



PRIX  
**FRANÇOIS GUIZOT**  
INSTITUT DE FRANCE



François Guizot-Institut de France 2020 prize

**Award ceremony**

Monday 5 October 2020, 6:30 PM, Grande Salle des Séances

Catherine Maire

Winner, Guizot Prize 2020

**Mr. Chancellor, Mr. Perpetual Secretary, Mr. President of the Association François Guizot, Mr. President, members of the jury, Ladies and Gentlemen:**

I thank you for the honour you have bestowed upon me by awarding the Guizot-Institut de France prize to my work, *L'Eglise dans l'Etat: Politique et religion dans la France des Lumières*, Bibliothèque des histoires, Gallimard, 2019. I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to you for having come to welcome me this evening despite the circumstances related to Covid. Words are not enough to convey my gratitude for the award that you have granted to this book, the fruit of many years of research, reflection and intellectual encounters.

This book originated 20 years ago in the work for my previous book, *De la cause de Dieu à la cause de la Nation: Le Jansénisme au XVIIIème siècle, (From the Cause of God to the Cause of the Nation: Jansenism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century)*, Bibliothèque des histoires, Gallimard, 1998. In the first place, this is because its central subject, Gallicanism, had remained like an apple on the side of the road. Indeed,

I had always thought that I would come back and pick it up one day to examine it more closely. Secondly, because, along with other research, my contribution on Jansenism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century changed the way I looked at the Enlightenment. Since then, several eighteenth-century specialists have understood the value of reconsidering philosophers such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, d'Alembert, Abbé Castel de Saint-Pierre, and even Malesherbes, in light of the *Unigenitus* quarrel. One of the research centres where I worked at CNRS, The Centre for European Religious Anthropology founded by Alphonse Dupront, before later joining the Raymond Aron Center for Political Studies founded by François Furet, also had the excellent initiative of sending me to the Roman archives of the Holy Office when they opened in 1998. I immediately understood the usefulness of taking an interest in the censorship of the French authors, the Jansenists, but also the Gallicans and the *philosophes*. All of these works commissioned by the Catholic Church allowed me in turn to change my vision of the Enlightenment that I had learned at the University of Geneva from Professors Starobinski and Baczko. This also encouraged me to integrate the *philosophes* into my new project, reflecting the different chapters.

These long years of research did not proceed in a straight line, instead they took me on many detours on which I risked getting lost in the labyrinths of erudition. At first, I believed that the various themes that make up the major parts of my book had been largely deciphered by historiography and that all I would have to do was to synthesize them by putting them into perspective. When I was put to the test, however, I discovered that this was not the case, especially, paradoxically, from the very beginning with the question of tolerance, which is so generally considered to be the achievement par excellence of the Enlightenment. Instead of the synthesis that I had imagined, the exploration of the subject required numerous primary investigations and forced me to return to different archives, ranging from the Joly de Fleury collection to the papers of Malesherbes. This effort even forced me to take up a most difficult task, as all those who have lived through it know, that of taking up a subject that we thought we knew well from another angle. In this case, that of the *Unigenitus* papal bull as a Gallican problem.

I had followed the trajectory of Jansenism from the *Grand Siècle* to the Age of Enlightenment, with its transformations and repercussions on the origin of the French Revolution. But what about Gallicanism? This word was just as problematic and even anachronistic in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when people

only spoke of the “liberties of the Gallican Church”. Was there a Gallican current, independent of the Jansenist debates? How could it be defined? Who were its promoters? Its theorists? Was it at the origin of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, as many authors of intransigent Catholicism had originally proposed, followed by many historians after them?

This exploration was without a doubt the most difficult I have had to carry out thus far, because it forced me to take into account what Guizot calls “the philosophical component” of history. This effort led me to reconnect with the French tradition of philosophical history of which Guizot is the first and greatest model. I was able to appreciate, after the fact, the relevance of the justification he gives for this approach, in the face of the incomprehension of a good part of the historical community with regard to a style of history that clashes with their narrow vision of the study of the past. His plea has lost none of its relevance! Allow me to quote him extensively:

**That very portion, indeed, which we are accustomed to hear called the philosophy of history—which consists in showing the relation of events with each other—the chain which connects them—the causes and effects of events—this is history just as much as the description of battles, and all the other exterior events which it recounts. Facts of this kind are undoubtedly more difficult to unravel; the historian is more liable to deceive himself respecting them; [4] it requires more skill to place them distinctly before the reader; but this difficulty does not alter their nature; they still continue not a whit the less, for all this, to form an essential part of history. (HCE, trad. George Wells, Knight, 1896, p. 63). [[https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/guizot-general-history-of-civilization-in-europe?q=accustomed#Guizot\\_1509\\_63](https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/guizot-general-history-of-civilization-in-europe?q=accustomed#Guizot_1509_63)]**

I am therefore doubly blessed to receive an award that honors the memory of the master of the style of history that I was led to practice.

My “facts” have been the great public polemics that have engaged the problem of the relationship between Church and State on subjects apparently unrelated to each other: the *Unigenitus* papal bull, the property and fiscal privileges of the Church, the denial of the sacraments, the remarriage of Protestants, the rules of the Society of Jesus, the assembly of clergy in 1765, monastic life, and the very place of religion in society.

No representative authors as in the Great Century such as Pithou or Bossuet, no general theory, no linear narrative but a hodgepodge of debates that had to be organized around the same problem: the ‘Church in the State’, according to the formula of Bossuet taken from Optat de Milève, that is to say, the problem of the particular form that the liberties of the Gallican Church took in France in the aftermath

of the General Assembly of the French Clergy of 1682, which settled the quarrel of the century by recognizing the principle of the absolute sovereignty of the monarch in temporal matters. One might have thought that the outcome of this long dispute, inherited from the Wars of Religion, through the Church of France's consented subordination to royal supremacy in its domain, would bring peace of mind. It was not so. This compromise left open, in fact, the question of the boundaries between the temporal and spiritual realms. Indeed, it generated a new series of sharp tensions. These tensions were no longer between Rome and France, but within the State itself, between the Church and the King, between bishops and parliaments, between spiritual jurisdiction and civil jurisdiction. Even tensions within the clergy and within certain religious currents, such as, first and foremost, the Jansenist current. These tensions put two versions of the "liberties of the Gallican Church" at loggerheads: firstly, the liberties of the Church and its spiritual independence vis-à-vis the State, and secondly, the liberties of the State to intervene in religious matters when the public interest is at stake.

The problems could not be more practical. How to apply a papal bull on matters of faith when this law of the Church is erected as a law of the State and how to apply it when the representatives of civil authority do not have the same interpretation. Are the goods of the Church and the clergy allowed to evade taxation? Can parish priests refuse the last sacraments to a dying person without sully his reputation as a citizen? What status should be accorded to the clandestine marriage of Protestants or even to the sincerity of those performed within the Catholic Church by so-called converts? Do the religious rules of the Society of Jesus resemble political constitutions that make it an extremely dangerous state coiled up within the state itself? What is the nature and justification of the monarchical institution represented by the General Assembly of the Clergy? Finally, is monastic life useful to society?

What I have tried to demonstrate is that these seemingly heterogeneous questions revolve around the same focus as it was understood by the most eminent figures of the Enlightenment, Montesquieu, Voltaire or Rousseau, each in their own way.

These repeated controversies have had a double posterity. On the one hand, they nourished the development of a new form of political anticlericalism that was promised a great future. Baron

d'Holbach merely orchestrated this theme, creating a final polemic at the end of the century with such unexpected opponents as Necker, a defender of the importance of religious opinions. On the other hand, these controversies promoted the principle of tolerance in various ways. It was not until Malesherbes, however, who succeeded with an unusual will and ability to make tolerance triumph on the civil level.

My book ends with the Gallican solution that, while meant to be definitive only reopened the quarrel in an explosive way: the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, that is to say, the most complete integration of the Church in the State, while giving the Church its spiritual independence. The entire administration of the Church is in fact under the control of the nation. Here again, far from calming down, the polemic was rekindled more vividly than ever, creating a fracture that would durably mark the life of the country. This brought two antagonistic visions of Gallicanism face to face. On the side of the defenders of the Civil Constitution was the refusal to establish Catholicism as the national religion in order to leave freedom of belief to personal conviction. On the side of the opponents of the Civil Constitution was the recognition of Catholicism as the national religion and the exclusivity of public worship, but with respect for the freedom of religious opinions. In fact, in both cases, the general tendency was towards a spiritualization of the relationship with the beyond. From a model of complementarity of roles, with the contentious points being the subjects on which the two logics encountered one another, we inevitably moved onwards to a division of labor. It then became a question of articulating distinct functions. But we were still a long way from the horizon of expectation of a complete separation, which remained absolute evil.

What, in the end, can we retain from these passionate controversies? They respectively call for two readings, between which it is not so easy to decide. It could be considered deplorable—which is a very common point of view—that so much energy has been spent in disputes, some of which seem derisory to us and others of which would have benefited from a more measured approach. But one may consider it a privilege to have the vigour of this public discussion, even if it was paid for with occasionally damaging or even absurd escalations. In this respect, I am tempted to agree with Guizot's point of view. His general statement seems to me to apply well indeed to my particular subject:

**“The civilization of France possesses this peculiar character; it has never been wanting in**

**intellectual grandeur. It has always been rich in ideas. The power of the mind has been great in French society—greater, perhaps, than anywhere else. It must not lose this happy privilege—it must not fall into that lower, that somewhat material condition which prevails in other societies. Intelligence, theories, must still maintain in France the same rank which they have hitherto occupied. (HCE, trad. George Wells, Knight, 1896). [[https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/guizot-general-history-of-civilization-in-europe?q=accustomed#Guizot\\_1509\\_63](https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/guizot-general-history-of-civilization-in-europe?q=accustomed#Guizot_1509_63)]**

France is the country in which everything is discussed, which is its burden as well as its privilege. This recurring polemical fever carries a price that may seem heavy. But what an advantage for those who believe, like Guizot, that the degree of civilization is measured by the place it gives to the powers of the mind.