

# Why We Support Bill 21

AFT On-line Event  
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# Secularism

- Equality of treatment for all, including equality of the sexes
- Freedom of conscience
- Religious neutrality of the State
- Separation between religions and State

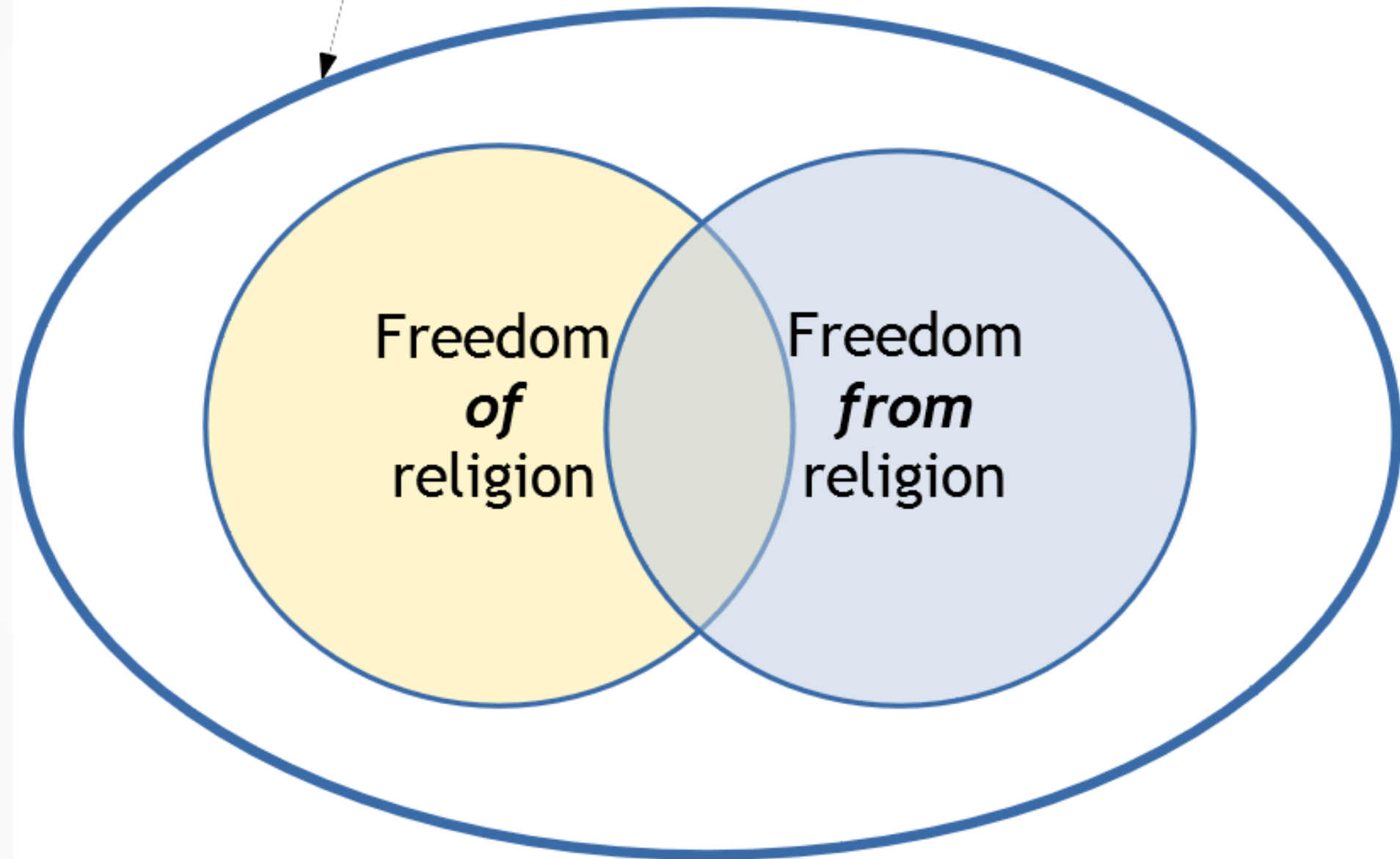
# Religious neutrality

- **The Strong:** Neutrality among various systems of belief and non-belief.
- **The Weak:** Neutrality among various systems of belief only (atheist and other non-believers excluded)
- **The Fake:** Withdrawing religious privileges implies “unequal” treatment for the formerly privileged.

# Full Secularism

- **Freedom of conscience**  
includes both freedom **of** and freedom **from** religion.
- **Religion** must be separated from the State because it **is dangerous** whenever it obtains political power or influence.
- **The principle of separation is essential.**  
Without it, the three other principles are all compromised.
- **Religious Neutrality must be of the STRONG type.** If not, then atheists and other non-believers are discriminated against.

# Freedom of Conscience



# Bill 21 : Advantages

- Clear definition of secularism.
- Inclusion of this definition in the Quebec Charter.
- Clear definition of religious symbol.
- Ban on religious symbols worn by civil servants in positions of authority, including schoolteachers.
- Ban on face coverings, whether worn by civil servants or by those receiving service.

# Bill 21 : Weaknesses

## **The ban on religious symbols is limited:**

- applies to only **part of the civil service**
- applies to only **teachers and principals in public schools**
- does not apply to **private schools** at all
- does not apply to **child-care centres** at all
- does not apply to MNAs (Members of **National Assembly**)
- does not apply to **installations**, e.g. walls of State buildings

# Bill 21 : Weaknesses (cont.)

- The **grandfather clause**.
- The 4<sup>th</sup> principle in the definition of secularism is “**freedom of conscience** and freedom of religion.” The second part is superfluous.
- Does not affect considerable **fiscal advantages** granted to religions.
- Does not end or reform the highly criticized **Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC) program**.
- **Dubious English translation**: Title in English uses the word “laicity” which is non-existent in English. The correct word is “secularism.” Also the word “lay” is used where “secular” should be used.



# “Laïcité” versus “Secularism”

- **“Secularism” tends to be weaker than “laïcité”** because the separation principle is poorly applied in the former.
- **But**, we must not exaggerate that difference.
- The concept of **“religion-State separation”** is nevertheless well known in English. We only need to take it seriously and apply it.

**Conclusion:** So-called “secularists” who fail to support Bill 21 — or worse, oppose it! — have no excuse. Their hypocrisy is obvious.

# Constitutional Considerations

- **Is Bill 21 compatible with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms?**

The courts will decide.

- The **1982 Constitution** is a human and imperfect document:

- starts by asserting the “supremacy of God.”

- allows federal judges to invalidate provincial laws.

- **Quebec has never signed** the 1982 Constitution.

- Courts may not rule on the legitimacy or wisdom of any use of the “notwithstanding” clause (**Ford decision** of the Supreme Court of Canada). Only the legislator can do that.

**Conclusion** : If the courts decide that Bill 21 violates the Charter, this will not be a moral decision, only a technical one. Maybe the Charter is wrong, not Bill 21?

# Some Guiding Principles

- **Secularism**, including religion-State separation
- Defending the rights of **atheists**
- Our goal: Maximize **freedom of conscience**
- **Distinction between beliefs & believers**, between ideas & people
- **Distinction between**
  - “**race**” (a biological concept)
  - **religion** (an ideology, a collection of ideas and practices)
- Avoid the **indoctrination of children**

# The Three Spaces

**Private**

**Public**

- Outside civic space
- Users of civil services

**Civic**

- State Institutions
- State Employees

# Bill 21: A Few Arguments in Favour (a)

## **TO ALLOW THE WEARING OF RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS BY EMPLOYEES IN THE CIVIL SERVICE AND SCHOOLS:**

- **Incompatible with State religious neutrality**, just like symbols on the walls.
- **Incompatible with separation** between religion & State.
- 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015, **Supreme Court of Canada**, in case of prayer at Saguenay city council, emphasized the importance of State religious neutrality.
- A **privilege** granted to religions. A **religious accommodation**.
- Constitutes **religious advertising, passive proselytizing**.
- **Discrimination against atheists**, against other non-believers and against believers who wear no symbols.

# Bill 21: A Few Arguments in Favour (b)

## **THE BAN ON RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS IS NOT DISCRIMINATORY:**

- It applies to men as well as women. Thus **no sex discrimination.**
- It applies to all religions. Thus **no religious discrimination.**
- Some religions impose certain accoutrements on women as a sign of their inferiorization. Thus, the ban on religious symbols is **anti-discriminatory** and **anti-misogynous.**
- A person who refuses to remove a religious symbol on the job is not being discriminated against. **That person is excluding & disqualifying himself/herself.**

# Bill 21: A Few Arguments in Favour (c)

## A QUESTION OF BEHAVIOUR:

- Banning religious symbols is **not discriminatory**. It is a **disciplinary** measure.
- Bans on religious symbols are like **laws banning smoking** in certain places.
- Bans on religious symbols are like **speed limits** on highways. Such limits apply to everyone. To say that banning religious symbols discriminates against believers is like saying that speed limits discriminate against owners of fast cars.

# Bill 21: A Few Arguments in Favour (d)

## **WHEN SOME PEOPLE'S RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS COLLIDE WITH OTHERS':**

- **Rights are not absolute.** The rights of some end where others' rights start.
- Freedom of thought or belief may be absolute, but **never freedom to practise.**
- Bans for civil servants and teachers: **a small and reasonable constraint** on their freedom to practise their religion, for a much greater good: **to protect the freedom of conscience of users and students.**
- **Wearing a religious symbol is a religious practice, not a religious belief.**
- **A religious symbol can be removed!**



# Bill 21: A Few Arguments in Favour (e)

## **BILL 21 IS MODERATE, TIMID EVEN:**

- **“several democratic liberal societies have adopted such measures,”** Justice Mainville, Quebec Court of Appeal, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2019.
- Bans on religious symbols: **France, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany.**
- **Face-coverings: Banned in numerous countries of Europe and Africa,** including several Muslim-majority countries.
- **European Court of Human Rights (ECHR):** It is legitimate to ban the Islamic veil worn by teachers in Geneva canton in order to protect equality between women and men. (Dahlab c. Suisse, 2001)
- Although groundbreaking in North America, **Bill 21 is in no way extreme.**

# Bill 21: A Few Arguments in Favour (f)

## A QUESTION OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS:

- To remove one's religious symbol at work is a form of **professionally ethical behaviour**.
- The **Quebec Public Service Act** bans partisan political symbols and behaviour for civil servants.
- Bill 21's ban is **a benefit for everyone**, because it protects the religious neutrality of civic space.
- Especially beneficial for **children of religiously pious parents**.
- **No religious practice is truly an obligation.**

# Bill 21: A Few Arguments in Favour (g)

## **THE SECULAR STATE IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR BELIEVERS' CHOICES:**

- **Believers themselves — not the State — are entirely responsible** for their religious beliefs and practices.
- If the State allows its employees to wear religious symbols, it is acting as if the symbol were part of the person, **as if they could not *not* wear it.**
- By banning religious symbols worn by its employees, **the State commits to treating every person equally**, regardless of their belief or non-belief.
- Thus the State commits itself to **respecting the freedom of conscience** of civil service users and school students.

# Bill 21: The Unique Argument Against

**Arguments against Bill 21 being generally very weak, opponents often indulge in gratuitous defamatory accusations.**

**There remains only one plausible argument against Bill 21:**

The law limits the freedom of civil servants and teachers.

True, but this argument requires that the rights of civil service users and public school students be completely neglected and ignored.

The opponents of Bill 21 do not care at all about the rights of students and users.

**Conflicting rights:** We must find an equilibrium.

# The Dishonesty of the Antisecular

- **Conflate “race” and religion**, thus negating freedom of conscience.
- If we accept this conflation between “race” and religion, then the **three Abrahamic monotheisms are downright “racist.”**
- **The scam of religious “obligations”**: holding the State responsible.
- **Conflate belief and believers**: thus conflating criticism of beliefs with prejudices against people.
- The scam of **“racialized” persons**.

# The Nonsense of “Islamophobia”

## **TWO PROBLEMS:**

- **Conflation of a belief** (Islam) **with believers** (Muslims). Anti-Muslim prejudice should be called “anti-Muslim prejudice.”
- To fear a religion is not necessarily an irrational phobia. It may be completely healthy.
- **To fear religious fundamentalism is simple prudence.**

# Fake Religious Neutrality

- **CHRISTIAN LEGAL FELLOWSHIP** (lawyers for Trinity Western U.)

“While the legislation purports to be advancing ‘religious neutrality’, it does the exact opposite. By effectively **banning citizens of certain faiths from public employment** based on their religious expression and identity, the Bill is promoting an *anti*-religious public square...

**But neutrality is required of the state, not individuals.** State neutrality exists not to coerceirreligious uniformity, but **to promote and enhance religious diversity**. To paraphrase the Supreme Court, the answer is **not to ban religion from the public sphere...**”

- **CENTRE FOR INQUIRY CANADA** (claims to be “secular”)

“A truly secular society also does not give special treatment in the form of a sanction, such as Quebec’s Bill 21. **People, including public sector employees, should not be treated differently if they are part of a religion.** Put simply, the state must always be neutral on issues of religious belief and must not treat someone differently because of their beliefs.”

# Implications of Fake Neutrality

- According to the **Christian Legal Fellowship**,
  - Believers are excluded from certain jobs. (**FALSE.**)
  - It is the State which must be neutral, not individuals. (**FALSE. The State exists only by virtue of the individuals who are its representatives.**)
  - The aim of religious neutrality is to “**promote...religious diversity**”! (**NONSENSE.**)
  - Bill 21 “ban[s] religion from the public sphere.” (**FALSE. See “The Three Spaces”**)
- According to **CFI-Canada**, Bill 21 treats religious believers different from others. (**FALSE.**) Thus, CFIC considers the State responsible for the religious believers’ choices (**but this grants an unacceptable privilege to those believers**). The Pastafarian Church is a good antidote to CFIC’s nonsensical position.
- **The antiseccularism of the CLF is unsurprising, as it is a Christian association. The antiseccularism of CFI-Canada is abject hypocrisy.**



# The Toxicity of the “Woke” Mentality

- **“Woke” = politically awake, aware.**
- A current in left-wing politics which has **abandoned Enlightenment values** (reason, tolerance, freedom, progress, universalism, human rights and secularism).
- Political **left and right are defined by** support for and opposition to Enlightenment values.
- Has become dominant among political leftists and centrists. **There is (almost) no (real) left left.**
- Also known as **regressive (pseudo-)leftism or anti-Enlightenment (pseudo-)leftism.**
- The woke mentality is a **major enemy of secularism.**

# Political & Philosophical Roots of “Wokism”

**The woke mentality is based on a number of political and philosophical currents:**

- **Intersectionality**, an obsession with personal identities, especially minority identities.
- **Multiculturalism**, or cultural relativism, an anti-universalist political ideology.
- **Postmodernism**, a scepticism about modernist ideas of objectivity, rationalism and knowledge.
- **Post-Marxist defeatism**, a degeneration of Marxism, resulting from Marxism’s failure.
- **Islamoleftism**, a further degeneration of post-Marxism, class replaced by minorities, especially Muslims.

# An Obsession With Minorities

- Intersectionality, multiculturalism, etc., a toxic mixture leads to **overemphasis on minorities** and contempt for majorities and the universal.
- Add Islamoleftism: Muslims given special priority, especially the pious. **Extreme complacency with respect to Islam and Islamism.** So-called “Islamophobia” condemned.
- **Non-recognition of some minorities:**
  - Quebeckers dismissed as just “whites.”
  - Secular Muslims ignored.
  - Ex-Muslims denigrated.

# Tyranny of Majority or of Minority?

- Does Bill 21, represent a “**tyranny of the majority?**” No, but the opposition to it does!
- The **tyrannical majority is the Rest-of-Canada (ROC)**, vilifying the minority (Quebeckers) for their progressive, secular legislation.
- However, many in ROC support Bill 21, but are bullied into silence.
- It is allied with a tiny but very vocal **tyrannical minority**, Islamists. Secular Muslims are ignored.

(Islamist = anyone who promotes Islam politically, attempting to obtain political power, influence or privileges for Islam.)

# Three Studies about Attitudes Towards Religious Symbols

- Antoine Bilodeau, et al. “Strange Bedfellows? Attitudes toward Minority and Majority Religious Symbols in the Public Sphere,” 2018, *Politics and Religion*
  - In Quebec, liberal values correlate with support for banning all religious symbols.
  - Illiberal values correlate with support for banning only minority religious symbols.
- Yannick Dufresne, et al. “Religiosity or racism? The bases of opposition to religious accommodation in Quebec: Religiosity or racism?” 2018, *Nations and Nationalism*
  - Opposition to religious accommodation correlates with low religiosity, not racism.
- Luc Turgeon, et al. “A Tale of Two Liberalisms? Attitudes toward Minority Religious Symbols in Quebec and Canada,” 2019, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*
  - Liberal values in Quebec correlate with banning religious symbols.
  - Liberal values in ROC correlate with opposing such bans.

# Summing Up

- The three studies show that **support for Bill 21 among Quebeckers is not correlated with racism or other illiberal attitudes.**
- Although interesting, it is **irrelevant to the validity of Bill 21.** Even if 100% of Quebeckers were racist or xenophobic or bigotted or whatever, Bill 21 would still be valid, progressive legislation.
- **Bill 21 is not racist** because it has nothing to do with race. It deals with secularism and religion.
- **Bill 21 is not discriminatory** because it applies to all persons and all religions equally.
- **Bill 21's ban on religious symbols is a small, reasonable limit on religious practice (not belief), protecting users and students.**

**Quebec  
is in the vanguard  
of the Americas  
on the issue of secularism.**



# Links



- **Atheist Freethinkers**, our English-language website  
<https://www.atheology.ca/>
- **Libres penseurs athées**, our French-language website  
<https://www.atheologie.ca/>
- **A Reading List on Quebec Bill 21**  
<https://blog.davidrand.ca/reading-list-quebec-bill-21/>
- **Laws Restricting Face-Coverings and Religious Symbols**  
<https://www.atheology.ca/laws-restricting-face-coverings-religious-symbols/>
- **Legal Fund**, in support of Bill 21  
<https://www.atheology.ca/briefs/legal-fund/>