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PARIS

## Catholic Bishop and Macron agree to revamp Notre Dame

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**Lorenza  
Formicola**



On 8 December, the Church bells will ring to announce to the whole world, not just Paris, that Mass will be celebrated once again at Notre Dame, although the work is not yet completed. For the special Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Francis had also been invited, but he declined the invitation.

**This is not the reason, however, that there has been renewed talk of Notre Dame,** but rather because the competition to select the artists with whom Emmanuel Macron intends to update the cathedral has reached its final stages. Eight artists have been shortlisted to draw up a project to replace the stained-glass windows, icons of Christianity, with symbols that, it seems, recall transhumanism. The final project still remains shrouded in mystery, but the request to break with the past and embrace modernity has not only come from the **président jupitérien**: it is the archbishop of Paris, Laurent Ulrich, who is the promoter par excellence of a 'new' Notre Dame, and he is **pushing** for the Elysée Palace to overcome the objections of art historians to allow the

restored cathedral to be an expression of 'today's France'.

**The mother church of the archdiocese of the French capital**, and the second most visited church in the world after Saint Peter's, boasts stained glass windows that are apparently too reminiscent of the Middle Ages. And so, the president and the monsignor, ignoring the opinion of the National Commission for Goods and Architecture (CNPA), which was firmly opposed to the replacement, are stubbornly moving towards new stained glass windows for the cathedral's six chapels. The French, art historians and the CNPA consider their removal, along with the new artistic decorations, liturgical furnishings and sacred vessels, an act of 'vandalism'.

**It was on 15 April 2019, the beginning of Holy Week**, when a fire provoked by an unidentified source - which in the meantime has also set fire to a few hundred other Catholic Churches across France, unless they are all victims of a strange self-burning phenomenon - swallowed up a large part of one of the cathedrals that is the symbol of Western Christianity. The three rose windows, as well as the stained glass windows of the walls and apse, however, were saved.

**Curiously, exactly two days after the 2019 fire**, Macron was already dreaming of a different fate for Notre Dame. Initially, he promoted the idea of a 'contemporary architectural gesture', proposing an international competition of architects to rebuild the missing spire. Then, he thought of a museum capable of collecting all the cathedral's works of art with the ambition, evidently, of stripping it bare. After considerable controversy, the plans were quickly withdrawn. But the idea of novelty that was to restore Notre Dame had now been launched, and, over the years, the most diverse proposals have followed: from the roof replaced by a greenhouse to the ecological chapel to walls covered with hemp leaves. Opposition by the experts consistently proved decisive in putting the brakes on any chimera. Notre Dame, according to the French law on the separation of Church and State of 1905, is state property with its use entrusted to the Catholic Church, therefore, every decision is, today, only on the desks of Macron and Monsignor Ulrich.

**At the end of 2020, still under the leadership of Monsignor Michel Aupetit**, it was the Paris diocese that first came up with the idea of contemporary stained glass windows. On the same occasion, benches with illuminated points that would connect the nave and the columns were also proposed: a design that recalls airport runways or even car parks. The then Minister of Culture, Roselyne Bachelot, opposed the diocese's plans, particularly for the stained glass windows, because 'they are classified as historical monuments and it is impossible to replace them'. It seemed that matter had been

shelved.

**But in a letter sent to the President of the Republic** in early December 2023, Monsignor Ulrich, the current Archbishop of Paris, reiterated his desire to see a series of new stained glass windows commissioned as a sign of the times. 'I fully subscribe to it,' Macron replied, 'with my full consent we will launch a competition.' The National Commission for Heritage and Architecture says it has not been taken into consideration and outraged French are trying to stop the 'design'.

**Immediately after the monsignor's letter, a petition was launched on change.org** by Didier Rykner, director of the magazine La Tribune de l'Art, which has collected over 190,000 signatures to date. But the debate has also become more serious. A class-action lawsuit has been launched by donors who had provided substantial sums to restore the stained glass windows of Notre Dame, and an appeal has also been launched by an architects' association on the grounds that France, by adhering to the 1964 **Venice Charter**, committed itself to "preserving, in restoration work, the historical elements of national monuments without altering them through modern additions". Furthermore, according to the Charter, one cannot destroy or remove an element that has not been damaged.

**These windows date back to the 13th century** and their complexity and beauty exemplify the best medieval craftsmanship as well as being among the greatest masterpieces of Christian art: they date back to 1255 and for hundreds of metres tell of Jesus, the Virgin Mary and the saints.

**Macron, thanks to Monsignor Ulrich, may also have the chance**, like Mitterrand with the Louvre pyramid and Pompidou with the Centre named after him, to have something to be remembered for over the centuries. And what could be better than Notre Dame? The president who has, by his own admission, distanced himself from a '**normal' presidency**, treats France like a matriarch controls the kitchen and living room. This was evident at the Olympics.

**But this time the desire to rewrite the past**, with the complicity of the Catholic Church, is so markedly communist that it annoys even the French who don't go to church. Already in the past, Macron has repeatedly said: 'France is not its history'. Yet the remodelled Notre Dame seems a leap back to the French Revolution, which devastated and stripped of all religious symbols the cathedral emblem of transalpine Catholicism and demolished its flèche (the one swallowed up by the 2019 fire had been rebuilt in 1858), to make it a 'temple of Reason'.

**Watching the burning cathedral live, Richard Millet wrote in the introduction to Notre Dame burns. The Self-Destruction of Europe** that 'the cathedral looked like a demonic cauldron. I have not heard anyone recall, on this occasion, what a cathedral is, nor what is depicted on the façade of Notre Dame, an admirable stone book and spiritual testament that shows the Apostles, the kings and prophets of Israel, the story of the Virgin Mary, the Last Judgement. The alliance of the two Testaments, the dual heritage of Jerusalem and Athens, which the European Union works every day to repudiate in the name of multicultural and multi-ethnic globalism imposed by massive immigration of which Islam is the bridgehead, this alliance is certainly intolerable to 'free thinkers' in love with 'social justice', anti-racism, human rights'.

**Whether everything will be cancelled forever** we will soon find out, for now the news is that Macron and the bishop of Paris are on the same page.