



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

## **International Declaration of the 9th World Congress of the IAFT Grenoble/Lyon (France), October 10 and 11, 2025**

The **9th Congress of the International Association of Free Thought (AILP)**, taking place in France, will participate fully in the various celebrations marking the **120th anniversary of the great French law separating Churches and State of 9 December 1905**. After the **United States and Mexico**, this so-called "**Law of 1905**" consolidated the choice of **separation** by **France**.

The principles of **separation** were precisely formulated at the **World Congress of Free Thought in Rome in 1904**, organised opposite the **Vatican City**. Since then, many countries have implemented, either partially or totally, these principles of **separation of civil and religious matters** in their **constitutions**, thereby reinforcing respect for **freedom of conscience**.

**Separation of Churches and State** was conquered in the **United States of America**, a Protestant country, in 1789. Then in **Mexico**, a Catholic country, in 1874. And in **France**, the country of *the Renaissance*, the *Enlightenment* and *the Revolution*, in 1795, 1871 and 1905. In 1918, **Lenin** imposed it in **Russia**, a country with an Orthodox tradition. In 1937, Muslim **Turkey** decided to introduce it in part. **That was yesterday, but what about today?** In Buddhist **Nepal**, Separation was established in 2008. It was introduced in 2009 in **Bolivia**, which mixes pagan cults with Christianity. In **Angola**, African country where animism and religious syncretism reign, Separation was established in 2010.

Whatever the history, the dominant religion or the majority culture, one thing is clear: the **separation of Churches, religions, cults and the State** is the democratic solution applicable everywhere and in all circumstances. Separation means freedom won, and democracy established. Separation is national in form and international in content. Separation paves the way for the future progress of all peoples and all nations.

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At the **International Conference Against Concordats** in April 2023, the **IAFT** declared:

- Respect for and defence of **freedom of conscience** cannot exist without a legal and legislative framework ensuring the *separation* of the religious sphere from temporal power. **Victor Hugo**, the great Free Thinker writer, expressed this observation in his famous rhetorical image: *'The Church at her home, the State at his own!'*.
- The effective **separation of churches and state** exists in many countries, while others have incorporated at least partial secularism into their constitutions to varying degrees. The **separation of churches and state** is therefore not the exclusive prerogative of any particular country. On the contrary, in its various forms, **freedom of conscience** is above all a universal

concept that is widely held, as it embodies the simultaneous aspiration for a more authentic and broader democracy and for the development of individual and collective freedoms.

- Established and official churches and religions are fundamentally discriminatory towards those who are not their adepts. They are fundamentally unequalitarian and in absolute contradiction with the exercise of true freedom of conscience.
- Contrary to the universal principles of **freedom of expression and association, concordats, churches and official and established religions** inevitably engage in the repression of ideas and people who do not identify with the '*official values*' proclaimed and imposed by states. Catholic Concordats, official and established churches and religions contribute through their doctrines of submission to the state and to power, particularly economic power, to strengthening the will to implement state ideologies, which are totalitarian by nature. These provisions, often referred to as 'blasphemy offences', are in many cases criminally punishable. '*Blasphemy*' is defined as a religious concept conceived solely within the internal sphere of a religion and therefore inapplicable to persons outside the religions concerned. This criminalisation constitutes a political crime against freedom of expression when it applies to everyone, believers or non-believers alike.
- Direct or indirect public funding of **religions, churches and cults** through the distribution of public money for the benefit of the philosophical beliefs of a few is discriminatory and inherently contradictory to the concept of **freedom of conscience**, which applies equally to non-believers and believers. This is also true of the loss of public money due to the privileged tax exemptions they enjoy. This is a scandalous advantage and a misappropriation of public money that should be used for the general interest and not for the **private interests** of sects.
- The privileges, especially financial ones, granted by some States to **Churches and education religious networks** are the exact opposite of the imperious necessity of a **secular public school system** open to all; furthermore, these privileges are discriminatory, as they undermine the fundamental principles of equality, science and rationalism.
- **Catholic churches** regularly use their special status granted or protected by complacent states to escape **Human Justice** in cases of crimes, particularly sexual crimes. This is an intolerable form of discrimination. When a **Special Court**, even a canonical one, protects members of religious institutions and allows them to escape their responsibilities, Human Law is denied and violated.

As war rages on almost every continent, seemingly advancing inexorably in the most barbaric manner, American society as a whole is facing a new, large-scale clerical (*faith-based*) offensive that calls into question the "**Wall of Separation between Churches and State**" established by the **First Amendment** to the U.S. Constitution patiently built for the people, by the people, and with the people. The participants in the **9th Congress of the AILP** should be proud to stand alongside the **North American Secular, Humanist, Atheist and Free Thought Associations**, which are the defenders of this protective wall of freedom of conscience and send them their fraternal greetings in complete solidarity.

The **IAFT** brings its full support and solidarity to all peoples defending their **right to self-determination** and wanting to fight against the barbarity of war and its aftermath of massacres, theft, pillaging, rape and destruction. The **IAFT** condemns the use of religion to justify and often organise these massacres.

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## *Religion is prehistoric and primitive*

Religions were humanity's first infantile attempts to explain and control nature. To explain the unknown in nature, religions gave us a meaningless answer, the answer of a 'god out of nothing': 'God made it'. All things, including humans, were believed to be the creations of gods and thus subject to their will. In an attempt to control nature through divine intervention, religions declared that we must praise these gods, once again subjecting humanity to their will.

Religions were also primitive and reactionary responses to the fear of death. Religions declared that a heavenly and eternal paradise awaited us after death, a paradise under the authority of 'gods' and that we had to 'earn' it. Once again, the will of men was subject to that of 'the gods'.

Consequently, according to religion, humanity had to bow down before the will of 'supernatural' deities and blindly obey their every desire. This was our only reason for existing. Ultimately, we were not masters of our own lives. We had no destiny of our own; we were the playthings or pawns in a strange, invisible and 'divine' game.

From the Jewish Torah, speaking of a path of pain and hardship since the 'fall', to the Buddhists and their vision of a world surrounded by suffering and passing by the Christians and their 'vale of tears', each religion claims that human's existence on Earth is merely an unavoidable, albeit minor, passage. The sole purpose of life is to gain access to an improbable 'life after death'.

The self-serving role played by the current leaders of religions in propagating these old ideas is ultimately destructive. Is there anything more harmful than asking people to give up the use of reason and evidence in order to believe in supernatural beings who steal our will, our independence and our dignity?

On the contrary, **Humanists, Secularists, Atheists and Free Thinkers** affirm their agreement with **Protagoras**: 'Man is the measure of all things.' We have no need to refer to the supernatural to determine the nature of reality, to know who we are and how we should act. Our intelligence and conscience are sufficient guides.

**Paradise**, if it exists, must be achieved on Earth and not in some ethereal realm beyond death. It is here and now that we must be human and alive. As **Free Thinkers**, we believe that humanity no longer needs primitive, outdated, dangerous and degrading religions.

## *Religion is the negation of science*

Science is based on reason and evidence; religion is based on faith. Both worldviews are mutually antagonistic. In fact, to have faith, one must often abandon or contradict reason and evidence. That is why religion is the negation of science.

By prohibiting science from going beyond the **Bible**, the **Quran** or any other 'Holy Book', religions have always fought against attempts to explain life in natural terms. Religions have always advocated 'revealed truth' over scientifically discovered truth. **Science** and **religion** are fundamentally antagonistic. **Galileo Galilei** and **Giordano Bruno**, persecuted by the Catholic Church, which initially rejected the theory of **evolution**, are examples of this antagonism.

Ethical choices often have to be made with regard to pure science and applied science. But what criteria should be used to determine what is 'right' and what is 'wrong'? Who should arbitrate these questions, gods or humans? There are so many conflicting mythologies and gods to choose from, their 'messages' being furthermore not always perfectly clear. In addition, what is the competence of religions to judge scientific discoveries? Ultimately, we must make decisions ourselves based on what is best for humanity. Science must be freed from the arbitrariness and dictatorship of religious dogma.

As **Free Thinkers**, we support a general effort to encourage critical thinking and the scientific method as the only means by which we can arrive at knowledge of the universe. We reject faith and '*revelation*' as methods for acquiring knowledge of reality because they produce only contradictory and inconsistent results. We encourage the contradictory examination and criticism of all supernatural belief systems and all religious institutions. We reject all explanations of the unknown by a '*god from nothing*.' We reject creationism as a religion without substance.

## *Religion is oppression*

The subordination of human will to '*divine will*' is an act of oppression. The custom of obeying the clergy, of letting them make decisions for us, is oppression and irresponsibility.

Religions and sects have always been used to justify social, economic, cultural and political oppression. From the caste system of **Hinduism**, to *the Epistle to the Romans* (13:1-7) of the **Christian Bible**, passing by the *Sura* (16:72) on bees in the **Islamic Koran** and by the unbridled and exploitative capitalism of the Protestants to the support by the **Eastern Orthodox Church** of tsarism and Stalinism, '*revealed teachings*' have justified the organisation of tyrannical social hierarchies and the maintenance of economic exploitation.

For anyone who criticised this hierarchy and exploitation was defying the '*divine will*'. This is why religions have always been instruments of social oppression. Throughout history, monarchs and dictators have found their moral '*justifications*' by appealing to supernatural authority, as in the example of the concept of '*divine right*'. Furthermore, injustice and misery are too often tolerated because of the religious belief that a better, supernatural world awaits us after death.

The participants in the **9th World Congress of the IAF** will work alongside many others for the complete emancipation of humanity in all areas. No political, ethical, economic, social or religious system can justify the enslavement of human beings. We support the strict separation of church and state and reject all preferential treatment and privileges granted to organised religions by governments.

## *Free men in a free society*

We can draw a conclusion from our discussions to elaborate this **Declaration**: as **Rousseau** said, '*Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains*.' The chains and balls of religion are indeed the greatest obstacle to the progress of humanity.

We must be free to think and live in a society organised according to our will. Our perception of who we are and what we are, what we choose to believe, the life we intend to lead, the way we choose to express ourselves, and with whom we choose to associate, determines our future and our happiness. Freedom of conscience is therefore of paramount importance in building the society in which we choose to live.

Consequently, we demand two things:

1. On an individual level, we advocate the international development of Free Thought, which is the only basis for true Humanism. If belief in gods persists, then there can be no dignified place for humans. We must choose, and we have chosen humans. We wish to emphasise, for example, that atheism (in places such as India or ancient Greece) is a very ancient philosophy, which has existed since long before most religions and sects.
2. Because true freedom of conscience can only exist through the neutrality of states and public services in philosophical matters (religious or anti-religious), we demand the complete separation of state and church in all countries. No government has the right to impose religious belief or non-belief on its citizens.

We unconditionally support the secularism and neutrality of governments that allow each individual to choose and express their own beliefs without any social or governmental constraints.

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On the occasion of the **120th anniversary of the French law on the separation of Church and State**, we declare:

- Believing that the emancipation of humanity must be pursued in all areas, **Free Thought** must continue to fight alongside all individuals and associations inspired by the same principles against all ideas, forces or institutions that seek to diminish, enslave or pervert individuals; **its determination to defend peace, freedoms, human rights, and the secular nature of schools and the State.**
- Since all beliefs are subject to free criticism, no one should impose or allow any limits on the use of free inquiry as a method of free thought.
- To its members, fraternally united in common action, Free Thought offers the most effective method of individual improvement and collective renewal.
- Free Thought urges all progressive people, forgetting their vain quarrels, to join together within it to work for the advent of a rational morality of happiness, human dignity and social justice.

Grenoble (France), October 11, 2025

■ From all continents, the following Free Thinkers, Humanists, Secularists and Associations sustain this Declaration:

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