

‘Civil war on Muslims’ if Marine Le Pen succeeds: Paris imam



French far-right leader and presidential candidate Marine Le Pen in Ennemain, northern France, earlier this week.

Matthew Clayfield, The Australian, 12:00AM May 6, 2017

On Thursday in Paris, the rector of the Grand Mosque of Paris, Dalil Boubakeur, marked this weekend's anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe. Flanked by military officials, ambassadors and veterans, he paid attention to the roles played, and sacrifices made, by French Muslims in the battle to rid Europe and North Africa of fascism. The mosque was founded in the 1920s to acknowledge the roles played by Muslims in World War I and helped Jews in World War II by forging Muslim birth certificates.

With anti-EU, anti-immigration candidate Marine Le Pen facing off against Emmanuel Macron in the second round of the French presidential election tomorrow, the irony of the occasion wasn't lost on him. "It would be like an atomic bomb falling," he told The Weekend Australian when asked of a Le Pen victory. "It would have the same effect, especially on the Muslim community. If such a thing was able to occur, it would be like Mr Macron says. It would signal the start of a civil war."

At the Mosque of Omar Ibn al-Khattab, where the Charlie Hebdo shooters are believed to have prayed, worshippers were not so quick to support Mr Boubakeur's preferred candidate. Salaheddine, 49, a French-Algerian garbage collector, voted for far-left candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon in the election's first round.

He said the Charlie Hebdo killers might have visited the mosque, but were not radicalised there. (The mosque preaches a version of Sunni Islam, Tablighi, which is conservative but apolitical.) He said although he might not like what Ms Le Pen has to say about Muslims or immigrants, on economic grounds he feels she may be on his side.

“If Marine Le Pen hadn’t said so many bad things about Muslims, I probably would have voted for her (in the second round),” he said. “I know some Muslims who did. But she’s closer to the working class (than Macron). She’s still a politician at the end, too, so maybe she wouldn’t have been that bad with Muslim people.”

Officer worker Samir, 44, has a more hard-line view. He believes the Charlie Hedbo and November 13, 2015, attacks were “false flag” operations designed to demonise French Muslims. “We’ve seen this movie before. We saw it 15 years ago,” he said, meaning the September 11 attacks. “My religious convictions do not allow me to vote,” he said. “We cannot expect this country to become an Islamic state. I’m not talking about the organisation. But it doesn’t interest me to vote until there is a candidate who represents my own vision.”