

BURNING CHURCHES

A new wave of Christianophobia sweeps France

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

09_09_2024



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The Church of the Immaculate Conception in the small town of Saint-Omer, in the Pas-de-Calais department in the Haute-France region, no longer has a roof or a bell tower. The interior is completely devastated, and almost nothing remains intact.

It was set ablaze last Monday, and 90 firefighters had to intervene to put out the blaze . When at first light, the pastor was informed of the fire in progress, he rushed to

the scene and asked the firefighters to enter the church. "The most important thing, the Blessed Sacrament, we recovered it," he later reported. But the neo-Gothic church, which was built in 1854 and had been restored in 2018, now needs to be rebuilt. Like Notre Dame in Paris.

Carrying out the anti-Christian attack was a 40-year-old man who was only released from prison on Aug. 27. The man's criminal record tells of 26 convictions for serious crimes, including dozens of arsons in as many churches.

Thus, while the prosecutor believes that "psychiatric and psychological investigations are needed to understand his real motivations regarding recidivism particularly in relation to places of worship," France is confirmed first in Europe for attacks, bombings and fires in Catholic churches. In fact, the only constant in the French summer has been attacks on Christianity.

In July, within days of each other, fires were set in the church of Saint Simplicien in Martigné-Briand, which saw the confessional burned to the interior, and then in Rouen cathedral, which destroyed "only" the tallest spire; the rest were quelled in time. In both cases, no culprits.

And if it had been a few years since "Allah Akbar" appeared on a church doorway as it was for Notre Dame du Taur in Toulouse and at Saint Pierre du Martroi in Orleans where, before the flames, the Islamic battle cry was left as a signature, history repeated itself last July 14. At Notre Dame du Travail, in the 14th arrondissement of Paris, someone-who has not yet been identified-covered the interior of the holy building with thoughts such as, "of the church here we are burning the first part"; "submit to Allah"; "one god Allah" along with many other inscriptions with explicit profanity. The bomber also tried to set it on fire, but to no avail, and before leaving the building, he stole a wooden statue of the Virgin Mary from the church, which was found in the bathroom in a nearby bar, with a knife at its throat, and the note, "Mary, this is your fate. We Muslims cannot accept you."

In New Caledonia, still in July, arson fires hit the churches of Notre-Dame de l'Assomption, Tyé Church and Saint Louis, of the latter of which nothing remains. Acts of violence so brutal that they prompted an intervention on the subject to Macron and the interior minister, Darmanin. In August, on the other hand, before Sunday Mass, the pastor of the church of Saint Pierre in Lège Cup Ferret found the tabernacle torn down and stolen consecrated Hosts thrown to the ground and trampled.

The French chronicle of attacks on Christianity gathers an endless list and as creative as ever in its declination of gratuitous violence, nevertheless it never tells of a perpetrator. One only has to think of the cases of Notre Dame, Saint Denis, Rennes, Saint Sulpice in Paris, Pontoise, Nancy, Nantes, Our Lady of Grace in Revel, the church of Saint-Jean-du-Bruel in Rodez, the cathedral of Saint Alain in Lavaur: all churches set on fire in recent years and which always, according to prosecutors' opinions, had clear evidence of arson, yet were dismissed as accidents. So much so that, for a long time, there were those who made irony out of the strange phenomenon of French churches in spontaneous combustion.

When, however, a culprit pops up, it is not always helpful. As was the case in the summer of 2021, when a priest **was murdered in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre, Vendée**, in western France. The murderer turned himself in to the police: he was an illegal immigrant from Rwanda, the same man who had **set fire to the cathedral in Nantes** a year earlier because he was exasperated that his residence permit was not being renewed.

A parliamentary report on “anti-religious acts,” presented to the prime minister in 2022 by Isabelle Florennes, a deputy from Hauts-de-Seine, and Ludovic Mendès, a deputy from Moselle, mentioned 857 anti-Christian acts committed in France in 2021, including 752 attacks on Christian places of worship and cemeteries. So every day at least two places of worship in France were subjected to violence. In 2022, attacks against the Christian community increased by 8 percent, according to the latest report by the Central Service for Territorial Intelligence (SCRT). In 2023, according to the Ministry of the Interior, there were nearly 1,000 **anti-Christian acts**: about 3 attacks per day.

Investigating the news, we see that this is a huge social phenomenon for Macron's France. The roots are deep and solutions are not on the horizon. The former favorite daughter of the Church now has at least 40,000 churches, a figure that must be juxtaposed with that of the de-Christianization that is rampant in the country and is characterized in particular by the decline in religious practice. Preserved, however, the custom of keeping them open, it follows that, first of all, surveillance in places of worship is waning every year: this makes them very easy places to attack.

The real understanding of the problem, however, lies in the violent **anti-Christian offensive** raging in France. A cultural datum that oscillates between the mockery and “intellectual acts” of hatred toward Catholics and the even judicial guerrilla warfare of various associations and NGOs, such as the 'Libre pensée' and the 'Ligue des droits de

l'homme' which, whenever a symbol of Christianity is glimpsed in the public space, are ready to clog the courts to wage a war against Christians. These two associations have been trying for years to clean France of statues of St. Michael and the Virgin Mary: emblematic are the cases in Sables d'Olonne, Vendée, and Bordeaux.

At the same time, if there has been a unanimous, one-sided criticism against the Catholic institution **for decades**, complete with choruses from the extreme left repeating, "the only church that enlightens is the one that burns," why can't this be considered an incitement to hatred? More importantly, how can one be surprised at the current drift? Which, moreover, has ended up, inevitably, intertwined with the hatred of Christianity inherent in Islam. Endangering, likewise, the life and liberty of all.

Macron's is a country experiencing the most important phenomenon of mass de-Christianization since the French Revolution, and, in a Society where there is nothing left to desecrate, churches remain, in the collective imagination, the last thing sacred left in France. For now, however, the gates remain unopen.