

### Reading 3: The Chartres pilgrimage, a traditional pilgrimage

#### Introduction

Talking about tradition is usual on the pilgrimage of Christendom. But do we all have the same definition of this word: Tradition or tradition?

Why would a pilgrimage of Christendom be traditional?

Does this word "traditional" have the same meaning as it did more than forty years ago when the pilgrimage was created?

This text is particularly intended for young Christian pilgrims, who may be accustomed to our pilgrimage, and familiar with these themes but may not always know the reasons behind the choices made by their elders. Explaining these choices made in the past is of great importance for Notre-Dame de Chrétienté which must know how to transmit to new generations the foundations of its work, its history, its roots. It is a spiritual, intellectual and historical heritage that is in question and it belongs to all pilgrims.

Tradition is the first of the three axes inscribed in the Charter of Notre-Dame de Chrétienté "Tradition-Christianity-Mission". Let us immediately distinguish between Tradition understood as the source of Revelation and the current called "traditionalism" which appeared in reaction to a crisis in the Church in the years following the Second Vatican Council. Traditionalism was particularly embodied by the figure of Monseigneur Lefebvre who spoke out against certain new trends in the Church: false ecumenism, liturgical reform, religious freedom, collegiality, relativism, subjectivism... Each of these words would require a complete presentation, which is not be our object in this reading.

The traditionalist position consisted of asking that the declarations of the council be interpreted in the light of the constant Magisterium of the Church. Later in 2005, Benedict XVI spoke of "a hermeneutic of continuity" to express the same idea. The traditionalists of the 1970s applied, basically without naming it, the "precautionary principle" recalled today on environmental subjects, preferring to abstain from an action when all its consequences are not known. This is, in effect, another name for the virtue of prudence and an act of Catholic common sense.

One of the most important points of divergence between "modernists" and "traditionalists" concerned the liturgy. The traditionalist movement had chosen to remain faithful to the Tridentine Mass, convinced that the believer always ends up believing as he prays (*lex orandi, lex credendi*) and that modern liturgical reforms would lead to a loss of faith among Catholics.

In order to fully understand the meaning of the word "traditional" today, we will return to the origins of the pilgrimage, the meaning of this reaction, its specificities and some major significant events in its history.

#### The Origins of the pilgrimage

Understanding a work naturally leads to an interest in its founders, their leaders, the historical context, what these founders thought, feared, believed, hoped.

In 1982, the decision to create this pilgrimage of Christendom was taken at the Henri and André Charlier Center in Mesnil Saint Loup, a small parish in Champagne dedicated to Our Lady of Holy Hope. Bernard Antony, founder and president of the Charlier Center, asked his collaborators to design and organize a "traditional Christian pilgrimage" from Paris to Chartres during the three days of Pentecost. The first pilgrimage took place the following year, in 1983.

In 1982, we were twenty years after the opening of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). We were emerging from these post-conciliar years which sought a renewal of the Church to ignite hearts. Cardinal Poupard, a witness to this period, reported in a conference the words of John XXIII on the Council: "The Council will raise a spring song of youth to Heaven." Dominican Father Congar, a famous conciliar father, said that the Second Vatican Council had been "the peaceful October 11 revolution in the Church!" That reference to the communist revolution very revealing of the times. So we had to dare, push back the walls! The Second Vatican Council wanted to "reinvent the Church," reconcile it with the modern world, and for this it was ready to take all risks. As a child, I lived through the 1970s and I remember the words of clerics and lay people who never ceased to criticize "the Church before", the "faith before", daring to say that "the priests before the Council were saying mass for themselves alone" A child of around ten years old could not understand what was happening in the Church of course. On the other hand, he was quite capable of feeling the effects of a "revolution".

In 1982, all Catholics remembered the words of John Paul II, on June 1, 1980, at Le Bourget before French Catholics: "France, eldest daughter of the Church, are you faithful to the promises of your baptism?" A year later, on May 13, 1981, John Paul II suffered an assassination attempt, on the anniversary of the first apparition of Fatima on May 13, 1917. He escaped, the bullet fired at point blank range being miraculously diverted from the

vital organs . This attack took place six years after the decriminalization of abortion by the Veil law in 1974, during the pontificate of Paul VI, when the Church in France remained almost silent in the face of a major transgression of the Decalogue.

However, if we go back in time, on July 25, 1968, in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, Paul VI recalled, against many, God's law on marriage and birth control, notably in his article 1415.

All these facts were well known to our founders in 1982. They wanted to awaken France, prevent de-Christianization, fight against communism. They saw the disastrous effects of new liturgical, catechetical, pastoral experiences... The traditional pilgrimage of Christendom was intended to be a work of conversion, reconquest, fidelity and resistance in a time of rupture.

You can guess that there are many books about this period. Some regret the lost 'spirit of the Council' – "The reforms were not sufficiently applied" – others consider that "the Council was an open door to modern progressive errors".

The traditionalist critiques focused, in fact, on some texts of the Council and especially called into question what was called "the spirit of the Council". Benedict XVI in his speech to the Roman Curia on December 22, 2005 said that this spirit was "like a poison which has penetrated the Church into all its fibres. If we now want to clean up the Church, we must not cancel the Council, but free it from the so-called "spirit of the Council."

The historian Guillaume Cuchet published a book in 2018 on the dechristianization of our society, *How our world ceased to be Christian – Anatomy of a collapse*. He combats the widespread idea that May 68 and Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* were the triggers for the spectacular collapse of Catholicism in France. According to him, the dropout took place before, as early as 1965, the year the famous council closed. Guillaume Cuchet bases his analyses on the statistical work of Canon Boulard who, since 1947, precisely mapped religious practice in France. An improvement had indeed been noted after the war until this significant fall, dated precisely from 1965. The whole question was whether the conciliar reforms (with the famous "spirit of renewal of the council") bore any responsibility for this dechristianization.

Let us take note of some of his analyses: Sunday Mass attendance, just before the Council, was 25% of French people (80% of children making their First Holy Communion, therefore practicing and catechizing until the age of 12). Today, attendance every Sunday (and not just monthly), is practiced by less than 2% of Catholics. In 1951, 51% of adults went to confession once a year. In 1983, nearly 70% of Catholics no longer confessed at all and the figures for confessions followed those for religious practice. The book mentions neither the fall in vocations nor the staggering number of priests and religious men and women who left the Church during this period.

### **How did we get to this point so quickly?**

Guillaume Cuchet sees the Second Vatican Council as a triggering event for the decline in religious practice: "We do not see what other contemporary event could have generated such a reaction. The chronology shows that it was not only the way in which the council was applied after its closure that caused the rupture. By its mere existence, to the extent that it suddenly made the reform of ancient norms possible, the council was enough to shake them, especially as the liturgical reform, which concerned the most visible part of religion for the greatest number, began to apply in 1964". Which makes Guillaume Cuchet say that "an outside observer could legitimately wonder if, beyond the continuity of a name and the theoretical apparatus of dogmas, it is indeed still the same religion."

### **A Catholic reaction**

All these disorders in the Church in the 1970s disoriented Catholics in a still deeply Christian country like France. They provoked the reaction of clerics and families (notably around Monseigneur Lefebvre) in a current of resistance called "traditionalism".

The "traditional" movement was recognized in a very simple request made to the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the time: "Let us experience Tradition!" This sentence sums up the state of mind of the "perplexed" Catholics of an era of complete turmoil: a new catechism, a new theology, a new mass...

To preserve the faith, to pass it on to their children, "traditionalist" Catholics have chosen to remain faithful to the traditional mass, to the catechism, to the age-old magisterium of the Church. They rightly refused to "reinvent the Church". And when we told them that a Catholic must first obey, they responded with the beautiful expression of Martin Mosebach: "Tradition is the insertion of the dead into present life. »

Paul VI was concerned, at the end of his pontificate, about this crisis in the Church: "Through some crack, the smoke of Satan has entered the people of God. We see doubt, uncertainty, problems, worry, dissatisfaction, confrontation. Doubt has entered our consciences, and it has entered through windows that should be open to light. This state of uncertainty also reigns in the Church. It was believed that after the Council the sun would have

shone on the history of the Church. But instead of sun, we had clouds, storm, darkness, searching, uncertainty. How could this have happened? An adverse power intervened whose name is the devil, this mysterious being to which Saint Peter alludes in his letter.”

Disobedience towards the ecclesial hierarchy was a suffering and a trial for the Catholics of that time. It is still curious to observe that the Second Vatican Council, which was intended to be a council of openness to the world and above all of non-condemnation, rained down sanctions on “traditionalist” Catholics!

The state of mind of the founders of the pilgrimage is recalled in the beautiful article by one of our founders, Rémi Fontaine: “Thus the pilgrimage of Christendom was born: a temporal organization, not to make a religious decision, to decide religious questions, but to enable the lay faithful to better survive the religious crisis, not to remain isolated in misfortune, contradiction and struggle, to better spiritually fulfill their temporal tasks. By relying (today as yesterday) for sovereign judgment on apostolic succession and the primacy of the Roman see, we refuse, by natural and supernatural right, to follow those who separate from it whatever their hierarchical rank. by imposing on us a new mass, a new catechism, a new Bible, which serve to prohibit the mass, the catechism and the traditional Bible. Does such a pilgrimage, such a temporal organization, nevertheless need priests? Certainly: as chaplains and not as leaders. As chaplains to distribute the sacraments, to enlighten, instruct and spiritually comfort our pilgrims according to a moral authority of advice, of replacement, but who cannot claim an authority of decision, or even of jurisdiction, like the priest in his parish or the bishop in his diocese. It must be reiterated that “traditionalism” is not a party with its leader or leaders. Tradition being one of the constituent sources of the Church, a pilgrimage of tradition can only be of the Church. Catholicism being necessarily traditional, tradition can only respect the structure of the visible Church (despite its failings) and mingle (despite its resistance) with this Church.”

### **A pilgrimage of Christendom**

The traditional pilgrimage of Christendom has been organized since its earliest days by committed lay people, for temporal and Christian resistance. The theme of Christendom will always be at the heart of a pilgrimage wishing to participate in the restoration of the social kingship of Our Lord Jesus Christ in accordance with the encyclical *Quas Primas* of Pius XI.

The vocation of the pilgrimage is recalled in its Charter in the first article: “The Notre-Dame de Chrétienté association... aims to promote Christendom; understood as the realization, in the life of society, of the kingship of the Christ over all creation and, in particular, over human societies.”

It is taken up in the famous sermon by Dom Gérard in 1985: “What is Christendom? Dear pilgrims, you know it and you have just experienced it: Christendom is an alliance of soil and sky; a pact, sealed by the blood of martyrs, between the earth of men and the paradise of God; a candid and serious game, a humble beginning of eternal life. Christendom, my dear brothers, is the light of the Gospel projected on our homelands, on our families, on our morals and on our professions. Christendom is the fleshly body of the Church, its rampart, its temporal inscription.”

The social kingship of Our Lord Jesus Christ has no longer been taught by the Church in recent years, to the point that many Catholics think that this doctrine has been abandoned. Particularly in France, triumphant secularism has seen the multiplication of laws against natural morality (abortion, euthanasia, eugenics, unnatural marriage, etc.). Our pilgrimage, because it is of Christendom, in unison with the requests of Benedict XVI on non-negotiable points, wanted to take its full place, supernatural and natural, in the struggles of our time by recalling the teachings of Church, by campaigning and supporting works going in the same direction, without ‘shop spirit’ as one of our masters, Jean Ousset, would have said. The Social Doctrine of the Church is always present in the training (booklets, video training, conferences, etc.) of Notre-Dame de Chrétienté because our pilgrimage is “of Christendom.” Notre-Dame de Chrétienté is a spiritual work with a desire for political action since “the political fight is the privileged place of the Church's fight against the devil” (Father Roger-Thomas Calmel).

This reference to Christendom often remains a misunderstanding for many who wrongly take it as a confusion between politics and religion. This subject is no longer understood, once again due to the doctrinal errors of the 1960s, notably an erroneous interpretation of the declaration of the Second Vatican Council, *Dignitatis Humanae*. This ambiguous text (by the admission of the Roman authorities themselves!) seemed to defend the neutrality of the State in religious matters. Let us not be surprised to see politicians, avowed Catholics, voting for laws such as abortion or unnatural marriage! A doctrine poorly expressed, and especially taught falsely, has disastrous consequences.

Let us recall the firm and clear words of Pope Saint Pius, this is an absolutely false thesis, a very pernicious error. Based, in fact, on this principle that the State must not recognize any religious cult, it is first of all very seriously insulting to God, because the creator of man is also the founder of human societies and he preserves them in existence just as he sustains us. We therefore owe him, not only a private worship, but a public and social worship, to honour him. Furthermore, this thesis is the very clear negation of the supernatural order; it limits, in fact, the action of the State to the sole pursuit of public prosperity during this life, which is only the

proximate reason of political societies, and it is in no way concerned, as it is foreign, of their ultimate reason which is the eternal beatitude offered to man when this short life has come to an end.”

Likewise, Leo XIII in the encyclical *Immortale Dei* of November 1, 1885: “Human societies cannot, without becoming criminal, behave as if God did not exist, or refuse to be concerned about religion as if it was something foreign or of no use to them. As for the Church, which has God himself as its author, to exclude it from the active life of the nation, from the laws, from the education of youth, from domestic society, is to commit a great and pernicious error!”

Is this not also what John Paul II said in the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* of August 6, 1993: “If there is no final truth which guides and orients political action, ideas and convictions can be easily exploited for the benefit of power. A democracy without values easily transforms into overt or sneaky totalitarianism, as history shows.”

### **Some major dates**

Among the major events of the first years of the pilgrimage, we must recall the coronations of four bishops, without pontifical mandate, by Monsignor Lefebvre in 1988. This event will separate the traditional movements between those attached to Monsignor Lefebvre, mainly the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Pius, from those who will accept the canonical regularization offered by the *motu proprio Ecclesia Dei afflictata* of July 2, 1988, of which we are the descendants.

It would take many years (almost twenty years) for the traditional liturgy to be fully authorized by the Roman authorities. The *motu proprio* of July 7, 2007 signed by Benedict XVI established that this liturgy had never been abolished (article 1) authorizing all clerics to celebrate it. In an accompanying letter to the *motu proprio* of 2007 which it is important to reread, Benedict XVI called for reconciliation within the Church.

The Society Notre-Dame de Chrétienté, without denying her commitments, her loyalties, her vocation, her history, wanted to respond to the pope's request. Benedict XVI, then cardinal, joined the critics of the traditional milieu when he wrote in his Memoirs in 2005: “I am convinced that the crisis in the Church that we are experiencing today is largely based on the disintegration of the liturgy which is sometimes even conceived in such a way – *etsi Deus non daretur* (as if God did not exist) – that its purpose is no longer at all to mean that God exists, that he speaks to us and listens to us. But if the liturgy no longer reveals a community of faith, the universal unity of the Church and its history, the mystery of the living Christ, where does the Church still manifest its spiritual nature? So the community is just celebrating itself. And it's not worth it. And because there is no community in itself, but it springs always and only from the Lord himself, through faith, as unity, disintegration into all kinds of parochial quarrels, partisan oppositions in a Church that is tearing itself apart thus becomes inevitable. This is why we need a new liturgical movement that gives birth to the true legacy of the Second Vatican Council.”

By expressing himself in this way, Cardinal Ratzinger clearly confirmed the position of the “traditionalists”: attachment to the traditional mass is not an aestheticism (a search for beauty), a nostalgia (a kind of “vintage” fashion) but a question of faith. To take up and adapt the words of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux speaking of the Benedictine Rule, we can say that on the pilgrimage of Christendom: “We are attached to the Tridentine Mass because the Tridentine Mass sustains us!”

For more than forty years, the pilgrimage of Christendom has recalled this link between the crisis in the Church, the liturgical crisis, the non-transmission of the catechism and the crisis of faith.

This stubborn desire that we have, to put words to our ills, seems to us the best way, the best response to participate in the evangelization called by the last Sovereign Pontiffs.

### **The traditional pilgrimage of Christendom 2023**

The pilgrimage has grown significantly (an increase of more than 70% over the last 8 years). How can we explain this regular, significant growth when the rate of regular religious practice has fallen below 2% in France?

Practicing Catholics (some say “observant”) want to be active, get involved in civil society and be missionaries. They seek a demanding Catholic education, faithful to Catholic dogmas. Many of our pilgrims (half of whom are under 20 years old) discover the spirituality of the Tridentine Mass and thanks to this liturgy discover the truths of the faith which very often are no longer (or only poorly) taught.

How can we not make a link between the liturgy and the transmission of the truths of the Catholic faith as Cardinal Sarah tells us?

Recent events within the Church allow us to better understand the traditionalist fidelity which highlights the evidence of the deep crisis that the Church is going through, according to some even more serious than the Arian crisis of the 4th century.

The *motu proprio Traditionis Custodes* of Pope Francis on July 16, 2021, and the responses to the *dubia* communicated on December 18, 2021 by the congregation for divine worship, were the highlights of 2021. A decree of the Holy Father of February 11, 2022 confirmed the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter in its own law and the use of liturgical books prior to the reform of Vatican II which did not prevent certain bishops from applying the *motu proprio* with brutality and without concern for the salvation of souls.

The former *Ecclesia Dei* communities have therefore suddenly seen their situation in the Church called into question with a whole series of sanctions such as the suppression of Masses, and the ban on sacraments such as confirmation, baptism, marriage.

Pope Francis defends in this *motu proprio* a contradiction between the Tridentine Mass and the Second Vatican Council, choosing the hermeneutic of rupture over the hermeneutic of continuity desired by Benedict XVI. While the Church struggles in the midst of immense difficulties (moral scandals, danger of schism in Germany, religious relativism, different interpretations of *Amoris Laetitia*, collapse of the practice of the Faith after the Covid crisis, the synod...), did nothing seem more urgent than to roll back the liturgical peace desired by the two predecessors of Pope Francis?

During a conference held on November 24, 2022, Notre-Dame de Chrétienté was given through me to conclude the various interventions: "Let us be aware that we are now in the third generation of dechristianized people in France! The grandchildren of Catholic families in the mid-1960s became "nones", that is to say people declaring themselves to have no religion (64% of 16-29 year olds say they have "no religion"). We know by faith that the Church will not disappear, that Our Lord does not abandon us. A recovery will definitely come. If we are worried, we remain confident. We know that the Church will save us, we will not save the Church, even if we want to defend it of course. And we know well that only the Magisterium will be able to correct the failing Magisterium. From a human perspective at least, the Church will have to rely on its last strengths, its last practitioners, its history, its roots, its great tradition. Uniting fervent Catholics, neither lukewarm, nor timid or resigned, obviously means fully integrating the traditionalist fringe which must have "its full place in the Church", as Benedict XVI promised. This is the whole meaning of our defense of the Tridentine Mass, a fight for the honour of God and for the Church."

## Conclusion

Our pilgrimage has been called a "traditional pilgrimage of Christendom" since day one. The label of "traditionalist" is neither a trophy nor an infamy but the consequence of a crisis ravaging the Church, yesterday as today, and based on two main errors, relativism and subjectivism, the new dogmas of our modern world. In "normal" times, simply calling yourself Catholic would, of course, suffice. The label "traditional" would even be a pleonasm: what would a Catholic be who would not transmit it?

But these are not "normal" times. Cardinal Brandmüller, expert on Church history and university professor, recently wrote to all the cardinals: "We will have to face serious attacks against the integrity of the deposit of faith, against the hierarchical-sacramental structure of the Church and against its apostolic Tradition. All this created an unprecedented situation in the history of the Church, such as was not even experienced during the Arian crisis of the 4th and 5th centuries."

Due to this context we readily accept that our pilgrimage is called "traditional of Christendom." And we see this crisis as being where the good Lord wanted to place us as "a call to holiness" to use the words of Father Roger-Thomas Calmel. We thus make an act of faith displaying our refusal of current errors, an act of fidelity and recognition for our masters. We reiterate, in this way, the commitment of Notre Dame de Chrétienté to remain "firm in the faith" for the greater glory of God.