

# We must teach citizenship, now.

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- We must not confuse spaces that are public, shared public spaces and private space.

The French social contract relies upon a separation of the **private**, the **personal** and **public** space.

**The private space** is where families can develop their own traditions. It is the family's individual and private space where they can raise their children as they wish. It is where, except in the case of physical harms, nobody can look through "the key hole" ...

Nowadays, the confusion between the '**public space**' and the '**private space**' leads some families to want that their personal beliefs, which are completely legitimate in the private space, to be carried over to the 'public space' instead of nationally-defined provisions. We have seen this with the occurrence of 'days withdrawn from school'.

**The public space**, (which by definition an educational institution is) is a place for common benefit, **for the common good. This is not the sum of private interests.** It is a place for an education which reflects the Republic and its values. **The common good** applies in all public and private institutions, and is expressed in schools through **programmes** the nation designs for all young people. It is what the Charter of Secularism defines as "**a common and shared culture.**" These programmes are not an amalgamation of the interests of different stakeholder groups. They are what **the nation, at the time, considers to be worthy for all.** Educational programmes presented to students are genuine **INFORMATION**, not beliefs or opinions.

The development of fanatical **individualism** often means they do not consider others or the community.

- The threefold crisis of society is : a crisis of meaning, a crisis of identity, a crisis of relevance.
  - **A crisis of meaning** : When we look at it, society is not capable of defining what values, principles or challenges are worth being passed on to future generations ... this void of meaning allows for 'brainwashing' ... The crisis is all the more serious as it results in a situation when no parent can be assured that their child will have a better life than they did. This causes anxiety about the future and a feeling that the values affirmed by the Republic do not apply to all.
  - **A crisis of identity** : Many families, not only those who immigrated one, two or three generations ago, are saying: "I don't know where I fit in. I don't really know where I come from or I idealise it... I don't know where I am headed..." Many feel they have no roots, neither here nor anywhere else. If I can dare to make a comparison, they are like those Dutch tomatoes, without any real taste, grown without any soil.

- **A crisis of relevance** : To live a meaningful life one needs to **feel useful**, to be the master of one's own destiny. So many families and so many young people feel useless, **disengaged** from their everyday life...

This growing situation shows a need for action, especially to prevent young people being led astray by 'bad shepherds'.

We need to make the young less susceptible to certain ideologies and harmful distractions.

- The values of the Republic : is a future which requires effort from everyone, as is stated in the preamble of the Constitution of 1946.

It is necessary to have a **dynamic** vision of the values of the Republic. This requires everyone's commitment and involvement in community groups which promote the values of the Republic. This is often seen as '**public worth**'.

- Secularism is **FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE, EQUAL TREATMENT** for all religions, **NEUTRALITY** and **IMPARTIALITY** of the State. **A THREEFOLD FREEDOM, for State public services, for religion and for individuals.**

**Secularism, the cornerstone of the pact with the Republic, rests above all, on three interconnected values which allow for the coexistence of religions. The legal and political system is not a instrument of war against religion.**

- **Freedom of conscience** allows each citizen to choose their spirituality. There are no obligatory beliefs nor any prohibited beliefs. Freedom of conscience means that each person can believe or not believe. They can live with a religion or without one. People can change their beliefs if they want. Freedom of religion allows self-expression in all religions, to associate and to pursue common spiritual goals. Thus, secularism also prohibits any anti-religious endeavour.
- **Equality before the law for all spiritual and religious choices** prohibits any discrimination or coercion and guarantees that the State favours none. It implies equality for all people no matter their spiritual choices, or whether they believe or don't believe in a God. Neither does it support religious dogma. The secular State will also not promote atheist or agnostic beliefs.
- **Neutrality of political power** means that political power recognises its limits and will not be involved in any way in the spiritual or religious realm. As every citizen must see themselves as part of the Republic, political power cannot have dominant influence in any particular spiritual choice. This is so we can all **live together harmoniously**. Equally, this concept means that all religions must respect the laws of the State and should not consider themselves to be "above the law" in their decisions and actions.

Secularism supposes independent political power and **the rule of law** on different spiritual and religious choices, they have no hold over the State and the State has no hold over them.

At the same time, the spiritual and the religious cannot impose on the State, and must abandon any political dimension. Secularism is incompatible with any religious ideas which would seek to regulate the social or political order in the name of any religious doctrine.

The neutrality of the State implies complete **impartiality** of its agents.

- The Civil State is the best interpretation of French secularism.

With the creation of the State came its supremacy over any other structure. The three most important principles of secularism are:

- Neutrality, the impartiality of the State which guarantees each individual recognition of their surname, their given name and their marital status, outside of any beliefs.
- Freedom of conscience is guaranteed by the fact that apart from a statement of birth, marriage and death, all these life-cycle events may be accompanied by whatever religious ceremony is desired. However, such ceremonies must be preceded by the statutory legal declarations. One can only get married in a church, a synagogue, a mosque or a temple after one has been married in the municipal town hall. An exclusively religious marriage is not recognised as a marriage.
- The equality of all before the law is guaranteed by the fact that the State does not concern itself with what, if any, religious ceremony follows the civil registration of a birth, marriage or death. It matters not whether one is a non-believer or an adherent of a religion.

**Thus, the Civil State gives every individual the right to live as a non-believer or to live with their faith.**

- The importance of education in French secularism. This is considered a basic right. It develops a common feeling of belonging, prioritising the values, awareness and knowledge which serve to unite, not to divide. This is not to deny one's origins or aspirations, or where one stands, but to know where one is headed and to be sure of one's values.

Education programs are secular. They are not neutral, as they subscribe to the values that are those of the Republic. But they must be fair.

The principles which underpin these programs, and how they are taught, are principally to avoid any discrimination, to avoid any racism, to treat all equally and to create harmony...

**In fact, secularism is not exactly neutrality.**

It rests on the values and practices which make it flourish. From 1908, Jean Jaures clearly explained: *“The most treacherous action of the enemies of state education, is to fall back on what they call neutrality. They thereby condemn it to a lack of any doctrine, thought or any intellectual or moral efficacy. In fact, only nothingness is neutral.”*

The bulletin of 12 December 1989 and the Decree of 18 February 1991, both contain the same paragraph, repeating this principle which should guide the teaching profession:

*“Public education does not endorse any creed. It does not prohibit any field of study. It is guided by a spirit of free thought. It has a duty to pass on to the student all knowledge and awareness which will allow them to exercise freedom of choice.”*

At present we can see a range of **challenges to state education programs** from fundamentalists and extremists of all religions and philosophies. Such challenges come from both students and parents.

- The importance of the educational community includes families and students to build community and harmony.

The challenge for secularism is to develop a sense of community and belonging for all, based upon a **spirit of harmony**:

- **prioritising the values, awareness and knowledge which will unite, not divide;**
- **which does not deny one’s origins or aspirations or one’s place, but which means one knows where one is headed and is secure in one’s values.**

Belonging to a **community** is a crucial part of harmonious coexistence. To move beyond community tension, we must promote **community adhesion**.

All public educational institutions must see themselves as conveying a common purpose which belongs to all, to be part of a national community effort.

These initiatives should contribute to strengthening secularism as the glue in the struggle against division and to ensure that **specific beliefs do not see themselves as being above common law**.

- An educational institution **is a secular space for knowledge and learning to be a member of our society**. It develops approaches and initiatives for building community and creates a space for community interaction, as well as listening to and dialogue with young people and families. An educational institution understands that social connections, torn apart by inequalities and crises, can be reconstructed with mutual support and engagement. It is a space where civics is not a cold, abstract concept, but is continuing and collective learning.

The educational **space** must be clearly identified and be symbolically separated from its surrounding environment. It should reach out to the locality in which it is situated, as well as welcoming whatever initiatives possible. Schools must watch for difficulties that can develop and realise it has the power to respond to its own economic, social and cultural environment. Schools should not stand by and be passive.

**Secularism** is there for all young people, no matter their social, ethnic or religious origins. Thus schools must repel any form of exclusion, and aim to allow students to succeed no matter where they come from. Educational institutions are committed to ensuring they are independent of any outside influence, be it political, economic, religious or ideological.

A public educational institution promotes **knowledge**, because today, more than ever, continuing one's education is the key to integration into society. A complete education is available to a diverse range of people whilst maintaining the same objectives for all. It teaches genuine **knowledge**, not beliefs or opinions.

Articles 7 and 12 of the '*Charter of Secularism*' underline the importance of education as part of a "**common and shared culture**". It also states that no subject can be excluded from the field of learning in secondary level education.

Public education develops the principles of **community living**, of awareness raising, of social and civic competencies. Thus, together with educational programmes and all academic disciplines, public education allows **students to understand the world, in order that they may thrive**. It encourages feelings of connection to one's local community as well as to the nation, and prioritises the general interest, not the interests of individuals.

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