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Secularism and French Religious Liberty: A Sociological and Historical View

*Jean Baubérot**

I. INTRODUCTION¹

As a sociologist and historian, I would like to offer some hypotheses about the social and historical context in which French legislation and its application interrelates so conspicuously. I want to emphasize the word “conspicuously.” The French speak willingly of the “French exception,” and it is true that the French system of secularism has peculiar or unique traits. Current French policy toward new religious movements, referred to as “sects,” has confirmed the view held in other countries, especially the United States, that the French are peculiar in this regard. This view is not entirely incorrect, but it must be qualified and placed in context; the characteristics shared by France and other societies, especially European and North American societies, are truly numerous. These common characteristics form a global framework within which each country reacts somewhat differently based on its own history and current situation.

For several decades, sociologists have classified the global context just described as “secularization.” The accuracy of this classification is currently an issue of debate, and the debate is of general interest because it implicates issues such as freedom of belief.

I will first discuss different historical perceptions of secularization and then give my own view of the present situation. Finally, I will

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1. This article is based on a presentation given at The Ninth Annual International Law and Religion Symposium held at Brigham Young University on October 6–9, 2002. Professor Baubérot gave this presentation in conjunction with a presentation by Professor Jacques Robert, law professor and former member of the Conseil Constitutionnel, who addressed some of the legal issues described herein. See Jacques Robert, *Religious Liberty and French Secularism*, 2003 BYU L. REV. 637.

identify, in this context, the characteristics that are truly unique to the French situation.

II. DISCUSSION

A. Different Perceptions of Secularization

1. Original sense of the word

The development of the term “secularization” can be broken down into four stages. To understand the first stage, one must remember the original sense of the word. Secularization originally dealt with the appropriation of ecclesiastical goods by the civil state; one example is the transfer of property carried out during the Protestant Reformation in the Germanic Empire.² Another example is the nationalization and sale of the property of the Catholic Church as “national goods” during the French Revolution.³ However, in the language of the Catholic Church, secularization has also signified the passage of a cleric, who is supposed to live outside the “siècle” (or world),⁴ in the “secular state,” or life “in the world.” In this way, one distinguishes the “regular priests” who are monks from the “secular priests” who are in charge of a parish.

2. Max Weber’s analysis

The second stage of secularization is characterized by Max Weber’s analyses of human sciences, developed at the beginning of the twentieth century. These analyses gave rise to secularization theories even though the German sociologist wrote principally of the “disillusionment” [Entzauberung]⁵ of the world. This “disillusionment” began, according to Weber, with the Hebrew prophets and the Greek philosophy. Disillusionment was further

2. See Jean Baubérot, *La sécularisation*, in *Le Grand Atlas des Religions*, ENCYCLOPAEDIA UNIVERSALIS 16 (1988).

3. See Claude Langlois, *Religion, culte ou opinion religieuse, la politique des révolutionnaires*, 30 REVUE FRANÇAISE DE SOCIOLOGIE 471 (1989).

4. “Siècle,” the French word for “century,” finds its roots in the Latin word “saeculum,” which also means “the world.”

5. According to Weber, the term “disillusionment” signifies a rejection of magic means of achieving salvation. A further and more general meaning of the word designates the predominance of rational instrumentality.

achieved by Protestantism because it “reject[ed] magic means of achieving salvation like so many superstitions and sacrileges.”⁶ The disillusionment of the world was thus carried out in the name of religious principles. However, disillusionment contributed to the emergence of a new phenomenon, industrial capitalism. According to Weber’s fundamental principle, a “paradox of outcomes,” this capitalism progressively pulls away from religion; the sector of industrial production develops on a mechanical basis, favoring an instrumental rationality.⁷

3. Sociological theories of the late twentieth century

The third stage of secularization is described by sociological theories formulated in the third quarter of the twentieth century. According to Peter Berger, secularization is “the process by which the sectors of society and culture are freed from the authority of religious institutions and symbols.”⁸ Bryan Wilson points out that a society becomes secularized when there is: (1) a decrease in the portion of wealth devoted to the “supernatural”; (2) an increased independence of social behaviors from religion, linked to the idea that social practices change living conditions; and (3) an increasing justification of institutions functioning with little or no tie to religion.⁹

4. Current view of secularization

Has religion so completely lost its social role that it operates as nothing more than personal belief? Wilson does not think so. He writes that the role of religion in a secular society consists of “furnishing men with comfort, in the interstices of a social system

6. MAX WEBER, *L'ÉTHIQUE PROTESTANTE ET L'ESPRIT DU CAPITALISME* [THE PROTESTANT ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM] 122 (Plon 1964) (French edition of *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*).

7. *Id.* at 248.

8. Peter Berger, *La religion dans la conscience moderne*, in *LE CENTURION* 174 (1971); Bryan Wilson, *Reflections on a Many Sided Controversy*, in *RELIGION AND MODERNIZATION: SOCIOLOGISTS AND HISTORIANS DEBATE THE SECULARIZATION THESIS* 195 (Steve Bruce ed., 1992).

9. BRYAN WILSON, *CONTEMPORARY TRANSFORMATIONS OF RELIGION* 25 (1976); Wilson, *supra* note 8.

deprived of soul, where men are half-consenting prisoners.”¹⁰ But a more common, or “vulgar,” vision of secularization has made religion a sort of relic, destined to disappear sooner or later as the world’s diverse societies proceed to modernity.

It is this current and “vulgar” vision of secularization—the fourth stage—that Berger criticizes, considering it unfaithful to the mental processes that underlay the theories of secularization. For Berger, the turning point of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries was “furiously religious.”¹¹ Admittedly, certain forms of secularization have affected society; however, they have not necessarily reached the consciences of many within society, and “the attempts of different religious denominations to adapt to the supposed demands of a secularized world . . . have, in general, failed.”¹² On the contrary, a revival has appeared of “conservative” movements that “show[s] that counter-secularization is at least as significant, in the contemporary world, as secularization.” Berger concludes: “This interaction of the forces of secularization and counter-secularization is one of the most important subjects for the sociology of contemporary religion.”¹³

B. Not Desecularization, but Established Secularization

With this foundation established, I would like to add my own perspective and examine how it is possible to analyze the French situation. First, it seems to me that even if Berger’s criticisms are justified, they do not invalidate the theories of secularization. In effect, these criticisms have not claimed that the decreasing social influence of religion leads to its disappearance. These criticisms indicate instead that the decreasing social influence of religion has led to a transformation of religious phenomena.

Berger himself insisted on the pluralization of religious forms corresponding to secularization. He analogized the religious scene of secular society to a market in which several religious entrepreneurs must compete. Berger further compared the religious scene of

10. Bryan Wilson, *Aspects of Secularization in the West*, 3 JAPANESE J. RELIGIOUS STUD. 276 (1976) (cited by JEAN-PAUL WILLAIME, *SOCIOLOGIE DES RELIGIONS* 94 (PUF 1995)).

11. PETER BERGER, *LE RÉENCHANTEMENT DU MONDE* [THE DESECULARIZATION OF THE WORLD] 15 (2001).

12. *Id.* at 17.

13. *Id.* at 21. Unfortunately, however, to my knowledge, Berger has not undertaken the study of this interaction.

secular society to a market of meanings, a market of definitions, and a market of sensibilities where the line between religious ideas and non-religious ideas (for example, psychology) tends to blur. From this point on, the Christian denominations, for example, have incentive to close ranks, banding together in the face of increasing competition from new sources. Ecumenism thus appears as a strategy of response to secularization.¹⁴ Likewise, since the 1970s, for Wilson and others, new religious movements are better positioned than the “main churches” to fill a social role in secular society. The success of new religious movements rests on their ability to build bridges—reaching out to the modern world and populations destabilized by socioeconomic changes. This ability derives particularly from the fact that these movements provide “truths to believe” that are simple and clear, tied to precise norms, capable of structuring the individual and giving him a strong identity.

With this perspective, one could say that the new religious fervor implicates less the analyses of secularization than it does the manner in which these analyses were ideologized and transformed into strategies of ecclesiastical adaptation. If these strategies failed, it is not because modern societies are not secularized in their social function; rather, it is because modern societies are so secularized that it is suicidal for churches to seek adaptation at all costs. It is precisely because societies are secularized that individuals who have varying “religious needs” expect something other than a mere imitation of society. The success of “counter-secularization” movements can probably be explained by the worldwide advances of secularization and the resistance produced by these advances. Thus, sociologist Sebastian Poulder links the intensity of conflicts concerning the status of women and family law in predominantly Islamic countries to the fact that in those countries today the major part of an individual’s public life is managed according to secularized Western norms.¹⁵ Some issues that straddle the border between public and private realms then play into a high-stakes question: whether to preserve an admittedly tense situation in line with traditional culture

14. Ecumenism is the process that drove the Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox churches to begin a process of dialogue and improved relations with the eventual goal of reunifying the Christian churches. See JEAN-PAUL WILLAIME, *VERS DE NOUVEAUX ŒCUMÉNISMES* 12 (1989).

15. SEBASTIAN POULDER, *ETHNICITY, LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS: THE ENGLISH EXPERIENCE* (1998).

or to neglect that culture completely in favor of secularized norms. At stake here is of course more than merely the concerns of Islam.

This high-stakes question is all the more pressing if, in the face of traditional cultures, the rights of man are emphasized. Further, the philosophy of Max Weber indicates that a dual extension plays an integral part in the problem: the extension of capitalism's mechanical base and the extension of capitalism's instrumental rationality.¹⁶ It is evident that commercialization is reaching domains that appeared out of reach fifty years ago. So it is, for example, with the domain of the "intimate" and of sexuality with the development of mass pornography. Commercialization has also reached into all elements of birth, life, and even death with the speedy growth of biotechnology. As the commercial sphere extends in this way, problems of meaning return *en force* as problems of society. These problems take on new importance—beyond just the "interstices of a social system."¹⁷ Rather, it is in a structural sense that questions of finality and observed rationality take on new importance.

On the other hand, if one considers the second indicator offered by Wilson to gauge a society's degree of secularization—an increased independence of social behaviors from religion, linked to the idea that the social practices are what change living conditions¹⁸—one can draw two conclusions.

The first conclusion is that it was the philosophers of the Enlightenment who extolled this increased independence of social behaviors. These philosophers encouraged independent social behavior by emphasizing two "hopes." The first hope of the Enlightenment philosophy is that changes in the condition of life will move in the direction of progress.¹⁹ The second hope is that increased connectedness is good: technical progress allowing increased satisfaction of the needs of humanity and the advancement of well-being; moral progress that lessens the violence in human relationships and leads to a harmonious coexistence; political progress permitting the gradual, historical realization of freedom, equality, and justice. The utopian ethic has played a key role in the secularization movement.

16. WEBER, *supra* note 6, at 250.

17. See BERGER, *supra* note 11.

18. See Wilson, *supra* note 10.

19. The belief in progress has been the driving force behind secularization.

Economic liberalism,²⁰ political liberalism,²¹ and the philosophies of progress²² are in fact parallel social and cultural phenomena. Together, these three liberalisms make up what is generally called modernity. Thus, the ideal of progress is common to both liberalism²³ and socialism. And if socialism ideologically opposes capitalism, it is essentially because of the gulf between the ideal and reality. Thus, according to socialism, one must “go beyond” capitalism to overcome this gulf. Moreover, we must not forget that Nazism also called itself “national socialism.” Nazism styled itself as socialist, but with the conspicuous difference that it refused an inclusive outlook in favor of a xenophobic attitude. Raymond Aron referred to communism and Nazism, significantly, as “secular religions.”²⁴ One can say that in the dialectical process of disillusionment, secularization has borne the structural elements of “reillusionment.”²⁵

To this first conclusion, another can be added: these secular notions so recently “reillusioned” find themselves currently again in the process of disillusionment. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 effectively marked the end of a historic period—an age of enlightenment and of revolutions bearing ideas of global progress, revolutions that have caused comings and goings on a global scale, from the Americas to China, passing back and forth through Europe along the way. Francis Fukuyama saw in this event “the end of history,” the liberal democracy forming the ultimate manifestation of government—a form that will not be superseded.²⁶ But Fukuyama was without a doubt too optimistic in underestimating the inherent paradoxes of the system. Fukuyama failed to account not only for a continued coexistence between wealth and poverty, but also for an

20. The French “libéralisme économique” corresponds most with the American idea of economic conservatism, emphasizing free market principles. Economic liberalism is linked to the development of capitalism.

21. Political liberalism led to the emergence of modern liberal democracies.

22. The philosophies of progress are linked to the nineteenth-century boom in various scientific disciplines.

23. The French word for liberalism, especially used in its economic sense, is closely linked to the American idea of capitalism. *See supra* note 20.

24. RAYMOND ARON, *L’OPIUM DES INTELLECTUELS* (1955).

25. By this, I mean that in constructive opposition to the process dominated by instrumental rationality, one finds a process where beliefs develop that are “secular” (that concern the “siècle,” or the everyday world, *see supra* note 4). These beliefs are not formed or advanced explicitly as beliefs but can be recognized as such by sociologists.

26. *See* FRANCIS FULCUYAMA, *THE END OF HISTORY AND THE LAST MAN* (Free Press 1992).

end to secular horizons that, no matter what the difficulties, allow for projections about the future. Moreover, even if technological progress continues and supplies perennial hope, this secular hope is increasingly overcome by a growing uncertainty. The mission of medicine has consisted of increasing “the hope of life.” Whatever the personal convictions of the doctor, medical institutions have provided a secular brand of hope. This hope is not dead, but in one respect it is dying because the new AIDS epidemic has brutally removed the illusion of an almost all-powerful mastery. On the other hand, the very success of medicine itself poses more and more unpublished problems. Undoubtedly, the practice of medicine changes the conditions of life, but if several decades ago this practice was universally considered morally good, this consensus no longer exists today. A single example illustrates this point. When faced with a dying patient, the possibility for the doctor to opt for either a regime of intensive medication or euthanasia is becoming more and more difficult. Now, intensive medication and euthanasia are morally debatable. In a more general vein, the whole range of issues pertaining to biotechnology can give rise to moral debates. Is all possible progress also desirable? That is now the big question, and not only in the medical field. Consider all that contributes to environmental degradation. The results of progress give way to increasing uncertainty and to conflict-charged questions about the appropriate limits of progress.

I propose to call this situation “established secularization.” The combination of the dual historical transformation I have briefly described—that of disillusionment, reillusionment, and globalization, the founding of “a world market encircled by a vast shantytown”²⁷—does not signify the end of secularization. Instead, this combination signals a transformation of secularization. Changing from a process to a movement, secularization is becoming a hegemonic reality that has destroyed secular illusions, whether they are ideological/political or technical/moral illusions.

This new disillusionment is different in its relation to the passing of time. Ephemeral effects thus are becoming more important than investments in long-term projects. That which derived more or less from ritual and permanence is becoming the result of passing whim.

27. Emile Poulat, *Après la fin de l'Histoire, quelle histoire pour l'humanité?*, FOI ET DÉVELOPPEMENT, janvier–février 1995, at 1 nn.229–30.

Mass communication favors sensationalism over analysis in the news, emphasizing its entertainment value. This entertainment broadcasts sex, violence, intrigue, heroism, and wealth in large doses. It can lead to resentment because of the sizable gap between the imaginary notions conveyed and the true nature of daily life with all its banality, difficulty, and routine.

It is in this context of secularization²⁸ that the resurgence of traditionalist undercurrents has come about in the historic religions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. It is also in this context that new religious movements have developed. These undercurrents and movements, in all democratic societies, inure *a priori* to the benefit of freedom of belief. But this statement of principle does not provide a complete concrete solution because the division between the religious and the nonreligious has never been well defined, and secularization blurs that division even further.

C. The Specifics of French Secularism

Let us turn now to an examination of the peculiar role played by the French situation in the larger context of secularization. The first aspect to consider is the way that modern France is organized. The founding event was the French Revolution. At that time, in spite of a clergy favorable to the revolution,²⁹ several factors quickly drew into conflict the Catholic religion—the only one that was legitimate under the old regime—and revolutionary ideals.

In other countries, like the United States and the United Kingdom, religion contributed in various ways to secularization and particularly to the development of a democratic sociability. In certain cases, the paradoxical term “religious secularization” may best describe nineteenth-century development.³⁰ In France, however, the process of secularization unfolded as a frontal conflict between what is called “clericalism,” or the claim of religion to political dominion over the country, and the anticlericalism that actively fought this claim.

28. Naturally, I do not claim that this context has been fully explicated.

29. Of the pro-revolution clergy here described, Abbot Grégoire is currently the most well known.

30. See JEAN BAUBÉROT & SÉVERINE MATHIEU, RELIGION, MODERNITÉ ET CULTURE AU ROYAUME-UNI ET EN FRANCE 1800–1914, at 295 (2002).

Anticlericalism had several faces. One face was a religious anticlericalism,³¹ predominant until the middle of the nineteenth century and only opposed to those it deemed to be excessive or to have abused politicization of religion. The Jesuits, in particular, were suspected of seeking undue influence over the youth. In the second half of the century, domination by Catholic political alliances motivated a radical shift toward anticlericalism. The religious institution itself was called into question, and reference to religion became a call for “free religiosity,” for a personal devotion where the relationship with the Divine supersedes ecclesiastical structures. Victor Hugo is one of the most well-known representatives of this kind of free religiosity. At the same time, another type of anticlericalism developed that included antireligious aspects. Rooted in scientific ideology, this anticlericalism perceived religion as an outdated explanation of the world that offered only a backwards orientation, irrelevant to the context of modern democracies. To this view, socioeconomic arguments were sometimes added denouncing religion as an “accomplice” in the “exploitation of the working class.”

The ties between various forms of anticlericalism, from the most radical to the more moderate, and the French Revolution are moral as well as political. The rights of man, as proclaimed by the revolution, appeared as nonreligious values, even antagonistic toward Catholicism, and Catholicism was the lens through which all religion was viewed at the time. Mona Ozouf demonstrated that, beyond mere political changes, the goal of the French Revolution was to regenerate the human being, to create a “new man.”³² Therefore, it is not surprising that this reference to the founding age of the revolution has also taken on a quasi-religious dimension. In my mind, the most ideological forms of French republicanism can indeed be termed a “secular religion.”³³

This secular religion had its institutions in both academia and medicine. This may not seem too unique, but despite the creation and development of medical and academic institutions all over the Western world during the nineteenth century, the French approach

31. *See id.* at 150.

32. MONA OZOUF, *L'HOMME RÉGÉNÉRÉ* (1989).

33. This term is used in an analogous sense to the term “secular religions” employed by Raymond Aron with reference to communism and nazism. *See supra* note 25.

was unique. Claude Nicolet writes, “[R]ecourse to medicine will not become a totally moral obligation tied to the nature of a specific political regime.”³⁴ Under this view, to take care of oneself was not only a personal affair, but also the duty of a citizen and an evidence of civic morals. In the French republican perspective, the school does not merely impart knowledge, it is the place of apprenticeship and liberty of thought.

It is important to distinguish “freedom of conscience” from “freedom of thought.” Freedom of conscience, along with its constituents, freedom of religion and freedom of belief, guarantees diversity of belief in society and the freedom to express those beliefs. Freedom of thought ensures the right to independently reexamine beliefs received from family, social groups, and society as a whole. This way, a person can freely adhere to these beliefs, adapt them, or turn from them to something else. Naturally, this is a conceptual distinction, and daily life produces constant disharmony between these two freedoms. But the perspective is not the same, and the French view school as the perfect institution to teach future citizens to exploit their faculties of reason and to help them exercise freedom of thought. The problem is that people can cease to view reason itself as a simple instrument, enshrining it instead. Indeed, there was a short-lived but authentic cult during the revolution (1793–1794) that actually worshipped the “Goddess of Reason.”³⁵

The founding of secularism in France was rooted in the political victory of the anticlerical movement. In effect, anticlericalism and the establishment of the Third Republic were tied together for several reasons. But even so, at the end of the day, secular law left freedom of conscience intact—not to mention freedom of worship, freedom of religion, and freedom of belief. I will not go into the details of the specific legislation for two reasons. On the one hand, such an explication would lead to a historic account that is beyond the scope of this paper. On the other hand, the great and historic legislative acts concerning school (the 1880s) and the separation of church and state (1905–1908) are still a part of French code, despite seeing some natural developments over the past century.³⁶ I will simply say,

34. CLAUDE NICOLET, *L’IDÉE RÉPUBLICAINE EN FRANCE* 310 (1982) (“[L]e recours à la médecine ne deviendra aussi nettement une obligation morale liée à la nature d’un régime politique précis”).

35. See MICHEL VOVELLE, *LA RÉVOLUTION CONTRE L’ÉGLISE* (1988).

36. See Robert, *supra* note 1.

in synthesis, that over time the primarily combative anticlerical movement gave birth to a primarily pacifist secularism. It is as if a revolutionary socialist party, assuming power by democratic process and keeping the democratic framework, ultimately gave birth to a social-democratic system.

It is easy to understand why this pacifist result displeased many republicans. Over the course of the Third Republic, there was a progressive disillusionment with republicanism as the republican regime came to be viewed as routine. This disillusionment was due in part to the establishment of secularism and to the loss by the anticlericalism movement of its utopian designs (which are common to all combative movements). Nevertheless—and this is essential—the combative and utopian aspects of anticlericalism did not disappear. Since anticlericalism was finding it so difficult to align itself with republicanism, it aligned itself with socialism. In France, there was a joining of secular illusions; in large measure, the various forms of socialism and communism identified with republicanism in an effort to resurrect and propagate republicanism's utopian aspects. But this happened at the very moment when republicans had just become firmly entrenched in power. Thus, pragmatism and management problems won out over the utopian flame. Illusionment and the utopian ideal, inspiring great passion, gave rise to the youth revolt of May 1968.

The situation changed during the last two decades of the twentieth century. First, it changed because of the fall of communism and Marxism, which led to the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Second, it changed because the socialist party assumed power in France in 1981. The party's slogan, "change life," faded in the difficulties of governance and clashed with the effect described above: faith's surrender to progress caused by growing uncertainty and questions about the appropriate limits of progress. A significant example occurred in 1983 when the French National Ethics Advisory Council was created and charged with considering the ethical impact of developments in biotechnology.³⁷ As a result, the republican nation-state suffered a profound crisis. Three principal factors explain this crisis. First, there was a loss of ascendancy over the republican nation-state due both to the globalization process and to the

37. See Jean Baubérot, *Le débat sur la laïcité*, REGARDS SUR L'ACTUALITÉ, Mar.–Apr. 1995, at 56 nn.209–10 (Les grands débats des années Mitterrand).

developing European structure and its accompanying transfers of power. The second factor is likewise linked to globalization. The development of mass, globalized consumption changed the relationship between the French and their institutions; a consumer-oriented attitude towards medicine and school has replaced the deferential attitude formerly held by the French. Finally, the nature of immigration—people moving from a different culture—has changed. Immigration is no longer limited to seasonal migrant workers, single men traveling between France and their native country to take advantage of the strong economy and an abundance of work. Rather, immigrants now come with their families to settle in a precarious setting of homelessness, unemployment, and social exclusion. This crisis of the republican nation-state and its institutions results in a reillusionment of republicanism for some, and for a greater number, a discomfort bordering on tension and fear.

Two reactions are possible to what has been improperly termed the “return of the religious” and to what Berger called the movements of counter-secularization. The first reaction comes from republican reillusionment. Thus it is that young Muslim students (the children of recent immigrants) have refused to remove their head scarves in the classroom. This began in 1989, and for several years it has been a national issue despite the fact that a judicial solution to the problem, both secular and democratic, was quickly found. This solution has been difficult to apply because, in short, the head scarf affair pitted supporters of republican reillusionment and defense of the academic institution against militant supporters of (and those influenced by) a counter-secularized Islam.

The second reaction comes from a general unrest caused by the current state of affairs in France. This unrest could harm Islam, as attested to by the bad will borne by certain administrative authorities and local politicians toward Islam, combined with the need for construction of new mosques. Indeed, this unrest can harm any religious movement that has not yet fully adapted to secularization. Significantly, the two most problematic areas are the academic and medical fields. Many today have an effectively ambivalent attitude with regard to institutions, much as they do with regard to moral rules. They insist on a consumer relationship for themselves but demand that these institutions exercise authority over others. In any case, a certain reentrenchment is apparent. There is a reentrenchment at school, where certain accommodations, such as a

religion-based waiver from the requirement to attend class on Saturday, are becoming much more difficult to obtain. There is also a re-entrenchment in the field of medicine where the notion of illegal practice of medicine has become a bludgeon used to condemn certain individuals and groups. And this occurs despite the fact that traditionally there was a certain tolerance in France toward attempts at religious healing.

This having been written, it would be wrong to oversimplify current problems in terms of these reentrenchments and reillusionments. Certain religious groups that are rebellious and even hostile to human rights enjoy nondiscriminatory treatment at the hands of public authorities, who choose not to discriminate because of those very same rights. There are also certain apocalyptic groups that await the end of the world in a way that poses a risk of collective suicide. In such cases, if the law imposes limits on their actions, a concrete solution will be difficult to find. It is thus all the more important that society first understand itself before attempting to find solutions, and it is my goal to help society in its struggle to understand itself.

III. CONCLUSION

This paper presents a dual conclusion. First, the problems encountered by France regarding freedom of belief are not fundamentally different from those encountered by other western societies even though certain aspects do constitute French peculiarities. Second, though it is common to spotlight the difficulties, we must not forget that freedom of belief is guaranteed in France. Every weekend, millions of people living in France go in freedom and in peace to religious services. This success is due to the achievements of French secular legislation. Nevertheless, vigilance is essential because, although French legislation gives serious guarantees on the matter, the dominant mindset can either negate those guarantees or disrupt the calmness that must preside over application of the law.