



THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF  
JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

22 May 2025

**From The European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses**

**Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee**

**Subsequent to the Adoption of the List of Issues**

**144th session (23 June–25 July 2025)**

**Spain**

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## **SUMMARY OF THE SUBMISSION**

This submission to the Human Rights Committee on Spain highlights violations of the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights subsequent to the adoption of the list of issues to be taken up in connection with the consideration of the 144th report of Spain.

Jehovah's Witnesses in Spain and as a worldwide organization respectfully request the Government of Spain to:

- (1) Ensure that discriminatory taxation of Jehovah's Witnesses ceases, in line with exemptions accorded to traditional "well-established religions";
- (2) Ensure that media standards prohibiting defamation are applied and that news outlets are held accountable for false and defamatory reports against Jehovah's Witnesses;
- (3) Protect freedom of religion by prosecuting those who commit hate crimes against Jehovah's Witnesses;
- (4) Abide by its commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Covenant for all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses is a charity registered in the United Kingdom. It provides support to Jehovah's Witnesses facing fundamental human rights violations in various parts of the world.
2. Jehovah's Witnesses have been present in Spain for more than 100 years. In 1970, they were granted legal recognition. In 2006, the Government of Spain granted Jehovah's Witnesses the legal status of a "well-established religion," putting them on the same level as traditional confessions. Generally, Jehovah's Witnesses manifest their beliefs freely and publicly.
3. Despite this long history and "well-established" status, Jehovah's Witnesses are subjected to discriminatory taxation not imposed on other religious denominations in the same legal category. On 19 February 2025, the Government of Spain presented to Congress its plan to correct this discrimination.<sup>1</sup>
4. In recent years, national media outlets have published false and defamatory accusations about Jehovah's Witnesses that potentially incite both hate speech and hate crimes. The judiciary's reluctance to enforce safeguards against unethical journalistic practices allows such hate crimes against the Witnesses to continue with impunity.
5. Additional details of such breaches of Spain's obligations under articles 9, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22 and 26 of the Covenant are set out below.

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<sup>1</sup> See Annex No. 1 and paras. 21-24 below.

## II. VIOLATIONS OF THE PROVISIONS OF THE COVENANT

**Freedom of thought, conscience and religion (article 18), right of peaceful assembly and association (articles 21 and 22), right to respect for private life and right to liberty (articles 9 and 17).**

**Prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence; equality before the law and effective protection against discrimination on any ground including religion (articles 20 and 26).**

### 1. Defamatory Media Reports

6. Between June 2023 and June 2024, national and regional media outlets published over 200 articles containing false and highly defamatory allegations originating from a small clique of disaffected former Jehovah's Witnesses. In most cases, journalists did not contact the Witnesses to verify the facts about their beliefs and practices. Although Jehovah's Witnesses sought to exercise legal recourse and issued formal right-of-rectification letters, very few were published. Local courts failed to enforce the right-of-rectification process, and lengthy appellate legal proceedings rendered the remedy ineffective.
7. On **24 October 2023**, the Government of Catalonia released a document titled *Guidelines on the News Treatment of Religion in the Media* in Catalan, Spanish and English.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, unsubstantiated defamatory information continues to be propagated by media outlets subject to the guidelines.
8. On **25 March 2024**, the State-owned national television channel, TVE, aired a 40-minute programme in which the presenter and director interviewed a former adherent who had published a book about Jehovah's Witnesses. The presenter made highly damaging and disparaging remarks, giving unquestioned credence to all of the grave allegations made by the interviewee without making any effort to verify or balance them.
9. The presenter described the book as credible, and repeatedly characterized Jehovah's Witnesses as a "destructive cult". He falsely claimed that a local court had labelled the Witnesses in this manner, failing to acknowledge that the same court had recently refuted such comments.<sup>3</sup> A few days later, Jehovah's Witnesses filed a complaint with the TVE Audience Ombudswoman, the Federación de Asociaciones de Periodistas de España, and the Consell d'Informació de Catalunya, bodies regulating journalistic ethics. All declined to censure the biased and unethical method of TVE in conducting the interview.
10. Starting in **April 2024**, one of the largest national newspapers, *ABC*, released the first episode of an eight-part weekly podcast series, *Expelled from Paradise: Surviving Jehovah's Witnesses*, which is entirely based on misinformation and interviews with disaffected former Witnesses. During this period, *ABC* published a total of 36 defamatory articles.

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<sup>2</sup> See Annex 2.

<sup>3</sup> See Annexes 3 and 4.

11. On **1 October 2024**, the television channel Telecinco broadcast a highly negative and slanderous television programme titled *La Verdad de los Testigos de Jehová* (*The Truth About Jehovah's Witnesses*).
12. In **February 2025**, the CEO and President of Fenix Media, a production agency operating under the direction of Telecinco, informed Jehovah's Witnesses that the agency was preparing a biased documentary featuring disaffected former Witnesses. Jehovah's Witnesses declined to participate in the production.

## **2. Hate Speech, Physical Attacks and Vandalism**

13. Jehovah's Witnesses have been targets of hate speech and physical attacks because of their religious beliefs. Several Kingdom Halls (places of worship of Jehovah's Witnesses) throughout the country have been vandalized. Such incidents increased from 8 during 2020 to more than 30 in 2023, following the proliferation of negative media coverage.
14. On **11 March 2023**, a man insulted and threatened three of Jehovah's Witnesses who were peacefully sharing their beliefs in the city of Palma de Mallorca. He threatened to kill the Witnesses if they did not remove a small portable cart displaying religious literature. The Witnesses responded calmly and respectfully, but the insults and threats continued. The incident was reported to the local police; however, the court simply filed the case with no further action.
15. On **23 April 2023**, several Kingdom Halls in Barcelona were vandalized. The facades and the front doors were daubed with graffiti containing hate speech such as "murderers ... homophobic ... ruin life ... Jehovah killer ... cult ... assassins." The Provincial Prosecutor's Office of Barcelona classified seven incidents as hate crimes, but all of them were dismissed because the perpetrators could not be identified.
16. On **2 July 2023**, a person who had previously made threats and shouted verbal abuse in a Kingdom Hall in Sevilla again insulted the attendees at a religious meeting and threatened to kill them. One of Jehovah's Witnesses who was present and had been threatened reported the incident to the local police.
17. On **9 December 2023**, outside a Kingdom Hall in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, a man insulted and threatened to kill several of Jehovah's Witnesses. The assailant threw a stone at a female Witness and performed a lewd act in front of her. He also stoned two cars and set fire to one of them. The fire department, the local police and the Guardia Civil (Civil Guard, a law enforcement agency) intervened. The police identified the perpetrator, and a hate crime complaint was made to the Prosecutor's Office. Also, Jehovah's Witnesses were informed that no further investigation could be carried out because the proceedings requested in the complaint (examination of the suspect's electronic devices) "would be disproportionate and excessively invasive with the existing evidence and the seriousness of the crimes investigated."
18. On **12 December 2023**, while a religious meeting was being held at a Kingdom Hall in Valencia, offensive graffiti using the Nazi swastika symbol was sprayed on the facade.
19. On **19 December 2023**, an unknown person left an envelope with "Call the Police" in large letters at a store near the centre of Almería. It contained a letter claiming that a bomb would explode at 9 p.m. in the Kingdom Hall on Margarita Street. Police and TEDAX (Technical Specialists in the Deactivation of Explosive Artefacts) arrived while a religious meeting was

in progress, and quickly evacuated the building. No bomb was found. The police were unable to link a suspect to the evidence, but a hate crime complaint was filed with the Prosecutor's Office. On **11 February 2025**, the Provincial Prosecutor's Office of Almería informed Jehovah's Witnesses that the case has been archived "on the grounds that the facts denounced constitute a crime, although there is no known perpetrator."

20. The majority of the cases described above were simply archived with no further follow-up because of the absence of an identifiable perpetrator, and some of them were simply classified by police and prosecutors as crimes of damage, threats or injury rather than as hate crimes.

### **3. Discriminatory Taxation Against Jehovah's Witnesses**

21. The tax regime for non-profit organizations regulated by Law 49/2022, establishes that religious denominations with the "well-established" legal status are granted exemptions from property, capital gains and construction taxes once they have signed a formal agreement with the Government. Jehovah's Witnesses and four other minority religions suffer discrimination because they have so far been prevented from benefiting from these exemptions.
22. On **25 April 2023**, the Minister of the Presidency announced that the law would be adjusted, so Jehovah's Witnesses and the four other religious minorities would receive the same tax exemptions as the four "traditional religions" with a signed agreement. However, the legislative initiative was cancelled when the Prime Minister of Spain called a general election.
23. Several months after the election, the Government informed Jehovah's Witnesses that the legislative process to adjust Law 49/2022 would resume. Later, they were told that the process for the proposed amendments would need to begin again.
24. On **February 19, 2025**, the PSOE (Ruling Socialist Party) presented a proposed legal reform to Congress to extend the tax benefits enjoyed by the Catholic Church and other denominations having an agreement with the State to five additional minority religions who are also officially recognized as having "established roots" (the Bahá'í faith, Buddhists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and the Orthodox Church). This reform seeks to equalize tax conditions for all "well-established" religious denominations (see Annex No. 4).

### **III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

25. Jehovah's Witnesses in Spain and as a worldwide organization express concern about the human rights violations exposed above in the submission. They respectfully request the Government of Spain to take the necessary steps to:
  - (1) Ensure that discriminatory taxation of Jehovah's Witnesses ceases in line with exemptions accorded to traditional "well-established religions";
  - (2) Ensure that media standards prohibiting defamation are applied and that news outlets are held accountable for false and defamatory reports against Jehovah's Witnesses;
  - (3) Protect freedom of religion by prosecuting those who commit hate crimes against Jehovah's Witnesses;
  - (4) Abide by its commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Covenant for all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses.

**Expediente: 121/000031**

**Nº Borrador de Enmienda: 16**

## **AUTOR**

GRUPO PARLAMENTARIO SOCIALISTA

## **Precepto que se añade:**

Disposiciones finales nuevas

## **Texto que se propone**

Disposición final (nueva). Modificación de la Ley 49/2002, de 23 de diciembre, de régimen fiscal de las entidades sin fines lucrativos y de los incentivos fiscales al mecenazgo.

Se modifica la disposición adicional novena, que queda redactada de la siguiente forma:

Disposición adicional novena. Régimen tributario de la Iglesia Católica, otras iglesias, confesiones y comunidades religiosas.

1.El régimen previsto en los artículos 5 a 15, ambos inclusive, de esta Ley será de aplicación a la Iglesia Católica y a las iglesias, confesiones y comunidades religiosas que tengan suscritos acuerdos de cooperación con el Estado español, sin perjuicio de lo establecido en los acuerdos a que se refiere la disposición adicional anterior.

Así mismo, será de aplicación a las iglesias, confesiones y comunidades religiosas y sus respectivas federaciones que, inscritas en el Registro de Entidades Religiosas, tengan reconocido notorio arraigo en España. En el caso de que el notorio arraigo hubiera sido solicitado por una federación, las entidades deberán formar parte de dicha federación.

2. El régimen previsto en esta Ley será también de aplicación a las asociaciones y entidades religiosas comprendidas en el artículo V del Acuerdo sobre Asuntos Económicos suscrito entre el Estado español y la Santa Sede, así como a las entidades contempladas en el apartado 5 del artículo 11 de la Ley 24/1992, de 10 de noviembre, por la que se aprueba el Acuerdo de Cooperación del Estado con la Federación de Entidades Religiosas Evangélicas de España; en el apartado 5 del artículo 11 de la Ley 25/1992, de 10 de noviembre, por la que se aprueba el Acuerdo de Cooperación del Estado con la Federación de Comunidades Israelitas de España, y en el apartado 4 del artículo 11 de la Ley 26/1992, de 10 de noviembre, por la que se aprueba el Acuerdo de Cooperación del Estado con la Comisión Islámica de España, siempre que estas entidades cumplan los requisitos exigidos por esta Ley a las entidades sin fines lucrativos para la aplicación de dicho régimen.

En las mismas condiciones, el régimen previsto en esta Ley, será de aplicación a las asociaciones y entidades creadas o dependientes de las iglesias, confesiones, comunidades religiosas y sus respectivas federaciones que, inscritas en el Registro de Entidades Religiosas, tengan reconocido notorio arraigo en España. En el caso de que el notorio arraigo hubiera sido solicitado por una federación, las entidades que se acojan a dicho régimen, deberán contar con la conformidad de tal federación.

3. Las entidades de la Iglesia Católica contempladas en los artículos IV y V del Acuerdo sobre Asuntos Económicos entre el Estado español y la Santa Sede, las igualmente existentes en los acuerdos de cooperación del Estado español con otras iglesias, confesiones y comunidades religiosas, así como las entidades referidas en los apartados anteriores que hayan obtenido notorio arraigo en España, serán consideradas entidades beneficiarias del mecenazgo a los efectos previstos en los artículos 16 a 25, ambos inclusive, de esta Ley.

### **Justificación**

Se trata de suprimir las diferencias de trato en el régimen fiscal de las confesiones religiosas que han obtenido el mismo reconocimiento de notorio arraigo por parte del Estado, no haciendo depender la aplicación de dicho régimen de una norma especial y singular como es el acuerdo de cooperación en una materia que permite un tratamiento jurídico general alcanzando mayor igualdad entre los diferentes creyentes de confesiones que tienen el mismo reconocimiento del Estado y por tanto, también, más neutralidad de los poderes públicos.





Roj: **SJPI 1682/2023 - ECLI:ES:JPI:2023:1682**

Id Cendoj: **28148420012023100001**

Órgano: **Juzgado de Primera Instancia**

Sede: **Torrejón de Ardoz**

Sección: **1**

Fecha: **25/10/2023**

Nº de Recurso: **432/2021**

Nº de Resolución: **310/2023**

Procedimiento: **Procedimiento Ordinario. Derecho al honor (Art. 249.1.2 LEC)**

Ponente: **GONZALO MARTIN VAZQUEZ**

Tipo de Resolución: **Sentencia**

### **JUZGADO DE 1ª INSTANCIA Nº 1 DE TORREJÓN DE ARDOZ**

C/ Granados, 18-20 , Planta 1 - 28850

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42020303

NIG: 28.148.00.2-2021/0005927

**Procedimiento: Proced. Ordinario (Dcho al honor, intimidación, imagen y cualquier otro derecho fundamental - 249.1.2) 432/2021**

Materia: Derechos Fundamentales

Grupo F

**Demandante:** TESTIGOS CRISTIANOS DE JEHOVÁ

PROCURADOR D./Dña. JAIME QUIÑONES BUENO

**Demandado:** D./Dña. Héctor PROCURADOR D./Dña. **MARIA JOSE RODRIGUEZ JIMENEZ**

### **SENTENCIA Nº 310/2023**

En Torrejón de Ardoz, a veinticinco de octubre de dos mil veintitrés

Vistos por mí D. Gonzalo Martín Vázquez, magistrado titular del Juzgado de Primera Instancia nº 1 de Torrejón de Ardoz, los presentes autos de Juicio Ordinario nº 432/2021 en los que han intervenido como parte demandante el Procurador de los Tribunales D. Juan de la Ossa Montes en nombre y representación de TESTIGOS CRISTIANOS DE JEHOVÁ; y como parte demandada D. Héctor representado por la Procuradora de los Tribunales Dña. **María José** Rodríguez Jiménez

### **ANTECEDENTES DE HECHO**

**PRIMERO** . - En fecha 3 de mayo de 2021 se presentó por el procurador D. Juan de la Ossa Montes, actuando en nombre y representación de TESTIGOS CRISTIANOS DE JEHOVÁ, demanda de juicio ordinario sobre protección del derecho del honor contra D. Héctor .

**SEGUNDO** . - Por decreto de 16 de septiembre de 2021 este juzgado admitió a trámite la demanda, dando traslado de la misma al demandado y al Ministerio Fiscal con entrega de copia y de los documentos acompañados y emplazándole para que contestara en el plazo legalmente establecido. Dicha contestación se produjo a través de escrito presentado en tiempo y forma, por medio de los cual opuso a la demanda solicitando que se dictara sentencia desestimatoria con imposición de las costas procesales a la parte actora. Cumplimentado este trámite se citó a las partes para la celebración de la audiencia previa prevista en el artículo

414 de la LEC, que tuvo lugar el 21 de septiembre de 2022 con la presencia de ambas partes personadas. Declarada abierta esta audiencia por S.Sª no se logró un acuerdo que pusiera fin al litigio, centrando los letrados sus respectivas pretensiones y solicitando el recibimiento de pleito a prueba. Tras ser declarados admitirse y declararse pertinentes los medios de prueba propuestos, se citó a las partes para la celebración del juicio.

**TERCERO** .- En el acto del juicio celebrado en dos sesiones los días 20 y 21 de septiembre de 2023, habiendo acudido el Ministerio Fiscal, tras la práctica de la prueba propuesta y admitida en la audiencia previa consistente en la documental que obra en autos y el interrogatorio de los testigos Dña. Bárbara , Dña. Belen , D. Leopoldo , D. Lucas , D. Luis , D. Mario , Dña. Claudia , Dña. Covadonga , Dña. Custodia , Dña. Delfina , Dña. Elisa , Dña. Eloisa , Dña. Esmeralda , D. Raúl , Dña. Estrella y Dña. Eva, quedaron las actuaciones vistas para resolver por medio de sentencia una vez que los letrados y el Ministerio Fiscal expusieron sus respectivas conclusiones.

**CUARTO** . - En la tramitación y sustanciación de estos autos se han observado en lo *sustancial las prescripciones legales, quedando el juicio registrado en soporte apto para la grabación y reproducción del sonido y de la imagen dando cumplimiento a lo dispuesto en el Art. 187.1 de la LEC* .

A los que son de aplicación los siguientes

## FUNDAMENTOS DE DERECHO

**PRIMERO** . - La acción ejercitada en este procedimiento es una acción de declaración de intromisión ilegítima en el derecho al honor, siendo que para la adecuada comprensión del objeto del proceso debe hacerse una breve exposición inicial de los principales acontecimientos: afirma la entidad actora que desde el 27 de marzo de 2019 y a través de la plataforma "Youtube", el demandado difunde un vídeo denominado "Presentación de la Asociación Española de Víctimas de los Testigos de Jehová" que daña la reputación y prestigio de la comunidad religiosa. Concretamente, atribuye la comisión de abusos sexuales y daños mentales a los miembros. Aduce que se han creado cuentas en Facebook y Twitter con la denominación ofensiva "Asociación de Víctimas de los Testigos de Jehová". Considera que se ha vulnerado su derecho al honor, solicitando el cese de la divulgación, la retirada del video de Youtube, una indemnización por daños y perjuicios y la condena a publicar el fallo de la sentencia con la misma difusión pública. El demandado contesta aduciendo que todo lo publicado se fundamenta en innumerables testimonios de víctimas de los abusos. Asimismo, aduce que las manifestaciones que efectúa en el vídeo se refieren a los miembros de la asociación actora que ocultan los abusos; alega que forma parte de la libertad de expresión; y que publica lo que difunden terceras personas. Invoca falta de legitimación activa ya que las entidades jurídicas de derecho público no son titulares de derechos fundamentales. En fase de conclusiones a la finalización del juicio, el Ministerio Público pidió la íntegra desestimación de la demanda.

**SEGUNDO** . - Lo primero que ha de tenerse en cuenta es que el **Art. 217 de la LEC** establece en sus **apartados 2 y 3** que *"corresponde al actor y al demandado reconviniendo, la carga de probar la certeza de los hechos de los que ordinariamente se desprenda, según las normas jurídicas a ellos aplicables, el efecto jurídico correspondiente a las pretensiones de la demanda y de la reconvencción. Incumbe al demandado y al actor reconvenido, la carga de probar los hechos que, conforme a las normas que les sean aplicables, impidan, extingan o enerven la eficacia jurídica de los hechos a que se refiere el apartado anterior."* Partiendo de esta norma básica acerca de la distribución de la carga probatoria, ha de ser la parte actora quien acredite todos los hechos que justifiquen la prosperabilidad de su demanda, si bien, como se infiere de la demanda y su contestación, realmente no se discute sobre del contenido del video en cuestión, de modo que este hecho ha de tenerse por acreditado conforme establece el Art. 281.3 de la LEC. Dicho esto, lo primero que ha de reseñarse es que el derecho al honor (que es el específicamente invocado derecho fundamental como presuntamente vulnerado) comprende tanto la estimación que cada persona tiene de sí misma como la consideración que le tienen los terceros. Y hemos de partir del contenido de la **Ley Orgánica 1/1982, de 5 de mayo, de protección civil del derecho al honor, a la intimidad personal y familiar y a la propia imagen**, cuyo Art. Primero. 1 establece que *"el derecho fundamental al honor, a la intimidad personal y familiar y a la propia imagen, garantizado en el artículo dieciocho de la Constitución, será protegido civilmente frente a todo género de intromisiones ilegítimas, de acuerdo con lo establecido en la presente Ley Orgánica"*. Y el **Art. Séptimo** señala que *"tendrán la consideración de intromisiones ilegítimas en el ámbito de protección delimitado por el artículo segundo de esta Ley : 1. El emplazamiento en cualquier lugar de aparatos de escucha, de filmación, de dispositivos ópticos o de cualquier otro medio apto para grabar o reproducir la vida íntima de las personas; 2. La utilización de aparatos de escucha, dispositivos ópticos, o de cualquier otro medio para el conocimiento de la vida íntima de las personas o de manifestaciones o cartas privadas no destinadas a quien haga uso de tales medios, así como su grabación, registro o reproducción; 3. La divulgación de hechos relativos a la vida privada de una persona o familia que*

*afecten a su reputación y buen nombre, así como la revelación o publicación del contenido de cartas, memorias u otros escritos personales de carácter íntimo; 4. La revelación de datos privados de una persona o familia conocidos a través de la actividad profesional u oficial de quien los revela; 5. La captación, reproducción o publicación por fotografía, filme, o cualquier otro procedimiento, de la imagen de una persona en lugares o momentos de su vida privada o fuera de ellos, salvo los casos previstos en el artículo octavo, dos; 6. La utilización del nombre, de la voz o de la imagen de una persona para fines publicitarios, comerciales o de naturaleza análoga; 7. La imputación de hechos o la manifestación de juicios de valor a través de acciones o expresiones que de cualquier modo lesionen la dignidad de otra persona, menoscabando su fama o atentando contra su propia estimación; 8. La utilización del delito por el condenado en sentencia penal firme para conseguir notoriedad pública u obtener provecho económico, o la divulgación de datos falsos sobre los hechos delictivos, cuando ello suponga el menoscabo de la dignidad de las víctimas".*

**TERCERO.** - Expuesto lo anterior y en cuanto a la *legitimación activa* de la demandante, es evidente que la posee desde el momento en que estamos ante una entidad jurídica, debiendo verse que el Tribunal Supremo en su sentencia de 7 de julio de 2009 señaló que "...en cuanto a la posibilidad de vulneración del derecho al honor de una persona jurídica, que la misma es afirmada por la jurisprudencia de esta Sala. Así, como se exponía en sentencia de 9 de octubre de 1997 el honor, fama o prestigio de una persona jurídica es indudable e indiscutible; se puede ofender a una persona física ni tampoco a una jurídica; una persona jurídica que es atacada en su buena fama, su prestigio o su honor, tiene indudablemente acción para su protección, sea persona jurídica de tipo personalista (*universitas personarum*), sea de tipo patrimonialista (*universitas bonorum*). A su vez, la sentencia nº 139/1995, de 26 de septiembre, del Tribunal Constitucional contiene una doctrina que puede resumirse de la siguiente manera: ninguna norma constitucional ni de rango legal impide que las personas jurídicas puedan ser sujetos de los derechos fundamentales; la Constitución contiene un reconocimiento de derechos fundamentales para determinados tipos de organizaciones; aunque el honor es un valor referible a personas individualmente consideradas, el derecho a su propia estimación no es patrimonio exclusivo de las mismas; el significado del derecho al honor ni puede ni debe excluir de su ámbito de protección a las personas jurídicas; la persona jurídica puede ver lesionado su derecho al honor a través de la divulgación de hechos concernientes a su entidad, cuando la difame o la *haga desmerecer en la consideración ajena*. Siguiendo esta doctrina, la sentencia de esta Sala de 14 de marzo de 1996 dice a): «la persona física y, por extensión constitucional, la persona jurídica, son merecedores de esta tutela» (se refiere al honor), y la de 20 de marzo de 1997 dice: «en lo que respecta a la cuestión de si las personas jurídicas puedan ser protegidas a través del ejercicio del derecho al honor, superando el brocardo que especifica que "las personas jurídicas tienen prestigio pero no honor". Efectivamente, aunque en la Constitución Española no se contiene pronunciamiento alguno acerca de la titularidad del derecho al honor en relación a las personas jurídicas, a diferencia de la Ley Fundamental de Bonn de 1.949 que proclama que los derechos fundamentales rigen para las personas jurídicas. Sin embargo a partir de la doctrina sentada a partir de la sentencia del Tribunal Constitucional de 26 de septiembre de 1995, se puede afirmar que de la propia sistemática constitucional el significado del derecho ni puede ni debe excluir de su ámbito de protección a las personas jurídicas». En consecuencia, esta Sala ha proclamado que la persona jurídica tiene derecho al honor, protegido constitucionalmente por el artículo 18.1 de la Constitución, regulado por la Ley 1/1982, de 5 de mayo y tiene legitimación activa en el proceso ejercitado para su defensa. En la Sentencia de 4 de diciembre de 2008 se recuerda la doctrina expuesta". Véase también la STS de 27 de noviembre de 2008 en términos similares. Aplicando esta doctrina al supuestos en ciernes, solo cabe confirmar que una asociación o entidad religiosa reconocida oficialmente como ante la que nos encontramos, puede perfectamente ser titular del derecho fundamental al honor que nos ocupa, de modo que ha de ser rechazada la excepción sustantiva planteada por la parte demandada.

**CUARTO.** - Pasando al fondo de la cuestión, si las manifestaciones contenidas en el vídeo lesionan la dignidad de la asociación religiosa, menoscabando su fama o atentando contra su propia estimación: aun cuando el derecho al honor se halla reconocido en profusa jurisprudencia (sentencias del Tribunal Supremo, entre otras, de 20 de marzo y 21 de mayo de 1997, 15 de febrero de 2000 y 5 de julio de 2004), sin embargo tampoco cabe valorar la intromisión con los mismos parámetros que cuando se trata de personas físicas, porque respecto de éstas resaltan dos aspectos: el interno de la inmanencia o mismidad, que se refiere a la íntima convicción o sentimiento de dignidad de la propia persona, y el externo de la trascendencia que alude a la valoración social, es decir, a la reputación o fama reflejada en la consideración de los demás (sentencias del TS de 14 de noviembre de 2002 y 6 de junio de 2003), mas cuando se trata de las personas jurídicas resulta difícil concebir el aspecto inmanente por lo que la problemática se centra en la apreciación del aspecto trascendente o exterior, consideración pública protegible (STS de 15 de abril de 1992 y 27 de julio de 1998), que no cabe simplemente identificar con la reputación empresarial, comercial, o en general del mero prestigio con que se desarrolla la actividad. Partiendo de estas ideas y continuando con las orientaciones jurisprudenciales en la materia, la sentencia de la Audiencia Provincial de Madrid de 11 de diciembre de 2009 establece que "...dice la reciente Sentencia del Tribunal Supremo Sala 1ª, S16-7-2008, nº 686/2008, existe ya una amplia jurisprudencia



de esta Sala, así como doctrina del Tribunal Constitucional, acerca del concepto del derecho fundamental al honor y las lesiones que pueden producirse como consecuencia de la publicación de artículos periodísticos que, en base a un alegado derecho a la información, incurren en el demérito o menosprecio de una persona. Es cierto que el Tribunal Constitucional ha reconocido que el concepto de "derecho al honor" carece de contornos precisos y que es relativo, en el sentido que es adaptable a las circunstancias presentes en cada momento en una determinada sociedad. La STC 49/2001, de 26 de febrero, afirma que "(...) ampara la buena reputación de una persona, protegiéndola frente a expresiones o mensajes que puedan hacerla desmerecer en la consideración ajena al ir en su descrédito o menosprecio o al ser tenidas en el concepto público por afrentosas. Por ello las libertades del art. 20.1 a) y d) CE, ni protegen la divulgación de hechos que, defraudando el derecho de todos a recibir información veraz, no son sino simples rumores, invenciones o insinuaciones carentes de fundamento, ni dan cobertura constitucional a expresiones formalmente injuriosas e innecesarias para el mensaje que se desea divulgar, en las que simplemente su emisor exterioriza su personal menosprecio o animosidad respecto del ofendido", o sea, que en definitiva consiste en el derecho a que otros no condicionen negativamente la opinión que los demás hayan de formarse de una persona. El derecho al honor conecta y debe ponerse en relación con el concepto constitucional de dignidad de la persona, reconocido en el artículo 10 de la CE, que debe informar la interpretación del artículo 18 CE y de las reglas contenidas en la LO 1/1982, de 5 de mayo, de Protección Civil del Derecho al Honor, a la Intimidad Personal y Familiar y a la Propia Imagen". Ahora bien, continúa diciendo la sentencia que "el derecho al honor no es absoluto y queda limitado por el derecho a la información, reconocido asimismo como derecho fundamental en el artículo 20 CE. El juez del caso debe ponderar los derechos en conflicto y de aquí que la STC 76/2002, de 8 de abril, aplique el criterio de la proporcionalidad, diciendo lo siguiente: "Ahora bien, la reputación ajena (art. 10.2 CEDH, SSTEDH caso *Lingens*, de 8 de julio de 1986 y caso *Bladet Tromsø y Stensaas*, de 20 de mayo de 1999 o el honor, constituyen un límite del derecho a expresarse libremente y de la libertad de informar (SSTC 297/2000, de 11 de diciembre y 49/2001, de 26 de febrero). Y es doctrina reiterada de este Tribunal, coincidente en lo sustancial con la elaborada por el Tribunal Europeo de Derechos Humanos al interpretar el art. 10.1 del *Convenio europeo de derechos humanos*, que en los supuestos de conflicto entre el derecho a la libre emisión de información y los derechos al honor, la intimidad y la propia imagen, garantizados en el art. 18.1 CE, la adecuada solución exige que se explicita la toma en consideración de ambos derechos en presencia (SSTC 104/1986, de 17 de julio y 76/1995, de 22 de mayo)". Así como la STC 85/1992 de 8 junio, que en relación al problema de la ponderación, afirma que "es importante destacar que, al efectuar la ponderación debe tenerse también muy presente la relevancia que en la misma tiene el criterio de la proporcionalidad como principio inherente del Estado de Derecho cuya condición de canon de constitucionalidad, reconocida en sentencias del más variado contenido (SSTC 62/1982, 35/1985, 65/1986, 160/1986, 6/1988, 19/1988, 209/1988, 37/1989, 113/1989, 138/1989, 178/1989 y 154/1990) tiene especial aplicación cuando se trata de proteger derechos fundamentales frente a limitaciones o constricciones, procedan éstas de normas o resoluciones singulares". Aunque es indiscutible que existe una limitación importante en la libertad de expresión, que persigue la correcta información de los ciudadanos". Llegados a este punto, la referida sentencia de la AP de Madrid incide en "...los requisitos que se reconocen para que no se entienda lesionado el derecho al honor de una persona: 1º- La relevancia pública de la información. Es una línea común en todas las sentencias de esta Sala, así como las del Tribunal Constitucional, que la libertad de expresión no protege la mera curiosidad ajena (STC 134/1999, de 15 julio), diciendo la STC 20/1992, de 14 febrero, que para que pueda afectar un derecho fundamental se requiere que su proyección sea legítima y que lo informado sea de interés público, ya sea porque los hechos tengan relevancia pública o porque las personas a las que afectan estos hechos sean públicamente relevantes.... 2º- El respeto a la dignidad de la persona. A pesar del derecho a la información, el empleo innecesario de términos vejatorios o injuriosos no precisos para transmitirla constituirá una lesión del derecho al honor, porque como ha afirmado la STC 105/1990, de 6 junio, el derecho a la información no autoriza el insulto (STC 158/2003, de 15 septiembre y STSS de 3 marzo 2003 y de 22 febrero 2006) ....".

**QUINTO**.- Luego el ejercicio de la libertad de expresión no lesivo del derecho al honor exige: a) que la información publicada no contenga insultos, vejaciones o injurias, de modo que en este punto se convierte en un límite al derecho a la libertad de expresión e información (STC 20/1990, de 15 febrero); b) no ampara la información redactada en términos formalmente injuriosos e innecesarios para el mensaje que se desea divulgar, por lo que excluye la basada en simples rumores; c) exige que sea veraz y que ostente relevancia pública (SSTS de 30 junio y 26 julio 2006). La sentencia del Tribunal Constitucional Sala 1ª, S 5-5-2000, nº 112/2000 establece que "este Tribunal ha venido diferenciando desde la STC 104/1986, de 17 de julio, entre la amplitud de ejercicio de los derechos reconocidos en el art. 20.1 CE según se trate de libertad de expresión (en el sentido de la emisión de juicios personales y subjetivos, creencias, pensamientos y opiniones) y libertad de información (en cuanto a la narración de hechos). Con relación a la primera, al tratarse de la formulación de "pensamientos, ideas y opiniones" [art. 20.1 a) CE], sin pretensión de sentar hechos o afirmar datos objetivos, dispone de un campo de acción que viene sólo delimitado por la ausencia de expresiones indudablemente injuriosas o sin relación

con las ideas u opiniones que se expongan y que resulten innecesarias para la exposición de las mismas ( STC 105/1990, de 6 de junio). Cuando se persigue suministrar información sobre hechos, la protección constitucional se extiende únicamente a la información veraz ( art. 20.1 d) de la CE). Este requisito de veracidad no puede, obviamente, exigirse de juicios o evaluaciones personales y subjetivas, sin perjuicio de que, de venir aquella información acompañada de juicios de valor u opiniones, estas últimas deban someterse al canon propio de la libertad de expresión, pues el ejercicio del derecho de crítica tampoco permite emplear expresiones formalmente injuriosas o innecesarias para lo que se desea expresar o comunicar, que bien pueden constituir intromisiones constitucionalmente ilegítimas en el honor ajeno ( SSTC 105/1990, de 6 de junio, 85/1992, de 8 de junio, 134/1999, de 15 de julio, 192/1999, de 25 de octubre). También destaca la sentencia del TC 180/1999 donde se incide en que "el derecho al honor es un concepto jurídico cuya precisión depende de las normas, valores e ideas sociales vigentes en cada momento. De ahí que los órganos judiciales dispongan de un cierto margen de apreciación a la hora de concretar en cada caso qué deba tenerse por lesivo de aquel derecho fundamental. No obstante esta imprecisión del objeto del derecho al honor, este Tribunal ha afirmado que ese derecho ampara a la persona frente a expresiones o mensajes que lo hagan desmerecer en la consideración ajena al ir en su descrédito o menosprecio o que fueran tenidas en el concepto público por afrentosas. Por tal razón hemos dicho que las libertades del art. 20.1 a) y d) CE ni protegen la divulgación de hechos que, defraudando el derecho de todos a recibir información veraz, son simples rumores, invenciones o insinuaciones carentes de fundamento, ni dan cobertura constitucional a expresiones formalmente injuriosas o innecesarias para el mensaje que se desea divulgar, en las que simplemente su emisor exterioriza su personal menosprecio o animosidad respecto del ofendido. No cabe dejar de advertir, sin embargo, que este derecho fundamental al honor está, a su vez, limitado por los derechos fundamentales a opinar e informar libremente. Por ello cabe la posibilidad, según las circunstancias del caso, de que la reputación ajena tenga que soportar restricciones cuando lo requiera la relevancia pública de aquello sobre lo que se informa o se opina". *Pues bien, en el caso que nos ocupa estamos en el vídeo ante unas narraciones de unos hechos en relación con los cuales se formulan juicios personales u opiniones sobre la conducta o actitud en general de la confesión religiosa ahora demandante, de forma que los términos del examen deben tener en cuenta los hechos y las opiniones a las que aquéllas sirven de soporte, comprobando, en el contexto del vídeo, si la información suministrada es veraz y si no contiene expresiones formal o manifiestamente injuriosas. Cosa distinta sería que las expresiones que se enjuician no sean ni formal ni manifiestamente injuriosas, sino que se trate de meros juicios, valoraciones, calificaciones o epítetos que puedan resultar molestos, hirientes, incluso de mal gusto y despectivos, pero no vulneradores del derecho al honor. Y como es fácil de ver, todo esto nos obliga a hacer un examen cauto de esas expresiones y de la forma en que se narran los hechos sobre los que se sustenta el juicio crítico y el contexto en el que aquellas expresiones se vierten, ya que únicamente la veracidad de los hechos revelados y la relevancia pública que los mismos puedan tener, pueden imponer un límite tal al derecho al honor de la entidad actora, que ésta deba tolerar la divulgación de aquella información.*

**SEXTO** .- Pues bien, no siendo controvertido el contenido del vídeo, destacan varios aspectos: primeramente, que el demandado no es un mero difusor ajeno o imparcial de opiniones o narraciones de hechos, en relación con antiguos miembros de la confesión religiosa de los Testigos de Jehová, sino que no solo también fue miembro de dicha asociación religiosa, sino que forma parte de la denominada Asociación de Víctimas de Testigos de Jehová (como él mismo revela al inicio del vídeo enjuiciado). Véase que el vídeo lo que supone es un acto o conferencia de presentación de la antedicha AVTJ, con el ahora demandado como primer conferenciante. En segundo lugar, resulta colmada la exigencia constitucional de que la información o hechos exteriorizados sean de relevancia pública, ya que estamos ante una entidad religiosa con carácter global, extendida por múltiples lugares del mundo, cuyas circunstancias o vicisitudes tanto positivas como negativas son o pueden ser de interés noticiable para la población en general. Y en tercer lugar, hay que llevar a cabo un análisis del vídeo y, efectuando una siempre compleja valoración proporcionada de los hechos que refleja, concluir si resultan inexactos y en evidente perjuicio de la imagen, estima o consideración pública que posee la entidad demandante. Pero antes reseñar un aspecto: a juicio de este juzgador, ha existido una relevante discordancia entre lo que es el estricto objeto del proceso (si las afirmaciones del Sr. Héctor en el vídeo atentan contra el derecho al honor de la actora) y lo que en último término ha supuesto el desarrollo de la prueba desplegada por las partes, con una cantidad elevada de testigos que, en último término, lo que trataban era de analizar o enjuiciar de una u otra manera las creencias o dogmas de la confesión religiosa, lo que este juzgador trató de forma insistencia de hacer ver, siendo que en cierta manera la parte demandada lo que en el fondo pretendía era llevar a cabo un análisis crítico de textos bíblicos y normas varias de la confesión. Pero esta línea argumental no puede ser admitida desde el momento en que la libertad religiosa se configura como una libertad intelectual de trascendental importancia en cualquier sociedad democrática, no siendo aceptable que atendiendo a principios o valores sociales siempre mutables en el tiempo, se pretenda (aunque sea conceptualmente) arremeter contra unos u otros dogmas religiosos, puesto que (como se ha dicho) forma parte de la incontestable libertad religiosa que ostentan todos los ciudadanos el creer en lo que

estimen oportuno (lo que ha de predicarse no solo de la asociación actora, sino de cualquier otra religión o confesión religiosa implantada en España). Luego la esencia de este procedimiento no es más que *analizar si las expresiones proferidas por el Sr. Héctor en este vídeo de presentación han vulnerado o no el derecho al honor de la actora. Justamente, siendo que no es controvertido el vídeo, quien suscribe esta resolución lo ha visualizado atentamente y observa los siguientes datos a tener en cuenta: al ser una conferencia de presentación de una asociación que ulteriormente ha sido debidamente registrada, el demandado efectúa una exposición de sobre lo que son los testigos de Jehová y, sobre todo, lo que son los ex miembros de los testigos de Jehová y las razones por las que acaban siéndolo. Y es notorio que el tono verbal empleado es sumamente calmado, sosegado, sin apreciarse estridencias ni una intensidad fuera de lugar, usando expresiones que no pueden catalogarse de insultantes en sí mismas en lo que concierne a los vocablos empleados. Además, atendiendo a los extractos que la parte actora en su demanda reputa atentatorios de su derecho al honor (aportó oportunamente el letrado en el juicio, documentalmente, una especie de guía a seguir), observo que coinciden literalmente con lo manifestado por el Sr. Héctor en el vídeo, de modo que sin más paso a valorar esas expresiones en el fundamento de derecho siguiente.*

**SÉPTIMO** .- a) Refiere la actora las expresiones contenidas en los minutos 2:33 a 3:08, donde supuestamente el demandado estaría fomentando la generación de estereotipos respecto de los testigos de Jehová, además de imputarles la ocultación de delitos, sobre todo en casos de abusos de menores. Pero si vemos las locuciones usadas, ciertamente estamos ante una escueta y más que puntual referencia a que según su opinión, cuando hay un caso público (dentro de la congregación) de la existencia de un abusador (referido a abusador de menores), "ellos traten de ocultarlo de la mejor manera posible". Pero esta expresión en sí misma no implica que atribuya a "ellos" (los testigos de Jehová) la persistente ocultación de supuestos abusos sexuales dentro de la congregación, sino que se refiere (o, al menos, lingüísticamente puede referirse, ya que al no haberse interrogado en el juicio al Sr. Héctor no puede conocerse su intención) a que tratan de ocultar que existe un presunto abusador (es decir, no encubrir el hecho sino al presunto autor), lo que es muy distinto. En todo caso, más allá de aquella somera expresión, en la conferencia no se lleva a cabo ninguna otra alusión a la predisposición de la actora para cometer infracciones penales ni para, concretamente, ocultar actos delictivos sobre menores, de modo que más allá de que no existan pruebas bastantes de que tal contexto encubridor sea cierto, concluyo que efectuando el proporcionado juicio de ponderación que exige la Jurisprudencia, no se ha vulnerado el derecho al honor de la entidad demandante. La misma conclusión predico respecto de las palabras "pero no una puesta en conocimiento de las autoridades del asunto, ellos no se consideran obligados", ya que tampoco el demandado especifica que la entidad activamente impida o compela a sus miembros a no comunicar a las "autoridades" el conocimiento de presuntos abusos sexuales, no reiterándose este tipo de locuciones por el Sr. Héctor a lo largo de su intervención. Las profusión de testificales llevadas a cabo en el juicio no hacen sino confirmar estas conclusiones ya que, en el fondo, lo que ha habido es un despliegue de las desiguales opiniones que tienen los miembros y los ex miembros de los testigos de Jehová sobre la cuestión, defendiendo cada uno de ellos su particular visión de lo que ha de entenderse por la confesión religiosa. Mas como este juzgador ya indicó anteriormente, lo importante no es si los testigos refutan o confirman que se ocultan abusos sexuales o cualquier otro delito, sino si las limitadas expresiones emitidas por el Sr. Héctor al respecto en el vídeo, afectan o no al derecho al honor de la demandante. Y como se ha indicado, en ningún momento imputa un comportamiento activo de la congregación para tapar tales abusos o para compeler a sus miembros a no revelarlo a las autoridades. En realidad, los testimonios han dejado claro que lo que al parecer puede acaecer es que existen *dos ámbitos de actuación o intervención de la entidad religiosa: la interna, que forma parte de la libertad de auto regulación que tienen todas las religiones para tratar un aspecto en cuestión (como es el modo de abordar o sancionar un presunto abuso sexuales entre miembros), y la externa donde, como han declarado prácticamente todos los testigos propuestos por la demandante, en ningún momento se les impide (tampoco se deja claro por la contraparte cómo podría impedirse) acudir a las autoridades policiales o judiciales para denunciarlo, siendo esferas distintas y paralelas que pueden coexistir perfectamente, pareciendo irrelevante en lo que aquí nos importa si existe o no una especie de tribunal "eclesiástico" que juzga internamente estas cuestiones, porque ello no impide que se pueda y deba acudir en su caso a las autoridades policiales o judiciales.* Luego aunque tal vez las palabras del Sr. Héctor en su alocución sean un tanto excesivas, tampoco imputa a la entidad actora la ejecución de un entramado manipulador destinado a evitar activamente que un abuso sexual a menores trascienda a las autoridades, de modo que todas las declaraciones a este respecto no poseen más relevancia al respecto.

b) Alude la demandante a las palabras comprendidas entre los minutos 4:49 y 5:40, que presuntamente estarían encaminadas a convencer falsariamente de que la entidad religiosa incita a sus miembros a cometer delito mintiendo a las autoridades. Escuchando el vídeo, nuevamente no se aprecia que las locuciones revelen nada más allá que un ideario genérico de que "no dicen la verdad" o "están dispuestos a mentir a las primeras de cambio", considerando este juzgador que dichas expresiones son tan abstractas además de parcas, que forman parte de la libertad de expresión del demandado sin que, por el contrario, afecten de una forma



sustantiva el derecho al honor de la actora. Lo mismo lo expresado en los minutos 7:20 a 7:36, donde el Sr. Héctor estrictamente refiere una experiencia personal donde varios testigos de Jehová acudieron a domicilio con fines apostólicos. Sí que es cierto que acto seguido revela más genéricamente que no solo mienten a las personas, sino que "mienten a las autoridades y mienten incluso a los tribunales judiciales", pero como tampoco especifica en qué medida ello se produciría, o qué tipo de ocultaciones serían, reputo tales locuciones comprendidas dentro de la libertad de expresión sin que posean entidad suficiente como para vulnerar el derecho al honor, no siendo expresiones objetivamente injuriosas o descalificativas sino simples juicios (muy genéricos) de valor sobre dicho extremo. Los testigos nuevamente han sido contradictorios, los propuestos por la parte actora negando estos extremos y los del demandado afirmándolos. Pero sin estar probado realmente que de alguna forma coercitiva se obligue a los miembros a mentir a las autoridades judiciales (no constan condenas por delitos de obstrucción a la justicia), más allá de sugerir actuar un beneficio de la entidad religiosa, lo cardinal es que las concretas expresiones empleadas por el demandado carecen de la significación lingüística y entidad suficiente como para hacer prevalecer el derecho al honor de la actora sobre la libertad de expresión de aquél.

c) Incide la parte actora en los minutos 9:50 a 10:32 donde el Sr. Héctor emplea las expresiones "los daños mentales producidos provienen desde una doble vía: las propias creencias que el individuo expulsado...el comportamiento de rechazo de familiares y amigos...". No obstante, ha de verse el contexto del relato, concretamente se está refiriendo a experiencias propias y de conocidos, donde tras la expulsión o salida de la congregación, el resto de los miembros dan inicio a una actitud de rechazo sistemático al "apóstata". Y cuando el demandado menciona los daños mentales, lo hace no en un contexto pernicioso por la pertenencia a esa confesión religiosa, sino solo por la circunstancia de haberla abandonado. *Y tales daños de tipo psicológico (o mental, como refiere el Sr. Héctor), racionalmente son más que previsibles de una u otra manera en quien, durante años, ha pertenecido a esa confesión y luego pasa a no hacerlo, al igual que pasaría si se perteneciera a cualquier otra asociación o sociedad de la que se hubiera sido miembro durante años, formando parte esencial de la vida. Entonces, mencionar que hay daños mentales ni es objetivamente falso ni per sé atenta contra el honor de la actora. Indudablemente el demandado liga en cierta manera los daños al hecho de que tras la salida, acontece el referido rechazo social, incluso por familiares, pero aquí hay que incidir en dos cuestiones: primera, que el que una persona decida dejar de hablar o de tratar con otra persona, forma parte de la libertad que todos los sujetos tienen a relacionarse con quien desee, de modo que los hechos que relata el demandado no afectarían en sí mismo al honor de la entidad actora al no referirse a comportamientos objetivamente perniciosos (en el sentido de que, aunque podría admitirse que no es deseable, cada ciudadano libremente interactúa con quien desea sin que existan normas ni valores supremos que obliguen a lo contrario). Los testigos en este tema han sido muy incisivos y ciertamente este juzgador extrae un hecho inequívoco: que cuando una persona deja de ser miembro de los testigos de Jehová, el resto en mayor o menor medida, dejan de tratarle socialmente, incluso de palabra y entre familiares. Estimo que no es misión de esta resolución emitir una opinión sobre esta cuestión, ya que (como he dicho antes) si alguien opta por ignorar o rechazar el contacto con otra persona, es una elección personal, y si la confesión religiosa impone moralmente ese hecho (incluso los testigos de la actora han venido a corroborarlo en cierta manera), formaría parte de las normas religiosas que asumen los miembros, libremente, cuando deciden entrar o mantenerse dentro, luego achacar "daños mentales" a ese estado de aislamiento social puede ser acertado en el sentido de sufrir un lógico padecimiento personal al ver que no te hablan los que antes sí lo hacían, pero no puede atribuirse mayor responsabilidad a la entidad religiosa ni a sus miembros, que no hacen más que seguir sus dogmas y principios que forman parte de su libertad religiosa.*

d) Afirmaciones incluidas en los minutos 31:02 a 31:10 del vídeo, donde el demandado refiere que "queremos hacer visible a la sociedad y a las autoridades los incumplimientos legales de la organización, tiene muchos muchos, cumplimientos ilegales". De nuevo considero que estas expresiones no especifican tales supuestos incumplimientos "legales" y no dejan de ser opiniones un tanto abstractas y sin imputación de hechos concretos, luego no afecta cardinalmente al derecho al honor de la demandante. Los testigos, nada nuevo han aportado sobre esta cuestión.

Por todo lo expuesto considero que las expresiones anteriormente detalladas, que emitió el demandado en el vídeo, formaron parte de su libertad de expresión, constituyendo locuciones razonables en el contexto de un acto público donde se presentaba el nacimiento de una nueva asociación de antiguos miembros (a los que denominan "víctimas") de los testigos de Jehová, sin que sus palabras resultaran ni especialmente ofensivas, ni objetivamente falsas ni ciertas, simplemente narraba las vivencias personales (he ahí la razón de su pertenencia a la AVTJ) de quien se considera a sí mismo y a otros como perjudicados, principalmente por razón de su salida de la entidad religiosa aunque también por parte de las vivencias mantenidas dentro, de forma que no considero vulnerado el derecho fundamental al honor de la demandante.

**OCTAVO** .- e) Finalmente, en los minutos 12:06 a 13:08 el demandado define a la *asociación religiosa actora* como "secta", como "la peor de las sectas" y luego como "secta peligrosa". En este caso, la cuestión es distinta: la expresión "secta" sí que posee una connotación negativa que puede ser dañina para la fama y credibilidad de la demandante, puesto que la información u opinión (según se mire) en este caso, se basa en un hecho que es inexacto, ya que los Testigos Cristianos de Jehová son una confesión religiosa inscrita en la Sección General (Religiones Minoritarias), número de inscripción NUM000 del Registro de Entidades Religiosas que se lleva en el Ministerio de Justicia, de modo que estamos ante una confesión legítimamente reconocida en nuestro país al igual que muchas otras. Luego catalogar a la entidad actora como una secta deviene erróneo desde el momento en que, en el contexto del vídeo analizado, implica atribuirle unos rasgos perniciosos o nocivos a diferencia del resto de confesiones religiosas legamente establecidas en España. Es más, el Sr. Héctor realiza un paralelismo entre los testigos de Jehová, las sectas, las "enfermedades" y cataloga a la actora como una "secta peligrosa", lo que más allá de las opiniones subjetivas que puedan mantener unos u otros ex miembros, no posee mayor base objetiva e, indudablemente, atenta contra la consideración pública que posee toda confesión religiosa legalmente reconocida por el estado, como es el caso. Y aún más: el demandado al aludir implícitamente a que los testigos de Jehová son una enfermedad (o la pertenencia a esa confesión), incluso hace un símil en su conferencia con "los casos de yihadismo y terrorismo", que aunque reconoce que los testigos de Jehová "no son de ese estilo", sí que insiste en que son una enfermedad "como la diabetes, que la gente vive con cierta normalidad y que cuando quiere acordar está destrozado por dentro". Por lo tanto, sin ambages el Sr. Héctor cataloga a la entidad actora como una secta, y además equiparable a una enfermedad (esta última la expresión dificultosamente puede tener un significado positivo), exteriorizando que no te das cuenta pero que acabas "destrozado por dentro". Tal enunciado estimo que no puede quedar amparado por la libertad de expresión, resultando palabras claramente desproporcionadas y manifiestamente injuriosas para ésta o cualquier otra confesión religiosa legalmente reconocida, atentando contra su honor y consideración pública no solo por el hecho de considerarla una secta sino, esencialmente, por catalogarla como una enfermedad, no tan grave como el terrorismo, pero en todo caso una enfermedad. En definitiva, no es tanto que el demandado no pueda tener una opinión negativa sobre la confesión religiosa a la que ha pertenecido durante años (es perfectamente legítimo y queda amparado por su libertad de conciencia y de expresión), sino que lo que se cuestiona es la forma de comunicarlo públicamente en el vídeo, pues hubo de cuidar no sólo la verosimilitud, sino también la forma en que la difusión de su opinión se hizo o se presentó al público en general. Y la trascendencia pública de la entidad actora no justifica que aquél emitiera expresiones que, en su conjunto, pueden llevar al oyente a la creencia de que la demandante es una secta equiparable a una enfermedad, en paralelo con el "terrorismo" o yihadismo", de modo que sus expresiones fueron innecesariamente ofensivas dándole un matiz injurioso, denigrante o desproporcionado a la consideración que posee la entidad religiosa reclamante. Por ende se declara que, únicamente en este extremo, ha existido una intromisión ilegítima en el derecho al honor de la parte actora. Sin embargo, respecto de los pedimentos recogidos en los numerales 2), 3) y 5) del suplico de la demanda, no puede accederse: en ningún lugar de la demanda se indica y de ninguna forma se ha probado en el juicio, que fuera el Sr. Héctor el que subiera el vídeo al canal YouTube, solamente que emitió expresiones en una conferencia promovida por la Asociación de Víctimas de los Testigos de Jehová. Luego si no consta que el demandado fuera el responsable de la emisión o difusión del vídeo, no puede condenársele a la retirada de los comentarios ahí emitidos ni a publicar el encabezamiento y fallo de la sentencia en el canal de YouTube, ya que para esto debería haberse demandado separadamente a quien es responsable de la propagación del video, que no es otra que la Asociación de Víctimas de los Testigos de Jehová, sin que el demandado sea su presidente ni legal representante en cuyo caso sí que podría inferirse que actuó de alguna forma en nombre de aquella. No siendo así, no se concibe cómo un particular podría conseguir la retirada de una parte de un vídeo que ha sido subido a un canal de internet por un tercero que no ha sido parte de este procedimiento, por mucho que dicho particular esté relacionado por dicho tercero, debiendo recordarse que estamos ante un proceso de tutela del derecho al honor, no en el ejercicio del derecho de rectificación. Tampoco se ha demandado a la entidad gestora del canal de YouTube, de forma que la condena no puede abarcar la difusión pública en ese canal de la presente sentencia. Conjuntamente, debe desestimarse íntegramente la demanda en lo que atañe a las cuentas abiertas en Facebook y Twitter, ya que no solo no se da ninguna explicación acerca de qué contenido específico afectaría al honor de la actora sino que, esencialmente, tales plataformas digitales son ajenas al Sr. Héctor, puesto que han sido creadas por la Asociación de Víctimas de los Testigos de Jehová, siendo que esta entidad no ha sido demandada en el presente procedimiento.

**NOVENO** .- Respecto de la indemnización solicitada en el punto 4) del suplico de la demanda, el **Artículo Noveno de la Ley Orgánica 1/1982** establece que "la tutela judicial comprenderá la adopción de todas las medidas necesarias para poner fin a la intromisión ilegítima de que se trate y, en particular, las necesarias para:...c) La indemnización de los daños y perjuicios causados... La existencia de perjuicio se presumirá siempre que se acredite la intromisión ilegítima. La indemnización se extenderá al daño moral, que se valorará atendiendo a las circunstancias del caso y a la gravedad de la lesión efectivamente producida, para lo que se tendrá en cuenta,



en su caso, la difusión o audiencia del medio a través del que se haya producido". Y como ha marcado la Jurisprudencia, son parámetros esenciales a la hora de fijar la indemnización, el tiempo que los datos se han difundido y la efectiva difusión que hayan tenido frente a terceros. En palabras del Tribunal Supremo en su sentencia de 12 de Mayo de 2015, "...los demandantes denuncian la infracción del art.

9.3 de la Ley Orgánica 1/1982, de 5 de mayo, sobre protección civil del derecho al honor, a la intimidad personal y familiar y a la propia imagen, porque se han vulnerado las pautas que han de ser tenidas en cuenta para valorar el daño moral y fijar su indemnización. Este precepto legal, en lo que interesa para resolver la infracción denunciada, establece: «La indemnización se extenderá al daño moral, que se valorará atendiendo a las circunstancias del caso y a la gravedad de la lesión efectivamente producida, para lo que se tendrá en cuenta, en su caso, la difusión o audiencia del medio a través del que se haya producido". Partiendo de estas consideraciones y asumiendo que la tarea de valorar económicamente los daños y perjuicios (de tipo moral) que una entidad jurídica haya podido padecer, es complicada, atendiendo a que solamente se ha declarado la intromisión ilegítima de una parte mínima del contenido y expresiones emitidas por el demandado en el vídeo, pero que la difusión de éste (prolongada en el tiempo) presumiblemente tuvo una notable audiencia entre el público, se le condena al pago de la cantidad de 5.000 euros por los daños y perjuicios. En definitiva, tras valorar la prueba practicada conforme a la sana crítica ( Art. 326 y 376 de la LEC) y apreciándose la existencia de una intromisión ilegítima en el derecho fundamental al honor de la demandante, proviene estimar parcialmente la demanda interpuesta por el *procurador D. Juan de la Ossa Montes en nombre y representación de TESTIGOS CRISTIANOS DE JEHOVÁ contra D. Héctor, representado por la procuradora Dña. María José Rodríguez Jiménez, declarando que las expresiones proferidas en los minutos 12:06 a 13:08 del vídeo denominado "Presentación de la Asociación Española de Víctimas de los Testigos de Jehová" subido al canal YouTube, suponen una intromisión ilegítima del derecho fundamental al honor de la parte actora. Se condena al demandado al pago de la cantidad de 5.000 euros por los daños y perjuicios padecidos por la anterior intromisión ilegítima.*

**DÉCIMO** . - De conformidad con el artículo 394.2 de la Ley de Enjuiciamiento Civil, cada parte abonará las costas causadas a su instancia yendo las comunes por mitad, vista la parcial estimación de la demanda llevada a cabo en esta resolución.

Vistos los preceptos citados y demás de general y pertinente aplicación

## FALLO

**ESTIMO PARCIALMENTE LA DEMANDA** interpuesta por el procurador D. Juan de la Ossa Montes en nombre y representación de *TESTIGOS CRISTIANOS DE JEHOVÁ contra D. Héctor, representado por la procuradora Dña. María José Rodríguez Jiménez, declarando que las expresiones* proferidas en los minutos 12:06 a 13:08 del vídeo denominado "Presentación de la Asociación Española de Víctimas de los Testigos de Jehová" subido al canal YouTube, **suponen una intromisión ilegítima del derecho fundamental al honor** de la actora.

**Se condena** al demandado **al pago de la cantidad de 5.000 euros** por los daños y perjuicios padecidos por la intromisión ilegítima descrita.

Cada parte abonará las costas causadas a su instancia yendo las comunes por mitad, vista la parcial estimación de la demanda llevada a cabo en esta resolución.

*Notifíquese* en legal forma esta sentencia a las partes y al Ministerio Fiscal, haciéndoselos saber que la misma no es firme, pudiendo interponer contra ella recurso de apelación que deberá presentarse ante este juzgado en el plazo de veinte días contados desde el día siguiente al de su notificación. De conformidad con lo dispuesto en la Disposición Adicional Decimoquinta de la LO 6/1985, del Poder Judicial, introducida por la LO 1/2009, de 3 de noviembre, para la preparación del recurso de apelación será necesario constituir un depósito de 50 euros y acreditar debidamente la consignación de dicho importe en la Cuenta de Depósitos y Consignaciones de este juzgado.

Así por esta mi sentencia, lo pronuncia, manda y firma el Ilmo. Sr. D. Gonzalo Martín Vázquez, magistrado titular de este juzgado.

La difusión del texto de esta resolución a partes no interesadas en el proceso en el que ha sido dictada sólo podrá llevarse a cabo previa disociación de los datos de carácter personal que los mismos contuvieran y con pleno respeto al derecho a la intimidad, a los derechos de las personas que requieran un especial deber de tutela o a la garantía del anonimato de las víctimas o perjudicados, cuando proceda.

Los datos personales incluidos en esta resolución no podrán ser cedidos, ni comunicados con fines contrarios a las leyes.

**COURT OF FIRST INSTANCE NO.1 OF TORREJÓN DE ARDOZ**  
**ORDINARY PROCEDURE**

**SENTENCE NO.**

In Torrejón de Ardoz, on October 25th, 2023,

Mr. G M V, the presiding judge of the Court of First Instance No.1 of Torrejón de Ardoz, having seen the current proceedings of Ordinary Trial No. .... in which the plaintiff's representative, Mr. J O M, court attorney, has participated on behalf of Jehovah's Witnesses, and the defendant, Mr. E F C M, was represented by the court attorney Mrs. M J R J.

**FACTUAL BACKGROUND**

**FIRST.** - On May 3rd, 2021, a lawsuit to protect the right to honor was filed by attorney Mr. J O M, acting on behalf of Jehovah's Witnesses, against Mr. E F C M.

**SECOND.** - By decree dated September 16th, 2021, this court admitted the lawsuit, notifying both the defendant and the Public Prosecutor. A copy of the lawsuit, along with attached documents, was provided, and the defendant was summoned to respond within the legally established period. The response, opposing the lawsuit and requesting dismissal with the imposition of procedural costs on the plaintiff, was submitted within the specified timeframe. Subsequently, the parties were summoned for the pre-trial hearing in accordance with Article 414 of the Spanish Civil Procedure Act (LEC), held on September 21st, 2022; both parties were present. During this hearing, initiated by His Honor, no agreement was reached to settle the dispute. The attorneys presented their respective claims, and after the admission of evidence was declared, **[Page 2]**

accepted, and deemed relevant, the parties were summoned for trial.

**THIRD.** - The trial was held in two sessions on September 20th and 21st, 2023, in the presence of the Public Prosecutor. After conducting the proposed and admitted evidence from the pre-trial hearing, including documentary evidence in the case file and the questioning of witnesses XXXXX, the proceedings were considered ready to be resolved by sentence. The attorneys and Public Prosecutor then presented their respective conclusions.

**FOURTH.** - The pertinent legal requirements have been observed in the processing and substantiation of these proceedings. The trial was recorded on a suitable medium for sound and image recording and reproduction in compliance with the provisions of Article 187.1 of the Spanish Civil Procedure Act (LEC).

The following are the applicable

## **LEGAL GROUNDS**

**FIRST.** - The action pursued in this proceeding is a claim for a declaration of unjustified interference with the right to honor. To comprehend the subject matter of the case adequately, a brief initial exposition of the principal events is necessary: Since March 27th, 2019, the plaintiff contends that the defendant has been disseminating a video titled "Presentation of the Spanish Association of Victims of Jehovah's Witnesses" through "Youtube". This video, the plaintiff claims, damages the reputation and prestige of the religious community by attributing the commission of sexual abuse and mental harm to its members. The plaintiff also alleges the creation of Facebook and Twitter accounts with the offensive name "Association of Victims of Jehovah's Witnesses." It claims that a violation of its right to its honor has occurred and is seeking for the dissemination to cease, the video to be removed from "Youtube", compensation for damages, and a court order to publish the ruling with equivalent public dissemination. In response, the defendant contends that the content published is based on numerous testimonies of abuse victims. The statements in the video, according to the defendant, refer to members of the plaintiff association who conceal the abuse. The defendant argues that this falls within the realm of freedom of expression and that he merely publishes what third parties disseminate. The defendant also challenges the active legitimacy of the plaintiff, asserting that legal entities of public law are not holders of fundamental rights. At the trial's conclusion, during the concluding phase, the Public Prosecutor requested the complete dismissal of the lawsuit.

**[Page 3]**

**SECOND.** - The initial consideration lies in **Article 217 of the Spanish Civil Procedure Act (LEC)**, which, in its **paragraphs 2 and 3**, stipulates: *"The burden of proving the truth of the facts, from which (according to the applicable legal rules) the legal effect corresponding to the claims of the lawsuit and counterclaim ordinarily arises, falls on the plaintiff and the counterclaimant. The burden of proving the facts that, according to the applicable rules, prevent, extinguish, or invalidate the legal effectiveness of the facts referred to in the preceding paragraph, falls on the defendant and the counterclaimed plaintiff."*

Based on this foundational rule regarding the allocation of the burden of proof, it is incumbent upon the plaintiff to substantiate all the facts to justify upholding their lawsuit. Nevertheless, as is evident from both the lawsuit and its response, there appears to be no genuine dispute concerning the content of the video in question. Consequently, this fact must be considered proven in accordance with Article 281.3 of the LEC. That being established, it is crucial to recognize that the right to honor, the fundamental right purportedly violated in this case, encompasses both an individual's self-esteem and the regard in which it is held by third parties. We must start with the content of **Organic Law 1/1982, of May 5th, on the civil protection of the right to honor, personal and family privacy, and the right to one's own image**. The **first article** of this law asserts that *"The fundamental right to honor, personal and family privacy, and one's own image, guaranteed in Article 18 of the Constitution, shall be civilly protected against all kinds of unjustified intrusions, in accordance with the provisions of this Organic Law."* **Article Seven** further outlines various actions that are considered unjustified intrusions into the privacy of individuals and specifies that *"They shall be considered unjustified intrusions in the scope of protection defined by Article Two of this Law: 1. Placing listening devices, filming equipment, optical devices, or any other means capable of recording or reproducing the intimate life of individuals in any location. 2. Using listening devices, optical devices, or any other means to gain knowledge of the intimate life of individuals or private letters not intended for the user of such means, as well as their recording, registration, or reproduction. 3. Disclosing facts about the private life of a person or family that affect their reputation and good name, as well as revealing or publishing the content of letters, memoirs, or other personal writings of an intimate nature. 4. Disclosing private data of a person or family known through the professional or official activity of the person making the disclosure. 5. Capturing, reproducing, or publishing, through photography, film, or any other method, the image of a person in places or moments of their private life, or outside of them, except in cases provided for in Article Eight (2). 6. Using the name, voice, or image of a person for advertising, commercial, or other similar purposes. 7. Imputing facts or expressing value judgments through actions or expressions that in any way injure the dignity of another person, undermining their reputation or attacking their self-esteem. 8. Using a criminal offense by the convicted person in a final criminal sentence to gain public notoriety or obtain economic benefit, or the dissemination of false information about criminal activities, when it involves damage to the dignity of the victims."*

**THIRD.** - Considering the above, regarding the plaintiff's active legitimacy, it is evident that it holds such legitimacy from the moment it is a legal entity. The Supreme Court, in its ruling of July 7th, 2009, stated that "... regarding the possibility of violating the right to honor of a legal entity, [Page 4]

this has been affirmed by jurisprudence of this Court. Thus, as stated in the ruling of October 9th, 1997, the honor, reputation, or prestige of a legal entity is undeniable and indisputable; an offense can be committed against a natural person as well as a legal one; a legal entity is attacked in its good reputation, prestige, or honor, undoubtedly having the right to legal protection, whether it is a personalistic legal entity (*universitas personarum*) or a patrimonialistic one (*universitas bonorum*). In turn, ruling 139/1995 of September 26th of the Constitutional Court contains doctrine that can be summarized as follows: no constitutional or legal norm prevents legal entities from being subjects of fundamental rights; the Constitution recognizes fundamental rights for certain types of organizations; although honor is a value related to persons considered as individuals, the right to one's own estimation is not exclusively the patrimony of individuals; the meaning of the right to honor cannot, and should not, exclude legal entities from its scope of protection; a legal entity may see its right to honor violated when facts are disclosed that defame the entity or discredit it in the eyes of others. Following this doctrine, the ruling of this Court on March 14th, 1996, states: a) "the natural person, and by constitutional extension, the legal entity, are deserving of this protection" (referring to honor), and that of March 20th, 1997, states "as regards the question of whether legal entities can be protected through the exercise of the right to honor, overcoming the saying that 'legal entities have prestige but no honor.'" Indeed, although the Spanish Constitution does not make any pronouncement about the ownership of the right to honor in relation to legal entities (unlike the Basic Law of Bonn of 1949, which proclaims that fundamental rights apply to legal entities), based on the doctrine established by the Constitutional Court ruling of September 26th, 1995, it can be affirmed that from the constitutional system itself, the meaning of the right cannot and should not exclude legal entities from its scope of protection. Consequently, this Court has proclaimed that the legal entity has the right to honor, constitutionally protected by Article 18.1 of the Constitution, regulated by Law 1/1982 of May 5th, and has an active standing in the legal process exercised for its defense. The outlined doctrine is recalled in the ruling of December 4th, 2008. See also the Supreme Court ruling of November 27th, 2008, in similar terms. Applying this doctrine to the present case(s), it can only be confirmed that an association or officially recognized religious entity, as in the case at hand, can perfectly be the holder of the fundamental right to honor in question, so the substantive defense raised by the defendant must be rejected.

**FOURTH.-** Moving on to the substance of the matter, do the statements contained in the video damage the dignity of the religious association, diminish its reputation, or undermine its self-esteem? Even though the right to honor is well-established in abundant jurisprudence (Supreme Court rulings of March 20th and May 21st, 1997, February 15th, 2000, and July 5th, 2004 among others), it is not possible to assess the intrusion with the same parameters as when dealing with a natural person. This is because two aspects stand out concerning natural persons: the internal aspect of immanence or selfhood, which refers to the inner conviction or feeling of dignity of the individual, and the external aspect of transcendence, that alludes to social evaluation, i.e., reputation or fame reflected in the consideration of others (Supreme Court rulings November 14th, 2002, and June 6th, [Page 5]

2003). When it comes to legal entities, it is difficult to conceive the immanent aspect, so the problem focuses on the appreciation of the transcendent or external aspect, a protected public consideration (Supreme Court rulings April 15th, 1992, and July 27th, 1998), which cannot simply be equated with the business, commercial, or general prestige with which the activity is carried out. Based on these ideas and following the jurisprudential guidelines on the matter, the ruling of the Provincial Court of Madrid of December 11th, 2009, establishes that "... according to the recent Ruling of the Supreme Court, 1st Chamber, S16-7-2008, No. 686/2008, there is already extensive jurisprudence in this Chamber, as well as doctrine of the Constitutional Court, regarding the concept of the fundamental right to honor and the damages that can occur as a result of the publication of news articles that, based on an alleged right to information, discredit or incur disdain for a person. It is true that the Constitutional Court has recognized that the concept of "right to honor" lacks precise contours and is relative, in the sense that it is adaptable to the circumstances present in each moment in a given society. Ruling 49/01 of February 26th states that "(...) it protects the good reputation of a person, protecting it from expressions or messages that may devalue it in the eyes of others by discrediting it or belittling it or making it shameful in the view of the public. For this reason, the freedoms of Article 20.1 a) and d) of the CE do not protect the disclosure of facts that, defrauding the right of all to receive truthful information, are nothing more than mere rumors, inventions, or insinuations without foundation, nor do they constitutionally cover formally injurious and expressions that are unnecessary to the message that the sender wishes to disseminate, in which he simply expresses his personal scorn or animosity towards the offended party." In short, it is a right to not have the opinions others have formed of one self to be negatively conditioned. The right to honor connects and must be related to the constitutional concept of the dignity of individuals, recognized in Article 10 of the CE, which must include the interpretation of Article 18 of the CE and the rules contained in Law 1/1982 of May 5th on Civil Protection of the Right to Honor, Personal and Family Privacy, and Personal Image. However, the ruling continues to say that "the right to honor is not absolute and is limited by the right to information, also recognized as a fundamental right in Article 20 of the CE. The judge of the case must weigh the conflicting rights, hence the Constitutional Court's Ruling 76/02 of April 8th applies the criterion of proportionality, stating the following: "However, the reputation of others (Article 10.2 ECHR, ECHR rulings in the Lingens case of July 8th, 1986, and the Bladet Tromsø and Stensaas case of May 20th, 1999), or their honor, constitute a limit to the right to express oneself freely and the freedom of information. (Constitutional Court rulings 297/2000 December 11th and 49/2001 February 26th). It is the reiterated doctrine of this Court, coinciding in substance with that elaborated by the European Court of Human Rights when interpreting Article 10.1 of the European Convention on Human Rights, that in cases of conflict between the right to the free expression of information and the rights to honor, privacy, and personal image guaranteed in Article 18.1 CD, the adequate solution requires that both rights be taken into account in presence (Constitutional Court rulings 104/1986 of July 17th and 76/1995 of May 22nd)." As well as Ruling 85/1992 of June 8th, which, regarding the problem of deliberation, states that "it is important to emphasize that, when deliberating, the relevance of the criterion of proportionality as an inherent principle of the Rule of Law, with its status as a canon of constitutionality (recognized in rulings of the most varied [Page 6]

content [Constitutional Court rulings 62/1982, 35/1985, 65/1986, 160/186, 6/1988, 19/1988, 209/1988, 37/1989, 113/1989, 138/1989, 178/1989, and 154/1990)], has special application when it comes to protecting fundamental rights from limitations or constraints, whether they come from singular norms or resolutions. Although it is indisputable that there is a significant limitation on freedom of expression, which seeks the correct information of citizens." At this point, the aforementioned ruling of the Provincial Court of Madrid emphasizes "the requirements recognized so that the right to honor of a person is not considered to have been damaged: 1<sup>st</sup> -The public relevance of the information. It is a common thread in all rulings of this Court, as well as those of the Constitutional Court, that freedom of expression does not protect against the mere curiosity of others (Constitutional Court ruling 134/1999 of July 15th), the Constitutional Court ruling 20/1992 of February 14<sup>th</sup> states that for a fundamental right to be affected, its repercussions must be legitimate and what is reported must be of public interest, either because the rights have public relevance or because the people to affected by these facts are publicly relevant. 2<sup>nd</sup> - Respect for the person's dignity. Despite the right to information, the unnecessary use of derogatory or injurious terms to transmit it will be constituted damaging to the right to honor because, as the Constitutional Court Ruling 105/1990 of June 6th has affirmed, the right to information does not authorize insult (Constitutional Court Ruling 158/2003 of September 15th and Supreme Court Rulings of March 3rd, 2003, and February 22nd, 2006)."

**FIFTH.-** Therefore, the exercise of freedom of expression that is non-injurious to the right to honor, requires: a) that the published information not contain insults, humiliations, or slander, so this point limits the right to freedom of expression and information (Constitutional Court ruling 20/1990 of February 15th); b) it does not protect information drafted in formally injurious and unnecessary terms for the message one wishes to convey, which excludes anything based on mere rumors; c) it requires truthfulness and public relevance (Supreme Court rulings of June 30th and July 26th, 2006). The ruling of the Constitutional Court, 1st Chamber, of May 5th, 2000, No. 112/2000, establishes that "since the Constitutional Court ruling 104/1986, of July 17<sup>th</sup>, this Court has been differentiating between the range of exercising the rights recognized in Article 20.1 CE, depending on whether it is freedom of expression (in the sense of the issuance of personal and subjective judgments, beliefs, thoughts, and opinions) or freedom of information (regarding the narration of facts). In relation to the former, since it deals with the formulation of "thoughts, ideas, and opinions" [Article 20.1 a) CE], without the intention of establishing facts or asserting objective data, it has a field of action that is only limited by the absence of undoubtedly injurious expressions or those unrelated to the ideas or opinions that are expressed and that are unnecessary for their presentation (Constitutional Court ruling 105/1990 of June 6th). When the aim is to provide information about facts, constitutional protection extends only to truthful information (Article 20.1 d) of the CE). This requirement of truthfulness cannot, obviously, be demanded of personal and subjective judgments or evaluations, without prejudice to the fact that, if that information is accompanied by value judgments or opinions, the latter must be subject to the canon of freedom of expression because the right to criticize does not allow the use of expressions that are formally injurious or unnecessary for what one wishes to express or communicate, which can constitute constitutionally illegitimate intrusions into the honor of others (Constitutional Court rulings 105/1990 of June 6th, 85/1992 of June 8th, 134/1999 of July 15th, 192/1999 of October 25th). It also highlights that the judgement of the TC 180/1999 goes on to emphasize that "the right to honor is a legal concept and its precision depends on the norms, values, and social ideas

in force at each moment in a given society. [Page 7] Hence, judicial bodies have a certain margin of assessment when specifying in each case what should be considered harmful to that fundamental right. However, despite this ambiguity in the object of the right to honor, this Court has affirmed that this right protects the person against expressions or messages that devalue them in the eyes of others by discrediting them or belittling them or that are considered shameful in the view of the public. For this reason, we have said that the freedoms of Article 20.1 a) and d) CE neither protect the disclosure of facts that, defrauding everyone's right to receive truthful information, are mere rumors, inventions, or insinuations lacking in foundation, nor do they have constitutional coverage for expressions that are formally injurious or unnecessary for the message one wishes to convey, in which its sender simply expresses his personal contempt or animosity towards the offended party. However, it is worth noting that this fundamental right to honor is, in turn, limited by the fundamental rights to freely express opinions and information. Therefore, depending on the circumstances of the case, there may be the possibility that one's reputation has to endure restrictions when required by the public relevance of what is reported or commented on." Well, in the case at hand, we are dealing with a video containing narratives of events in relation to which personal judgments or opinions about the conduct or attitude in general of the now plaintiff religious confession are formulated. Therefore, the terms of the examination must take into account the facts and opinions to which they serve as a basis, checking, in the context of the video, whether the information provided is truthful and whether it does not contain formally or manifestly injurious expressions. It would be different if the expressions under consideration are neither formally nor manifestly injurious but rather mere judgments, evaluations, qualifications, or epithets that may be annoying, hurtful, even distasteful and derogatory, but not violative of the right to honor. As it is easy to see, all this obliges us to conduct a cautious examination of these expressions and the way in which the facts on which the critical judgment is based are narrated, as only the truthfulness of the disclosed facts and their public relevance can impose a limit on the right to honor of the plaintiff entity, which must tolerate the dissemination of that information.

**SIXTH.-** Well, while the content of the video is not controversial, several aspects stand out: firstly that the defendant is not a mere disseminator of opinions or narratives of facts related to former members of the religious confession of Jehovah's Witnesses, rather, not only was he a member of that religious association but is also part of the so-called Association of Victims of Jehovah's Witnesses (as he himself reveals at the beginning of the video in question). Note that the video is basically a presentation conference of the aforementioned AVTJ, with the now defendant as the first speaker. Secondly, the constitutional requirement that the externalized information or facts be of public relevance is fulfilled since we are dealing with a religious entity of a global nature, spread across multiple places in the world, whose circumstances or vicissitudes, both positive and negative, are or can be of news interest to the general population. And in third place, an analysis of the video must be carried out, making an always complex but balanced assessment of the facts that it reflects, and a conclusion made regarding if they are inaccurate and in evident detriment to the image, esteem, or public consideration that the plaintiff entity possesses. Before addressing the main issue, it is worth noting one aspect: in the view of this judge, there has been a significant discrepancy between the strict [Page 8]



object of the proceedings (whether Mr. C's statements in the video violate the plaintiff's right to honor) and what ultimately has been the development of the evidence presented by the parties. There has been a large number of witnesses whose ultimate purpose was to analyze or judge in one way or another the beliefs or dogmas of the religious confession. This judge tried persistently to highlight this, as in a way the defendant's intention was to carry out a critical analysis of biblical texts and various rules of the religious confession. However, this line of argument cannot be accepted since religious freedom is configured as an intellectually important freedom in any democratic society. It is not acceptable to, based on principles or social values that are always changing over time, (although conceptually) attack one or another's religious dogma. This is because of the undeniable religious freedom that all citizens have to believe in what they consider appropriate (and this applies not only to the plaintiff association but to any other religion or religious confession established in Spain). Therefore, the essence of this procedure is nothing more than analyzing whether Mr. C's statements in this introductory video have violated the plaintiff's right to honor. Indeed, since the video is not in dispute, the undersigned has carefully watched it and observes the following relevant points: as it is a presentation conference of an association that has subsequently been duly registered, the defendant provides an exposition of facts about what Jehovah's Witnesses are and, above all, what ex-members of Jehovah's Witnesses are and the reasons they end up leaving. It is evident that the verbal tone used is extremely calm, composed, without any stridency or undue intensity, using expressions that cannot be categorized as insulting in themselves regarding the words used. Furthermore, considering the excerpts that the plaintiff, in their lawsuit, deems to be offensive to their right to honor (the lawyer timely submitted a kind of guide to follow during the trial), it is observed that they literally coincide with what Mr. C expressed in the video. Therefore, without further ado, these expressions will be evaluated in the following legal grounds.

**SEVENTH.** - a) The plaintiff refers to the expressions contained in minutes 2:33 to 3:08, where supposedly the defendant would be promoting the creation of stereotypes regarding Jehovah's Witnesses, and also attributing to them the concealment of crimes, especially in cases of child abuse. But if we look at the phrases used, we are certainly facing a brief and more than punctual reference to the fact that, in his opinion, when there is a public case (within the congregation) of the existence of an abuser (referring to a child abuser), "they try to hide it in the best possible way." But this expression in itself does not imply that he attributes to "them" (Jehovah's Witnesses) the persistent concealment of alleged sexual abuses within the congregation, but rather, it refers (or, at least, linguistically can refer, since Mr. C was not interrogated in the trial, his intention cannot be known) to the fact that they try to hide that there is an alleged abuser (that is, not to cover up the act but the alleged perpetrator), which is very different. In any case, beyond the brief expression, no other allusion is made in the conference to the plaintiff's predisposition to commit criminal offenses or, specifically, to hide criminal acts against minors, so that beyond the lack of sufficient evidence that such a cover-up context is true, I conclude that, by carrying out the assessment and weighting required by Jurisprudence, the right to honor of the plaintiff entity has not been violated. The same conclusion is predicted regarding the

[Page 9]

words "but not a report to the authorities on the matter, they do not consider themselves obligated," since the defendant also does not specify that the entity actively prevents or compels its members not to communicate to the "authorities" the knowledge of alleged sexual abuses, and this type of wording is not reiterated by Mr. C throughout his intervention. The abundance of testimonies given in the trial only confirms these conclusions since, ultimately it has been a display of the different opinions that members and former members of Jehovah's Witnesses have on the issue, each defending their particular vision of what is to be understood by the religious confession. Furthermore, as this judge indicated earlier, the important thing is not whether the witnesses refute or confirm that sexual abuses or any other crime is being hidden, but whether the limited expressions made by Mr. C on the subject in the video affect the right to honor of the plaintiff. And as indicated, at no time does he attribute an active behavior of the congregation to cover up such abuses or to compel its members not to reveal it to the authorities. In reality, the testimonies have made it clear that what seems to happen is that there are two areas of action or intervention of the religious entity: the internal one, which is part of the freedom of self-regulation that all religions have to address a specific aspect (such as how to address or sanction an alleged (CRIME OF) sexual abuse among members), and the external one, where, as practically all the witnesses proposed by the plaintiff have declared, at no time are they prevented (nor is it clear from the opposing party how it could be prevented) from going to the police or judicial authorities to report it, being different and parallel spheres that can coexist perfectly, and it seems irrelevant for what concerns us here whether there is or not a kind of "ecclesiastical" tribunal that judges these issues internally because this does not prevent it from being reported to the police or judicial authorities when necessary. So even though Mr. C's words in his speech may be somewhat excessive, he does not attribute to the plaintiff entity the execution of a manipulative scheme aimed at actively preventing sexual abuse of minors from being reported to the authorities, so all statements in this regard are irrelevant.

b) The plaintiff refers to the words between minutes 4:49 and 5:40, which allegedly would be aimed at making the false impression that the religious entity encourages its members to commit a crime by lying to the authorities. Listening to the video, once again, it is not apparent that the phrases reveal anything more than a generic idea that "they do not tell the truth" or "are willing to lie at the drop of a hat." This judge considers that these expressions are so abstract and sparse that they are part of the defendant's freedom of expression without substantively affecting the plaintiff's right to honor. The same applies to the statements made between minutes 7:20 and 7:36, where Mr. C strictly refers to a personal experience where several Jehovah's Witnesses came to his home for apostolic purposes. It is true that he subsequently more generally reveals that they not only lie to people but also "lie to authorities and even lie to judicial courts." However, since he does not specify to what extent this would occur or what type of concealments would be involved, I consider such statements to be within the realm of freedom of expression without having sufficient significance to violate the right to honor. These are not objectively injurious or disqualifying expressions but rather very generic value judgments on that matter. The witnesses again have been contradictory, with those proposed by the plaintiff denying **[Page 10]**

these aspects and those of the defendant affirming them. However, without actual proof that members are coercively forced to lie to judicial authorities (no convictions for obstruction of justice are documented), beyond suggesting that they are acting in the interest of the religious entity, the crucial point is that the specific expressions used by the defendant lack linguistic significance and sufficient substance to prioritize the plaintiff's right to honor over the freedom of expression of the defendant.

c) The plaintiff emphasizes minutes 9:50 to 10:32, where Mr. C uses expressions such as "the mental damage comes from two sources: the individual's own beliefs... the rejection by family and friends...". However, the context of the narrative must be considered. Specifically, he is referring to personal experiences and those of acquaintances, where after expulsion or departure from the congregation, the remaining members initiate a systematic rejection attitude towards the "apostate." When the defendant mentions mental harm, he does so not in a harmful context due to belonging to that religious confession, but only because of the circumstance of having left it. Such psychological (or mental, as Mr. C refers to them) damages are rationally more than predictable in someone who, for years, has belonged to that religious confession and then ceases to do so, just as it would happen if one belonged to any other association or society of which they had been a member for years, forming an essential part of life. Therefore, mentioning that there are mental damages is neither objectively false nor does it per se violate the honor of the plaintiff. Undoubtedly, the defendant in a certain way links the damages to the fact that after leaving, the mentioned social rejection occurs, even by family members. However, two issues need to be emphasized here: first, the decision of a person to stop talking or interacting with another person is part of the freedom that all individuals have to relate to whomever they wish. The facts recounted by the defendant would not affect the honor of the plaintiff in itself, as they do not refer to objectively harmful behaviors (in the sense that, although it may be undesirable, every citizen freely interacts with whomever they want without the existence of rules or supreme values that compel otherwise). The witnesses on this issue have been very incisive, and this judge extracts an unequivocal fact: when a person ceases to be a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, the rest, to a greater or lesser extent, stops having dealings with them socially, even verbally and among family members. I believe it is not the mission of this resolution to express an opinion on this matter since, as mentioned before, if someone chooses to ignore or reject contact with another person, it is a personal choice. If the religious confession morally imposes this fact (even the witnesses of the plaintiff have come to corroborate it in a way), it would be part of the religious norms that members freely assume when deciding to enter or remain within. Therefore, attributing "mental damage" to this state of social isolation may be accurate in the sense of suffering a logical personal distress when those who used to talk to you no longer do, but greater responsibility cannot be attributed to the religious entity or its members who are simply following their dogmas and principles that are part of their religious freedom.

d) Statements included in minutes 31:02 to 31:10 of the video, where the defendant states, "we want to make the organization's legal non-compliances visible to society and authorities, it has many, many illegal compliances." Again, I consider that these expressions do not specify such alleged "legal" non-compliances **[Page 11]**

and remain somewhat abstract opinions without imputation of specific facts. Therefore, they do not fundamentally affect the plaintiff's right to honor. Witnesses have not contributed anything new on this issue.

Based on all that has been stated, I consider that the expressions previously detailed, which the defendant conveyed in the video, were part of his freedom of expression, constituting reasonable statements in the context of a public event where the birth of a new association of former members (whom they refer to as "victims") of Jehovah's Witnesses was being presented. His words were neither particularly offensive nor objectively false nor true; he simply narrated personal experiences (hence his affiliation with the AVTJ) of someone who considers himself and others as harmed, mainly due to their departure from the religious entity but also as a result of experiences within it. Therefore, I do not believe that the fundamental right to honor of the plaintiff has been violated.

**EIGHTH.** - e) Finally, in minutes 12:06 to 13:08, the defendant defines the religious association plaintiff as a "sect," as "the worst of sects," and then as a "dangerous sect." In this case, the issue is different: the expression "sect" does have a negative connotation that can be harmful to the plaintiff's reputation and credibility since the information or opinion (depending on how you look at it) in this case is based on a fact that is inaccurate. The Christian Witnesses of Jehovah are a religious confession registered in the General Section (Minority Religions), registration number 000068 of the Register of Religious Entities kept by the Ministry of Justice. Therefore, we are dealing with a confession legitimately recognized in our country, just like many others. Therefore, categorizing the plaintiff entity as a sect becomes erroneous from the moment that, in the context of the analyzed video, it implies attributing pernicious or harmful traits to it, unlike the rest of the legally established religious confessions in Spain. Furthermore, Mr. C draws a parallel between Jehovah's Witnesses, sects, "diseases," and categorizes the plaintiff as a "dangerous sect." This, beyond the subjective opinions that former members may hold, lacks a greater objective basis and undoubtedly goes against the public consideration that any religious confession legally recognized by the state possesses, as is the case. Moreover, the defendant implicitly alludes to Jehovah's Witnesses being a disease (or belonging to this confession), even making a comparison in his lecture with "cases of jihadism and terrorism," acknowledging that Jehovah's Witnesses are "not of this style," but insisting that they are a disease "like diabetes, which people live with some normality and when they realize it, they are destroyed inside." Therefore, without ambiguity, Mr. C categorizes the plaintiff entity as a sect and also comparable to a disease (this last expression can hardly have a positive meaning), stating that you do not realize it, but you end up "destroyed inside." This statement, I believe, cannot be protected by freedom of expression, resulting in words that are clearly disproportionate and manifestly injurious to this or any other legally recognized religious confession, attacking its honor and public consideration not only for considering it a sect but, essentially, for labeling it as a disease, not as serious as terrorism, but in any case, a disease. In conclusion, it is not so much that the defendant cannot have a negative opinion about the religious confession to which he belonged for years (which is perfectly legitimate and [Page 12]

protected by his freedom of conscience and expression), but what is questioned is the way of communicating it publicly in the video. He should have taken care not only of the authenticity but also of the way in which the dissemination of his opinion was made or presented to the general public. The public importance of the plaintiff entity does not justify that he issued expressions that, as a whole, can lead the listener to believe that the plaintiff is a sect comparable to a disease, in parallel with "terrorism or jihadism," so his expressions were unnecessarily offensive, giving an injurious, denigrating, or disproportionate nuance to the consideration that the plaintiff religious entity possesses. Therefore, it is determined that, only in this regard, there has been an illegitimate intrusion to the right to honor of the plaintiff. However, regarding the requests set out in paragraphs 2), 3), and 5) of the pleas contained in the petition, they cannot be granted: nowhere in the lawsuit does it indicate, and in no way has it been proven in the trial, that Mr. C uploaded the video to YouTube, he only made statements in a conference promoted by the Association of Victims of Jehovah's Witnesses. Therefore, if it is not proven that the defendant was responsible for the broadcast or dissemination of the video, he cannot be sentenced to withdraw the comments made there or to publish the heading and sentence decision on YouTube because the person responsible for the dissemination of the video should have been sued separately for this to happen, this would be none other than the Association of Victims of Jehovah's Witnesses, the defendant is not its president or legal representative, in which case it could be inferred that he acted in some way on its behalf. As this is not the case, there is no conceivable way for an individual to withdraw part of a video that has been uploaded to an internet channel by a third party who has not been part of this proceeding, even if that individual is related to said third party, and it must be remembered that we are in a process of protecting the right to honor, not exercising the right of rectification. The entities managing the YouTube channel have not been sued either, so the ruling cannot include the public dissemination of this sentence on that channel. Simultaneously, the entire lawsuit in relation to the Facebook and Twitter accounts must be dismissed since not only is there no explanation about what specific content would affect the honor of the plaintiff, but essentially, such digital platforms are unrelated to Mr. C because they have been created by the Association of Victims of Jehovah's Witnesses, and this entity has not been sued in this proceeding.

**NINTH.** - Regarding the compensation requested in point 4) of the pleas contained in the petition, **Article Nine of Organic Law 1/1982** establishes that *"judicial protection will include the adoption of all necessary measures to put an end to the illegitimate intrusion in question, and, in particular, those necessary for: ... c) Compensation for damages caused ... The existence of damages will be presumed whenever the illegitimate intrusion is proven. Compensation will extend to moral damages, which will be assessed considering the circumstances of the case and the seriousness of the injury actually caused, taking into account, where appropriate, the dissemination or audience of the medium through which it occurred."* As marked by jurisprudence, essential parameters for fixing compensation are the time the data has been disseminated and the effective dissemination it has had to third parties. In the words of the Supreme Court in its ruling of May 12th, 2015, "the plaintiffs denounce the infringement of Article 9.3 of Organic Law 1/1982, of May 5th, on civil protection of the right to honor, [Page 13]"

personal and family privacy, and one's own image because the guidelines to be taken into account to assess moral damage and set its compensation have been violated. This legal provision, in what is relevant to resolve the alleged infringement, establishes: 'Compensation will extend to moral damages, which will be assessed considering the circumstances of the case and the seriousness of the injury actually caused, taking into account, where appropriate, the dissemination or audience of the medium through which it occurred.'" Starting from these considerations and assuming that the task of economically assessing the damages (of a moral nature) that a legal entity may have suffered is complicated, considering that only a minimal part of the content and expressions issued by the defendant in the video has been declared illegitimate, but that the dissemination of this (extended over time) presumably had a significant audience, the defendant is condemned to pay the amount of 5000 euros for the damages. In conclusion, after evaluating the evidence presented in accordance with the principles of fair judgment (Article 326 and 376 of the Spanish Civil Procedure Law) and recognizing the existence of an illegitimate intrusion into the fundamental right to honor of the plaintiff, the lawsuit filed by the attorney Mr. J.O.M on behalf and representation of JEHOVAH's CHRISTIAN WITNESSES against Mr. E.F.C.M, represented by the attorney Ms. M.J.R.J is partially upheld. It is found that the statements made in minutes 12:06 to 13:08 of the video entitled "Presentation of the Spanish Association of Victims of Jehovah's Witnesses", uploaded to YouTube, constitute an illegitimate intrusion to the fundamental right to honor of the plaintiff. The defendant is sentenced to pay the amount of 5000 euros for the damages suffered due to the aforementioned illegitimate intrusion.

TENTH. - In accordance with Article 394.2 of the Civil Procedure Law, each party will bear the costs incurred at their request, with common costs being shared equally, given the partial acceptance of the lawsuit in this ruling.

Considering the aforementioned provisions and others of a general and pertinent nature,

## **RULING**

**I PARTIALLY UPHOLD** the lawsuit filed by the Attorney of the Courts, Mr. J O M, on behalf and representation of *JEHOVAH's CHRISTIAN WITNESSES*. As the defendant, Mr. E F C M, represented by the Attorney of the Courts, Ms. M J R J, **I declare that the statements** made in the minutes 12:06 to 13:08 of the video titled 'Presentation of the Spanish Association of Victims of Jehovah's Witnesses,' uploaded to YouTube, **constitute an unlawful infringement of the fundamental right to honor** of the plaintiff."

The court orders the **payment of the sum of 5000 euros** for the damages suffered due to the unlawful intrusion described. Each party will bear the costs incurred at their request, with the common costs divided equally, considering the partial acceptance of the lawsuit carried out in this resolution." [Page 14]

"Notify this ruling to the parties and the Public Prosecutor in a legal manner, informing them that it is not final, and they may file an appeal against it, which must be submitted to this court within twenty days from the day following its notification. In accordance with the provisions of the Fifteenth Additional Provision of the Organic Law 6/1985 of the Judiciary, introduced by the Organic Law 1/2009 of November 3, the preparation of the appeal requires the payment of a deposit of 50 euros and duly proving the payment of said amount into the Deposits and Consignments Account of this court."

"So, by this ruling, the Honorable Mr. D. G M V, presiding judge of this court, pronounces, orders, and signs."



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Departament  
de la Presidència

# GUIDELINES

GUIDELINES ON THE NEWS  
TREATMENT OF

# RELIGION IN THE MEDIA

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March 2024



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# INTRODUCTION

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Religion, far from disappearing or losing importance in the lives of people and communities, is continuously being transformed and continues to have great relevance in Catalan society. Sociological data tells us that religions do not slide into disappearance or ostracism, but rather evolve, renew and diversify.

Due to various factors of social, cultural and demographic evolution, the current reality of religion in Catalonia is diverse and highly pluralistic: pluralism of attitudes towards religion (adherence, rejection, ignorance, etc.), pluralism of religious denominations, pluralism within religions and pluralism in the relationship of believers with their religion. Non-religious conscience options (atheists and agnostics) must also be taken into account. We must see this diversity as an opportunity to strengthen social cohesion and not as a fracture.

Within the framework of a non-denominational state, that is to say, where no religious denomination controls the state, the action of the public authorities in Catalonia must be guided by two key principles: the fundamental right to religious freedom and the principle of equality and non-discrimination.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change one’s religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

For its part, section 8 of Article 40 of the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia establishes that “The public authorities shall promote the equality of all individuals, regardless of background, nationality, gender, race, religion, social condition or sexual orientation, and shall also promote the eradication of racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, homophobia, and of any other manifestation that may constitute a violation of the equality and dignity of the individual.”

The Catalan model of respect for religious freedom and management of religious plurality could be defined as inclusive secularity. Secular, because the public authorities are independent and differentiated from any religion or belief system, but inclusive because it recognises the reality of religion in Catalonia and actively promotes the right to religious freedom in a common framework of coexistence and interculturality.

The role of the media is vital in promoting equal rights in the diversity of personal choices. Dealing with a reality as complex as religious plurality requires specific knowledge and also a critical and integrative vision.

For this reason, the Catalan Audiovisual Council (CAC) and the General Directorate of Religious Affairs of the Generalitat de Catalunya (Government of Catalonia) have promoted the preparation of these Guidelines. They have taken as a starting point the [\*CAC Criteria with regard to religion as shown on television entertainment programmes\*](#) (published in 2002) and the document [\*Religious diversity and the media: an expression of the will for dialogue\*](#), by the Religious Diversity Advisory Board of the Generalitat de Catalunya.

First, we present you with background data on the diversity of religious practice in Catalonia, Europe and the world, as well as the legal framework that deals with this matter. Below are some general Guidelines for addressing religious diversity in the media. For a more practical purpose, we have included a section with common mistakes to avoid and best practices.

To help better understand and communicate the singularities of the religious denominations, at the end we have drawn up an appendix with 12 sheets with the most relevant characteristics and specificities of the religious denominations with the most presence in Catalonia.

We hope that it will be a useful tool for professionals, and that it will contribute to the inclusive dimension of Catalan society, with the appropriate use of terms and concepts, in this context of great richness, but also of complexity.

# RELIGION IN CATALONIA AND THE WORLD

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n secularity is understood as the defence of freedom of conscience based on the principle of personal autonomy and, at the same time, as a guarantor of the equal rights of all spiritual options and the neutrality of the State towards religions. In this context, the media acquire a new responsibility, since they must reflect, in a balanced and impartial way, the plurality that characterises our society, including religious plurality.<sup>1</sup>

## Religion on a global scale

Human beings are spiritual people. It is estimated that nearly 6 billion people in the world identify with a religion. Christianity and Islam are the ones with the most followers, while Hinduism and Buddhism occupy the third and fourth positions. These are the four most widespread religious denominations, but there are many more in the world: popular and traditional religions, and other more minority ones, such as the Bahá'í Faith, Jainism, Sikhism, Shintoism, Taoism, Wicca or Zoroastrianism, to mention just a few.

It is interesting to note that 1 in 6 people in the world do not identify with any religious group. In the ranking of religions on a global scale, this group would occupy third position, only behind Christians and Muslims. And yet, surveys show that many of the people who say they do not belong to any religion have, despite everything, some kind of religious or spiritual beliefs.

## Religion at European level

In general, the European population is less religious than in other parts of the world. And, within Europe, there are considerable differences in the degrees of commitment to religion.<sup>2</sup>

Christianity, which for a long time has been the predominant religion in Europe in terms of number of followers, remains in the majority. In this context, it should be borne in mind that, when we talk about Christianity, we must include at least the three branches with the most representation: Catholicism, evangelical churches and orthodox churches.

Compared to the rest of the world, across the European continent there is a relatively lower degree of traditional religious practice (e.g., through attendance at worship) and this figure is slightly higher in Central and Eastern Europe than in Western Europe. In line with these data, people in Western Europe express their beliefs to a lower degree than in the central and eastern part of the continent, where the vast majority of the population claims to believe in God.

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1 Religious Diversity Advisory Board (2021). [Religious diversity and the media: an expression of the will for dialogue](#).

2 Data taken from the survey by the [Pew Research Center](#) conducted between 2015 and 2017 in 34 European countries.

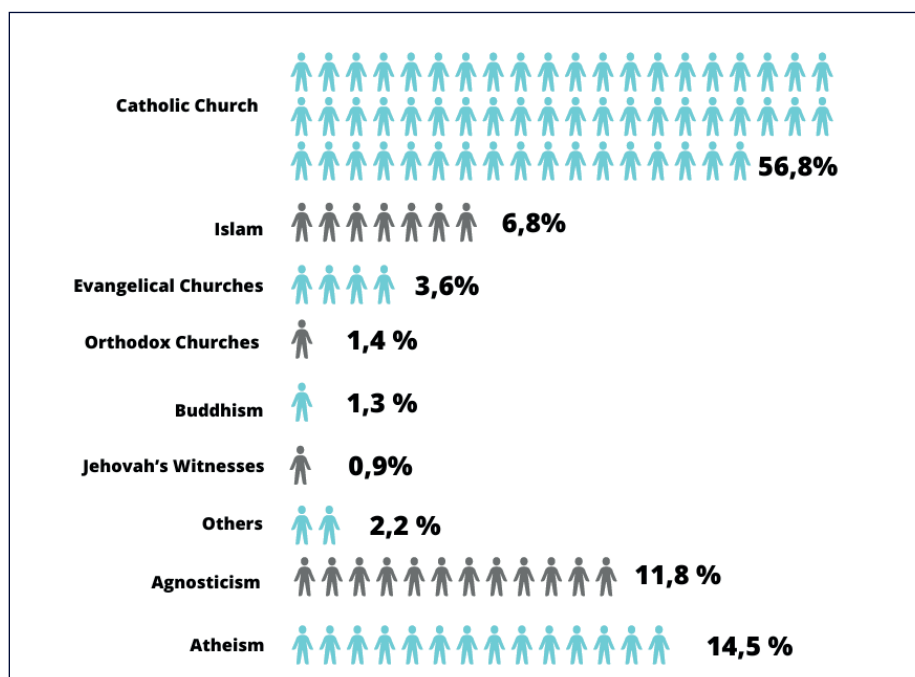
## Religion in Catalonia

Catalonia is a highly plural society from a religious point of view and at the same time aware of the importance of having knowledge of the characteristics of the different religions that live there.

According to the [Baròmetre de la religiositat i sobre la gestió de la seva diversitat \[Barometer on religiosity and the management of its diversity 2020\]](#),<sup>3</sup> 66.9% of Catalan women and men consider it very or fairly important to have some knowledge about religious diversity in order to understand some cultural or artistic expressions, or certain political situations. The results of the Barometer also show a good perception of the relations between the different religious communities in the country and a stabilisation of around 5% in the number of people who have felt discriminated against for religious reasons.

The Catholic Church is the main religious denomination in Catalonia, with which more than half of the citizens identify. It is followed, at a distance, by the evangelical churches and Islam. It should be noted that a quarter of Catalan men and women opt for non-religious awareness (atheists and agnostics)..

### Main religious denominations in Catalonia. Year 2023

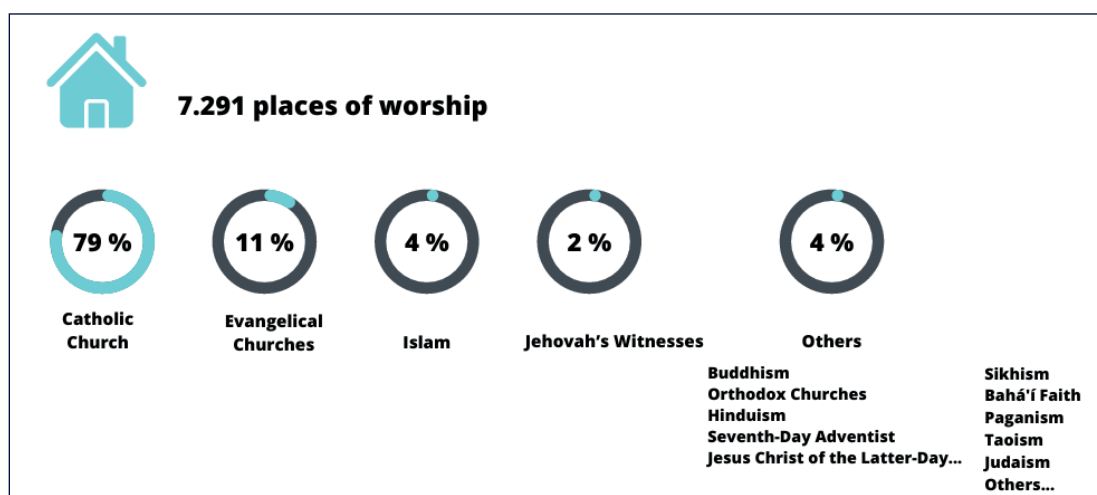


Source: Centre for Opinion Studies (CEO) and Ministry of the Presidency of the Generalitat de Catalunya.

<sup>3</sup> [Baròmetre de la Religiositat i sobre la gestió de la seva diversitat \[Barometer on religiosity and the management of its diversity\]](#). General Directorate of Religious Affairs. Data corresponding to the 2020 study. Scope: Catalonia. Sample size: 1,600 people over the age of 16

According to the [Mapa religiós de Catalunya \[Religious Map of Catalonia\]](#),<sup>4</sup> Catalonia has 7,291 places of worship of 15 different religious denominations, of which 80% belong to the Catholic Church. Of the 1,496 non-Catholic places of worship, evangelical churches are the religious minority with the most places of worship in Catalonia, followed by Islam.

### Places of worship in Catalonia, by religious denomination



Source: General Directorate of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of the Presidency of the Generalitat de Catalunya.

The team of experts who drew up the map reached some conclusions that we consider relevant for contextualising religious information in the media.

- Religious diversity has a long history in Catalonia, but it has not been until recent years that it has begun to experience a modestly normalised situation.** Even today, many communities claim the possibility to fully exercise the rights contained in different regulations, such as the [Organic Act on Freedom of Religion](#) or the 1992 agreements established with certain minority religions.
- The growth of immigration has led to an increase in religious diversity in Catalonia over the last two decades, but there have also been conversions of people from native families.**
- The map of religious diversity in Catalonia is in the process of being institutionalised, but with certain difficulties in making it visible.** Religious diversity is mostly invisible in the Catalan architectural landscape, although it is gradually gaining visibility.

<sup>4</sup> Initiative of the DGAR to have a census of places of worship with activity in Catalonia. Data taken from the 2022 update.

- d) **Centres of worship play a key role as spaces for sociability within the framework of minority religions.** They become more relevant in communities formed by cultural and/or national minorities, because they also become socialising spaces for the second generations and meeting points.
- e) **Centres of worship are often drivers of intense social work.** It is common for places of worship to carry out a social task aimed at the population in general, although there is also the possibility that this activity is directed exclusively at members of the community.
- f) **There has been an increase in interfaith relations between communities in the last ten years.** Interfaith dialogue has become an engine for establishing networks between members of various religions at the local level.



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION

The right to freedom of religion and conscience is widely recognised in the international legal framework. Thus, Article 18 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) specifies that:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom, individually or collectively, in public or in private, to manifest one's religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.*

Article 16 of the [Spanish Constitution](#) also recognises freedom of religion and worship as a fundamental right, not only on the part of individuals, but also on the part of communities. And it urges the public authorities to take into account the religious beliefs of the citizens and to establish relations of cooperation with the different religions. This right was later developed by [Organic Act 7/1980, of 5 July, on Freedom of Religion](#).

[The Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia](#), for its part, goes a step further and calls on the public authorities to promote the equality of individuals, regardless of their religion – among other factors – and to eradicate any expression that may constitute a violation of the equality and dignity of the individual (section 8 of Article 40). Also, in accordance with section 7 of Article 42, the public authorities shall also ensure social, cultural and religious harmony among individuals in Catalonia, and respect for diversity of beliefs and ethical and philosophical convictions, and shall foster intercultural relations through the encouragement and creation of forums for mutual awareness, dialogue and mediation.

Freedom of expression is also recognised as a fundamental right. In the context of the United Nations, this right is contained in two basic documents. On the one hand, on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights itself, Article 19 of which states that:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.*

On the other, the \_\_\_\_\_, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 16 December 1966, states (in Article 19) that:

1. *Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.*
2. *Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.*
3. *The exercise of the right provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:*
  - a) *For respect of the rights or reputations of others.*
  - b) *For the protection of national security or of public order or public health and morals.*



This normative deployment therefore protects all forms of opinion, including religious ones. And this is also underlined in Article 27 of the [ICCPR](#):

*In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion and to use their own language.*

Aware of the special protection that minorities require, the General Assembly of the United Nations, in [Resolution 47/135](#), of 18 December 1992, approved the [Declaration on the rights of people belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities](#), which establishes (in Article 1) that:

*States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity.*

It is therefore the duty of states and their administrations to protect religious diversity in all its forms. In this regard, and taking into account the particularity of our view, Article 4 is of particular relevance, which states:

*States shall take measures where required to ensure that persons belonging to minorities may exercise fully and effectively all their human rights and fundamental freedoms without any discrimination and in full equality before the law.*

This article refers to human rights and fundamental freedoms and, therefore, also talks about the right to information in its double dimension: the right to receive information and the right to communicate information. The Spanish Constitution considers it a fundamental right. For its part, the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia also mentions the right to receive information and its application in the various areas. Specifically, [Article 52](#) of the [Statute](#) says that:

*The public authorities shall promote the conditions, which guarantee the right to information and the right to receive accurate information from the media, and contents that respects personal dignity and political, social, cultural and religious pluralism.*

In order to **respect the rights of people who are part of religious minorities in our country, we shall ensure their right to communicate information, also of a religious nature**. In this way, **the training of the journalists is a key factor in guaranteeing compliance with this international mandate**.

## LEGAL STATUS OF THE DIFFERENT RELIGIONS IN SPAIN

Religious entities are listed in the register provided for this purpose by the Ministry of the Presidency of the Spanish Government. Therefore, any entity appearing in this register is legal and carries out its activities under the protection of Law 7/1980, of 5 July, on Freedom of religion. See the entities registered on this [link](#). On the other hand, the legislative bodies have approved different regulations over time which has meant that not all religious denominations enjoy the same rights. In this regard, it should be remembered that Spain and the Holy See signed five international treaties between 1976 and 1979<sup>5</sup> under which the Catholic Church is given, among others, the right to certain tax benefits, the right to religious assistance for citizens interned in prisons, hospitals, sanatoriums, etc., the inclusion of the optional Catholic education at all levels of education, or the civil effects of canonical marriage.

In 1992, Spain signed three cooperation agreements with the representative federations of the Evangelical, Jewish and Muslim communities. These agreements, which were later approved as law<sup>6</sup> by the General Courts, they also specifically recognise several rights to the members of these communities. In many cases, they coincide with those listed for the Catholic Church, but in others, they foresee specificities for some of these religious denominations. Thus, for example, Muslims and Jews have recognised the right to have specific plots in municipal cemeteries; and it is established that the food at hospitals, schools or other similar centres will be tried to adapt to Islamic religious precepts.

Finally, the State also recognises as “well-established religions” other denominations such as Buddhism, Jehovah’s Christian Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Orthodox churches or the Bahá’í faith.<sup>7</sup> This title grants the theoretical possibility to these religious denominations to sign a cooperation agreement in the future similar to that of Protestants, Jews and Muslims, in addition to giving them certain rights, such as the civil recognition of marriage for these rites.

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<sup>5</sup> See them on this [link](#).

<sup>6</sup> The following laws are involved:

- [Cooperation agreement of the Spanish State with the Federación de Entidades Religiosas evangélicas de España](#) (approved by Law 24/1992, of 10 November).
- [Cooperation agreement of the Spanish State with the Federación de Comunidades Israelitas de España](#) (approved by Law 25/1992, of 10 November).
- [Cooperation agreement of the Spanish State with the Comisión Islámica de España](#) (approved by Law 26/1992, of 10 November).

<sup>7</sup> The evangelical, Jewish and Muslim communities were also recognised as well-established religions in the Spanish State before they signed the aforementioned cooperation agreements.



# GUIDELINES

## > ABOUT THE CONTENT OF THE NEWS ITEMS

**01**

### **Broaden one's view and avoid simplifications and clichés.**

Often, the conception that exists of certain religions or religious minorities is limited to some stereotypes or prejudices. Other times, the coverage carried out by journalists tends to be limited to some specific aspect of a community, so that the field of our view of that group is reduced. In this regard, it is advisable to approach religious issues with an avoidance of clichés and with the aim of finding a broad and complementary view.

For example, when referring to Islam, Ramadan is often referred to as a month of fasting, although it is also a time especially dedicated to introspection and community, as in the case of Catholics, for whom Christmas is a period of redoubled efforts and commitments for social justice. Thus, it would make sense to make an informative piece where, in addition to talking about food customs, the emphasis was also placed on the personal implications and the social customs of the communities.

**02**

### **Take into account the specifics of each religious denomination when reporting.**

It is advisable to focus on religious information, especially when it refers to religious minorities, focusing on four pillars:

- a) Corpus of beliefs: it is advisable to understand and explain the specificities of each religious denomination, how it is organised and interacts within the community and with the rest of society.
- b) Customs and rites: it is advisable to explain and show the various elements that characterise a religious denomination, such as clothing, the calendar or the rites.
- c) Social action: it is necessary to publicise the commitment that religious communities have to people who are in a situation of social vulnerability.
- d) Prejudices: pay attention to the stigmatisation that religious people suffer simply because they are religious, and even more so when it comes to non-majority groups.

**To learn more about these specificities, consult the appendix “Basic information on the religious denominations with the most presence in Catalonia” at the end of this document.**

03

### Learn about the calendars of the different religious denominations.

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To conduct good coverage of the cultural and social aspects that characterise a religious denomination, it is advisable to plan and establish a calendar of the main annual milestones of each religious tradition. This will allow us to be prepared in advance and produce richer and more detailed news items. It would therefore be a matter of anticipating the arrival of the main festivities of each tradition.<sup>8</sup>

The main festivities of some of the religious denominations with a presence in Catalonia are, for example, the Jewish Easter or the Yom Kippur, the Christian Christmas or the Sikh Guru Granth Sahib festival.

04

### Be careful when talking about religious fundamentalism.

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We cannot label a person or a religious community as a *fundamentalist* for the mere fact of following a certain decalogue, code of ethics or tradition. Nor can we categorise as sectarian any religious denomination that is not the main form (in this way, we take away the right of expression from minorities). The terms *sect* and *sectarian* have negative and stigmatising connotations, and should not be equated with religious minorities.

In recent years, there has been an increase in religious information related to forms of fundamentalism in the media, although extremist groups are an exceptional reality and do not respond to the generalised way of doing or feeling of members of any religious tradition. The news buzz they generate is rather due to fundamentalism's desire to create a stir with the aim of being seen.

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<sup>8</sup> The calendar of the main religious holidays can be consulted at the [website](#) of the General Directorate of Religious Affairs

## > REGARDING PEOPLE WHO PRACTICE A RELIGION

**01**

### **Be aware that Catalonia is plural and diverse.**

For some years, we have referred to religious traditions other than Catholicism as an imported body as a result of migrations. Although this approach has been partially correct for a while, it is now obsolete. Currently, many people born in Catalonia experience their religious life outside the Catholic tradition. So far 14 other religious denominations have been identified in our country that have developed their own path, form and evolution.

So, for example, it no longer makes sense to always talk about the Bahá'í community as a community from Iran, since there are more and more Catalan Bahá'ís.

Religious freedom is a fundamental right of citizens and its collective dimension must be respected as a positive social value, a fact that entails respect for all religious denominations or entities. It is also necessary to apply the principle of equal treatment for all religions, regardless of their sociological impact.

**02**

### **Take into account the evolution and the generational factor of religions.**

While it is true that in Catalonia the Catholic Christian religion is the leading faith, it must also be said that over the last decades the percentage of the population that declare themselves to be followers has decreased significantly. However, this sociological phenomenon, which is specific to Catholicism at the present time, cannot be applied to the other traditions. There are religious denominations that have been experiencing growth in recent times, such as the various evangelical churches or Buddhism, to name a few.

As for the generational factor, in Catalonia, the highest percentage of the population with religious beliefs is among older people. Nevertheless, there are also many young people today who claim that religion is a part of their identity, and who show their religious belief in a natural and uncomplicated way, for example, on social networks.

The case of some influencers should be highlighted (influencers) in the field of religions, with thousands of followers in Catalonia and who are often young, female and Muslims (Miss Raïsa or Ramia Chaoui are examples of this).

03

### Try not to make generalisations.

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Although many religious denominations have spokespersons and structures of institutional representation, we must remember that unity occurs within diversity, that is to say, that there is plurality within each tradition. Therefore, we must pay attention to the inherent variability within each tradition and avoid making generalisations when reporting.

In the same way that not all Catholics agree on the same customs or opinions, neither are the other religions made up of people with a single profile. For example, in the world of evangelical churches, there are those who read the Bible literally and those who interpret it; or there are also those who bless homosexual marriages and those who condemn them.

04

### Avoid contributing to the stigmatisation of religious minorities.

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There are people in Catalonia who feel stigmatised by the fact of belonging to a religious minority or to a religion that is not the majority. There are also people who claim that they have suffered discrimination when the news has been reported, emphasising not only the newsworthy event, but also the religious denomination to which the people involved belong. It is necessary to act with special responsibility and rigour in the case of expressions that may give rise to discrimination on religious grounds.

We can think of the Muslim community, in the days following a terrorist attack. Or in Jehovah's Witnesses, who complain that, in the face of negative news, it tends to be emphasised that the person responsible for the crime is a Jehovah's Witness, while in other similar news items the religious denomination of the person involved is never indicated.

05

### Be aware of one's own prejudices and also of those that religious communities may have.

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In the same way that journalists can approach religious denominations from the generic perspective of stereotypes, here we would like to highlight that this tendency occurs in both directions. Therefore, the members of the communities also sometimes approach journalistic work from a perspective of prejudice, especially in the case of religious minorities. Thus, some communities are afraid to engage with journalists, especially when the request comes from programmes that exploit controversy.

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<sup>9</sup> In this regard, it should be remembered that paragraph 1 of Article 19 of [Catalan Act 19/2020, on equal treatment and non-discrimination](#), urges public administrations to "apply measures for equal treatment and the prevention of discrimination based on religion or belief and ensure that public policies respect the right to religious freedom in the terms established by legislation."



## > SPECIFIC POINTS ON JOURNALISTIC PRACTICE

**01**

### **Select our information sources with care.**

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Most religions are heterogeneous and diverse, and do not have a single institutional spokesperson. Therefore, it is necessary to select our information sources with care depending on each religious organisation and the information we are looking for.

Often, confusions occur because in the structure of the Catholic Church there is a single official spokesperson who speaks on behalf of the entire institution. This situation, however, is not mirrored in the other traditions.

**02**

### **Expand the range of interlocutors, including people from religious communities.**

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Information related to religious traditions is often compiled from expert voices, usually from academia. Although this is an interesting point of view, it is necessary to strengthen, whenever possible, the voice of the people who are part of the community and who have a real and lived experience of what it means to belong to that particular religious denomination.

**03**

### **Select audiovisual resources and interviewees carefully.**

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Choosing an image or video that correctly illustrates a piece of information is an essential part of the journalistic profession, since, due to their visual nature, they convey with immediacy certain messages that can either reinforce prejudices and stereotypes or dismantle them. It should also be noted that the selection of sources can contribute to showing different faces of a religion, often more consistent with the reality and diversity of the country.

Thus, if when reporting on news about Islam we include the statements of a person born in Catalonia with white skin, for example, we are showing that Islam is diverse and that there is a reality beyond the cliché that all Muslims are people with different physical features.

## 04

## Check information to report it accurately.

Linked to the previous point, and in order to avoid reproducing prejudices and generalisations, it is advisable not to take for granted any preconceived ideas about certain communities. Religions develop and change over time, and often do so in parallel with the evolution of societies. Therefore, within religious denominations that, for example, may have had a tradition of polygamy for quite some time, it may no longer be the case today. It is therefore advisable to check the data before reproducing it.

Such is the case with members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who are often said to be polygamists, even though this is a practice that has not been part of their doctrine for decades. We can also refer to the tendency to take for granted that Orthodox churches celebrate Christmas on 7 January, while this is only a peculiarity of some patriarchates (Moscow, Serbia, Georgia) and the rest celebrate Christmas on 25 December.

## 05

## Use accurate language to talk about religion.

We need to talk about it with the same care as when we talk about the other topics that are part of the current media landscape. We need to know the language and terminology specific to this area. As for communities, it is good practice to ask them what name(s) they would like to be used when referring to them.

We know the case of the Bahá'í community, which is recognised only by name *Bahá'í Faith* and *Bahá'ís*, while different dictionaries, both in English, Catalan and Spanish, accept the terms Baha'ism or Baha'ist or their equivalents. Or, to cite another example, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints ask not to be referred to as *Mormons*, but rather with the name of their church.

**To learn more about this issue, consult the “Common mistakes and good practices” section, with expressions to use and avoid.**



## > REGARDING THE FRAMEWORK OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGIONS AND JOURNALISTS

01

### Distinguish between spiritual practices and religions.

In the contemporary world, practices linked to people's well-being proliferate, which use specific techniques and vocabulary, which for many years have been part of the restricted area of religions. Although the contemporary world tends to ignore the contextualisation of these practices, it can be useful for the journalist to know the framework that explains them and allows to grasp their full meaning. This will allow us to report more rigorously.

For example, today one can talk about *mindfulness* without making any reference to Buddhism or we can attend a course on Ayurvedic medicine without mentioning Hinduism.

02

### Knowing who has the power to decide what is and what is not a religion.

The Ministry of the Presidency of the Spanish Government is the body that regulates what is and what is not a religion. The source to consult when we need to define a framework for action is the General Directorate of Religious Affairs of the Generalitat de Catalunya.

One example is *Scientology* or Church of Scientology, which in Spain (and, consequently, in Catalonia) is considered a religion, while in other European countries it is not.

**To learn more about this aspect, consult the section "The legal status of the different religious denominations in Spain".**

03

### Taking care of the need for training.

It is legitimate not to know the terminology of the various religions, especially in a secularised world. However, when it comes to reporting on religion, it is necessary to commit to training and an honest exchange between the communities and the representatives of the media. This is an exchange that will be fruitful in both directions: on the one hand, journalists will receive first-hand information and get to know closely what the worldviews of each community are, and conversely, communities will feel more and more comfortable when addressing journalists.

# COMMON MISTAKES AND BEST PRACTICES

Below is a selection of the most widespread prejudices and stereotypes regarding religions, which, therefore, should be combated both in personal terms and also when communicating in professional terms. We also offer a collection of guidelines and best practices to achieve a qualitative improvement in the treatment of information in the media.

## > STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

- **It is wrong to consider that religions are structured analogously to the way the Catholic Church is organised.** Although the Catholic branch of Christianity is the majority religion in Catalonia and has strong cultural roots, it must be taken into account that each religion has its own organisational system.
- In many communities, **it is necessary to distinguish between the person responsible for the religious or doctrinal side and the person responsible or spokesperson for the community.** Taking into account this difference in profiles will help us to avoid mistakes and direct ourselves to the best interlocutor possible, when necessary.
- **Religions are internally diverse.** Therefore, when we have to report on a particular religious denomination, we must be careful not to make generalisations.

## NOMENCLATURE AND SPECIFIC TERMINOLOGY

Common mistakes		
"Evangelists...", "Baha'ists...", "Mormons..."		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
Each religion has its own way of naming its members and there is no general criterion that works for all of them.	Depending on the religious denomination, it is advisable to use the following terms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bahá'í Faith: <i>Bahá'ís</i> or <i>members of the Bahá'í Faith</i></li> <li>- Buddhism: <i>Buddhists</i></li> <li>- Catholic Church: <i>Catholics</i></li> <li>- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: <i>Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints</i></li> <li>- Evangelical churches: <i>Evangelicals</i> or <i>Protestants</i></li> <li>- Hinduism: <i>Hindus</i></li> <li>- Islam: <i>Muslims</i></li> <li>- Jehovah's Witnesses: <i>Jehovah's Witnesses</i>.</li> <li>- Judaism: <i>Jews</i></li> <li>- Orthodox churches: <i>Orthodox</i> (preceded by the name of the patriarchate, if applicable)</li> <li>- Seventh-day Adventist Church: <i>Adventists</i></li> <li>- Sikhism: <i>Sikhs</i></li> </ul>	It is necessary to use the most suitable name, which is usually what the members of that religious community use to call themselves.

Common mistakes		
"Arabs, Moroccans or Muslims..."		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
<i>Arab, Moroccan or Muslim</i> are not synonymous concepts. The first two refer to geopolitics or culture, and the last one to the religion.	To refer to the community of believers who profess Islam, the only correct term is <i>Muslims</i> .	The term <i>Arab</i> should be used to refer to the members of the people originally located in the Syro-Palestinian desert and in northern Arabia, the term <i>Moroccan</i> to refer to a person who is from Morocco or to things relating to Morocco, and the term <i>Muslim</i> to refer to the members of the community of believers who profess Islam.

Common mistakes		
"Islamists..."		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
<i>Islamist</i> is not synonymous with <i>Muslim</i> .	We should use the word <i>Muslims</i> (and not <i>Islamists</i> ) to refer to the community of believers who profess Islam.	It is advisable to use each concept rigorously: Islam is the name of the religion and Islamism is a politico-religious movement. An Islamist person is therefore a follower of Islamism (and not simply a Muslim).

Common mistakes		
"Islamic..."		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
The adjective <i>Islamic</i> applies to things or objects, but not to people.	The word <i>Muslims</i> (and not <i>Islamic</i> ) must be used to refer to the community of believers who profess Islam.	It is advisable to use the term <i>Muslim</i> to refer to people (e.g., "a group of Muslims") and <i>Islamic</i> to refer to objects (e.g., "an Islamic building").

Common mistakes		
"The Evangelical Church..."		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
There is no single structure that includes all evangelical churches, as is the case with the Catholic Church.	<i>Evangelical churches</i> refers to a collection of churches. To refer to a specific church, use the name of the church itself (e.g., Bethel Evangelical Church or "the evangelical church on Carrer Ripoll").	It is advisable to talk about <i>evangelical churches</i> to refer to the multiplicity and diversity of churches that were born of or were linked to the Protestant Reformation, but that do not have a unique or common organisation among them.

## ROLES AND POSITIONS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Common mistakes		
The Muslim priest", "The Evangelical priest", "The Protestant priest"		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
The concept and figure of the priest is specific to the Catholic Church, but not to other religious traditions.	In the case of Islam, it is necessary to speak of the <i>imam</i> and in the case of evangelical churches, it is necessary to speak of the <i>pastor</i> .	It is advisable to use the terms <i>chaplain</i> or <i>priest</i> only when speaking in the Catholic context and using other terms ( <i>pastor</i> , <i>imam</i> , etc.) when referring to points of references from other religious traditions (taking into account that the roles are different in each case).

Common mistakes		
"The leader is the imam", "Here the rabbi is in charge". "The Dalai Lama, the Pope of the Buddhists..."		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
The pyramidal hierarchical structure, characteristic of the Catholic Church, is not reproduced in all religious traditions. Likewise, there are often not exactly the same positions or functions among the religious leaders of the various communities.	The imam is primarily the prayer leader, the rabbi is a religious teacher, and the Dalai Lama is the leader of Tibetan Buddhism (not all Buddhism).	It is necessary to know at least the organisational structure of the various communities in order to make use of the most appropriate terms at each moment, as well as to be able to select the best interlocution in each case.

## GENERALISATIONS

Common mistakes	
"Religions are sexist."	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
Religions express themselves according to the culture of each place.	We should also pay attention to the feminist references within each tradition.

Common mistakes	
"Only Buddhists meditate."	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
All religions incorporate prayer or meditation in their own and specific form.	There is a tendency to regard the practice of Buddhist meditation as something alien to the entire prayer tradition of other religious denominations. However, almost all forms of prayer have something in common with each other.

## > PLACES OF WORSHIP

- Some groups linked to religious minorities often find it difficult to open temples or buildings for worship. Usually, the lack of financial resources or sometimes the reluctance of the neighbourhood explain these situations. In their stead, **commercial premises or building basements have been adapted**.
- Although each tradition gives particular uses to its temples or places of worship, we can establish that **the celebration of worship, community meetings and social or solidarity action are a common denominator** of almost all religious denominations.
- **Each tradition has certain rules of behaviour inside the temple** and it is not possible to extrapolate codes of conduct that serve for all of them. In this regard, before establishing contact with each tradition, it is necessary to learn about them in an appropriate way.

## NOMENCLATURE AND SPECIFIC TERMINOLOGY

Common mistakes		
"They opened a church in the neighbourhood."		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
The word <i>church</i> is used only to refer to the places of worship of some branches of Christianity.	In the case of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we need to speak of <i>chapels</i> . In the case of the Bahá'í Faith and Hinduism, the term <i>centres</i> must be used. When we refer to Islam, we call them <i>prayer halls</i> or <i>mosques</i> . In the case of Judaism, they are <i>synagogues</i> . In Sikhism, they are <i>gurdwaras</i> . Jehovah's Witnesses call them <i>Kingdom Halls</i> .	It is necessary to identify well which religious tradition each place of worship belongs to and call it by the name that corresponds to it; that is, the one used by the community itself.

Common mistakes		
"A new mosque is being opened in the city."		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
Some Muslim people consider that the majority of prayer halls in Catalonia cannot properly be termed <i>mosques</i> .	Some Muslims only use the term <i>prayer hall</i> , instead of <i>mosque</i> , if the building does not have a minaret.	It is advisable to distinguish between the concepts of prayer hall and mosque depending on the architectural characteristics of the building in question.

Common mistakes		
"Protestant Mass", "Orthodox Mass"		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
Evangelical communities celebrate services, not masses (which is the Catholic Church's term for them). Likewise, Orthodox communities celebrate <i>divine liturgies</i> .	In the case of evangelical communities, it is necessary to speak of worship and in the case of Orthodox communities, of <i>divine liturgy</i> .	It is advisable to adjust the terminology to the reality of each religious tradition and avoid parallels with the Catholic Church.

## OPENING AND FUNCTIONS OF CENTRES OF WORSHIP

Common mistakes	
"I agree that a mosque can be opened, but not here."	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
There are multiple laws protecting the right of religious assembly and regulating the right to establish places of worship or assembly for religious purposes.	The information about the possible illegality of the place of worship must be checked with the competent local authority (the town hall) and also with the official leaders of the religious community.

Common mistakes	
"Strange things are done in that space."	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
Many religious minorities have their places of worship in commercial premises or garages, which can convey a sense of precariousness. In addition, in these spaces one does not only pray in silence, but rather there are other ways of celebrating worship, as well as carrying out various activities, such as training or social action, among others.	It is advisable to be aware that not all places of worship are large architectural constructions, nor should they be, and that this fact should not be used to categorise "first-rate" and "second-rate" religions. In fact, it should be borne in mind that, often, this situation is generated due to the lack of financial resources and administrative difficulties. On the other hand, it is useful to know the idiosyncrasy of the functions of places of worship in different religious traditions.

Common mistakes	
"The centre does not comply with the minimum security and capacity measures. There are too many people."	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
If a place of worship does not meet the material and technical conditions necessary to guarantee the safety of the users and the hygiene of the facilities, and to avoid inconvenience to third parties, it cannot operate. The municipal council has the powers to check these conditions.	It is advisable to consult the current regulations and/or consult the competent local administration, as well as the official spokesperson of the religious community in question.

Common mistakes	
"Covering your head or body when entering a place of worship is a sign of submission."	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
In many traditions, covering the head is a symbol or sign of respect.	It is necessary to give voice to the testimony of different people who show the diversity of reasons as to why a practice is carried out.

## LEGAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Common mistakes	
"A new religion is being established in the neighbourhood."	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
Historically, there has been great religious diversity in Catalonia, even though it has sometimes had to live underground	It is advisable to make sure that it really is a new religion and to contextualise the facts historically or, if appropriate, also in the context of migratory circumstances. To learn about the trajectory and implementation of a certain religion, consult the <a href="#">Mapa Religiós de Catalunya [Religious Map of Catalonia]</a> .

Common mistakes	
"They invade public spaces."	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
At certain times of the year, especially those associated with religious festivities, communities tend to hold larger gatherings that, in some cases, affect public roads, such as the celebration of the end of Ramadan or Palm Sunday.	It should be borne in mind that there is a framework that regulates the use of public roads and it is advisable to highlight this when reporting. It is also good practice to remember that religious organisations have the same right to occupy public roads as other organisations. Also, in this example, the concept of <i>invasion</i> has negative connotations (e.g., <i>avalanche</i> , etc.) which should be avoided.

Common mistakes	
"Their religion...? Yes, but only in their own homes."	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
Various laws exist that protect the right to assemble (including for religious purposes) and the right to establish places of worship or assembly for religious purposes.	It must be remembered that there is the fundamental human right of freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the freedom to express it individually or in common, in public or in private.

## DISCRIMINATION

Common mistakes	
"The mosque will bring a lack of security.", "The evangelical space leads to conflicts in the neighbourhood.", "The synagogue is a source of problems."	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
There are no data that demonstrate the link between the opening of a place of worship and the increase in threats to security.	It is advisable to check the information so as not to give space to fake news, except when debunking them.
Common mistakes	
"Islam is invading us.", "Jews are a plague."	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
It is difficult to count how many members there are of each religious tradition. However, the data show that, after Catholicism, evangelical churches are the religious tradition with the most places of worship in Catalonia and also the one that has experienced the greatest growth in this regard.	<p>It is necessary to contrast the information with objective data in order to report with maximum reliability.</p> <p>In the examples, in addition, the terms <i>invasion</i> and <i>plague</i> have negative connotations that should be avoided.</p>



## > CLOTHING AND SYMBOLS

- The use of certain pieces of clothing of a religious nature does not respond to fashions, tastes or personal choices that can be modified from day to day, but they implicitly contain a deeper meaning, linked to a way of life. For the members of some religious communities these are not optional elements.
- In general, all religious traditions include Guidelines on clothing related to respect for customs, decency and modesty. In most cases, women have received more recommendations than men.
- Religious freedom is one of the fundamental rights collected from all spheres of jurisprudence. Now, **the right to religious freedom of each individual or community may also suffer from some limitations in accordance with the legal system.** Defining in which cases a religious element can be worn or in which cases it cannot is a question that remains subject to the laws of each country and the interpretation of each case, and is also a question in constant evolution and construction.
- **The use of the veil is a practice that some Muslim societies have considered appropriate within their religious tradition.** In this context, it is also important to avoid generalisations and to bear in mind that **the reasons that lead a woman to wear a veil or otherwise are specific and varied, and they are not the same for everyone.**

## CLOTHING

Common mistakes		
"Churches that make you cover up are conservative"		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
The demand to cover the hair, shoulders or legs often has to do, for some religious communities, with a question of respect.	Churches that make you cover up understand covering your body as a symbol of respect: some are conservative and some are not.	It is advisable to distinguish which elements are customs and which are ideological orientations. If entering places of worship to cover the news, it is advisable to respect the rules of the place of worship.

Common mistakes	
"Muslims who wear robes are radicals"	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
Many Muslims, regardless of their way of life and understanding of religion, wear robes at important times, such as Ramadan or Friday prayers. In addition, the robe is a garment used in various religious traditions.	It is advisable to take cultural elements into account and to be aware that clothing does not always define a person's ideological orientation.

## VEIL, BURQA AND TURBAN

Common mistakes		
"The veil is degrading for women"		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
The use of the veil is a practice that some Muslim societies have considered appropriate within their religious tradition.	In the use of the veil it is necessary to consider several factors, such as tradition or the attribution of personal meanings. The veil is a symbol that can have different meanings depending on the person who wears it.	Avoid generalisations: every woman decides whether or not to wear a veil, for specific reasons that can be very diverse. Giving them a voice is a way of knowing their reasons.

Common mistakes		
"Women who wear veils are Muslims."		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
There are women who are Muslim and do not wear a veil, and there are women of other religions or traditions who do.	Currently, in Catalonia, there is a great diversity of religions and the veil is a proper element of more than one religion (for example, it is also a part of Hinduism and Sikhism).	Generalisations should be avoided, so that the internal diversity within any religious tradition can emerge.

Common mistakes	
"In Catalonia there are many migrant women wearing the burqa."	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
The burqa is not common in Catalonia. It is true that tourism, especially from countries in the Persian Gulf, has made niqabs more visible in some large cities in recent years.	It is necessary to use the appropriate terminology for each element, differentiating the concepts of <i>veil</i> , <i>burqa</i> or <i>niqab</i> , among others.

Common mistakes		
"If they wear turbans, they are Taliban."		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
The turban is not exclusively an element of the clothing of Taliban men. There are people from other backgrounds and religions, such as Sikhism, who wear turbans.	In Catalonia, most of the men who wear turbans are Sikhs.	It is good practice to avoid direct associations between the wearing of the turban and terrorism.

## > FUNDAMENTALISM

- **Extremism or fundamentalism is relative, it depends on the framework in which it occurs.** There is no single and objective way to define when an ideology is extremist or not, but cases must always be contextualised. Therefore, we must be very careful when adding adjectives such as “fundamentalist”, “radical” or others when reporting on the religion.
- **There is no religious tradition that includes violence or terrorism as a possible form of expression.** Therefore, associating religion and violence is bad practice.
- **We must not confuse being fundamentalist with being conservative.** There are religious groups that are not very open to change or modernity, but this does not make them fundamentalists. The differentiating element is the fact of wanting to impose one’s own doctrine on the rest.
- When we report on cases of religious fundamentalism, we must keep in mind that **there are violent political groups that use religion (with a fundamentalist discourse) to justify their actions.**
- The majority of prejudices and concepts that appear in the media linked to the issue of fundamentalism have to do with Islam, as the data from the [Observatorio de la Islamofobia](#) [Observatory on Islamophobia]. It must be taken into account that this fact does not lead to generalisations about this religion.

## FUNDAMENTALISM ASSOCIATED WITH ISLAM

Common mistakes	
“Muslims are fundamentalists”	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
As in other religions, a minority of Muslim people are fundamentalists.	Avoid generalisations.

Common mistakes		
“The Islamists...” (referring to a member of the Muslim community)		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
<i>Islam</i> refers to religion, while <i>Islamism</i> refers to the political-religious movement. These terms are not synonymous.	<i>Muslims</i>	We should use the word <i>Islamist</i> to refer to a person who follows Islamism and the term <i>Muslim</i> to talk about someone who professes Islam.

Common mistakes		
"Islamic terrorism"		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
Islam, like other religions, implicitly carries a message of peace and condemns all forms of violence.	<p>It is necessary to identify the specific group that has committed the attack or terrorist act when reporting.</p> <p>Ultimately, although it is discouraged, the concept jihadist terrorism can be used.<sup>10</sup></p>	It is advisable to remember that terrorist acts are committed by individuals, not countries, ethnic groups or religions. Thus, it is necessary not to label terrorism based on origin, ethnicity or religion.

Common mistakes		
"The Islamic State claims the attack..."		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
"Islamic State" is a terrorist organisation, although it has a name easily associated with a political organisation.	"DAESH claims the attack..."	Prioritise the use of official terminologies or those recommended by reference bodies.

Common mistakes		
"Jihad is a war.", "Jihadism has perpetrated an attack..."		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
The concept of <i>jihad</i> means, essentially, effort to overcome and resist all evil, both in the personal sphere and within the Muslim community.	Often, what we popularly call <i>jihad</i> are actually actions or attacks by terrorist groups.	It is advisable to use the word <i>jihad</i> exclusively in the semantic framework that corresponds to it, as overcoming and resistance.

<sup>10</sup> On this question, see the [Guidelines on news coverage of terrorism](#) which was published by the Catalan Audiovisual Council in 2016. Specifically, Recommendation 1.5 points out that "Acts of terrorism are not committed by countries, ethnic groups or religions, but by individuals. It is therefore important not to describe terrorism by reference to a place of origin, race or religion. For instance, the term "jihade terrorism" is preferable to "Islamic terrorism". Only as last resort.

## FUNDAMENTALISM ASSOCIATED WITH OTHER RELIGIONS

Common mistakes		
"Many Protestant churches are sects."		
Remember that...	How should we say it?	Guidelines and best practices
Etymologically, any split away from a group is a sect. However, the birth of a new group or the division of a group does not lead, de facto, to being able to talk about a sect in the pejorative sense of the term.	"Many Protestant churches are spin-offs."	It is advisable to use other terms that do not have associated connotations, such as <i>splinter group</i> or the name of the new church or community.

Common mistakes	
"Jehovah's Witnesses is a sect."	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
Jehovah's Witnesses is recognised as a religion in Spain.	It is advisable to consult the <a href="#">register</a> of the Ministry of the Presidency to find out which religions are recognised in Spain.

## > RELIGION AND EDUCATION

- Lack of religious denomination is not synonymous with agnosticism or atheism and, therefore, **the presence of religion in public spaces is a reality that coexists with the rest of social expressions.**
- Both the Spanish Constitution and the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia recognise **the right of all persons to receive religious instruction and information of any kind.**
- Today, in Spain, there are established **agreements that ensure that the teaching of Catholicism, Judaism, Islam and Protestantism is integrated into the education system.** Currently, in Catalonia there is a Catholic religion class, some cases of evangelical religion and a pilot plan relating to the subject of Islamic religion has been launched.

Common mistakes	
"Religion in school is indoctrination"	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
In a non-denominational State like Spain, the school subject of religion must promote respect for all religions.	It is worth remembering that there are many ways to teach religion and that, more and more, educational centres choose to teach religious culture. Thus, while religion usually teaches about a specific religious tradition, religious culture focuses on the history of all religions and their effects on societies.

Common mistakes	
"The subject of religion at school should not be compulsory"	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
Currently, in public schools, the subject of religion is not compulsory for students.	We should consult the education law in force at the time, where the educational curriculum for each school stage is published and the compulsory subjects are determined.

Common mistakes	
"I don't understand why my son has to do religion if I'm not a religious person"	
Remember that...	Guidelines and best practices
There is no obligation to take the subject of religion.	It is advisable to be aware that, in order to know or talk about the diversity of beliefs, it is not necessary to share them or agree with them. On the other hand, having access to this type of information makes it possible to improve coexistence (inside and outside school), to become more critical and to better understand the world in which we live.

# APPENDIX.

## BASIC INFORMATION ON THE RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS WITH THE MOST PRESENCE IN CATALONIA



This appendix contains 12 files with the most relevant characteristics and specificities of the religious confessions with the greatest presence in Catalonia, presented in alphabetical order:

- Bahá'í Faith
- Buddhism
- Catholic Church
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
- Evangelical churches
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Judaism
- Orthodox churches
- Seventh-day Adventist Church
- Sikhism



# BAHÁ'Í FAITH



## Basic data

- **Number of Bahá'í assembly points in Catalonia (2022):** 25
- **The Bahá'í Faith in Catalonia:** in 1949 the first meeting group was formed in Barcelona and, two years later, a new meeting group was begun in Terrassa.
- Bahá'í people **do not identify with the words *Bahá'ism* or *Bahá'ist*** (although these are officially recognised terms in different dictionaries both in English, Catalan or Spanish). The members of this religion **are called *Bahá'ís*** and their religion is the **Bahá'í Faith**.

## How are Bahá'í people organised in Catalonia?

The Bahá'í community is structured around two types of institutions.

- **Democratically elected institutions destined to make decisions regarding the life and goals of the community.** This is the case of institutions such as the Universal House of Justice or national or local spiritual assemblies. The latter, present in Catalonia, are made up of nine members who are elected each year and who must be over twenty-one years old. Bahá'í elections are held without candidacies or electoral propaganda and men and women over the age of 18 take part.
- **Consultative institutions:** these have the function of guaranteeing the unity of the faith and encouraging the communities. They are made up of the councillors and their assistants.

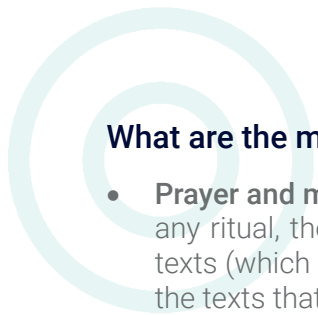
## Who can be a good interlocutor?

- **Local spiritual assemblies:** the Bahá'í Faith does not have people consecrated to worship, but activities are regulated and supervised by Bahá'í institutions, especially local spiritual assemblies (no one engages in proselytising, because it is a prohibited practice). Therefore, the local Spiritual Assembly is in charge of supervising, coordinating and accompanying all the activities that take place within the community and this is where one needs to look for a valid interlocutor.

## What are the places of worship?

- **Temples:** there are currently only eight Bahá'í temples in the entire world.
- **Centres or private homes:** apart from these eight temples or houses of worship, there are no specific places of worship in this religious tradition, but Bahá'í people gather in what are called centres (and, often, in private homes).





### What are the main functions of the centres?

- **Prayer and meditation meetings:** in these assemblies, which are not articulated through any ritual, the members of the community worship God through the reading of sacred texts (which are not always stipulated, but the people who attend the meeting can share the texts that they wish). At the end, there is time for informal conversation and often for light refreshments.
- **Study:** study circles are courses that aim to facilitate community members and their friends to develop their capacities to serve society. In these meetings, their qualities, aptitudes and abilities are enhanced based on the sacred scriptures, prayer and reflection.
- **Education of children and young people:** regular classes are often offered by age groups where children's virtues and character education are worked on. There is also a programme for the spiritual empowerment of the "pre-young", which is aimed at boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 15. The aim is to help them identify their latent qualities and talents: develop a new awareness of reality, the sense of justice, the spirit of selfless service to others....
- **Celebration of festivities and other community meetings:** such as the Nineteen Days festival, which is celebrated on the first day of each month of the Bahá'í calendar, and in which a time is devoted to devotion and the reading of prayers and meditations, a time to talk and consult about the community affairs, during which everyone can express themselves, and a time for informal conversation, to share artistic activities or games and food.
- They also serve as administrative centres.

### What are the features of a Bahá'í centre?

- There is no regulation on these centres and they can be different in each place. In general, they are simple in terms of their ornamentation (some pictures and flowers) and with the arrangement of the furniture according to the occasion and the number of participants.

### What recommendations should be followed to enter Bahá'í centres?

There is no aspect that needs special attention.

### Are there differences between men and women?

There is no difference.

### What types of clothing stand out?

The Bahá'í Faith does not include any specific clothing.

### Recognition by the Spanish State

The Bahá'í Faith is **recognised as a "well-established religious denomination" since 2023**, a pre-requisite to be able to establish cooperation agreements with the State in the future.



# BUDDHISM



## Basic data

- **Number of Buddhist centres in Catalonia (2022):** 65
- **Buddhism in Catalonia:** Buddhist communities began their history in Catalonia through several people born in Catalonia and in the rest of Spain who felt attracted by Eastern practices. Currently, they are welcoming more and more members.
- People who follow Buddhism are called **Buddhists**.

## How are Buddhists organised in Catalonia?

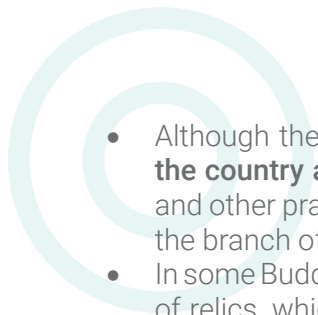
- There is no structure that represents Buddhism in the world.
- Fundamentally, Buddhist people create **organisations of centres around a certain teacher**.
- In Catalonia, since 2007, there has been a body called the [Coordinadora Catalana d'Entitats Budistes \[Catalan Coordinator of Buddhist Entities\]](#), which encompasses centres and organisations from very different Buddhist currents and traditions.
- In any case, the great heterogeneity within Buddhism needs to be taken into account. Several different traditions have been established in Catalonia: Theravada, Zen Buddhism, Nichiren Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism etc. Between them there are slight differences, especially in formal terms. In addition, there are also more secular organisations being set up all the time.

## Who can be a good interlocutor?

- The **teacher**: even though in Buddhism there is no specific figure of a minister, there is the important figure of the *teacher*, who in the case of Tibetan Buddhism is named the *lama* and in the case of Zen Buddhism receives the name of *teacher*, *roshi* or *sensei*. Usually, the teachers are in charge of **leading meditations and rituals**.
- The **sangha**: around the teachers there is the group made up of the *sangha*, that is, **the people who follow them**. In many Buddhist communities in Catalonia, among the members of the *sangha* **there is a person who performs functions similar to those of a secretary**. It is this person, or the teacher, who we can contact for information.

## What are the places of worship?

- In Buddhism there are many forms of worship and it is common for them to be performed **both at home and in a centre**, which may receive different names depending on the school or tradition of which it forms a part: *temple*, *centre*, *monastery* etc.
- In these centres there is almost always an altar with a statue of Buddha, flowers, the photograph of the teacher who has given transmission to the current teacher, incense and candles. It is common for Buddhists to sit on the floor, although meditation can be practiced sitting on cushions or in a chair.



- Although there are some Buddhist monasteries in Catalonia, **most Buddhist centres in the country are in flats or premises**. It usually involves prayer and meditation, offerings and other practices, such as reciting sutras or chants, or the tea ceremony (depending on the branch of Buddhism followed by the centre).
- In some Buddhist monasteries there is a monument called a **stupa**, intended for the storing of relics, which consists of a massive stone structure in the form of a hemispherical or bell-shaped mound, crowned by a balustrade with a pole that supports one or several parasols of honour.

### What recommendations must be followed when entering Buddhist centres?

- Before entering the central space, it is recommended to **switch off telephones** or put them in silent mode.
- In this space, one enters **barefoot** and wearing **clothing in neutral tones that cover one's legs and shoulders**.
- **Upon entering** the centre, **one needs to incline one's head forward in front of the figure of Buddha** and, with the hands together in front of the chest, to bow to the figure. It is also necessary to perform this bow if there is a teacher at the centre.
- **Speaking softly** is a sign of respect.
- When sitting, **it is important to try not to face one's feet in the direction of any of the images of deities** that are in the centre, as doing so is a sign of disrespect. If possible, it is advisable **to avoid turning one's back on them** when nearby. It is also advisable to never touch any of the figures in the temple.
- Photographs of the centre can be taken, although it is best to ask permission before doing so.

### Are there differences between men and women?

- Nowadays, although with exceptions, in general, women assume the same responsibilities as men, and every day there are more women teaching Buddhism.
- It should be borne in mind that, at centres in Catalonia, this gender differentiation is almost imperceptible.

### What types of clothing stand out?

- In Tibetan Buddhism, if someone is not a teacher or a monk, they do not need to wear any specific clothing; in any case, some piece of clothing within the maroon colour range. In Japanese-based Zen Buddhism one is advised to wear dark or black clothes; in Korean-rooted Buddhism, it is grey or bright colours.
- Buddhist monks tend to follow a dress code with inherent meaning. In most monastic traditions, they tend to shave their heads as a symbol of humility and detachment, among other reasons. In addition, they usually wear a habit or robe or kimono and the masters cover it with a large piece of clothing that wraps around the body and hangs from one shoulder (usually the left). The simplicity of this piece symbolises the asceticism and humility of the life they have chosen. However, there are some differences:
  - In Tibetan Buddhism, the clothing has a colour within the range of maroons and oranges.



- In Japanese-based Zen Buddhism, a black kimono is generally worn and the masters cover it with a beige or dark coloured garment; there are traditions where this garment is brightly coloured.
- In Theravada Buddhism the habits are white.
- In any case, it is also necessary to take into account the existence of many lay currents that do not necessarily wear any special clothing.

### When can we talk about fundamentalism in Buddhism?

- On several occasions, Western societies develop an **idyllic image of Eastern religions** which is, to a certain degree, stereotyped. When reporting on news, it is advisable to remember that all religious traditions are made up of light and shadow.
- Although we usually hear about cases of fundamentalism in monotheistic religions, **Eastern traditions, like the rest, also give rise to fundamentalist movements.**

### Recognition by the Spanish State

Buddhism is **recognised as a “well-established religious denomination” since 2007**, a prerequisite to be able to establish cooperation agreements with the State in the future.



# CATHOLIC CHURCH



## Basic data

- **Number of Catholic centres of worship in Catalonia** (2022): 5,795
- **The Catholic Church in Catalonia:** the presence of the Catholic Church in Catalonia dates back to the early centuries of the Christian era. It is currently the majority religion in Catalonia, with 80% of the centres of worship and also in terms of the number of people who identify with it. During the years of Franco's dictatorship, the political regime looked to identify itself with the Catholic religion and established a link between the political power (the State) and much of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Catholicism has always coexisted in Catalonia with other religious denominations, especially Judaism, Islam and Protestantism. Since the latter half of the 20TH century, and more strongly from the 1990s, with the increase in migratory flows, the Catholic Church began to share space with an ever-increasing diversity of religious denominations.
- The members of the Catholic Church are called **Catholics**.

## How are Catholic people organised in Catalonia?

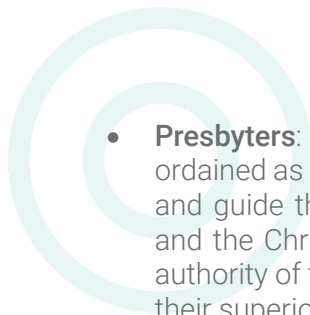
- The Catholic Church is territorially structured into **bishoprics or dioceses**, which are divided into **parishes** and are grouped into **ecclesiastical provinces**.
- It recognises the **Bishop of Rome (the Pope)** as the figure who, in the name of Christ, presides over all the particular churches or dioceses.
- It considers that, in each of the dioceses, the sole Church of Jesus Christ is present.
- **In Catalonia there are ten episcopal sees** grouped around **two metropolitan churches**, which form **two ecclesiastical provinces**. The headquarters in Tarragona has its suffragan dioceses in Girona, Lleida, Solsona, Tortosa, Urgell and Vic, and the headquarters in Barcelona has its suffragan dioceses in Sant Feliu de Llobregat and Terrassa. The bishops of the ten dioceses with episcopal headquarters in Catalonia form the **Tarraconense Episcopal Conference**, established in 1969 as an internal body of the Catholic Church in Catalonia and chaired by the Archbishop of Tarragona.
- The faithful can also be linked to movements, religious congregations or prelatures.

## Who can be a good interlocutor?

- In general, the Catholic Church has a **stipulated hierarchical structure** and a clear organisational chart, both within each church and with regard to the universal community. For this reason, there is usually no hesitation in selecting the official sources, although outside this hierarchy there is a broad range of groups, movements and tendencies.

The possible interlocutors are:

- **Bishops** (or archbishops in certain sees): these are priests who receive the task of presiding over a particular church or diocese. They are the highest authority for their bishopric as teachers and pastors, always in communion with the Pope.



- **Presbyters:** these are the men who, upon receiving the sacrament of orders, have been ordained as priests (also popularly called *chaplains*) and they can administer sacraments and guide the groups of faithful entrusted to them by the bishop on the path of faith and the Christian life. They are obliged to remain celibate and remain under the direct authority of the bishop in the case of being linked to a bishopric, or under the authority of their superior if they belong to a religious institute.
- **Deacons:** these are the men, married or unmarried, who are constituted as qualified servants of the word and of charity, always around a bishop. They are also referred to as priests.
- **Laymen and women:** these are Christians who, by baptism, are considered to have the dignity of members of the people of God.
- **Religious life:** there are male and female communities of religious life where both priests and the laity can opt for a Christian life in community, with a specific charisma: missions, teaching, health, contemplative life, etc. They undertake to observe the vows of chastity, obedience and poverty.
- In a monastery or abbey, **the abbot or abbess** is the head of the community, while the **prior or prioress**, if there is one, is the person just below that figure.

### What are the places of worship?

- **Church (or temple):** this is the most important meeting place. In Catholic churches, unlike what happens in the churches of other branches of Christianity, there are usually representations in the form of images and sculptures.
- When we refer to the place of worship itself, we write the word without a capital letter. However, when we speak of the Catholic Church, in capital letters, we refer to the “community of believers of the Christian faith that recognises the primacy of the Bishop of Rome as vicar of Jesus Christ and successor of Saint Peter”.
- **Monastery:** place where a community of monks or nuns lives according to the rules of the order to which they belong. Monasteries are usually isolated buildings, with a specific layout, to encourage a life of prayer and reflection.

In addition to the generic term *church*, other more specific concepts are often used to refer to the places where the Catholic community celebrates its faith. Some of these terms are the following:

- **Basilica:** historical denomination of certain temples. Today the title of basilica is held by temples that excel for historical, artistic and liturgical reasons.
- **Chapel:** space intended for worship and prayer.
- **Cathedral:** main church of a diocese, where the seat of the bishop is located.
- **Parish:** this has different meanings. It can refer to the main church of the parochial constituency; to the set of people who are part of a parish or the ecclesiastical territorial demarcation, of local scope, which gathers a group of faithful and is ruled by a priest, who is called a *rector*.

### What are the main functions of the church?

- **Celebration of the liturgy:** the most significant meeting of the Catholic community in its day-to-day life is the celebration of the eucharist, the mass. This meeting is especially busy on Sundays.



- **Rituals:** the church is the place of celebration of Catholic rituals, such as baptism (usual for children), marriage or funerals.
- Most churches participate in the **social entity Caritas**, created by the Catholic Church itself, which aims to help people with fewer resources, beyond the circle of the Catholic community.

### What are the features of a church?

- The church is entered through the **central nave**, which is full of pews for the parish community.
- From almost all points of this nave one can see the **sanctuary**, which is a higher area than the rest of the central nave and which houses the **altar** and the **ambo**, which is the place from which the Bible is read during the Eucharist.
- Located at the back of the sanctuary is the **tabernacle**, which is the cupboard containing the bread of the Eucharist. A small candle-shaped light shines in front of the tabernacle.
- In some space of the church there is always the **baptistery or baptismal font**, which is the place used for baptisms.
- Most churches have a **bell tower**.

### What recommendations should be followed to enter churches?

- It is a symbol of respect to be **silent** inside a church.
- It is considered impolite to talk on the phone inside the church and one should not **check one's phone** during any moment of the liturgy.
- If we need to move around the church while a ceremony is taking place (to take photographs, for example), it is advisable to **move along the side corridors**.

### Are there differences between men and women?

- Currently there are no differences between male and female parishioners.
- Women cannot be ordained as priests, which is why many positions and responsibilities in the Catholic hierarchy are held only by men.

### What types of clothing stand out?

Catholic lay people do not wear any specific clothing. On the other hand, priests, monks and nuns do:

- **Alb:** this is a long, sleeveless, white dress worn by Catholic priests, in some of the contexts in which they exercise their ministry.
- **Chasuble:** this is the external liturgical ornament (over the alb) that priests wear to celebrate the Eucharist, when they are fully clothed in their vestments. Its colour varies depending on the time of the liturgical year.
- **Stole:** also to exercise the ministry, the priests wear the stole, a piece of cloth about two metres long and about twenty centimetres wide. It is placed over the shoulders, around the neck and falling towards the front of the body. **The colour of the stole, like that of the chasuble, varies according to the time of the liturgical year.**
- **Habit:** this is the garment worn by the monks and nuns of some orders, especially when they have a monastic life. They also tend to wear a belt that ties the clothes around the waist and promotes mobility.



### When can we talk about Catholic fundamentalism?

- In the case of Catholicism in Catalonia, **one of the most common misconceptions is to confuse religious traditionalism with fundamentalism.** In these cases, it is worth bearing in mind that Catholic fundamentalism usually needs a certain basic structure: a grouping or movement that organises it. The mere fact of following the precepts of the Church as an individual life option or even in a community, without causing any conflict with the outside world, does not allow us to speak of fundamentalism. In addition, we should recall that there needs to be a desire to impose one's own worldview on the rest.

### Recognition by the Spanish State

The religious denomination with which the Spanish State maintains its closest relationship is the Catholic Church, with which, **through the Holy See, the State has established agreements (1976 and 1979) in matters of religious assistance, legal matters, education and cultural matters, and economic matters.**



# CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS



## Basic data

- **Number of chapels of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Catalonia** (2022): 13
- **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Catalonia:** it was established in Catalonia in 1969, first in Barcelona and immediately afterwards in Sabadell, Terrassa and Mataró.
- The people who belong to this community **are not comfortable with being called “Mormons”**. Popularly, they have been known under this name as a result of the importance that this community has given to the *Book of Mormon*. However, speaking of “Mormons” often has negative connotations, so it is advisable not to use this term. **We refer to them as “members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” or “Latter-Day Saints”**.<sup>11</sup>

## How are the people of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints organised in Catalonia?

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a complex structure:

- The members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints consider that this follows the **same model of Church that Jesus Christ established during His earthly ministry** and which has been restored in modern times.
- The governing bodies of the Church on a worldwide scale include the so-called **General Authorities** and the **General Officers**.
- the **General Authorities**, which are in charge of the overall direction of the Church, include several bodies:
  - The First Presidency, which is the supreme governing body of the Church, and is made up of a “prophet” and two or three apostles
  - The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles
  - The Seventy General Authorities
  - The Presiding Bishopric.
- The **General Officers**, who are in charge of various sectoral areas, include:
  - Relief Society General Presidency
  - Primary General Presidency
  - Young Women General Presidency
  - Sunday School General Presidency
  - Young Men General Presidency
- Territorially, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is organised into **stakes** or **districts (constituencies)**, each of which has approximately 2,000 to 4,000 members, and is led by a stake president who is supported by two counsellors. Each stake is made up of at least five **wards**, and each ward is led by a **bishop**, which may include smaller units, called **branches**, which are led by a branch president, who also receives the support

<sup>11</sup> You can consult more information about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on its official page: [churchofjesuschrist.org](http://churchofjesuschrist.org).



of two counsellors. In Catalonia, there are three stakes: those of Barcelona, L'Hospitalet de Llobregat and Lleida.

- The Church has no professional clergy and all its members, both women and men, have the opportunity to serve voluntarily within the Church organisation. One such opportunity is to serve as a missionary.

### Who can be a good interlocutor?

The possible interlocutors are:

- The stake presidents.
- Bishops and branch presidents.
- The communication officers of each stake.

### What are the places of worship?

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints differentiate between temples<sup>12</sup> and the centres where they usually meet, called *chapels*.

- **Temple:** this is the most sacred space and in which very specific acts and rituals are held, only open to members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- **Chapel.** Usually the following are performed:
  - **Sacrament Meeting:** this is the ceremony that is celebrated on Sundays and that gathers men and women of all ages. It includes speeches by members, hymns and the administration of the sacrament of the Holy Communion.
  - **Sunday School: religious training** which is organised according to the age and gender of the attendees.
  - Meetings of the priesthood, of young people and children, and of the Relief Society.
  - **Training in welfare and social assistance:** this includes classes on various topics, such as work and economic self-sufficiency, as well as multiple social assistance actions.

Regarding its structure:

- The spaces of the chapels are distributed in a room called the **Sacramental Hall**, where the sacramental meeting takes place, which does not contain images, and where there are multiple benches facing the pulpit and several classrooms where the rest of the assemblies take place.
- They can include a **sports court** which is sometimes the same room as the **cultural space**, which has a stage for shows or theatrical performances, among other activities.
- They can also have a **kitchen**.

### What recommendations must be followed to enter the chapels?

- It is recommended to attend the chapel **dressed up**, especially on Sundays and conference days. Most men wear a jacket, shirt and tie. Women usually wear modest dresses or skirts.

<sup>12</sup> There are currently none in Catalonia, but it has been announced that one will be built in the future.



### Are there differences between men and women?

- In general, in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the **importance of family** predominates, as well as **the differentiated roles** which they consider men and women should have.
- **Inside the chapel, men and women separate** before the sacramental assembly.
- Currently, women cannot enter the priesthood, but can assume positions of leadership and responsibility in the smallest territorial units – branches – or as “general officers” within the global management structure.

### Recognition by the Spanish State

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is **recognised as a “well-established religious denomination” since 2003**, a pre-requisite to be able to establish cooperation agreements with the State in the future.



# EVANGELICAL CHURCHES

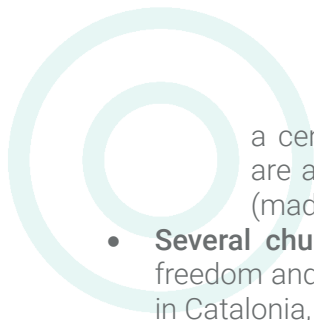


## Basic data

- **Number of evangelical centres of worship in Catalonia (2022): 818**
- **Evangelical churches in Catalonia: they have had a continuous presence in this territory since 1868 when, following the revolution called “La Gloriosa”, there began to be a certain religious freedom.** There are Protestant churches that have more than 150 years of history.
- This is the religious tradition that has grown most prominently in the last two decades and is the denomination that has created the most places of worship during the last few years.
- Protestantism includes under a common root a wide range of denominations, churches, organisations and entities that make up a diverse, plural and heterogeneous panorama. It is the largest religious minority in Catalonia.
- The people who are part of these communities or churches **can be called Christians, Protestants or Evangelicals. They may also be named after their denominational family, for example: Reformed, Pentecostal, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran,** among others. **We never refer to them as “evangelists” or talk about the “evangelist” religion** (the evangelists are the four authors of the gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John).

## How are the people of the evangelical churches organised in Catalonia?

- Protestantism and, consequently, the evangelical churches are the result of the Protestant Reformation driven mainly by Martin Luther in the 16<sup>TH</sup> century, to which John Calvin and John Wesley, among others, also contributed. However, it is a **infinitely diverse group** in many aspects, also in its organisational form.
- It is usual that **each evangelical church carries out its activity very autonomously**, although different churches that share the same doctrinal understanding can come together to form **denominations or denominational families**. For this reason, we can speak both of “the evangelical Church”, when we refer to the whole, and “evangelical churches”, if we want to emphasise their diversity.
- In a generic way, we can distinguish three ways of organising:
  - **Episcopal organisation:** it consists of a territorial structure organised through national assemblies and which has democratically elected bishops (and with theological connotations different from those of the Catholic Church). Each local community democratically elects its Community Council.
  - **Presbyterian-type organisation:** At the national level, a government structure is provided and at the level of each local community, a presbytery or council of elders is provided, in all cases democratically elected.
  - **Congregationalist organisation:** it consists of churches or communities with full autonomy and self-managed by the community itself, where decisions are made democratically. It comes from what has been called the “Radical Reform”, which consisted of going to the root of the gospel (hence the name “evangelicals”). **They are the majority in Catalonia.** Many of the so-called “historical churches”, with



a century-old presence in Catalonia, have this form of organisation. But there are also congregationalist churches among the so-called “ethnic communities” (made up mostly of people from a certain country).

- **Several churches can be federated** to defend more strongly the rights of religious freedom and their positions and interests before the State and the rest of society. Thus, in Catalonia, traditionally, the different evangelical entities, after the arrival of democracy, have been grouped in the bosom of Consell Evangèlic de Catalunya, created in 1981. In Catalonia there are also some organisations that bring together Protestant pastors, such as AMEC (Associació de Ministres de l’Evangeli de Catalunya) or the COMEC (Confraternitat de Ministres de l’Evangeli de Catalunya). Finally, it should also be noted that there are some organised denominations. Some examples are the Unió d’Esglésies Baptistes de Catalunya, the Federación de Iglesias Evangélicas Independientes de España or the Coordinadora d’Assamblees de Germans de Catalunya.

### Who can be a good interlocutor?

- **Pastor:** this is the highest religious authority in most evangelical churches. This is not an intermediary between God and the community, but is the person who leads the local community and manages and organises worship, and who, based on their knowledge and learning, can provide training and spiritual advice.
- In the same church there can be several pastors, who can often be **assisted by other charges** within the local church.
- **Elder:** this is a person who acts as a spiritual guide, teacher or leader. They can act as a pastor’s assistant, especially in Reformed or Presbyterian churches. At the same time, some churches, especially assemblies of brothers, are led by a group of elders, without a pastor.
- Since evangelical communities are characterised, among other aspects, by having a lot of freedom and independence in their temperament and organisation, **it is necessary to learn about the doctrinal branch of each community and its composition** in order not to broadcast erroneous or confusing news.

### What are the places of worship?

- **Church:** this is the most important meeting place for evangelical people.
- For historical reasons and their funding limitations, most evangelical churches **in Catalonia they are located in basements of houses, premises or warehouses**, although there are also many historic churches that have their own buildings and temples built as such.

### What are the main functions of the church?

- **Worship service:** every Sunday, the evangelical community celebrates a worship service (which we cannot call a “mass”) in community, at the church. There are four main elements of worship: praise, prayer, preaching and the sacrament or Holy Communion or Lord’s Table.
- **Sunday School:** One of the distinguishing characteristics of evangelical churches is Sunday School. There can be two types. On the one hand, the one which is taught simultaneously with the worship service and which is aimed at boys and girls up to twelve



years old, or occasionally at teenagers. On the other, the one aimed at adults, which is generally taught before Sunday worship.

- **Preaching:** the places of worship of the evangelical community are, above all, a place of preaching the Scriptures. This preaching is usually carried out by the pastor and/or lay preachers, that is, active members of the community who have not been ordained in the clergy.
- **Celebration of the sacraments or sacred rites:** In Protestantism there are no sacraments, but ordinances. They are baptism and the Holy Communion or Lord's Table. As for baptism, it is common for it to be performed by immersion in adulthood, as a sign and sign of wanting to freely join the family of the Christian faith, although some denominations perform it by sprinkling and on infants. As for the Holy Communion, it consists in the distribution of bread and wine among the faithful.
- **Bible study:** most evangelical churches have spaces or classrooms to hold work and assembly groups, or Sunday school.
- Structure of **charitable and welfare activities.**

### What are the features of an evangelical church?

- **Main hall:** this is where worship is celebrated; it is full of chairs or pews and musical instruments for praise.
- **Platform:** this is where the pulpit and the praise group are located.
- **Pulpit:** this is the place from which preaching is done and from which prayers and songs are directed.
- **Rooms:** most evangelical churches have rooms that allow social meetings and Bible study.
- **Baptistery:** this is the space where immersion baptisms are celebrated; it must have enough capacity for a person to be immersed in it. The baptistery is not always present in all evangelical temples. For this reason, communities that have a baptistery make it available to other communities.
- Evangelical churches tend to be very sober **in terms of aesthetics and decoration**, because they do not worship images or revere saints or images of the virgin. There may be **a cross or the fish symbol**, for example, but we do not usually find other representations in the form of an image or sculpture. If on occasion there is an artistic or symbolic figure, this is a decorative expression, but it is never an object of faith.

### What recommendations should be followed to enter churches?

- There is no special requirement to join any local community or church by following the use of our social environment.
- Although they share the same faith, the expressions of worship can be very different between evangelical churches. In this regard, it is necessary to take into account the case of **Pentecostal churches, where people are particularly expressive**, specially at the time of the songs (quite the opposite of other communities, which are much more sober). For this reason there are moments of a great bodily and verbal expressivity. Always, but especially at these times, one must have previously asked for permission to make recordings or take photographs.



### Are there differences between men and women?

- In the vast majority of evangelical churches there are no differences between men and women to the point where we can find, in all denominational families, women in leadership or in the pastorate. Despite this reality, one can also find some communities that incorporate its nuances.

### What types of clothing stand out?

- Evangelical Christians do not wear any specific clothing that differentiates them from the rest of the population. Even so, it must be remembered that the great diversity existing within the evangelical churches and the degree of freedom that characterises them makes classifications difficult.
- Pastors, depending on their ecclesiastical tradition, may wear a toga during services and/or at special ceremonies, such as weddings or funerals.

### When can we talk about Protestant fundamentalism?

- We can speak of Protestant fundamentalism when a literalist interpretation of the sacred text is made.
- Protestant fundamentalists see as a threat everything that they believe endangers or calls into question any of the traditions to which they feel connected.
- Theological conservatism should not be confused with fundamentalism. In order to be able to speak of Protestant fundamentalism, there must be a certain intransigence in the interpretation and defence of religion, a closure with respect to other divergent views, inside and outside Protestantism itself and the desire to impose one's own worldview in the other areas of Christianity.

### Recognition by the Spanish State

The Spanish Constitution establishes that Spain is a non-denominational country. This means that it maintains relationship and agreements with some religious traditions. In the case of evangelical churches, **in 1992 cooperation agreements were signed with the Federación de Entidades Religiosas Evangélicas de España (FEREDE)**, which grant the evangelical community the following rights:

- Right to religious assistance in public centres.
- Right to religious education at school.
- Right to civil recognition of religious marriage.
- Right to collect money.
- Entitlement to certain tax benefits.
- Right to the inviolability of their places of worship.



# HINDUISM



## Basic data

- **Number of Hindu centres of worship in Catalonia** (2022): 24
- **Hinduism in Catalonia:** the first small groups of people who sympathised with Hinduism formed in Catalonia in the 1970s. In general, they were young people interested in Eastern traditions who, in some cases, had travelled to India with the desire to learn a little more about the Hindu tradition. New communities, of a very diverse nature, have been created in the last few years.
- The people who are members of Hinduism are **Hindus**, people linked to the tradition called Sanatha Dharma, which over time has been translated, especially in the West, as *Hinduism*.

## How are Hindu people organised in Catalonia?

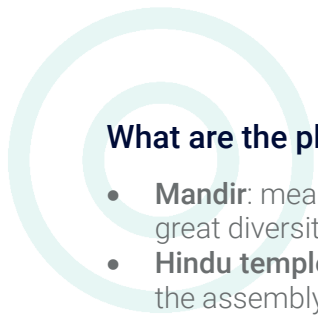
- Hinduism is an **infinitely diverse tradition, with numerous currents and schools**. So much so that it can often seem that we are talking about different religions, possibly because the lack of knowledge from the West makes it more difficult for us to understand this reality.
- Hindus generally cluster around the figure of a **guru**, from which several organisations are generated.
- **There is no single world body** to coordinate the Hindus.
- **In Catalonia there are several Hindu organisations that act independently** and often without having contact with each other.

## Who can be a good interlocutor?

The best interlocutors will always be people who have an active involvement in the community, because they have much more information than those who go to the temple on an occasional basis. The possible interlocutors are:

- **Guru or teacher:** the figure of the guru or teacher plays a central role. This figure is responsible for guiding the spiritual life of the devotee or follower and suggests the practices considered most appropriate at any given time.
- In Catalonia, and in general, we can distinguish between:
  - **Teachers or gurus.**
  - **Active members of a community:** they can both be people who live in the temple itself and who often have no work activity outside, as well as people who have a family and work life, but are actively involved in the community.
  - **Collaborating members:** they are in charge of specific tasks or get involved on an ad hoc basis.
  - There are also groups that have an **assembly coordination**.





### What are the places of worship?

- **Mandir:** means *temple*. This is a space dedicated to one or more deities which, given the great diversity of Hinduism, does not have a single format, but can be very diverse.
- **Hindu temples or centres:** in Catalonia we speak of Hindu temples or centres to refer to the assembly places of the Hindu community, whether they are temples in the full sense, or whether they are private homes with a shared space dedicated to some deity.

### What are the main functions of Hindu centres?

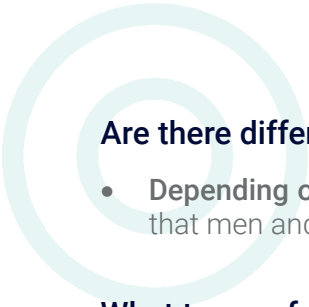
- **Recitation and meditation:** at the centre (and also at particular altars), Hindu people recite sacred mantras (words or phrases with great spiritual power to focus and relax the mind). One of the best known mantras is *Om*. They also meditate, worship one or more deities, recite and contemplate sacred texts, and listen to the teaching of a teacher.
- **Songs and ritual ceremonies,** such as the puja (which includes the offering of food, flowers, incense, light etc.).
- **Yoga practice:** some communities use the centre to practice yoga, which is one of the six Hindu philosophical systems and consists of a set of psychophysiological techniques in order to experience liberation in this life.

### What are the features of a Hindu centre?

- **Room:** it is common for the centre to have a room (the largest) dedicated to meditation and reciting sacred texts. This room usually has some cushions to sit on and also a chair for older or sick people.
- **Image of at least one deity:** the prayer room includes a space where there is the image of at least one deity, to which the temple is dedicated; and there may be others, also with images.
- **Puja (altar):** is where the image of the deity is placed, in the framework of a **chapel** which is usually decorated with flowers and other **offerings**, and that has curtains or doors that can be opened and closed.

### What recommendations should be followed to enter places of worship?

- We must **take off our shoes**.
- Once inside the centre, we should remain **silent**.
- It is a sign of respect **to approach the figure of the deity, look it in the eyes and make a salutation** with the palms of the hands together in front of the chest or forehead.
- It is advisable **not to wear clothes that are particularly low-cut and that show one's shoulders and legs**.
- When sitting, it is important to try **not to face one's feet in the direction of any of the images of deities** that are in the centre or at the teacher, as it is considered a lack of respect. If possible, it is advisable to **avoid turning one's back on them** when nearby.
- It is advisable to **ask if it is allowed to take photographs** or any other kinds of images. Especially with regard to the representation of deities, in some centres they prefer to avoid it, as a sign of respect.



### Are there differences between men and women?

- **Depending on the communities, there are differences** between the functions and roles that men and women can adopt.

### What types of clothing stand out?

- Hindu people do not wear specific clothes. The clothes worn by the inhabitants of countries where the majority religion is Hinduism have an explanation based on culture,

### When can we talk about fundamentalism in Hinduism?

- On several occasions, Western societies develop an **idyllic and, in a way, stereotyped image of Eastern religions**. When reporting on news, it is advisable to remember that all religious traditions are made up of light and shadow.
- Although we usually hear about cases of fundamentalism in monotheistic religions, **Eastern traditions, like the rest, also give rise to fundamentalist movements**.

### Recognition by the Spanish State

At this moment, **there are no specific agreements with the Hindu community**.



# ISLAM



## Basic data

- **Number of Islamic prayer halls in Catalonia** (2022): 304
- **Islam in Catalonia:** in 1974 the first Islamic oratory opens, but it is not until the 1980s and 1990s that the creation of Islamic prayer halls is definitively consolidated in Catalonia and takes a special place among the other religions present in the country.
- People who practice Islam or who feel part of this religion are **Muslims**. Expressions such as now should be avoided *Arabs, Islamists, Moors or Mohammedans*, which have other meanings. On the other hand, **we use the word *Muslims* to refer to people and the word *Islamic* to refer to things** (we speak of an “Islamic building”, but of a “Muslim person”).

## How are Muslim people organised?

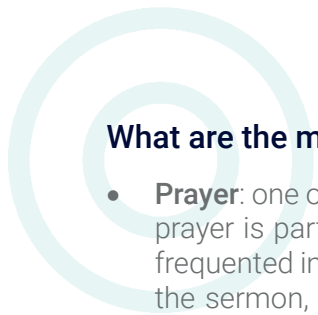
- In Catalonia, Muslim people gather around prayer halls.
- In Catalonia there are, among other entities, the following federations: **Federación Consell Islàmic de Catalunya, Unió de Comunitats Islàmiques de Catalunya** and **Federació Islàmica Catalana**.
- **At the international level, there is no one body** or entity that brings together and can represent all Muslims, although **there are councils of the wise** which establish opinions on various aspects of the lives of Muslims.

## Who can be a good interlocutor?

- In Sunni Islam, the majority in Catalonia, **there is no consecrated authority**.
- **Imam:** this is the person in charge of presiding and leading the prayers, but is not considered a mediator between man and God. This is a hired person who can have different profiles.
- **Managing board of a prayer hall:** in Catalonia, it is common for prayer halls to have managing boards made up of a **chairperson**, who is often also the **spokesperson**, a **vice-chairperson**, a **secretary**, a **treasurer** and some **board members**. Many of them tend to be good interlocutors.

## What are the places of worship?

- **Mosque:** this is the place of worship where Muslim people gather. Some Muslims consider that for a mosque to be considered as such it must have, among other elements, a minaret.
- **Prayer halls:** they tend to be located in the basements of buildings, in industrial estates, in garages etc., in humble and discreet places as a result of scarce financial resources or the difficulties in finding other spaces.



### What are the main functions of prayer halls?

- **Prayer:** one of the five precepts of Islam is to pray five times a day. Therefore, community prayer is part of the daily routine of Muslim people. The Friday noon prayer is the most frequented in the prayer hall, because it coincides with the holy day of Islam, and includes the sermon, called the *khutbah*. Before praying, Muslim people perform ablutions: they wash their face, neck, hands, arms and feet. After that they lay out a carpet on the floor and orient themselves towards Mecca (often in the place of worship there are lines marked on the floor that facilitate the orientation and organisation of the faithful). On the carpet they perform a sequence of movements that intersperse different positions (standing, bending and prostrating) while reciting different formulas.
- **Training:** it is common, in the afternoons or during the weekend, for the prayer hall to host groups of children, men or women to have training: Quran classes, learning classical Arabic, Catalan or Spanish courses etc., as well as talks on specific topics.
- **Social meeting and solidarity space:** Prayer halls often become social meeting spaces between members of a community with the same geographical origin. In addition, they are mutual support sites: when looking for a job, a house or when assuming the costs of repatriating a body, for example.

### What are the features of a prayer hall?

- At the entrance to the prayer hall there is always a **space** (a shelf, some cupboards etc.) **in which to place one's shoes**.
- **Sink, basin or space with running water:** this is located near the space for shoes. It is where the faithful wash their feet, hands, arms, face and neck, before praying. This is ritual washing, which is a sign of respect to Allah and also a preparation for the "inner washing" that prayer carries out.
- On the floor, the prayer hall is **carpeted**.
- Once inside the place of worship, there is a shelf containing several copies of the **Quran** which can be consulted and which are also used when the Quran classes are held.
- **Mihrab:** this is a bas-relief located in the prayer room that serves to indicate the direction of Mecca (specifically, the Ka'ba) and, therefore, the direction in which to pray. It is visible from the entire prayer hall.
- **Minbar:** this is the pulpit from where the *khutbah* or sermon is given on Friday at noon.
- Sometimes there is a set of **clocks** which indicate the time when the prayers must be performed on those days.
- **Decoration:** some walls or spaces are decorated with **calligraphy**. However, **we never see illustrations or paintings of human figures, nor representations of God**. In Islamic art this is considered forbidden.

### What recommendations should be followed to enter prayer halls?

- In Islamic places of worship **everyone can enter**, whether one is Muslim or not. One enters barefoot.
- In some centres of worship **it is common for women to be asked to cover their heads** before entering, especially if it is a time of prayer.
- Inside the prayer hall it is advisable to **speak softly**, as occurs in other places of worship.
- As long as people in the community do not specify otherwise, photographs can be taken of all the spaces. However, it is preferable **not to stand in the pulpit area**, especially at the time of the prayer or the *sermon*, nor in front of the believers when they are praying.



### Are there differences between men and women?

- It is usual for **men and women not to share the same prayer space**. In the larger prayer halls, there is a space for men and another for women. In others, men pray in the front rows and women in the back rows. And, in others, women may not pray there.
- Many prayer halls are meeting spaces for the women of the community outside of prayer times. They gather there as a social event, where they share conversation, tea and pastries, or where they conduct shared cultural activities. They tend to have a fixed room or space.
- Women are often responsible for the training of the children who attend the prayer hall outside school hours to learn Arabic and learn about the Quran.

### What types of clothing stand out?

- The veil is a piece of fabric that **serves to cover the body or part of the face of some Muslim women**.
- **The Quran urges one to dress modestly and each person or community interprets it in their own way**.
- The meanings attributed to wearing the veil have varied throughout history. **Avoid generalisations** and understand that the reasons that lead a woman to wear or not wear a veil are specific and diverse.
- **In Catalonia there is no legislation that prohibits the use of any type of veil, but there are regulations for coexistence in public spaces**. These are recommendations to ensure the safety of the population and protect the integrity of minors. For example, it is considered that the use of the burqa or the niqab in schools can hinder the vision and mobility of minors, since it hides their faces and, therefore, make social relationships difficult.
- **In several European countries** the advisability of wearing the veil in public spaces has also been debated. And, in some cases, laws have come to be incorporated that prohibit any symbol of a religious nature in certain contexts (for example, in France, where in 2004 there was a law passed prohibiting the displaying of symbols linked to religion in public schools).
- Different types of veils need to be distinguished and talked about with proper rigour:
  - **Hijab**: veil used by many Muslim women. It covers the head and often the neck, and the face is visible.
  - **Chador**: veil worn mostly by Iranian women. It is usually a black fabric that covers a large part of the body and only shows the face.
  - **Niqab**: piece of clothing that covers the hair, neck and face. Only the eyes can be seen.
  - **Burqa**: stiff piece of clothing that covers the hair, face and eyes, and is dark in colour (usually blue or black). It has a grid in the eye area so they can see through it.

### When can we talk about Islamic fundamentalism?

- Islamic fundamentalism is based on a **literal reading of the holy book, the Quran, and the Sunnah**, without admitting any kind of updated interpretation of the text. It fights any kind of modernity and proposes to live according to the original orthodoxy.
- Since the precepts of Islam **penetrate many areas of people's lives**, fundamentalist movements range from aspects of everyday life to the political system, passing through the intellectual sphere or that of social organisation.
- Almost all violent Islamic fundamentalist movements have a **politico-religious slant**, which turns conflicts into **highly complex realities**.



### What do you need to know when reporting cases of Islamic fundamentalism?

- **It is advisable to differentiate between the terms *Islam* and *Islamism*.** The name of the religion of Muslims is Islam, and this is the only correct way to refer to it. On the other hand, *Islamism* is a “politico-religious movement in favour of the Islamisation of law, institutions and government”.<sup>13</sup>
- **It is necessary to differentiate between the terms *Islam* and *Mohammedan religion*.** It is not correct to designate Islam as a “Mohammedan religion” (and, by extension, it is also incorrect to call Muslims “Mohammedans”). These forms built from the name of the prophet Muhammad are the result of an erroneous parallelism with the terminology of Christianity (from *Christ*, the word *Christian* is formed).

### Let's clarify concepts: *Jihad* or holy war?

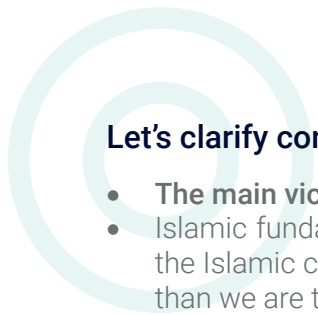
- **The translation of the word *jihad* as “holy war” is incorrect.** This meaning has been adopted by certain fundamentalist groups and is therefore a partisan expression and unfair to the Muslim community. The concept of *jihad* mainly refers to the effort that every Muslim person is called upon to make in order to improve his/her own conduct day by day.
- **Terrorist acts are committed by certain people** and not by the group of people of a country, ethnicity or religion. For this reason, we do not refer to terrorism based on origin, ethnicity or religion and avoid expressions such as “Islamic terrorism”. In this sense, whenever possible, it is necessary to identify the specific group that perpetrates a terrorist act (e.g., ISIS, Boko Haram, etc.). It is also preferable to avoid the use of the expression “jihadist terrorism”, because, as we have pointed out, the concept *jihad* refers, from the outset, to a personal effort by the believer.<sup>14</sup>
- **Salafist is not synonymous with terrorist:** The terms *Salafi* or *Salafist* are often used to categorise a person or community as being closely linked to terrorism. The truth is that the term *Salafist* designates the followers of a certain doctrinal current within Islam that seeks to find the elements to reform Islam from within the original doctrine of this faith. Under this epithet, however, we find people and groups with very diverse orientations.

### Let's clarify concepts: Does Islam produce more cases of fundamentalism than other religions?

- Although most of the cases of fundamentalism that have occupied the news in Catalonia in recent years have been terrorist attacks perpetrated in the name of Islam, it must be borne in mind that **fundamentalism is not a characteristic of Islam**, but a risk and a reality of all religious traditions (especially monotheistic ones), as well as in non-religious areas.
- There is also no data that allows us to affirm that the tendency towards fundamentalism is any greater in Islam than in other religions.

<sup>13</sup> Associació UNESCO per al Diàleg Interreligiós. [Diccionari de religions](#). Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> For more information, see the [Guidelines on news coverage of terrorism](#).



### Let's clarify concepts: Is the West the main victim of jihadist terrorism?

- **The main victims of Islamic fundamentalism are Muslims themselves.**
- Islamic fundamentalism reacts, above all, against the modernisation of the societies of the Islamic countries themselves. Terrorist attacks in these territories are more frequent than we are told through the media.

### Recognition by the Spanish State

In the case of Islam, **in 1992 cooperation agreements were signed with the Comisión Islámica de España** which grant the Muslim community the following rights:

- Right to religious assistance in public centres.
- Right to religious education at school.
- Right to civil recognition of religious marriage.
- Right to collect money.
- Entitlement to certain tax benefits.
- Right to the inviolability of their places of worship.
- Right to plots in public cemeteries.



# JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES



## Basic data

- **Number of Kingdom Halls in Catalonia (2022):** 112
- **Jehovah's Witnesses in Catalonia:** the first Kingdom Hall that was founded in Catalonia dates from 1973, in Barcelona. Since then, the expansion of Jehovah's Witnesses was rapid and steady until the late 1990s, when the rate of growth slowed.
- The members of Jehovah's Witnesses are called **Jehovah's Witnesses or Bible Students**.

## How are Jehovah's Witnesses organised in Catalonia?

- **Hierarchical structure:** Jehovah's Witnesses state that they are organised in a hierarchical structure of **six levels, at the top of which they place God, followed by Christ**.
- **Congregations:** these are the basic organisational unit of Jehovah's Witnesses. They meet throughout the week in the Kingdom Halls to study the Bible, to preach the faith, etc. They are directed by **elders**, although there may also be **ministerial servants** that are in charge of certain areas of activity. Very often, two, three or four congregations use the same Kingdom Hall on alternate days.
- **Circuit:** set of about twenty congregations headed by a circuit superintendent.
- **Branch office:** body of state level scope, at the head of which is a branch committee, made up of several superintendents, who have a coordinator.
- **Governing board:** standing committee currently made up of eight anointed members. It is responsible for establishing the organisation's earthly guidelines, overseeing the preparation of the biblical information that appears in its publications and presented at its meetings, and directs the worldwide preaching work that it carries out.

## Who can be a good interlocutor?

- Among Jehovah's Witnesses there are no religious personnel as such, but only **people responsible for different organisational levels**.
- **Elder:** this is the figure who could be closest to the representative of the community, although it should be borne in mind that his task is not to act as an intermediary with God, but only to direct the study meetings that each congregation carries out.
- **Regional communication manager:** in each region there are two regional spokespersons. They are the ones who can provide us with the information we need.
- **National communication manager:** at its state headquarters there is the Department of Public Information and the spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses in Spain. Any media can contact this department directly to ask for all the necessary information.

## What are the places of worship?

- **Kingdom Hall:** Jehovah's Witnesses are organised into congregations that usually meet twice a week in the Kingdom Hall. Kingdom Halls host several congregations (various groups), which are separated according to the common language they use when assembling and preaching outside the religious community (Catalan, Spanish, Urdu, sign language, etc.). Every week exactly the same programme is followed in all the Kingdom Halls of the world.





## What are the main functions of Kingdom Halls?

Kingdom Halls are not a place of worship as such, but a meeting centre. These meetings include prayers and songs of praise to God. Here is what is taught and shared:

- **Bible study** (once a week).
- **Public speaking training**.
- **Prayer songs**.
- **Bible conference** (one day at the weekend).
- **Analysis of articles** from the magazine *The Watchtower* (*Atalaya* in Spanish), through questions and answers from the attendees.

## What are the features of a Kingdom Hall?

- **Large space:** there is a main room with a small platform facing rows of benches or chairs where members of the community sit.
- **Decoration: they contain no images and almost no decoration.**
- **Other smaller rooms:** apart from the main room, the venue usually has a smaller room that is used for study sessions in smaller groups.

## What recommendations should be followed to enter Kingdom Halls?

- **Anyone is free to enter** a Kingdom Hall.
- Unlike other communities, in this tradition **collections are not made there**.
- Although the meetings are open to the public, they cannot be filmed from the opening song until the closing prayer. The reason is that they regard their meetings as a part of their worship, and therefore view unnecessary interruptions or distractions as disrespectful to God. In addition, this makes it possible for the image of any attendee not to appear in a media against their will.

## Are there differences between men and women?

- During the meetings, there are no differences between the men and women who attend them.
- Women cannot assume management positions. They participate fully in preaching and also teach biblical principles to their children.

## What types of clothing stand out?

- Jehovah's Witnesses do not wear specific clothing.
- When they go to the temple, **they dress up and ensure they arrive very clean**.
- the **women** usually wear a **long or knee-length skirt and covered shoulders** (symbol of respect and modesty).

## Recognition by the Spanish State

The State granted legal recognition to Jehovah's Witnesses in 1970. In 2006 it recognised them as a **well-established religious denomination**, a pre-requisite to be able to establish cooperation agreements in the future.



# JUDAISM



## Basic data

- **Number of synagogues in Catalonia** (2022): 5
- **Judaism in Catalonia:** the Jewish community has been present in Catalonia since medieval times, but for a period of time, after the expulsion of the Jews from Catalonia, this presence ceased to exist, at least visibly. It is not until the beginning of the 20<sup>TH</sup> century that the Jews once again occupy a public place with the creation of the synagogue of the Israeli Community of Barcelona.
- **Jews** is what we call people who are members of Judaism. It is not correct to refer to them as **Semites**, since there are many non-Jewish Semitic peoples. Instead, we do use the word *antisemitism* to refer to a type of religious intolerance, the 'set of racist or xenophobic feelings, prejudices, ideologies, beliefs and practices against Jews, against Judaism globally or against a part of the Jewish faith'<sup>15</sup>

## How are Jewish people organised in Catalonia?

- **In Catalonia, Jewish people are mainly organised around the four synagogues** in existence, which have different orientations. Within each synagogue there are usually several groups intended to attend to the needs that arise from Jewish law (food, funerals, etc.).
- Internationally, unions often arise from several synagogues that share the same doctrinal orientation.
- Judaism is a **particularly diverse religious tradition**. Broadly speaking, we can distinguish between:
  - **Ultra-Orthodox Judaism:** which rejects certain elements of modernity.
  - **Orthodox Judaism:** which tries to preserve traditional Judaism.
  - **Conservative or Moderate Judaism:** which tries to modify the orthodoxy by means of an emphasis on historical elements.
  - **Reformist Judaism:** which represents an attempt to reinterpret Judaism taking into account modern knowledge and learning.

## Who can be a good interlocutor?

- **Management Committee:** although each community has its own system of organisation, it is usual to have a management committee that takes care of the management of the synagogue, of the social and cultural activities that take place there and of the hiring of the male or female rabbi. Generally, the interlocutor for journalists will be a representative of this committee or the managing board (and not necessarily the rabbi).
- **Rabbi:** this is the highest religious authority inside a synagogue. The rabbi is not a priest, but a scholar of Jewish law. His/her main task is to provide religious training to the people who attend the synagogue, although he/she is often also the person responsible for performing infant circumcision, celebrating weddings and funerals, or controlling the death of animals according to the ritual.

<sup>15</sup> The definition has been taken from the [Diccionari de les religions](#), edited by Termcat



### What are the places of worship?

- **Synagogue:** this is the space around which the religious life of the Jewish communities takes place. It is also a community space beyond what is strictly religious, given that Jewish identity goes beyond the religious dimension. In Greek it means 'assembly'.

### What are the main functions of the synagogue?

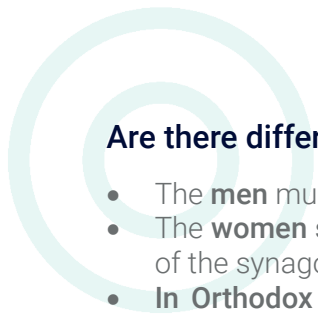
- **Worship service:** three services are held every day in the synagogues. Those on Saturday are considered the most important and have the most attendance.
- **Prayer:** The faithful who attend the synagogue pray in different ways: standing, leaning, sitting, prostrate or swaying.
- **Study and teaching:** all synagogues have training, teaching and study groups.
- **Community organisation:** the various service groups in the community are organised through the synagogue (the care groups for the deceased and their families, the aid groups, the reception groups, the women's groups, the youth groups, social assistance groups, etc.).
- **Celebration of holidays:** among the main ones are Rosh Hashanah (or New Year's festivities), Yom Kippur (or Day of Atonement) and Pessah (or Jewish Passover).
- **Celebration of the rites of passage:** the synagogue is also the meeting place where the rites of passage are celebrated: birth, integration into the community, marriage and death.

### What are the features of a synagogue?

- **Pulpit:** in the centre of the synagogue, or in the front part, there is usually the pulpit (bimah), which is the place from where the liturgical service and teachings are given, and also from where the rabbi usually delivers the sermon (although, sometimes, it may be delivered from another pulpit).
- **Torah Ark:** this is a cabinet built into the wall that holds the Torah scrolls and usually points to Jerusalem.
- **Chandelier:** in front of or above this cabinet, there is usually a chandelier or other type of light that is on twenty-four hours a day.
- **Benches:** facing the pulpit are the benches where the people of the community sit.
- **Decoration:** the synagogue may be decorated with **inscriptions made in Hebrew** and also with **menorah** (seven-armed chandeliers).

### What recommendations should be followed to enter synagogues?

- It is not recommended **to show up at the synagogue without informing them** beforehand. When the visit is arranged, you will probably need to be accredited.
- In the case of **men**, it is mandatory to wear a **kippah or yarmulke** to enter the synagogue.
- Inside, it is advisable to maintain a **restrained attitude**, not to laugh loudly or have unnecessary conversations.
- It is a sign of respect **not to turn your back on the Torah Ark**.
- **It is likely that taking photographs is prohibited inside the synagogue.** In any case, the best thing is **to make the inquiry** beforehand to the person who gives access to the synagogue or to a person in charge of the community.



### Are there differences between men and women?

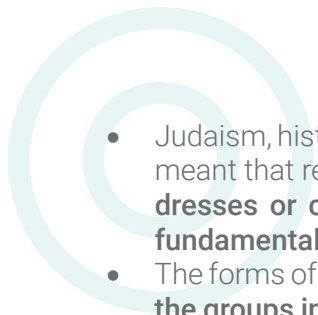
- The **men** must put on the **kippah** upon entering the synagogue.
- The **women sometimes cover their hair** with a head scarf: this depends on the tradition of the synagogue.
- **In Orthodox synagogues, men and women stand apart during worship.** Sometimes, some to the right and others to the left (or vice versa). At other times, women sit in the back pews or on an upper floor.

### What types of clothing stand out?

- Within Judaism, there are some customs related to clothing linked to the religion. However, **it is advisable to talk about customs and traditions, and not exclusively about precepts.**
- The men wear:
  - **Kippah:** a cap traditionally worn by men to enter the synagogue and also occasionally during meals and holidays, or in other situations. It can be made of cloth, wool or any other fabric. For the Jews, it is a way of remembering and recognising the presence of God and His ascendant condition with respect to humans.
  - **Tallit:** a rectangular shawl used by men in some prayers to cover their shoulders and sometimes their heads. It is usually white with blue stripes. It always has fringes in the four corners, which are the most characteristic feature of the tallit, which recall the precepts of the Torah.
  - **Tefillin:** a leather case inside which are fragments of the Torah written on parchment, which are carried two at a time, one tied to the arm and the other to the forehead. These are worn during morning prayer.
- **Ultra-Orthodox Judaism contemplates a series of precepts and dress codes that Reform or Liberal Judaism does not follow.** They are indications that come from the reading of the Torah and what differentiates the Orthodox form from the other forms of Judaism is the literalness in the interpretation of the letter. **In ultra-orthodox Judaism,** some men usually wear **black trousers and jacket and a white shirt**, and sometimes also a **black hat**. Some of them also make **hair curls on both sides of the head** and let their **beard** grow a little or a lot. There are also men who, faced with the prescription of covering their head, wear the **kippah** outside the synagogue, in everyday life.
- **Female** Jews do not usually wear distinctive elements. Even so, in the case of women of the ultra-orthodox tradition, their clothes **aim to keep most of the body covered**, which is why they tend to wear **long skirts**. **Some married women also try not to show their hair** in public and cover them with a head scarf or veil, or some use wigs.

### When can we talk about Jewish fundamentalism?

- Jewish fundamentalism is based on the **reading of the sacred texts line by line** (in this case, the Torah and the Talmud) and the **faithful monitoring of the prescriptions of conduct, from a perspective that rejects any other different way of doing things. It is considered that the original meanings of the Torah cannot be updated** due to their character as a literal transcription of divine revelation. This fact, on occasion, also entails opposing the possibility of translating the holy book, which happens to be read only in Hebrew (by those who can do so).

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- Judaism, historically, has developed as a religious identity, but also a cultural one. This has meant that religion penetrates all areas of daily life. As a result, **the way a Jewish person dresses or combs his hair could never be a sufficient reason to speak of religious fundamentalism.**
  - The forms of Jewish fundamentalism **cannot be directly or automatically linked to any of the groups involved in the conflict between the State of Israel and Palestine.** The reality is varied and does not allow us to relate any geopolitical area to a specific expression of Judaism.

### Recognition by the Spanish State

In the case of Judaism, **in 1992 cooperation agreements were signed with the Federación de Comunidades Israelitas de España** which grant the Jewish community the following rights:

- Right to religious assistance in public centres.
- Right to religious education at school.
- Right to civil recognition of religious marriage.
- Right to collect money.
- Entitlement to certain tax benefits.
- Right to the inviolability of their places of worship.
- Right to plots in public cemeteries.



# ORTHODOX CHURCHES



## Basic data

- **Number of Orthodox centres of worship in Catalonia (2022):** 53
- **Orthodox churches in Catalonia:** these were implemented in Catalonia at the beginning of the 20<sup>TH</sup> century as a result of a small Greek community that decided to create, apart from a cultural meeting point, a religious community, the Greek Orthodox Church, located in Barcelona. In the same city, in the 1960s, a group of people born in Catalonia interested in Orthodox rituals gave life to a Catalan Orthodox church which is currently under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Serbia.
- We call the members of Orthodox churches **Orthodox men/women and we add the country of the church to which they belong**. For example, "a Russian Orthodox man", "the Ukrainian Orthodox Church", etc.

## How are people organised in the Orthodox churches in Catalonia?

- The various Orthodox churches **are independent**.
- Despite the autonomy that characterises them, the patriarchs **meet in council** and all grant a primacy of honour to the **Patriarch of Constantinople**.
- Orthodox churches are organised around several **patriarchies** and they are autocephalous churches: Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Moscow, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Ukraine, etc.
- **In Catalonia we find communities belonging to several patriarchates**. All have a hierarchical structure, so deacons and priests are under the authority of their bishop.

## Who can be a good interlocutor?

- **Patriarch:** this is the main authority. It is a title of dignity granted to the bishops of some important churches (this is the case of Constantinople, Moscow, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, etc.)
- **Exarchs:** these constitute another important source of information. They are hierarchs who rule an exarchate or administrative territory of the Orthodox churches. For example, the Archbishop of Athens for the Greek Church.
- **Presbyters:** these are the men who preside over the divine liturgy and can administer most of the sacraments. Married men can enter the priesthood and bishops come from the monastic estate.

## What are the places of worship?

- **Church:** this is the most important meeting place. Great importance is given to icons, which are painted images representing Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the saints, the mysteries, etc.
- Several of the Orthodox communities there **in Catalonia they do not have their own place of worship, but use Catholic churches on loan** for a few hours or throughout the year, in the case of disused chapels or hermitages.



### What are the main functions of churches?

- **Celebration of the Divine Liturgy:** this is the celebration of the Eucharist, which includes the singing of hymns and litanies. It has the particularity that it usually lasts hours.
- Structure of **charitable and welfare activities**.
- **Cultural and religious education:** many churches take advantage of one of the attached rooms to carry out courses in the original language of the community, religious education for children or specific formations, such as iconography workshops.

### What are the features of an Orthodox church?

- The entrance to Orthodox churches is usually a **hall where candles are lit, which are then placed in front of one of the icons** that is nearby.
- After the lobby, one enters the **central nave** of the church, which does not usually have benches or chairs to sit on.
- On one side of this nave is the **bishop's throne**, a symbol that is associated with membership in a spiritual organisation and community.
- It maintains the **iconostasis**, which is the **wooden or masonry wall** which, especially in churches of the Byzantine tradition, is between the sanctuary and the nave of the church. The iconostasis has a central door with two doors (the **royal or holy** doors, which also have a curtain) and two sides, and serves as a support for icons, in accordance with some canons that establish their distribution. These doors give access to the sanctuary, which is behind the nave and is the most sacred space in the temple.
- A lot of importance is **afforded to illumination**, which is carried out with natural light, artificial light and candles.

### What recommendations should be followed to enter Orthodox churches?

- It is advisable to enter Orthodox churches **wearing clothing that is not too low-cut or shows one's legs**.
- **In some churches, it is preferable for women to cover their heads** with a head scarf.
- **There are some churches that do not allow non-congregants to enter beyond the vestibule** entrance to the church. For this reason, it is advisable to consult this before entering the nave of the building.

### Are there differences between men and women?

- **In some churches, men and women pray separately.**
- Women may not hold religious positions.

### What types of clothing stand out?

- Christians in Orthodox churches do not wear any specific clothing.
- We can find differences between the believers of **the more conservative churches, which tend to cover most of the body**, and the believers from the more liberal ones.
- Not all priests in Orthodox churches follow a specific dress code, but many use **robes or other distinctive elements**.



### Recognition by the Spanish State

Orthodox churches are **recognised as a “well-established religious denomination” since 2010**, a pre-requisite to be able to establish cooperation agreements with the State in the future. In any case, some of these churches benefit in an extraordinary way from the rights recognised by the State to the member entities of the Federación de Entidades Religiosas Evangélicas de España, with which it signed a cooperation agreement in 1992.





# SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH



## Basic data

- **Number of Adventist churches in Catalonia (2022):** 22
- **The Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Catalonia:** it arrived in Catalonia in 1903 through three young missionaries from California, but it was not until 1940 that the first church was opened in the country. Since then, first cautiously and then, towards the end of the 1970s and during the early 2000s, in a more consolidated way, the organisation opened new places of worship.
- Members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are named **Adventists**. The reference to the “seventh day” in the name of this religious denomination has to do with the strict observance of the Sabbath as a day dedicated to the Lord.

## How are Adventists organised in Catalonia?

- **General Conference:** this is the central body, located in Washington D.C. It consists of a **president and an executive council elected every five years**.
- The different communities around the world are grouped into continental, state and, sometimes, regional areas. However, currently there is no body that formally groups and coordinates the Adventist churches in Catalonia. So, all the churches in Catalonia belong to the **Conferencia Española** (which has its headquarters in Madrid), and the Spanish Association belongs to the **Union of Southern Europe**, which is part of the **Euro African division**.

## Who can be a good interlocutor?

Each church or congregation is led by a Council made up of the following:

- **Pastor:** this is the main person in charge of the local church and is in charge of leading the services.
- **Elders:** leaders chosen by the community from among the most senior members or from those to whom a special value is attributed. They collaborate with the pastor in carrying out their tasks.
- **Deacons:** these are responsible for taking care of the temple, knowing about the incidents that affect the members of the community, helping the needy, etc.
- **Directors of departments:** they coordinate the tasks assigned to each department. The most important departments are: secretariat, treasury, Sabbath school, youth society, minors, family, etc.

In relation to community members, it is common for Adventist churches themselves to make the following distinction:

- **Baptised members:** these are the members who have been baptised and conduct their activity within the framework of the church.
- **Remaining members:** these are the members who have a relationship with the church, but do not have all the rights and duties of the members.



### What are the places of worship?

- **The church:** this is the name given to the place of worship of the Seventh Day Adventist Church.
- **Saturday is the day of observance** of Adventists (and not Sunday, as in most Christian churches) and, therefore, it is the busiest day.

### What are the main functions of places of worship?

- **Prayer assembly:** these usually take place on Friday evenings and include the singing of hymns, preaching and spontaneous prayers of the faithful who attend.
- **Religious education:** Sabbath School, intended for all the people of the community, distributed by age groups, of a maximum of twelve people each, is the equivalent of the Catholic catechesis or the Sunday school of the evangelical churches. It usually takes place on Saturday mornings.
- **Worship service:** this takes place on Saturday at mid-morning, after Sabbath School. It includes songs, time for prayer, offerings, Bible reading and preaching.
- **Communion:** on some Saturdays, at the worship service, communion is also celebrated, which begins with a “washing” of the feet among the members of the community as a symbol of humility and forgiveness.
- **Training:** the place of worship and also other spaces serve the members of this tradition as training spaces, especially on health (diet, “alternative” therapies, prevention of alcoholism, how to stop smoking, etc.).

### What are the features of an Adventist church?

- Adventist churches tend to have **a small stage with a platform**, which are faced by **rows of benches or chairs where the members of the community sit**.
- **They have no images and practically no decoration.**

### What recommendations should be followed to enter churches?

- It is a symbol of respect to remain **silent during worship**.
- If we need to speak and it is not to make any collective contribution to the worship service, it is best to do so in a quiet voice.

### Are there differences between men and women?

- It is not common for there to be differences between men and women who attend Adventist worship.
- Women cannot achieve the position of pastor.

### Recognition by the Spanish State

In the case of the Adventist Church, **included in the Federación de Entidades Religiosas Evangélicas de España [Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities of Spain] (FEREDE)**, some **cooperation agreements were signed in 1992** which grant the Adventist community the following rights:

- Right to religious assistance in public centres.
- Right to religious education at school.
- Right to civil recognition of religious marriage.
- Right to collect money.
- Entitlement to certain tax benefits.
- Right to the inviolability of their places of worship.



# SIKHISM



## Basic data

- **Number of gurdwaras in Catalonia** (2022): 10
- **Sikhism in Catalonia:** Sikhism arrived in Catalonia at the end of the 1980s, when small groups of Sikhs met in private homes. It was in the 1990s when the number of immigrants from the Indian Punjab increased and, as a result, the first Sikh temple in the country was opened, located in Barcelona.
- People who are part of Sikhism are called **Sikhs**, a word that we could translate as “disciples” (of Guru Nanak, who is the founder of Sikhism).

## How are Sikhs organised in Catalonia?

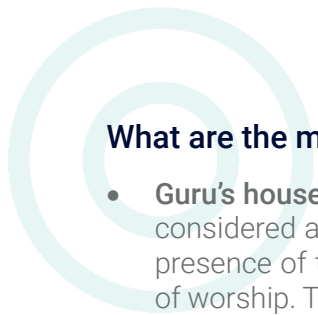
- **At the global level, there is no hierarchical structure** to organise the Sikhs.
- Although in certain areas there are temple associations that have become very powerful, in principle, **each gurdwara is fully independent**. Internally, and this is what occurs in Catalonia, each gurdwara is usually organised through a **managing board** with a **chairperson**, which does not necessarily perform religious functions.

## Who can be a good interlocutor?

- **Community spokesperson:** the most recommended thing is to contact the spokesperson of the community and, in the case of Catalonia, since it is a fairly recent immigration, with young Sikh people, who express themselves more easily.
- **Granthi:** this can be either a man or a woman and is the person responsible for guarding and looking after the welfare of the Guru Granth Sahib, their holy book.
- **Khalsa Sikhs:** this is the order of initiated Sikhs. This is the group of Sikhs who have passed the Sikh initiation ceremony, the *amritsansakar*, where amrit is received, which is a kind of sacred nectar. These members of the community have a different, higher degree of religious commitment than the rest. Externally it is easy to identify them, because they follow the so-called “five Ks” (see the section on clothing). Also, once the ceremony is completed, the men adopt the name of *Singh* (lion) and women adopt *Kaur* (princess), after their given name.
- **Jathedar:** this is the highest authority of the Sikh community, the person who takes care of the Akal Takht or “eternal throne”, a temple located in the city of Amritsar (Punjab, India). However, there is no one person leading the community.

## What are the places of worship?

- **Gurdwara:** this is the place of worship where the Sikh community gathers. *Gurdwara* means “the place where the guru is”. It is a space of meditation. The most crowded prayer ceremony in Sikhism is held on Sundays, because people are more available to attend.
- **In Catalonia it is usually located in basements of buildings, in old garages or industrial buildings.**



### What are the main functions of the gurdwara?

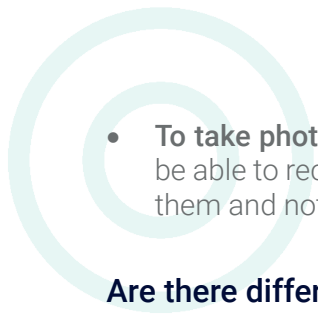
- **Guru's house:** the holy book of the Sikh community is not considered "just" a book, but is considered an eternal guru and plays a major role in centres of worship. In fact, it is the presence of this book, the Guru Granth Sahib, that turns a place or building into a place of worship. The Guru Granth Sahib contains Sikh doctrine and is considered the supreme authority of Sikhism; it is usually placed on a kind of throne. At night it is ceremoniously taken to its room, where it has a bed to be able to rest on; in the morning it is woken up and dressed (both the clothes of its room and the "garment" of the Guru Granth Sahib are adapted to the climate, just as is done with the temperature of the room, so that it does not get cold or hot); it is offered food, etc. The Guru Granth Sahib is read aloud at various times of the day.
- It is used in the **langar**, a communal kitchen and dining room.
- **Meditation and prayer** is performed there.
- **Kirtan:** in Sikh temples there is always a place where hymns from the holy book are sung and where young people who are learning to play are able to practice.

### What are the features of a gurdwara?

- At the entrance there is usually a **container with head scarves**, as you have to go inside with your head covered.
- Just before or just after the space for head scarves, there is an **area to leave one's shoes** (usually with separators).
- A little further on, there are one or more **basins** in which to wash one's hands and feet.
- The floor of the gurdwara is **carpeted**.
- One of its singularities is that it has a **kitchen**. The kitchen is a key space, because it is where all the food offered at the centre is prepared.
- The **kirtan**, which is usually located to the right or left of the area where the Guru Granth Sahib is located, is the space in the temple where praise is sung.
- There is also the **Guru Granth Sahib's room and the granthi's bedroom**.

### What recommendations should be followed to enter gurdwaras?

- **Everyone can enter** the gurdwaras, whether one is Sikh or not.
- Entry is prohibited to people who are carrying **alcohol or tobacco**.
- Both men and women need to **cover their head with a head scarf** (it can either be a personal one or one of those offered by the centre at the entrance). It is a show of respect to God.
- One enters **barefoot**.
- Then, one must **wash one's feet and hands** in the basins which are on the floor.
- With one's head covered and your feet clean, one must **walk along the central carpet until reaching the front of the altar of the Guru Granth Sahib and prostrate oneself**. At the end of the prostration, it is a sign of respect not to turn one's back to the book.
- Next, it is advisable **to sit facing the Guru Granth Sahib with folded or crossed legs**. Care must be taken not to stretch the legs in the direction of the Guru Granth Sahib as this could be considered an offence.
- One is likely, shortly after sitting down, to be offered a **sweet ball made of semolina, butter and sugar**, which is taken from a bowl with the hands. It is considered rude to refuse the offering.

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- **To take photographs of the interior of the temple, permission is required**, especially to be able to receive the corresponding directions regarding the position from which to take them and not to be disrespectful to the Guru Granth Sahib or offend the community.

### Are there differences between men and women?

Women tend to sit on one side of the gurdwara and the men on the other, separated by the central corridor, which is what people use to get to the Guru Granth Sahib and prostrate themselves.

### What types of clothing stand out?

- **The five Ks:** when a Sikh person decides to be part of the *khalsa*, he/she is predisposed to follow and preserve the essence of Sikhism under any circumstances. One of the elements contemplated by the *khalsa* are the so-called "five Ks": five signs that represent Sikhism and tend to be followed quite faithfully, as the Sikh faith involves quite a high degree of commitment.
  - **Kes or Kesha:** both men and women tend not to cut their hair, so it is common for them to wear it very long. In fact, Sikh people do not cut their hair on any part of their body, which is why men tend to wear very long beards. This practice symbolises spiritual power and acceptance of God's infallible wisdom.
  - **Kanga:** this is the comb (usually wooden) that is used to keep the hair collected and to be able to cover it with the turban. It functions as a reminder of the need for cleanliness which is both external (the body must be kept clean) and internal (it is advisable to live an orderly life and maintain a state of spiritual purity).
  - **Kach or kachera:** knee-length shorts that are usually worn as underwear and signify fidelity and chastity.
  - **Kara or karha:** a steel bracelet that is worn on the right arm and that does not have an ornamental character, but a symbolic one (as if it were a handcuff, it recalls the eternal link between the believer and the divinity).
  - **Kirpan:** ceremonial dagger with a curved blade that is worn hanging from a string and that constitutes another element of the costume. The symbolism of wearing this kind of short sword is well explained by the etymology of the word *kirpan*, which means 'honour and compassion'. Thus, far from being a weapon, wearing the kirpan becomes a reminder of the need to defend justice without fear and to always do so from a compassionate and humane state.
- **Hair:** given the prescription not to cut one's hair and to always maintain good hygiene, in Sikhism there is a specific clothing intended to collect the hair and keep it clean. Even so, currently in Catalonia many Sikhs cut their hair to facilitate entry and adaptation to the world of work.
  - **Dastar:** turban formed by a piece of clothing several metres long and without patterns worn by Sikhs and used to collect their long hair. The values of dignity, honour, value, spirituality and piety are attributed to him.
  - **Scarf:** although some women also wear dastar, the vast majority cover their heads with a scarf.
  - **Ramal:** Sikh children who do not cut their hair also wear it in a bun and usually collect it with a piece of clothing called *ramal*.

### Recognition by the Spanish State

At this moment, **there are no specific agreements with the Sikh community.**



## ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED

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- 
- Comunitat Advaitavidya
  - Comunitat Bahá'í de Barcelona
  - Comunitat Israelita de Barcelona
  - Comunitat Sikh de Catalunya
  - Conferència Episcopal Tarraconense
  - Consell Evangèlic de Catalunya
  - Coordinadora Catalana d'Entitats Budistes
  - Església Adventista del Setè Dia
  - Església de Jesucrist dels Sants dels Darrers Dies
  - Església Ortodoxa Espanyola
  - Església Unida de Terrassa
  - Federació Consell Islàmic de Catalunya
  - Grup de Treball Estable de Religions
  - Testimonis Cristians de Jehovà
  - Unió de Comunitats Islàmiques de Catalunya



**Consell  
de l'Audiovisual  
de Catalunya**



**Generalitat de Catalunya  
Departament  
de la Presidència**