

## Subject: The Grand Orient of France:

At the July meeting of the Lodge, after the Lecture by R.W.Bro. Haussmann on 'World Freemasonry in Harmony', he distributed to those present, a copy of one of the pages of the web-site of the Grand Orient of France, called the "**White Book of Laïcité**."

Bro Eric Townsend has submitted the following critique of the web-site and its various statements. In order to make this criticism understandable to all, extracts of the web-site statements made are linked to the points made by Bro. Townsend.

Finally, the paper's author, R. W.Bro. Haussmann has replied.

EXTRACT: Under Laïque values, "The laïque humanism relies on the principle of total freedom of conscience."

*Bro. E. T. You can kill billions and still claim total freedom of conscience - this means nothing. "Good Conscience" is a far different thing. Hitler and Stalin had 'freedom of conscience'.*

EXTRACT: Laïque practices - A civic and social status, "The rules are clearly defined and based on human rights. No group, political, sect or church can claim to penetrate, or even more, to turn the functioning of the republican society to its advantage. The separation of the church from the state is the cornerstone of social "laïcisme". It admits neither (sic) exception, nor modulation nor adjustment. Its totality and integrality are the conditions for its existence. It is the only way for everyone to believe or not to believe whilst freeing the churches themselves from official relationships with the state. If the churches want to exist, let the churchgoers fund them, religion being a matter of personal conviction."

*Bro. E. T. This means whoever has the most money wins. This is just as wrong as Government not teaching Evolution in schools. Will it protect church property from vandalism?*

EXTRACT: "Civil law is the only one empowered to organize the field of civic and social life. The republican representatives, elected or civil servants, expect in return during the exercise of their functions, an absolute neutrality in relation to individual or collective practices and observe a strict obligation of reserve."

*Bro. E.T. May God help us! This is impossible. All civil authorities can be bought and manipulated by powerful money. Look at our civil law; it's a joke. Do we trust our solicitor? Yes, they promise and charge a lot but do we get justice?*

EXTRACT: "Finally, the laïque and republican school must be kept free from all interference, either economical, denominational or ideological, even when disguised as apparently cultural. School is not a place for manifestations, neither for the confrontation of differences of opinion; it is a place where, of a common accord, *all* particularism and all similar conditions are forgotten. School must prohibit all forms of proselytism.

*Bro. E. T. Does this mean we teach nothing? Students just accept what they are told and all agree nobody has an opinion. 'Big Brother Rides Again'.*

EXTRACT: The future - New fields of application - "In a world characterised by the most profound disruption of economical, political, social and cultural structures that we have known for centuries, 'laïcité' appears as the response to this fundamental question: what can be done to remedy the anxiety, the anguish, the indifference, the abandonment of all sense of responsibility and the violence?

In a society ever more multicultural, laïcité can teach individuals to cooperate, to find a certain understanding and harmony in their differences. We have already described the dangers of separate communities. We can see that nationalism is growing again in Europe, nourished by religious and ethnic hate. 'Laïcité' is the only idea viable to bring back lasting peace to the Balkans, an example amongst many.

*Bro. E.T, Why can not any culture be taught to appreciate other cultures, without having to change its own culture. Why is laïcité — the only one? You can have a National Culture, while tolerating individual minority cultural differences so long as those minorities live peacefully within the National Culture and do not try to openly change it to their views(intolerance).*

**EXTRACT:** "There is still much to do, even in Europe, where countries having political and judicial systems approaching the French "laic" system, or being able to evolve in this way, are rare. The Establishment logics, with rewards to religion, still largely dominate. However some signs prompt us to think that evolution is possible: modification, more and more questions are being posed, in this same country about taxing religion.

*Bro. E. T. Evolution to what? And for whom?*

**EXTRACT:** The ever more frequent judicial interventions, notably to settle problems linked to religious practices(e.g. the wearing of the Islamic veil in school), is disturbing. It's up to the Republic to define unitary measures and to hold by them. Society life must not resolve itself to be directed by a series of jurisprudences concerning the practices and relationships between different communities. There is a very severe americanisation of community life, which questions the foundation of our republican society.

*Bro. E. T. If this means moslems can wear the veil to school if they wish - what tolerance is this on their part?*

**EXTRACT:** The "laicisation" of life styles(love and sexuality, death and illness) is not finished. The liberty to choose one's way of life, the social modes of life for couples and families, the fundamental guaranties for liberty in this context, children's rights and dignity, are so many fields of application for a "laïcité" as guarantor for the freedom of body and spirit.

*Bro. E. T. Does this mean homosexuality and lesbianism is to be considered normal. How does recognition help the family?*

**EXTRACT:** In the composition of moral or ethical committees which are formed here and there, it is important to favour in the choice of members their abilities and not their convictions. For shouldn't the aim of these committees be to see that the necessary conditions are sufficient for the exercise of liberty and the respect of human dignity, rather than to try to keep a false balance between rival communities ?

*Bro.E.T. Shouldn't people have convictions and shouldn't they be recognised?*

**EXTRACT:** Finally, culture and artistic creation, and also information and communication participate to the development of awareness which is no longer reserved for schools, It is necessary however to permanently ensure that no religious or dogmatic taboos and also no economical or ideological pressure groups can impose the slightest limitation to liberty, even by economically stifling the vitality of minority groups. It is in the name of "laïcité" that we must denounce all forms of single-mindedness.

*Bro E. T. It never was reserved for schools!*

*This also suggests, kill off everything you don't agree with, particularly religion! Who makes the decisions, who and what to destroy. I thought this whole system of "laïcité" was to protect freedoms. Finally is not denouncing single-mindedness fearsome in itself?*

**EXTRACT:** "Laïcité" is not an outdated idea but on the contrary a progressive idea, and has many fields of action open before it.

*Bro E.T. It seems that one action is to burn the bible!*

**EXTRACT:** " Laïcité " has become institutional. It has a legal framework and its proper rules. Its rules apply to the whole social guild and it is not the result of progressive contracts between communities or groups. there is, after all, only one sort of " laïcité" which cannot be qualified : it can be either "new" nor "plural".

*Bro. E. T. It cannot be qualified or defined because it is not possible and deliberately destroys that which it claims to protect. It is like trying to grab a handful of air. It has no substance.*

**EXTRACT:** "Laïcité" is a notion founded upon humanistic principles built up over the years. It is an assertion with a strong signification and value in favour of individual liberty. It is the strongest guarantor of civil peace. It includes a personal moral and a social ethic. It is an action and will, even resistance ; resistance to the tendency to renounce, to the comfort of giving in to single-mindedness.

*Bro. E.T. It will destroy individual liberty as soon as it gets power.*

#### **IN SUMMARY:**

*Regarding "laïcité" , my views are that this system destroys what it claims to protect and dimly stands for. Contrary to passing laws to limit religion in schools and state, I would encourage all Christian religion. I would fund Christian Church schools unconditionally. I would legislate that no veils or moslem attire should be worn at school. I would not stop Islam being taught in schools if they re-wrote the Koran(getting rid of their teachings against so-called unbelievers). I would support the present view by Grand Lodges of not*

*recognising the Grand Orient of France if this is the policy of the that body. I am not against the thrust but against the impossibility of its application, its lack of definition and its 'tearing down effect', without satisfactory replacement of existing social norms. Atheism will not help the spiritual nature of the people. Atheism, with all its pretences to tolerance is intolerant and 'anti-' everything else, Materialism does not act through reason and logic but through greed. Even if over-zealous religion is wrong, atheism will prove worse. There are few people who live and act by 'Good Conscience', so if we elect 'free conscience', nothing will prove free. Hitler and Stalin will rise again in a more prohibitive and deadly form - all in the name of protecting freedom through civil responsibility.*

**Author in Reply:**

Bro. Townsend has made a number of argumentative points, some of which are valid but **I** will not attempt to develop answers for all points made as there are too many to cover.

I cannot stress enough the proposition referred to in my paper and borrowed from that of Bro. Murray Alford's reference to Matt Ridley's "The Origins of Virtue" that '*morality is actually built into the operation oldie universe and is not the exclusive possession of religion*'.

If this is accepted by Bro. Townsend, much of criticism fails. I have said that we are, (perhaps un-wittingly), whether by Western Values or by Eastern, indoctrinating children before they have the innate ability to fully assess the world about them. As he says "given a choice, they are more likely to act unselfishly and pass on these codes of behaviour to their descendants, by the instruction they receive". Bro. Townsend rightly refers to examples of past criminal behaviour - who knows what sort of an upbringing Stalin and Hitler had - one can only imagine!

One must ask why he is prepared to back the Christian schooling of children against Muslim schooling, without the removal also of some offending passages in the Bible, (and to which most Christians either are ignorant of, or are put aside as 'irrelevant').

Of course, it is the instructor who makes the study of any subject come into being, and to influence children. This is where the philosophy of "Laicisation" of the Grand Orient of France is "coming from". It seeks to help people make decisions which are right, between two people or two hundred.

In regard to Atheism, I don't know whether the Grand Orient is atheistic. It claims not to be. Surely if a member of the G.O.F. believes that the Grand Design of the Universe was a Natural Development and in accordance with the laws of the all-seeing eye of Nature, he does not have to believe that a person, called God, with a flair for such design caused it all to happen.

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