

**FREE THOUGHT COLLECTION:
SPIRITISM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

Series 2

The Spiritist Perspective on Fundamentalisms

Jacques Peccatte

Book 9

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Translation: Danette Lebrón and José Arroyo

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The ideas and arguments presented in this book are the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of CEPA and CPDoc.

PRESENTATION

"(...) free thought elevates human dignity; it makes a person active and intelligent, instead of a mindless believer."

Allan Kardec (Spiritist Review, February 1867)

The International Spiritist Association (CEPA) and the Spiritist Research and Documentation Center (CPDoc) launched, in April 2021, the **Free Thought Collection: Spiritism for the 21st Century**.

The first series in the collection is set out to present, in a concise yet conceptually precise way, the theoretical foundations of the so-called secular, free-thinking Spiritism that has developed in several countries in the Americas and in Europe in recent years.

Published in four languages—Portuguese, Spanish, English, and French—the series aims to disseminate secular, free-thinking Spiritism broadly and accessibly.

This approach offers a fresh perspective on Spiritism, founded by Allan Kardec in 1857 with the publication of his inaugural work, *'The Spirits' Book*, and later spread globally through institutionalization and popularization.

As it spread, Spiritism was influenced by the historical, cultural, and religious contexts of each country and era.

In Brazil, for example, Spiritism met an environment shaped by Catholic tradition, which resulted in its assimilation as another Christian religion. This compromised the principles of rationality and free thought originally proposed by Kardec.

This syncretic process—observed in other countries as well—reduced Spiritism to a “smaller religion,” distancing it from its epistemological vocation and draining its potential to contribute to the field of knowledge, especially in the areas of science and philosophy.

In response, Spiritists gathered around CEPA and CPDoc proposed a rereading of Spiritist

thought, looking to recover Allan Kardec's generous proposal: a spiritualist, secular, free-thinking, humanist, and progressive philosophy aligned with advances in knowledge, ethics, and spirituality in the contemporary world.

Series 1 of the **Free Thought Collection** presented to the public several fundamental topics in Spiritism from this new perspective, seeking to clarify them both for Spiritist audiences and for those interested in the subject. The eight volumes that form it were prepared by intellectuals from the Spiritist movements of Argentina, Brazil, Spain, and Venezuela, and are available free of charge on the CEPA and CPDoc websites. The works follow criteria of clarity, concision, and precision, addressing the following topics:

- **Spiritism from a Secular, Free-Thinking Perspective**
Milton Rubens Medran Moreira (Brazil) and Salomão Jacob Benchaya (Brazil)
- **The Immortality of the Soul**
David Santamaria (Spain)
- **Mediumship: Exchange Between Two Worlds**
Yolanda Clavijo (Venezuela) and Ademar Arthur Chioro dos Reis (Brazil)

- **Reflections on the Idea of God**
Ricardo de Moraes Nunes (Brazil) and Dante Lopez (Argentina)
- **Reincarnation: A Revolutionary Existential Paradigm**
Mauro de Mesquita Spínola (Brazil)
- **The Evolution of Spirits, Matter, and Worlds**
Gustavo Molfino (Argentina) and Reinaldo Di Lucia (Brazil)
- **Spiritism, Ethics, and Morality**
Jacira Jacinto da Silva (Brazil) and Milton Rubens Medran Moreira (Brazil)
- **Allan Kardec: The Founder of Spiritism**
Wilson Garcia (Brazil) and Matheus Laureano (Brazil)

In the words of José Herculano Pires, an important Brazilian Spiritist philosopher, Spiritism is still “the great unknown.” Shadows of misunderstanding persist, obscuring its original brilliance as an innovative philosophical proposal centered on reason and facts in the light of modern thought.

Series 1 contributes to a comprehensive, counter-hegemonic view of Spiritism, seeking dialogue and

openness to otherness in the face of predominant currents within the Spiritist movement.

Now CEPA and CPDoc present to the public **Series 2** of the collection, with the central theme **Spiritism and Society**. This new stage aims to carry forward the successful publishing project by addressing contemporary issues essential to humanity.

The books in **Series 2** explore the relationships between Spiritism and sensitive, timely subjects such as politics, humanism, work, racism, the climate crisis, sustainability, religious fundamentalism, gender, sexualities, the role of women in society, ideology, and mass communication.

The authors were invited to engage in dialogue with Kardec's work, adopting a secular, free-thinking approach in counterpoint to religious Spiritism. Their contributions reflect post-Kardecist updates and seek to apply Spiritist thought to the dilemmas and challenges of the 21st century, also considering the updating of language and concepts.

The proposal is to deepen the process begun with **Series 1** and to strengthen the consolidation of a secular, progressive, and free-thinking Spiritism. To ensure diversity of ideas, nationalities, and genders,

authors from the first series were not repeated. Some works were written by individual authors, others by pairs, trios, or larger teams.

We are grateful to the authors and editors who generously granted the copyrights of their works to CEPA and CPDoc. Each book was guided by a terms-of-reference document intended to ensure thematic and editorial unity while respecting the authors' freedom of expression.

The ideas and thesis presented are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the institutional position of CEPA or CPDoc.

Series 2 is offered as reference material and didactic support for scholars, promoters of Spiritism, and organizers of courses, lectures, and study groups. Like **Series 1**, this new stage aims to foster healthy, plural debate on topics relevant to Spiritism.

The collection is published in a spirit of dialogue—not to show sectarian divisions, but to affirm identities, build bridges, and promote exchange with Spiritists from different currents and with non-Spiritists interested in the subject.

We reiterate the collection's target audience: Spiritists affiliated with CEPA, Spiritists from other

traditions, and non-Spiritists interested in the issues addressed.

If it fulfills this purpose, **Series 2** of the Free Thought Collection: Spiritism for the 21st Century will have fully achieved its goals.

Organizers

*Ademar Arthur Chioro dos Reis - Mauro de
Mesquita Spínola - Ricardo de Moraes Nunes*

During the year 2026, CEPA will have commemorated 80 years of existence. This is a milestone not only for us, as a collective, but for the entire global Spiritist movement. With this anniversary, an important chapter is marked in the history of the world's oldest worldwide representative Spiritist organization in uninterrupted operation.

These first 80 years unfolded in a turbulent twentieth century and a first quarter of the twenty-first that brings new challenges and opportunities. The Law of Progress, proposed in Kardec's outline presented in *The Spirits' Book*, serves as our point of reference. Not everything advances simultaneously or across all domains at once, just as not all individuals have their personal progress subordinated to the progress of others. Understood in this way—with a panoramic, expansive view—we see that progress, change, and movement are universal constants. Looking

to the quantum universe, the physical universe, and the moral universe that each of us embodies, we note how Progress is Law.

So too has been the progress of CEPA—International Spiritist Association. From an avant-garde representative and confederative movement to an association of organizations, collectives, and individuals aligned in agreement and heading in the same direction: to present and represent the Spiritist message in the language of our time, addressing present-day issues and always engaging in dialogue with contemporary knowledge and society. In other words, to stand for the ideal of Spiritism from an updated, fresh perspective—always.

Today, Spiritist thought is more exposed than ever to analysis, scrutiny, critique, and to encounters with people who thirst for a loving, empathetic, and solidaristic spirituality—one that does not keep chewing over the religious atavisms of yesteryear. That is the fertile ground that is not always cultivated, but which is our specialty. More and more women and men seek to find themselves and to identify as Spirits, looking for a language that satisfies their intellectual curiosity, their critical thinking, and their free-thinking disposition.

The fruits of the influence of CEPA—International Spiritist Association—are visible and ever-expanding throughout the Spiritist milieu. Increasing numbers of individuals and collectives are joining us, understanding that Spiritism, seen from a non-religious perspective, has much to contribute and indeed frees us from ancient, heavy cultural and behavioral chains. As an organization, we cannot claim exclusive credit for this. The fact that more people today continue to draw near to a comprehensive, free-thinking, progressive, and secular view of Spiritism also reflects the rising quality of the studies, analyses, and research being carried out in different fields of knowledge on topics that Spiritism addresses. In other words, as individuals progress, so too does the way ideas, discourses, arguments, and proposals are presented and developed.

This is where CEPA's editorial initiative—the Free Thought Collection: Spiritism for the 21st Century—comes into play. This second series of books will serve as a forum or resonance space from which we stand for and present to the world a Spiritist proposal that is:

1. *deistic*; finding in the Primary Cause—God—the starting point of everyone and everything.

2. *immortalist*; understanding the immanence of the existence of Being—individualized and enduring.
3. *progressive and evolutionist*; recognizing the importance of physical life, with its ecological, economic, and social responsibilities, as a learning arena and reinforcement for the Spirit.
4. developed through *dialogue* with *Spirits* — that is, with human beings without a physical body — who offer us their experiences, perspectives, and counsel or cautions in building a practical, fraternal, ever-living body of knowledge.
5. recognizing in *universal solidarity* something beyond personal experience or speculation—an undeniable reality: Earth is our current school-home, and the universe is full of workshops and stages that are likewise available to us and to those who have preceded us, as well as to those who are coming into consciousness.

Although it is not a guaranteed, assured, or linear process, we expect that, with the passing of time, individuals will mature their ideas, attitudes, outlooks, and assessments. These expectations are part of human dynamics; yet they sometimes collide with a different reality that apparently will

not unfold at the desired speed. We often notice people repeating old, worn-out sayings, clinging to childish attitudes, or striving to oppose change and progress, dismissing as utopian the ideas they do not understand.

Knowing this, we should not be surprised that organizations and institutions of any nature—social, political, philosophical, religious, economic, and so on—are an amplified reflection of it. After all, organizations, and institutions, like society itself, represent the sum of the individuals who compose them. That is why we see collectives marked by resistance, inertia, resentment, and disinterest when faced with changes that require reconsidering positions and maturing attitudes and ideas.

Does Spiritism, as a spiritualist philosophy with moral consequences, have this resentful, stagnant, immature character? The answer seems obvious: **NO!**

So, we invite our readers to do the following: enjoy this reading, analyze each book, take notes, write down questions, and take part in the events where the authors who contributed to each of the books that make up the Free Thought Collection will be present. Bring us your concerns and let us discuss

them. After all, that is how knowledge is built, how we grow, and how we learn.

We are fully confident that the Free Thought Collection will touch your life in a positive way. Thank you for reading us and allowing us to contribute something positive.

José E. Arroyo

President of International Spiritist Association - CEPA

CPDoc is currently one of the oldest Spiritism research centers in operation in Brazil. Its main goal is the development and dissemination of Spiritist-themed studies and research, using the method best suited to each topic and drawing on contributions from various fields of knowledge. It thus looks to contribute to the advancement of knowledge as a whole and of Spiritism in particular.

CPDoc was founded in Santos (SP) in 1988, born from the dream of young people keen to expand Spiritist studies. Today it includes participants from several Brazilian states and other countries. Works are published through its portal, in books, in the press, and at various events—especially the Brazilian Symposium on Spiritist Thought and CEPA's Congresses and Conferences, the organization it joined in 1995.

In a world dominated by superficial knowledge, shallow and uncontrolled information, and the absence of critical

thinking, CPDoc continues striving to offer students and scholars of Spiritism a probing gaze toward the future. It is always a utopia, always a dream, but that is how it began, and, despite the natural fatigue brought by the passage of years, the group still toys with the belief in knowledge that sparks reflection and changes in paradigms and attitudes—for the individual and for society.

Without claiming to point out a single path, we are certain that the light of critical, non-dogmatic, humanist knowledge—free of any institutional imposition—can yield something effective in this quest that began in 1857 in France and that we insist on keeping alive: the pursuit of happiness through understanding what life is.

Information on published books and articles, events promoted by CPDoc, and online courses are available on the group's portal: <http://www.cpdocespirita.com.br>.

Saulo de Meira Albach

President of Spiritist Research and Documentation
Center - CPDoc

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PREFACE

For addressing this theme — “*The Spiritist Perspective on Fundamentalisms*” — I believe the organizers of the “Free Thought Collection—Spiritism for the 21st Century” could not have made a better choice.

Jacques Peccatte carries in his blood and soul the legacy of what, in his country, France, marked the great movements of Modernity on behalf of a revolution of ideas capable of turning a significant page in History, especially in the West.

The transition from the theocratic state to the democratic rule of law—recognizing the autonomy of the human spirit and investing it with the responsibility of governing a plural, secular society—opens a new historical era.

By tracing the emergence of these ideas and their gradual implementation in the world, he identifies religious fundamentalism and integrism as causes of the enormous violence that spans centuries and millennia of human history.

Replacing supposed eternal, immutable truths with free thought — the generator of scientific knowledge and the stimulus to philosophical reasoning — was one of Modernity's great achievements. But this is a process still underway, and the secular, free-thinking Spiritist proposal is part of it.

The author calls attention to the number of peoples and countries still governed by religious laws that override any attempt at a legal order grounded in human initiative and rationality. The consequence is extreme state violence perpetuated under the mantle of the sacred, in opposition to the human and to secularism.

After the historical sketch—covering not only the Christian world but other religious traditions as well — Peccatte turns particularly to the current moment in Western countries, extending a more detailed analysis with a focus on nations in the Americas, notably Brazil.

Nations such as the United States of America

and Brazil, although formally secular states governed by democratic constitutions, harbor—beneath the surface of the consciousness of substantial portions of their populations — fideistic concepts and values that tend toward heightened conservatism. In that cultural milieu, a political class grows, which obstructs advances in modern achievements such as women's political and professional equality, respect for ethnic and gender diversity, freedom of worship and religious practice, and, above all, the establishment of a truly secular state to guide its laws and governance.

The author acknowledges progressive advances within the Catholic Church, thanks to the action of pontiffs whose outlooks come closer to secularism and its proposals, yielding a generous stance in favor of social justice and the fraternity of all peoples. On the other hand, he points to Pentecostal evangelicalism as a growing force among the peoples of the Americas, with retrograde and conservative appeals. He laments, in Brazil's specific case, that a large contingent of people self-identified as Spiritists have contributed to this conservative movement typical of integrist sects. Only a distorted view of Spiritism could lead to this. He singles out Roustaingism—a religious reading of Spiritism—as one of its major distortions.

The work under discussion underscores that not all social violence stems from religious influence. Yet, in the author's judgment, only secularism can ensure a "different and healthful path for democracy." He supports that Spiritism proposes an open spirituality that accepts scientific advances and situates itself on a plane of philosophical reflection. From this posture, it can contribute effectively to a more just and happier society.

Above all, the author's message is optimistic—as is the Spiritist proposal. He emphasizes that all authoritarian systems last only for a time; sooner or later, they give way to the resistances that invariably arise.

It is a worthwhile read, grounded especially in Allan Kardec's progressive proposal, present in the Moral Laws set out in Part Three of *The Spirits' Book*.

Milton Rubens Medran Moreira

Centro Cultural Espírita de Porto Alegre (Brasil)

Past President of CEPA

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INTRODUCTION

Our world is undergoing major changes and facing extremely serious wars. Religious radicalism contributes to these conflicts, even fueling wars that for decades have ravaged the Middle East, where most countries are governed by theocratic regimes.

Here, grounded in our spiritualist and Spiritist ethics, we set out to analyze the religious and political realities classified as fundamentalist. First, let us look at the definitions of the terms used.

Fundamentalism: a movement or current of thought that demands obedience to strict rules and dogmatic principles, inherited from a literal interpretation of religious texts such as the Bible or the Qur'an. The term applies to fanatical religions in which all laws of justice, equality, and freedom

are ignored, especially with regarding women. Fundamentalism can also apply to non-religious ideologies that claim an absolute truth in politics.

Integrisism: the attitude of believers who reject any change in their religion, which must strictly uphold established rites and dogmas. Among Catholic fundamentalists, for example, there are often collusions with far-right movements. This can also be seen in so-called evangelical churches, especially Pentecostal ones.

Theocracy: the organization and governance of a state based on religious principles that establish the rules and laws to be applied in a society.

There are many examples of such politico-religious powers. Much has been said about the power of the ayatollahs in Iran and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Radical Islam also includes movements that do not govern but have a terrorist component, such as al-Qaeda, Daesh, Hezbollah, and Hamas. Moreover, for historical reasons, we often forget to mention extremist Judaism, which has always existed among supporters of a Greater Israel who do not want a Palestinian state to exist. In this sense, the issue goes beyond religion, which has become a pretext for ethnic and territorial supremacy,

something that is certainly not the precise aim of this study of fundamentalism examined from a spiritualist point of view.

1

RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM IN HISTORY

The very principle of a religion is the belief in supernatural, transcendent forces that can be invoked. There may also be one or more gods who govern human beings with an invisible hand, helping them better handle their difficulties and errors.

The earliest religions were polytheistic—for example, among the Greeks, with Aphrodite, goddess of love; Athena, goddess of war; Apollo, God of light; Hephaestus, God of fire; and so on. Later, among the Romans, there was a correspondence between the gods and their functions and attributes, almost identical to what is found in Greece. The chief of all the Greek gods, Zeus, became Jupiter in the Roman pantheon, and we find similarities in the other attributions.

These are ancient mythologies, for Rome assimilated the Hellenic culture. Looking a little further back in time, Egyptian culture also had its gods: Iris, Osiris, Horus—god of the sky and kingship—and Thoth, god of science, the arts, and wisdom.

These mythologies were made up of supernatural powers personifying natural phenomena, such as sunlight, or abstract concepts, such as love.

In the East, within the context of Hinduism, we find the great Hindu trinity: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—three gods theoretically of equal power, representing the three aspects of divine power: creation, preservation, and destruction. Yet there is a God, a supreme and unique universal spirit who moves all human, animal, and material life. Hence Hinduism is at once monotheistic and polytheistic.

Considered one of the oldest, Sumerian religion was polytheistic, with Marduk as king of the gods. Enlil was the god of air, wind, and storm. The civilization of Sumer dates to the end of the fourth millennium BCE, clearly showing us that the need to appeal to a belief has been a constant in human civilizations since time immemorial.

A word about Buddhism: Buddha is not a god, nor does he claim to be a god. The goal is to be

freed from the cycle of suffering and passions through reincarnation, with the final aim of reaching nirvana. Depending on the school and tradition, Buddhism is not always considered a religion, and its distinctive feature is the absence of the notion of a God at the origin of all things; even so, there are divinities, so Buddhism can be compared to a form of polytheism.

Without surveying every religious culture in the world since the dawn of humanity, we can observe that the oldest traditions were mostly polytheistic, while monotheism arose mainly in Jewish culture with Abraham (around 1850 BCE), considered the ancestor of the three religions that recognize a single God: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Later, Moses (around 1300 BCE) is said to have received directly from the divine the tablets of the law, which established moral values and conduct, thereby consolidating belief in a single God.

These, broadly speaking, are the origins of the best-known religions—setting aside the various African animisms and the beliefs present in diverse Indigenous cultures around the world, often repressed by Christian colonizers in centuries past. It was in this context that monotheism often ended up replacing older traditions based on ancestor worship and the veneration of one or more gods of nature.

Back to the West: the gods of Olympus left no posterity beyond their copy in Roman culture, for it was through the Church of Rome, in the early centuries, that the God of the Christians supplanted all the polytheistic traditions, inherited mainly from Greece.

In this study of fundamentalism in religion, it is quite difficult to situate antiquity from this point of view. In Integrism there is a notion of intransigence that can lead to punishment for not respecting religious dogmas and laws. It can take the form of apostasy—rejecting one's own religion in favor of another. In a certain sense, we see this in Jesus who, contrary to the law of the Talmud, challenged the Jews in their principles, questioned them, appealed to God, and at times contradicted Jewish law. He challenges established principles. Thus, he comes up against what can already be considered a form of radicalism: that of the priests of the law who, faced with a religious as well as social agitator, distrust the one who comes to challenge established dogmatism. We may say, then, that the refusal to question an instituted dogma already represents the beginning of integrism—capable of preventing a culture from evolving and imprisoning it in immobility, sometimes for several centuries. Throughout history, some

religions have undergone interesting evolutions, while others have remained stuck in immutable ancestral principles. Even so, there were advances and retreats, with periods of progress followed by fundamentalist phases. This is what happened in the Christian West during the era of the Inquisition, which ran through the entire Middle Ages. Across the European continent, heretics were tortured and burned at the stake. This is the most terrifying image of murderous fundamentalism—atrocities committed in the name of the official religion, Catholicism, an institution that, under papal authority, became criminal.



DID YOU KNOW?

In 1231, Pope Gregory IX established the Medieval Inquisition. It persecuted people accused of witchcraft, Luciferians, and heretics such as the Waldensians, Albigensians, and Cathars.



Pope Gregory IX

The Inquisition developed primarily in France, and later in Spain and Portugal—countries closely tied to the papacy through their adherence to Catholicism.

The German priest Conrad of Marburg was the first to hold the title of inquisitor, appointed by Gregory IX.

A little later, we find the same kind of abuses when papal authority was challenged, with Jan Hus, born between 1369 and 1372, tortured to death on July 6, 1415, in Constance.



John Hus

A Czech theologian and scholar, a religious reformer, he was excommunicated and condemned to the stake. A year later, his friend and chief supporter, Jerome of Prague, was also burned at the stake. In a sense, they were forerunners of the Protestant Reformation.

THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

Martin Luther (1483–1546), born in Saxony in what was then known as the Holy Roman Empire, challenged papal authority by holding the Bible to be the only legitimate source of Christian authority.



DID YOU KNOW?

In 1882, the spirit of Jerome of Prague manifested to Léon Denis for the first time, informing him that he would be his guide for half a century.

Shortly thereafter, Jerome of Prague assured him of unconditional support: *"Go, my son, along the path before you; I walk behind you to support you."*

Disturbed by the practice of selling indulgences, which had been implemented to fund the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome—he published his Ninety-Five Theses in 1517, a list of propositions that would give rise to the Protestant Reformation. His excommunication for heresy followed from his disagreements with the papal office and certain Church dogmas.



A little later, the French theologian John Calvin (1509–1564) carried the Protestant Reformation forward. He emphasized the doctrine of predestination.



Like Martin Luther, he rejected the veneration of saints, the authority of the pope, and priestly celibacy. He also retained only two of Catholicism's seven sacraments: baptism and the Eucharist.

THE COUNTER REFORMATION

In the second half of the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church did everything possible to combat the Protestants. After the Council of Trent, new congregations were created, among them

the Jesuits, who would later wield enormous influence. Beyond all the historical details, in terms of fundamentalism, we should chiefly recall the persecutions carried out against heretics, including Protestants.

This was the era of the Wars of Religion; the most famous event of that history was the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572. Thousands of Protestants were slaughtered by Catholics in Paris.

THE HOLY INQUISITION

The Inquisition was established by the Catholic Church during the twelfth century as an official authority tasked with addressing instances of heresy.

The penalties imposed ranged from prayers and penances to fines, and could include the confiscation of all property and, in the case of apostates, the death penalty.

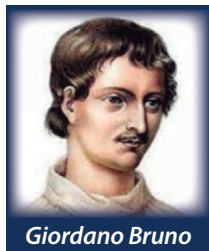
Persecution also extended to the colonies, where Indigenous peoples were forcibly converted. In the Iberian Peninsula, Jews and Muslims were likewise subjected to forced conversion.

In Spain, the Inquisition was first abolished in January 1813 by the Cortes of Cádiz but reinstated

during the Restoration in 1814. It was definitively abolished by a decree of July 15, 1834.

In 1633, Galileo—who defended heliocentrism, the idea that the Earth revolved around the Sun—was forced to recant at the insistence of the Holy Office.

In 1600, Giordano Bruno—a proponent of an infinite universe and the plurality of worlds—defied the Church. Condemned by the Inquisition tribunal, he was burned alive in Rome.



CHURCH AND STATE

In France, the first transformations of religious power took place during the French Revolution. The Church was suppressed, and that was the moment when the State broke away from religion, laying the first foundations of secularism, based on the principle that religion should no longer impose its laws on politics.

On the night of August 4, 1789, the clergy—until then the kingdom's First Estate—disappeared as a political body. In that same year, church property

was nationalized. In 1790, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was adopted, which profoundly reformed the Catholic Church. Dioceses and parishes were reorganized.

The pope condemned the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen and the Civil Constitution of the Clergy*.

Some priests refused to take the oath required by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. These priests went underground and were persecuted by the authorities. Some of them were exiled, massacred, or deported.

2

THE BIRTH OF THE SECULAR STATE

Since the French Revolution, there has been a rejection of religious influence over politics. Thus, the principle of secularism appeared, which represents both the refusal of religious authority and the guarantee of religious freedoms. Article 10 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, dated August 26, 1789, states that *"no one shall be disturbed for their opinions, even religious ones, provided that their expression does not disturb the public order established by law."*

These early efforts to establish a secular state in France were challenged by the Restoration and by two empires, bringing us to 1870, when, after the capitulation of Napoleon III at Sedan, Léon Gambetta announced the deposition of the emperor. It was

at this moment that the Third Republic definitively replaced royal and imperial powers. The idea of secularism was once again taken up, especially by our Spiritist predecessors, who were active in the League of Education to secure a public school system that was secular, free, and compulsory—an achievement that became a reality in 1881 with the Jules Ferry laws.

The Ligue de l'enseignement ("*League of Education*," free translation), led by Jean Macé, included several Spiritist members, among them Alexandre Delanne, Léon Denis, Camille Flammarion, Emmanuel Vauchez, Pierre-Gaétan Leymarie, and others. These figures, following Allan Kardec, the great educator and promoter of Spiritist philosophy, devoted themselves to advancing secularism as a principle that enables the State to guarantee instruction and education independently of any religious institution.



DID YOU KNOW?

In 1791, in response to the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* of 1789, a woman named Olympe de Gouges published her own *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen*, in which she advocated for equal rights for men and women. Her opposition to the more radical revolutionaries led to her execution by guillotine in 1793.

In addition to the issue of public education, the role of the Churches—still exerting their influence on society—was also reconsidered, particularly by the three successive monarchies of Louis XVIII, Charles X, and Louis-Philippe. This period of monarchical restorations led to the neglect of the achievements of the French Revolution, which had initiated the first steps toward secularism. The principle was later reevaluated by the Third Republic, ultimately leading to the law of December 9, 1905, which established the separation of Church and State. This law also addressed matters concerning places of worship, religious associations, and the oversight of religious practices, becoming the cornerstone of secular institutions.

From a legal standpoint, secularism is the principle of separation between civil society and religious society with respect to the organization and administration of public life. The State must remain neutral and impartial regarding religious denominations, while public institutions must be independent of the clergy and the Churches.

Secularism thus stands in opposition to what, under the Ancient Régime, was the predominance of the clergy allied with the monarchy, which granted the Church the role of the State's official religion.

In terms of religious practice, spiritual matters are relegated to the private sphere. This takes us back, far into history, to the origins of secularism, illustrated by the famous words of Jesus when questioned by the Pharisees, who sought to trap him by asking whether it was lawful to pay taxes to the Roman emperor. Calling them “hypocrites,” he asked them to show him the coin used for the tax and inquired whose image it bore. They replied it was Caesar—Tiberius, who, like all Roman emperors, bore the title “Caesar.” Jesus then answered: *“Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s, and unto God what is God’s.”* With this response, he pointed to the essential separation between the material and the spiritual—that is, between political organization and religious principles.

In ancient Rome, emperors held the highest religious office, and the same was true in the Middle Ages, when Western European monarchs exercised a divine right of power shared with ecclesiastical authorities. Likewise, in the Byzantine Empire, the emperor held supreme authority, standing above the Church itself and even over its highest representative, the Patriarch of Constantinople.

In contemporary societies, secularism — though not always explicitly proclaimed — has become an

established reality in many countries, particularly in Europe.

It is worth noting that in Anglo-Saxon countries, tradition dictates that a Bible be placed in hotel rooms as bedside reading. This custom aims to encourage the reading of the Scriptures, though it inevitably reflects the implicit influence of religion in tradition.

We also find this practice in other contexts, such as swearing an oath on the Bible in U.S. courts. Even more widely recognized is the tradition followed by all U.S. presidents, who take the oath of office with their hand on the Bible.

The concept of the separation between Church and State is often attributed to the English philosopher John Locke. Building on his principle of the social contract, he argued that the State has no legitimate authority to interfere with individual conscience. Locke emphasized natural rights and freedom of conscience, which must be safeguarded from government intrusion. This demand for religious tolerance and the recognition of individual conscience had a profound influence on the American colonies and on the drafting of the United States Constitution.



THE PRINCIPLE OF SECULARISM

In France, according to the official guidelines provided by the annual report of the Observatory of Secularism, the summary is as follows:

"Secularism guarantees freedom of conscience. From this freedom flows the right to express one's own beliefs or convictions, within the limits of respect for public order. Secularism entails the neutrality of the state and imposes equality for all before the law, without distinction of religion or conviction.

Secularism guarantees believers and non-believers the same right to freely express their beliefs or convictions. It guarantees the right to have or not have a religion, to change religions, or to follow none at all. It guarantees the free exercise of worship and religious freedom, but also freedom with respect to religion: no one may be compelled to observe religious dogmas or precepts.

Secularism implies the separation between the state and religious organizations. The political order is based exclusively on the sovereignty of the citizenry, and the state, which neither recognizes nor funds any religion, does not interfere in the internal functioning of religious organizations. This separation results in the neutrality of the state, territorial institutions, and

public services—but not of their users. Thus, the secular Republic guarantees citizens' equality before the administration and public services, regardless of their convictions or beliefs.

Secularism is not one opinion among many, but the freedom to have one. It is not a conviction, but the principle that makes all of them possible, provided they respect public order."

WHERE IS SECULARISM APPLIED?

There are always distortions between a principle and its real-world application, and this is true of secularism as well. One of the first major countries to impose the principle of secularism (in 1924) was Turkey under Mustafa Kemal, known as Atatürk. It was undoubtedly a way of aligning with Western values and ways of life, creating a break with the Ottoman imperial and Islamic past. Inspired by the French Revolution, he incorporated secularism into the Constitution. In a sense, Atatürk carried out a cultural and social revolution, replacing the Arabic alphabet with the Latin alphabet, granting women the right to vote, and abolishing sharia, thereby stripping Islam of its status as an official religion.



Atatürk

Sharia: the Islamic legal system, which sets out various doctrinal and cultural norms and rules. Some aspects are incompatible with the notion of human rights, particularly regarding freedom of expression, sexual freedom, and the status of women.

In present-day Turkey, religious education is compulsory in public schools, even though President Erdogan still invokes some secular principles inherited from his distant predecessor. As a result, it can no longer be said that the country upholds true secularism, which consists of separating social organization from religious practice.

Another notable example of secularism is France, which in 1905 instituted the separation of Church and State. In practice, the principle of secularism is periodically reconsidered in different eras, depending on context. Today, because of the immigration of people of Muslim faith, many debates have arisen that remain unresolved regarding to visible religious symbols such as the Islamic headscarf, whose use is prohibited in public spaces.

There is also the issue of public education, partially delegated to private schools, which has long persisted in France with the so-called “free schools” under contracts with the state. In addition, there are

fully private Catholic schools and, today, confessional Quranic schools whose curricular content is not precisely known.

We can thus see that secularism is not a perfect, fully enforced norm; rather, it is a guideline that reflects a tradition of more than a hundred years in France. Nevertheless, there are other countries that, even without having constitutionally enshrined this principle, apply a relative form of secularism—such as most Western or Western-aligned countries (Australia, Japan, South Korea, etc.), as well as countries in Latin America and others around the world whose politics are not grounded in religious principles.

A SIGN OF EVOLUTION

Considering the course of human history, in which monarchies gradually gave way to republics, the relationship with religion came under scrutiny. The monarchy was the guardian of a religious institution; the two were closely intertwined and ruled populations in an authoritarian manner, leaving no room for questioning. This relationship with religion was especially challenged by Enlightenment philosophers, who sought to conceive other forms of power that, while respecting belief in God, aimed to emancipate populations.



DID YOU KNOW?

In the 18th century, the Age of Enlightenment, philosophers questioned how societies were organized. They were the forerunners of democracies and republics, and they also raised the issue of religion's influence on society.

In a way — and without intending to — they became the intellectual touchstones of the French Revolution. Montesquieu clearly defined the separation of powers; the influence of religion had already been addressed by Voltaire, who denounced its obscurantism; and freedom through education was the guiding principle of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

3

SPIRITISM AND FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE AND BELIEF

Based on the definitions set out above regarding the secular state, we can clearly distinguish what belongs to the private sphere and what falls within the public domain. Everything related to the organization of society should not be influenced by the various beliefs inherent to each culture. However, this does not prevent everyone from expressing and living their belief with complete freedom. In this context, freedom of conscience applies not only to people who do or do not hold a religious belief, but also to Spiritists, who describe themselves as nonreligious, claiming a spiritual, scientific, and philosophical identity. Spiritism is, in essence, the philosophy of conscience, grounded in freedom—or at least in free will—as presented in *The Spirits' Book*.

FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE

Spiritist teaching is based on principles initially defined by Allan Kardec, drawn from communications from the other world, which he studied, analyzed, and synthesized in *The Spirits' Book*. These major principles, which Kardec himself called divine laws, have remained unchanged over time. Among them are the manifestation of Spirits through mediums, reincarnation as a law of intellectual and moral evolution, and the plurality of inhabited worlds.

All this rests on the idea of a God—a generic term that, despite its limitations, seeks to express the immensity of the universe and the transcendence of love and creation. All this lies beyond our human capacity for comprehension, yet the very act of invoking this concept indicates that we have some awareness of it—an awareness that returns to our ever-evolving minds. It is an awareness that something lies beyond us, to which we try to draw nearer in an initial grasp of understanding, whether on a scientific or philosophical level. Everything in human history tends toward this search for understanding—not only in the arts and literature, but also in technology, science, philosophy, and religion—all of which reflect a fundamental intuition

that connects us with a transcendent force beyond our capacity to conceptualize.

Every intellectual and spiritual reflection implies freedom: freedom to think and act, freedom to express ideas and create—even if this is not clear everywhere in the world. But wherever we live, there is always a need to work to expand freedoms. There are countries where everything remains to be done, and nations like ours, where we enjoy the advantage of the right to expression with few restrictions.

The first freedom to defend—through a process that varies by region—is freedom of conscience, since it is the starting point for all struggles for human well-being and development. However, when speaking of conscience, it is essential to consider an indispensable intellectual requirement. To be conscious, yes—but conscious of what, and based on what knowledge?

Conscience needs to be nourished by knowledge and culture to have a foundation for reflection. We may be aware of existing, thinking, and living among our fellow humans, yet without culture our conscience will remain limited. How can we judge a fact or an event if we do not know the causes? From this standpoint, we can see that conscience is

extremely limited when people lack a solid grasp of the facts. This becomes noticeably clear when social networks enable the spread of disinformation and propaganda, distorting reality to the point of creating virtual realities that, in fact, do not exist. Therefore, in addition to conscience, it is essential to add critical thinking, free will, and the capacity to make judgments. And that requires a solid education, supported by sound instruction.

FREEDOM OF BELIEF

The very principle of secularism, based on religious freedom in the private sphere, guarantees full freedom of belief within respect for democratic rules—and this, of course, holds true in societies that grant this right.

In theocratic societies that do not apply the separation between politics and religion, as in the case of Iran, there is no freedom of belief, since the state's official religion, Shia Islam, dictates the laws and dominates the institutions that define the norms of social coexistence. In this context, there is a single, unquestionable belief about which reflection is forbidden since that would mean calling it into question. It is sometimes possible to evolve religious

concepts, as is happening today among Catholics, who have freedom of conscience and reflection. However, in a society governed by strict religious rules, it is clear there is no room for any questioning. This is particularly visible in the condition of women in Muslim theocratic states, such as Iran, Afghanistan, and several others.

Spiritists, for their part, defend full freedom of belief, but they also defend democracy, which is the only system that allows that freedom. Spiritism, unlike certain religions, does not cast anathema on any movement that does not uphold the same principles. On the contrary, as a philosophy and spirituality of individual emancipation, Spiritism can only champion complete freedom of conscience, oppose theocracies, and, where appropriate, discuss points of religious spirituality while respecting beliefs.

We often debate certain religious principles that strike us as absurd, and others have done so before us, such as Léon Denis who, following Allan Kardec, never failed to point out the uselessness of concepts like heaven, purgatory, and hell, which reflect a certain notion of a vengeful, punitive God in the image of human magistrates. Nevertheless, if these critical debates have occurred throughout the history

of Spiritism, they have always concerned beliefs. This led Allan Kardec to say that if certain people are satisfied with their beliefs, we must respect their faith; it is not our place to turn them from their paths.

Spiritism brought with it a completely new element: the possibility of communication with the other world—a contact that allowed us to refine our knowledge of life after death. In many respects, this contradicted religious beliefs, yet it could also confirm certain concepts, such as the Christian notion of God or the principle of reincarnation in Eastern schools. The idea was no longer to systematically contradict all beliefs, but to see how some of them might have a basis in truth that had, however, been altered over time and distorted by monarchical and religious powers seeking to control the population.

And it was from these foundations of truth studied by our forerunners that Spiritists opened the debate, facing great difficulties—especially in the nineteenth century, when the Catholic Church still professed rigorous principles, among them the existence of the devil, which was considered the only entity capable of manifesting through mediums. Things have evolved since then, to the point that we can imagine a dialogue with more progressive Christians who, on

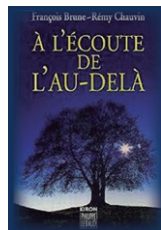
the moral plane, might find points of agreement with Spiritists. It is also worth recalling the advances of the official Church regarding the possible communication with the dead—something we owe to statements by Father Concetti in 1996, published in L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican's official press organ.



DID YOU KNOW?

Father François Brune, a French priest and theologian (1931–2019), was interested in communication with the dead. He wrote **À l'écoute de l'au-delà ("Listening to the Beyond," loosely translated) with parapsychologist Rémy Chauvin.**

Although he was convinced that the spirit survives after death, he did not agree with the idea of reincarnation.



He and other priests were interested in the paranormal, and this had a decisive influence on the development of Catholic dogma. In November 1996, the major Italian news agency ANSA published an interview with the priest Gino Concetti, in which he spoke about life after death in an innovative way, without excluding possible communication with

the deceased. In doing so, he subverted Catholic principles that, until then—without denying strange phenomena—had attributed them at times to the devil, at others to the saints or the Virgin Mary. Any other form of communication was considered sacrilegious.

Therefore, we can consider today that mediumistic communication is recognized by the Church, even if it does not encourage it, given that it may present dangers. So, this is a step forward that should be acknowledged.

Although the newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* supposedly represents the Vatican's official position, we do not know whether the Roman Curia and the Pope investigated this matter—which seems unlikely, since the information did not receive major media coverage. Moreover, it is known that the Church's principles can be somewhat flexible, and it is not precisely known what may be made the subject of a decree. The most recent one to gain notoriety was, in 2007, the abolition of limbo, once considered the destination of those who died without being baptized.

To conclude on freedom of conscience and belief from the Spiritist point of view, let us recall

that for Spiritists tolerance is paramount. Although, as progressive Spiritists, we assert a nonreligious, philosophical identity, our primary orientation is to affirm that Spiritism stands apart from the dogmatic beliefs taught by religions, while at the same time accepting the possibility of dialogue with religious traditions that wish it. Father Concetti, on behalf of the Vatican, in a way opened the door to this dialogue.

Obviously, we will be much more circumspect when we encounter other religions, some of which are retreating further and further in terms of morality and ethics. Fundamentalist factions are taking shape by cultivating the most retrograde obscurantism imaginable.

Such are, for example, certain branches of American evangelicalism that have spread around the world, rejecting the theory of evolution and exhibiting a complete regression on women's emancipation. Likewise, all branches of Islamism that deny any form of freedom to women follow this same line of thought.

Beyond the respect we owe to all beliefs, we cannot accept religious ideas that have radicalized to the point of becoming fundamentalisms.

Moreover, this phenomenon has developed in authoritarian countries whose governments — so-called theocracies — are based precisely on these principles of religious radicalism.

4

FREEDOM OF RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION

Religious freedom raises the historical issue that religions, for the most part, have imposed their principles and dogmas through the exercise of power.

The Catholic Church perpetuated its predominance in conjunction with royal and imperial powers, to the point that, for example, the king of France was considered God's representative in his country. Religion thus held sway over the population in tandem with the supremacy of kings and nobles. This meant that the expression of spirituality was hindered by the principles of life dictated by the temporal power of the kingdom and the Church.

In France, it was mainly in the twentieth century that laïcité and the separation of Church and State,

in 1905, severed temporal power from religious representation. The Catholic Church slowly accepted this situation, in France and elsewhere, and ultimately ceased to pose a problem when a new reformist pope, John XXIII, succeeded Pius XII.

VATICAN II

We highlight the decisive role of the Second Vatican Council, initiated by Pope John XXIII in 1962, with the aim of reforming dogma



Second Vatican Council

and granting a certain freedom to religious practice. Although the abandonment of the Latin Mass was only the most visible part of the reform, other principles were reconsidered considering the transformations occurring in the world at that time. The Council addressed issues such as technological advances, the emancipation of peoples, and the Church's relationship with other religions.

The larger question, beyond dogma, was how to apply Jesus' message in the contemporary

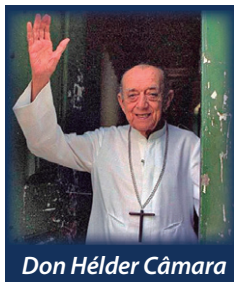
world. There was, therefore, a social and political dimension to John XXIII's action, especially through his encyclicals. Notable among them is *Mater et Magistra* (1961), which addressed the Church's social commitment, and *Pacem in Terris* (1963), which spoke of peace among all nations, grounded in "truth, justice, charity, and freedom."

Through the voice of the Council, Catholicism then moved beyond its narrowly defined religious conceptions to open itself to the world in seeking the meaning of its mission. Drawing on universal values, John XXIII sought to unify Christianity—even at a more political level—by questioning the two great systems of his time, capitalism and communism, and holding them up to these universal values. The aim was less to lecture those systems than to prompt reflection within them and invite dialogue. The goal was simply to seek, within society, whatever might contribute to the betterment of humanity. And in that call to reflect on humanity's future, it becomes evident that *laïcité* was no longer at issue, since the Vatican, as a spiritual authority, appealed to all states, none of which was governed in the name of a Catholic theocracy.

A NEW CURRENT

Over this shift initiated by John XXIII there arose new currents of Christian thought more deeply engaged in civic life, grounded in political theories into which religious reflection could be grafted.

It was in the early 1960s that currents influenced by Marxism emerged. Some Catholics then began to draw, in part, on an atheistic philosophy to show that Marxist analysis did not necessarily depend on philosophical materialism, and that it was perfectly possible, as believers, to claim the same analysis of how societies function and to share the same view of the solutions to be pursued. Thus, Liberation Theology emerged, represented, among others, by Dom Hélder Câmara in Brazil. The aim was not to promote a Soviet- or Maoist-style revolution, but to press for concrete, pragmatic aspirations. This bishop denounced conditions of poverty in the Third World, the arms trade, the Vietnam War, and the Brazilian dictatorship (1964–1985). Nicknamed the “Red Bishop,” he said: “I feed a poor person, and they call me a saint. I ask why the poor person has nothing to eat and they call me a communist.”



Another important figure in Liberation Theology is Leonardo Boff (born in 1938), a theologian and Franciscan who, after being barred from preaching, left the priesthood to devote himself to grassroots services supporting mothers and children experiencing homelessness. He fights against injustice and social inequality, supports the Landless Workers' Movement, and shows deep concern for environmental disasters.



Another phenomenon of the same period, especially in France, was the worker-priest movement—young priests who wanted to give social meaning to their religious role. They went out to meet people working in factories, making contact with a working-class world represented by unions or political parties whose philosophical leanings were more atheist than religious.

Some commentators have occasionally suggested that the worker-priests were instruments of a declining Church, trying to recruit believers in every milieu. It soon became clear, however, that they were in fact people of great sincerity who, beyond their metaphysical reflection, sought a concrete application of the Christian message. They

felt more at ease defending the most vulnerable than exercising a ministry based solely on preaching the word, without the means to put it into practice. It is true that it was not a lasting phenomenon; it simply reflected a time when there was a desire to move away from passive, purely verbal evangelism to share the concrete realities of working life.

RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION AMONG CATHOLICS

The foregoing example shows that Catholics, in their diversity, began granting themselves certain freedoms. This movement began with John XXIII and continued, in a more traditional vein, under Paul VI. Later, the pontificate of John Paul II presented an ambiguous face of the Church, oscillating between conservatism and progressivism. We had a pope who, due to his Polish background, used his influence to oversee the transformation of Poland and, by extension, of the countries with authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe, satellite states of the Soviet Union.

Was a pope necessary to bring about the dismantling of the Eastern Bloc? In reality, no, because in the end it was Mikhail Gorbachev who gave the green light for the emancipation of all the Warsaw Pact countries under the yoke of the Soviet Union. John Paul II's diplomatic action undoubtedly

influenced Poland's emancipation, which came before that of its neighbors, but one way or another, this transformation would have occurred regardless of any religious or Vatican influence.

On that occasion one could appreciate the full subtlety of negotiations that were more political than religious. And it became clear that, on more theological matters, modernity did not always keep pace with history, with positions that remained very conservative on the social plane. For example, some Africans still recall John Paul II's speeches urging people not to use contraceptive methods—messages that plainly failed to win the support of populations in the Third World. We can, however, acknowledge that John Paul II was an activist for peace, through his travels and various interventions in many countries.

Subsequently, the pontificate of Benedict XVI (2005–2013) marked a period of stagnation, even a certain regression from the standpoint of theology and dogma. Added to this was a lack of public charisma before a Christian populace that had grown accustomed to expressing its fervor as though acclaiming a rock star when John Paul II traveled—or even simply crossed St. Peter's Square in his popemobile, specially adapted to protect him from the risk of attacks.

As for Pope Francis, we have witnessed a real change that he sought to bring to the Vatican through his office. It is known that he faced numerous opposition within the Roman Curia. But his determination led him to press on with his convictions, especially when it came to social and political issues. He spoke out about the humanitarian scandals involving migrants crossing the Mediterranean, calling on every country to assume its responsibilities.



We also see that this pope did not have a particular predilection for theological and dogmatic issues, unlike his predecessor Benedict XVI. His concern was more humanistic and humanitarian, focused on the concrete application of the Gospel message.

In this sense, the freedom with which he expressed his faith placed him in a position to seek change from within, as he tried to do in the realm of Vatican finances—an attempt he abandoned in the face of strong resistance. He then turned his attention to the urgent need for a form of religious expression close to human beings, to human communities, and to the political risks that belligerent autocrats impose on us.



DID YOU KNOW?

John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* opens with the following sentence:

"Peace on Earth — the object of humanity's deepest longing throughout all ages — can be established and secured only by absolute respect for the order established by God."

The various points addressed are tied to the notion of God—not in a dogmatic way, but with a certain openness that leaves room for questioning and reflection. It includes considerations of the economy, the working classes, and the emancipation of women.

Authority, for example, must be measured against the moral order established by God and must not degenerate into oppression. It also addresses citizens' participation in public life, their rights, and duties, and the common good.

It contains passages underscoring the need for democracy and solidarity. Even the issue of political refugees was addressed at the time. In short, it is a document imbued with deep spirituality which, by virtue of its closeness to social, political, and moral realities, could serve as a guide for Christians in the 1960s—and in many respects still resonates in our societies today.

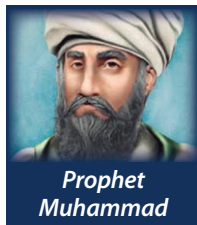
Let us also recall that, since John XXIII, there has been a persistent desire for dialogue known as ecumenism. The goal was to promote common actions and prayers among the different branches of Christianity—the Protestant churches, the Anglican Church, the Orthodox Church, and Eastern Christians.

This desire also extended to other religious movements around the world—Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism—when a pope, during a trip, reached out to other spiritual traditions to open an interreligious dialogue.

THE MUSLIM WORLD

Unlike the Catholic Church, other religions do not have an established hierarchy or a supreme leader responsible for setting the theological line to follow.

This is, among other things, the reality of the Muslim world, where different currents of thought are expressed. However, two major branches predominate: Shiism and Sunnism, whose origins go back to the death of the Prophet Muhammad and the question of his succession. Sunnis recognize



the first three caliphs (a term meaning “successors”), while Shia consider only the fourth caliph, Ali, to be legitimate.

Today, Sunnis account for about 90% of Muslims and form a majority in many countries. Shia are the majority in Iraq and Iran. There is also a Shia minority in several countries, such as Syria and Lebanon.

In fact, Sunnism and Shiism share many common points; a deeper analysis would be needed to grasp all these nuances. But let us return to this chapter’s theme—freedom of expression and its influence on societies.

We observe that, in contemporary Islam, several countries have remained or become theocracies—that is, states governed according to the laws of the Qur’an which, from a legal standpoint, determine the rules to be followed and the penalties to be applied when these norms are not respected.

Let us recall that, in the past, some of these states had adopted a form of secularism by refusing to align civil laws with religious laws. This was the case in Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Syria, and Iraq. However, these regimes remained authoritarian and repressive.

The new systems became theocratic and continued oppressing populations in similar ways,

with one difference: the oppressive norm changed in nature, shifting from a civil or military dictatorship to a religious dictatorship.

HINDUISM TODAY

A religion practiced in India, Hinduism has no founder, no imposed dogmas, and no organized institutions. With 1.1 billion followers in 85 countries, it is the world's third-largest religion.

Before the colonial period, Hinduism encompassed a vast body of knowledge and sciences, bringing together philosophy, law, politics, and medicine.

Beyond sacred books and traditional beliefs, it is important to observe how this religion is currently used for political ends.

India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, presents himself as a highly active Hindu nationalist, oriented toward modernity and driven by the supremacy of the Hindu religion. In contrast, the founders of the Indian nation, Gandhi and Nehru, campaigned for a tolerant plurality of beliefs, but they were unable to contain the massive rejection by Muslims, which led to the creation of two new states—West Pakistan and

East Pakistan—the latter later becoming Bangladesh. Conflicts persisted, since although many Muslims emigrated to the new Pakistani territories, others remained in India. This led to an archaic ostracism by an important Hindu community that adopted an extremely uncompromising fundamentalist stance, to the point of no longer tolerating other ethnicities or religions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi follows this line of thought, promoting a cultural and identitarian nationalism that, in his view, is completely incompatible with Islam.

Muslims — as well as Christians and Sikhs — are stigmatized and demonized as belonging to a “non-Indian” faith because it was born outside the Indian subcontinent.

The first five years of Modi’s government (2014–2019) were marked by nationalism and fundamentalism, preaching hatred against Muslims or trying to convert them to Hinduism. This continued during his second term.

One of the most debated issues is the sacred cow. Today there are cow-protection militias tasked with prosecuting Muslims suspected — often unjustly — of eating the **meat of this sacred animal**.

THE INFLUENCE OF BUDDHISTS

Buddhism teaches the renunciation of violence and promotes the ideals of compassion and benevolence. However, over 2,500 years of history, there have been countless instances of violence instigated by people or groups identifying as Buddhist.

In recent history, Sri Lanka saw violent clashes between the Sinhalese (Buddhists) and the Tamil minority until 2009.

And today, in Burma, the Buddhist persecution of the Rohingya Muslim minority continues. The Dalai Lama, the foremost representative of Buddhism, has consistently called on these extremist movements to cease their fratricidal struggles and practice nonviolence.



Dalai Lama

In Burma (Myanmar), the “969 movement,” led by dissident monk Ashin Wirathu, is composed of anti-Muslim extremists. These Buddhists set fire to mosques, schools, and homes belonging to the Rohingya minority, with the aim of expelling them from their lands. Most of these victims are forced to

seek refuge in Bangladesh and other neighboring countries.

Here we see an anti-Muslim ostracism similar to that in India, likewise, driven by a form of nationalism tied to the majority religion, which must become the sole point of reference, excluding all others.



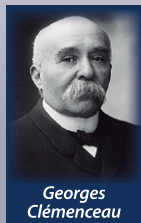
5

FUNDAMENTALISMS AND VIOLENCE

The rise of fundamentalism is today a crucial issue—not only in relation to distorted spiritualities, but also in sociopolitical terms. Let us first look at fundamentalisms of Christian origin which, by their influence, sometimes end up shaking even the foundations of our societies, especially in the so-called Western cultures and particularly in the United States. This movement, in all its diversity, is often grouped under the generic term “Evangelical.” More precisely, it is the Pentecostal branch that has grown exponentially in the Americas, becoming the front line for populist politicians such as Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro—candidates who, in 2016 and 2018, harnessed evangelical religious fervor for their own political rise and to spread anti-democratic, racist, discriminatory, anti-feminist, homophobic ideas, among others.

In earlier times there was talk of the alliance of the “sword and the *goupillon*”—an old expression attributed to Georges Clemenceau applied to the collusion between the army or the state and the Church. Today, in other forms, we see the extent of the intimate link between religion and politics in many countries. When it comes to Islamic theocracies, we understand that secularism has almost never existed in some of these states and that one day progress will be needed to usher in a new era for these regions.

Georges Clemenceau (1841–1929) was a French statesperson who served as Prime Minister of France from 1906 to 1909 and again from 1917 to 1920. A key figure among the Independent Radicals, he was a staunch advocate of the separation of Church and State, of amnesty for the Communards exiled to New Caledonia, and of opposition to colonialism. Clemenceau, a physician who became a journalist, played a significant role in the politics of the Third Republic.



On the other hand, when it comes to American democracy—capable of an intellectual regression to the point of questioning the teaching of evolution in some schools, and a moral regression on social issues—it is legitimate to ask how such extremisms,

dictated by certain currents within evangelicalism, could have served a corrupt power so strongly. Moreover, other far-right, anti-democratic forces sparked rebellions that reached their most senseless point with the attack on the Capitol on January 6, 2021.

This clearly shows that nothing can be considered definitive. Regardless of the democratic advances achieved by certain societies, we must always remain alert and prepared for the possibility of backsliding—returning, even temporarily, to chaotic situations that might recall the darkest moments of our history. And, based on the examples we have seen, we can see that we need to always stay extremely vigilant, or risk suffering disastrous upheavals that can result in new wars, like those that have broken out recently.

However, we cannot say that fundamentalist religions are at the root of all conflicts; no—they merely follow in their wake. If we look at today's great autocrats, we see that their ambition is confined to their own political cause, regardless of their religious ideas, if they have any. It is, therefore, primarily the abuse of power that drives these autocrats to invade, to colonize beyond their borders, and at the same time to subjugate their own populations.

At the same time, religious framings can serve them as tools of self-legitimation. For example, American evangelicalism champions reactionary ideas on the intellectual and moral planes, which in themselves did not feed the harmful notions already held by Donald Trump, but this support proved decisive for him.

An entire sector of religion placed itself at his service, and he knew how to exploit it cynically, privately mocking the beliefs held by his supporters. Thus, holders of authoritarian power do not concern themselves with moral or religious questions and—sticking with the same example—the real issue is electoral and domestic politics, with emphasis on migration, a reality presented as a calamity: the supposed “invasion” of migrants from Latin America.

VIOLENCE

The hallmark of fundamentalist religions is their violence, whether verbal or directly physical. As for verbal violence, it suffices to observe some current sermons. We can, for instance, compare them with those of former pastor Billy Graham in the 1960s. One then notes a resurgence of aggressiveness in their discourse, a growing moral intransigence about

social issues such as abortion, with statements that turn into excessively radical political positions.

The former pastor and televangelist Billy Graham—considered in his time an atypical figure—took care to say that he addressed all people, right and left, and that his movement should in no way involve itself in electoral political conflicts, clearly separating the spiritual from the temporal. He did, however, support another pastor in his struggle for civil rights, Martin Luther King, though he was not directly involved in the demonstrations. Later, having stepped away from his religious responsibilities, he was dismayed to see how his successors became increasingly involved in the political arena—and most often on the side of reactionary conservatives.

We saw these groups in action on a variety of issues. If we analyze them in light of what we now know, the most striking thing remains their literal reading of the Bible, which had the disastrous consequence of exerting such influence that the content of school instruction came to be questioned—reaching the point where a bill was even introduced in the Senate, even though, fortunately, it was not passed. The central notion is the rejection of evolution as set forth by Charles Darwin and other naturalists and paleontologists.

Thus, to avoid problems, some schools chose to teach both theories—creationism and evolution—without opting for one or the other.



DID YOU KNOW?

Creationism — the idea of creation **ex nihilo** (out of nothing) — stands opposed to the notion of the progressive evolution of species, as explained by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, Charles Darwin, Alfred Russel Wallace, and more recent naturalists such as the French priest and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

Evangelicals return to the ancient concepts of biblical creationism found in the first book of Genesis: a world created in seven days; the creation of the plant world and then the animal world; and finally, the creation of the first two humans, Adam and Eve, who appeared around 4000 B.C.

Scientific research over the last two centuries has shown that the world has been transformed gradually and that there has never been spontaneous generation of any form of life out of nothing.

Knowing that the biblical story inevitably takes us back to the journey of the Jewish people from Adam and Eve onward, evangelicals have taken their religious interference even further into the political

sphere—this time on an international scale. They believe that God’s chosen people must reconquer the entirety of the land God promised them. Only when this program is completed, they say, will the Messiah be able to return to Earth and the end times will arrive with the Last Judgment. And better yet—by a twist of fate—it is at that very moment that the Last Judgment will be very unfavorable to the Jewish people. At least, this is one of the more eccentric versions one can find. In this way, by projecting the end times in a manner not found in the source texts (the Bible), they manage to influence events; for example, much of the evangelical movement supports the project of a Greater Israel that would dispossess all Palestinian territories and send the population back to who knows where...

More concretely, evangelicals campaigned for moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem—something achieved at Donald Trump’s initiative. The United States officially opened its embassy in Jerusalem on May 14, 2018. Moreover, it is a way of deflecting attention from a long-standing, unresolved problem: the status of Jerusalem...

Here we run up against the Israeli Palestinian conflict, which dates to 1948 and has grown ever more complex, especially since Hamas’s murderous attack

on October 7, 2023. And then we come to so-called Islamic terrorism, which has diversified in various forms in various places. These fundamentalisms have developed over the past decades in response to the West's neocolonial interference.

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (1979–1989) and the two Gulf Wars (1990–1991 and 2003) were reckless interventions that fueled resentment among Middle Eastern peoples and encouraged the gradual rise of a radical, political Islamism that no longer had any religious grounding. The result was a considerable fundamentalist expansion—with the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Islamic State (Daesh) in Syria and Iraq, and its offshoots extending farther into Afghanistan and Africa. In various countries, sleeper networks have been and remain a constant threat, lying in wait for new malicious acts like those we have already suffered in Europe and elsewhere: *Charlie Hebdo*, the Bataclan (2015), Barcelona's Las Ramblas, Moscow on March 22, 2024—and we cannot list them all, because the list would be far too long.

In these examples of violent, indiscriminate terrorism, religious feeling serves above all as a pretext for destructive ends, with no other political project than to sow death. And if the declared goal is to win people over to sharia, the real point is to

assert the supremacy of terror—sometimes even via internal struggles, as in the opposition between the Taliban and the Islamic State in Afghanistan, where two Islamic factions face off.

What role does belief play in such situations? We can see that the metaphysical or spiritual dimension is practically nonexistent. The underlying idea is that the male half of the population must dominate the female half, subjecting it to servitude—as happens in certain theocracies, where women’s lives have become unbearable and where, moreover, the economy is ruled by mafias and corruption.

However, we cannot conclude that this situation stems from religious saturation—this would be a misguided shortcut, since classical, traditional Islam is anything but a spirituality of emptiness. As in any religion, there are positive values: goodness, justice, sharing, and peace. The problem, however—as in all religions—is that human ambitions end up prevailing and hijack beliefs, distorting them in the service of their own interests to establish authoritarian powers that reflect not a spirituality but the human soul in its basest aspect.

We therefore need to move away from the widespread idea that religions are the source of

many of the world's upheavals, forever generating the worst, as if they were simply "religious wars." In reality, we need not look far to find the reasons behind conflicts; it is enough to observe human nature. And to illustrate this view, let us recall that horrors are also committed independently of any religious influence. When Stalinism reigned in the Soviet Union, it was a philosophically atheist country where religious practice had been banned. And yet, there as elsewhere, the worst crimes were committed—not in the name of religious supremacy, but in the name of a system that sought to improve the human condition and ended up becoming an autocratic regime in the service of the dictatorship of one man.

For that matter, Nazism corresponded to no spirituality at all, only to various forms of ostracism: antisemitism; the persecution of Roma, homosexuals, and communists; the application of eugenics; and so on. What was religious about any of this? Absolutely nothing...

Therefore, all these systems in which the tyrant takes himself for God are built on nothing and promise nothing. And this is still visible today, with or without a religious façade. In the case of the current terrorist movements that exploit distorted religious beliefs, the impact is truly harmful, as believers

who were once thoroughly traditional risk falling themselves into a certain form of fundamentalism. We have seen how Daesh's propaganda managed to lure young French people into senseless blindness based on simplistic beliefs and promises of future wonders.

Daesh is an Arabic term that refers to the terrorist group Islamic State (IS), also known as ISIS or ISIL. The term is an acronym formed from the initials of the Arabic expression "al-Dawla al-Islamiya fil Iraq wa'al Sham" and is used to avoid referring to the group as "Islamic State." In addition, "Daesh" sounds similar to the Arabic word "Dahes," which means "sower of discord."

We saw above two forms of violence: the primarily verbal and propagandistic violence of evangelicals in the United States, and the terrorist violence of Islamic groups in the Middle East. In the first case, although democracy is destabilized, it remains. In the second, the forces in question rely on annihilating the enemy in favor of theocratic power.

A SPIRITIST POINT OF VIEW

If, as Spiritists, we are led to study and comment on these matters, it is because we find it intolerable to support criminal actions perpetrated in the name of spirituality.

These spiritualities—whether the legacy of Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, or Buddha—are, by definition, bearers of fraternity and peace. And yet, throughout history they have served as a pretext for fratricidal wars. This makes it clear that human beings, by nature and in their inferiority, are still mired in these primary stages of domination, pride, greed, and meddling—in a feeling closer to emptiness than to a true quest for growth. Humanity is searching for itself, taking side roads that rarely lead to the right place, trapped by its most basic instincts, its desires, its jealousy—by an omnipresent selfishness that can become the driving force of violence.

And yet the prophets mentioned above—and others who ought to serve as references—preached understanding, forgiveness, and love of one's neighbor. And in their name, everything became possible—the best, but above all the worst—for human beings who distorted their messages and then found in them pretexts that fed their own conflicts.

In the face of all these scourges of another age that have invaded our present, our Spiritist philosophy is a true compass that could help certain people rediscover the path of spirituality. It is true that the path is narrow, threading a course between religions and other forms of spirituality, because—

unlike all the others—Spiritist spirituality still lifts ancestral taboos, particularly the taboo of death.

We are no longer trapped by the imaginary hells and heavens created by religious castes of various traditions; now we live in the reality of communication with the beyond, which conveys teachings directly from the souls inhabiting the other plane. Allan Kardec was their interpreter and became their founder and codifier through his works, which had an extraordinary impact in their time, and which still today form the foundation of Spiritism wherever it is embraced and taught. Admittedly, Spiritism's influence remains modest compared to that of religions, whether institutionalized or distorted.

As for fundamentalist religious movements, we can only note their steady growth over the past three or four decades. We can understand all their implications and interconnections—both cultural and political—especially in unstable regions where democracy is still a little-known concept (the Near and Middle East). However, when it comes to democratic societies contaminated by pseudo-Protestant fundamentalism, as was the case in the United States and Brazil, we harbor doubts about this kind of spiritual and political regression.

Obviously, Spiritism is not meant to become the prop of any political force. But at the very least it can denounce what openly contradicts justice, freedom, and every moral value it upholds. And for Spiritists who also claim the Christian message, they will see that these reference values are not being respected by those Christians called Evangelicals or Pentecostals—at least by those who say they follow the false values mentioned above.

Estamos em uma época bem diferente daquela de nossos predecessores. Em outros tempos, os We live in a time vastly different from that of our predecessors. In other times, Spiritists confronted established religions, particularly the Catholic Church. Let us recall the Barcelona auto-da-fé. Today, that Catholic religion is no longer in opposition to Spiritism (see the previous chapter—Father Concetti). It is the new forms of derivative religions that pose problems even more serious than those of the old Catholic religion in Allan Kardec's day. Classical Protestantism diversified into several so-called pseudo-Protestant sects (Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals, etc.), which became new religions, primarily in the United States. Some of these sects remained within classical Protestantism, while others

leaned toward an assertive biblicism, believing that Scripture must be taken literally without granting it the slightest symbolic meaning, despite imagery that calls for interpretation.

6

ON REVEALED TRUTHS

The notion of revelation belongs to religious vocabulary, saying that a prophet, at a given time, came to deliver a message of divine origin. Most religions are based on this idea of revelation, especially Judeo-Christianity.

Allan Kardec, in his time—though he placed himself outside the religious sphere—described Spiritism as the Third Revelation, as an extension of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In this schema, Moses represents the First Revelation, having received—“at God’s dictation”—the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, and a full set of religious, social, and dietary laws. The Second Revelation corresponds to the life of Jesus, who came to continue and clarify Moses’ teachings, emphasizing the fundamental

law of love of one's neighbor. And the Third Revelation follows Jesus', explaining what remained veiled in his teachings—such as the meaning of apparitions, healings, and other phenomena, as well as the concept of reincarnation. For example, the resurrection of Jesus—which is the primary foundation of Christianity—became, according to the spiritualist explanation, the phenomenon of the tangible appearance of the spirit after death, which completely demystifies the notion of a miracle in this circumstance and is not unique to Jesus' character.

This notion of a Third Revelation began to generate some controversy as society became increasingly globalized. At a time when the Christian West dominated the world through colonization and the evangelization that followed, there existed a kind of spiritual supremacy represented by Christendom in many regions of the globe. Then, with decolonization, many cultures once again highlighted their religious or spiritual traditions, which, in any case, had always remained very present. This was true of major religions such as Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, which expressed their identity and culture in many countries—often in the form of theocracies, as we saw in earlier chapters.

And at this point it becomes clear that Eastern schools, although they have long upheld the principle of reincarnation, were not integrated into the line of continuity leading to Spiritist revelation. For this reason, people from other religious traditions sometimes express surprise on discovering that only the Judeo-Christian heritage was considered a prelude to the revelation of an afterlife capable of conveying the truths of the spiritual world. Thus, the concept of a "Third Revelation" may strike some people from other cultures as somewhat exclusionary or even disrespectful, even when they show a sincere interest in Spiritism.

That said, Spiritists—past and present—have always found universal principles in all religious phenomena, principles rooted in fundamental intuitions in human history: the intuition of God, the survival of spirits, reincarnation, and other concepts.

Ultimately, the essential point is that, since it is not a religion, Spiritism can take root and develop in all regions of the world, given that in every culture these fundamental intuitions show remarkable similarities. In any case, Spiritism's future progress in the world will inevitably require abandoning all dogmas inherent to proven religions.



DID YOU KNOW?

In his book **Genesis**, Allan Kardec titled the first chapter “The Character of Spiritist Revelation.” Filled with reflections on the concept of revelation, this chapter includes, among many others, the following notable observation:



“The Spirits teach no morality other than Christ’s because there is none better... The same could be said of the morality taught five hundred years earlier by Socrates and Plato—and in almost identical terms; and likewise of all the moralists who repeat the same thing in every tone and under every form. Well then! The Spirits simply come to increase the number of moralists...”

What the teaching of the Spirits adds to Christ’s morality is knowledge of the principles that bind the dead to the living, which completes the vague notions he had given of the soul, its past, and its future...”

In the history of Spiritism there is an episode about revelations that is little known in France and deserves to be told.

It concerns a revelation—Catholic in tone—that diverged from and dissented from Allan Kardec’s

and, in the early days of nascent Spiritism, caused some confusion by reviving mystical and religious notions. This current disappeared in France, but it left a lasting mark on the history of Brazilian Spiritism under the name “Roustainguism,” after a contemporary of Allan Kardec, the Spiritist Jean-Baptiste Roustaing.

J.-B. ROUSTAING (1806–1879), born in Bègles — in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region of southern France—was a lawyer at the Bordeaux court and, in his own way, took part in the birth of Spiritism. As the leader of a Spiritist group in Bordeaux that emerged during the ferment of the Kardecist movement in the 1860s, Roustaing developed his own theory—as if to complement Allan Kardec’s — but in reality, he came into complete opposition to the principles painstakingly developed by the founder of Spiritism. Historical accounts say that Roustaing and Kardec exchanged some correspondence, but their friendship went no further than that.

Roustaing formulated his theory from messages obtained through the medium Émilie Collignon and published the dictations of several Spirits under the title *The Four Gospels, or Revelation of the Revelation*. This work is marked by major contradictions with the principles of Spiritism. Allan Kardec made some criticisms of these writings, which

ended up deeply displeasing the lawyer Roustaing and his disciples.

The Spirits said to have dictated *The Four Gospels* were the four evangelists, aided by the apostles and the prophet Moses. Beyond the identity of the figures, it was above all the content of the messages that seemed suspect in a “revelation of revelations” that suddenly put forward principles contrary to those of *The Spirits’ Book*, undermining much of the hard-won ground of newly defined Spiritism. Allan Kardec—who had just brought Spiritism to life in what he called the Third Revelation—found himself confronted with a dissident group in Bordeaux that brought new pseudo-Catholic revelations.

These new revelations had minor impact in French spiritualist circles, and Jean-Baptiste Roustaing’s books did not go down in history in France, but they enjoyed a certain success in Brazil. When the first Brazilian groups formed in the nineteenth century, some already possessed the works of J. B. Roustaing.

From Brazilian sources we learn the following: at an 1889 session of the “Sociedade Espírita Fraternidade” in Rio de Janeiro, the medium Frederico Pereira da Silva received a message signed by Allan Kardec

stating that a Spirit named Ismael would guide the Brazilian Spiritist movement. It seems that, even then—and through that biblically tinged name—this message was influenced by the Roustainguist outlook, an influence that then came into contradiction with Allan Kardec's. Thus, distortions arose in nascent Brazilian Spiritism, where Kardec's methodology and some of his principles were somewhat altered.

We find this kind of syncretism—oddly linking Roustaing and Kardec—in one of the great names of Brazilian Spiritism: Bezerra de Menezes (1831–1900). It thus appears that the Brazilian Spiritist Federation (FEB) was, from its origins, marked by the introduction of Jean-Baptiste Roustaing's theses—and still is, at least in part, to this day. This, at least, is the impression we hear from other Brazilian Spiritists who, for their part, identify solely with Kardecism.

A PSEUDO-CATHOLIC THEORY

Roustaing's books are a blend of some authentic concepts with theses close to Catholicism.

The four new gospels lie at the root of confusion surrounding Jesus' person and the nature of his being. Jesus—the incarnation of God according to the Catholic Church—assumes a somewhat similar

nature according to Roustaing's followers: a sinless spirit who would have evolved "in a straight line," along a path different from that of other spirits—a spirit whose purity would be such that his incarnation on Earth would have been fictitious.

According to the four new Gospels, Mary recovered the virginity so prized by the Catholic Church. Roustainguist spiritualists posited a Jesus with a fluidic body, who was not incarnate. He would simply have manifested in the form of a more or less tangible apparition, fulfilling his mission through a fluidic yet visible appearance.

It is the purity of an exceptional being, different from other spirits, that is highlighted in this thesis, which even goes beyond the Catholic conception at the following point: Mary, in addition to her legendary virginity (reaffirmed by Roustaing), would not even have needed to "stain" Jesus' purity, since she did not give birth to him, for he was only fluid. The deified Jesus of the Church became the sinless Jesus according to Roustaing—who, according to his writings, never incarnated. Just as, in the Church, the flesh is a symbol of sin, the four new gospels underscore this notion even more, going beyond the Church's virginal conception by asserting there was no conception at all, since there was no incarnation.

According to Roustaing, Jesus would never have known evil and would never have trodden the paths of ignorance in prior and distant incarnations. Once again, Jesus was deified—or at least presented as a being set apart from creation.

This pseudo-religious theory was nonetheless labeled Spiritist, even though Allan Kardec strove to restore to the figure of Jesus his dimension as a missionary man who incarnated naturally, without contradicting the laws of nature. He explained miracles in the light of mediumistic and magnetic phenomena, presenting Jesus not as a divine being but as a particularly advanced reincarnate spirit, on a mission among human beings to convey the divine message of love and freedom.

On this subject, let us quote Jon Aizpúrua (Venezuela), who wrote the following:

“Besides the thesis of Jesus’ fluidic body, we find in these Gospels many extravagant claims in which Spiritist concepts are mixed with Catholic dogmas—claims that were strongly opposed by Allan Kardec and the Spiritist thinkers who followed him.”



Jon Aizpúrua

The Brazilian Spiritist Bezerra de Menezes, from a Catholic background, quickly adopted Ismael's mysticism (mentioned above). It was a blend of Kardec and Roustaing, with Kardec reinterpreted in the light of Roustaing's four gospels. Finding deep Catholic roots among Brazilians, this hybrid thinking had no trouble imposing itself as a kind of Spiritist Catholicism. A mocking neologism was even coined: "espiritólico." (spiritholic – free adaptation of the word in Spanish)

THE FLUIDIC BODY OF JESUS

In **Révélation de la révélation** by Jean-Baptiste Roustaing, it is stated verbatim that Jesus did not have a carnal body and therefore did not experience suffering.

Allan Kardec addresses this question in his book **La Genèse selon le spiritisme** (Chap. XV, "Disappearance of the Body of Jesus") in the following terms:

*"(...) Jesus would not have taken on a carnal body, but only a fluidic body; throughout his life he would have been merely a tangible apparition—in a word, a kind of *agénere*. His birth, his death, and all the material acts of his life would have been*

*nothing but appearance. Thus, they say, because his body had returned to a fluidic state, it was able to disappear from the tomb, and it was with this same body that he is said to have appeared after death. 'No doubt such a fact is not radically impossible, based on what is known today about the properties of fluids; but it would be, at the very least, something wholly exceptional and in formal opposition to the character of the *agéneré*(...)'"*

From Jesus' birth to his death, everything in his actions, his language, and the various circumstances of his life bears the unmistakable marks of corporeality. The phenomena of a psychic order present in him are occasional and in no way abnormal, for they can be explained by the properties of the perispirit and are found, to varying degrees, in other individuals. After his death, by contrast, everything in him reveals the fluidic being in the manifestation of his Spirit.

Regarding the thesis of a fluidic—i.e., non-incarnate—Jesus, a Spirit that has no material body cannot experience suffering resulting from the alteration of matter; from this it follows that if Jesus suffered materially—as cannot be doubted—it is because he had a material body of a nature similar to that of other humans.

If Jesus had been, throughout his life, a fluidic being, he would not have felt pain; all the acts of his life, the repeated announcement of his death, the sorrowful scene in the Garden of Olives, his Passion, his agony—even his last words on the cross at the moment of expiring—would have been mere simulations, giving a false idea of his true nature by leading us to believe in an illusory sacrifice of his life. This would have been an unworthy farce, with which he would have abused the good faith of his contemporaries.

Roustaing's thesis, conveyed through the messages of the medium Émilie Collignon, was not, in fact, new, for it can be found in every point among the sects of the Docetists and the Apollinarians, who spread these beliefs during the first centuries of the Christian era. In the fourth century, Apollinaris of Laodicea claimed that Jesus had an *impassible* body descended from heaven, not born, that he did not suffer, and that he died only in *appearance*.

We may also ask whether Roustaing—and above all his medium—might not have absorbed this knowledge through reading ancient texts even before embarking on the path of spiritualist experimentation, which would have influenced

the messages received, as often happens in pseudo-mediumship, which merely reveals the experimenters' own preconceived thoughts and convictions—also known as animism.



DID YOU KNOW?

Agensis is the absence of an organ's formation during embryonic development (from the Greek *genesis*: formation).

According to Allan Kardec's **The Genesis** (ch. XIV, no. 36), *agénères* are tangible apparitions of spirits, fleeting or momentary, that have *"something strange and unusual in their behavior... their gaze, vaporous and penetrating at once, lacks the sharpness of a look through the eyes of the flesh; their speech, brief, lacks the brilliance and fluidity of human language..."*

These are apparitions produced by spirits who manage to densify their perispirit to the point of making it visible, either in a vaporous form or in a more tangible one.

7

IS THERE FUNDAMENTALISM IN THE SPIRITIST MOVEMENT?

We speak of fundamentalism when conservative ideas translate into required lines of conduct—chiefly social demands—whose noncompliance may bring severe reprisals. Here we are dealing with theocracies, that is, governments guided by religious principles.

To this day, Spiritism has never been able to influence any government, unlike what happened with Catholics and what still occurs with U.S. Evangelicals, who have heavily swayed electoral outcomes as well as debates on social issues such as adoption, abortion, and assisted reproduction, among others.

However, when observing individual votes by Brazilian Spiritists in elections, one can see a clear influence of the conservative Spiritism

mentioned above. Thus, driven by dogmatic—even fundamentalist—principles, there are Spiritists who, quite naturally, discover an affinity with far-right ideas. In the 2018 elections, many Brazilian Spiritists, when asked about their political preferences, stated that they voted for Jair Bolsonaro, showing that closeness. This is how dogmatic ideas can merge with the far right's fundamentalist views—something extremely harmful to the entire Spiritist movement, in Brazil or anywhere else—to the extent that prominent, well-known Spiritist leaders showed affinity with Jair Bolsonaro. This flatly contradicts every humanist principle of Spiritism.

So yes, a form of fundamentalism can exist within Spiritism—when its ideas are distorted. Here is one example among many: some Spiritists claim Allan Kardec condemned homosexuality, yet no such statement is found anywhere in his work, simply because that topic was not under discussion in his time. As for other social issues, it became necessary to consider the evolution of science and society, reassessing each matter one by one in an up-to-date way—something dogmatic Spiritists did not accept.

We can see, then, that the movement's more conservative strands are caught in a fundamentalist-

style dogmatism, which has led many Spiritists to vote in line with far-right fundamentalisms. If this was reality among Pentecostals in the United States for fundamentalist religious reasons, it is jarring to see the same thing occur among some Spiritists.

This shows us, once again, that there are two tendencies within the movement: a secular, free-thinking Spiritism, and a religiously inspired Spiritism which—socially and politically—can drift far from humanism, emancipation, and justice, principles that are, nevertheless, inherent to the very foundations of Spiritist philosophy.

The insistence on claiming the term “religion” in fact amounts to expressing a certain radicalism about the ideas being put forward—ideas that re-create dogmas. And here we need to pause and reflect on definitions: in Spiritism, dogmas do not exist as axioms, as they do in Catholicism. We can cite the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception, Mary’s perpetual virginity, and the Holy Trinity, which makes Jesus an incarnation of God. We can also cite Jesus’ resurrection on the third day as a miracle that defies the laws of nature. And after this first resurrection in the presence of “the women,” there were successive appearances to the apostles and to the disciples

on the road to Emmaus—phenomena explained by their similarity to spiritualist experiences. All these dogmas are often tied to the notion of miracles. We see this as well in the event of the Ascension. The Resurrection was understood as Jesus' physical return, risen "in flesh and bone," inviting the disciples to touch his wounds. And after telling the apostles of their mission to go and preach the good news, he said he would depart—disappearing for good as he ascended into heaven.

In light of Spiritist facts, the explanation is simple: Jesus' perispirit, momentarily materialized, could be touched to verify its physical tangibility. This is the famous episode of Doubting Thomas. And then the Ascension again points to an appearance of Jesus—tangible or vaporous—who vanishes by rising into the air.

The same applies to other episodes and miracles, as explained by Allan Kardec, particularly in *The Genesis* and *The Gospel According to Spiritism*.

There lies the origin of all Christian dogmas. Experimental Spiritism and metapsychical studies allow us to explain everything without resorting to the notion of miracle. Thus, everything can be understood as a natural phenomenon—one that

goes beyond the commonly accepted laws of physics; but through new laws involving spirit and perispirit, we arrive at an explanation grounded in a new rationality we might call the physical–spiritual.



DID YOU KNOW?

Ectoplasm phenomena were carried out experimentally around mediums such as Florence Cook, Élisabeth d'Espérance, William Eglinton, Kluski, and many others, in the presence of scientists who conducted the sittings. The physical phenomena produced resulted from Spirits' ability to densify their perispirit to the point of making it visible and palpable. These phenomena can also occur spontaneously, outside an experimental setting; this is what happened in the case of Jesus, explaining what came to be called the Resurrection and all the fluidic, tangible manifestations that followed.

SPIRITISTS IN SOCIETY

It is important to remember that if progressive Spiritists are committed to secularism, they are also citizens likely to take part in society. They can have a place on ethics advisory committees just like other representatives of civil society.

On another level, we have seen—especially in Brazil—school and extracurricular literacy programs, medical clinics, and charitable, volunteer, and support organizations that exist to make up for shortcomings in government institutions.

One might well think the ideal would be for states to be fully responsible for everything related to public services. But we also know that even in the most developed countries, charities remain necessary—and increasingly indispensable—given the deficiencies of governments and administrations. In France, for example, there are Secours Populaire, Secours Catholique, Restos du Cœur, Emmaüs, and several others. Thus, in so-called emerging countries, it is clear that social structures are still insufficient, mitigated by nongovernmental organizations, as in Brazil. And of course, Spiritist organizations make a major contribution by providing education and medical care for humanistic and humanitarian reasons.

This state of affairs is certainly not ideal, since it proves the inadequacy of state structures, because everything that falls under the category of public service should necessarily be the responsibility of public authorities.

8

TRANSCENDING RELIGIONS

CULTURAL PHENOMENA

Every religion is embedded in a culture—unless it has itself shaped that culture. In this sense, disparities can be observed depending on the region: one is not Muslim in the same way in Indonesia, the Middle East, or the Maghreb. One can be Buddhist in Japan, Tibet, Nepal, or Southeast Asia in different ways. One can be Christian—Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox—with significant variations depending on the civilizations that embraced these Christian traditions.

And yet all these religions, while they may be cultural phenomena, also correspond to a search for meaning in a world that seeks to unveil the mystery of its own existence. But out of a natural desire to cling to convictions, universal truths have been

proclaimed here and there that are, in reality, nothing more than the provisional certainties of those who utter them. This is particularly evident in the religious fundamentalisms mentioned earlier. And this is where the search for meaning is transformed, becoming the expression of all-too-human flaws such as pride, domination, and power over others. Thus, various sects were born, and traditional religions were also led to generate fundamentalist movements that defend restrictions claiming to be moral but that, in reality, prove irreconcilable with the simple principles of reason and love.

By mixing domains we have arrived at this point: religions have always been more or less involved in social order and civic life as political forces. They were, and remain, instruments of power. Only secularism—as it began in France—showed a different, healthy path toward democracy. Other countries, even if not officially secular, have in practice followed this path, relegating religion to its proper place: addressing the major metaphysical questions.

However, we are still far from the goal when we consider all the states administered according to religious precepts—states unfamiliar with the concept of secularism and whose populations have

no idea what it would mean to have political power detached from religion.

In the more developed countries, there has been some distancing of religious influences in the administration of society, even though in the West there still exists a Christian cultural background rooted in mindsets. Even where secularism has been rightly introduced, spirituality can still have a role in society—provided it is an open spirituality that accepts scientific advances and situates itself on a plane of philosophical reflection.

On this basis, religions can find their place in modern society: for example, we have seen Catholics fighting for freedom in certain countries, Buddhists resisting for Tibet's autonomy, and so on.

BREAKING WITH CULTURAL CONDITIONING

Religion is a means that seems indispensable for expressing a feeling—a need to believe, perhaps a need for transcendence. But it is, above all, a cultural phenomenon that developed through fear and repression: if you do not obey certain precepts, you expose yourself to divine justice... This fear of an uncertain eternity—in which we do not know what awaits us—is still very present in the collective

unconscious, and it is in fact the unconscious that is at play when we approach the subject of death, in the face of mindsets that still react instinctively according to religious taboos without even realizing it.

In traditional civilizations (in Africa, for example), death is not so repressed, unlike in our established Western religions, where death is not to be touched—much less its mystery unveiled—lest it provoke God’s wrath... or the Devil’s...

Thanks to the advent of Spiritism with Allan Kardec in the nineteenth century, death could finally be drawn out of its mystery in a quest that became at once philosophical and scientific. Religious resistance was, without a doubt, extraordinarily strong—as was scientific resistance, which still persists. But at least a window was opened onto that forbidden world, revealing its secrets. In the continuity of Enlightenment humanism, taboos were transgressed with the theories of evolution (Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, Charles Darwin, and Alfred Russel Wallace) and later with Allan Kardec’s Spiritism. A century and a half later, one sometimes has the impression we have not advanced much—still finding ourselves on an island of resistance. And yet our role is indeed to resist cultural conditioning if we wish to make room for philosophical reflection and give meaning to our

modern societies. And this meaning can only be found through a dynamism of spirit—on a new path where spirituality can play its part by advancing the universal values of love, justice, freedom, and the emancipation of the reincarnated human being.

And this meaning is even more likely to be found if it is grounded in a metaphysics of progress, of successive lives, and of evolution in an infinite, divine universe.

Through post-mortem communication we discover the true motivation for our lives—and could this not fundamentally change the disenchanted outlook of the human being who does not know where he is headed? We could move away from both religiosity and materialism toward a new perspective that would place the life of the reincarnated spirit at the center of everything, reclaiming the philosophers' universal values for a just emancipation of humanity. The cultural conditioning of the past would become obsolete, and we could build new models of life in society that would no longer reproduce the old patterns.

A society whose ethics were based on the principles of spirit—its faculties and its evolutionary reincarnation—would obviously be a utopian program in the world's current state. But if we look to the future, today's utopia may become tomorrow's model.

We will no longer say, as one of our forerunners Henri Regnault (1873–1955) did, “Only Spiritism can renew the world.” Still, Spiritism is a solid value that no moral code can contradict because it points toward progress—without any form of alienation—and opens horizons that could extend to science, medicine, art, and many other fields. Let us affirm, then, that Spiritism, more modestly, can contribute to the transformation of the world.

WHEN WILL FUNDAMENTALISM END?

As mentioned above, religious and cultural conditioning is at the root of many of our errors. We have also seen the extent to which deals struck between religion and politics become fertile ground for extremism in the service of authoritarian regimes.

From this standpoint, today’s world stands at a crossroads. Once the worst systems have been pushed to their extreme—and that is the current situation in some countries—there is no path left but to consider removing dictators who have been in power for too long. Authoritarian systems only last for a time, as the past has shown us more than once. After long resistance, after unspeakable suffering

and the deaths of fighters who paid with their lives, progress comes and people free themselves. After ten years, twenty years, or more, we have seen peace processes appear; we have seen nations climb out of the abyss in which they were trapped.

The beginning of the twenty-first century has surely shown us that the resurgence of religious fundamentalism can place entire nations at risk. But resistance has never died out, which gives humanity boundless hope in a struggle that never ceases.

WE FORGET HALF OF HUMANITY

Fundamentalisms also reach a breaking point and will have to give way, especially on one essential issue that is changing the face of the world: the assured emancipation of half of humanity—women—who are leading major resistance movements across the globe.

By way of example, during a demonstration against abortion, it was truly clear that men delivered most public speeches. Some women interviewed by journalists on the scene tried to minimize this male domination in the movement's public voice and stressed that they themselves were far less radical than their husbands, for instance on banning abortion.

Many women stay silent or do not display the same vehemence as men when speaking privately. Their voice is silenced before they can even express an opinion, and yet it is precisely their situation that is at stake, for they are the ones who carry life—sometimes without having desired it. Being the instrument of procreation can be something marvelous or, on the contrary, an unbearable burden for a woman in distress who did not want this motherhood. And the height of irony is that it is men who opine and impose their dictates—men who will bear none of the consequences, neither in body nor in spirit.

It would be far more sensible to convene collegial groups composed of women to deliberate on this matter—even evangelical women—since some of them are not always fully convinced by what is imposed on them. They are the ones directly implicated, and every situation must be considered, especially in cases of rape, unplanned pregnancy, accidental pregnancy, pregnancy suffered by a teenager, or one occurring in a harmful family context. In short, for those who call themselves Christians—and therefore humanists a priori—the men in these radicalized circles should think twice about their own actions. These men deny any responsibility, no doubt believing there is a natural inequality between men and women.

This appeal obviously addresses only part of the issue since there is also the moral and spiritual aspect related to the notion of the already-incarnate spirit. But that is another matter, philosophical in nature, requiring calm debate which, in any case, will not be the object of any condemnation on our part. The topic in its philosophical dimension is still independent from the other dimension: the social or sociological realities painfully lived by women or young girls in despair because they do not feel able to shoulder such a burden. Men, for their part, often exempt themselves from all responsibility and impose on women what their morality deems right, without having to face any consequences themselves.

Yes, this issue does indeed have a place in a manifesto against fundamentalism. It is an oppressive fundamentalism for those who find themselves alone before a moral obligation they are not allowed to evade, according to the dictates of a religion.

To fully address the matter, we must add that the radicalism of several evangelical churches also imposes a ban on any form of contraception.

Elsewhere in the world, Muslim fundamentalisms predominate. Other countries, other customs—and, again, it is women who pay the price for a cultural

machismo so deep it can strip them of their very identity. The problem is that, in this case, we are faced with the application of demands said to be contained in certain interpretations of the Qur'an.

It rather seems as though culture and religion have blended, and religion serves as a justification for ancient traditions in which women are seen as men's slaves. Once again there is an indisputable notion of inferiority, as recognized and established by tradition. "That's how it is because it's always been that way," and this can be repeated indefinitely, refusing to accept any evolution in the principles humanity has invented.

Among the most liberty-killing requirements are Sharia law, submission, and punishments and penalties that can go as far as stoning—a form of unworthy human cruelty.

CONCLUSION

The issue addressed here—fundamentalism—is particularly troubling in contemporary societies. It lies at the origin of countless religious and ethnic conflicts around the world, and it is also a catalyst for horrific wars such as those in the Middle East or Sudan—territorial wars, fratricidal wars—in which we lament crimes against humanity akin to true genocide. It is true that, in the vocabulary used by the international court, the word *genocide* applies only in extremely specific cases, but whatever the term, these realities cannot be ignored.

In the face of these scourges, humanism will always seek to overcome such unbearable horrors through new hopes, sustained only by intellectual and social struggles aimed at rolling back everything tied

to fanaticism, the destroyer of lives and gravedigger of the highest principles championed by humanists of every stripe, among whom true Spiritists are included.

The noblest policy in these circumstances is education, based on what we discussed in the second chapter: an education grounded in secularism. At the same time, we must analyze the political context of fundamentalism—that of authoritarian systems that use religion as a mode of domination and dictatorship. This is perfectly reversible, especially considering that some of the countries affected by destructive fundamentalism have known freer times, even if imperfect.

Reversing these trends is still possible, paving the way for the disappearance of fundamentalism, especially those of religious origin.

There is a global factor that, in fact, blocks almost every possibility of progress on the political front: the UN, whose Security Council has five permanent members (China, Russia, the U.S., the United Kingdom, and France) and can only make decisions unanimously. This means there is always at least one country that, by using its veto power, blocks any resolution based on its own interests—most often the United States, Russia, or China.

Only functional reforms would make certain decisions effective within this international framework. Moreover, even when resolutions are approved by the UN General Assembly, the countries involved do not comply. And when it comes to humanitarian rules, belligerents care little about applying them, readily placing themselves in situations of war crimes, crimes against humanity, or ethnic cleansing.

That said, outside this international body, we are seeing new horizons open thanks to extremely courageous struggles. This is the case in Iran, where strong resistance is being expressed by both men and women under the terrible risk of torture and imprisonment. The same is happening in Burma, where groups of women have created a genuine clandestine resistance army against the ruling dictatorship.

There are also groups or individuals in Afghanistan who, through women, secretly educate and instruct children in their homes, exposing themselves to severe punishments when discovered. And in that same country, in the Panjshir Valley, Ahmad Massoud, son of Commander Massoud, has revived the legacy of guerrilla resistance. Since the fall of Kabul in August 2021, he has formed a resistance front calling for a fight against the obscurantism of Islamist fanaticism in his country.

Therefore, resistance is very real and present wherever possible. From it will emerge true solutions for justice and the emancipation of peoples.

We Spiritists, for our part, can support these essential changes with our words, our writings, and our activist actions alongside other humanist movements. This is happening here and there, particularly in France.

In this study of fundamentalism, the first task was precisely to denounce every reality of religious integrism and measure all its consequences. Pointing out a problem does not mean solving it, but it already brings it to light so all its implications can be understood.

For us—secular, free-thinking Spiritists—it was once again a matter of clearly establishing the distinction between a Spiritism of human emancipation and one that has locked itself into immutable dogmatic principles—a Spiritism that has been deformed over time, becoming the very opposite of that emancipation.

We must therefore, in the name of a Spiritist philosophy of freedom, continue to fight all dogmatisms which—from integrism to fundamentalism—still corrode part of our societies in different parts of the world.

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Jacques Peccatte

Retired, after a professional career in the transportation sector.

A Spiritist since 1974, he was, together with Michel Pantin (medium), one of the founders of the first Spiritist group established in Nancy, in eastern France. He is currently president of the *Cercle Spirite Allan Kardec* association, of which he was one of the founders in 1977. Since 2003, he has also been responsible for the Spiritist group in Paris.

He founded **Journal Spirite** (**Spiritist Journal**) in 1989 and has been its editor-in-chief ever since.

In 1996, he published the book **À la rencontre des Esprits** (**Encounter with the Spirits**), which recounts the most notable events from the early years of the *Cercle Spirite Allan Kardec*.



In 2020, he oversaw the publication of the book **Le monde de demain à la lumière du spiritisme** (**The World of Tomorrow in the Light of Spiritism**), co-written with Colombe Jacquin and Luc Gruntz.

A seasoned lecturer, he has organized numerous conferences and information forums in France. In 1998, he took part in the Maracay congress in Venezuela. In 1999 and 2000, he attended CEPA meetings and congresses in Brazil. He also took part in two meetings in Salou, Spain, in 2014 and 2016.

The books in **Series 2 - Spiritism and Society** explore the relationships between Spiritism and sensitive, timely subjects such as politics, humanism, work, racism, the climate crisis, sustainability, religious fundamentalism, gender, sexualities, the role of women in society, ideology, and mass communication.

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