste collection, money saved again thanks to the exemption from deducting contributions and taxes on the myriad of their lucrative commercial activities, billions untaxed on their tourism businesses (just think of the **Pilgrimage Charities**), on buildings owned by churches and used for commercial purposes, such as ex-convents and ex-colleges transformed into care homes, sports centres, rest homes, residences, boarding schools... not to mention luxury multi-star hotels. And these are just a few examples!

A political and economic powerhouse

So, the **Vatican** is certainly not poor, as the **Gospel** that inspires it would have us believe! Independently of the **IOR (Institute for the Works of Religion)** and the international affairs of the **Vatican Bank**, on the sole territory of the **Italian Republic**, the **Vatican** possesses an immense national patrimony. To take just the **Congregation of Propaganda Fide** in Rome, it owns some 795 buildings with nearly 2,000 offices and flats, with an estimated market value of 9 billion euros. And yet Italy, thanks to the **Concordat**, continues to be the **Vatican's** biggest financial provider, including in its desire to please it when it recognises its dictates on confessions, family, sexuality, reproduction, living wills, civil rights and so on!

The fascist Concordat

The economic, political, and social powers of the **Church** are inextricably linked to the incomplete separation of **Church and State**. **Mussolini**, the **atheist Mussolini**, stopped the struggle for this **separation** - a struggle led by the **post-Unità d'Italia** liberal ruling class - by offering the Church the **Patti Lateranensi**, in other words the **Concordat**, on 11 February 1929.

This included:

- A **treaty** proclaiming, *«the Catholic religion as the sole State religion»*. This treaty prohibited any *«interference by the Italian government in the Holy See»*, guaranteeing it *«absolute independence in the exercise of its mission»*. In so doing, the Italian State crystallised a structural resignation of its sovereignty.
- A **Concordat** to regulate *«the conditions for the exercise of religion and the Church in Italy»*, but in which all rights were vested in the **Holy See**.
- A **financial agreement**, the only one of its kind in history, in which the State, although victorious at Porta Pia (20 September 1870), undertook to compensate the Holy See for the *«loss of the patrimony of Saint Peter»*.

Basically, the State was apologising for having taken back Rome and put an end to the Church's temporal power, which, as everyone knows, was built on the historical forgery of the **«Donation of Constantine»**, a creation of the **Vatican curia** in the Middle Ages.

The **Concordat** was *«the alliance of the bludgeon and the sprinkler»*, as the **freethinker Ernesto Rossi** put it. Fascism sought the Papal blessing, which was useful in softening the masses' view of its totalitarianism, which had become so clear to the blind themselves following the assassination of **Giacomo Matteotti**, ordered by **Mussolini**; The Church was realising its old theocratic dream, thanks also to the annuities that the Italian state had guaranteed it, and which the **Mussolini**

government inaugurated by paying the **Vatican 750,000 million lire** in coin (around 600,000 million euros), to which it added «*a gift of goods with a nominal value of 1 billion lire (around 800,000 euros)*».

Pius XI could then exult and exclaim: «*We needed a man like the one Providence has brought Us!*»

The process of secularisation is blocked

The **Lateran Accords** were launched by the «*providential man*» as an act of regularisation of the «**Roman Question**» (political controversy over the status of Rome, as being both the seat of the Pope's temporal power and the capital of the Kingdom of Italy) (Editor's note). We are talking about the «**Roman Question**» for which **Garibaldi** and so many patriots died in their fight to conquer Rome, the «**Roman Question**» which, for the young Kingdom of Italy, from the moment it was proclaimed (1861), had meant the achievement of a unified Italy, the «**Roman Question**» that the **Concordat** now renamed «*compensation*», reversing history.

If we were really talking about «*compensation*» («**risarcimento**»), the Kingdom of Italy had already given concrete expression to this in the «**Law of Guarantee**» («*Legge delle garantigie*») of 13 May 1871, by which the **Vatican** became sovereign in the area that it had granted itself, a law that recognised the **Papacy's** exemptions from contributions as well as the ownership of numerous real estate assets, also guaranteeing it some **3,225,000** reindexed annual lire for the maintenance of the clergy. A stratospheric sum for the time!

In republican Italy

Fascism collapsed, but its **Concordat** remained, a dark stain on the **Republican Constitution**; even though the **Concordat** was not an integral part of the constitutional text, but was only mentioned, as recalled in 1971 by article no. 30 of the **Constitutional Court**, which states that «*the Concordat cannot have the power to evade the supreme principles of the constitutional order of the State*». This means that the application of the **Concordat** is subordinate in all circumstances and at all times to the secularity of the State, as the supreme constitutional law!

And this last question is very often - and quite willingly - put aside by politicians.

The Craxi Concordat

In 1984, the **Concordat** was renewed at the instigation of the head of government, **Bettino Craxi**, who was committed to the socio-political reconstruction of the post-68 era. This was why it offered the Church the opportunity to regain ground lost in an increasingly secularised society, which had managed, thanks to its struggles, to obtain civil laws: from divorce to the legalisation of the contraceptive pill, via family law, voluntary termination of pregnancy and the status of workers' rights...

In this context, the **Concordat** itself was considered outdated and there was a growing movement in the country for its abrogation, including among Catholics themselves.

Against this trend, the **Craxian revival** offered the Church a formidable springboard to resume its work of penetrating Italian society by «*recognising the principles of Catholicism as an integral part of the historical heritage of the Italian people*». It was a formulation that fully legitimised the indirect sovereignty that the **Mussolini Concordat** had granted to the **Vatican**, but also established a relationship of parity between the State and the Church in «*reciprocal collaboration for the promotion of the individual and in the interests of the country*».

This «*promotion of the individual*» confirmed the idea that the identity of the human being was founded in that of the Catholic being, and this is what authorises the Church, from **Saint Paul** to the present day, to display its universalism.

With the **Craxian revision** of the Concordat, the emancipation of our Republic from the **Vatican**, which the real country had been calling for, was once again moving further away.

The Catholic religion, soul of the State?

The Catholic religion was no longer considered to be the religion of the Italian State (as had been expressly established), but the State paradoxically made the Catholic religion an integral part of the people.

The Church was recognised as the support of the nation, of national identity, of every citizen. An ideological fallacy.

After the new «*providential man*», others came, anointed by *the Lord*. They rush forward and continue to do so, followed by their cohort of little stirrers of sprinklers full of holy oil, to distribute ever more privileges, raining money down on the Vatican Church.

For example, consider the parity system for education introduced in 2000, which authorised the funding of public schools, reclassifying them as «*parity*» schools. This was a legal paradox (or rather a trickery) that made it possible to circumvent the **Constitution**, which gives **State schools** their own constitutional body. In fact, article 33 of the Constitution stipulates that public schools are to be excluded from any State funding.

Remember the introduction of tenure in 2003 for teachers of the Catholic religion, who, while continuing to be entirely dependent on their respective bishoprics, except of course for their state-funded salaries, which are higher than those of other teachers, can now move into other disciplines and management positions.

In short, the infinite ways of the Lord go through... Vatican clientelism!

Out of our pockets

The new **Concordat of 1984**, as soon as it was promulgated, revealed the State's insolent favouritism, if only through two brutal mechanisms: the tax deduction from Italians' income tax in favour of the **Catholic Church** (the famous 8%) and the optional teaching of religion (IRC - Insegnamento della Religione Cattolica).

The first of these two shameless mechanisms, worthy of a perverse crook, known as the 8%, passed off as democratic the fact that part of the income tax was earmarked for the Church of one's choice. In truth, the winner is the **Catholic Church**, thanks to the introduction of the magic formula of «*la parvenza garantista*». It states that: «*In the event of a choice of Church not expressed by the taxpayer, the destination will be determined on the basis of the majority of the choices expressed*». So even if only **30%** of Italians choose the Catholic Church, this minority, which represents the majority of the choices made, means that the **Roman Catholic Church** is able to pocket **90%** of the entire **8%** in an exponential multiplication of money that currently amounts to more than a billion euros every year.

Contrary to what the **Italian Bishops' Conference's** advertising campaigns cleverly suggest, the money is essentially used to maintain the clergy and their structures. This includes maintaining the structures that harbour the most despicable scandals, from the **Vatican Bank** to clerical paedophilia.

Taking over schools

The second of the two mechanisms highlighted here concerns catechism lessons in state schools, which, like the **8%** mechanism mentioned above, are presented as a free choice. On the contrary, it has given rise to epic religious wars in schools, with the Judiciary intervening, even going as far as the **Constitutional Court**, simply to authorise those who did not choose to attend this IRC («*Insegnamento della Religione Cattolica*», Teaching of the **Catholic religion**), not to be sequestered in class while their classmates attended God's hour.

However, the **Supreme Court** clarified this point by confirming not only the legitimacy of not attending the catechism hour, but also any teaching presented as an alternative to it (judgment no. 203 of 1989). And judgment no. 13 of 1991 formally establishes that the so-called «*non-compulsory*» status is not only non-negotiable but must remain within the school premises.

It is interesting to note that today, especially in higher education establishments (highschools), entire classes have refused to attend these IRCs. And yet - mystery of faith? - those who teach them are on the increase! And proposals are being made to include the subject «*Science of Religions*» in secondary schools. Could this be a move to make the Catholic religion compulsory?

What is to be done?

To get away from all these Vatican colonisation operations, there's only one thing to do: **the Concordat must be repealed**. And that is why we are still fighting, despite everything.

This **Convention**, my dear **freethinker friends**, strengthens us in this common battle to finally achieve the **separation between Churches and States**, to build a world without dogmas or bosses. And it is the Church that possesses both vices, that of dogmatism and that of totalitarianism.

Is the Orthodox Church the official religion in Greece?

by Stratos Kalaitzis, president of the Association “Hypatia’s Friends”



An **official religion** is a religion with legal status and recognition in a State.

State religion can also be considered as a form of official religion. «Official religions» correspond to the limited number of them to which the State provides a legal framework, for example of concordatary type, and possibly institutional or financial support. The State thus facilitates the practice of official religions to the detriment of unofficial religions, whose worship can be limited or even prohibited.

In Greece today, the **Orthodox religion** is the ‘prevailing’ religion in the sense of being the ‘majority’ and more or less ‘privileged’ one.

The Greek Constitution of 9 June 1975, which is still valid today, begins with the sentence «*In the name of the Holy and Consubstantial and Indivisible Trinity*».

Article 3 of the Constitution states:

The prevailing religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ.

First of all, we consider that sacred texts are quite inappropriate in a constitutional law.

But, beware...

The reference to the «prevailing religion» was included into the **Constitution** as the **basis for the specific relationship of the Church with the State**, the title of **Article 3** being «*Relations of Church and State*».

This means that the specific relationship concerns the legal field and more specifically the autonomy, administration and regulation of the **Charter of the Church of Greece**, which was drawn up in 1850 and amended in 1928, which specifies that each religious administrative region, each bishopric is economically and administratively independent.

There is also a reference to the power of the **Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ** to allow only the official translation of the **Bible** in order to avoid inter-religious quarrels.

Therefore, Article 3 is only an administrative law article that has been included into the Constitution for a technical reason.

Article 5 states: *All persons living within the Greek territory shall enjoy full protection of their life, honour and liberty irrespective of nationality, race or language and of religious or political beliefs.*

Article 13 further states:

1. *Freedom of religious conscience is inviolable. The enjoyment of civil rights and liberties does not depend on the individual's religious beliefs.*
2. *All known religions shall be free and their rites of worship shall be performed unhindered and under the protection of the law. The practice of rites of worship is not allowed to offend public order or the good usages. Proselytism is prohibited.*
3. *The ministers of all known religions shall be subject to the same supervision by the State and to the same obligations towards it as those of the prevailing religion.*
4. *No person shall be exempt from discharging his obligations to the State or may refuse to comply with the laws by reason of his religious convictions.*

Therefore:

Articles 5 and 13 of the *Constitution* also guarantee freedom of religious conscience and prohibit proselytism. The question of whether Greece is an Orthodox State is a cultural and historical consideration and not a constitutional rule, since the *Constitution* does not impose religious beliefs on the people, but reserves for specific historical reasons a special administrative relationship between the State and the Orthodox Church.

Article 16-2 states:

Education constitutes a basic mission for the State and shall aim at the moral, intellectual, professional and physical training of Greeks, the development of national and religious consciousness and at their formation as free and responsible citizens.

In a recent decision of the **Council of State** in 2018 (the publication of this judgment was, however, accompanied by **reservations from some judges and by minority opinions**) **mainly employing the so-called prevailing religion clause, the Supreme Administrative Court** emphasised that the main objective of religious education in schools must be the presentation of the doctrines, moral values and traditions of the Orthodox Christian religion, i.e. **it expressly recognised the preservation of the denominational character of the course as a constitutional obligation.**

Therefore, let us go back to the issue of **compulsory religious education in schools**. *Constitution* itself seems effectively make this teaching compulsory. It is therefore a constitutional obligation of the legislator as well as of the competent minister to ensure that the subject is included in the school curriculum and is taught adequately.

The **1975 Constitution** establishes a network of rules which, although preserving a servility of the State, allows for a sufficiently open interpretation of the relevant rules. Given the establishment of freedom of religious conscience, but also the fact that popular sovereignty is defined as the foundation of the state, the preponderant view in theory and jurisprudence is that the provision establishing the **Greek Orthodox Church** as the prevailing religion does not invest an official status of state religion, but establishes an empirical fact of a majority religion among the citizens.

So in Article 16-2, for instance, the statement that the development of religious consciousness is the aim of education should not be interpreted as a provision guaranteeing the compulsory teaching of religious subjects with a confessional content (as is the case today), nor even as an obligation to orient children formally towards the divine.

According to both the rule on the formation of free and responsible citizens and the one on religious freedom, developing the religious awareness of children means the acquisition of knowledge about all religions, because of the importance of the religious phenomenon in its historicity, so that they can develop their own religious awareness. The constitutional aim of education is broad-mindedness, not indoctrination, and this constitutional aim is currently ignored.

The main problem is therefore not so much the constitutional provisions themselves, but the state policy. Moreover, on the basis of the case law of the **European Court of Human Rights**, which leaves a great deal of latitude to states in defining the relationship between church and state, even if the dominant religion were not constitutionally enshrined, the mere sociological fact of its predominance could establish the possibility for the state to impose restrictions on constitutionally guaranteed rights in order not to offend the religious feelings of citizens.

In our country, legislative rules remain captive to the historical Church-State relationship involving results that create enormous contradictions and conflicts with the existence of freedom of religious conscience.

Even after **Law 4301/2014**, aiming in its explanatory statement to homogenise the legal personality of religious communities, a multi-speed system of religions is in reality established. Thus the **Church of Greece**, the **Israelite Communities** and the «**Muslim Communities**» are organised as **Public Law Legal Entities**, the other **Churches** specifically targeted by the law are recognised directly as Private Law Legal Entities such as the **Catholic, Anglican, Ethiopian, Evangelical, Coptic Orthodox and Armenian Churches**, while all the others have to submit relevant applications under a system of insurmountable obstacles.

Besides, the salary of the **Greek Orthodox Church's** clergy is set in such a way that, through taxation, believers of other faiths or **atheists** are obliged to finance its functioning. It is worth noting that the provisions that instituted a special tax-

tion of the church's income of **25%** and then **35%** as compensation for the State's taking over the salaries of its clergy have been abrogated and thus today the taxation of the church includes the Property Tax, the Special Extraordinary Fee of the Agglomerations and the Tax on the Income from Commercial Leases. The result is that today the cost of the wage bill amounts to about 193 million euros per year, while the income from taxation is 3.5 million. Moreover, the recognition of the **Church's clergy** as public officials implies that the State, through the taxation of all Greeks, also finances the clergy's inflammatory (intolerant and sometimes openly racist) rhetoric against citizens who do not share the same faith or who have a sexual identity that is unacceptable to them.

According to the writer **Michalis Kalopoulos**, religion, by its nature and position, has every reason to prevent complete historical knowledge. By preventing the knowledge of history, it manages to preserve an available space in the popular imagination for its own religious mythologies. In fact, the recognition of the Church as a moral and national guardian unfortunately makes it a legitimate judge and administrator of historical truth.

The lack of historical consciousness, so strong in the Greek people, now presents extreme phenomena of historical amnesia. Almost none of today's Greek children even know where their first name '**Hellen**' comes from. We actually asked a large number of high school students and almost none of them knew that it came from the son of the antediluvian patriarch of the Greeks, **Deucalion** and his wife, Pyrrha.

According to the myth, **Hellen** had been saved with his family and many animals from a terrible flood thanks to his father's ark in which they had all found refuge. This myth was surprisingly completely forgotten by the people who still bear its name, the «Hellenes».

The **Greeks**, living under the yoke of their religious instruction, ignore it, while they all know Noah and the biblical flood. The Greeks, living under the yoke of their religious upbringing, ignore it, while everyone knows Noah and the biblical Flood.

What is religion in the end? Is it not, above all, an enemy of history and an arbitrary dictator of historical memory? The **religion of the Ancient Greeks** is born for one only reason, to answer the needs of understanding our world and not to give clerics and paid divine mediators a professional reason for existing.

Today, there are many who, with serious arguments, consider religion to be the most powerful brake on the intellectual elevation of people.

In ancient times, temples, theatres, schools, libraries, even markets, parliaments, gymnasiums and arcades, were all an indivisible cultural continuum.

But what has happened so that today the country rich of the world's greatest heroes and brightest ancestors is now under the domination of figures of another people's religious history?

Why do all **Greeks**, from the youngest to the oldest, know the Jewish Patriarchs of the **Old Testament**, such as **Abraham, Isaac, Jacob**, and ignore the names, existence and history of their great ancestral heroes?

Why does an old Greek woman invoke the names of the heroes of Jewish history almost every day and ignore the name of **Prometheus**?

All **Greeks** from the youngest to the oldest know **Noah**, while they ignore **Deucalion**, they know *Abraham* but have never heard of **Hellen**, the son of **Deucalion**.

This systematic replacement is the result of a spiritual ideological-religious colonisation that the **Greeks** have been undergoing for many centuries and which keeps the population in ignorance.

Through the legal proselytism of public education, Greek education insists on inculcating in the beautiful souls of young Greeks, not rationality, but the global sanctification of Jewish history and the insidious anathema of their ancient heritage. How is it that whole armies of intelligent people are speechless before the parade of religious excesses, stand-ing by and

watching this nonsense of religious propaganda of Jewish history?

Is it not a major act of enslavement of future generations by religious education, which imposes and implants these ancient Hebrew fairy tales into the heads of our own helpless children?

Teachers should reconsider their obligation to teach knowledge. It is impossible for any part of the educational community to watch passively the destruction of its own people. How long will this world of education put up with being the silent auxiliary of power?

Teachers are modern **Prometheus** and have to be the thieves of the forbidden knowledge. How long will these teachers remain silent in the face of the daily, brutal sacrifice of truth on the altar of religious rapacity? When will they realise that the days of absolute religious dictatorship are over? When you teach young children, you have constantly as aim to be a pedagogue and educator and not become an accomplice to their obscurantism. Teachers are the natural guardians of culture. Submitting just for the sake of a salary is the height of indignity for a teacher worthy of the name.

Imagine a nightmarish world in which, for the sake of pay, everyone would obediently carry out orders that increasingly distance our daily lives from human values. At the current rate of gradual renouncement concerning our dignity and of daily alienation, what will our children's world soon be like? If even teachers are so easily transformed into interest carriers, then, with good reason, future generations will judge our time as the worst and most unworthy one.

Why does biology teach us that it took millions of years for the human species to evolve and religion teach us that it all began with the divine creation of **Adam and Eve**?

Why, within school organizations and headmasters, are there always individuals in cassock validating or censoring the curriculum?

We are the laughing stock of Europe because of this coexistence of education and worship in the same ministerial building.

Moreover, according to our latest information on this subject, the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs is located in a building rented from the Church!

By way of conclusion :

The Association «*Hypathia's Friends*» in Greece, member of the **International Association of Free Thought**, which I represent, considers that «*the free man*» is more useful to society than «the chained man». He develops his critical mind in the interest of the society where he lives and works, whereas religion transforms man into a fearful, submissive, superstitious person, supposedly guilty of original sin and who will consequently find his salvation only after death.

The teaching of religion to Greek schoolchildren must stop.

Article 3 of the **Greek Constitution**, which states «*The prevailing religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ*» must be repealed.

Citizens elect politicians. Politicians make the laws of the State and theoretically power emanates from the people: divine law has no place in the **Constitution**.

Greece has unfortunately watched the **Renaissance**, **Rationalism**, *the Enlightenment* and **Humanism** from afar, due to the **Ottoman occupation** during four centuries.

The remnants of the **theocracy** are gradually diminishing under the pressure of the population, which is moving further and further away from beliefs.

The Church must pay its clergy and respect the tax laws like any other citizen.

The **separation of Church and State** is for us the cornerstone of our demands. This separation must take place within the

framework of negotiations for mutual interest, as is the case in divorce proceedings.

In 2005, the parliamentary group of the **Greek Communist Party** together with the **Synaspismos Party**, now **Syriza**, together with two independent deputies, tabled a bill prepared by the **Greek Union of Human and Citizen Rights** providing for the **separation of Church and State**, the cremation of the deceased and other social advances. This proposal was rejected by the right-wing Parliament.

We supported this bill and consider nowadays that this struggle must be pursued.



The Reich Concordat of 1933

Carsten Frerk

Membre du Conseil international de l'AILP



Motto: «*The end justifies the means*»
(Niccolò di Bernardo de Machiavelli)

Before we look at the **Reichskonkordat of 1933**, a brief look back and at the prehistory.

The defeat of the **German Empire** and the end of the monarchies in Germany with the end of **World War I** (1918/19) hit the **Catholic Church** hard. The great bastion in Central Europe seemed lost. It meant the end of the «*unity of throne and altar*», the end of kings and the emperor «*by the grace of God*».

It was a long road of victory, domination and loss:

380 CE : Emperor **Theodosius** elevates the

Trinitarian variant of Christianity to state religion.

800 : The **Pope** crowns and anoints **Charlemagne** Emperor in Rome. The Emperor kneels, the Pope stands: a power struggle begins.

1077: Emperor **Henry IV** submits to the Pope in **Canossa**.

1520: Emperor **Charles V**, in whose empire «*the sun never set*» - the Roman Church at the height of power.

1517-1555: **Reformation** in Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands. The European North is lost to the **Catholic Church**.

1536: **Henry VIII** establishes the **Anglican state church in England**.

1587: **Mary Stuart of Scotland** is executed. England and Scotland are lost.

1803: Imperial Deputation Treaty (RDHD) and end of the last 20 ecclesiastical territories.

1804: **Napoleon I** crowns himself - in the presence of the Pope

1806: **Francis II** resigns - end of the **Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation**

1814: **Bavarian Concordat** (I) Financial security for the bishops

1905: Laïcité in France

1919: And now the end in Germany? An old concordat that was no longer worth any money?

The Church and the Christian conservatives in Bavaria were waiting. A new concordat was already in the drawers.

In **1924**, a Bavarian Minister of Justice was in the Reich government in Berlin for the first time and the Concordat was presented to him for examination. He found that everything was in order.

This **Concordat** set the tone: it was an expression of contempt for the **democratic National Assembly** and, as a clear breach of the law, unconstitutional.

In Article 10 it is agreed that the bishops and the higher clergy will be paid by the state - fixed in **Reichsmark and Pfennig**. In contradiction to the **constitution**, the church still sees itself as a state church, paid by the state.

The final section of this article then stipulates: «*In the event of a replacement or new regulation of the state benefits to the church based on law, contract or special legal title, the **Bavarian state** assures the preservation of the church's interests through compensatory benefits which, according to the content and scope of the legal relationship, grant full compensation for the right that has ceased to exist, taking into account the monetary value ratios*».

This breaks through the **imperial constitution** and stipulates that these state payments to the churches, i.e. the financing

of the clergy by the state, does not end but is guaranteed for eternity.

But nobody cared: hyperinflation kept people busy and by the second **Reichstag** election in 1924 the democratic spring in Germany was over.

His Eminence, the **Apostolic Nuncio** in Berlin and Archbishop of Sardis, Dr **Eugen Pacelli** remained active and in 1929 achieved that Prussia - the dominant state of the **Weimar Republic** - also concluded a concordat in which the vested rights of the Church were guaranteed and the state payments for the personnel endowment were agreed at **2.8 million Reichsmarks**.

This largely satisfied the interests of the **Catholic Church** in preserving vested rights and state funding for the clergy. Around 80 percent of Germany had been settled with **Bavaria and Prussia**.

At first, the episcopate had a reserved and conceited attitude towards the proletarian **National Socialists**. This changed after the **Reichstag** elections (5 March 1933), when the **National Socialists** (together with the German Nationalists) gained a majority.

The clergy accepted the aspect of (supposed) legality and came to terms with the National Socialists.

The **Catholic Centre Party** agreed (on 24 March 1933) to the Enabling Act - which abolished the parliamentary democracy of the **Weimar Republic**. The **communist deputies** and parts of the **Social Democrats** had already been arrested before.

Now the **German Reich** government was anxious to be recognized internationally and found a willing partner in the **Catholic Church and the Vatican** - which was and is granted a high moral authority.

What had happened in the meantime? The **Lateran Treaties** with the fascist **Mussolini** in Italy (February 1929) and on the Enabling Act in Germany (March 1933) and the negotiations of a concordat since 1931 with the Austro-fascists around **Engelbert Dollfuss in Austria** (signed in March 1933).

With the **Lateran Treaties**, the **independent state of the Vatican City** was created as a sovereign state - by grace and legitimization of the **fascists** - and as compensation for territorial losses, the Italian state paid 1.8 billion lire and **Catholicism** became the state religion.

A **concordat** could be concluded with Germany in 1933, since - as prescribed by **canonical church law** - the German Reich Chancellor **Adolf Hitler** was and remained a Catholic.

The commonality of an authoritarian attitude, i.e. the subordination of the individual to the state, as well as the common **anti-communism** and **anti-Semitism** now came into play. Concordats had already been concluded with the **fascists in Italy and Austria** - followed by later ones in **Portugal** (May 1940) and **Spain** (1953).

Both the **Holy See** and politicians of the **Catholic Centre Party** had sought to conclude a comprehensive concordat in the 1920s. The **Vatican's** demands (confessional schools, state benefits) could not be enforced. Only the transfer of power to Hitler opened all doors.

The **Centre Party** was lured with the conclusion of a **Reich Concordat** if it agreed to the so-called Enabling Act. In a *«ral-ly»* of 28 March 1933, the **German bishops** relativised their previous warnings against **National Socialism**, especially since **Hitler** had made an unexpected offer in his government declaration of 23 March 1933: the guarantee of church rights such as privileges and the designation of **Christianity** as the *«unshakeable foundation of the moral and moral life of our people»*.

Already at the beginning of March 1933, Pope **Pius XI** had praised **Hitler** in audiences as a champion against **Bolshevism**. The two camps, **Hitler** here and the **Church** there, were undoubtedly moving towards each other.

The German negotiating delegation travelled to Rome in April 1933 under the leadership of the conservative former Reich Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor **Franz von Papen**, with Hitler's instructions to comply as far as possible with **Catholic** interests and wishes. The **Concordat** was signed on 20 July 1933 - after four months - and ratified in September 1933.

And this is what the **Concordat** looked like, among other things:

In the preamble of the **Concordat**, the friendly relations between the National Socialists and the *«Holy See»* are affirmed.

«His Holiness Pope Pius XI and the German Reich President, guided by the common desire to consolidate and promote the friendly relations existing between the **Holy See** and the **German Reich**, willing to regulate permanently the relationship between the **Catholic Church and the State** for the entire area of the **German Reich** in a mutually satisfactory manner, have decided to conclude a solemn agreement, [...]».

Art. 1: Freedom of religion and public practice of religion: guaranteed.

Art. 4: Unlimited freedom of ecclesiastical publications: guaranteed.

Art. 9: Confessional secrecy: guaranteed.

Art. 10: Clerical clothing such as uniforms protected from abuse

Art. 12: Ecclesiastical organizations remain public corporations

Art. 15: Orders are not subject to any restriction: guaranteed

Art. 16: Bishops take an oath of allegiance to the state

Art. 17: Property of the Church: guaranteed

Art. 18: Redemption of state services

(1) by friendly agreement

(2) The special legal titles also include the legally established tradition.

(3) Redemption with appropriate compensation

Art. 19: Existence of Catholic theological faculties: guaranteed

Art. 21: Catholic religious education is an ordinary subject: guaranteed.

Art. 23: Catholic confessional schools: guaranteed

Art. 27: Military chaplaincy: guaranteed

Art. 30: On Sundays, following the main service, a prayer is offered for the welfare of the German Reich and people.

Art. 32: Membership in political parties is forbidden to clergymen

Art. 33: For open questions, «an amicable solution will be brought about by common consent».

In short: **the state** grants all claims of the **Catholic Church** and the Church abstains from any political activity. In other words, for property, funding and denominational schools, the **Roman Catholic Church** submits to the **National Socialist state**.

Much of what had not been achieved in the **democratic Weimar Republic** was now realized as valid law throughout the Reich with the **National Socialists**.

Note: The **Concordat** has 33 or 34 articles: This is a sacred number in Christian terms, as it is the number of years of the life of **Jesus Christ**.

In a secret annex to the **Reich Concordat 1933**, theology students, priests and the entire diocesan clergy are exempted from (future) military service in the event of mobilization (i.e. the start of war).

«In the event of a transformation of the present German military system in the sense of the introduction of universal conscription, the calling of priests and other members of the secular and religious clergy to perform military service will be regulated in agreement with the Holy See according to the following guiding principles, for example:

a) Students of philosophy and theology in ecclesiastical institutions, who are preparing for the priesthood, shall be exempt from military service and the exercises preparatory thereto, except in the case of general mobilization.

b) In the case of general mobilization, clergy employed in diocesan administration or in military chaplaincy shall be exempt. Ordinaries, members of ordinariates, superiors of seminaries and ecclesiastical convicts, seminary professors, pastors, curates, rectors, coadjutors and clergy who permanently preside over a church with public worship are considered as such.

In other words, the **Vatican** and the **higher Catholic clergy** were already informed in the early summer of 1933 that the **National Socialists** intended to reintroduce military service, rearmament and thus war. It did not bother them, provided the clergy were exempt.

Under the common ideology of **anti-communism**, the soldiers of the German Wehrmacht wore a belt buckle on which a Reich eagle with swastika was depicted, framed by «**Gott mit uns**».

After the **Second World War**, in preparation for the founding of the **Federal Republic of Germany**, the Western zones also examined which decrees, laws and treaties from the years 1933- 1945 should be repealed. The **Reich Concordat of**

1933 was not affected; it is still valid today.

Its continued validity was aided on the one hand by the fact that numerous **former Nazis** still worked in leading positions in the state and political parties, and on the other hand by the **CDU chairman** in the Parliamentary Council and later **Federal Chancellor** (1949-1962) Konrad Adenauer, who had a '*rubber article*' inserted into the Basic Law in the form of Art. 123, which (implicitly) continued the validity of the **Reich Concordat**: «GG, Art. 123 (2) *The state treaties concluded by the German Reich [...] shall remain in force [...] until new state treaties are concluded by the bodies competent under this Basic Law or their termination otherwise takes place on the basis of the provisions contained in them.*»

Of the common concerns of the **Catholic Church** and the **National Socialists - anti-communism and anti-Semitism** - the open anti-communism of the post-war **conservative Christian Democrats** and the Catholic clergy had remained a unifying element. (Social democrats = «*All roads lead to Moscow*».)

In the meantime, all «*concordats with fascists*» (Italy, Spain, Austria, Portugal) have been changed by new versions, only one country has done nothing in this direction so far: **Germany**.

But this view overlooks the fact that in the 1960s there were indeed considerations to renew the **Concordat**. However, they refrained from doing so because it became clear that - even under a conservative, Christian Democratic government at the time - they would never again get such good conditions as in the «*Hitler Concordat*» and left it at that.

Instead of keeping quiet about it, however, it is currently (2022/2023) even being reactivated. In the discussions about the «*replacement of state payments*», the **Catholic Office** and **Christian Democrats** refer to the fact that the churches must be involved in negotiating the principles for this replacement/termination of **state payments to the church** - after all, an «amicable agreement» was agreed in the **Reich Concordat**.

If that is how the **Catholic Church** sees it, then it should promptly go in search of the **National Socialists/Fascists** in the present Germany, because this friendship was agreed with their *Nazi forefathers*', not with democrats.

Thank you for your attention.



The relationship between church and state in the UK

Stephen Evans, CEO, National Secular Society



It's my pleasure to join you to talk to you about the relationship between the **church the state and the monarchy in the United Kingdom**, which is somewhat different from the situation in France, where secularism or "Laïcité is enshrined in law and embraced as a national principle.

I'm afraid to say the opposite is true in **Great-Britain**, where, despite its population having an increasingly secular outlook, the **Church of England** is officially established as the **state Church**, with many privileges flowing from that.

Our organisation works across several fronts to protect and promote freedom of belief, freedom of expression and freedom of choice, but disestablishment, and achieving a secular state is our overarching objective.

The relationship between **church, state and the monarchy** hasn't often been a particularly salient political issue in **Britain**, but it has risen up the political agenda recently due to several factors which I'll come on to, which I think, mean we can be more hopeful of change now, than we have been a for a while.

But to begin, I'll spend some time setting out what *establishment* is and what it looks like in a UK context.

As you will all know, "*establishment*" refers to a formal relationship between a **church** or a religion, and **the state** it operates in.

The **United Kingdom** is made up of four countries: **England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland**. **The Church of England** is established in only one of those countries: **England**. There are no established Churches in Northern Ireland nor in Wales. **The Church of Ireland** was disestablished in 1871. Disestablishment took place in Wales in 1920. **The Church of Scotland** has special status in Scotland but is wholly independent of the state.

The most visible manifestation of **Anglican establishment** is probably the reigning monarch, the **King**, being both the head of state as well as **head of the Church**, holding the titles of **Supreme Governor of the Church of England and Defender of the Faith**. For the avoidance of doubt, that faith is the *«one true protestant faith»*.

These titles date back to the reign of King **Henry VIII** and England's break from Rome and the authority of the pope and the Catholic Church. It is a requirement for our Monarch to be "*in communion with the Church of England*". This means our head of state must be a **protestant**. So much for equality and freedom of belief.

The Coronation of **King Charles** will take place in May. A coronation is a state occasion, but primarily a religious affair. The King is currently receiving spiritual guidance sessions with the **Archbishop of Canterbury** to prepare him for a ceremony where our head of state will vow to:

- maintain the Protestant Religion
- maintain and preserve the settlement of the Church of England, and its doctrine and worship, and:
- Preserve the rights and privileges of bishops

The Sovereign will then be '*anointed with holy oil, blessed and consecrated*' by the archbishop. And then **Holy Communion** will be celebrated.

The event is largely unnecessary. No other European monarch has one. And **King Charles** is already King, so clearly, taking the oath is not a prerequisite to the accession to the Crown. Coronations do not make a monarch.

British **Human Rights** Barrister **Geoffrey Robertson** recently described the Coronation as “*a legal irrelevance, just a silly and superstitious Church of England ritual. Charles has no need at all to be crowned by a minority church.*»

It will be quite an expensive irrelevance, too. Our requests for information on the expected state spending on the **Coronation** have so far been refused.

The last coronation, the coronation of **Queen Elizabeth**, took place in June 1953. Since then, Britain’s religion and belief landscape has changed dramatically. Religious adherence has plummeted, minority religious have grown, as has non-belief.

Nevertheless, the upcoming coronation, is expected to look and feel very similar to the previous one. There may be more of a multifaith element, but it will be an unmistakably **Anglican affair**.

And all of this overlapping of **Church and head of state** entrenches religious privilege in the UK and gives the monarchy a kind of quasi-religious character. It’s an institution that we have almost been encouraged to worship.

The question of whether we should retain a monarchy at all perhaps goes beyond the secularist remit, albeit a large proportion of secularists will have republic tendencies.

But certainly, the accession of **King Charles** provides an opportunity for us to press the message for **secular reforms**, and we are trying to get that debate started, arguing that if we are to have a head of state, **that role should be secular**. And **disestablishment** should deliver that.

So that’s one pillar of **establishment**.

Another manifestation of church establishment is the bishops’ bench. This is the right of 26 Anglican clerics to sit as of right, as lawmakers in our upper chamber, the House of Lords.

The **UK** is the only Parliament in Europe to have explicit religious representation. Outside of Europe I’m only aware of **Iran** that has such an arrangement.

All parliamentary sessions in the **UK parliament** begin with **Anglican prayers**. And there is always at least one bishop in the **House of Lords** when it is sitting. But there are often several, especially when they have a particular interest in what’s being debated, such as assisted dying laws, for example.

Bishops are treated with unique deference in the **House of Lords**. They can take part in all business of the **House**, including tabling and asking questions of Ministers, leading, or speaking in debates, scrutinising legislation, voting, and serving on parliamentary committees. So, the privilege of seats in the **House of Lords** extends far beyond the right to vote, it gives **Church bishops** unique access to Ministers, lawmakers, and the corridors of power. Influence far beyond any other religious or secular special interest group can dream of.

Another aspect of **establishment** is the role **Parliament** plays in church governance.

*Many of the internal laws passed by the Church of England’s decision-making body, **the General Synod**, must be approved by both Houses of Parliament before they can come into effect.* So, this means that although the governance of the Church of England has been delegated to the **General Synod**, parliament remains legislatively supreme. So, in many ways, the **Church** is subservient to **Parliament**.

In fact, **Parliament** has the authority to pass laws affecting the **Church** without the church’s involvement, but by convention it does not do so.

The **King** also appoints an Anglican MP from the governing party to hold the **church** accountable to **Parliament** by answering questions, and to speak officially on behalf of the **Church of England** in **Parliament**. And we sometimes exploit this mechanism by asking MPs to ask probing questions.

The state also plays a role in filling key positions within the **Church**.

Bishops and Archbishops are appointed by the ruling **monarch** – acting on advice from the **Prime Minister**. Until the mid-1970s the **Prime Minister** had an unfettered right to advise on appointments, and the **Church** had no formal role in the appointing process of its own bishops and archbishops at all, although it was usually consulted, as a matter of courtesy.

But the role of the **Prime Minister** in selecting or **advising on archbishops** becomes a bit problematic if the **Prime Minister** isn't an **Anglican**, and particularly in they are **Catholic**.

Under the law, no '*person professing the Roman Catholic religion*' is allowed to advise the Queen on the selection of **Church of England bishops**. This rule dates back to the **1701 Act of Settlement**, a law to ensure a Protestant succession to the English throne.

But this anti-Catholic legislation put our **catholic former Prime Minister**, Boris Johnson, in a difficult situation. Instead, another Minister had to be drafted in to advise **the Queen**. Bizarrely, our current **Prime Minister**, **Rishi Sunak**, a **Hindu**, can advise on the selection of bishops. Only Catholics are explicitly banned.

Appointments to other church positions, such as deans, deacons, and priests, are also shaped by the views of state officials.

So, there's plenty of **church** interference in **state** affairs, but also plenty of **state** meddling going on in **church** affairs, which as secularists, we should not support. **The Church of England**, like all other religions, should enjoy complete independence.

Perhaps another aspect of **establishment** is the continued role the **Church** plays in **state education in Britain**. The role the Church and now other faith groups, play in state education is in part down to the privileged role the church enjoys in our political and civic life.

A quarter of all primary schools in England are run by the **Church of England** which gives the Church significant influence over education policy. And this is the reason we still have a law requiring a daily act of collective worship in all schools, an exemption from equality law that allows church schools to discriminate in their admissions in favour of churchgoers, select teachers based on their faith, and an outdated version of Religious Education that allows religious groups to largely determine the syllabus.

So, the presence of an established church is a significant barrier to achieving a **truly secular education system** free from religious discrimination and control.

Due to its established status the **Church** also has a prominent ceremonial role in state occasions. The Church has a dominant role in our **national remembrance**, which is why the annual ceremony at the cenotaph at times resembles a church service, where the **bishop of London** leads Christian prayers.

But if remembrance is important, and I think it is, then it needs to be meaningful to people. If it's not meaningful, people switch off, if they switch off, they forget. Given that religion is a turn off for so many, particularly younger people, our **national remembrance** having a religious flavour is far from ideal.

Then there is of course, the **Coronation**, which I covered earlier. It'll be interesting to see the reaction to the forthcoming coronation, which as I said will be a very religious affair, because the nation's religion and belief landscape has changed out of all recognition, since the last one in 1953. It'll be interesting to see how the public react.

So that's what **establishment** looks like in the United Kingdom.

There are two principal objections to there being an **established church**.

First, it's unfair. The existence of a legally enshrined, national religion and established church privileges one part of the population, one institution and one set of beliefs.

The **Church of England** is given a **special status** that other religions do not enjoy. This is clearly unfair to those who do not adhere to the **Church of England** or any other religious doctrine.

The second objection is it's inauthentic. The idea that we're a Christian country is a pretence, not based in reality. Christianity is one influence among many that shape the **British** current ways of life. But we can't, in any meaningful way, be described as a Christian country.

I mentioned earlier that there are reasons why we might be more hopeful of change now, than we have been a for a while. At that's because several recent events have started to perfectly illustrate the objections I just mentioned.

The death of **Queen Elizabeth** means for the first time in 70 years we will have a coronation. This has bought and will continue to bring the relationship **between the state and church** into focus. Our head of state's role of '*defender of the faith*' will be scrutinised.

King Charles has made clear his intention to be a defender of faith generally, not only the faith. This fits with the role the **Church of England** have assumed for itself as promoting a *multifaith, rather than secular Britain*. The Church very much wants to be a means by which other denominations and faith communities can be privileged or elevated in public life. But only on the basis that the **Church of England** will be uniquely privileged.

And despite the Kings very vocal support for religious freedom, the monarch's religious role is underpinned by an assumption that all future monarchs will be **believing Anglicans**. The monarch's support for freedom of religion or belief is wholly inconsistent with the role of **head of state** in the UK being reserved exclusively for practising Christians. this contravenes every principle of non-discrimination ever drawn up and runs contrary to the right to freedom of religion or belief.

So, we have been using to Coronation of **King Charles** to convey the message that religious privilege has no place in a modern secular democracy.

But not only does our set up make second class citizens out of **non-Anglicans**, but it also makes second class citizens out of **lesbian and gay** people.

The **archbishop of Canterbury** recently reaffirmed his church's **official rejection of gay sex** and the Church of England, which is permitted to carry out officially recognised marriages, refuses to carry out same-sex marriage, which is of course legal in Britain.

Of course, the church's doctrine is its own affair, but we've been pointing out in a recent campaign that an officially homophobic institution shouldn't be part of the state.

As one opposition party member of parliament said recently: "*The overwhelming view of MPs is that it is not sustainable for our established church to be institutionally homophobic and to actively exclude a portion of the population, whom they have a duty to serve.*"»

The issue of **same-sex marriage** is a divisive one in the **UK Church** and the **archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby**, has said he would rather see the Church disestablished than split over same-sex marriage. So, this gives us hope!

Increasing secularisation and **religious diversity** also highlights, not only the unfairness of the status quo, but the absurdity of it.

The most recent Census showed that the percentage of Christian adherents in England and Wales has fallen from **72%** in 2001 to **59%** in 2011, and now to **46%** in 2021, going down **13%** every 10 years. If it continues at that rate, it will be a very small percentage in 2050!

But already **Christians** are in a minority situation. Lots of other polling in recent years paints a picture of declining faith and growing nonreligiosity.

- The UK is the sixth **least religious country in the world**.
- Social attitude surveys have found around a half of British people have no religion, which goes up to **70%** for those aged 18-24

- Just **0.9%** of the English population worship in Anglican churches on an average Sunday. Some way short of the **46%** of Christians in the Census.
- Just **1%** of young adults say they identify with the **Church of England**.

But it's not just affiliation, it's attitudes, too.

- **60%** of Brits say religion isn't important in their lives.
- **81%** agree that «*Religious practice is a private matter and should be separated from the political and economic life of the country*».
- More of us oppose than support the idea of the UK having an official state religion.
- **58%** of the adult population oppose state funded religious schools.
- British citizens (including churchgoers) overwhelmingly reject the Church's position on **abortion, assisted dying and same-sex marriage**.

So, establishment simply doesn't sit well with the reality. It's out of date. And not very inclusive.

Take our national anthem for example. **God Save the King**. It's not something many of us can sing with any authenticity.

So, falling affiliation with **Church of England** and growing religious diversity is another reason why **disestablishment** is desirable, and I think inevitable.

There are also arguments for **Disestablishment** coming from an Anglican and a broader Christian perspective, too.

Some **Anglicans** within the Church itself are arguing that the Church should voluntarily relinquish its privileges and established status to free the church to pursue its own mission with greater authenticity.

At a recent event we organised, we gave a platform to **Anglicans** who want greater church autonomy and recognise the importance of state impartiality, and so echo our call for **disestablishment**.

The **Archbishop of Canterbury** has suggested **disestablishment** “*wouldn't be a disaster*” for the **Church of England**, but also made it clear the Church would not be initiating change, at least not yet.

So, for the time being, those who benefit from religious establishment seem keen to preserve it – particularly the bishops whose seats in the **House of Lords** give them political lobbying power and prestige.

But bishops aside, many Christians would support **disestablishment**. I only say this to point out that disestablishment need not be a clash between church and state. It could be progressed with the mutual understanding that a **formal separation stands to benefit both**.

All sides should recognise that maintaining a **minority established church** in a religiously pluralistic and largely secularised nation is unsustainable.

Radical change in our culturally conservative country is a significant challenge. I am optimistic, though. The UK's drift away from **Christianity** looks set to continue. All the trends, declining Christian belief, and an ageing congregation, means **Christianity** will continue to decline.

At the same time, nonreligiosity and minority faiths and particularly **Islam** are seeing significant growth.

So, it's clear we need a long-term, sustainable settlement on the relationship between religion and the state and that settlement should be based on the principles of **secularism**.

That means a clear **separation** between religion and state and **equality for all**, irrespective of religion or belief.

Thank you.

“Sixteen Words: The Supreme Court And The Evisceration Of The First Amendment’s Church-State Separation Provisions”

Robert Boston, editor, Church & State magazine,
Americans United for Separation of Church and State



The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees five fundamental freedoms: religious liberty; free speech; press and media freedom; the right to “assemble,” that is, to gather in public spaces to march and protest; and the right to petition, which means Americans have the right to ask their government leaders to address problems without fear of punishment or reprisal.

The amendment begins with religious liberty and separation of

church and state, the subject that concerns us here today. That portion is only 16 words long: “*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.*”

The editor in me is very impressed to see a fundamental human right expressed in just 16 words. I doubt the political leaders we have in America today could do that. But there is a drawback: Because the provision is only 16 words long, it is somewhat vague and open to interpretation.

How we interpret those 16 words has been the crux of the debate in America.

In 2002, the first time I spoke in Paris, we in America were dealing with President **George W. Bush** and his so-called “*faith-based*” initiative, which was really nothing more than an effort to pour taxpayer money into the coffers of churches and other houses of worship and charge them with the task of caring for the poor and those in need – responsibilities that in many other nations are seen as a government duty. To **Bush**, those 16 words allowed this.

In 2017, I was here again with worse news: **Donald Trump**, an admitted sex offender, former reality TV show host, struggling real estate developer and part-time confidence man, had been elected president with the help of extreme **Christian** groups and was busy trying to demolish what **Thomas Jefferson** called “*the wall of separation between church and state*” found in our **First Amendment**. Trump had no respect for the first 16 words of the First Amendment – or indeed the rest of it.

This time, I am here with some better news: The American people ejected Trump from office in 2020 and elected Democrat **Joe Biden**. According to **Trump** and his most fervid advocates, the election was stolen. They argue that **Trump** really won and say there was massive voter fraud. They have passion but lack anything like evidence. Of course, their claims are nonsense. Those of us who live in the reality-based community are aware that **Trump** received 232 votes in the Electoral College to **Biden**’s 303 votes. I would remind you that it takes 270 votes to win. In the popular vote, **Trump** received **74.2 million** votes to **Biden**’s **81.2 million**. You don’t have to be a math wizard to see who really won.

Trump lost. His disciples ransacked the **U.S. Capitol Building** on Jan. 6, 2021, after he incited them to do it. We all saw the horrific images on television as the insurrection – and let us be clear, that is what it was, **an insurrection**, an attempt to

overturn the results of a democratic election – played out. From a room on the second floor of my house in Maryland about 8 miles north of the **Capitol**, I watched the scene play out live on my computer. Like all right-thinking **Americans**, I was horrified. But as dark as that day was, it did not change the results, and mob rule was put down. Trump lost. And two weeks later, **Joe Biden** was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States.

Joe Biden is a **Roman Catholic** and a career politician. Given his advanced age, I was a little worried about his ability to run for office. But I had come to the point where if the **Democratic Party** had nominated a coatrack to run against **Trump**, I would have voted for the coatrack. I think **Biden** has surprised us all, especially on the international stage, although a stubborn remnant of **Trump** loyalists continues to heap abuse and disdain upon him.

So, **Trump** lost. **Hooray!** There is hope for those 16 words yet. But, in some respects, **Trump** is still with us. Not only does he continually attempt to interject himself back into politics from his mansion in Florida, but we are still feeling the repercussions from his chaotic four-year term. In the main, Trump’s term was marked by a string of embarrassments and missteps. But he did one thing that will plague us for years to come: He changed the nature of the **U.S. Supreme Court**.

Let me give you just one example of how this has affected **Americans’** lives: During **Trump’s** tenure, the **COVID-19** pandemic erupted. **Trump** was wholly unprepared to lead during this difficult time. He listened to quack doctors peddling questionable remedies and resisted issuing orders to tell people to not gather in large numbers.

In some states, governors tried to halt the spread of **COVID** by curbing mass gatherings, but in other states, governors basically ignored **COVID**, or, worse yet, embraced **conspiracy theories** that it wasn’t that serious. In some parts of the country where governors were taking **COVID** seriously, houses of worship were closed alongside other types of gatherings such as musical concerts, speeches, movie theaters and stage plays. Normally, the government would not have the power to order the closing of events like this, but we were facing a public-health emergency. Houses of worship were being treated like secular entities, so there was no violation of rights.

Some extremely conservative churches challenged these orders. At first, the **U.S. Supreme Court** upheld the right of government officials to issue the “do not gather” orders. But then Justice **Ruth Bader Ginsburg**, perhaps the strongest advocate of **separation of church and state** on the **court**, died on Sept. 18, 2020. Trump replaced her with **Amy Coney Barrett**, a far-right Catholic. The new **court** majority began striking down the closure orders – even though several “super-spreader” **COVID** outbreaks had been traced to houses of worship. We have now reached more than 1 million deaths from **COVID** in America.

Of course, these deaths can’t be traced to any single source. But medical experts agree that we would have had far fewer deaths had we enforced order to close more aggressively in the early days of the pandemic, before we had a vaccine. I should also note that many **conservative religious groups** have told their members not to get the vaccine, arguing that **faith in Jesus** would protect them from getting sick. Ironically, some of the religious leaders who said this later contracted **COVID** and died.

Trump’s stamp on the **Supreme Court** did not stop there. We are feeling the effects in several other areas:

- **Tax funding of religion:** For a long time in America, the basic principle was that religious groups should be funded with money raised voluntarily. Indeed, opposition to **church taxes** led **James Madison** to pen a powerful broadside against compelled financial support for churches in 1785 – the “**Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments**.” In 2002, the **Supreme Court** said it was permissible for states to give tax support to religious secondary schools – a clear violation of our First Amendment. **Trump’s Supreme Court** has extended this ruling, stating that in certain cases, taxpayer support of religious schools is not just permitted, it may be required.

Bear in mind that religious schools are not accountable to the taxpayers who are now expected to pay for them. They discriminate in hiring staff and in admitting students. Some of them expel or deny admission to young people who are members of the **LGBTQ community**. Some teach absurd ideas such as creationism, offensive concepts about race or demonstrably untrue things about American history. The funding they receive could be supporting our public schools, which serve **90 percent of America’s children** – schools that in some parts of the country are underfunded and struggling to secure resources.

- **Discrimination in Public Settings:** If you know anything about American history, you are aware that we have a shameful record when it comes to race. This includes chattel slavery, racist “*Jim Crow*” laws, violence and lynching and denial of the right to vote. It is an ugly and disturbing history.

There was a time when **Black Americans** could be denied service in restaurants, hotels, stores and other facilities merely because of the color of their skin. The landmark *Civil Rights Act of 1964* was designed in part to stop this.

Trump’s Supreme Court is inching close to the embracing the idea that religious belief creates a right to discriminate. Thus, the owner of a store or a secular business could refuse service to **LGBTQ people, Muslims, Jews, atheists, Black and Brown people, single mothers** and others simply by citing his or her religious beliefs. Remember, we are not talking about houses of worship here. Everyone concedes that churches have the right to reject certain members and deny services to people outside their faith. What we are talking about here is secular, for-profit businesses. Thus, **religious freedom** – a great and noble principle that America helped pioneer – is becoming a cloak for shabby forms of discrimination.

- **Religion in public education:** As I mentioned a moment ago, in America, **90 percent of our children attend public schools**. These schools are run by the government and serve children of many different faiths as well as those of no faith. At one time, these schools in many parts of the country began the day with Christian prayers and *Bible* readings. But that was a long time ago. Such practices were struck down by the **Supreme Court** in 1962 and 1963. Mind you, students can pray in our schools, but it has to be voluntary. It can’t be forced onto them. Last year, the **Supreme Court** weakened these rulings, declaring that a high school football coach has the right to pray with students on the field after games. Some students felt pressured to pray when they didn’t want to. The coach is an authority figure, after all. The **Supreme Court** simply did not care.

- **Abortion and reproductive rights:** As you probably know, last summer the **Supreme Court** overturned the **right to legal abortion** that it established in 1973. Many Americans were shocked. They should not have been. **The court** had been chipping away at this right for years, egged on by religious extremists. Thanks to *Trump’s Supreme Court*, they finally achieved their goal.

The **right to get an abortion** and the **right of women to determine their own bodily autonomy** came about only after a long, hard struggle. In the 19th century and into the 20th, it was common for birth control devices, such as condoms and diaphragms, to be banned in some states. In fact, doctors could be punished for even discussing birth control with married couples. I’m proud to say that **Americans United** fought against these laws in the 1950s, and in 1965, the right of consenting adults to use birth control was established by the **Supreme Court** in a case called *Griswold v. Connecticut*. Remarkably, there are some people in America urging the Supreme Court to overturn that ruling as well – and they may well have sympathizers on the **Supreme Court**. Why do people want to overturn this ruling? Because their religion frowns on the use of artificial forms of birth control, and they wish to impose their dogma by force on people who have chosen not to adopt it.

When it comes to **reproductive freedom** in America, we are moving in the wrong direction – backward.

- **The right to marry the person you love:** The **Supreme Court** upheld same-sex marriage, often called “*marriage equality*,” in 2015. But the composition of the **court** has changed since then, again thanks to **Trump**, and some people are pushing the **court** to overturn that ruling, too. Most Americans support marriage equality, but a vocal minority of religious extremists, pointing to *Bible* passages or statements by the **pope** or other **religious leaders**, feel differently.

If they are successful, we could find ourselves in a ridiculous situation where a married same-sex couple would have a legal marriage in, say, **Illinois** but then cross the border into **Missouri**, where it would not be legal. Under President **Biden**, **Congress** passed a law to protect the right of same-sex couples to marry by compelling all states to recognize a legal marriage performed elsewhere. But as we have seen, the “Trumpified” **Supreme Court** cares little for the rule of law and might not uphold such a measure.

- **Religious symbols in public places:** Symbols are meant to unify. Consider, for example, a nation’s flag or allegorical representations of freedom and liberty. But religious symbols cannot unify because they are inherently divisive. Yet the **Supreme Court** is increasingly allowing government to display and maintain religious symbols, primarily crosses.

In 2019, the **Supreme Court** ruled that a 40-foot-tall Latin cross could remain on government property in Bladensburg, Maryland. The cross was erected in 1925 to memorialize area men who had died during **World War I** but was later rededicated to honor all war dead. But it can't do that. And that reason it can't do that is because it is a cross. The cross is the preeminent symbol of the **Christian faith**. It can only memorialize Christians who died fighting wars. The cross is not a generic symbol. It has power and meaning for Christians precisely because it is central to that religion. If you are an **atheist** or a **non-Christian**, imagine a cross being erected on your grave after your death. That would be offensive. This is no different.

- **Attacks on the right to read and learn:** It shames me to stand here and tell you that very right to read, learn and understand the world around you is under attack in my country. We are seeing an unprecedented wave of censorship of books in public schools and in libraries. Not far from the town where I was born and raised in **Pennsylvania**, a public school teacher was subjected to a criminal investigation because she was seen in the school with a book about **LGBTQ** rights. In **Florida**, **Texas** and other states, public school officials must go through a cumbersome process of review before books can be added to school libraries. The result is that some schools have simply stopped buying library books. Librarians and people who work in the education field are increasingly being subjected to harassment and frivolous lawsuits.

It is embarrassing to admit this, but some Americans are simply afraid of knowledge. They are afraid of asking questions. They are afraid of their children even learning the truth about our nation's history. They are afraid for their children to learn about different cultures and religions.

- **The rise of violent nationalism:** If you watched news footage or examined photos taken on Jan. 6, 2021, when the **Capitol** was sacked, you undoubtedly noticed that some people who took part were hoisting crosses or signs about **Jesus**. Several scholars have examined the role that **Christian Nationalism** played in that attack. It was significant. Fed lies by **Trump** and his allies on the Fox News Channel, religious extremists joined the attack and tried to overturn the results of a democratic election.

Many people have since been held accountable for what happened on that day. Some are currently serving lengthy prison terms. But many of the religious leaders who egged them on have not been punished. Indeed, when the **Congress** issued a lengthy report about the attack and the event leading up to it, **violent Christian Nationalists** barely merited a mention.

Members of this faction are dangerous and don't support American democracy. Some of them admire the neo-fascist movements that have sprung up abroad. Many go so far as to hail Vladimir Putin as a bold protector of Western civilization and Christian values, and they admire Russia for passing anti-gay laws. These same people are agitating for ending America's support for Ukraine against Russian aggression.

So, what is the remedy for all this? I wish it were easy. It's not. **Church-state separation** was not eroded overnight and getting it back won't happen in a day either. This will be a long-term project.

At **Americans United**, we will soon unveil a national campaign to persuade Americans to recommit to the principle of **separation of church and state** and those 16 words of the **First Amendment**. In this campaign, we will acknowledge the reality of how many people communicate these days. Thus, messages will be simple and short and suitable for social media.

Polling data shows that many more **Americans** support **separation of church and state** than oppose it. **Christian Nationalists** are not a majority. But, for a variety of reasons, Americans are not grasping that **church-state separation** and **secular government** are the structures that support so many of their rights and that without them, America will no longer be America. Our challenge is to remind them of that.

Sometimes a shock to the system is required. I mentioned the **Supreme Court** ruling overturning legal **abortion**. We've seen a backlash to that, and in several states since then, including conservative states, people have gone to the polls in ballot referenda and voted to support **abortion rights**.

Demographic changes may also play in our favor. The United States is slowly becoming a **more secular country**. Growing numbers of Americans are stepping away from organized religion. Even the **fundamentalist churches**, which for many years had been immune from this trend, are feeling the changes.

At the same time, the younger generation seems less interested in fighting certain “*culture war*” battles. They favor legal abortion and **LGBTQ** rights by lopsided margins.

Our international allies, like those of you in this room, have a role to play. In America, “**secularism**” has often been a dirty word. Some people seem to fear it, even though the concept is built into our **Constitution**. You can help them understand that not only is **secularism** nothing to fear, it is, in fact, the protector of true **religious freedom and freedom of conscience**.

Many Americans have made the mistake of equating **religion** with **morality**. That is, they believe that one cannot be moral, good and decent person unless one is also religious. We must aggressively debunk this notion.

The American scholar **Phil Zuckerman** has produced several books exposing this for the lie that it is. **Zuckerman**’s research has focused on Scandinavian nations, primarily **Denmark** and **Sweden**, where religious observance has dwindled, but residents report high degrees of satisfaction and happiness, and people enjoy a high quality of life. Secular government and, to some extent, a secular society, are our best weapons for warding off a *de facto* **established church in America**. And European models can help us as we seek to persuade Americans to embrace, not run from, secularism.

So, let’s go back to those 16 words I talked about earlier. We face serious challenges in America. We must restore the vision of **founders** like **Thomas Jefferson, James Madison** and to return our nation to the true intent of the **First Amendment** and its 16 words that protect us from **clerical domination**.

As we contemplate this task, I would like to thank allies from the international community who join us in the struggle to free all people from state-sponsored religion, and I salute all those who labor to protect **freedom of thought**.

I was 24 when I began working at **Americans United** to defend the **separation of church and state**. My hair was dark brown. I wasn’t married, and I had no children. Now, nearly 36 years later, you can see that my hair is more gray than brown. I’ve been married for nearly 31 years, and the two daughters my wife and I raised are out on their own.

Much has changed for me personally. But the one thing that has not changed is the joy I feel when I come here to be among you, connecting with old friends and making new ones.

I am reminded that this work on behalf of those 16 words, although challenging in these difficult times, is not a burden. No, it is never a burden to defend **freedom of conscience** – it is a privilege and an honor.

My time defending this principle professionally will come to an end at some point as I get even older and grayer. But I will always advocate for **freethought, secular government and Jefferson’s wall of separation between church and state**. As long as I can turn on a computer, pick up a pen, march in the street or indeed draw a breath I will stand for this cause. I will always be a friend to those 16 words.

I am inspired knowing that all of you – and so many others around the world – join me in this struggle to keep the mind free.

Thank you.

The Church and the war in Ukraine (2014-2022)

by Mikhaïl Borisovitch Konashev

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Preliminary note: the presentation uses mainly Russian sources of information, as well as foreign sources available in Russia, including Ukrainian sources.

The Church, the Powers, the State

The Church has always been associated with the **State**, with power, and has always, with rare exceptions, cooperated with the State, supporting, and justifying its policies. The ideological justification for such a policy has been provided by Church texts, first and foremost by the biblical precept «*All authority comes from God*», whose synodal translation, with numerous commentaries, is generally provided in Church publications, including on the Internet: «*Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.*» (**Bible** - Romans 13:1).

Therefore, it is not at all odd that the **Church** has supported and justified not only so-called democratic regimes, but also openly reactionary ones, including **fascist** ones. After all, this does not prevent us from serving **God**. It was the case in Spain during the **Civil War** and later under **Franco**. It was the case in Germany under **Hitler**. And it happened more than once in Latin America. So, to paraphrase a famous quote from **Alexander Solzhenitsyn** about Latin American dictatorships, we can say that all we have to do to denounce the links between the **Church** and **fascism** is to name the dictators of the twentieth century, who killed and tortured thousands of people.

In the **Soviet era**, the Church, as a special type of religious organisation and in terms of its place in history, has the following characteristics : **firstly**, «*in all antagonistic social systems, the Church is linked to the ruling classes, fulfilling important political, legal and ideological functions, supporting and sanctifying exploitative relations*».

Secondly, since the Church had taken shape at the time of feudalism, it was closely linked to the entire state and social structure, acting «*as the most general synthesis and the most general sanction of the existing feudal system*»

Thirdly, in the capitalist era, the **Church** is separated from the **State** in a number of capitalist countries, including **France** and the **United States**, and loses its former legal functions, religious organisations compete with each other, and the individual enjoys a certain freedom of choice in the field of religion, which masks the Church's link with the ruling class. In the **post-Soviet era**, the authors of articles on the Church in encyclopaedias and reference works were ministers of the Church itself. In particular, in *The Great Russian Encyclopaedia*, the article on the Church is written by the archpriest, and there is not a single word about the **Church's** link with the **State** or with social classes, strata or groups.

The Church in Imperial Russia

Throughout its history, the **Russian Orthodox Church** (ROC) has not only supported but also faithfully served the **Tsarist authorities**, including at the beginning of the twentieth century during the **Russo-Japanese War** and the **First World War**. More especially as, from 1721 to 1918, the **Russian Orthodox Church** was governed by the **Holy Synod**, established as a State institution by **Peter the Great** in 1700. The Church and religion were thus placed under the strict protection of the State.

The crisis of the State was always accompanied by a crisis of the Church, particularly in times of war, which Orthodox authors explain by the influence of an **anti-spiritualist left-wing revolutionary ideology**. They explain the position of the Church in Russia during the **First World War** as follows: «*At the turn of the twentieth century, Russian society underwent a notable 'desecration'. Imbued with revolutionary ideas, false morals and values, it became increasingly irreligious. The*

campaign against the State was simultaneously directed against the Church. The Church was often the object of unfounded attacks and criticism, and its authority was deliberately diminished»

The Church in the USSR

For this reason, the **Russian Orthodox Church** did not initially accept the **October Revolution of 1917** and the Soviet regime. Mainly because the **Bolsheviks** were atheists on principle and, after seizing power, almost immediately **separated the Church from the new Soviet state**. The first point of the **Sovnarkom** decree «*On the Separation of Church and State, School and Church*» could not have been clearer: «*The Church is separated from the State*». It was only in 1927 that **Metropolitan Sergius** published an epistle (known as the «**Declaration**»), in which he referred to the **Soviet Union** as the civil homeland and urged members of the Church to show civil loyalty to the Soviet authorities, while demanding total political loyalty to the Soviet government from foreign clergy. During the 1920s and 1930s, and again from 1959 onwards, the **Communist Party** and the **Soviet State** engaged in active anti-religious agitation and propaganda.

As a result, by 1987, the number of active churches in the **USSR** had fallen from 54,000 to 6,893, and the number of monasteries from 1,000 to 15. In addition, two monasteries were located outside the USSR - in the **Holy Land** and on **Mount Athos**.

From 1987, during the period of **Mikhail Gorbachev's «Perestroika»**, a gradual process of strengthening the role of the **Russian Orthodox Church** began, including the transfer to the **Patriarchate**, dioceses and communities of believers of buildings and properties previously under the jurisdiction of the Church. From 1988, as part of the celebration of the Millennium of the baptism of Prince **Vladimir of the Rus' of Kiev** and for the holding of the **Council of the Russian Orthodox Church**, divine services began to be broadcast live on television.

The Church in the USSR during the Great Patriotic War

In the **USSR**, the contribution of the **Russian Orthodox Church** to the defence of the country was discussed in a fragmentary way in scientific literature, generally devoted to relations between the State and the Church, but not in the media. In **post-Soviet Russia**, the role of the **Russian Orthodox Church** in the victory of the **Great Patriotic War** is clearly exaggerated, while the role of the **Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)** is scarcely mentioned in books and articles or in the official media, including the religious media, or is recounted with an emphasis on the erroneous decisions and actions of the **Communist Party** and its leaders, including **Stalin**.

There is, however, a more balanced and objective position. In any case, from the very first day of the **Great Patriotic War**, the leaders of the **Moscow Patriarchate** called on the people to defend the homeland and supported the Soviet state. But in the territories occupied by German troops, the **Church** actively collaborated with the **Nazis**. At the same time, many clergymen took part in the **partisan** movement, helped underground fighters and Soviet prisoners of war, and saved **Jews** from extermination.

Overall, the life of the Church in the occupied territories of the **USSR** experienced a massive and largely spontaneous upsurge, particularly in **Ukraine, Belarus** and north-west **Russia**. During the three years of occupation, at least 9,400 churches and around 60 monasteries were restored in conditions of famine, devastation and lack of material resources.

The Church in post-Soviet Russia

In **post-Soviet capitalist Russia**, the **Russian Orthodox Church** has not only regained the role it played in the **Tsarist State** before the **Revolution**, but has also considerably strengthened it, becoming a powerful and independent non-governmental institution, while in fact being an **ecclesiastical department of the State** and above all of the presidential power. In the media, mainly on television, successive Presidents of the **Russian Federation** have constantly emphasised the special role of the **Church**. This is particularly true of the **President of the Russian Federation** from 2008 to 2012, **Dimitri Medvedev**, who emphasised the special role of the Church as the most important and authoritative public institution in modern Russia.

In his turn, President **Vladimir Putin**, constantly keen to strengthen the **Church's** position in the **State** and its role in public policy, including presidential politics, signed a **law on the protection of the Church** almost ten years ago, officially «*to combat insults to citizens' religious beliefs and feelings*». The **Russian Orthodox Church** has established itself in public policy, both official and unofficial, and in the main areas of society: in the **ideology of the State**, in education, both at

school and in higher education, in culture and the media, and in the armed forces. This crusade against secular society was launched by the **Russian Orthodox Church**, first timidly, even at the time of «*Perestroika*», then confidently and openly from 1992, and finally aggressively and perfectly cynically.

In March 1994, the **Ministry of Defence** and the **Russian Orthodox Church** signed an agreement on mutual cooperation. In 2009, **Dmitri Medvedev**, then President of Russia, accepted the idea of the EOU PM (Moscow Patriarchate) and several other «*traditional*» religious associations to create a **military clergy institute**. In 2009, the then President of Russia, Dmitri Medvedev, accepted the idea of the ROC (**Russian Orthodox Church**) and several other «*traditional*» religious associations to create a military clergy institution. In 2010, the ROC appointed the first priests to clergy posts in all military units. In the same year, the **Ministry of Defence** approved the «*Regulations on organising work with believers in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation*», paragraph 13 of which lists the tasks of officials, the first of which is to organise and hold rites, religious ceremonies and take account of the religious duties of armed forces personnel.

The institution of military priests in the Russian armed forces is developing, their personnel is increasing and the programme to provide the army with military chaplains is being implemented gradually but steadily. At the same time, the **Russian Orthodox Church** blessed both Russia's military defence and «*the performance of military duty*» in general, and chaplains constantly consecrated weapons, including warships, submarines and missiles.

The **Social Doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church** supports Christian patriotism, which manifests itself, among other things, «*in the defence of the homeland against the enemy*» (II, 3).

The **Doctrine** clearly states that «*the Church ... does not forbid her children to take part in military operations, if it is a question of defending their neighbour and restoring justice*» (VIII, 2). The document also notes that «*in times of war, it is necessary to protect the civilian population from direct military action*» (VIII, 3). It also states: «*In the present system of international relations, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between aggressive and defensive war. The dividing line between the former and the latter is particularly blurred when one or more States or the international community take military action on the pretext of defending a people that has been the victim of aggression* (XV. 1). *For this reason, the question of the Church's support or condemnation of military operations must be examined on a case-by-case basis when they are launched or about to be launched*».

After the destruction of the **USSR** in 1991, a historically unprecedented feature of the **Russian Orthodox Church** was the transnational nature of its exclusive jurisdiction within the **former USSR** (excluding **Georgia**): for the first time in its history, the **Moscow Patriarchate** considers its «*canonical territory*» (the term was introduced in 1989) to be the territory of numerous sovereign and independent states. Since the early 1990s, this has led to an abnormal situation of schisms and parallel jurisdictions, mainly in Ukraine, where there are three Churches: the **Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate**, the **Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate** and the **Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church**.



The status of clerical exception in Alsace-Moselle and ultra-marine derogatory statutes

By José ARIAS (FNLP)



Dear friends and comrades,

It is up to me to present the existing situation in France for the subject that interests us, namely the **Alsace Moselle concordat** and the situation of the **overseas territories**.

Secularism in France is an organisational principle of the **Republic** that establishes the neutrality of the State with regard to religions and all religious or philosophical beliefs. This means that the State does not favour any particular religion and does not interfere in religious affairs, while protecting the freedom of belief and religious practice for each individual. Secularism also

implies a **strict separation between the state and religious organisations**, as well as equal treatment of and respect for all religions and beliefs, or the lack thereof.

It is the **law of 9 December 1905** which established this institutional functioning, notably through its first two articles which stipulate

«**ARTICLE 1.** - *The Republic guarantees freedom of conscience. It guarantees the free exercise of worship subject only to the restrictions set out below in the interests of public order.*

Art 2: *The Republic does not recognise, pay or subsidise any religion. Consequently, as of 1er January following the promulgation of the present law, all expenses relating to the exercise of worship shall be eliminated from the budgets of the State, the departments and the communes.*

The **law of 1905** is part of the constitutional block of the Fifth Republic, yet despite this, serious breaches of this principle persist in some parts of France.

The situation in Alsace - Moselle

When this law was adopted in 1905, the departments of Moselle and Alsace were under the **German Reich** and, as a result, the **1905 law** did not apply there.

At the end of the **First World War**, in 1918, the «*lost provinces*» were returned to France, but not all the laws of the Republic were reintroduced. The citizens of these departments were deprived of the benefits of the **secular nature of the state and of public schools**. The concordat system applicable in France until 1905 will continue to apply to the departments of **Haut-Rhin, Bas-Rhin and Moselle**.

This concordat regime was based on the **law of 18 Germinal Year X** (8 April 1802) which incorporated the **Convention of 26 Messidor Year IX** (15 July 1801) signed between the **Holy See** and the French government, better known as the **Concordat of 1801** signed between **Bonaparte, First Consul**, and **Pope Pius VII**.

Let us remember that after the revolutionary decade from **1789 to 1799**, after the **coup d'état of 18 Brumaire year 8**,

it is the end of the **Directory**, **Bonaparte** also claims to put an end to the **French Revolution**, to re-establish a moral and social order, with the primary objective of maintaining himself in power.

For his part, **Pius VII**, the pope elected in March 1800, wanted to re-establish the power of the Catholic Church, which was divided between those who had accepted the **Civil Constitution of the Clergy of 1790** and those who had not. The Church had lost most of its goods and powers and its activity was confined to the private sphere.

The **Concordat of 1801**, which was difficult to negotiate, and above all the so-called «*organic articles of the Catholic cult*», were not easily accepted by the clergy, but led to the re-establishment of the Catholic cult as it had been during the **Old Monarchical regime**.

The preamble to the **1801 Concordat** states that «*The government recognizes that the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman religion is the religion of the great majority of French citizens*».

Bishops are appointed by the **First Consul**, on the proposal of the **Pope**. Article 5

Article 6: Before taking office, bishops and archbishops must take an oath: «*I swear and promise to God, on the Holy Gospels, to keep obedience and fidelity to the Government established by the Constitution of the French Republic. I also promise not to have any intelligence, not to attend any council, not to maintain any league, either within or without, which is contrary to public tranquillity; and if, in my diocese or elsewhere, I learn that something is being planned to the prejudice of the State, I will make it known to the Government.*

Article 7: «*Second-rate clergymen shall take the same oath in the hands of the civil authorities designated by the government.* »

The following prayer formula will be recited at the end of the Divine Office in all the churches of France: «**Domine, salvam Republicam. Domine, salvos fac consules**»:

«*Lord save the Republic; Lord save the Consuls!*»

Parishes shall be reorganised after the consent of the government (**Article 9**)

The parish priests appointed must first be approved by the government. (**Article 10**)

«*The Government shall ensure a suitable salary for the bishops and parish priests whose dioceses and cures are included in the new district.* (**Article 14**)

This **Concordat** is still in force today, which is why on 23 July 2022, the website of the **Catholic Church of Moselle** announced «*with joy*» the appointment of **Philippe BALLOT** by Pope Francis and the **President of the Republic Emmanuel Macron** to the post of 104th bishop of Moselle. **This is a unique event in the world.**

In the departments of Alsace Moselle, the organic articles of the **Protestant cults** also apply.

Later, in **1808**, the «**Israelite cult**» was also recognised and regulated by the **imperial decree of 17 March 1808**, and the salaries of the rabbis were made the responsibility of the State by the **law of 8 February 1831**. Finally, on 25 May 1844, the **royal decree** regulating the organisation of the **Israelite cult** was promulgated.

State-funded recognised religions

Under the concordat system, the «recognised» cults are allocated a budget by the **Ministry of the Interior «et des cultes**», which amounts to **39 million euros** for the remuneration, including charges, of 1,254 religious jobs as at 31 December 2017, to which must be added the amount of pensions (**21 million euros**) for a grand total of **60 million euros per year**. It is paid by all taxpayers in France.

Ministers of religion are paid by the State according to a salary scale and most of them are classified in **category A of the civil service**, the best «recognised» and best paid of the State's agents.

The **Bishop** now receives a salary of **4400 euros gross**, a driver, 20 collaborators paid by the State, he is officially invited to all public ceremonies.

The parish priests receive **2500 euros gross**, more than the ministers of the Protestant and Jewish churches. There are practically no salary contributions (3.7%) as these are also paid by the state, as are the pensions. The length of sick leave and retirement are negotiated between the minister and the bishop. In addition, there is free accommodation. There are also many fiscal and financial advantages.

In its decision **no. 2012-297 QPC** of 21 February 2013, while the **1905 law** applies to most of the departments of France, the **Constitutional Council** ruled that this financing was not contrary to the 1958 Constitution, thus making two systems that are opposed in their basic principle cohabit.

Public religious institutions

Whereas in France, religions are organised in associations and are self-financing, in **Alsace Moselle**, the religious institutions of recognised religions (Catholic fabriques, Protestant presbyteral councils and Jewish consistories) are public establishments with a statute and receive public subsidies.

The **parish councils** manage the property of the parish and are administered by a council which consists of **the priest and the mayor of the town**. Filling the deficits of the parish council is an obligatory expense of the municipalities!

What about unrecognised religions?

All other religious options than these so-called «*recognised*» cults are lowered to the rank of «*non-recognised cults*» like the **Muslim cult or the Buddhists** whose practitioners are underestimated as if they were second-class citizens, not to mention the **non-believers** who are downright despised, especially the **Libre Pensée** and the **secularists**.

That said, local authorities retain the possibility of financing «*non-recognised*» religions, if this decision is taken by the community.

We are also witnessing this incredible segregation, on the one hand, of cults that can demand respect for their recognition, while others are relegated to the rank of sub-citizens and put in the position of begging for a place in the system.

And when an unrecognised community manages to obtain funding from certain municipalities anxious to restore a semblance of equal treatment 2,563,599 to the **Islamic Community Milli Gorius Grande Mosque Eyyub Sultan (CIMG-GMES)** for the construction of what was to become the largest Mosque in Europe on the pretext that it had not signed the **Charter of Islam in France**.

The **law on separatism**, adopted in 2021, has added a further difficulty to the situation, as it requires all structures to sign «**CERs: Contracts of Republican Commitment**» imposing respect for the *values of the Republic*, CERs which are denounced by the associative world as an attempt to impose a state ideology, where previously there was freedom of **association and organisation**.

The Ors de la République for some, ministerial vindictiveness for others, and in particular **Muslims**...

This is the situation with regard to religions in Alsace Moselle.

And what about the exceptional school status of Alsace Moselle?

The **citizens of Alsace-Moselle** were still subject to the **school law of 1850**, the law of the very reactionary **Viscount de Falloux**. When it was voted, the majority of Alsatian deputies (22) voted against it! However, this law was adopted by a **monarchist and Bonapartist assembly**, which was anti-republican and **openly clerical**, placing the entire public education system under the control of the recognised cults, essentially the **Catholic Church**, and making primary schools confessional.

In 1850, **Victor Hugo** denounced Falloux's party in the **National Assembly**, «*a party that imagines that society will be saved because it will have put a Jesuit everywhere where there is no gendarme*».

Religion was essential to educate the good people in the respect of moral values, it had therefore to be taught. Its teaching

was compulsory in public schools, and even worse, primary schools were denominational under the authority of the **mayor** and the **parish priest**.

During the annexation, here and there, **the Reich** imposed the merger of Catholic and Protestant denominational schools for reasons of organisational convenience. These mergers took place against the wishes of the **Catholic clergy**, who fought tooth and nail to maintain the **Catholic denominational character** of the public schools.

When Alsace Moselle returned to France, this system continued after the renunciation of the introduction of **French secular laws (Ferry and Goblet laws, etc.)**.

In **1924**, when the **Herriot** government was trying to introduce **secular laws**, and when certain communes such as Colmar or Strasbourg were trying to create bi-denominational schools, the Bishop of Strasbourg, **Mgr Ruch**, launched a school strike, forbidding all Catholics to enrol their children in these schools, fiercely opposing the establishment of **secular** and above all interdenominational schools. These schools were established in spite of everything against the Catholic hierarchy!

Over time, it became possible to exempt children from religion classes. This exemption was obtained late on 17 June 1933 with the **Guy La Chambre** circular, which allowed this exemption to be granted on the basis of a simple declaration by the head of the family to the school principal. This was a step forward for pupils and families.

Religious data on pupils

In order to organise this compulsory education subject to exemption, these pupils must be known, which is why they are subject to registration according to the religion of their parents. This registration was legalised in 1995.

Thus, in the computers of the Rectorates of the **Academies of Nancy-Metz and Strasbourg**, we find files of the names of the pupils who follow the teaching of religions, and therefore also those who follow the courses of Jewish religion, imagine that, after what our Jewish fellow citizens have undergone throughout the history of the European continent.

Religious indoctrination from an early age in schools

Under the Alsatian Moselle school system, religious indoctrination of pupils is legal to counteract accelerated dechristianisation.

The teaching of religion is a teaching discipline included in the acquisition of the **«Socle commun de connaissances et de compétences»**. But these courses clearly have a clerical aim because they aim *«to help pupils acquire knowledge, methods and attitudes enabling them to build their cultural, relational and religious identity and to live together in different ways»*. (Bishopric of Metz)

«The courses are taught by religious instructors proposed by the three denominations recognised by the local statute (Catholics, Protestants, Jews), approved by the academic services and trained by the services under the responsibility of the religious authorities» (Bishopric of Metz)

Despite the scheme: declining numbers

Despite this clerical arrangement extended to all public schools in the three départements, the number of pupils in religion is in free fall due to the increase in requests for dispensations. This situation provoked an open crisis between the **bishoprics of Metz and Strasbourg**, i.e. between supporters of maintaining confessional teaching and supporters of inter-confessional teaching! To this day, the former still hold the upper hand.

Vincent Peillon's charter of secularism

Even though the number of pupils has fallen dramatically, this situation still persists despite the application of the **«charter of secularism»** introduced by **Vincent Peillon** on 12 September 2013. This charter is displayed in all schools and its Article 6 confers on the public school a protective role: *«the school protects students from any proselytism and any pressure that would prevent them from making their own choice»*. **Article 11** imposes a duty of strict neutrality on staff: *«they must not manifest their political or religious convictions in the exercise of their duties»*. And in **Article 15**, it asks students to contribute *«to the implementation of secularism within their school»*... in spite of this, schools open their own to religious speakers... the height of absurdity!

Until **1974**, public school teachers had to teach religion. The **Ecoles normales**, and then the **IUFMs**, imposed religion courses on students until the beginning of this century; today, those who refuse them are entitled to an equivalent in the form of a course on morality. Chaplains can inspect trainees in all disciplines.

The maintenance of religious education in public schools is a serious breach of the requirement of neutrality that one has the right to expect from the national education system.

The **offence of blasphemy**, which applied under the **local penal code**, was only repealed in 2016 after the terrible attacks on the journalists of *Charlie Hebdo*.

Public higher education includes a department of religion at the University of Lorraine and the Faculty of Theology in Strasbourg.

In spite of all this anachronistic device, the crisis of faith continues and the flight of believers is accelerating!

In 2021, the bishopric of Moselle acknowledged that less than **1%** of the population attended religious services... which means that the **Concordat, the public financing of religions, the salaries of ministers of religion, the immense tax exemptions, the maintenance of an unhealthy relationship** between local elected officials and ministers of religion, and the **teaching of religion** are not enough to halt the fall in vocations and the collapse in the number of believers:

- **Churches are empty**
- **The religion classes are more than sparse.**

The crises related to **paedo-crime** have not helped matters of worship.

And yet the concordat system, which is contrary to **freedom of conscience**, is still there.

This is why the **abrogation of the Concordat of 1801** is the fight of the **Free Thought**.

But there are still other exceptions to the law of 9 December 1905, which concern French Guiana and the overseas collectivities (French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon as well as New Caledonia and Mayotte)

The **1958 Constitution** keeps in force the worst texts from the darkest moments of French history.

This is the case with the situation in **French Guyana**, a territory to which the **royal decree of 27 August 1828** issued by **Charles X**, who tried to impose the return of the **absolute monarchy** and who launched the worst colonial expeditions, accompanied by the so-called ‘civilising mission’, still applies.

The **1828 Ordinance of Charles X** is a royal decree which aims to strengthen the role of the Catholic Church in French society. It stipulated that **bishops** were to be appointed by the king and that priests were to take an **oath of loyalty to the state**.

This order is partly motivated by the religious mission, which is an initiative of the **Catholic Church** to spread the Christian faith abroad. This takes the form of missions to Africa and Asia, where Catholic priests go to evangelise the local population.

Governments saw these missions as a way of strengthening their influence in these regions, compromising the **sovereignty of the people** and their right to practice their own religion.

In the end, **Charles X's ordinance** and the religious mission testify to the centrality of religion in nineteenth-century French society, as well as to the close ties between **church and state** at that time.

It is still by virtue of this ordinance, but not only, that priests are paid by the **General Council of Guyana** and the **Protestant cult in French Polynesia**.

The Mandel Decrees

The overseas collectivities of **French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, New Caledonia and Mayotte** are governed by the **Mandel Decree-Law** of 16 January 1939, amended by the Decree of 6 December 1939.

This decree allows cults to organise themselves as a religious mission represented by a board of directors, itself placed under the supervision of the prefect. Religious denominations may also organise themselves in the form of a simply declared association governed by the **law of 1 July 1901** on the contract of association.

The decree of 23 January 1884 organises the **Protestant churches** in the French establishments in Oceania, modified by the decree of 5 July 1927.

In these overseas territories, the remuneration of ministers of religion is the responsibility of the religions themselves (religious missions or associations), except in French Guyana where, by virtue of the **royal decree of 27 August 1828** and the **law of 13 April 1900** establishing the general budget for expenditure and revenue for the financial year 1900, the remuneration of ministers of Catholic religion approved by order of the prefect is the responsibility of the **territorial collectivity of Guyana**.

In **Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon**, the remuneration of the Catholic clergy has been subsidised by the **General Council** since 1940.

The maintenance and repair of religious buildings in these overseas territories is also the responsibility of the religious denominations. There are exceptions as in the rest of France.

Most of the Catholic buildings built in Guyana before 1939 belong to the public domain of the territorial collectivity of **Guyana** or the communes.

In **Saint-Pierre and Miquelon**, the Catholic church buildings belong to the communes, which, although they do not have title to the buildings, provide external repairs and heating, while the more important work is the responsibility of the Catholic religious mission and the parishioners.

In the **French Southern and Antarctic Lands**, the places of worship, namely three chapels and an oratory, and their furnishings belong to the public domain of the State.

Conclusion

Although the **Catholic, Protestant and Jewish churches** claim to accept the principle of **separation of church and state** included in the **1905 law**, they are careful not to ask for its application to the **Moselle** and **Alsace** departments and the **Overseas Territories**.

On the contrary, they militate fiercely to keep the financial manna included in the texts of the **Concordat**, but also in the **Royal Order and the Mandel Decrees**, inventing arguments of great ineptitude.

These lies are picked up by the local media and unprincipled politicians in their service, contributing to the thickening of concepts that are very clear:

In the secular republic, believers pay for their own religion.

This venal attitude shows a natural inclination of these cults for money and the benefits of position.

65 years of governments of the **Fifth Republic**, from the left and the right, have done nothing to help the situation because they have never undertaken to challenge these particular legal regimes and extend the **1905 law** to the entire territory of the **Republic**.

For the **French Freethinking National Federation**: The unification of the Republic on the basis of the **law of 1905** remains the objective of **all secularists**.

Thank you for listening to me

Conclusions of the conference by Christian Eyschen

Spoke-person of IAFT



We would like to thank all those who attended these two days so rich and so varied, sometimes coming from very, very far.

We are going to publish all the texts in a digital version in english, spanish and french and they will be distributed widely.

Among all the topics, we have discussed from knowledge and expertise of our friend, **Keith Porteous Wood**, recognized expert at **United Nations**, about the sexual crimes of the **Catholic Church**. We have analysed the accounts of **ninety-three**

dioceses in France and we have established that the **Catholic Church** is seated on a pile of gold. **The Church must pay for all these crimes**, the Church can pay, she can do it, she has the money.

We recommend you to buy the book from **Dominique Goussot** at the bookstore outside, about the **secularist inventories**. You will find how we manage to get this result and it could help you for your researches.

Last thing, we have prepared an **international statement** for the conclusion of this international conference. We have sent it widely to everyone in 4 languages.

We received some proposals for changes that we accepted, very few were not...

We can consider that the **statement** received the agreement of nearly everybody and is virtually accepted.

But to do some gymnastics, I will ask you to hold your hand to adopt it physically.

Thank you to everyone once again.

**Meeting national de la Libre Pensée en décembre 2015
Pour la défense de la loi du 9 décembre 1905
de Séparation des Eglises et de l'Etat**



Speech Montmartre Friday April 7th 2023

Nicole Aurigny



Citizens, dear friends, dear comrades,

To all of you, from **France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Norway, Portugal, Ireland, Greece, United Kingdom, Russia, USA, Muslim countries and Latin America**, I bring the fraternal greetings of the **Fédération nationale de la Libre Pensée**.

What an emotion! What a joy also to be together here at the foot of the **statue of the Chevalier de la Barre**, as we did on September 3rd 1905 when more than **20,000 freethinkers** gathered around the model, and as we did on November 4th 1906 for the official inauguration in front of the portal of the basilica.

At last! the **statue of the Chevalier de La Barre**, symbol of our determination to fight for secularism, for **freedom of conscience**, against concordats and against all forms of conscription, is once again in front of us.

This statue, made to remind us of the necessity of our fight, is, at the same time, the result of our fight. Indeed, it took a great deal of perseverance and obstinacy to install it in front of this building dedicated to obscurantism and atonement.

Remember!

On **March 18th 1871**, on the side of this hill where we are standing, the people of Paris gathered to prevent the soldiers sent by **Thiers**, head of the provisional government, from removing the 171 cannons that the people of Paris had paid for by subscription and that they had placed on **Montmartre** to keep them out of sight and out of reach of the **Prussians**. The soldiers refused to fire and fraternised with the population. The revolt quickly spread throughout Paris. It was the beginning of the **Commune**, which, among the major measures it took, voted for **secular schools** and for the **separation of Church and State**. Earlier, in July 1847, the hill had hosted the **first major Republican banquet**, attended by 1,200 guests, and had been a refuge for the **insurgents of 1848**, before having **Jean-Baptiste Clément** as its mayor from March to May 1871.

Hence, for **reactionaries**, the image of Montmartre as the *«hotbed of impious and revolutionary action»*. For the Church, this is intolerable.

For the **Church**, for centuries, **Montmartre** has been the hill known throughout Christendom as the site of the alleged martyrdom of **St Denis**. And since, the Church much prefers legend to history, it is not afraid to tell the story that **Denis**, decapitated at Montmartre, picked up his head and continued on his way for about 6 km before expiring where the **Basilica of St Denis** was built. This is also the hill where, in 1534, a certain **Ignatius de Loyola** founded the **Jesuit Order**, devoted to the Pope, *«perinde ac cadaver»*.

For the **Church**, the military defeat of 1870 was *«divine punishment after a century of moral decay since the Revolution of 1789»*. It was therefore necessary to *«save France, which had deserved God's punishment through the encouragement*

*it had given to the revolutionary spirit throughout the world». To achieve this, it was decided to build the **Basilica of the Sacré-Cœur**. This project was shamefully accepted by the **National Assembly**, which voted to expropriate the top of the hill as a «*public utility*» for the benefit of the bishopric, in violation of the Concordat legislation in force at the time.*

On June 16th 1875, at the laying of the foundation stone, **Hubert de Fleury**, one of the initiators of the project, declared: «*The church of the Sacré-Cœur is being built on the very spot where the Commune began, where Generals Clément-Thomas and Lecomte were assassinated. We remember this hillock filled with cannons, criss-crossed by drunken hooligans, inhabited by a population that seemed hostile to all religious ideas and whose hatred of the Church seemed above all to animate them.*»

For republicans, democrats and **freethinkers**, it was a real provocation. Several answers were considered: as early as 1880, the **City Council**, which considered the basilica to be «*a permanent insult to intelligence*» and «*a consecrated place of political and religious fanaticism*», proposed transforming the building into a theatre or a people's centre; in the meantime, it decided to restore the old **church of St Pierre** «*to play a good trick on the Sacré-Cœur*». The idea of installing a colossal statue of liberty, which could reach 160 metres in height, was even considered!

In 1885, following a petition from **Freethinkers**, a street in Montmartre was named after the **Chevalier**, replacing the rue des Rosiers where the **Communard Eugène Varlin** had been lynched in May 1871. Finally, a statue of the last man in France to be executed for blasphemy, the **Chevalier de la Barre**, was erected in front of the future basilica, as an «*antidote to the poison*», according to the **Libre Pensée**.

For their part, the clerics solemnly inaugurated the basilica in June 1891 and installed the «*big bell*», the «**Savoyarde**», in 1895.

It was time to react. The «**La Barre Monument Committee**» formed in 1897 was a unitary body: it included workers' militants, freethinkers, Communards such as **Jean Allemane**, and **Dreyfus** supporters, notably Senator **Auguste Delpech**, one of the founders of the **Ligue des Droits de l'Homme**.

In 1904, the **City Council** repossessed a 5,000m² plot of land in front of the **Sacré Coeur**, which had been wrongfully appropriated by the Archdiocese of Paris. It also affirmed its desire to place the statue of **the knight** in line with the main entrance in order to counter the domination of the Church over the Parisian landscape. It also approved a subsidy of 5,000 francs.

A sculptor was chosen: **Armand Bloch**, a friend of **Zola's**, and on September 3rd 1905, thousands (20,000, 50,000?) of **Freethinkers** from France, Belgium, Italy, England, Hungary, Germany, Argentina and the Czech Republic marched past the model of the **statue of the Chevalier**. This was just a few months after the vote by the **National Assembly**, three months before the final vote on the **1905 law separating church and state**. The procession marched past singing **La Carmagnole** and the **Internationale**. The large police force put in place by **Prefect Lépine** was unnecessary: the demonstrators, who had been received at Paris City Hall, were in good spirits, peaceful and triumphant.

The official inauguration of the statue, created by sculptor **Armand Bloch**, took place on November 4th 1906. **The Chevalier de La Barre** is shown chained to his torture post. His right leg is bent and he is supporting his left arm, as his right knee and right wrist were broken by torture when he was subjected to the ordinary and extraordinary question. **Voltaire's Dictionnaire philosophique**, discovered at his home - a discovery that led to his death - is tied to his feet because it was burnt with his body. How better to signify that **the Knight's** torment is also, in absentia, **Voltaire's** torment.

This statue unleashed clerical fury: «**Le Pèlerin**» denounced the «*aggressive nature*» of the monument, which it saw as «*a violent and hateful protest*» against the **Sacré-Cœur**. But the greatest outburst of violence came from the writer **Léon Bloy** - ironically, he lived on *rue du Chevalier de La Barre*. In his Diary, he describes «*the despicable monument placed in front of the basilica so that pilgrims could read a few blasphemies on the base before entering*». For him, it was a «*desecration*» of the **Sacré-Cœur**, surrounded by «*huge bands of scoundrels [who] have come to parade shamelessly before the silly image of that little bastard, the Chevalier de La Barre*», and he encouraged good Catholics to «*pis*» on it.

For the **freethinkers**, the **statue of La Barre** «*marked the beginning of the secularisation*» of Montmartre, which would

otherwise have looked like a *«city conquered by barbarians who were enemies of fertile life and aesthetics»*.

But the **Church** did not admit defeat, and it would not rest until it had done away with the statue and, of course, what it represented. The sculptor's studio was attacked several times, and the monument was smeared several times with white paint and minium. Under the pretext of redeveloping the top of the Butte, the Church finally managed to get the statue moved to a nearby square, now called **Square Nadar**.

But what the **Church** failed to do, the **Nazis** succeeded in doing. On October 11th 1941, the **Vichy government** promulgated a law to remove metal statues throughout France, in order to help the German war effort. Statues that were not compatible with the **«National Revolution»** were targeted; Republican figures were destroyed. Around a hundred statues were removed in Paris. Kings and queens, saints were spared, but **philosophers of the Enlightenment**, free spirits and artists were melted down. **Le Chevalier de la Barre** was one of the first, along with **Dolet, Voltaire, Diderot, Condorcet, Victor Hugo** and **Emile Zola**. As the former curator of the Musée Galliera put it, *«the authorities couldn't resist taking the opportunity to settle old score»*. They *«had their eye on the Chevalier de la Barre... and were determined to do away with Zola.»*

After 1945, although the statue of **General Mangin** - the **«butcher of the Blacks»** during the 1914-1918 war - was quickly rebuilt, the same did not happen to the statue of the **Chevalier de La Barre**.

However, every year, activists from the **Libre Pensée**, local councillors from the 18th arrondissement, members of the **P.C.F.**, the **S.F.I.O.**, the **Grand Orient de France** and **Droit Humain International** gather in front of the pedestal to demand the statue's return. Collections were organised; a wax model was made by the Uruguayan sculptor **Pedro Olaizola**, but in 1966, the authorities' opinion was unfavourable. A new project was launched in 1984, but failed again. In 1996, a statue was proposed, but **Voltaire's Dictionnaire philosophique** had disappeared, along with any reference to the torture. The least we can say is that the ersatz statue in Nadar Square in no way represents what the **Chevalier de La Barre** was. That's why we've made this one, which is exactly the same as the original.

Thank you to all those who have contributed to the creation of this work. Thanks to the sculptor for his meticulous work, despite the disappearance of the statue and its model.

The Church's determination to remove the statue and erase the memory of the **Chevalier's** courageous gesture is an expression of its relentless fight against freedom of thought.

In 1766, the public prosecutor at the Chevalier's trial spoke of an *«impious and audacious sect»* that wanted to *«shake the throne and overthrow the altar»*, whose cry was *«freedom of thought»*.

In 1791, the Pope used two encyclicals to condemn the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. *«Nothing could be more senseless»*, he wrote, than *«this equality and this freedom»* that had now been granted. Freedom could only mean *«licence to think, say and write»*, *«a monstrous right»* which would *«destroy the Catholic religion and with it the obedience due to kings»*.

When the first article of the **1905 law** was published - *«The Republic guarantees freedom of conscience»* - the Pope responded by reminding us that *«the multitude has no other duty than to allow itself to be led and, as a docile flock, to follow its shepherds»*.

The first major demonstration of the **Libre Pensée** after the war, which was held in front of the base of the statue of the knight, had the following slogan:

- **For freedom of conscience against religious intolerance**
- **For secular schools against the fanatics of ignorance**
- **For reason and science against superstition**
- **For a secular Republic**

These are still our watchwords. They are the slogans of our international conference, which has just begun.

Shame on those who classify the **Sacré Cœur** as a historical monument; it is the monument of the **Versillais**, of the **moral order**, of **reaction**.

The historical monument is the **statue of the Chevalier de La Barre**, a monument to freedom of conscience and emancipation.

Honour to the Chevalier de La Barre!

Down with the skullcap

Vive la Sociale!



The La Barre affair according to Voltaire



For the Abbeville Section of the LDH,
Jean-François Cocquet

The memory of the **La Barre affair** is still vivid in Abbeville where, in 1765, the young **knight** was arrested, tried and sentenced to death for *blasphemy and sacrilege*, i.e. for «*singing impious songs and even for having passed in front of a procession of Capuchins without having taken off his hat*», if we use **Voltaire's** expedient and ironic terms in the article «*Torture*» in his *Philosophical Dictionary*.

The **Ligue des Droits de l'Homme** and its friends from the **Libre Pensée** strive to keep this memory alive every year by gathering around the **La Barre Monument** anyone who is attached to **freedom of thought** and expression, to freedom of opinion whether religious (or irreligious), political or philosophical - this fundamental freedom guaranteed by the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, particularly in its articles 9, 10 and 11:

Article 9.

All men are presumed innocent until proven guilty, and if it is deemed necessary to arrest them, any harshness that is not necessary to ensure their safety must be severely punished by law.

Article 10.

No one should be disturbed for his opinions, even religious opinions, provided that their expression does not disturb the public order established by law.

Article 11.

The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man; every citizen may therefore speak, write and print freely, while being subject to liability for the abuse of this freedom in the cases determined by the law.

It is in the name of these principles that the **LDH**, following the attack on the Paris headquarters of the newspaper **Charlie Hebdo** on 7 January 2015, organised a conference entitled *Religions and freedom of expression* and subtitled «*History and current events of the La Barre affair*»: this conference focused on: 1 - L'affaire **La Barre**: ce que l'histoire permet de dire, 2 - Sacré, blasphème et sacrilège, 3 - L'affaire **La Barre** et le *Dictionnaire philosophique* de **Voltaire**, 4 - De l'affaire du **chevalier de La Barre** à la liberté d'expression et de création aujourd'hui. The proceedings of this colloquium have been compiled and can be forwarded.

In the centre of Abbeville, not far from the **La Barre Monument**, is what is known as Le Pavé La Barre. The origin of this modest stele is the gesture of two teachers and two students who, in 1902, placed a bouquet of flowers on the very spot where the **Chevalier** was beheaded... In 1905, the **law on the separation of Church and State** was passed.

It is therefore important in Abbeville to keep the memory of the Chevalier alive, as it is here, near the **Sacré Coeur** in Paris, built after the Commune, especially as the act of commemoration itself can always be seen as a provocation: in Abbeville, the statue of the Chevalier was defaced at night by a sect of **fundamentalist Christians**. We must conclude that the martyrdom of the young **Chevalier** is not buried in history: it is an ever-present, incandescent historical fact, a call to vigilance.

It would take too long to describe all the circumstances that led to **La Barre's** death sentence. Suffice it to say that, in the 18th century, Abbeville was a major town in the Kingdom of France. It had a population of nearly 20,000 (today, just over 24,000). It owed its prosperity primarily to the establishment of the Manufacture des Rames, a factory located near the

port which produced carpets and fine sheets: it ensured the survival of a whole population of overexploited farmers and workers. It should be noted in passing that **Colbert** called on Protestant industrialists from the Netherlands, the **Van Robais**, to set up this factory, and they were granted the privilege of burying their dead in the factory grounds: heresy can therefore be limited by economic interests... The city was divided between **Catholics - Jesuits and Jansenists, Protestants** and rebellious spirits won over by the **Enlightenment** - and between respectable bourgeois and nobles, with some young nobles willingly provocative, such as **La Barre** and his companions in adventure. The poor Chevalier's fate was definitively sealed when, after a search, a copy of *Voltaire's Dictionnaire philosophique* was discovered in his home.

By condemning the young **La Barre**, the political and clerical powers were attacking the spirit of the **Enlightenment**, at a time when that power was itself divided. The aim was to intimidate **Voltaire**, who had defended the **Protestant Calas**, who had been tortured in Toulouse, and whose case was denounced in **Voltaire's Treatise on Tolerance** in 1763, and then the **Protestant Sirven**, accused of having provoked the death of his daughter, who had allegedly wanted to convert to Catholicism was defended by **Voltaire**. But far from remaining silent, Voltaire added the article «Torture» to his **Philosophical Dictionary** in 1769. Thanks to **Voltaire**, the **La Barre affair** could now be considered from the judicial angle, the religious angle and the point of view of natural law.

In a court case, the «*question*», in other words torture, could be ordered by the **Criminal Lieutenant**. It was called «*preparatory*» or «*preliminary*» (prior to the actual execution) and, depending on its degree of violence, «*ordinary*» or «*extraordinary*». **Voltaire**, following in the footsteps of **Montaigne, La Bruyère, Montesquieu** and **Jaucourt**, to name but a few, denounced this legal procedure as barbaric and useless (under torture, the fragile innocent is likely to confess, the resistant guilty to deny), a legal practice contrary to the very idea of civilisation.

From a religious point of view, **Voltaire's** logic is unstoppable: *if God exists, he cannot, as a transcendent being, be offended by any of his creatures. To claim to avenge God is fanaticism.* In other words, sacrilege and blasphemy do not exist in the eyes of the infinitely great; they only exist in the eyes of infinitely small men when they allow themselves to be won over by this rage, this superstitious vanity, to make themselves the avengers of their divinity. In **L'Esprit des Lois**, **Montesquieu** had already observed that a sacrilege, a desecration for example, must be judged as a simple infraction of **public order** and, if necessary, condemned in proportion to the damage suffered. In other words, if proof had been duly established that **La Barre** or some other of his companions had mutilated a crucifix on a bridge in Abbeville, the judges would have had to sentence him to restore the statue. Let's not even mention his irreverence during religious ceremonies: the **Bishop of Amiens** himself wanted to ignore it...

The **La Barre affair** shows that established religions are necessarily affirmation and negation. Therein lies their unsurpassable contradiction: each affirms that a transcendent, absolute and universal Truth inspires it, that it is holy in itself in its forms and functions, and that it sanctifies the flock of its faithful; each consequently denies that another religion is even possible in truth and holiness: the other religion is erroneous, error must be denounced and hunted down, *a fortiori* agnostic or atheistic error. They are all potentially dangerous because they exclude as much as they seek to include: suspended or actual violence is consubstantial with them, as the history of Catholicism shows, for example, and particularly in the **Dictionnaire philosophique**.

One of the aims of **Voltairean deism** is to untie the link between violence and the sacred and to free people's consciences.

Voltaire believed in the existence of a single god, the creator, i.e. the architect and legislator of the universe. The **Voltairean god** is accessible only within the limits of reason informed by experience, which men must accept with humility. To go beyond these limits is to enter the realm of metaphysics, which inspires dogmatic thinking as well as superstitious fables, thinking that is all the more dangerous because it nourishes these endless confrontations in which each debater claims to hold the truth in a domain that is that of belief, not reason.

Moral action may be supported by religious teaching, according to **Voltaire**, but it is in man's native sensitivity that it originates. Sensitivity expresses itself in revolt at the injustices, humiliations and sufferings that so many people endure. To use the **Kantian expression**, «*the maxim of action can be set up as a universal law*» because it recognises in each person, here and now, an essential human universal, a common humanity. This is why no religious commandment should take precedence over natural law: natural law is *a priori* a matter for human reason and expresses itself spontaneously in and through sensibility; by virtue of its universality, it suspends or should suspend obedience to the religious commandment,

which is always particular - particularly when it is based on a literal reading of the sacred text: «*Any literal meaning,*» writes **Pierre Bayle**, «*which contains the obligation to commit crimes is false.*»

Good action is therefore inspired by reason and a sense of humanity, unlike the evil action of religious fanatics. Fanatics are irrational and inhuman: their anger becomes rage and their rage becomes cruelty - paradoxically, because they sometimes flout the principles they claim to uphold, which they ignore or choose to ignore, by adopting a literalist reading of their own sacred texts without seeking to grasp their spirit. But fanatics do not see the paradox: «*They draw their fury from the very religion that condemns them*», says a lucid and decidedly pessimistic **Voltaire**.

So much so that **Voltaire's worship of the Supreme Being** is no longer a matter of doctrinal training or catechesis, nor does it consist in assent to a dogma, but in the universal ethic of the feeling of humanity, which reason identifies as a «*primitive light*». **The cult of the Supreme Being** is therefore not the business of a church or a sect. Indeed, it is remarkable that the **Voltairean sacred**, hospitality for example, is of interest to all men, regardless of their religious beliefs.

Such was the universalist thinking that inspired **Voltaire** when he protested against the **martyrdom of the Chevalier La Barre**.



Marianne Feltrin



I bring you greetings from the **Association des Amis et Amies de La Commune de Paris 1871** (Association of Friends of the Paris Commune 1871), which is taking part in this rally to restore the **statue of the Chevalier de la Barre**, a Free Thinker martyr. Founded in 1882 by **Communard men and women** returning from exile or deportation, our association defends the idea of secularism alongside our friends from the **Fédération Nationale de la Libre Pensée**.

Less than a week after its proclamation, the Commune, with its decree of 2 April 1871, was truly the initiator of **secularism**. Under the **Commune**, France became the first secular state in the world. The **separation of Church and State** was based on freedom, «*the first of the principles of the Republic*» and therefore «*freedom of conscience [...] the first of freedoms*».

The **Communard** education project was emancipatory. In the wake of the decree of 2 April, the **Commune's Education Commission** created a secular, **compulsory and free school** for the first time.

From their exile in London, the group **La Commune révolutionnaire** reminded us in June 1874 in their «**Appel aux Communeux**» that «*Expelling God from the realm of knowledge, expelling him from society, is the law for man if he wants to achieve science, if he wants to achieve the goal of revolution [...]*». [...]

The struggle of the **Communards** is still relevant today. The work of the **Commune** and the democratic and civic method used to develop it are sources of inspiration for the defenders of secularism.

The clergy supported the **Versailles repression** and never acknowledged the massacres perpetrated against the **Communards**. In a total agreement between the Church and the authorities, the **National Assembly** passed a law of expropriation with a view to building an expiatory basilica dedicated to the **Sacred Heart of Jesus** on the very spot where the **Paris Commune** began on 18 March 1871. In 1874, the construction of the basilica was declared to be in the public interest! In our eyes, this building represents the repressive **moral order** that led to the bloody crushing of the **Commune**. The building was listed as a World Heritage Site in 2020, then classified in October 2022 following a vote by the **Paris City Council**. Unfortunately, the **AACP 1871** petition did not get enough support to change this decision.

To say that the Commune is not dead is to highlight the fact that the current struggles are aimed at social transformation, at making society more humane and more supportive. It's a struggle that the Communard men and women waged in their time. What the people wanted and achieved in 1871 is still very relevant in 2023.

In keeping with the ideals of the Commune, the Friends of the Paris Commune 1871 call on all those who want to resist attacks on social and democratic rights to fight to win new ones.

Long live the Commune! Vive la Sociale!





The Ligue de l'Enseignement and the right to «blasphemy»

Charles Conte

Chargé de mission à la Ligue de l'Enseignement



The Ligue de l'enseignement joins this evening the **Fédération Nationale de la Libre Pensée**, the **Ligue des Droits de l'Homme** and the **Friends of the Commune**. Together, around the new **statue of the Chevalier de La Barre**, we solemnly affirm the need to defend and illustrate freedom of expression in all fields, including criticism of religions.

Freedom of expression is an imperative condition for democracy, scientific progress and artistic creation. It guarantees the clarity of decisions taken by elected citizens. It is necessary for intellectual exchanges between researchers. It is essential in the world of arts and letters. **Freedom of expression** is the fruit of an age-old struggle that is constantly being renewed.

According to a report entitled «*Blasphemy: information sacrificed on the altar of religion*» submitted by **Reporters Without Borders** in 2013, 94 out of 198 countries have legislation against «blasphemy», «*apostasy*» or «*defamation of religions*». Direct repression is sometimes backed up by more underhand attempts. Rational or satirical criticism of religions is said to be a sign of disrespect, or even «*hate speech*». These accusations develop in a general confusion marked by the use of ill-defined notions such as «*Judeophobia*», «*Islamophobia*» and even «*Christianophobia*».

In a **secular republic such as ours**, freedom of conscience is guaranteed to all citizens. Whether they are believers, agnostics or atheists. Everyone has the right to express it as they see fit. In the text of the judgement handed down by the Abbeville court on 28 February 1766, we read that the **Chevalier de La Barre** was «*accused and convicted of having passed within twenty-five paces of a procession without taking off his hat, which he had on his head, without kneeling down, of having sung an impious song, of having paid respect to infamous books, among which was the philosophical dictionary by Sieur Voltaire*».

We say it loud and clear: **we refuse to get down on our knees** and we will continue to read **Voltaire's Dictionnaire philosophique** and have others read it.

Against religious barbarism

Bernard Guillon, President of the Union of Atheists

The **Union of Atheists** is pleased to share with **Freethought** this fat banquet on this day when some maintain their belief by celebrating mythical events that are supposed to be the foundation of their religious practices.

These practices could be only a friendly folklore, if they did not lead, since the night of time to sectarian and barbaric drifts. Today we have mentioned one of the victims of this barbarism.

On July 1, 1766, the **Chevalier de la Barre** died, a victim of Catholic religious barbarism. At the age of 21, he had his bones broken and his hand cut off before the executioner's axe cut his neck and his body was thrown at the stake. His crime: **impiety**. He had refused to discover himself during a Catholic procession, had a copy of Voltaire's «Dictionnaire philosophique» and had broken a crucifix.

He was the last victim of the Catholic clergy on French soil. Soon after, the **Revolution** would free the people from the yoke of religion. But it still took more than a hundred years for the **law on the separation of Churches and the State** to sanctify the freedom of conscience allowing it to live together.

The recent news unfortunately reminds us that religious barbarism is not dead.

The imams and mullahs of **Islam** brutally murdered two 23-year-old men fighting for their right to freedom. Condemned for impiety, they were tortured, then hanged, their bodies, exposed to the sight of all at the end of a crane.

But they are not alone. Religious extremists of all stripes show their teeth at every opportunity. **Catholics** who utter death threats against an artist and ban performances on the grounds that they are desecrating buildings that have long been public. **American Protestants** murdering doctors who perform abortions.

Orthodox rabbis calling for holy war for the promised land. And by whom would it be promised if not by a chimera.

And, if the **Union of Atheists** is not intended to take political positions, we must recognize that the connivance with the far right manifests itself openly in many of these situations.

Only a **humanist and rational ethic** allows social cohesion and peace.

I want to make it clear that this humanism inherently excludes discrimination against individuals based on their beliefs. There is no place in a humanistic and rational ethic for irrational hatred.

It is the proselytic and communitarian religious ethics that we reject.

The **Union of Atheists** will therefore be among all the struggles that will set back religious obscurantism and irrational beliefs.

Atheist friends, join us, because nothing is ever acquired and the freedom to think might one day be delighted by some slanderous, bearded or not, who would come to power with the complicity of anti democratic parties.



Free thinkers, free eaters!

Schneckenburger Benoit
Secrétaire général adjoint de la Libre Pensée



Dear and dear comrades,

Once again, this year, we pay tribute to the «**Fatty Banquets**». Fatty, because it was a matter of denouncing the religious and Napoleonic obligations not to eat meat on the so-called **Good Friday**.

Free thinkers are no longer surprised by the absurdities of superstition, obscurantism, and fanaticism, but many of our fellow citizens do not know how far these prohibitions can go.

Food ban is deadly.

Let us listen to **Voltaire**, who reminds us that the **Catholic Church**, supported by **Charlemagne who made the consumption of meat on a holy day a capital crime**,

has made food bans a principle of terror: “*The archives of a small place of the country called Saint-Claude, in the most hideous rocks of the county of Burgundy, keep the sentence and the record of execution of a poor man named Claude Guillon, whose head was cut off on July 28, 1629. He was reduced to misery and starved to death; one meatless day he ate a piece of a horse that had been killed in a nearby meadow. That was his crime. He was condemned as sacrilege. Had he been rich and had supper been served for two hundred tidal crowns, and had he left the poor to starve, he would have been considered a man who fulfilled all his duties*”. “*We, having seen all the documents of the trial and having heard the opinion of the doctors in law, declare that said Claude Guillon was reached and convinced to have taken meat from a horse killed in a meadow of that city; to have cooked said meat on March 31 (...) and to have eaten it.*” Voltaire, *Commentaire sur le livre, Des délits et des peines*.

Protestants, Jews, free thinkers, could be denounced for not respecting these prescriptions. **All religions are concerned!** In a comics, **Snowy**, the **Tintin’s** dog, a supposed reporter of the “*petit vingtième*”, was almost executed for desecrating a sacred cow. **Quick Gun Murugun**, a 2009 film by **Shashanka Ghosh**, in the style of **Bollywood**, renews the Western genre by opposing a defender of small restaurateurs against the nasty **Rice Plate Reddy** who at the head of the **junk food chain Mac Dosai** imposes traditional patties but made from beef!

If France has a thousand cheeses, religions have a thousand prohibitions

The scope of food bans is extremely varied and fluctuating. Judaism and the Old Testament, referring to **Deuteronomy** and **Leviticus**, forbid for example 24 birds, including the eagle, the ostrich and the owl: one cannot then eat ostrich steak, the trade of which was revived by Australia and New Zealand. Most insects are forbidden, but grasshoppers are not: “*You will have in abomination any reptile that flies and walks on four feet. But among all the reptiles that fly and walk on four feet, you will eat those that have legs above their feet, to jump on the ground. Here are the ones you will eat: grasshopper, solam, hargol and hagab, depending on their species. You will have in abomination all the other flying reptiles that have four feet.*» Lv 11

Good news for trendy restaurants that sell grilled and spicy grasshopper-based appetizers. **Judaism**, on the other hand, prohibits meat cheese skewers found in Japanese restaurants because the **Exodus** says, «*You will not cook a kid in his mother’s milk.*»

Islam repeats most of the prohibitions of the **Old Testament** by stating that “*The food of those to whom Scripture has been given is lawful for you, and your food is lawful for them*” (5:5).

As for **Judaism**, we know the prohibitions of **Islam** concerning pork, which also allows the extreme right to hide its anti-Semitism by its rejection of Muslim traditions.

Prohibitions in the dogmatic blur

The origin of these prescriptions has been widely discussed. We will not dwell on their character of eternal truth, it belongs only to believers. And even! History shows a lot of back and forth. **The Old Testament restrictions were lifted in the New Testament, with Mark the evangelist** saying that “*this is how he declared all pure food*”. And yet, in the Middle Ages, more than 150 days were affected by the restrictions of the Christian calendar. It was only in **Vatican 2** and 1966 that the obligation to fast before communion was lifted, and the defence of eating meat on Fridays. Moreover, the same ban did not apply to Spaniards who had been exempted from it since the **battle of Lepanto**. A victory against the **infidels** was worth derogation.

Similarly for **Hinduism**, historians today show that the cow was not sacred in the early days, and on the contrary object of many sacrifices. Today, the **Hallah** is the subject of growing demand, but also major trade and political issues. In 2014, a **start-up called “Capital Biotech” commercialized self-tests to detect the presence of pork** in food. What a flip-flop when senior **Islamic** officials said in the 1930s that any food suitable for **Jews and Christians** could be consumed by Muslims!

The cultural role of the forbidden

As regards pork, the **rationalist explanation of the ban cannot derive its sources from an implicit hygienism**. As **Claude Fischler** points out in *L’omnivore* (Odile Jacob 1990), **consumption of it is permitted or prohibited in climatic zones where the diseases are the same**. The culturalist explanation is more relevant. On the one hand it comes from the apparent disorder in a so-called harmonious world represented by the pork, the only quadruped with a split hoof that does not ruminate.

On the other hand, it reveals that religious norms and values play their full role of community unification. **It is through rites that believers connect, religare being one of the chosen etymologies for religion. They are inscribed in the most intimate by these provisions as the control of the bodies.**

Food bans and secularism

Today, dietary prescriptions still challenge secular activists. The **ritual slaughter** which touches the defenders of the animal cause, constitutes a **violation of the regulatory provisions**, provided both by the European institutions in the name of freedom of belief, and by decree no. 97/903 of 1 October 1997. The latter states that “*stunning of animals is mandatory before any slaughter or slaughter, with the exception of the following cases: the obligation to stun animals is subject to a derogation with regard to ritual slaughtering*”. **Although Darwin has shown that we are also animals, that we share with many of them pain, isn’t it time to review an exemption for such illusory reasons?**

With regard to school canteens, how to reconcile the two parts of article 1 of the 1905 law: freedom of conscience and the exercise of worship? Current jurisprudence seems to have found a common-sense solution: neither the recognition of religious dispositions – **kosher or halal**, for example – violates the neutrality of the State laid down by Article 2; **nor the obligation to eat what offends**. The simplest, with all due respect to some, is to systematically offer as an alternative another meal, devoid of any religious prohibition: **vegetarian or vegan**.

Let’s go to the banquet!

Here is the history of these **prohibitions**. Let us go back to banquets very briefly. They have always been, in their diversity, an opportunity to celebrate freedom of thought. **We know that the history of the Republic, like that of secularism, has known great moments of banquets. Veal’s head banquets on 21 January, to oppose the Republic to the monarchy, allowed when freedom of opinion was threatened to circumvent censorship. On April 10, 1869, Sainte Beuve, Renan, Flaubert, and Taine promoted banquets known as the “Saint Gras” (Holly fat), the “Côtelette” (Sparerib), and other names against the Church and the Empire.**

The form of the banquet is not insignificant. **Spinoza**, the philosopher who, more than any other, never ceased to defend **freedom of thought**, opposed the ethics of joy to the morals of contention. **May our banquets be festive, may they celebrate the joy of sharing with friends the pleasure of living.** This banquet ceremony is even older than are used by the

Republicans. **It has its source in the Greek symposium. It was instituted under the title of philosophy by Epicurus who organized banquets with her friends.**

Besides, the **Epicureans like to turn away the words of the evangelist Paul who said: «manducemus et bibemus, cras enim moriemur»: let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we will die.** The very sceptical **Montaigne** made it one of his principles, linking it to the Egyptian tradition. The fathers of the Church tried to deny **Paul's** word, seeing it as an epicurean origin, for whom **hedonism** was inseparable from the satisfaction, certainly moderate, of the pleasures of the belly, without fear of death. The slayer of the **Infamous, Voltaire**, a lover of good food, was not mistaken in believing that *«This freedom of table (freedom of speech and opinions) is regarded in France as the most precious freedom that one can taste on earth».*

Let us be proud of these traditions.

Free thinkers, free eaters from all countries, enjoy!



Speech on clerical abuse

Keith Porteous Wood, President of the (UK) National Secular Society
Spoke-person of IAFI



Two factors particularly attract would-be clerical abusers. **1)** The spiritual power that priests exercise over minors makes it harder for them to resist, and **2)** religious bodies jealously guard their reputation, so abuse is covered up - thus sparing the perpetrators from accountability. So it is no surprise that such abuse is found in almost every religion and denomination. Most, but by no means all, of our work on abuse involves the **Roman Catholic Church**. This is largely because it runs more schools and other institutions involving children than any other denomination or religion.

The first record of abuse being a problem in the **Catholic Church** is from the 4th century. 1700 years later we are now in the fourth decade of worldwide *publicity* of abuse which has hugely diminished church attendance and the Church's moral authority.

The **Pope** claims that there should be zero tolerance to abuse, but I have yet to see any convincing evidence of him enforcing this without exception. Even **Francis's** own reputation on abuse is poor. I will give four examples.

1. One of **Francis's** showcase initiatives was to set up in 2014 a **pontifical** (i.e. his own) **Commission** tasked with protecting minors from abuse. Just nine years later it is disintegrating. Founding members of the **Pope's Commission**, including both victims, have abandoned it, generally in despair about its impotence and the **Pope's** lack of interest in its work.

And despite the **Vatican's** legendary wealth, the Commission is so desperate for funds it has had to resort to begging for charity to operate even on a reduced level. The Italian bishops' conference was suspiciously eager to offer money. That it absolutely refuses to instigate a comprehensive inquiry into abuse in **Italy** gives us a clue about its motives.

2. In 2018 **Francis** accused victims in Chile of "*calumny*" for accusing a Chilean bishop of repeatedly covering up abuse, although this had already been brought to the Pope's attention. Only after it was proved that he had been informed did he apologise.

3. He has never disciplined or overridden **prelates** fighting openly against legal changes that would drastically improve victims' ability to claim damages.

4. Worse was the total blanket rejection in 2014 (during his papacy) of the recommendations of the experts of the **UN Committee on the Rights of the Child**, many of them relating to clerical abuse. One of these urged the **Vatican** to "*Immediately remove all known and suspected child sexual abusers from assignment and refer the matter to the relevant law enforcement authorities ...*" Yet **Francis** and the entire **Catholic Church** refuse to take this elementary preventative step.

This demonstrates their only priority is to protect abusers and the Church's reputation; victims are just collateral damage, and not uncommonly even punished by the **Church** for the rest of their lives for making their abuse public. Nor is there any country where the Church offers fair compensation to abuse victims, an obligation under the **UN Convention**.

Francis's predecessors also had a poor record on child abuse. So-called *saint* **John Paul II**, when a cardinal in Poland, reportedly managed to rid himself of a priest he knew to be an abuser by commending him to an archbishop outside **Poland** but omitting any mention of abuse. **Benedict** promoted **Cardinal Nolan** to be Archbishop of New York, after Nolan removed \$57 Million that should have been available to victims claiming compensation for horrific abuse at a home for deaf children. Even if the promotion was not a reward for this massive fraud, **Benedict** regarded the fraud as acceptable. Fortunately the courts restored the money to the victims, but only after a hard-fought appeal.

These are some of the problems, so what are we doing about them?

Countries are required every five years under the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** to report to the **UN Committee on the Rights of the Child** their difficulties in fulfilling their **Convention** obligations. NGOs, such as us, are also invited to submit concerns. This provides an opportunity for campaigners seeking to fight such abuse in countries throughout the world. We have been doing this, mainly over clerical abuse, for 15 years.

The **Committee** consults with the relevant country and the NGOs. I recently answered questions the **Committee** posed to me in Geneva. They take our work seriously and generally refer to points we raise in their "*concluding observations*" in which they list their concerns and make recommendations.

These "**concluding observations**" are public documents designed to bring pressure on countries to take corrective action, but they do not carry the force of law. We therefore try to get them publicised to maximise the pressure on the governments concerned.

Typical recommendations we make are for the extension or elimination of criminal and civil statutes of limitation for abuse, the introduction of a mandatory reporting law and for there to be a State-led inquiry into abuse.

I will now make some comments about specific countries.

Before **Ireland** became known for having the highest per capita rate of abuse in the world, it was probably the most pious Catholic country. I suspect there is a causal connection. When the anti-Catholic British rulers were driven out of Ireland around a hundred years ago, the **Church** filled the resulting power vacuum. And the **republic** set out to be a beacon of Catholic virtue. Contraception was banned, but the fun-loving Irish didn't restrict sex to being within holy matrimony. This resulted in many children being born to single mothers who, unlike the fathers, were cruelly punished. Many were enslaved, for example in **laundries run by the Church** and were heartlessly separated from their children. Without guardians, the children were easy targets for predatory priests. And because the new state was so keen to maintain its reputation for Catholic virtue, it was unthinkable to prosecute the priests. Touchable children plus untouchable priests equals abuse on a massive scale that shocked the world.

And the scale of abuse also mortified Ireland, so maybe it is no coincidence that Ireland is one of the countries with one of the steepest declines in mass attendance and the most rapid transformation from **extreme social conservatism** to becoming a beacon of **social liberality**.

France and **Portugal** are among countries whose **churches** have recently conducted their own inquiries. We view these with suspicion and suspect that most are instigated to head off a state-led inquiry, which should be far more independent and wide-ranging, for example by considering the effectiveness of law and law enforcement. Another reason why state inquiries are better is that victims are far more likely to be prepared to give evidence to a state body than one which abused them.

You may have recently learned of a scandal about abuse in **Portugal**. We raised our concerns about this with the **Committee** in 2018 and they made recommendations about it in their concluding observations.

Given **France's** legendary *laïcité*, it never occurred to me that there would be an abuse problem, but I could not have been more wrong. I have spent longer on the abuse in France over the last three years than all other countries combined.

It started with **Cardinal Barbarin**, the top Catholic in France, who had Papal ambitions. He was criminally convicted for failing to report abuse of a minor – as the law requires – by a priest pretending to be a scout master who over decades had grievously and systematically abused 3,000-4,000 scouts. We and others paid for the case to be heard as a private prosecution because, despite the weight of evidence, the **public prosecutor** refused to act. Despite **Barbarin** admitting that he knew of the abuse, higher courts decided mysteriously to overturn the conviction. Not I think the finest hour for French justice.

A **courageous priest**, who had been harshly treated by **Barbarin**, succeeded where we did not. He launched a petition for **Barbarin's resignation**, and after over 100,000 had signed it, the **Pope** gave in and accepted **Barbarin's** resignation. He is now teaching first year seminarians in Brittany. The **Pope**, who is a friend of his, invited sympathy for **Barbarin's** downfall, but failed to mention the scouts who were abused because the Church had failed to denounce the perpetrator.

France's Church appointed an ostensibly independent commission which initially claimed that since 1950 there had been around 10,000 abuse victims, which I told the **Commission's president** was implausible. It then revised this to 1/3 million! This suggests around a million abuses, which scandalously resulted in only around 200 convictions, surely demonstrating that the Church and clerics are above the law?

As a result of our representations, the **UN** asked the **French state** to include details about clerical abuse in its report. Astoundingly, it did not. Does this mean the **State** does not care about such abuse, or that it is subservient to the **Church**? We await the Committee's report, but we expect it to be highly critical.

The most shocking admissions that I heard in France were from **Jean-Marc Sauvé**, the **President of the French Church's Commission** and the **Head of the French Monks and Nuns association**, who is a brave woman. Both said that they had encountered criminality in their investigations of abuse in the **French church**. Such corruption is unfortunately **Church-wide**.

The unpalatable reality is that **Church** is incorrigible. So, in the interests of victims and justice, none of us must miss any opportunity to hold both **religious organisations** and **state operators** to account. We therefore need to pressurise states to be much more active and effective in uncovering abuse, in punishing perpetrators and to ensure the Church compensates its victims fairly.

We can and should all campaign in our own countries for these goals. I urge you all to play your part in doing this.



The Church must pay, the Church can pay

speech prepared by Dominique Goussot and red by Sylvie Midavaine



Citizens, comrades, dear friends,

In his *Treatise on Tolerance* published in 1763, only three years before the horrific torture inflicted on the young **Chevalier de La Barre** following his condemnation for «*impiety, blasphemy, sacrilegious execrable and abominable*» **Voltaire** (1694-1778) wrote by the judges of the **presidium of Abbeville**, who was a member of the Roman Church, that “*the abuse of the holiest religion produces great crimes.*” The sexual abuse practised by some ministers of the **Catholic cult** on minors

is evidence of these crimes, committed not only against the thought and conscience of individuals but against the very being of children abandoned to their claws. For the record, other abominations are added to these monstrosities. Thus, in addition to the innumerable rapes of nuns from 1925 to 1961, the nuns of the **Congregation of Good Help of Our Lady Help of Christians in Paris** had welcomed at the **convent of Tuam**, In Ireland, thousands of young single mothers have been subjected to inhumane treatment of their offspring, including eight hundred deaths of young children. «*There is something rotten*» not «*in the empire of Denmark*» as **Hamlet** thought but in the **Vatican**.

Sexual abuse of minors is not isolated. They are the result of a real system of predation: the spider web woven around the world by the **Vatican** has taken hundreds of thousands of minors into its care since the middle of the twentieth century. The Catholic hierarchy has covered these atrocities and protected those who committed them. Thus, faced with lawyers administering relentless evidence of the many sexual abuses committed against minors in Bavaria, the pope emeritus **Joseph Ratzinger**, alias **Benedict XVI**, has himself-even acknowledged in a letter of February 6, 2022 to have modestly turned a blind eye to the crimes being committed in the Archdiocese of Munich for which he was responsible from 1977 to 1982.

In recent years, State-led commissions have uncovered the extent of child sexual abuse that has been the subject of extensive investigations in various countries where the Roman cult population is large, notably in Ireland, in 2009, in **Germany** and the **Netherlands**, in 2010, as well as in Australia, in 2013, whose royal commission did considerable investigative work (17,000 victims heard; 42,000 phone calls received; 27,000 correspondence investigated). In 2018, the Attorney General of the **State of Pennsylvania** drafted the report allowing three hundred priests to be indicted before a popular jury.

In **France**, in 2018, the **Senate majority** refused to set up a **parliamentary commission of inquiry** into these crimes. Nevertheless, in 2019, a fact-finding mission chaired by **Catherine Deroche**, Senator for Maine-et-Loire, submitted a very general report on the “**Public policies for the prevention, detection, reporting and enforcement of sexual offences likely to be committed by persons in contact with minors**”, a way to drown the Catholic fish in the ocean of harm to minors while positively signaling the efforts made by the **Conference of Bishops of France** (CEF). Ultimately, forced to put out the fire in the opinion, it set up the **independent commission on sexual abuse in the Church (CIASE)** in November 2018.

La **Libre Pensée** praised the work done by the **CIASE** under the chairmanship of **Mr. Jean-Marc Sauv **, honorary vice-president of the **Conseil d’ tat**. The findings of this commission are astounding: 216,000 minors have been sexually assaulted by 2,900 to 3,200 priests (2.5% of their population), from 1950 to 2020, an average of 72 per predator. This number reaches 330,000 when the crimes committed by lay people in pastoral works of the **Roman Church** for young people are taken into account. The **CIASE** therefore rightly asserts that “*It is essential to give real justice to the women and men within the Catholic Church who have suffered in their flesh and spirit from sexual violence.*” She observes that the **Church’s** answers are “[...] *Globally insufficient, often late, only reactionary to the events, or poorly applied.*”

The question of reparation for the harm suffered by the victims seems to be decisive. Even before the publication of the **CIASE** report in early October 2021, at the end of its August 2021 **Voiron Congress**, the french **Free Thought** had put forward the only acceptable solution: **full compensation for victims**, which the **CIASE** had not clearly stated. In view of the principle that the **Republic** could not finance the cults in the regime of separation introduced in France in 1905, it was not conceivable for the Free Thought to admit that the **Roman Church** could organize an exceptional appeal for donations, two-thirds, or even three-quarters under certain conditions, reimbursed by tax through a **tax deduction**. On this point, the **CIASE** shared our point of view. **Free thinkers** therefore affirmed that the Church must and can pay.

It has to pay because it is morally and legally responsible. Morally, because the **systemic nature** of this large-scale sexual predation goes beyond, but does not erase, the individual involvement of the authors. From a legal point of view, because the latter are generally insolvent – priests have low incomes – the dioceses bear the responsibility for others provided for in the Civil Code for the persons concerned, the **Court of Cassation** has made a broad interpretation in order to satisfy in all circumstances the rights to reparation of the victims.

Can the Church pay? **Free Thought** has never doubted this, but it has demonstrated it by studying the accounts of the **ninety-three dioceses**, including twenty-six in depth. The results of this survey exceed our boldest estimates: without prejudice to the Congregations' treasure, which remains a mystery, the **Church of Secular France** is at the head of a fortune of around **eight billion euros**.

First of all, in order to make a correct assessment of the findings to which **Free Thought** has reached, it is important to recall that the **Roman Church** has an exceptional ability to rebound in financial matters, in remarkable conditions of opacity in general. Thanks to the **Concordat** approved by the law of the **18th germinal Year X**, it has for the first time erased the consequences of the **nationalization of the property of the clergy** which the revolutionaries carried out in 1789 to overcome the financial crisis bequeathed by absolutism.

Following the entry into force of the **Law of 9 December 1905** on the **separation of Churches and the State**, it has reconstituted immense wealth benefiting in particular, on the one hand, the provision of buildings of worship free of charge by the law of 2 January 1907, which was made necessary by **Rome's** refusal to set up the **religious associations** imposed by the **law of 1905**, on the other hand, measures taken for its benefit by the **Vichy regime** – authorization given to diocesan associations to receive tax-free grants; breach of the principle of public non-financing of cults by authorising public authorities to pay aid for the repair of cult buildings – and finally, the largesse of the **Fifth Republic** which, Since 1960, has opened wide the floodgates letting flow the immense amount of the money of the State and the local authorities in the purse of the Catholic teaching.

At the end of its study, **Free Thought** established that at the end of fiscal year 2019 the dioceses of France had a sum of more than **one billion six hundred million euros**, deposited in current accounts, accounts in booklets or in the form of immediately movable investment securities. In addition, the book value before depreciation of its land and buildings, recorded in the accounts at their historical purchase price, amounted to nearly **three billion euros**. After a work of updating this sum according to the evolution of the price of new and old homes throughout France from January 2000 to December **2019**, **Libre Pensée** has determined a **theoretical market value of this real estate and land heritage: it reached more than six billion three hundred million euros** at 31 December 2019, the equivalent of one tenth of that of the State. It is very likely that this estimate is below reality.

To shed light on this subject, let us give some examples: the **archdiocese of Paris** has the headquarters of the telephone company **Free**, a building worth one hundred and fifty million euros, as well as the convent of the Bernardines, restored with a lot of public money; the bishop of Lille lives in the largest listed hotel of the eighteenth century listed in the great French city of Flanders; twenty seminarians occupy the immense seminary of Issy-les-Moulineaux, an architectural marvel of the seventeenth century; the diocese of Nice has a large tourist hotel-restaurant overlooking the sea; that of Aix-en-Provence holds the magnificent estate of Baume comprising a building built at the same time as a park of twelve hectares.

What is the **Roman Church** currently devoting to compensating the **330,000 victims of sexual abuse of minors** committed by priests or lay people invested in pastoral works for youth? Twenty small million euro, or 1.2% of its only treasury, are made available to the two instances entrusted by the **Bishops' Conference of France** to repair the crimes committed! To date only a quarter of this amount has been spent. The documentary produced for **France Television** by journalist **Ju-**

lie Lotz, who gave the floor to **Free Thought** to expose the fruits of her work, shows that greed walks at the arm of crime. In particular, this one-hour film leaves the floor wide open to witnesses and also traces the proceedings of a meeting of one of the two bodies.

To a woman who has been raped for years during her minority by three successive priests, it is proposed to take over until the end of her days the veterinary expenses to be incurred to care for her dog. To a man who suffered continuous sexual abuse in his teens, the person in charge of the case, obviously inclined to deny him any compensation commensurate with the harm suffered, maintains that this victim has rebuilt well since she married, had children, and led an apparently normal life.

The report also states that the **Church** intends to limit to **sixty thousand euros** the amount of compensation, whatever the crime committed, its duration and its impact on the subsequent life of the abused minors. To make a comparison, a judge in **New Jersey** condemned the **American Church** to pay an average of nearly **300,000 euros** to each of the 300 people involved. This ceiling is an insult to the victims. In this regard, **Free Thought** can only condemn this position even though the Church holds billions of euros in its hands. She must pay, without restriction! She can pay without difficulty! «*The nerves of the battles are the pecunes*» said **Rabelais** (1483-1553) in his *Gargantua*.

I would not want to end this speech without thanking warmly, on behalf of the **International Association of Free Thought** and on behalf of all of us, our friend **Keith Porteous Wood** of the **National Secular Society (NSS) of the United Kingdom** who, for years, carries out considerable work, notably with the **United Nations (UN)**, to denounce the sexual abuse of minors perpetrated within the **Roman Church** in the world. **The French Free Thought** is extremely grateful to him for having relayed the results of his investigations to the **UN**.

I thank you and wish you to continue joyful free-thinking agapes.

International Declaration

For the separation of Churches, Religions and States!

For the abrogation of the Concordats!

For the end of privileges in favour of the Religions!

This **international Colloquium** held on 7 and 8 April 2023 in Paris (France), on the initiative of the **European Coordination Office of the Free Thought**, supported by the **International Association of the Free Thought** and other associations, studied under their different aspects the situations of Churches and Religions in different countries on several continents.

On this occasion, the participants, coming from countries of several continents, all welcomed the symbolic reinstallation of the original statue of the **Chevalier de la Barre** in its prior place at the top of the **Butte Montmartre**, facing the Basilica called «**Sacred Heart of Jesus**», which is an expiatory symbol for the Parisians guilty of the «**crimes of the Paris Commune**» during 1871, which, among other things, decreed the **Second Separation of Churches and State** in France referring for the first time to **freedom of conscience** in the definition of this principle.

The statue of the **Chevalier de la Barre** honours the memory of a young man who, keeping his hat on head while a religious procession was passing by, asserted his freedom of conscience when it was forbidden and repressed. The tribute to the **Chevalier de la Barre**, burnt in Abbeville on 1st July 1766, is a tribute to his gesture as a free man. By refusing to salute a procession, he affirmed his freedom of conscience publicly, he claimed for every man the freedom of expression. This rather insignificant gesture in appearance was so important, so fundamental that it earned him his death.

This statue of the **Chevalier de la Barre** became the symbol of the defence of freedom of conscience, the foundation of secularism and of the **Separation of Church and State**, known throughout the world for being the symbol of **Voltaire's** writings about the **Martyrdom of the Chevalier**, with the inscription «**Impious**» nailed at the top of the stake and **Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary** thrown in the flames.

The statue was erected and inaugurated during the **World Congress of the Free Thought in September 1905**, because the **French law of Separation of Churches and State** was going to be voted in the following months. The form (i.e., the statue) joined in the same movement the substance (i.e., the law). 25,000 people from many countries took part in the inauguration event, demonstrating their deep attachment to the complete advent of **freedom of conscience**.

The participants in this **International Colloquium in Paris**, in their great diversity, want to promote this fundamental claim, the **freedom of conscience** of the militants of **secularism** and **humanism** throughout the world and on all continents.

Examining the diverse situations in different countries, it became clear to them several things:

- Respect and defence of **freedom of conscience** cannot exist without a legal and legislative mechanism for **separation** between the religious sphere and temporal power. **Victor Hugo**, the great free-thinking writer, magnified it in a formula: «**The Church keeping to itself; the State to itself**».
- Situations of effective **separation of Churches and State** exist in many countries, and elsewhere elements of secularism more or less exist in the constitutions. Therefore, the **separation of Churches and State** is not the prerogative of any specific country, in which case it would be an exception. On the contrary, in its various forms, freedom of conscience is above all a widespread universal concept as an aspiration of peoples aspiration for greater and better democracy and the broadening of individual and collective freedoms.
- **Catholic concordats** (there are no concordats for other religions) are **diplomatic agreements** between **a State** (or a region of a country) and **the Holy See** (the diplomatic name for the **Vatican State**) granting exorbitant privileges exclusively

to the Catholic religion. **These diplomatic agreements** result in inegalitarian treatment of non-Catholic citizens of any other belief, religious or otherwise, and are consequently in total contradiction to the notion of **freedom of conscience**.

- Established and official Churches and Religions are essentially discriminatory against those who are not followers. They are fundamentally inegalitarian and in flagrant contradiction with the application of genuine freedom of conscience.

- Opposite to the universal principles of **freedom of expression and association**, the **Concordats, Churches, and official and established Religions** inevitably engage in the repression of ideas and people who do not identify with the «official values» thus proclaimed and imposed by the States. **The Catholic Concordats, the Churches and the official and established Religions** contribute by their doctrines of submission to the State and to power, especially economic power, to reinforce the will to implement **State ideologies**, which are by nature totalitarian. These provisions, often referred to as «**blasphemy offences**», are in many cases criminally reprehensible. «Blasphemy» is defined as a religious concept conceived only within the internal sphere of a religion and therefore not applicable to people outside the concerned religions. This criminalisation is a political crime against freedom of expression when it applies to all, believers or not.

- Direct or indirect public financing of **Religions, Churches, and Cults** by distributing the money of all for the benefit of the few's philosophical option is discriminatory and contradictory to the notion of **freedom of conscience** applicable fundamentally to non-believers as well as to believers, and similarly, the loss of public money due to tax exemptions granted. It is an outrageous advantage and a misappropriation of public money which should be used for the **general interest** and not for the private interests of cults.

- The privileges, particularly financial ones, granted to the **teaching networks of Churches and Religions** by certain States are an attack against the claim for a **public and secular school open to all** and are discriminatory, as they infringe the principles of equality, science, and rationalism.

- The **Catholic Churches** regularly use their special status granted or protected by complaisant States to escape the **Human Justice** in the case of crimes, especially sexual ones. This is an unbearable discrimination. When a **Justice of Exception**, would it be canonical, protects religious people and let them escape their responsibilities, human law is denied and violated.

Consequently, the participants in the Paris International Colloquium :

- **Urge** all associations and activists attached to **Humanism, Secularism and Freedom of Conscience** to act in their respective countries for the **effective Separation of Churches and State** and to defend it when it exists partially or totally. This legal and legislative mechanism is the best democratic means to guarantee and promote **freedom of conscience**, which must be equal for all.

- **Call on** all supporters of **genuine democracy** to mobilise for the abrogation of the **Catholic Concordats, of the established Churches and the established Religions** and to demand the abrogation of the penal statutes of «**blasphemy offences**».

- **Encourage** friends of **Freedom of Conscience** to demand that States put an end to public funding of religions and their related collateral organisations, and that they launch a campaign of enquiries bringing to light the assets and wealth of Religions and Churches with a public edition of their results.

- **Wish** that the **Conclusions and Proceedings of the VIIIth Congress of the AILP in Madrid on the Secularity of Public Education** be made widely known to public opinions in the countries, especially its conclusions: «*The inescapable objective of secularists and free thinkers is to plan a non-religious education that protects the mental health of the new generations through the development of a rational and critical conscience*».

- **Demand** that in criminal matters, acts of all kinds committed by religious people be subject to **the ordinary jurisdiction of the legal and official** and therefore common Justice of the concerned countries and that no ecclesiastical privilege be used to preserve religious criminals from the **Human Justice**.

Paris, April 8th, 2023



**FÉDÉRATION NATIONALE
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