

Dear **Salman Rushdie**,

In the «Republica e Laicidade» civic association, we have a very precise and practical question to ask you ; a question that requires a short introduction.

The short introduction

Classical Greeks had two words to express the idea of «people» : the word «*ethnos*»/«*ethnikos*» and the word «*laos*»/«*laikos*». The «*ethnos*» concept was a narrow and exclusive idea, demanding a common shared identity among members of a concerned group (*the Athenians, the Spartans, ...*) ; the «*laos*» concept was used to designate the universal idea of «people», and was clearly a wide and inclusive idea, meaning effectively «every one», with no reserve at all.

The modern concepts of «*laicism*» and «*laicity*» were formed from that old «*laos*»/«*laikos*» Greek word : «*laicism*» being the principle that states that societies should not be, by any means, controlled, permanently and exclusively, by any single identitarian group («*ethnos*»), would it have an historical, racial, cultural, linguistic, religious, ethic, economic, aesthetic, or any other non-universally sharable background ; «*laicity*» being the several different ways in which one society can convert the principle of «*laicism*» into practice – and one must be aware of the fact that there is quite a wide space for a continuous cultural, social and political experiment.

In English speaking countries, people refers to «*secularism*» and «*secularity*» – meaning State and Church should be separated from each other and that societies should be free from a clerical control – and usually refuses to use terms as «*laicism*» and «*laicity*», which are said to be exclusively French concepts – in fact they are commonly used in Mediterranean countries as France, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Suisse and even Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey... – not really having a clear meaning in English...!

However, in our contemporary world tending to globalisation it seems to us that quite wider concepts such as «*laicism*» and «*laicity*» should be considered among the most positive and challenging ideas for mankind – invit-



ing us to organise ourselves into open and inclusive (anti-totalitarian) societies and, simultaneously, allowing us to enjoy from the most extensive individual freedom – and, so being, in our perspective, to state that «*laicism*» and «*laicity*» are French concepts would be such an evident nonsense as to regard penicillin as something Scottish !” (the argument comes from H. Pena-Ruiz)

Question

Both, as a writer – a man concerned with the good use of words – and as a global fighter for freedom and tolerance – a man engaged in spreading all over the world the idea of personal freedom in open and inclusive societies – can you agree with us upon our approach to the words and the concepts of «*laicism*» and «*laicity*», considering, as we do, that it would be very interesting if they were understood, accepted and adopted by English speaking people ?

If so, would you accept the challenge to become a sort of a missionary concerned with spreading the words «*laicism*» and «*laicity*» and the good concepts they refer to among English speaking people ?

Post Scriptum

In the case you accept our challenge, would you please allow us a couple of minutes in the end of this session to exchange some more ideas about this project and our e-mail addresses, so that we can start working to set up an international strategy involving, at least, laicist people and associations from France, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Suisse, etc., to support the development of such a difficult task ?

Luis Manuel Mateus

lmateus@hotmail.com
republica-laicidade@hotmail.com