

# PAIX LITURGIQUE

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## Tradition in France: History and State of Affairs in 2018.

Since

the motu proprio Summorum Pontificum was published in 2007, Paix Liturgique has endeavored to illustrate the universality of the interest in the traditional liturgy by publishing reports, testimonials, and surveys picked up on every continent. These demonstrate that attachment to the traditional liturgy and to the Faith is not, nor has ever been, (as has been stated too often) a “Franco-French business.” And yet during our travels we have often been asked about traditional Catholicism in France. The present letter seeks to present a succinct 2018 summary of Tradition in France, of its present circumstances, and of its history.

13,000: that is the number of pilgrims who took part in the Our Lady of Christendom pilgrimage from Paris to Chartres (the pilgrimage organized by Ecclesia Dei communities) in 2018. To this number must be added the 6,000 faithful frequenting the Society of Saint Pius X who walked from Chartres to Paris on the same Pentecost week-end. On either side, and therefore in aggregate, these are significant numbers, which are constantly on the rise and attest to the extraordinary vitality of French traditional Catholicism. Cardinal Sarah, who paid a visit to the pilgrims of Christendom Sunday evening before welcoming them in the Cathedral of Chartres on Monday, declared that he had been struck by all this youth and all these families that prove that the Christian roots of France still bear fruit.



Chartres pilgrims (photo Notre-Dame de Chrétienté).

### I - Deep Roots

Often, overseas but sometimes also in France, the reaction of French Catholics to the conciliar and postconciliar upheavals is confined to the person of Marcel Lefebvre, first archbishop of Dakar and superior general of the Holy Ghost Fathers at the time of the Council. Yet long before Archbishop Lefebvre decided to found the Society of Saint Pius X in 1970 for the preservation and restoration of the Catholic priesthood, many French priests and laymen had expressed their fears and refusal regarding the modernist reforms.

The reaction of priests was multifaceted. In the first place, an intellectual aspect involving the publication of many texts criticizing neomodernist errors—take, for example, the work of Fr. Calmel, the Dominican theologian, or that of the abbé de Nantes, founder of La Contre-Réforme Catholique, who may be called the first French traditionalist “resistant”.<sup>1</sup> Next, a militant aspect with such priests as the abbé Coache or Fr. Barbara,<sup>2</sup> who were to lead hundreds of laypeople on pilgrimage to Rome in the early 1970s there to express their attachment to the Mass of Saint Pius V. Lastly a local aspect with a great number of parish priests who, in every diocese, sought to preserve or even restore in their parish all that the Council winds were sweeping away. Alas most of them were persecuted, at times most cruelly, by their hierarchy and confreres until they stopped living their Catholic life as they had received it and as it had existed time out of mind. Only a few “witness pastors,” usually in rural areas, were able to make it through those dark years, but once they were compelled to stop because of old age or because they had been recalled to the good Lord, their work quickly disappeared, leaving in near-total isolation the faithful who were attached to what these priests had maintained. . . .

In religious communities too there had been reactions before Archbishop Lefebvre. Of course mention must be made of the role played by the Benedictine

Abbey of Fontgombault and its first “daughter,” Notre-Dame de Randol, which kept up the traditional Mass until 1973 as well as of Dom Gérard Clavet, founder of a Benedictine priory at Bédoin in the Vaucluse (and who would later found the Abbey Sainte-Madeleine du Barroux), not to mention certain Fathers of Saint-Vincent de Paul. Not to forget, on the women’s side, the Dominicans of the Holy Ghost (Pontcalec) on the one hand and, on the other hand, the two branches of the teaching Dominicans of the Holy Name of Jesus (at Fanjeaux and Brignoles) who assist the work of Archbishop Lefebvre; they too contributed, through the Catholic education of girls, to the very essence of the Catholic family.

Besides the clergy and religious, the mobilization of the faithful was immensely important since laymen were freer to act and react even though, at times, French ecclesiastical authorities—in this case imagining that they were still in the good old preconciliar days—tried to use compulsion or the kind of authority that had become completely anachronistic after the Council, all in an effort to shut up these free and independent spirits with canonical penalties . . . .

Over a half-century after those dark times particular homage is due to Jean Madiran. At the helm of the review *Itinéraires* he played, with courage, intelligence, and obstinacy a decisive role in the “Great Refusal” of the Novus Ordo, of the abandonment of the Catechism, and of the falsification of Scripture. Other personages had an outstanding role, such as *inter alios* Michel de Saint-Pierre, Louis Salleron, Jacques Perret, or such inspiring—and inspired—personalities as Henri and André Charlier, and also Jean Ousset who, though he was not directly implicated in religious or liturgical matters, made this reaction possible though the human seed-bed he formed over at La Cité Catholique. Also essential was the creation of *Una Voce* by Georges Cerbelaud-Salagnac in 1964, as well as Pierre Debray’s movement *Les Silencieux de l’Église* (The Silent Ones of the Church).<sup>4</sup> On the militant side we recall *L’Alliance Saint-Michel* which was on the front lines fighting against the most glaring abuses. Likewise we’ll note the creation of the *Scouts d’Europe* in 1958 (who at the time were clearly committed to opposing religious innovations) and of the *Mouvement de la Jeunesse Catholique de France* (Movement of the Catholic Youth of France) in 1967.

## II -

### Overview of the situation in 2018

#### A) Chapels and churches

Starting in the late 1960s the French hierarchy, whose authority covered parishes and Catholic institutions, worked to end anything that might resemble opposition to conciliar novelties. Men and women who remained attached to the traditional mind-set were persecuted within Church structures; so were laymen who had to suffer many obstacles whenever they wished to have access to the traditional Mass and to an orthodox catechism for their children.

There arose a wind of resistance among some of them—old and young, men and women—to help faithful priests celebrate a now-forbidden Mass, and to provide themselves with the means to continue to attend it. And so, by dint of purchasing a garage here (or a former butcher shop, as on the Rue de la Cossonnerie, in Paris!), renting a music-hall transformed into a makeshift chapel there, within a decade they established an extraordinary network of “illegal Masses” so that France might still be irrigated by a truly Catholic Mass.

Only in 1988 did the *motu proprio Ecclesia Dei*, promulgated by the Roman authorities as a firewall to Archbishop Lefebvre’s episcopal consecrations, allow for the vice-grip to be gently released—recall the words of Dom Gérard: “all the benefits obtained after the consecrations were only obtained thanks to the consecrations” . . . . Then came the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* in 2007, which legitimized this “resistance” to the conciliar Mass by deciding that the traditional Mass had never been forbidden—which was at least debatable as a point of fact, especially in France—and finally allowed, though not always very generously, to broaden the number of churches and chapels where the liturgy that this text terms “extraordinary” is celebrated.

In 2018

the celebration of the traditional Mass remains absent in only three continental French départements out of ninety-five. These are all three rural départements: Ardèche; Creuse; and Haute-saône. In concrete terms this means that there always exists a traditional Mass less than one hour away by car wherever one finds himself in France. There are 285 Mass venues (whether or not on Sundays) recognized by the dioceses in our country, as opposed to 132 when *Summorum Pontificum* was promulgated in 2007. If one adds the 203 SSPX Mass venues (against 184 in 2007), there is a total of 488 traditional worship venues in 2018 as opposed to 316 in 2007. Naturally, if this number is compared to the 4300 parishes that exist in France, it may not seem like much. Yet one may now say that the traditional Mass is celebrated one way or the other in over 10% of French parishes—fifty years after that Mass was suppressed, crushed, persecuted!

## B) Traditional Community Seminaries

For about twenty years the best way to eradicate the engine of Catholic resistance, namely the traditional priesthood, seemed to be a strategy consisting in persecuting faithful priests and forbidding the ordination of even slightly conservative seminarians.

Except that in 1970 Archbishop Lefebvre erected a seminary open to young men wishing to become priests in the classical mold. The extraordinary respect and stunning enthusiasm of a crowd of laity for the resistant-prelate simply rested on the fact that he was “making priests”: the Mass, the catechism, and Catholic family life were going to be able to continue just as before. In this, Archbishop Lefebvre was carried by all the institutions of so-called “integral” Catholicism which, from the 1950s to the 1970s, made up what was to become fertile ground for French traditional Catholicism,<sup>5</sup> and which allowed for half

a century of spiritual, liturgical, catechetical, and family-based resistance marked by extraordinary perseverance and at times heroism on the part of Catholic laypeople and families.

The SSPX and the Fraternity of Saint Peter, the Institute of Christ the King and the Institute of the Good Shepherd were born on a solid French foundation. The first two were both established in Switzerland and have each their European seminary in Germany, although the SSPX long ago set up its year of spirituality in Falvigny, near Dijon in Burgundy, France. The Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest has its seminary in Tuscany, Italy. The Institute of the Good Shepherd alone, for the time being, has its seminary in France. One can pray for these institutes to have a seminary on French soil soon. . . .

### *C) Religious Communities*

We've mentioned above the religious communities that had resisted, or attempted to do so, during the years of darkness and tears. Archbishop Lefebvre's inauguration of a seminary producing ordinations caused numerous religious vocations to flock to him, which ultimately yielded a flowering of new religious institutes. These new communities are now quite numerous, be they of pontifical or diocesan right, such the foundation at Riaumont, the religious of Saint-Vincent-Ferrier, the Canons of the Mother of God, the Missionaries of Divine Mercy, or allied to the SSPX, such as the community of the Transfiguration, the Capuchins of Morgon, the Benedictines of Bellaigue, the Carmelite communities, the Dominicans of Avrillé who later became independent, etc. One might also mention assimilated foundations such as the community of Saint Thomas Becket which, in one way or another, are fruits of the French Catholic resistance in the immediate aftermath of the Council.

### *D) Vocations*

For the past few years we have drawn up a precise account and analysis of traditional priestly vocations as compared to diocesan vocations. In these years an average of one new priest in five was ordained in and for the extraordinary form of the Roman rite. This phenomenon also affects religious vocations, which are more difficult to count accurately but whose growth is identical. Since the liturgical reform, Fontgombault, itself a daughter foundation of Solesmes, produced the abbeys of Randol, Triors, and Donezan in France and Clear Creek Abbey in the United States, and has also revived the moribund abbey of Wisques. For its part the Abbey of Le Barroux, founded by Dom Gérard Calvet, has produced the priory of La Garde and, indirectly, several other foundations linked to the SSPX (from Brazil to New Mexico, whence arose the foundation of Bellaigue, in France). The same astonishing dynamism is found among religious women, starting with the teaching

Dominicans of Fanjeaux and Brignoles (SSPX) and those of the Holy Ghost (Ecclesia Dei), among the Benedictines and the contemplative Dominicans of Avrillé and elsewhere . . . .

#### *E) Youth, Family, and Social Organizations*

The extraordinary ferment we have just presented keeps going. Its effect has been the surprising development of associations, reviews, and a flowering of websites on the net dealing with news, piety, and meditation. There are also scouting, long-distance catechesis, youth movements, spiritual direction for families (Domus Christiani), pro-life or charitable initiatives, not to forget of course Our Lady of Christendom, which organizes the Paris-Chartres pilgrimage mentioned at the beginning of this letter, etc. These works have an impact beyond the traditional world, for instance the March for Life or SOS Christians of the Orient to mention only two pilot initiatives of the past few years.

#### *F) Schools*

There was, at the time of the Council, a very rich network of Catholic schools. Like all Catholic institutions, however, they ended up excluding any connection with the traditional spirit, when they didn't become militant centers of opposition to that spirit. This is why Catholic families, once their prayers and decisive work had been rewarded with venues to attend Mass in, immediately shifted their attention to the creation of schools where an authentic Catholic spirit would reign. The result was spectacular: the map of fully Catholic independent schools to date numbers 172 schools that do not have a contract with the State and are in principle free from diocesan control. The number has exploded these past fifteen years, as indeed has the independent school movement as a whole. While American Catholics often opt for homeschooling, French traditional Catholics prefer to send their children to schools that they create and finance themselves, whose curricula perpetuate the values they are attached to and where religious education is generally entrusted to priests and religious from Ecclesia Dei communities or institutes, the SPPX, or diocesan priests in the Summorum Pontificum mold who celebrate the extraordinary form of the Roman rite.

#### *G) Future perspectives: French Catholics and the Traditional Liturgy*

In 2001, 2006, and 2008, Paix Liturgique commissioned independent professional entities to conduct three surveys covering the entirety of continental France concerning the relationship between French Catholics and the traditional

liturgy of the Church: IPSOS in April 2001; CSA in November 2006 and September 2008. From the end of 2009 on, we completed these national surveys with diocesan and parochial polls. For two years, until the summer of 2011, and once again in 2018, we commissioned fourteen surveys in those French dioceses we deemed to be most significant to complete and sharpen the results of our national surveys. The results of these surveys—to date the only serious statistical studies on the question—reveal a great coherence across time and space in the attitude of French Catholics regarding what is now conventionally called the “extraordinary form of the Roman rite.” Their results are clear: IN FRANCE ONE CATHOLIC LAYMAN IN THREE (at least!) DECLARES HIMSELF READY TO ATTEND THE TRADITIONAL MASS SO LONG AS IT IS CELEBRATED IN HIS OWN PARISH. There is, therefore, a long way to go, some misunderstandings to overcome, some men of good will to convince, and many years of work and prayers to get there; but what a joy, and what a hope, for us and for our families: *Nunc dimittis servum tuum Domine* . . . .

### III - Conclusion

Is this not the fruit of Providence and of men raised by Providence, is it not the application of the motto of Saint Joan of Arc, Patroness of France: “Men of arms will battle and God will grant them victory”? God is never defeated in generosity; He has shown as much by permitting a situation that NO ONE WOULD HAVE BELIEVED POSSIBLE 50 YEARS AGO!

What has happened in France, however, is only an example of what has happened in different ways in the United States, in Mexico, or elsewhere, and which may happen in many other places in the next few years.

And all this is but a beginning, a first participation in the revival of the Church and her institutions, her mission, and her liturgy. As the Benedictine motto has it, we must continue to pray and work—ceaselessly.

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#### 1 -

Although it no longer is very influential, *La Contre-Réforme Catholique* had a great aura from its foundation in 1967 because of the notoriety formerly acquired by the newsletter that the abbé de Nantes had been writing to his friends from the late 50s on.

#### 2 -

Abbé Coache, at the time pastor of Montjavoult in the diocese of Beauvais, was removed by his bishop after he had restored the Corpus Christi procession in his parish, which transformed it into a hub of Catholic resistance in the greater Paris area. He then opened the Maison Lacordaire in Flavigny-sur-Ozerain, in Burgundy, where he preached retreats. His presence in the village encouraged the installation there of an Olivetan Benedictine abbey

and of the Society of Pius X, to which he later donated his house.

Fr. Noël Barbara, pastor of the diocese of Constantine and author of a Catechesis on Catholic marriage, for a time joined the Parish Cooperators of Christ the King, a congregation devoted to preaching the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius according to the method of Fr. Vallet, their founder. He then settled in the region of Touraine where he directs *Forts Dans la Foi*, which is an association and the title of its review.

3 -

They gave it up under pressure from Paul VI at the time . . . only to pick it up again under the provisions of the 1988 motu proprio *Ecclesia Dei*.

4 - The

*Silencieux de l'Église*, like Canon Catta's *Opus Sacerdotale* (see our French-language Lettre 400), have not placed the defense of the traditional liturgy at the heart of their struggle; they focus on putting the brakes on modernist trends rather than on promoting traditional restoration. Nevertheless, by virtue of their great numbers and their inclusiveness, these two initiatives have played an important role in preserving the *sensus fidei* among French Catholics.

5 - We here allude to an article by the abbé Grégoire Célier, “Un terreau fertile: La Tradition en France avant la Fraternité Saint-Pie X (1958-1976),” *Regard Sur le Monde* (30 April 2014).