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Xavier Maréchaux, *Pie VII: Le pape qui défia Napoléon.* Paris: Passés-Composés, 2024. 312 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, indices for names and places, *remerciements,* and table of contents. €23.00. (pb). ISBN 978-2-3793-3460-3.

Response by Xavier Marechaux, State University of New York (Old Westbury).

I would like to thank *H-France* for allowing me to respond to Professor Woell's review of my biography of Pope Pius VII. His main criticism, that the quality of my book is undermined by "the lacuna of archival sources," and that I should have waited until after the COVID-19 pandemic to conduct research in France and Italy, seems, to me, overstated. Two principal considerations shaped the way this book was written.

The first is the book's particular editorial context. My biography of Pius VII emerged from a race between two publishers: my own, Passés-Composés, and Perrin, which had commissioned Jean-Marc Ticchi. The aim was to mark the bicentennial of Pius VII's death with only the second full biography of him in French, the first being Artaud de Montor's 1836 work. Because of the commemorative deadline and the intended audience (non-academic French readers primarily interested in Napoleonic history) the book was limited to 100,000 words and centered on the pope's relationship with Napoleon. I signed my contract in January 2020, and delivered the manuscript in August 2021, but unfortunately Perrin was able to get ahead of us and published its biography in April 2022. Despite the time constraint, neither I nor my publisher considered the work rushed, and we were satisfied with the final product.

The second, regarding the archival research that Professor Woell recommends was, in my view, not essential. The key primary sources for the major events of Pius VII's life have already been published, and notably the sources for the two events, the conclave of Venise in 1800 and Pius VII's arrest in 1809 by General Radet, my discussion of which particularly bothers Woell. To reconstruct how Chiaramonti became pope, I drew on letters from Cardinal Maury to Louis XVIII; reports from Cardinal Herzan to the Austrian court; and the memoirs of Cardinal Consalvi, pro-secretary of the conclave. I also consulted Cardinal Gerdil's record of the voting; the journal of Mgr. Gregorio Speroni (second master of ceremonies); and the testimony of Mgr. Nicola Manari, confidant of Cardinal Albani, dean of the Sacred College. For the 1809 arrest of Pius VII, Professor Woell questions my reliance on Cardinal Pacca's memoirs, published in 1834, on the grounds of their late date. However, Pacca began writing them immediately after his imprisonment at Fenestrelle in August 1809, only weeks after the pope's arrest. I also used General Radet's report written the following day, as well as a report from Giuseppe di Diana, an Italian police officer who witnessed the arrest. For both events, by

comparing these different sources, I identified several discrepancies and, I believe, shed new light on well-studied events.

Finally, Professor Woell criticizes my conclusion that the confrontation between Pius VII and Napoleon contributed to the Church's rejection of revolutionary ideals (equality before the law, freedom of thought, and freedom of religion) and that the pope's determination to recover the totality of his estates limited the Church's ability to engage with marginalized groups, notably Jews and enslaved Africans. Instead, he suggests that, in face of today rise of autocracy, the lesson lies in Pius VII's resistance to tyranny. While I appreciate this perspective, I find it somewhat anachronistic. My intention was to situate Pius VII's actions within the specific political and ecclesiastical context of the early nineteenth century and shed light on how the confrontation of Pius VII and Napoleon reinforced a conservative approach within the Papacy in which preserving the Church as an institution became more important than extending liberty of conscience and freedom to communities outside the Catholic faith.

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