

LETTRE À UN GRAND-DUCHÉ CHRÉTIEN
BRÉIF UN E CHRËSCHTLECHE GRAND-DUCHÉ
BRIEF AN EIN CHRISTLICHES GROSSHERZOGTUM
LETTER TO A CHRISTIAN GRAND DUCHY

LUXEMBOURG in the early 21st century

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A sequel to *The Hollow Cross*
instigated by comments and reactions
and recent political events.

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The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg that is addressed here is peculiarly unruly towards secular reason and medieval habits are kept as strongly as the once-famous fortress the capital is built on. However, there are other countries with similar stubbornness, and all oddly claim to be modern states. This *letter* may apply, in its essentials, to many a *free* state in any part of the world. My direct painful experience in my home country makes me complain with priority about the state of affairs in Luxembourg. Millions worldwide await a change that leading morons yet prevent. This otherwise gloriously capable society has no excuse for bunk.

PREFACE

This letter contains a plea for change. In a political situation that has recently revealed in this small country in the heart of Europe, that the development of its society should no longer be impaired by anachronistic institutions, which exercise a selfish influence on education and politics, compelling those who cannot abide in their conscience, to bear the cost, change is overdue.

The title *Letter To A Christian Grand Duchy* and its translations deliberately recall a *letter* with similar intentions that the American author Sam Harris wrote as a reaction to nationwide response to his book *The End Of Faith*. He called his answer *Letter To A Christian Nation*. (*)

He addressed the US-American nation as a whole, questioning the sincerity of their conventional attitude and exposing telltale facts, inviting his compatriots to reconsider their arguments. Following his example implies respect for his work, which we sincerely acknowledge, and we hope that varying his title for our related ambition is an acceptable way.

(*) Sam Harris *The End Of Faith* (2004) - *Letter To A Christian Nation* (2006)

It is perhaps useful to insert here, that the constitution of the United States of America stipulates since 1791 – First Amendment – that the state has no ties with religion and prohibits partiality for any religious belief.

1 - THE HISTORY

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg was created by political decisions at the *Vienna Congress* in 1815, where important arrangements were signed for a new order of Europe after troublesome decades following the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars and it was not until 1839 that the territorial shape of the country was finally left untouched. The prior status had led to odd coalitions and land losses, and for another half century tumultuous developments in the European countries had a London Conference in 1867 declare the country as neutral territory, between the anxious interests of the major powers of the time Great Britain, France, Prussia and Russia, and still under the reign of the king of The Netherlands. When the hereditary male line of the Dutch king went extinct, complicated contracts between aristocratic European families delivered a new hereditary dynasty to Luxembourg: the house *Nassau-Weilburg*, of German origin.

A constitution of 1868 modelled a constitutional monarchy practising a parliamentary democracy with the grand duke as head of state and the people's representatives in the chamber doing the political work.

Important economic assets such as the foremost metallurgic industry ensured a prosperous epoch to this small country of merely 2.586 square kilometres with an average population of less than 400.000 until later years brought numerous immigrants and a growing part of cross-border labour taking part in Luxembourg's market. International industrial facilities discovered the small central spot, that provided good grounds for their subsidiaries.

Luxembourg was one of the founder states of the European Economic Community in 1957 and has remained engaged in the European development from this landmark origin. By and by, a very important financial place attracted hundreds of banks, national and foreign, and favourable laws made it challenge the best foreign competitors.

Traditionally, like in most European countries, a dominant church kept a privileged role next to monarchy and parliament – in Luxembourg the Roman Catholic Church.

2 – THE 21st CENTURY

We will leap over some painful periods and the usual struggle for progress to arrive in the 21st century with a keen eye on the situation that obliges – and enables - a thinking person more than ever to assess the morality, the truthfulness, the justification of the social surroundings.

As traditions change over time, and new priorities challenge a modern society, the old pattern may annoy parts of a democratic population and get into conflict with evolving social rights and principles of justice. Moreover, nobody will want to automatically adopt an opinion not his own, and generally – in the political theatre – different opinions will create different parties, where a free citizen will find a more or less fitting haven for his individual vote.

But, what if an institution carries on its anachronistic privileges without convincing all members of society? In addition, what if these privileges and their financial support were imposed? These issues will undoubtedly lead to a more detailed scrutiny of the nature and right of these institutions and, before all, their necessity.

That is where we have come in the *Christian Grand Duchy* of Luxembourg.

Recent events, if not turmoil, have shaken the country by the end of 2008, hastening the collision of opposing ideas, as they revealed unusual character and dubious intentions.

Before relating further events, let us have a look at the *status quo* that we will later question.

The Roman Catholic Church holds a privilege to teach religious lessons in public schools. The clerical body is entirely paid by the taxpayer regardless of his or her beliefs. The maintenance for all churches is assumed by the community – not by the congregation. The church does not give account of assets, properties, and expenditures.

Other congregations do not get the same attention, while some are equally paid by the public treasury.

The throne of the Grand Duke is a hereditary privilege linked to the function as head of state.

All of the above six engagements are charged upon the national budget for a total of well over 35 million Euro annually. Maintenance of church property is a task provided free of charge by public service administrations.

In the year 2008, culminating in December, both monarchy and church played a role that upset like a wildfire the parliament and most of the population. No slapstick could do better.

After a fierce fight among the political parties - with enormous media attention, petition initiatives, and additional involvement of the state council a law was due for a second vote (after some modifications) that had a firm majority according to all polls and the first vote. It was the law *enabling* euthanasia - or death aid – under strict conditions in hopeless cases of sickness, being exclusively eligible to the concerned person.

This law project – introduced by the deputies Lydie Err and Jean Huss – was following the example of the legislation in this respect of The Netherlands and Belgium for a solution in dignity in case of an incurable disease as well as a legal basis for involved physicians, who could not be prosecuted if the strict conditions were scrupulously met.

The most divisive issue was the right of humans to decide for their own fate, which the church denied and the liberals acclaimed.

In the days before the scheduled vote the climate rose and two institutions built a pitfall for democracy. The monarch and the church.

The monarch Henri, the Grand Duke of Luxembourg, stated that he would not sign the law - a provision of article 34 of the constitution - due to his catholic belief.

The archbishop Fernand Franck of the Catholics issued orders to the clergy to be read from the pulpits in order to intimidate the democratic body with its representatives.

The Pope Joseph Ratzinger - Benedict XVI - stated in Rome that this law in Luxembourg would be an illegal act in the eyes of the Christians.

All three had measurelessly exceeded their rights, their tasks, and failed their obligations. It was all too obvious that the scheming was organized.

A series of dramatic speeches took most of the time of the session the day of the vote. The vote on December 18th, 2008 turned out as expected: 31 for the passage of the law, 26 against, 3 abstentions (the Chamber has 60 representatives).

Now, what is so dramatic about the mischievous meddling if the vote came through?
It is a scandal!

The monarch's lapsus (Latin for *slip of the pen*) was immediately cured by a unanimous decision of the chamber of representatives to amend article 34 of the constitution in order to free the monarch from signing any law and reducing his role to promulgate it, with no need to agree with it, should his conscience not comply.

The Vatican's and the church's behaviour brought about the pressing issue of separation of church and state, that had ignited newly in 2007/2008.

So now, it was only a step to question monarchy and church as participants in political affairs.

3 - THE JUSTIFICATION

Whether someone wants to keep a monarchy or not is a matter of opinion, to be sure, but what about the necessity? If we have a parliament, we do not need a monarch, with a court that costs millions, paid by the people. Could we not make better use of these funds?

A church - any church - is a different issue. Many people do not believe in religion and do not accept the role of a church. Why should one church have supremacy over others, regarding privileges and advantages of financial nature? Should a religious belief not be a private concern?

Do religion and church have a moral authority? What in the history of the Roman Catholic Church has shown us in 2000 years that they have? The others are of similar tissue. What proof have religions and churches for their truthfulness?

Why should a church perpetrate indoctrination in the education of a society?

Do atheists, agnostics, unbelievers, or other people who for individual reasons do not want to be molested by a church – do they all not have the right to be protected from the fatal influence of dogma?

Please reconsider your opinion on the following questions:

Is it just - from all angles - that people who do not believe in God should pay for a church?

Is it correct to let a government pay a clerical body that not all accept?

Is it good for a society if opinions are enforced on children in religious education?

Is it fair to influence the mind of a child, often barring a way out of the trap when grown up?

Is it righteous to allow material wealth and independence to priests while the rest struggle?

Is it acceptable that a church takes political influence?

As a parenthesis it must be added here, that a dubious committee hastily founded after the vote had passed, tried to enforce a legal referendum – as a last resort – to make the government trip, to maintain all the rights of the Grand Duke (who didn't himself want them any longer) and to raise all kinds of fuss in the political arena. The required number of signatures to start a referendum is legally 25.000 eligible voters; the lists put up at the town halls got together precisely 796, who reportedly went to sign without knowing too much what.

Now, everybody was keen on the election results due June 7, 2009, (for both chamber of representatives and European Parliament) for the jokes had amused some, but not all, and a turnaround in political force was at least possible.

Meanwhile, on March 12, 2009, the chamber of representatives had voted (2nd vote – 1st vote on December 11, 2008) with a large majority the modification of Art. 34 of the constitution, limiting the Grand Duke's role in passing laws to proclaim them without necessarily approving them, which in fact is an unnecessary formality before the regular publication in the *Mémorial* and the following effectiveness. There was only one amendment - the most urgent one, due to prior events – on the agenda of a special commission appointed to review the constitution. (A more in-depth review was planned for later).

Due to the firm roots of the society anchored to conservatism, church, monarchy, and their dubious influence, the elections did NOT bring the overdue change. The same coalition of Christian-Socials with submissive Socialists – who do not deserve the name – continued governing, with a few new figures and some jobs shifted. On the whole, it looked like no one wanted change at all. However, the many who had turned away - of older or younger decisions - from the “leading” parties spoke another language, the language of reason.

4 – THE CLAIM

If not all, and even not a majority of the populace, share the guidelines and beliefs of one or more governing political parties and their representatives, it is a fair claim to free them of compulsory conventions and duties, which are an insult to their convictions and an arbitrary cheating on their purse.

It is a very different thing to allow something and to impose something.

If the religions and churches were allowed to work in private circles, paid by their members only, keeping out of education and politics, and unbelievers and those not sympathising with any

religious body were freed of anachronistic but lawful conventions, we would have a society of truly social equality.

In the early 21st century of our time – so unfortunately established by a religion that has no proof of the event the calendar is based on – we should leave behind, more eradicate, all roots hindering reason and justice with ludicrous relicts of the Middle Ages, to move towards true dignity, if that is an attribute humankind wants to deserve.

NO power to religions, clergy, churches beyond their clubs. NO influence on education and politics.

But also:

NO enforced duties on those who do not follow religious delusion, but secular humanistic ethics and the call of reason in all fields of human presence and work on this planet.

The progress would be enormous if we achieved that splitting, and the only way towards a humane future. The other one being the decline that will end at the very bottom of civilization.

Who are those who want to make the choice for us?

Vim Wammer

END OF ENGLISH VERSION