



APOSTASY

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Apostasy: "the public abandonment of a religion, a doctrine, a party" (*Petit Larousse illustré*, 1986). This definition, almost old-fashioned in its simplicity and clarity, says what it means—to apostatize is to renounce one's strongest convictions. It is the apostasy of Western Europe that we are witnessing, without it seeming to bother many people.

The European continent is in the process of a generalized apostasy. Everyone knows it, sees it and says nothing because we all feel, in a way, responsible for it. Some clear minds say it, with their words, in their own their style, in their thought. There is Chantal Delsol and her *Fin de la chrétienté* [*End of Christianity*], Jean-Luc Marion with his *Brève apologie pour un moment catholique* [*Brief Apology for a Catholic Moment*], or Pierre Manent whose latest work *Pascal et la proposition chrétienne* [*Pascal and the Christian proposal*] is a remarkable attempt to rescue what Western civilization, and particularly French civilization, still contains of Christianity.

General Rejection of Christianity

We are in the process of an accelerated apostasy because everything that made up Western Christianity and that "held" society together, like cement "holds" the wall, is today rejected in the most widespread way possible. This process will undoubtedly remain in the history of civilizations as the testimony of the greatest cultural and religious scuttling caused not by external blows, like the great invasions and forced conversions, but by the very people who were the custodians.

Judge for yourself—if we actually want to see, that is, so strong and profound is the blindness of those who have sacrificed to the idols of cultural and religious modernism ("they have eyes and they do not see, they have ears and they do not hear," says the Psalm [134/135:16-17]).

The first attack, in a way, was the fruit of Liberty, much demanded over the centuries—the claim of "personal autonomy." Personal freedom became the alpha and omega of any action claimed, whatever the field—relationships between people, within the family, choice of life, choice of sex, child, work time, leisure time. The list is endless. "Personal autonomy" has become the new Creed of the European Court of Human Rights, an absolute form of freedom which must be untrammelled. The national legislations of the members of the Council of Europe, which covers almost the whole of the European continent, are thus condemned, stigmatized when they assert the very idea of constraint that the law could impose on citizens to prevent them from voluntary mutilation, the consented tortures, while waiting for

the said Court to allow the final sexual deviations.

We should not forget, however, that the first versions of the Statute of the Council of Europe provided for a reminder that the founding States wanted to found this European organization "strengthened by the common attachment of their peoples to the individual liberties guaranteed by the traditions of their Christian civilization and by their political institutions"—which became in the final text: "animated by the same spirit and possessing a common heritage of ideals and political traditions, respect for liberty and for the rule of law"—which is not quite the same thing.

The same process, as we know, was followed for the fundamental texts of the European Union. The draft "Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe," finally rejected by the French people in 2005, was unable to make any reference to the "Christian roots of Europe" in the face of resolute opposition from the French government.

This scuttling of the foundations of Europe, this anti-Christian negationism is obviously the fruit of a militant secularism whose origin is not difficult to find in certain currents of thought. It uses the vector of Law, of freedoms, of bills, of international treaties to advance a project of erasing Christian references or even any reference to God, when they still exist in certain texts, in order to enunciate new rights and freedoms, no longer conceived as universally recognized rights, but as those of militant groups which contest the universality of certain concepts in order to divert them to the benefit of their "community," of their social, sexual or communal tendencies. The Law has become the vector of particularism; that is to say, the negation of a desire to live together which was still the definition of the Nation, as defined by that apostate Ernest Renan, but which had the sense of history and of the national community.

The Cultural Attack

The second angle of attack is cultural and the demonstration can be made by each of us. Since the law of December 9, 1905 on the separation of Church and State, all Christian symbols can no longer be erected in public space. Article 28 of the law of 1905 expressly states that "it is forbidden, in the future, to raise or affix any religious sign or emblem on public monuments or in any public place whatsoever, with the exception of buildings used for worship, burial grounds in cemeteries, funeral monuments, as well as museums or exhibitions."

It is not only today that disputes arise concerning nativity scenes in town halls, statues of Saint Michael in village squares, and crucifixes in classrooms. This movement has actually been going on like clockwork for a long time. This explains why our country wayside crosses are not replaced, restored, notwithstanding the courage of associations such as "SOS Calvaries," which accomplish an admirable task, in a beautiful spirit of craftsmanship and work well done.

The visible aspect of Christianity passes through the buildings, the symbols, the statues, the ex-votos, the sounds (Will the bells still ring tomorrow? to quote the title of a book by Philippe de Villiers), illustrating the ancestral anchorage of religion in the landscape. On the other hand, we can see how other religions have perfectly understood how the inscription of a religious monument in public space is the mark of a cultural hold.

The mystique of the great French monuments is sometimes attacked head-on, as shown by the debate—which is not yet over—on the monumental purpose of the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris. It is significant to note that its character as a national monument is emphasized, not because of its liturgical and Christian purpose, but because the monument is identified with national events whose religious character is erased—the Liberation of Paris, funerals of heads of state. It will be necessary to be attentive to the presentation of the reconstruction made by the State authorities when the cathedral will be opened again—to worship and not only to the public.

The current debate on the potential disuse of churches, and other places of worship, for reasons of non-use by the custodians, Catholics in particular, for budgetary reasons of maintenance or necessary renovation, reveals the growing disinterest of our fellow citizens for their places of worship, in a form of apathy. Thus, we learn that the town of Serqueux (Seine-Maritime) wants to destroy its church, built after the war, and organized a local referendum on this subject. Should the majority of our fellow citizens decide what should be preserved from our history, including religious history? The State, by its abstention, is obviously no longer the guarantor of the freedom of worship, which yet is guaranteed by Article 1 of the law of 1905.

The Apostasy of the Conscience

Finally, the apostasy is that of the conscience. When the law admits of infringing upon life, before birth and tomorrow perhaps at the end of life, it signifies a loss of moral awareness of what the human person is from conception to natural death. The legislative will, or rather the will of the acting minorities,

becomes the norm, a legal one, and the fight is for freedom of conscience, not only of the caregivers but also of any person exercising authority. To forbid or limit freedom of conscience seems to us the moral outcome of apostasy. Where faith gives us the means to know what conduct we should hold, especially when life is at stake, the apostasy of our contemporaries opens the door to nothingness, to the negation of the person and his infinite value. Freedom of conscience, a major issue for every believer in a world without God.

Guillaume Drago is an associate professor of law and president of the Institut Famille & République.

Featured: "*The Kiss of Judas*." Anonymous, ca. 17th century.

