

A FRENCH HISTORY OF TRADITIONALISTS

Posted on May 15, 2022



The subject of these pages is, in a broad sense, religious—Catholic—traditionalists. Yves Chiron also explains why being a ‘traditionalist’ is not exactly the same as being a ‘traditional’ Catholic.

Category: [REVIEW](#)

Tags: [Catholicism](#), [France](#), [history](#), [Manuel Vieira da Cruz](#), [tradition](#), [traditional Mass](#), [traditionalism](#), [Yves Chiron](#)

This book—feel free to judge it by its cover—is not about ‘political traditionalism.’ The subject of these pages is, in a broad sense, religious—Catholic—traditionalists. Yves Chiron also explains why being a ‘traditionalist’ is not exactly the same as being a ‘traditional’ Catholic. Other labels the text clears up for the newcomer are ‘integrism’ (*intégrisme*), ‘national catholicism,’ and ‘Lefebverism’ or ‘sedevacantism,’ as well as the significance of these labels within the vast, fragmented reality of present-day Catholic tradition.

The author is a well-known historian who for almost four decades has been studying, extensively, although not exclusively, the history of the Church in the 19th and 20th centuries. He has published several dozen books, including biographies of Popes Pius IX (1846-1878), Saint Pius X (1903-1914), Benedict XV (1914-1922), Pius XI (1922-1939), and Paul VI (1963-1978).

He has also written about contemporary saints like Padre Pio of Pietrelcina (1887-1968) and on the controversial figure Mgr. Bugnini (1912-1982), the main architect of the sweeping liturgical changes that followed the Second Vatican Council. Another of Chiron’s books describes the life and works of Dom Gérard Calvet (1927-2008), who in the 1980s founded the Sainte Madeleine Benedictine Abbey close to the village of Le Barroux, Provence, a place not so distant from Yves’s own Occitan birthplace.

One of Chiron’s future books will quite probably be the biography of Jean Arfel (1920-2013), the writer better known as Jean Madiran, whose inspiration can be felt in several pages of this *History of the Traditionalists*. Chiron concludes the *Histoire* with a quote from Madiran: “The ‘traditionalists’ are not, nor can they be, a party, an army or a church; it is [about] a state of mind ... and, of course, a way of living. A *professio* and a *devotio*.” As the author notes in a recent interview in *La Nef*, published in English by *The*

Catholic World Report, “The word ‘traditionalist’ appeared in a magisterial document for the first time in St. Pius X’s *Lettre sur le Sillon (Notre Charge Apostolique)* in 1910. The pope wrote: ‘The true friends of the people are neither revolutionaries, nor innovators: they are traditionalists’.”

This *History* is a systematic and perspicuous account in the best French *tradition*; it is French history—not French theory—from a French perspective. Post-revolutionary France has also been and still is the core of healthy reactions to secularization; *et pour cause*, the book is focused on *la fille aînée de l’Église*, although a few subchapters are dedicated to personalities, movements, or deeds outside France, in Rome, Switzerland, Spain, the United States, Argentina, Brazil, and elsewhere.

A detailed part of the book is inevitably concerned with the Second Vatican Council, its antecedents, developments and consequences. As time goes by, several attitudes towards the Council arise and expose a contradictory conflict inside the Church, the tension between innovation and tradition. Many Catholics find themselves facing a once unthinkable and dramatic dilemma: fidelity towards the dictates of Rome or fidelity to the lasting tradition of the Church. Some keep trying—not always with success commensurate with the effort—to choose both and interpret ‘changes’ in the light of tradition. The proverbial house divided against itself...

This is a book of more than six hundred pages, two thirds of it consisting of a historical exposition spanning 15 well-documented chapters. It also includes an index with more than one thousand personalities, a hundred of them appearing in a ‘biographical dictionary’ where one can further learn about some of the protagonists.

The book is the result of more than thirty years of research with first hand access to private archives and correspondence, including some unique and previously unpublished documents. Last but not least, the author makes use of interviews with main actors and direct witnesses. Yves Chiron’s *History of the Traditionalists* is neither a general history, nor a definitive history, but it certainly deserves to be considered as an impressive and comprehensive contribution.