

French president appeals to Christian past

His popularity waning with a year to go before an election, French President Nicolas Sarkozy is reminding the French of their Christian heritage. The Sydney Morning Herald has the story.



Reuters photo

Nicolas Sarkozy, the leader of a secular republic, has been photographed with Catholic nuns before praising Christianity, stoking nationalist sentiment and questioning the role of Islam in French society.

Two weeks before regional elections and a month before France implements its ban on the wearing of the full face veil in public, the French President has created a rift in his centre-right party, exploiting anti-Muslim feeling in an attempt to stop voter defections to the far right.

During a visit to the pilgrimage town Puy-en-Velay in southern France on Thursday, he said the French must not forget the religion on which the country was founded, the "magnificent Christian heritage" that shaped its culture.

"As a secular President I can say that," he said, speaking in the village known best as a traditional stop on the ninth-century pilgrimage the Way of Saint James, which leads to Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

"This heritage comes with obligations, this heritage is a privilege, but it presents us above all with a duty: it obliges us to pass it on to future generations, and we should embrace it without doubt or shame," he said. "This is the France that we love, the France that we're proud of, the France that has roots."

More here.