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Anti-Muslim incidents: Constant annual decreases since 2010

HRWF (30.10.2019) - In 2018, 100 anti-Muslim incidents were recorded against 121 in 2017, 182 in 2016 and 429 in 2015, the year of the jihadist attempts against the journalists of Charlie Hebdo. It is the lowest number since 2010.

A small increase was recorded concerning anti-Christian incidents: 1063 in 2018 against 1038 in 2017.

After two years of decrease in 2016 and 2017, the number of anti-Jewish incidents in France increased by 74% in 2018: 541 against 311 in 2017. There were 81 acts of violence and homicide attempts, 102 incidents targeting Jewish places and 358 anti-

Jewish threats. In 2018, 824 Jewish sites were subjected to security measures by the police and the military.

The number of racist and xenophobic incidents decreased by 4.2%: 496 in 2018 against 518 in 2017.

These statistics were made public on 12 February by the Minister of the Interior, Christoph Castaner.

Recommended reading

Press release of Christophe Castaner and Laurant Nunez (Ministry of the Interior): Lutte contre la haine, la discrimination, le racisme et l'antisémitisme (12 February 2019) <https://bit.ly/2IAUs3j>

Police arrest 84-year-old man over gun and arson attack at French mosque

Suspect in incident in Bayonne, south-west France, once stood as candidate for far-right Front National in local election

By Angelique Chrisafis

The Guardian (28.10.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2BVBQa> - An 84-year-old man who once stood as a far-right candidate in local elections has been arrested on suspicion of carrying out a shooting and arson attack that injured two people outside a mosque in south-west France. Two men aged 74 and 78 are in a serious but stable condition in hospital after the incident in Bayonne on Monday afternoon.

Police said a man tried to set fire to the door of the mosque and that when he was interrupted, he opened fire. The man then set fire to a car before fleeing, police said.

The suspect was arrested close to his home in the Landes, 10 miles away. The two injured men are believed to have been worshippers at the mosque. A police source told Reuters that the suspect was a candidate in local elections in the Landes in 2015 for Marine Le Pen's far-right party, Front National, which has since been renamed National Rally. He took 18% of the vote in the first round.

Nicolas Bay of the National Rally confirmed to Cnews TV channel that the suspect had been a candidate, but he had left the party saying its ideas didn't suit him. Bay said: "He is an extremist who had no place in our ranks and who left."

In a statement, the National Rally said the suspect had been removed from his local federation following the 2015 local elections after comments found to be "against the spirit and political line" of the party. He had left the party.

The French president Emmanuel Macron condemned the "hateful" attack, saying: "The republic will never tolerate hate". He promised to "protect our Muslim fellow citizens".

France's interior minister, Christophe Castaner, offered his "solidarity and support to the Muslim community" over the attack and said he felt their "shock and fear".

Le Pen condemned what she called an “unspeakable attack” and said it was “absolutely contrary to the values of our movement”. She said: “These crimes must be dealt with with the utmost severity.”

France has been grappling with a fresh political row over the Muslim headscarf and calls by some on the right to ban mothers in headscarves from volunteering on school trips. This month 90 personalities, including actors and writers, signed an open letter in *Le Monde* calling on the president, Emmanuel Macron, “to say with force that Muslim women, whether they wear a headscarf or not, and Muslims in general have a place in our society – and to refuse our fellow Muslim citizens being monitored, stigmatised or denounced for the practice of their religion”.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of the leftwing France Unbowed party, tweeted on Monday: “In Bayonne the harassment of Muslims has produced its effect. Enough is enough now.” He called on all public figures to “stop encouraging hatred”.



Local residents, fire and police officers stand outside the Bayonne mosque after the incident.
Photograph: STR/AP

Hours before the mosque attack in Bayonne, Macron had met Muslim leaders at the Élysée Palace and urged France’s Muslim community to step up the fight against “separatism”, in the wake of a recent attack by a radicalised police employee who stabbed four colleagues to death in Paris.

There have been intermittent attacks on mosques in France in recent years. In 2007, 148 Muslim headstones in a national military cemetery near Arras were smeared with anti-Islamic slurs and a pig’s head was placed among them. In March this year, workers building a mosque in the south-western town of Bergerac found a pig’s head and animal blood at the entrance to the site.

Mosques were also targeted after the killing of 12 people at the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in 2015. Dozens of mosques were attacked by arsonists, and others with firebombs, grenades or gunfire.

From Warsaw to Paris: MIVILUDES will cease to exist on 1 January 2020

HRWF (01.10.2019) - "*The European Federation for Research on Sectarianism (FECRIS) assists victims of sectarian discrimination and receives support of our government*", said the spokesperson of the French delegation at the OSCE/ ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw.

He was hereby partly using his right of reply against CAP/ Freedom of Conscience, a NGO with ECOSOC status which had criticized the financing by the French state of FECRIS. For years, this anti-cult organization was repeatedly pointed at for defaming minority religious groups in Europe and for supporting its Russian vice-president, who was notorious for his hate speech towards Jehovah's Witnesses (now banned in Russia since 2017), Mormons, Hare Krishna devotees and other non-Orthodox religions.

In 2017, the Faculty for Comparative Study of Religions and Humanism in Antwerp published a book in French entitled "**Les mouvements antisectes et la laïcité: Le cas de la FECRIS**" (<https://bit.ly/2p2wRu9>) by Patricia Duval and Willy Fautré, which was an updated translation of their book in English "**Anti-sect movements and State Neutrality. A Study Case: The FECRIS**" (<https://bit.ly/2ohDoRo>) published several years ago in the university journal "Staat-Religion-Gesellschaft" by the Technical University of Dresden (Editors: Gerhard Besier and Hubert Seiwert).

Now, the end of the existence of the controversial MIVILUDES which for years had been repeatedly accused of defamation and discrimination by French and foreign NGOs and sometimes sentenced by courts, has been programmed: 31 December 2019.

Today, 1 October, Thomas Mahler said in *Le Point*, in an article entitled "Does the government abandon the fight against the sects?":

Miviludes had no president for a year and the retirement of Serge Blisko. It is now downright threatened with dissolution, as revealed this morning France Inter. Yesterday, Anne Josso, Secretary General of the Interministerial Mission of vigilance and fight against sectarian drifts, announced internally that the structure would be attached to the Ministry of the Interior from 1 January, and therefore no longer depend on Matignon. Anne Josso was received by Marc Guillaume, Secretary General of the Government, who spoke of a "redevelopment" and downsizing. Originally composed of fifteen people with seven specialized advisers and administrative staff, the Miviludes should be limited to three or four civil servants. It should merge with the Interministerial Committee for the Prevention of Delinquency and Radicalization (CIPDR). (...)

For Miviludes officials as well as for activists, there is no doubt: the fight against sectarian aberrations is no longer a government priority. An activist explains us, for example, that each year, the Ministry of the Interior must issue a circular inviting the prefects to organize an information meeting with Miviludes and local associations or social services, "which leads to 40 or 50 meetings a year. But this year, Castaner (Ministry of Interior) did not do it." (Translation by CAP/ Freedom of conscience).

See some articles published in French media:

https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/2019/10/01/sectes-la-miviludes-va-t-elle-disparaitre_1754651

<https://www.franceinter.fr/lutte-contre-les-sectes-la-miviludes-va-t-elle-disparaitre>

Un citoyen et universitaire français contraint de se convertir à l'Islam / A French citizen and professor obliged to convert to Islam

***"J'accuse les autorités françaises", écrit-il dans une lettre adressée à:
"I blame the French authorities", he writes in a letter addressed to:
Human Rights Without Frontiers***

HRWF (11.09.2019) – **FR:** *Human Rights Without Frontiers* a reçu un témoignage très troublant d'un professeur d'université français obligé de se convertir à l'islam et d'adopter un nouveau prénom, arabe – Ziad –, dans le cadre d'une demande de visa pour un mariage avec une dame marocaine, chercheuse dans un cadre universitaire à Casablanca.

Trois lettres au consulat de France à Casablanca sont restées sans réponse. Trois voyages au Maroc ont été nécessaires pour des formalités administratives. Outre ces frais de voyage, les frais d'avocat se sont élevés à 1000 EUR et l'acte de conversion et de changement de prénom a coûté 35 EUR.

Des recours auprès des tribunaux français sont restés vains et les demandes de soutien politique sont restés sans résultat.

Un autre traitement administratif n'impliquant pas un choix cornélien entre la foi et le cœur était possible sans conversion forcée à l'Islam, écrit le Prof. Stéphane Valter.

EN: *Human Rights Without Frontiers* has received a very disturbing testimony from a French professor of the University of Lyon. He had to convert to Islam and take a new Arabic first name – Ziad – as part of a visa application for his now-wife. She is Moroccan and is a researcher at the university of Casablanca.

He sent three letters addressed to the consulate of France in Casablanca which have remained unanswered. He had to take three trips to Morocco due to administrative formalities. In addition to these travel costs, lawyers' fees for the couple amounted to 1000 EUR, and the act of conversion and first name change cost 35 EUR.

Review procedures through French courts remain fruitless and requests for political support have had no result.

Prof. Stéphane Valter writes that this administrative process was possible without a Cornelian choice between faith and heart, which would have avoided his forced conversion.

عقد اعتناق إسلام.

الحمد لله وحده عقد اعتناق إسلام مدرج بمذكرة الحفظ 22 للعدل الأول عدد 74 صحيفة 47 وصل عدلي 46/51 تلقاه العدلان رشيد عارف والطبيب مجدوب الحمياني المنتصبان للإشهاد بدائرة المحكمة الابتدائية الاجتماعية بالدار البيضاء وذلك على الساعة العاشرة النصف من صباح يوم السبت 09 رجب عام 1440 الموافق 2019/03/16 وبعد حضر لدينا السيد **فالحطي** ستيفان المولود بتاريخ 1960/05/20 باريس فرنسا من والده اشيل ووالدته جنين جنسيته فرنسي السحامل لجواز سفره رقم 13CA22662 من الجمهورية الفرنسية صالح إلى غاية 2023/06/30 سكناه رقم 08 زنقة جون فيليب رامو 76600 لوهافر فرنسا والحال وقته بدائرة نفوذ ذي المحكمة وأشهد أنه نبت دين النصرانية رغبة منه ودخل في دين الإسلام رغبة فيه لعلمه أن الله لا يقبل ديناً سواه ولا يرضى لعباده الكفر وأشهد أن لا إله إلا الله وحده لا شريك له وإن محمداً عبده ورسوله ووقف على الشريعة الإسلامية من صوم وصلاة وزكاة وحج إن استطاع إليه سبيلاً والتزم بالاعتقاد من الجناية واعتنق الإسلام وحمد الله على ما أهداه من هذه النعمة واختار لنفسه من الأسماء العربية "زيداً" وذلك عن طوع واختيار من غير خوف ولا إكراه ولا توقع مكروه الكل تام عرف قدره شهد به عليه وهو بأتمه وعرف به بما ذكر أعلاه اكتفاء وحرر بتاريخه. عبد ربه تعالى

و عبد ربه تعالى

عبد ربه تعالى

المسندة لأعلم بأولائها ومراعاتها بتاريخ

14 ص 1440
21 مارس 2019



Acte de conversion forcée à l'Islam et changement de prénom de Stéphane Valter Act of forced conversion to Islam and first name change of Stéphane Valter

« Je suis citoyen français, maître de conférences à l'Université du Havre (au moment des faits), et depuis le 1er septembre de cette année, professeur à l'Université de Lyon 2.

Au niveau administratif

Le Consul français de Casablanca a refusé un visa à ma fiancée malgré l'extrême solidité du dossier et toutes les garanties apportées, afin qu'elle puisse venir en France et y contracter mariage. Je n'ai donc eu d'autre solution que d'aller au Maroc pour l'épouser. Et pour ce faire, j'ai été obligé de me convertir à l'Islam, selon la loi marocaine, incontournable : un non-musulman ne saurait épouser une musulmane, fait que le Consulat ne pouvait absolument pas ignorer.

Ma fiancée (désormais épouse) marocaine est chercheuse à l'Institut Universitaire de la Recherche Scientifique (Rabat) et vacataire à l'Université de Ain Choq (Casablanca). Elle a demandé un visa au Consulat de Casablanca, pour trois raisons : tourisme, recherche et raisons familiales (mariage prévu). À ce titre, ma fiancée et moi avons fourni au Consulat toutes les garanties nécessaires, avec tous les documents utiles. Mais le Consulat a refusé le visa.

J'ai alors adressé trois courriels explicatifs au Consul, avec copies au Consul adjoint et au responsable du service des visas. Ces courriels incluait, entre autres, une attestation du maire de la commune d'Île-de-France dans laquelle notre dossier de mariage avait été déposé, pour une célébration prévue en juin 2019. Hélas, mes courriels sont restés – par manque total de courtoisie, c'est le moins que l'on puisse dire – sans réponse.

Saisie, la Commission des recours (Ministère de l'Intérieur, Nantes) a confirmé le refus, avec les mêmes arguments ineptes : ma fiancée ne serait prétendument pas rentrée au Maroc à l'expiration du visa (comment donc oser laisser entendre que j'allais aider ma fiancée / épouse à enfreindre la loi sur le séjour des étrangers ?) ; le garant n'aurait pas eu les ressources nécessaires pour payer un billet de retour en avion (alors que je suis un contribuable solide) ; etc.

Citoyen honorable, fonctionnaire d'État depuis de nombreuses années, désormais professeur à l'Université de Lyon 2, comment n'aurais-je point été contraint à la probité ?

J'ai donc dû aller me marier au Maroc (août 2019), puisqu'il m'était impossible de me marier en France, dans le village où demeure ma mère depuis 1968, où j'ai passé de longues années, dans lequel se trouve la maison de famille, et où est inhumé mon père. (Ce côté sentimental n'a visiblement intéressé personne, et on peut se demander si ma fiancée et moi-même avons eu affaire à des fonctionnaires humains ou à des automates sans cœur.)

Concrètement, j'ai dû aller au Maroc plusieurs fois (pour de courts séjours, impératifs professionnels et raisons familiales ne me permettant pas d'y demeurer longtemps) pour que nous puissions nous y marier, la célébration en France s'étant avérée impossible.

Une première fois pour la conversion à l'islam : l'acte de conversion – forcée, dans le sens où le Consulat ne me laissait d'autre issue – a été exécuté devant un notaire avant d'être enregistré auprès d'un tribunal, et j'ai payé l'équivalent de 35 euros. J'ai dû prendre le prénom de Ziad (que j'ai moi-même choisi), notifié dans l'acte.

Une seconde fois pour un rendez-vous obligatoire au Consulat, afin que celui-ci me délivre un certificat de capacité à mariage, établi environ un mois et demi plus tard.

Une troisième fois pour le mariage lui-même : comme je ne pouvais demeurer au Maroc trop longtemps, j'ai dû prendre les services d'un avocat local, instruit des rouages de la Justice, dont la mission était de faire accélérer le processus, qui a ainsi pris un peu plus d'une semaine au lieu de quelques mois (les tribunaux marocains étant engorgés). Le prix de sa célérité a été de 1.000 euros (somme qu'il a en partie distribuée à plusieurs fonctionnaires, pour que le dossier aille plus vite). J'ai donc été coupable de contribuer à la corruption du système, ce que je déplore, même si je n'avais pas réellement le choix.

Au niveau juridique

J'ai par ailleurs déposé une requête en référé suspension, auprès du Tribunal administratif de Nantes, contre la décision de refus de visa émise par le Consulat, puis confirmée par la Commission des recours.

Pour contrer ma requête, le Ministère de l'Intérieur (Direction de l'immigration – sous-direction des visas – bureau du contentieux) a développé une argumentation absurde, infantilisante et culpabilisante pour justifier le refus de visa. En sus des arguments mensongers déjà avancés par le Consulat puis la Commission des recours : j'aurais été trop pressé de me marier ; j'aurais « brandi » (juste après la notification de refus par le consulat) une attestation du maire du village de ma mère (laissant ainsi entendre que

c'était une attestation de complaisance, signée à la va-vite par Monsieur le maire) pour forcer la main du Consul ; ce n'était finalement pas contraire à la Loi qu'un citoyen français, fonctionnaire et universitaire, soit obligé de se convertir à l'islam et de se marier au Maroc ; le formulaire de demande de visa ne permettant pas d'indiquer plusieurs motifs (alors que ma fiancée voulait venir pour tourisme, recherche universitaire et raisons familiales : mariage), la demande a soi-disant semblé peu claire, et donc suspecte ; etc.

Le Tribunal administratif de Nantes semble avoir servilement repris l'argumentation du Ministère, en ne se focalisant explicitement que sur un point, tout à fait secondaire : j'aurais demandé la suspension (en urgence) de la décision de refus de visa uniquement pour que ma fiancée, alors devenue ma femme, puisse être présente fin août lors de mon déménagement du Havre à Lyon (à la suite de ma nomination à Lyon 2). Fi, donc, de tous les autres arguments par moi avancés ! En fait, j'aurais engagé une procédure de référé suspension pour les seules commodités d'un simple déménagement, tout le reste étant omis dans l'ordonnance du juge administratif...

Le Tribunal n'a ainsi nullement tenu compte de mes courriers détaillés, argumentés et documentés, et son jugement n'est de la sorte pas du tout équilibré. Quelle différence entre le Droit et la Justice ! (Je ne pouvais malheureusement être présent à l'audience pour défendre oralement ma cause car je me trouvais alors au Maroc.)

L'audience pour l'annulation (sur le fond) de la décision de refus de visa aura lieu en décembre 2019, mais son issue n'aura qu'une portée symbolique, en cas d'annulation, étant donné que le mariage marocain est réalisé (et que la transcription de cette union à l'état civil de Nantes – pour les mariages à l'étranger – est en cours).

Au niveau politique

J'ai demandé l'intervention de la députée de ma circonscription du Havre (la 7e), qui a donc écrit au Ministre des affaires étrangères, au Ministre de l'Intérieur, puis au Premier Ministre (ancien maire du Havre), mais sans aucun résultat concret.

Parallèlement, j'ai moi-même demandé l'intervention du Ministre des affaires étrangères, du Ministre de l'intérieur et du Premier ministre pour débloquer une situation administrative absurde : l'erreur première d'appréciation du dossier (à cause de la mauvaise volonté) est devenue – en raison de la non-prise en compte obtuse de toutes mes clarifications et garanties – une décision discrétionnaire, un excès de pouvoir. Les autorités françaises m'ont ainsi refusé le droit de me marier dans le lieu de mon choix (le village familial), et m'ont poussé – même indirectement – à me convertir malgré moi à l'islam, avec un changement afférent de prénom.

Toutes ces belles correspondances politiques ont suivi la voie hiérarchique normale, et ont fini par atterrir – trois fois – dans le bureau de Monsieur le Directeur général des étrangers en France (Intérieur), dont la qualité première semble bien être de ne pas agir dans la précipitation, étant donné qu'il n'a rien fait. (Je n'ose pas un instant penser qu'il aurait donné des instructions pour que la Direction de l'immigration – sous-direction des visas – bureau du contentieux commît un mémoire en défense, au Tribunal administratif, si absurde et méchant.)

Pour résumer

Les autorités consulaires françaises (erreur d'appréciation puis excès de pouvoir), l'administration de l'Intérieur (obstination dans l'inanité), le pouvoir politique (veulerie et incompétence) et la justice administrative (dans le cas présent : à l'idiosyncrasie

kafkaïenne) ne m'ont laissé d'autre choix que de me convertir à l'islam pour réaliser mon projet matrimonial.

Il existe pourtant des voies légales et administratives pour tout citoyen français confronté à ce choix cornélien : abjurer sa foi, ou abandonner son athéisme, pour pouvoir épouser l'élue de son cœur ; ou bien renoncer au bonheur avec sa dame de cœur pour conserver ses croyances. (Outre ceci, j'ajoute que ces voyages au Maroc ont induit des coûts, et que je suis finalement heureux, comme universitaire, d'avoir eu assez de temps libre pour les réaliser.)

La solution évidente était que ma fiancée vienne en France, où nous nous serions mariés. Puis elle serait retournée au Maroc d'où elle aurait demandé un nouveau visa, pour regroupement familial, dans le strict respect de la légalité. C'est ce que j'ai maintes fois écrit, au Consul, à la Commission des recours et à tous les politiciens dont les Cabinets n'ont fait que transmettre ma demande, selon la voie hiérarchique.

C'est le devoir des autorités françaises d'utiliser ces voies si elles ne veulent pas se rendre complices de violations graves des droits fondamentaux à l'encontre de ses citoyens. Outre la Loi française, l'article 12 de la Convention européenne des droits de l'Homme reconnaît comme fondamental le droit au mariage, dans le lieu de son choix ; et l'article 14 interdit toute discrimination, sur la base de la nationalité, qui empêcherait de facto – par le refus de visa – la tenue de la cérémonie du mariage en France.

Si je comprends bien que les visas ne peuvent se délivrer les yeux fermés, un minimum d'intelligence permet toutefois de trouver des solutions, surtout quand la demande est sérieuse. Et Monsieur le Consul, dont mes impôts servent à payer le double salaire, comme expatrié, aurait dû faire preuve de plus d'entendement et d'humanité.

De surcroît, ma conversion forcée à l'islam aura probablement des conséquences professionnelles négatives (elles ne seront en tout cas certainement pas positives), en sus de la violence symbolique : cette contrainte a peiné ma mère, aurait affligé mon père s'il avait été vivant, et a détruit les doux souvenirs de mon adolescence d'enfant de chœur (même si je me suis depuis éloigné de la religion).

Outre le manque flagrant de discernement, voire l'acharnement, mon cas révèle hélas clairement un réel problème de dysfonctionnement administratif, d'égarement juridique et de pusillanimité politique, qui se conjuguent dans le mépris des citoyens.

Stéphane VALTER, Le Havre, le 7 septembre 2019

PS: Ceux qui voudraient des précisions supplémentaires peuvent contacter M. VALTER à l'adresse email suivante : s.valter@univ-lyon2.fr

Cult-like deviations in the Catholic Church: 163 cases since 2015

By Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (04.07.2019) - Since its creation in 2015, the body of the Catholic Church in charge of monitoring 'cult-like deviations' in its midst addressed 163 cases according to its report dated 12 June 2019, announced Mgr Alain Planet, Bishop of Carcassonne, at a press conference held last month.

These cases concern both new and old groups (healing, charismatic or traditionalist), religious congregations, movements, and individuals (13 priests) claiming to belong to the Catholic Church. No name has been made public because the "victims" of these cases do not always want their names to be made public, Bishop Alain Planet said. A number of cases have been dealt with internally and warnings have been circulated about some people and some groups, according to Bishop Alain Planet.

The Catholic bureau in charge of this mission receives complaints and forwards them to the prosecutor's office when there is a violation of the law. When there is no such violation, it listens to the victims, collects their testimonies, and provides individual assistance.

« The head of a Catholic association was recently tried by a correctional court for mind control (emprise spirituelle) and this is a disaster as it can be experienced as a rape by the victim », Bishop Planet said.

According to Sister Sorlin, a member of the Catholic bureau, the deviations are always the same whatever the group or the person: worshipping the founder, separation from the outside world, disembodiment, sense of guilt, etc.

The identifying criteria are developed in a « Documents Épiscopat » about cult-like deviations in Catholic communities (n°11 - 2018), published by the Church of France as a part of its information and prevention campaign.

A Follow up of the Call of Lourdes

The body « Dérives sectaires » within the Bishops' Conference of France stems from the « Appel de Lourdes », recalled Bishop Planet. In 2013, a group of about 40 victims and relatives of victims of abuse in the Church, wrote to the bishops who had gathered in a plenary session about cult-like deviations within Catholic institutions.

Two years later, in the aftermath of this call, a bureau which was already working on sensitive issues inside deviating Catholic communities was officially put in place with a mandate to identify cut-like deviations and a bishop at its head. The bureau works in collaboration with MIVILUDES, AVREF (Aide aux Victimes des Dérives de Mouvements Religieux en Europe et à leurs familles) and the CORREF (Conférence des Religieux et Religieuses de France).

This bureau depends on the presidency of the episcopate. On 9 December 2019, the CORREF (Conférence des Religieux et Religieuses de France) will devote a full day of reflection on spiritual abuses in the Catholic Church.

This bureau comprises of a president and six other members, including two nuns.

Stigmatization and non-stigmatization

In December 1995, in the aftermath of several collective suicides and massacres with a religious dimension in the world (Guyana, USA, Canada, Switzerland, France...), a Parliamentary Commission in France published a controversial report stigmatizing 173 non-Catholic religious and belief communities as harmful and dangerous. This had a catastrophic impact on many of these law-abiding and peaceful movements and their members.

Following this report, an "Observatoire interministériel sur les sectes" was established in 1996 and in 1998, the Government developed a new inter-ministerial organization, the

"Mission interministérielle de lutte contre les sectes" (MILS) which were widely criticized for their stigmatization and discrimination policies by the international human rights community, the OSCE and the successive UN Special Rapporteurs on freedom of religion or belief. Later on, the MILS was replaced by the "Mission interministérielle de lutte contre les dérives sectaires" (MIVILUDES) but the stigmatization of dozens of groups did not stop.

In 2005, then Prime Minister Jean-Pierre released a circular saying the list of cults was obsolete, had no legal foundation and should not be used as a reference any more. However, in the meantime, the French media had largely amplified the biased picture of the groups and contributed to the shaping of their negative image in society.

Until the worldwide scandals of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, the parliamentary institutions dealing with "cults" were giving the impression that there were no cult-like deviations in the Catholic Church. Noteworthy is the MIVILUDES is not stigmatizing the Roman Catholic Church and apologies for stigmatizing small religious and belief groups does not seem to be on its agenda.

Civil court suspends priest, imprisons him for embezzlement

For the first time, a civil court in France completely prohibits a priest from exercising his ministry

By Clémence Houdaille

La Croix International (01.07.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2YuIneJ> - A former priest for a community of parishes in the Upper Rhine region of France near the German and Swiss borders has been found guilty of embezzling approximately €400,000 worth of assets belonging to two octogenarian sisters.

Father Ryszard Pszczolkowski was sentenced on June 27 by the Mulhouse Criminal Court (Upper Rhine) to three years in prison for the crime.

This penalty "constitutes the legal maximum" incurred in such a case, said the lawyer Thierry Moser, who was the plaintiff for one of the sisters, now 92 years old, and her three nephews and nieces. The other sister died in 2014.

Father Pszczolkowski, who was incardinated in the Archdiocese of Strasbourg was also sentenced to five years' suspension from administering his priestly duties, a punishment that "a little surprised" Father Bernard Xibaut, the archdiocesan chancellor.

"This priest had already been suspended "a divinis" forbidding him from celebrating Mass or administer the sacraments in 2016 by the now retired Archbishop Jean-Pierre Grallet, as a precautionary measure, when we learned of his detention," the chancellor noted.

"We had also reported his case to Rome, and will now transmit the civil judgment to the Vatican, requesting that it be removed from the clerical state. But this is the first time we have seen a civil judgment prohibiting someone from administering his priestly duties as such — and not just this or that aspect of the priesthood such as contact with young people for example," he said.

Native of Poland, incarcerated in Strasbourg

This priest was indicted in April 2016 and imprisoned for abuse of the weak and vulnerable people and for violence against them.

Sick at the time of his incarceration, he had not administered his priestly duties for a few months. During the hearing held on June 27, psychologist experts painted a portrait of a "perverse" man, endowed with a "strong personality" who "imposes himself," on others, according to lawyer Moser.

The two "very pious" sisters, "fell under his influence." They were fascinated by and admired him. He "pressured them" by "acts of physical, psychological and moral manipulation," using and abusing his priestly status, said the lawyer.

The defendant had managed to obtain a power of attorney over his victims' bank accounts and to be named as a universal legatee, collecting over the years approximately €400,000 worth of assets.

Having arrived in Alsace in the 1980s, "like a certain number of Polish priests," according to the archdiocesan chancellor, Father Pszczolkowski, was in conflict with his native diocese. He had been put under the authority of a bishop "perhaps a little too quickly" in the Archdiocese of Strasbourg.

As the court did not issue a warrant of arrest, Father Pszczolkowski currently resides in a religious house in Bas-Rhin.

HRWF Comment: A clear abuse of weakness.

A private Islamic school to be closed, a court in Grenoble ruled

HRWF (09.05.2019) - A private Islamic school in Echirolles, near Grenoble, is due to be closed because its teachings are inspired by Salafism, according to National Education Minister, Jean-Michel Blanquer. On 12 February, a court of first instance in Grenoble ruled that the school, attached to a mosque, was to shut its doors because there are allegedly serious shortcomings in its curriculum, and its teachings are harmful and obscurantist. The court decision has been appealed and the hearing is to take place on 1 July. In the meantime, the school is still operating. The parents have been advised by the Education Ministry to enroll their children in another school but they still hope the first court decision will be overruled. Minister Blanquer said in an interview that three Islamic schools had been closed under this legislature.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezSWksqywTo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg9oxXamS0g>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8t_eKRW7eo

Jewish couple in Paris assaulted and robbed at home by gang of intruders

By Ben Cohen

The Algemeiner (25.04.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2wsif7K> - A Jewish couple in Paris was assaulted and robbed in their own home earlier this week, a Jewish communal security organization confirmed on Thursday, raising the concern that the attack was the latest in a series of "home invasions" targeting Jews.

In a statement, the BNVCA — an antisemitism monitoring agency based in the French capital — said that it condemned the "violent assault suffered by a Jewish couple Shalom H., at their home in Aubervilliers, on Monday, April 22 at 10 PM." The agency said that the four hooded assailants had "probably" targeted the couple because of the traditional Jewish mezuzah affixed to their front door.

The couple themselves were reported to be badly traumatized following the attack, during which they were both beaten, subjected to death threats and then robbed of 5,000 euros in cash along with various items of jewelry.

Located in the Seine-Saint-Denis area to the northeast of Paris, Aubervilliers is one of several economically-deprived suburbs where a previously significant Jewish population has dramatically declined in number, as residents facing antisemitism on a daily basis have moved to other parts of the city or made aliyah to Israel.

According to French polling expert Jerome Fourquet, "over the last fifteen years, [the size of the Jewish community] has collapsed in a series of municipalities in Seine-Saint-Denis," in many cases from over 500 families to less than 100. Approximately 40 percent of the area's residents are Muslims, mainly of North African background.

The BNVCA said it was calling on local police to identify and prosecute the perpetrators of Monday's attack. "Once again, the myth of the Jews and their money leads evildoers to prefer Jews when choosing a target," the agency stated.

For more than a year, a broader pattern of "attacking Jews as close as possible to their homes" had become visible, the BNVCA added.

The exodus of French Jews from neighborhoods plagued by antisemitism was highlighted in the speech given by Francis Kalifat — the president of French Jewish communal body CRIF — to his organization's annual dinner in February.

Speaking to an audience that included French President Emmanuel Macron, Kalifat noted the release of government statistics that showed a 74-percent rise in the number of antisemitic attacks in France over the previous year.

"In 2018 as in previous years, French Jews were insulted, harassed, threatened, robbed, assaulted or beaten because they were Jews," he said.

"Who are their aggressors?" Kalifat continued. "Too often, young Muslims."

Speaking to the same gathering, Macron declared that "France must draw new red lines [against antisemitism] and we will do so."

More reading:

[Jews Feel Safer in Europe's Conservative East Than Its Liberal West](#)

France's other burning Churches

COMMENTARY: The country needs to identify the circumstances and motives behind the attacks and take decisive action.

By Nina Shea



Hudson Institute (04.05.2019) - <http://m.ncregister.com/daily-news/frances-other-burningchurches> - On Easter Sunday in France, a fire originating in a [Notre Dame](#) confessional received little attention. That Notre Dame was not the great cathedral in Paris, but an ordinary church in Tarascon, near Marseille. In February, [Notre Dame of Dijon](#) was vandalized, with [Hosts scattered about](#). At Notre Dame Church in Nimes, a cross was recently drawn on the wall using excrement and consecrated Communion Hosts. Notre Dame of France Catholic bookstore was vandalized last September. None of the attacks on these other Notre Dames drew much notice, either.

[The flames that ravaged Paris' Notre Dame](#) riveted the world because it is a legendary, architectural masterpiece at the center of France's capital and much of its political history. For those who track religious-freedom threats, the fire itself may be less of a surprise than that it apparently was started by accident.

Hundreds of other French churches are being quietly burned or damaged — in deliberate attacks.

Ellen Fantini, who directs the watchdog [Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians in Europe](#), told me in an email that church attacks in France have been relentless for the past four years. Thanks to her efforts and the [diligent documentation](#) of French journalist Daniel Hamiche, I can point to a few examples here. This destruction, at the hands of a variety of actors, barely receives a glance from the French state, prosecutors, media or public. Rarely are the attackers identified or apprehended.

We also see this happening to churches in Northern Cyprus, Egypt, northern Nigeria and other places where certain members of society are hostile to a small and weak Christian community and the government itself is indifferent.

To be sure, unlike these other places and in [Sri Lanka over Easter](#), the French churches are not filled with worshippers when attacked — or, for that matter, hardly ever filled these days. Nevertheless, it is a shock to see the same governmental failure to protect houses of worship in a country with a strong rule of law.

The overwhelming majority of French churches attacked are Catholic, but some have been Protestant and Eastern Orthodox. As Fantini commented, “They [the churches] don’t seem high on the agenda when it comes to the political will to provide protection.” As a result, French Christian churches are being gradually destroyed, one by one. We cannot expect this to stop until there is adequate state protection and an end to legal impunity. To do that, France needs to identify the circumstances and motives of those behind the attacks.

In March, St. Sulpice, Paris’ second-largest church after Notre Dame, was the site of a fire that was officially [declared arson](#). Its pastor, Msgr. Jean-Loup Lacroix, reported that homeless people started the fire but did not do so out of religious hatred. In many cases the unprotected churches are preyed on by thieves, which indicates criminal intent, if not hatred. The [Cathedral of Saint-Louis in Fort de France](#), for example, was robbed five times last December. Ten churches in two weeks, in two dioceses, were looted in February, though, in a rare example of [police action](#), two men were arrested.

But many times, the culprits are a variety of extremists enraged by the identities and teachings that the churches symbolize — Christianity, French nationalism and Western civilization at large. Even the Cathedral of Notre Dame’s burning is perceived by some as a “liberation,” as a Harvard professor informed [Rolling Stone](#). The magazine explained that the cathedral served for some French as a “deepseated symbol of resentment, a monument to a deeply flawed institution and an idealized Christian European France that arguably never existed in the first place.”

Ironically, they are targeting churches, when, as a 2018 Pew survey found, only [18% of the French attend church even monthly](#), and the churches’ influence over French politics and culture is diminishing to the vanishing point. While arrests are few, a mix of ideologies and motives is readily apparent from the graffiti the vandals often leave. They are shown to be radical secularists, anarchists, leftists, feminists, sexual libertarians, Islamists, radical Muslims and a Satanist group, which religion scholar [Massimo Introvigne](#) says is minuscule in France. Due to the breadth of hostile forces, Fantini [calls](#) France the “worst country in Europe” for Christians.

In January, Grenoble’s [Saint-Jacques Church burned to the ground shortly after the slogan “blessed abortion”](#) was graffitied on it during a right-to-life rally there. An anarcho-libertarian group claimed responsibility on the blog site [“Le seule église qui ...”](#). The site’s name references an infamous early-20th-century anarchist slogan: “The only church that illuminates is a burning church.” Officials had quickly pronounced it an electrical fire from a short-circuit and dismissed the anarchists as “opportunists.” The investigation continues.

Last July, after Saint-Pierre du Matroi Church in Orléans was attacked by arson, "Allahu akbar" was found graffitied on its surviving walls. The Cathedral of Saint-Jean of Besançon was vandalized with the slogan "our lives, our bodies belong to us" and the anarchist "A."

The Basilica of Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Chaumont was spray-painted with anarchist symbols and the word "Satan" with a heart symbol. Last year, the façade and double doors of the 1,000-year-old Notre Dame Cathedral in Strasbourg were graffitied with the anarchist motto "Neither God nor Master." Graffiti on the Saint-Roch-du-Férétra Chapel in Toulouse stated: "Church on fire," "Dirty priest" and "Satan punishes homophobes."

Islamist terrorists and other radicalized Muslims have led France's most deadly attacks against Christians: the Islamists [who slit the throat of Father Jacques Hamel](#) in Normandy's Saint-Etienne du Rouvray while he celebrated morning Mass in 2016 and those who conducted [the ISIS-inspired terrorist attack on Strasbourg's Christmas Market in December](#), which killed five and wounded a dozen. These perpetrators were shot by police. Arrests occurred in the cases of radicalized Muslims who showed up at the Cathedral Saint-Vincent de Chalon-sur-Saône and the 13th-century Cathedral of Notre Dame in Reims, threatening to blow them up, as well as in the case of a Syrian woman, wearing a Venetian face mask, who entered Sainte-MarieMadeleine and took an ax to the holy water font, a side altar bas relief and a statue, where she placed a Quran — all in front of terrified congregants. In September 2016, a Moroccan Muslim man was arrested reportedly for being a serial church arsonist, setting fires to three churches in Millau. Outside Paris, police arrested an Algerian Muslim man suspected of planning an attack on "one or two churches," as he was reportedly advised to do by a contact in Syria.

Numerous unidentified vandals, acting with clear anti-Catholic animus, have aimed at what Catholics hold most sacred, the consecrated Hosts. Statues of Jesus and Mary have been shattered, defaced or beheaded and crosses broken or turned upside down. Christian cemeteries have reported hundreds of grave stones toppled and graffitied, including with blue Nazi swastikas, like those recently found desecrating France's Jewish cemeteries.

Church leaders themselves seem reluctant to discuss the attacks.

"We do not want to develop a discourse of persecution. We do not wish to complain," Archbishop Georges Pontier, who heads the French bishops' conference, said when asked about the church attacks in March. He redirected press attention instead to French anti-Semitism, which is also a serious threat, though he did tell the Register such incidents were [taken seriously](#). I was reminded of what veteran Church scholar George Weigel observed a decade ago, "Too many European bishops have internalized a sense of their own irrelevance and the Church's."

The outpouring of emotion, prayers and funds after the Notre Dame blaze was heartening. And [the heroic demonstration](#) of faith of Father Jean-Marc Fournier, the Paris fire brigade chaplain who rescued from the burning cathedral the Blessed Sacrament, chalices, monstrances and sacred relics, was especially inspirational.

No graffiti or claim of responsibility has surfaced to suggest that the Notre Dame fire was anything but an accident. And while the example of Notre Dame may not rekindle appreciation for France's Christian patrimony, it should stir a demand for the government to protect it.

[Nina Shea](#) is the director of the Hudson Institute's [Center for Religious Freedom](#)

Nearly 100 French Jewish gravestones vandalized with swastikas on day of marches against anti-Semitism



Some of the 80 gravestones vandalized in a Jewish cemetery in the eastern French village of Quatzenheim, Feb. 19, 2019. (Frederick Florin/AFP/Getty Images)

JTA (19.02.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2GS9RoL> - Almost 100 gravestones at a Jewish cemetery in France were discovered vandalized with swastikas hours before the start of marches Tuesday against the recent rise in anti-Semitic attacks in the country.

French President Emmanuel Macron visited the cemetery in the eastern French village of Quatzenheim, near the border with Germany, on Tuesday afternoon and promised that his government would take action.

Local Jewish community representatives joined Macron as he stood in front of the graves vandalized with blue spray-painted swastikas and observed several moments of silence, The Associated Press reported.

The French president is scheduled to hold a moment of silence with other French leaders on Tuesday evening at the Holocaust memorial in Paris.

French police reported last week that anti-Semitic acts in France rose by 74 percent in 2018 over the previous year, and a wave of anti-Semitic incidents centered on Paris has

swept the country in recent weeks, spurring 14 political parties to urge a protest rally in response. The parties, including Macron's La République En Marche!, and the CRIF Jewish umbrella group called on French citizens to rally Tuesday in Paris and several other French cities in demonstrations under the banner "No to anti-Semitism."

In response to the cemetery vandalism, Israel's immigration minister, Yoav Galant, in a tweet called on French Jews to "come home" and immigrate to Israel.

"The desecration of the graves in the Jewish cemetery in France is reminiscent of dark days in the history of the Jewish people," he wrote.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a statement Tuesday called the vandalism "shocking" and said French and European leaders must take a strong stand against the "plague" of anti-Semitism.

Statistics: Anti-Muslim, anti-Jewish and anti-Christian incidents in 2018

HRWF (18.02.2019) – After two years of decrease in 2016 and 2017, the number of antiJewish incidents in France increased by 74% in 2018: 541 against 311 in 2017. There were 81 acts of violence and homicide attempts, 102 incidents targeting Jewish places and 358 anti-Jewish threats. In 2018, 824 Jewish sites were subjected to security measures by the police and the military.

In 2018, 100 anti-Muslim incidents were recorded against 121 in 2017, 182 in 2016 and 429 in 2015, the year of the jihadist attempts against the journalists of Charlie Hebdo. It is the lowest number since 2010.

A small increase was recorded concerning anti-Christian incidents: 1063 in 2018 against 1038 in 2017.

The number of racist and xenophobic incidents decreased by 4.2%: 496 in 2018 against 518 in 2017.

These statistics were made public on 12 February by the Minister of the Interior, Christoph Castaner.

Source: Press release of Christophe Castaner and Laurant Nunez (Ministry of the Interior): Lutte contre la haine, la discrimination, le racisme et l'antisémitisme (12 February 2019) <https://bit.ly/2IAUs3j>

Church of Scientology wins case in appellate court of Caen against the former head of Miviludes, Georges Fenech

By Willy Fautré

HRWF (13.02.2019) - Georges Fenech, 64, former president of the MIVILUDES (Interministerial mission for the monitoring and fight against cults) from 2008 to 2012 and three times member of the National Assembly, recently lost a case against the Church of Scientology for violating the legal principle of presumption of innocence.

On 18 December 2018, the first civil chamber of the appellate court of Caen ordered him to pay 1000 EUR to the Church of Scientology for damages. Fenech, who is a former magistrate, will also have to pay 4000 EUR for court costs. The offence was committed on 12 September 2014 during an interview on Europe 1 radio station when he declared that the Church of Scientology had been found guilty in a case of abuse of weakness by the Church and one of its members, the CEO of the thriving BTP company in the Yvelines. In summer 2014, some of BTP's employees had lodged a complaint for moral harassment and abuse of weakness, alleging that they had been forced by the CEO to follow classes on Scientology.

Several months after that radio interview, the Church of Scientology referred the case to the TGI of Caen (Court of Great Instance). On 23 January 2017, the TGI declared the request inadmissible. The Church appealed the decision and on 18 December 2018, the appellate court of Caen took a decision in favour of the Church, arguing that Fenech had presented the plaintiff as already convicted, which was not the case.

In its decision, the court stressed a number of aggravating circumstances concerning Fenech. As he had been a magistrate and the head of Miviludes, and had claimed on the radio that in the performance of his duties he had allegedly stated the negative influence of the Church of Scientology in the suicide of a young man, he posed himself as an expert. According to the court, his statements were made without any reservation or precaution and without checking the facts and its sources of information.

Four churches in France vandalized over the past week

In one instance a tabernacle was broken into and its contents strewn on the ground

By Anne-Bénédicte Hoffner



Notre Dame Church in Dijon (Photo by JC Tardivon/MAXPPP)

HRWF (12.02.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2WZayC8> - France, over the past week, has witnessed a series of churches being vandalized and in some instances desecrated.

The vandalism took place in Nîmes, Laval, Houilles and finally in Dijon on Feb. 9.

In Laval and Houilles, the criminals only attacked objects and statues, but in Nîmes and Dijon, they opened the tabernacle and threw the eucharist.

On Feb. 9 shortly after its opening, the sexton at Notre Dame Church in Dijon saw the tabernacle and the hosts scattered on the altar, a tablecloth rolled into a corner, a vase broken.

A Mass of reparation was celebrated that afternoon by Bishop Roland Minnerath of Dijon, preceded by a penitential rite, the diocese said in a statement, highlighting the "sadness" of faithful of this parish in the city center.

The series of attacks began Feb. 4 in Houilles, Yvelines. A statue of Mary was found broken in pieces on the ground, in the church of St. Nicholas.

Father Etienne Maroteaux, pastor of the parish of Houilles-Carrières-sur-Seine, again lodged a complaint, having already being subjected to violent attacks during the last two weeks that saw the altar cross thrown to the ground and the chair of the celebrant wrecked.

The next incident took place on Feb. 5 at the Saint-Alain Cathedral in Laval, in the Tarn. The secretary of the parish who came to shut the cathedral found the smoking remains of the tablecloth of the altar of a side chapel, as well the nativity scene that was there, the fire had not spread, reports La Dépêche du Midi. A cross was also thrown down and the

arm of the crucified Christ statue twisted to look like the famous gesture of the footballer Paul Pogba.

"God will forgive. Not me," said the city's mayor Bernard Carayon, whose town hall had just contributed to expensive renovations of the church building.

"I strongly condemn the vandalism of Lavour Cathedral and I share the outrage aroused by this intolerable act," said Jean Terlier, deputy of the district, while assuring the Catholic community of his support.

On Feb. 6, the police were called to the church in Nîmes.

The tabernacle was broken into and its contents strewn on the ground. Religious objects were vandalized and a cross was drawn on the wall with excrement, reports the local press.

Investigations are underway to try to find the wrongdoers.

See video on TV Channel France 2:

<https://bit.ly/2mzGxeP>

Anti-Semitic acts surged by 74 percent from 311 in 2017 to 541 in 2018

<https://bit.ly/2mEUh8i>

<https://bit.ly/2o8wmhO>

Spate of anti-Semitic acts sparks outrage in France

A tree planted in a Paris suburb in memory of a young Jewish man who was tortured to death in 2006 has been chopped down, authorities said Monday, confirming the latest in a series of anti-Semitic acts in France.

France 24 (12.02.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2tiPEAz> - Ilan Halimi was kidnapped by a gang that demanded huge sums of money from his family, believing them to be rich because he was Jewish.

After being tortured for three weeks, the 23-year-old cellphone salesman was found dumped next to a railway in the southern suburb of Sainte-Genevieve-des-Bois. He died while being brought to hospital.

On Monday, municipal workers sent to prepare a memorial site for an annual remembrance ceremony this week discovered that a tree planted in his honour had been chopped down and a second one partly sawn through, local officials told AFP.

The police are investigating the incident, which the French government's special representative on racism, anti-Semitism and discrimination, Frederic Potier, described as "ignominious".

It is the latest in a series of anti-Semitic acts and attacks that have raised fears of a new wave of anti-Jewish violence in a country that is home to Europe's biggest Jewish population.

Anti-Semitic acts surged by 74 percent last year, from 311 in 2017 to 541 in 2018, French Interior Minister Christophe Castaner said Monday.

"Anti-Semitism is spreading like poison," the visibly moved minister said near the spot where the tree was chopped down.

"By attacking... Ilan Halimi's memory, it's the Republic that's being attacked," he added, vowing that the government would take action.

In two separate incidents in the past two days, swastikas were drawn on Paris postboxes containing portraits of late Holocaust survivor Simone Veil and the word *Juden* (German for Jews) was sprayed on the window of a bagel bakery in the capital.

The incident involving the postboxes was reported by artist Christian Guemy, who painted the portraits of Veil on the boxes in the city's 13th district to mark her burial last year at the Pantheon, final resting place of France's most illustrious figures.

A former justice minister, Veil was a hugely respected figure whose death in 2017 caused a national outpouring of emotion.

"Shame on the despicable person that disfigured my tribute to Simeon Veil, Holocaust survivor," Guemy tweeted Monday along with pictures of the boxes.

Reacting to the tweet, European Affairs Minister Nathalie Loiseau expressed consternation over the "desecration".

Jihadist attacks

Meanwhile on Sunday, one of the founders of French bagel bakery chain Bagelstein said vandals had sprayed the word "*Juden*" in yellow paint on the window of an outlet in the Ile Saint-Louis island in central Paris.

Government spokesman Benjamin Griveaux drew a line between the graffiti and an arson attack last week on the home of parliament speaker Richard Ferrand, over which the "yellow vest" protest movement has come under suspicion.

But Gilles Abecassis, co-founder of Bagelstein, said he did not believe that antigovernment demonstrators, some of whom have shown support for a comedian convicted of anti-Semitism, were responsible.

"They wrote it in yellow but that could be for the Star of David," he said, adding that he had received thousands of messages of solidarity from around the world.

In November, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe warned that France, whose pro-Nazi regime deported Jews during World War II, was "very far from being finished with anti-Semitism".

In recent years, French jihadists have targeted Jews in a number of attacks.

In 2012, an Islamist gunman shot dead a rabbi and three children at a Jewish school in Toulouse and in 2015 an extremist claiming allegiance to the Islamic State group killed four people at a kosher supermarket in Paris.

Cult hunters and imaginary cults



A 60-year-old female trainer in 'biodynamism' from Nyons, discharged on appeal - Archives Le DL /Jean Francois SOUCHET

By Willy Fautré

HRWF (04.02.2019) - On 29 January, the appellate court of Grenoble discharged a 60-year-old female trainer in 'biodynamism' accused of "abuse of weakness of a person under psychological or physical subjection".

In July 2017, after a 16-hour hearing (!), during which the public prosecutor of the criminal court of Valence had requested a suspended two-year prison sentence, the confiscation of the Mochatte domain in Nyons and a fine 250,000 EUR, the accused had been cleared of all charges. However, the French anti-cult organization (UNADFI) and the prosecutor's office appealed the decision.

Attorneys Luc Abratkiewicz and Alain Fort who were defending their client said to Le Dauphiné newspaper: "After 8 years of investigation, that lady has finally seen the end of her judicial ordeal. Her teachings had nothing to do with a cult-like practice."

Source : Le Dauphiné (<https://bit.ly/2oaoA75>)

France has millions of Muslims. Why does it import imams?

State secularism works in funny ways.

By Kamel Daoud

The New York Times (28.01.2019) - <https://nyti.ms/2S6B5xZ> - What to do about Islam in France? Considering Islamist terrorist attacks, communalism and the international manipulation of Muslim communities, the matter is pressing. But it's contentious, because managing Islam seems to go against laïcité, France's staunch version of state secularism, and a 1905 law that mandates the separation of church and state.

Wouldn't revising that law be an admission that secularism is bowing to Islamism? On the other hand, if the law isn't revised, or if the French state cannot find other ways of monitoring and steering Islam, then Islam in France risks falling under the control of foreign states or the influence of radicals. That is already the case, actually: Since laïcité prohibits the French authorities from using public funds to build mosques or train imams, Algeria, Morocco, Turkey and Saudi Arabia have stepped in. According to the newsmagazine L'Express, 70 percent of imams practicing in France are not French.

In an attempt to overcome these paradoxes, President Emmanuel Macron recently convened at the Élysée Palace the country's various Muslim leaders and then representatives from all religions. The order of the day for the broader meeting, held on Jan. 10, was old emergencies: how to punish radicalism, control the financing of mosques and make Muslim authorities accountable. The news daily Le Monde, which obtained the note that the president handed to attendees, reported that the government was proposing to revise the 1905 law while "confirming" "its principles."

It was an attempt to square a circle, a malaise, so very French. And the narrower question of what to do about imams — their origins, their trainings, their salaries — summarizes it well.

Here is a first hurdle: It's virtually impossible to tally imams in France. No one really knows how many there are, partly because the collection of data based on ethnic or religious grounds is prohibited. The last available estimates from the interior ministry — which date back to 2012 — put the number of mosques in France at around 2,500. (A 2016 report by the Senate said it was closer to 3,000.) But those figures are as outdated today as they were imprecise in the first place: What even counts as a "mosque" when so many Muslim believers gather in the basements of low-income building complexes or other improvised prayer halls? And there being 2,500 mosques doesn't mean there are 2,500 imams: In Sunni Islam, the version of Islam most prevalent in France, anyone can declare oneself an imam and volunteer to lead prayers or the Friday Sermon.

There is no central authority overseeing Islam in France. Anyway, how do you supervise the mosques you don't fund or imams you can't pay?

For the time being, France, for lack of its own theological schools, has favored filtered immigration: It brings in imams from abroad, mostly from the home countries of its main immigrant communities, either for long stretches or just for Ramadan. Paradoxically, one of the justifications for this policy — though rarely admitted publicly — is security: It seems less risky to rely on an official imam from Algeria than to let a self-proclaimed imam emerge in a Paris banlieue, or suburb.

For example, Algerian imams wishing to go to France must first undergo investigations. And as the Algerian government puts it, modestly, the "Algerian expertise" in internal security matters ensures quality vetting. The government has also offered its services to the United States, Belgium and Italy.

In 2018, Algeria sent approximately 100 imams to officiate in France. Morocco and Tunisia contributed about as many each. In 2017, L'Express ran the headline "Morocco, the factory of French imams," with an article on imam-apprentices, some sent from France, whom the kingdom was training in how to dispense "middle-ground" Islam before

dispatching them abroad. According to the news weekly *Le Point*, Turkish “consular structures” oversee more than 250 mosques and about 200 official imams seconded by Turkey to France.

The filtered import of foreign imams may look like a good practical solution; in fact, it’s an ideological trap. These imams, even if acting in good faith, can only reinforce communalism in France and work against integration, because they are not French. In the name of *laïcité*, France is dangerously delegating its Islam to other states.

Those states benefit. For the Algerian government, the export of imams seems to confirm the country’s return to stability. Saudi Arabia sees proselytizing as a form of soft power. So does Turkey, which appears invested in maintaining a religious lobby abroad.

The stakes are high, apparently. When last year the Austrian government expelled about 60 Turkish preachers to counter, it said, the creation of “parallel societies” and “political Islam,” Turkey called the move “racist” and “Islamophobic.” When the French government said it wanted to create a distinct “Islam of France,” Algeria — speaking indirectly, via an expert’s op-ed in state media — accused it of “arrogance tinted with ignorance.”

The import of imams, the foreign financing of mosques — these delegations of power by the French authorities are a dead end: They won’t do enough to stem radicalism in France, and they will do even less to nurture the emergence of, precisely, an Islam of France.

The president’s office seems to want to overcome all this. But some of the participants in that first meeting convened by Mr. Macron at the beginning of the year reacted with calculated anger before accepting the invitation. Members of the French Council of the Muslim Faith decried the “colonial administration of Islam.” It’s a clever conflation: By invoking colonialism, they can leverage guilt as a bargaining chip while maintaining Islam’s communal valence. Why do that? For fear of losing power if France develops a *sui generis* form of Islam. Harping on Muslims’ status as a once-colonized group is a way of highlighting their ties to their countries of origin, over those to their host country.

Past attempts to create Muslim councils — the Great Mosque of Paris, the Federation of French Muslims, the Union of Islamic Organizations in France (also known as Muslims of France) — that could effectively represent France’s various Muslim communities have failed. One reason is the rivalry among the groups’ leaders, different confessional strands and foreign governments with ties to immigrant communities. Algeria competes with Morocco, and both of them compete with Turkey and Saudi Arabia: As the journalist Henri Tincq has pointed out on *Slate.fr*, the Paris Mosque is “loyal to Algeria,” the Federation of French Muslims has “ties to the Muslim World League and Morocco” and the Union of Islamic Organizations in France is “close to the Muslim Brotherhood.”

It’s difficult to separate Islam from its community and the community from its country of origin without being accused of interference. Whenever the French government tries to manage Islam in France, Algeria says it’s meddling, when in saying so, it is Algeria that is meddling in France’s affairs.

So what can be done? One solution has been put forward by Hakim El Karoui, an international consultant close to Mr. Macron and the author of the recent report “The Islamist Factory” and, in 2016, of “A French Islam Is Possible.”

First, he recommends strictly supervising external financing or informal funds collected in mosques, neighborhoods or local associations. He also suggests creating an independent fund for training imams by taxing halal businesses, money collected through the Muslim

alms known as zakat and commerce around the pilgrimage to Mecca. Those are good ideas for trying to keep state and church, or cult, separate while integrating French Muslims into France.

But just what should be uniting is proving divisive: Mr. El Karoui's proposals are controversial, notably for the French Council of the Muslim Faith. One of the organization's vice-presidents called them an "insult" to Islam and accused Mr. El Karoui of conflating Islam and Islamism. That reaction sums up well the endless-seeming debate between those who want to maintain a monopoly over Islam in France and those who wish to develop an Islam of France.

Arson in the church of Revel



Arson in the Notre-Dame-des-Graces church in Revel in June 2018 (VDML)

HRWF (28.01.2019) - On 7 June 2018, a fire was set in the church of Revel; fortunately, it was quickly contained. The arsonist was sentenced to one year in prison by a court in Toulouse on 21 January.

A bearded man in his 50s was seen exiting the church a few minutes after the fire began. The suspect was questioned by police but released for lack of evidence. After an investigation lasting several months, the police gathered sufficient proof. He was arrested in Marseille (where he had moved) and received a split sentence of one-year in prison with half being a suspended sentence.

The name and motive of the arsonist has not been released. Source: Actu (<https://bit.ly/2B2teYo>)