



François Guizot-Institut de France Prize 2016

Award Ceremony

Thursday, 13 October 2016, Grande Salle des Séances

Speech by Mr Gabriel de Broglie

Chancellor of the Institute

Mr. President¹ of the François Guizot Association

Mr. Perpetual Secretary²,

Mr. President of the jury,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

I am very happy to welcome you to this new award ceremony of the Prix François Guizot-Institut de France. I warmly thank the François Guizot Association, whose proposal in 2013 deeply touched us, since the Institut de France is now included in this Prize created in 1993, thus giving the opportunity for the name of François Guizot to resonate anew in this Palace. In fact, it seemed only natural that the Prize should be awarded within these walls, many times frequented by the one who, along with Adolphe Thiers, animated French political, parliamentary, university and academic life in the 19th century.

François Guizot reconvened the Academy of Moral and Political

¹ Stephan Coste, president of the François Guizot Association

² M. Darcos

Sciences in 1832 and played an active role as of this date in revitalizing it, inspiring its efforts during more than forty years. Admitted in 1833 to the l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres, elected in 1836 to the Academie Française, he is at home here and this triple membership in the Institut de France makes me think that it is more him who receives us, than us who pay him tribute. After his retirement from politics, François Guizot remained very involved in the work of the Academie and welcomed four of his fellows to the Academie Française: Charles de Montalembert in 1852, Jean-Baptiste Biot in 1857, Henri Lacordaire in 1861, and Lucien-Anatole Prévost-Paradol in 1866; not to mention the many other speeches he made here during his life at the Académie.

This Grande Salle des Séances, whose inauguration Guizot witnessed in 1846, remains, along with the Abbey of Val Richer in Normandy, an echo chamber where memories of him can gather. While the Prix François Guizot may not, strictly speaking, be a prize of the Académie itself, the spirit of the Académie resonates all the same, awarded as it is by a jury chaired by a member of the Institute³ that includes three other Academicians.⁴ Sharing the voice of Guizot himself when speaking of this prize seems an evidence.

We know Guizot the historian, author of the impressive 26-volume *Memoirs of the History of England* and the 31-volume *Memoirs of the History of France*; we also know Guizot the politician, with his broad governmental actions, from the Guizot Law that generalized primary education to the Entente cordiale with Great Britain as well as his perspectives on economic liberalism and his famous statement "Enrich yourself!" Another Guizot is less well known, a man of faith inspired all his life by the principles of Christianity, who devoted no less than four volumes to the problems of his time in *Contemporary Religious Problems*:

"Modern societies should not fear religion, and not bitterly dispute its natural influence; that would be a childish fear and a cruel error."

³ Jean-Claude Casanova

⁴ Michel Zink, Georges-Henri Soutou, Gabriel de Broglie (alongside : Claude Habib, Mona Ozouf, Hélène Huby, Laurent Theis, Georges de Ménil, Philippe Raynaud, Patrice Gueniffey, Benedetta Craveri, and Sudhir Hazareesingh).

Such are the words of Guizot in *Democracy in France*, a book published in January 1849, less than a year after the fall of his government, pushed out by the Revolution of 1848. If this book allows insight into Guizot's perspective on religion, especially in the chapter devoted to the moral conditions of social peace in France, it should not be seen as a profession of faith: the deposed president of the council was then in exile in England and he had not been voted in during the legislative elections of the previous April; so his work is dictated more by resentments than by his deepest and most sincere aspirations.

Nevertheless, Guizot has always been clearly in favor of the temporal influence of the Christian religion; even in spite of himself, he appears as one of the most clerical ministers of the modern age. In 1833, he had deliberately involved the main teaching congregations with his primary education bill. For social and moral reasons, he saw the Church as one of only two effective powers in public education, along with the State, and had personally committed to the continuation of moral and religious education at school.

A fervent Protestant whose faith was tormented and sometimes shaken, as was the case upon the occasion of the death of his first wife Pauline de Meulan in 1827, Guizot was nonetheless "the most Catholic of Protestants and the most Protestant of Catholics" as he was described by his contemporaries. In the heat of his governmental actions, he was often reproached by his co-religionists for having conducted a policy too favourable to the Catholic Church, to the detriment of a more active participation in the instances of the Reformed Church, especially since he had been member of the Consistory of Paris and several other Protestant societies since 1815.

After his fall, with his political retreat on the horizon, he took on more responsibility in the Protestant Church in which he became one of the leaders of the orthodox current, a supporter of dogma and of institution, with rather republican inclinations. In favour of what he called "the great and general Christian Church", François Guizot clearly appeared

as an ecumenical Protestant. This Christian faith, strengthened over time, would make him concerned about religious issues his entire life. On this matter, his concerns were also punctuated by a number of personal relationships, first and foremost with Albertine de Staël, who married Victor de Broglie, a very pious and fervent Protestant, with whom Guizot's mother had maintained a close and almost mystical friendship. What he called his "slow, laborious, progressive conversion" dates to this era.

In 1852 he befriended Montalembert, whom he had just received at the Académie Française. When he published in 1864 his *Méditations sur l'essence de la religion chrétienne* (*Meditations on the essence of the Christian religion*), rather well received in Catholic circles up to the Pope himself, his "dear and great friend" Montalembert, with whom he had devoted himself to parliamentary struggles fifteen years previously, sent him enthusiastic letters. The publication in 1866 of the *Méditations sur l'état actuel de la religion chrétienne* (*Meditations on the Current State of the Christian religion*) would strengthen this friendship, and Guizot would rejoice in great Catholic respect for his faith and his confession. Thus, Guizot, over time, became closer to liberal Catholicism, of which Montalembert and Albert de Broglie were the leading figures.

Already, in 1861, in his praise of Lacordaire at the Académie Française, he had appreciated the rapprochement of religious faith and political liberty. I quote:

"[French society] desires and appeals to, sometimes brilliantly, sometimes profoundly, and in spite of contrary appearances, religious faith and political liberty; France feels by instinct and knows by experience, that these two sublime powers are necessary to one another, and that their security as well as their dignity also requires them to unite. "

The publication in 1868 of *Méditations sur la religion chrétienne dans ses rapports avec l'état actuel des sociétés et des esprits* (*Meditations on the Christian Religion in its Relations with the Present State of Societies and*

Spirits) presents the most successful testimony of his religious maturity. I quote again:

"It is a common saying today that Christianity does not accommodate either freedom or science, and that morality is essentially distinct and separate from religious faith. I hold these assertions to be false and greatly harmful to the cause of liberty, morality, and science which they claim to serve. I believe the Christian religion and liberty to be not only reconcilable, but necessary to each other. I believe morality is naturally and intimately united with religion. I am convinced that the Christian religion and science have no sacrifice to make, nor anything to fear from one another. "

In short, while it is certain that Guizot was constantly aware of his religious convictions, the benefit of hindsight now allows us to see that his tireless preaching in favour of the rapprochement of Protestantism and Catholicism, in a spirit of liberal and political ecumenism, did not have the success he hoped for. We can even talk about failure. The triumph of democracy on the one hand, and the great industrial successes of the Second Empire and Saint-Simonianism, on the other hand, defeated this dated conception of the necessary alliance of religion and politics. A liberal, Guizot was none the less conservative and too doctrinaire in an era wholly aiming for freedom and the democratic movement.

Chateaubriand acknowledged the advent of a new society at the expense of the aristocratic system, Tocqueville understood that democracy would prevail regardless of religion, but it was not the same for Guizot, who pleaded until the end in favour of Christianity and its necessary temporal hold. This political commitment, however, should not be seen as anachronistic. At the time, the evidence was not as clear as it is today. The fight against relativism having been backed by the Catholic Church with the *Syllabus of Errors* of Pope Pius IX in 1864 and the shy advances of Protestant conceptions that were to receive the support of social Catholicism from the 1870s onward under the leadership of Albert de Mun, would partly support the aspirations of François Guizot. But the

politico-religious conception of the society he defended did not flourish in our democracies, allowing us to think that he whose name graces the Prize that will be awarded this evening based such a conception too much on history and not enough on contemporary affairs.

I leave the last word to François Guizot himself, as this question he poses in the preface to his third *Meditations* sounds almost like an admission in his opinionated defence of Christian society:

"What do I think of stubbornly throwing such an effort in the midst of the events and practical and urgent problems that are shaking the civilized world?"

Before giving the floor to Stéphane Coste, President of the Association François Guizot, I would like to express my gratitude to his mother, Catherine Coste, and present my congratulations to the laureate and to thank each of you for having come to attend this ceremony.