

Vested Struggles: The Social and Ecclesiological Significance of Stoles in Seventeenth-Century France¹

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IN his six-part poem, *Le Lutrin* (*The Lectern*; 1674–83), Nicolas Boileau details the “heroic” struggle that ensues between a bishop and a cantor after the former takes it upon himself to install a lectern within the choir of one of his diocese’s parishes. The choirmaster promptly has the church’s chapter remove the offending object on two occasions, and both parties obstinately defend their cause with unrestrained zeal:

In Vain the *Chanter* and the *Chapter* strove;
Twice they essay’d the fatal Desk to move:
As oft the Prelate with unweary’d Pain,
Fix’d it to his proud Rival’s Seat again.
Muse, let the *Holy Warrior’s* Rage be sung;
Why *Sacred Minds* *Infernal* Furies stung:
What Spark inflam’d the zealous Rival’s Heat,
How *Heavenly* Breasts with *Human* Passions beat!²

The dispute centers on a question of precedence: for the prelate, the primary concern is whether he can exercise his right to operate unhindered within his territory; for the choirmaster, it is an issue of saving face, as the wooden stand obstructs his place and impairs his professional role in directing the choir. In detailing the two men’s enmity, the poet’s hyperbolic license might, at first glance, indicate a satire with strong anti-clerical overtones. However, the poet drew his inspiration from a documented case, and there are many such occurrences in the seventeenth-century French church involving such passionate outbursts of pettiness.³ This article examines a series of animated disagreements between secular clergy over an apparently inconsequential

¹This investigation was supported by the University of Kansas General Research Fund allocation #2301143, which enabled me to undertake research in Paris.

²Nicolas Boileau, *Le Lutrin: a Mock-Heroic Poem in Six Cantos*, trans. N. Rowe (London: E. Samger and E. Curl, 1708), 2.

³Boileau’s primary source was the clash between Claude Auvry, former bishop of Coutances and incoming treasurer of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, and the church’s choirmaster: *Les Œuvres de M. Boileau*, ed. J.-B. Souchay (Paris: Didot, 1740), I, 325n.

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topic: the permitted use of the priestly stole. These case studies reveal deeper concerns pitting lesser clergy and their parishes against the outside intrusion of ecclesiastical agencies of surveillance; often, these incidents encapsulate the dichotomy between rural traditions and urban interference. Such conflicts were invested with a particularly symbolic value because of where they always took place—at the entrance to a church—and as a prelude to a liturgical rite. These disputes possess a quasi-liturgical flavor, and the participants appear desirous of retaining a solemn aspect to these otherwise impassioned episodes. There is a notion of public transparency and a relative sense of order in the verbal exchanges, beginning with the interrogation of the offended party, an apologetic retort on the part of the other, and an ultimate threat of sanctions, followed by the departure of one faction. It is striking that, despite the indispensable presence of witnesses—parishioners, bishop's assistants, members of the cathedral chapter—who record and recount the event, these bystanders only rarely ever intervene, and their role becomes not unlike spectators at a liturgy celebrated according to prescribed rubrics. In this, these scenes of discord are analogous to the Ancien Régime's ordering of social transgressions exemplified in those convicted of a capital crime; Michel Foucault has detailed the complicity of condemned felons in the spectacular ritual of execution, which in some cases even resulted in an "almost theatrical reproduction of the crime."⁴

The series of stole-wearing cases illustrates how apparently trivial disputes may sometimes be invested with a far wider underlying import. The duc de Saint-Simon details the bitter struggles within the mid-seventeenth-century French court over the right of selected nobles to be seated on a *tabouret*, a padded, backless stool, in the presence of royalty, a privilege that stirred up much resentment among those not so favored.⁵ Female courtiers who enjoyed this entitlement while attending Louis XIV's evening meal eventually became known as metonymic *tabourets* instead of the original "seated ladies," so closely did prerogative become tied up with the chair.⁶ In the same way that such an unprepossessing object as a diminutive seat comes to embody rank, rancor over the wearing of the stole may be understood as an ecclesiastical expression of similar sentiments. Just as Saint-Simon's observations about the quarrel of the *tabourets* are a paradigm for an increasingly claustrophobic atmosphere within a court removed from Paris, I contend that the investigation of these apparently insignificant but passionately fought clerical disagreements similarly may be deeply revealing

⁴See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), 42–45 (quotation from 45).

⁵Louis de Rouvroy, Duc de Saint-Simon, *Mémoires: Vol. I (1691–1701)*, ed. Yves Coirault (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), 51–12.

⁶Jean-François Solnon, *La Cour de France* (Paris: Fayard, 1987), 328–29.

of the state of religious life in early modern France. That these scuffles should revolve around costume during the reign of the image-conscious Louis XIV is not surprising, for under his tenure “dress was a political issue”; moreover, the monarch was recognized as having succeeded in the “elevation of dress and dressing into acts of state.”⁷

I. BISHOP FAURE: CONFRONTATION AND HUMILIATION

The landmark lawsuit dealing with the abuse of the stole took place toward the end of the 1660s, a decade during which matters of hierarchical etiquette were taking on a fresh significance due to Louis XIV’s assumption of personal power and the increasing stratification of the court. On Sunday, January 27, 1669, many of Roye’s inhabitants gathered in the town’s impressive church for an official thanksgiving ceremony to mark the end of a violent outbreak of the plague that had necessitated the departure of a large section of the area’s populace.⁸ The bishop of Amiens, François Faure (who headed this diocese from 1653 to 1687), had distinguished himself by remaining in his diocese throughout the crisis years of 1668 and 1669, a period that claimed about 20,000 plague mortalities in the region.⁹ The day chosen for the ceremony was particularly appropriate, as it fell within the octave of the feast of St. Sebastian, patron of plague-related causes.¹⁰ To this end, the municipal’s elders had invited the bishop to pontificate at the scheduled service within their church, and Faure duly arrived in Roye on January 26. At 8 o’clock on the following morning, the dean, canons, and chapter of Saint-Florent solemnly processed to the church’s main entrance after having celebrated High Mass and the office of Sext to await the prelate’s arrival.¹¹ It was usual for the chapter to proceed to the episcopal lodgings to collect the bishop

⁷Philip Mansel, *Dressed to Rule: Royal and Court Costume from Louis XIV to Elizabeth II* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 2, 4.

⁸For a history of the progress of the plague during the early modern period, see Edward A. Eckert, “The Retreat of Plague from Central Europe, 1640–1720: A Geomedical Approach,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 74:1 (Spring 2000), 1–28 (particularly 11–14, which details the 1660s). A communal ceremony was particularly appropriate to denote the end of the contagion, since “one of the most shocking aspects of a plague outbreak [was] the rupture in normal religious activities”: Lawrence Brockliss and Colin Jones, *The Medical World of Early Modern France* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 69.

⁹Ferdinand Pouy, *Histoire de François Faure, évêque d’Amiens* (Amiens: Douillet, 1876), 59.

¹⁰The origins of this patronage are somewhat obscure, though it appears he was allocated care of sufferers of the disease since the standard narration relates that he had the appearance of a hedgehog when he was pierced with arrows: “In stipite quasi hericius aculeis undequaque coopertus relinquitur,” André Du Saussay, *Martyrologium Gallicanum* (Paris: Cramoisy, 1637), I, 56.

¹¹*Procez verbal d’une excommunication majeure fulminée par Reverend Pere en Dieu, Messire François Faure Evêque d’Amiens: Contre Monsieur le Clerc, Prestre, Docteur en Theologie de la Societé de Sorbonne, Doyen et Chanoine de l’Eglise Royale de Roye, pour n’avoir voulu quitter l’Estolle en sa presence* (Paris: Bouilleroit, 1670), 3.

personally; the non-observance of this custom contributed to creating a more theatrical confrontation at the doors of the church.¹² Instead of occasioning the habitual rite of greeting, the episcopal appearance caused a scene that could hardly have edified the expectant bystanders. For, after having kissed the crucifix and crossed himself with the holy water, both offered by the dean,

the said Lord Bishop reportedly said these words: “Mr. Dean, remove your stole,” to which the aforementioned Dean replied with great respect and humility: “Monseigneur, I beg you most humbly (speaking both for myself and for my chapter) not to require this of me, given that I can nor must not do so.” . . . To which the Lord Bishop said, “Just take off your stole, which is a sign of jurisdiction before me, your superior.” The Dean’s reply to this was that he had not read anywhere that the stole was a sign of jurisdiction, but rather was a sign of the priest performing his office, which was the case in point, this being demonstrated by the words of a bishop who, when ordaining a priest, passes him the stole, saying “*Accipe jugum Domini.*”¹³

Faure, obviously exasperated at the resistance being shown to him in such a public manner, then commanded the dean to remove his stole under pain of excommunication.

This extraordinary scene reveals surprisingly tenacious stances on both sides concerning a slim band of material worn around the neck; nevertheless, as an anonymous tract written by the bishop or one of his supporters highlighted, “This vestment, which is so small in appearance, became the focus of a major affair, and was the visible symbol of a premeditated rebellion.”¹⁴ There seems little doubt that Faure rightly sensed a calculated act, as the recalcitrant dean’s responses appear rehearsed.¹⁵ Moreover, the dean, Faron

¹²Philippe Loupès, *Chapitres et chanoines de Guyenne aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: EHESS, 1985), 344.

¹³“Iceluy Sieur Evesque auroit dit aussit-tost ces paroles, Monsieur le Doyen ostez vostre Estolle; Aquoy ledit Sieur Doyen auroit répondu avec grand respect et humilité; Monseigneur, je vous supplie tres-humblement (vous parlant pour moy, et pour mon Chapitre) de n’exiger pas cela de moy, attendu que je ne le peux, ny dois faire. . . . Sur quoy iceluy Sieur Evesque a dit, Quittez donc vostre Estolle, qui est une marque de Jurisdiction devant moy, qui suis vostre Superieur. A quoy ledit Sieur Doyen a repondu, qu’il n’avoit leu nulle part que l’Estolle fût une marque de Jurisdiction, mais bien le Caractere du Prestre en Office, comme il estoit là, Ce qui estoit marqué par les paroles de l’Evesque, qui faisant un Prestre, luy donne l’Estolle, et luy dit, *Accipe jugum Domini.*” *Procez verbal*, 3–4.

¹⁴“Alors cet ornement qui paroist petit, devint le sujet d’une tres-grande affaire, et fut la marque visible d’une rebellion premeditée,” *L’Estat de l’Eglise Collegiale de Saint Florent de Roie* (Amiens?: [n.d.], 1669), 28. Faure penned some pro-Mazarin pamphlets during the Fronde and so certainly possessed the polemic skills to forward his case. See Joseph Bergin, *The Making of the French Episcopacy, 1589–1661* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996), 622.

¹⁵The presence of several pre-invited legal witnesses to the ceremony appears to have surpassed a nominal or customary inclusion: “L’an mil six cens soixante-neuf, le Dimanche vingt-septième jour de Janvier, Nous Notaires Royaux à Roie, sous-signez; A la priere des Venerables Doyen,

Le Clerc, mentions that he speaks on behalf of the chapter, which suggests that this matter had been discussed in the community before the altercation at the church.¹⁶ As Le Clerc pointed out, the conferral of the stole at sacerdotal ordination does not imply any reception of authority and occurs as a minor element in this rite. Yet over the centuries this vestment evolved into an integral feature of the priestly ministry, and during the ninth century it was mandated to be worn by priests at all times as an external sign of their dignity.¹⁷ Writing close to the Amiens events, one contemporary liturgist comments that “the stole corresponds to priests that which the *pallium* accordingly represents to patriarchs and archbishops . . . : so too is the stole a symbol of the duty and care of the pastor for the people, which is the yoke under which he is placed.”¹⁸ This opinion is doubtless related to the fact that priests most frequently wear a pastoral stole when administering the sacraments of matrimony and penance, both of which require faculties, that is to say canonical incardination within an order or diocese, in order to be valid. Moreover, the stole is worn in differing ways by the celebrants and assistants at Mass: deacons wear it over their left shoulder fixed at the waist on the right-hand side; priests arrange the right band to cross over the left band; and bishops wear it hanging straight down, all of which seems to indicate that this liturgical item is an intrinsic marker of rank.¹⁹

Chanoines et Chapitre de l’Eglise Royale de Roye, Nous sommes transportez en ladite Eglise, entre sept et huit heures du matin, a l’effet d’estre presens à tout ce qui s’y passeroit entre l’arrivée et la sortie de Monsieur l’Evesque d’Amiens, où estans, toutes choses se seroient faites et passées ainsi qu’il ensuit,” *Procez verbal*, 3.

¹⁶Saint-Florent de Roye was founded in 1047 and had its own dean with twenty-two prebendary clergy. See Pierre Desportes and Hélène Millet, *Fasti Ecclesiae Gallicanae: répertoire prosopographique des évêques, dignitaires et chanoines de France de 1200 à 1500* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996–2004), I, 3.

¹⁷Louis Trichet, *Le Costume du clergé: ses origines et son évolution en France d’après les règlements de l’Eglise* (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 46.

¹⁸“L’Estole est aux Prestres, ce que le *Pallium* est aux Patriarches et Archevesques avec proportion . . . : de mesme l’Estole signifie le soin et la charge du Curé ou du Pasteur pour le peuple, qui est le joug auquel il est soumis,” Gilbert Grimaud, *La Liturgie sacrée; où toutes les Parties et Ceremonies de la Sainte Messe sont expliquées, avec leur Mysteres et Antiquitez* (Lyon: Jullieron, 1666) part I, 38–9. For the first comprehensive study of the pallium to be published in France, see Nicolas de Bralion, *Pallium archiepiscopale* (Paris: Camusat, 1648).

¹⁹An early term for the stole was *orarium*, and this could be applied both to a metropolitan’s pallium or to a presbyter’s stole, depending on the context. See Roger E. Reynolds, *Clerics in the Early Middle Ages: Hierarchy and Image* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 6–7. It is interesting that the tippet effectively replaced the stole among Anglican clergy in England during the same period, and the color and trimmings of this garment indicated differing levels of authority. More recently, Benedict XVI has reassumed the tradition of Roman pontiffs being draped with a crimson state stole, worn over a red silk mozzetta, to denote universal jurisdiction, a practice that had largely fallen into disuse under his predecessor.

Faure acted decisively: after three warnings threatening his dean with censure, he verbally excommunicated him and promptly departed. Le Clerc sought legal recourse, and an *arrêt* found in his favor, as a result of which the irregular punishment was lifted by Cardinal Barberin, archbishop of Reims, who was metropolitan of the province.²⁰ Later that year, on December 30, the Paris Parlement declared definitively for the dean and added that Faure had not only abused his authority in this matter, but also that the dean had the full right to wear the stole in his bishop's presence, as did the pastors of Roye in front of the dean of chapter when they visited their parishes.²¹ It is possible that Faure's stubbornness originated in a perceived intellectual slight; Le Clerc was the diocesan *théologal* or canon theologian whose function was to help the bishop draft legislation and educate clergy. In many cases, this official formulated documents in their entirety.²² The civil authorities' reaction is surprising, as in similar incidents the inferior clergy had lost their right to wear the stole before their superiors; Faure's belligerent character, and his insistence on distributing a document detailing the excommunication "judged by everyone to be abusive, defamatory, and scandalous," seem to have counted heavily against him.²³ The verdict of the Parlement as the highest court of appeal may also be indicative of a wider trend during this period of this organ asserting its judicial authority over the church in France, even for an issue as apparently minor as liturgical etiquette. Albert Hamscher has detailed how "Louis [XIV] strove to bring the episcopacy under further secular supervision with the cooperation of his judges, and so long as Parlement's intervention in ecclesiastical affairs buttressed royal policies, the councils left the judges wide latitude for vigorous activity."²⁴ There may have been some local prejudice due to the fact that he was also a member of the Observant

²⁰ *Arrest du Parlement du treize Mars 1669. contre Reverend Pere en Dieu Messire François Faure Evesque d'Amiens, à l'occasion d'une prétenduë excommunication prononcée par luy le 27. Janvier dernier, contre Monsieur le Clerc, Prestre, Docteur en Theologie de la Societé de Sorbone, Doyen et Chanoine de l'Eglise Royale de Roye, pour n'avoir voulu quitter son Estolle en sa presence, estant fondé en exemples dans le Royaume, et en possession à son égard confirmée par Arrests* (Paris: [n. pub.], 1669), 1–2.

²¹ *Procez verbal*, 29.

²² Joseph Bergin, *Crown, Church, and Episcopate under Louis XIV* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), 103 and 137.

²³ "[Une libelle] estimée de tout le monde injurieuse diffamatoire et scandaleuse," *Arrest du Parlement du treize Mars 1669*, 2. Faure later quarrelled with the archbishop of Reims, Le Tellier, and addressed a long letter to the pope on this subject; see *Correspondance du Nonce en France, Angelo Ranuzzi (1683–1689)*, ed. Bruno Neveu (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1973), II, 89, 100.

²⁴ Albert N. Hamscher, *The Parlement of Paris after the Fronde, 1653–1673* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976), 150–1.

Franciscan, or Cordelier, order.²⁵ Furthermore, he owed his rank to the patronage of Mazarin, of whom he had been an active client.²⁶

II. VISITATIONS AND STOLE SQUABBLES IN RURAL FRANCE

Feuds over the donning of the stole were more common in the context of rural parish visitations by archdeacons. The first legislation on the subject was an *arrêt du conseil* of January 26, 1630, which confirmed an earlier decision of the *official* of the diocese of Rouen (December 12, 1625) that forbade Nicolas and René Dehors from wearing the stole during the visitation of their archdeacon; the text labels this as constituting a long-standing tradition.²⁷ In this instance, a decision of the Parlement of Rouen that had found for the two priests against their archdeacon, Adrien Behotte, was overturned. This early decision acted as a clear legal precedent until the Faure case. The diocese of Chartres was to experience a number of stole disputes involving pastoral visitations, and in response to the archdeacon of Pinserais, the complainant in an action against members of his archdeaconry, his clergy referred to the Amiens case as an authority to be followed in their *factum* or formal legal brief.²⁸ “And the court will no doubt remember the famous judgment it gave on December 30, 1669, between Mgr. François Faure, bishop of Amiens, and Mr. Faron Le Clerc, Dean of Roye.”²⁹ Even though the details of this incident resemble those of Amiens, it is intriguing that the archdeacon was ultimately victorious. As with the Amiens situation of three years earlier, the archdeacon engaged in a spirited confrontation at the entrance to a parish church under his immediate jurisdiction:

Mr. Le Maire, who is the holder of this archdeaconry, made his visitation in 1672 of these two parishes; Messrs Chevalier and Arnoul,

²⁵Jean de La Fontaine wrote a *conte licentieux* about the establishment of a Cordelier convent, indicating that the arrival of friars was sometimes viewed as an intrusive addition to the community. “Les Frères de Catalogne” was first published in 1666; see *Contes et nouvelles érotiques*, ed. J.-P. Morel (Paris: Séguier, 1995), 60–66.

²⁶Bergin, *The Making of the French Episcopate*, 521.

²⁷*Arrêt du conseil privé qui décharge Adrien Behotte, grand archidiacre de la cathédrale de Rouen, de l’assignation à lui données au Parlement de Rouen* (Paris: [n.d.], 1630), 2.

²⁸“By the late seventeenth century, publishing a legal brief, or *factum*, was a common way for litigants to assert pressure on courts and judges by placing their own self-justifying narrative of a legal conflict into public circulation”: Leslie Tuttle, “Factum or Fiction? Convent Scandal, Cloister, and Publicity in the Era of Louis XIV,” in *The Cloister and the World: Early Modern Convent Voices*, ed. Thomas M. Carr, Jr., EMF: Studies in Early Modern France 11 (Charlottesville, Va.: Rookwood, 2007), 130.

²⁹“Et La cour se souvient sans doute de ce celebre Jugement qu’elle rendit le trentième Decembre 1669. entre Mre François Faure, Evesque d’Amiens, et Me Faron le Clerc, Doyen de Roye,” *Moyens de droit pour les Curez de l’Archidiaconé de Pinserais, Appellans comme d’abus, d’une Sentence renduë par l’Official de Chartres, le 15. Avril 1673. Contre Me Philippe le Maire, Archidiacre de Pinserais* ([Paris]: [n. pub.], 1673), 2.

who are the pastors thereof, received him at the door of their church in the customary manner, but they had a stole presented by their curates and retained the ones that they were wearing. The Archdeacon claimed that the pastor of the parish in which he was making his visitation should not wear the stole in his presence, and that he alone enjoyed this right in both churches, as in all the churches of his archdeaconry; nevertheless, since these pastors continued in their stance, and these protests were causing scandal, he withdrew and subsequently submitted a *procès verbal* about this matter to the Chancellery of the diocese of Chartres.³⁰

The two pastors at the center of this affair were joined in their appeal by the support of eight other *curés* belonging to Le Maire's archdeaconry (4), displaying deep-seated sentiments that united ten priests against their immediate superior. In their *factum*, the two priests referred to the practice of clergy wearing stoles during diocesan synods, which they did in front of their ordinary (5). This argument had also been used in an earlier stole dispute in the Rouen diocese.³¹ The archdeacon responded, not unreasonably since bishops are mitered before the pope during a general council, that during a local synod the clergy hold the role of counselors, whereas on a pastoral visit they are being called to account to their immediate superior (14). Again, the hierarchical nature of the visitation and the question of rank become crucial factors. Le Maire's reasoning about the necessity of clergy removing their stoles in his presence is quite revealing: "For to invoke the argument that bishops allow pastors to wear the stole in their presence is a weak one, as bishops have plenty of other external signs of their superiority without needing to use that one; this is not the case with the archdeacon, who does not wear any vestment during a visitation

³⁰“Le Sieur le Maire, qui est pourveu de cét Archidiaconé, fit sa visite en l'année 1672. dans ces deux Paroisses; ledit Chevalier et le Sieur Arnoul, qui en sont Curez, le receurent à la porte de leur Eglise en la maniere accoustumée. mais ils luy firent presenter une Estole par leur Vicaire, et conserverent celle dont ils estoient revestus. L'Archidiacre pretendit que le Curé de la Paroisse où il faisoit sa Visite, ne devoit point porter l'Estole en sa presence, et qu'il estoit en possession de ce droit dans ces Eglises, et dans toutes les Eglises de son Archidiaconé; Neantmoins commes ces Curez persisterent dans leur dessein, et que ces contestations causoient du scandal, il se retira, après en avoir dressé son procez verbal. Il les a fait assigner à l'Officialité de Chartres,” *Arrest du Parlement rendu à l'audiance de la Grand' Chambre le 31. Juillet 1674, sur les Conclusions de Mr l'Advocat General de la Moignon; Par lequel l'Archidiacre de Pinserais, en l'Eglise Cathedralle de Chartres, est maintenu dans la possession de porter seul l'Estole dans ses visites. Contre les Curez d'Orgeval et de Chambourcy, appellans comme d'abus d'une Sentence renduë par l'Official de Chartres, et autres Curez intervenans, ausquels il est fait deffense de porter l'Estole en presence dudit Archidiacre faisant sa Visite* (Paris: Couterot, 1674), 4.

³¹*Arrests du Parlement de Roüen touchant l'Estolle. Pour les Curez de la ville de Roüen. Contre Maistre Adrian Behotte Chanoine et Archidiacre en l'Eglise Cathedralle dudit Roüen* ([Rouen]: [n. pub.], 1626), 7. This is the decision that was overturned in 1630.

that distinguishes him from the pastor, or other clergy.”³² This can be read as a rail against diminishing status, a sense of being undervalued by ordinaries and, while essentially being episcopal delegates, having little in the way of external dignity to advertise their office. The extent of the powers of the archdeacon had been severely curtailed by the Council of Trent.³³ He lost his independent faculties to excommunicate clergy; a court of higher resort was created, that of the vicar general (although never implemented within France); and he had to render an account of all visitations to the ordinary, whose permission had to be obtained in advance.³⁴ This was not a minor matter for Le Maire; for him, the wearing of the stole involved respect for ecclesiastical hierarchy, and he criticizes both the “subordination” of his priests as well as the necessity of maintaining order (7). The archdeacon’s defense is comparable to François Faure’s, and it is all the more surprising that the 1669 *arrêt* was effectively ignored in the definitive judgment to this appeal.

The timing of these cases coincides with the increasing implementation within France of Trent’s directives for frequent visitations of individual parishes by the bishop or his representative. In the case of parish visitations, the arrival of the archdeacon signaled more than a routine inspection of the church and parish accounts, and it is within this context that injured pride and entrenched mutual resentment played their part in challenges over clerical attire. Seventeenth-century French rituals are often quite detailed in the provision of instructions for such visitations:

The Visitor changes his Stole, then goes to be seated at the entrance to the Choir on a chair specially placed there, and gives a speech to the people, setting out the purpose of the visitation and encouraging them to benefit from it, after which he will hear any complaints that may be brought to his attention, and if they are of a serious nature, then he must hear witnesses in private and take their accounts, which will be duly signed by

³²“Car d’alleguer que les Evesques permettent aux Curez de porter l’Estole en leur presence, c’est un foible moyen, les Evesques ont assez d’autres marques de superiorité, sans rechercher celle-là; Il n’en est pas ainsi de l’Archidiaque, qui ne porte aucun ornement dans sa Visite pour se distinguer des Curez, et des autres Prestres,” *Moyens de droit*, 10–11.

³³“Après avoir été, au Moyen Age, un concurrent redoutable pour l’évêque, l’archidiaque fut en quelque sorte remis dans le rang par le Concile de Trente consacrant un lent travail de reconquête du pouvoir par les ordinaires,” Robert Sauzet, *Les Visites pastorales dans le diocèse de Chartres pendant la première moitié du XVIIe siècle* (Rome: Edizioni de Storia e Letteratura, 1975), 45.

³⁴“Archdeacons, deans and other inferiors shall visit those churches in which they have thus far been accustomed legally to make visitations, but from now on with the consent of the bishop, personally and with the aid of a notary” (Session XXIV, chapter 3), and “Matrimonial and criminal causes shall not be left to the judgment of a dean, archdeacon or other inferiors, even in the course of their visitation, but shall be reserved to the examination and jurisdiction of the bishop only” (Session XXIV, chapter 20), *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. H. J. Shroeder, Rockford 1978, 193, and 211 respectively.

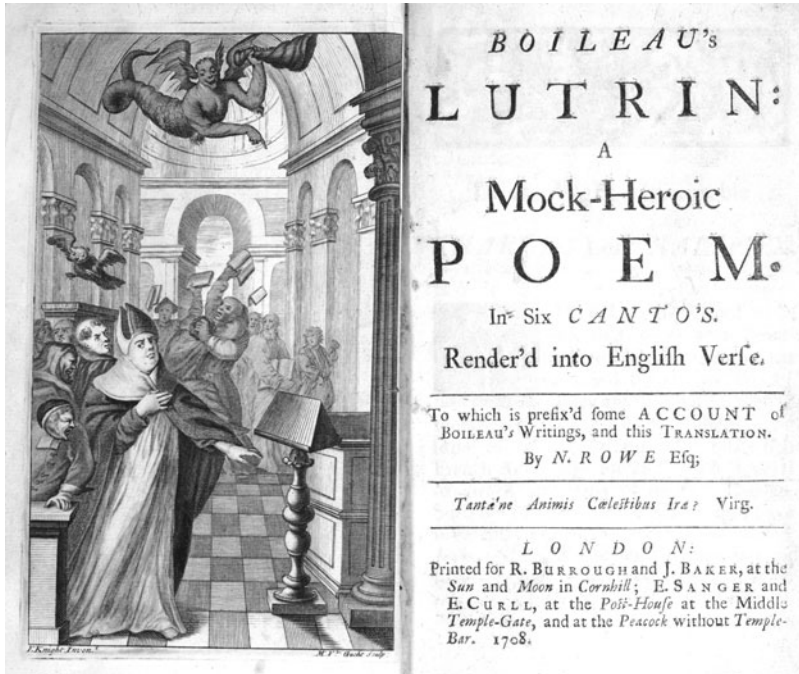


Fig. 1. The frontispiece to this 1708 English translation of Nicholas Boileau's *Lutrín* is almost emblematic of the energy devoted by some ecclesiastics to defending hopelessly trivial causes. Reproduced courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

*all parties, submitting a statement of everything into the bishop's hands within a month of the end of the visitation.*³⁵

The archdeacon's visit was consequently an opportunity to voice local disagreements, or discontent with the pastor or parish administration, and was one of the post-Tridentine strategies to combat vice and abuses.³⁶ In addition to

³⁵“Le Visiteur change d'étole, va s'asseoir à l'entrée du Chœur sur une chaise qu'on a dû lui préparer; fait un discours au peuple, lui expose le sujet de la visite, et l'exhorte à en profiter. Puis il entend les plaintes qu'on a à lui faire, s'il y en a qui soient considerables, il doit entendre les témoins en particulier; prendra leur serment, faire signer à chacun sa deposition, dresser un procès verbal de toutes choses, qu'il nous mettra entre les mains, un mois après sa visite achevée,” *Rituel de Verdun, renouvelé et augmenté par Monseigneur l'illustrissime et reverendissime messire Hyppolite de Bethune, évêque, comte de Verdun* (Verdun: Fanart, 1691), 626–7 (emphasis in the original).

³⁶Henry Phillips notes that this campaign enjoyed some success, as “the *procès-verbaux* of diocesan visits seem to record that parishioners' complaints greatly diminished, especially in the last quarter of the century,” *Church and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 12.

this, the archdeacon was encouraged to inquire into all aspects of the daily life of not only the resident clergy, but also of all members of the laity. Questions regarding family life include whether parents have been diligently sending their children to school; whether girls have been attending along with their male siblings; and if parents are allowing children to sleep in their beds before they have reached their first full year of age (*Rituel de Verdun*, 628 and 631).³⁷ Moreover, the archdeacon is empowered to establish whether the pastor and schoolmaster ensure that children are not reading unsuitable books, and “whether the pastor or other clerics are moral men, and if they have any women in their residence other than their mother, sisters, aunts, and nieces, who are under the canonical age of fifty years old” (630 and 631). The manner in which this is phrased invites the archdeacon not merely to restrict the formality of questioning to the priests themselves, but also to encourage members of the parish to vouch for, or criticize, their ministers. Robin Briggs cautions that, on this point, “visitation records are far from reliable, since the parishioners were rarely willing to denounce their *curé* to an outsider.”³⁸ Interpreted in this light, it would seem that the “systematic attempts to track the faithful for their affective performance of essential socio-religious rites” were unsuccessful, since the laity was not prepared to assent to bureaucratic surveillance.³⁹ Nevertheless, the visitation remained ambitious in its scope, and no aspect of rural life is neglected in the archdeacon’s survey, for he was to see that there were no public enmities or other scandals (631); that people were not engaged in superstitious practices; and that no immodest behavior was practiced at betrothal or nuptial festivities, particularly that the groom did not demand money or valuables from his intended or actual spouse (632).

Such a detailed intrusion into a local community covering everything from parishioners’ community relationships, sexual mores, and local traditions must have sometimes been accompanied by a certain degree of antagonism; it is possibly more than personal affront to the disrespect shown to his dignity that convinced Le Maire to leave the two parishes so swiftly.⁴⁰ As a template for visitation investigation, this document confirms that “the Counter-Reformation hierarchy seems to have taken it for granted that

³⁷Discouraging children under the age of one year old from sleeping with their mothers was a measure to prevent infant mortality. See Wietse de Boer, *The Conquest of the Soul: Confession, Discipline, and Public Order in Counter-Reformation Milan* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 238.

³⁸Robin Briggs, *Communities of Belief: Cultural and Social Tensions in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 262.

³⁹De Boer, *Conquest of the Soul*, 185.

⁴⁰Charles Borromeo’s guide to pastoral visitations was widely emulated as a model yet focused on parish activities such as confraternities rather than on the home life of families. See Henri Le Brun, *Archidiaconus, sive de archidiaconorum dignitate et officiis, tractatus canonicus* (Rouen: Lallemand, 1659), particularly 92–179.

household religion was a seed-bed of subversion.”⁴¹ After having inspected the parish, the visitor would draw up a *procès-verbal* detailing a list of corrections and improvements for the parish.⁴² On the question of the wearing of the stole, some French rituals mention that the priest should be without a stole, whereas others leave the question intriguingly, and probably purposely, open.⁴³

III. A REBEL PRIEST: ABBÉ THIERS AND THE ARCHDEACON

One priest of the troubled diocese of Chartres who was obsessively opposed to archidiaconal privilege was Jean-Baptiste Thiers (1636–1703). He belonged to a different archdeaconry than the ten priests of Pinserais, that of the Grand Archidiaconé.⁴⁴ Even so, it is likely that Thiers advised the clerics in their dispute and in particular in the formulation of their legal case, since many of the principal points they employed in their defense are included as essential components of Thiers’s 391-page treatise written to justify the wearing of the stole by a *curé* during an archidiaconal visitation.⁴⁵ Thiers wrote a total of thirty-two polemical works on unusual topics such as a history of wig-wearing, the function of church bells, and superstitions connected with the sacraments.⁴⁶ His polemic output is characterized by an effortless erudition as well as a tendency to degenerate into uninhibited *ad hominem* condemnations.⁴⁷ The

⁴¹John Bossy, “The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe,” *Past and Present* 47 (May 1970): 68.

⁴²Bernard Hours, *L’Église et la vie religieuse dans la France moderne, XVIe–XVIIe siècle* (Paris: PUF, 2000), 275.

⁴³The *Rituel de Verdun* has the explicit instruction that the priest is “revêtu de surplis sans étole” (624), whereas that for Alet simply details that the *curé* “luy presentera une étole blanche qu’il luy fera baiser, et la luy mettra ensuite au col,” *Rituel romain du Pape Paul V à l’usage du diocèse d’Alet* (Paris: Savreux, 1667), Part II, 246–47. After losing his case over inferior clergy wearing the stole in his presence, Faure invents a new diocesan tradition for episcopal visitations: any clergy present will wear a surplice and cope, precluding the need for a stole: *Rituel du Diocèse d’Amiens*, Amiens 1687, 569.

⁴⁴The *grand archidiaconé* was the largest of the six archdeaconries of the Chartres diocese, comprising six deaneries; the Pinserais archdeaconry was composed of two. See *Répertoire des visites pastorales de la France*, ed. Gabriel Le Bras and others, Première Série (Paris: CNRS, 1979), II, 87.

⁴⁵See, for example, the precedent of synods and councils enumerated in *Arrest du Parlement rendu à l’audience de la Grand’ Chambre le 31. Juillet 1674*, 4–5, and expanded on in Jean-Baptiste Thiers, *De Stola in Archidiaconorum Visitationibus gestanda à Parœcis, disceptatio* (Paris: Du Puis, 1674), 260–275. Thiers also takes up Archdeacon Le Clerc’s comments on the formula for presenting the stole at priestly ordination: see 372–75.

⁴⁶Jean-Baptiste Thiers, *Histoire des Perruques où l’on fait voir Leur origine, leur forme, l’abus et l’irregularité de celles des Ecclesiastiques* (Paris: Au dépens de l’auteur, 1690); *Traité des superstitions qui regardent tous les Sacremens*, 4 vols. (Paris: Dezallier, 1697–1704); *Traitez des cloches et de la sainteté de l’offrande du pain et du vin aux messes des morts, non confondu avec le pain et le Vin qu’on offroit sur les Tombeaux* (Paris: Nully, 1721).

⁴⁷“Ce sont d’ailleurs ses œuvres et ses attitudes intransigeantes en matière de liturgie, de préséance, de tenue générale des lieux du culte, qui lui attirèrent bien des ennus et rendirent sa

litigation involving the ten Pinserais clergy galvanized him into preparing for his own imminent pastoral visitation. When the *grand archidiacre* of Chartres, Jean Robert, accordingly arrived in Champrond, Abbé Thiers was awaiting his arrival bedecked with a pastoral stole that he continued to wear throughout the visit. It would seem that the priest wrote *De Stola* for the sole purpose of presenting a copy to the archdeacon as an *apologia pro stola sua* on this very occasion, constituting a courageous and emblematic act attempting to reclaim decades of petty humiliation imposed on minor clergy.⁴⁸ Thiers's behavior is highly singular even when considered within the context of charged standoffs between clerics. These incidents invariably proceeded in an almost formulaic fashion, with the offended party publicly demanding of the other to retract before departing. It is not so much the pastor's written defense or refusal to remove his vestment that would have taken his superior or congregation by surprise, but rather producing his book. Thiers's actions are a breach of the unspoken pattern of etiquette in these not uncommon occurrences, as well as a *coup de théâtre* to rival any contemporary drama. His work underwent a further edition later that same decade that reveals it had a ready audience among the clerical classes, confirmed by the fact that this appeared in Latin, unlike the majority of his monographs (a total of twenty-four out of thirty-two were produced in the vernacular).⁴⁹ Thiers would elaborate on his dislike for archdeacons during his involvement against the Cathedral Chapter of Chartres on the subject of its decision to license two vendors to sell religious articles outside the building's entrance:

I am not a *Satiriser*, because I have never made any satires, neither in prose, nor in verse; and I counter that if I were to produce any, they would be specifically aimed against archdeacons who are so self-serving and sordid that they will take pastors' hats or parish missals if they are not paid their visitation fee.⁵⁰

vie si agitée," Marie-Claude Berge, "Prêtres et paroissiens au XVIIe siècle vus par Jean-Baptiste Thiers," *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest* 93:1 (1986): 37.

⁴⁸Jean-Baptiste Thiers, *Traité des Superstitions: Croyances populaires et rationalité à l'Âge classique*, ed. Jean-Marie Goulemot (Paris: Le Sycomore, 1984), 30.

⁴⁹Jean-Baptiste Thiers, *Disceptatio de Stola in Archidiaconorum Visitationibus gestanda à Paræcis, disceptatio* (Paris: Dezallier, 1679).

⁵⁰"Je ne suis point un *Satyrique*, parceque je n'ay jamais fait de Satyres, ny en prose, ny en vers, et je luy proteste que si j'avois en à en faire, ç'auroit esté particulièrement contre les Archidiaques qui sont si interessez et si sordides que de faire emporter les Chapeaux des Curez, les Missels des Paroisses, quand on ne leur paye pas leurs droits de visite," *Factum pour M. Jean Baptiste Thiers, Curé de Champrond et Bachelier en Theologie de la Faculté de Paris, Deffendeur; contre le Chapitre de Chartres, Demandeur* (Paris?: [n. pub.], 1679) 152. The treatise that precipitated the issue was Thiers's *Dissertation sur les porches des Eglises, dans laquelle on fait voir les divers usages auxquels ils sont destinez; Que sont les Lieux Saints et dignes de la veneration des Fideles; Et qu'il n'est pas permis d'y vendre aucunes marchandises, non pas mesme celles qui peuvent servir à la pieté* (Orleans: Hotot, 1679).

In addition to their scrupulous scrutiny into local events, archdeacons were also entitled to remuneration for their presence. Thiers reluctantly concedes this right, but adds:

However, there is a significant number of Archdeacons who demand this fee, even when they do not make the visitation of the churches of their archdeaconry in person, but only by proxy. This happens all too often in certain dioceses; the bishops are not unaware of it, and the pastors are too poorly educated on their duties, or cowardly enough to allow it, and Archdeacons do not have the least scruple in this matter. Yet, the Councils forbid this so explicitly that some oblige miserly Archdeacons to make restitution, some declare that they are suspended from their functions, whereas others impose excommunication.⁵¹

This is not presented as an uncommon practice, and it is likely to have occurred within the Chartres diocese with some regularity, since six archdeacons oversaw 903 parishes, making it one of the largest sees in France during the seventeenth century.⁵² Thiers clearly voices the malcontent of his fellow clergy with this complaint, and he further alludes to a contemporary case involving the possessions of a deceased *curé* (sig. ã3^r). The Paris Parlement would eventually find in favor of the archdeacon:

[The Parlement] consequently safeguards and maintains said Charles Cocquart de la Motte, Archdeacon of Josas within the Church of Paris, in the right to take the best bed linen, habit or cassock, cincture, surplice, almuss, breviary, biretta, horse, or donkey if applicable, following the death of priests within his Archdeaconry, as belonging to him by right after their passing, because of his office and dignity of Archdeacon to take a funeral fee.⁵³

⁵¹“Cependant il y a quantité d’Archidiaques qui exigent ce droit, encore qu’ils ne visitent pas eux-mêmes en personne les Eglises de leurs Archidiaconez, mais seulement par Procureurs. Cela ne se pratique que trop souvent en certains Diocèses; les Evêques ne l’ignorent pas, les Curez sont ou assez-peu instruits de leurs devoirs, ou assez lâches pour le souffrir, et les Archidiaques n’en ont pas le moindre scrupule. Mais les Conciles le défendent si expressément, que les uns obligent ces Archidiaques avares à la restitution, les autres les déclarent suspens de leurs fonctions, les autres enfin les frappent de l’excommunication.” Jean-Baptiste Thiers, *Traité de la dépouille des curez, dans lequel on fait voir: que selon les Canons des Conciles, les Libertez de l’Eglise Gallicane, les Ordonnances des Rois de France, les Arrests de Parlement, les Loix et les Coutumes du Royaume, les Archidiaques n’ont nul droit sur les meubles des Curez decedez* (Paris: Desprez, 1683), 31–2.

⁵²*Répertoire des visites pastorales*, II, 87.

⁵³“[La Cour] en consequence a maintenu et gardé ledit de la Motte comme Archidiaque de Josas en l’Eglise de Paris, au droit de prendre apres le le deceds des Curez de son Archidiaconé, tant de la Ville que de la Campagne, leurs meilleur Lict garny, Robbe ou Soutanne, Ceinture, Surplis, Aumusse, Breviaire, Bonnet quarré, Cheval ou Mulet, s’ils en ont, comme à luy appartenans par leurs decez, à cause de sa Charge et Dignité d’Archidiaque pour son droit de funerailles.” *Arrest du Parlement de Paris rendu en faveur du sieur Abbé de la Motte, Archidiaque de Josas*

This decision demonstrates the extent of the archdeacon's privilege over his charges, as well as the level of sanction and protection of these benefits that extended to his subordinates even after their deaths. Within the context of such extensive advantages, Thiers's palpable vitriol becomes more comprehensible; it would appear to some country priests that their archdeacons were after the very clothing on their backs.

In retaliation for Thiers's defiance during his visitation, Robert lodged a complaint to the *official* of the diocese that the pastor had two female cousins housed in the presbytery, and these two relations were removed shortly thereafter. This act of revenge spurred Thiers into the anonymous publication of *La Sauce-Robert*, a pun linking his nemesis's name to a popular culinary sauce.⁵⁴ Thiers, still referring to himself in the third person, returns to the vexed question of the correct etiquette for wearing stoles during a visitation and fulminates against the archdeacon's authority: "He laughs openly at your threats and your pride, because his life is blameless and he carries out his duties honorably."⁵⁵ This stance of defiance was maintained over the following few years: a second part to the *Sauce-Robert* was issued in 1678, and a sequel appeared in 1679, indicating that Thiers's energetic enmity showed no signs of diminishing.⁵⁶ The 1679 work provides a collection of six documents related to the Robert-Thiers feud, including a copy of an appeal formulated by Thiers, a letter about the case by the same, and a letter of the bishop of Chartres regarding Robert. The *plainte* submitted to Chartre's *official* sets out six points of contention, none of which concerns the use of the stole, and the last of which claims that the archdeacon was usurping episcopal power.⁵⁷ The conspicuous absence of the stole from this list may indicate that the matter had officially been decided to Robert's advantage.

The *Sauce-Robert* afforded Thiers the opportunity to elaborate his opinion on the difference between ecclesiastical orders. In the "Letter of M. Thiers

dans l'Eglise de Paris; contre quelques Curez de son Archidiaconé, tant pour le droit des funeraillles, que pour celui de sepulture (Paris: Pépingué, 1684), 8.

⁵⁴For a complete list of all works written by, or attributed to, Thiers, see Jean-Pierre Nicéron, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des hommes illustres dans la république des lettres* (Paris: [n. pub.], 1727–45), IV, 341–353.

⁵⁵"Il se mocque de vos menaces et de vôtre fierté, parce qu'il vit sans reproche, et qu'il fait sa charge avec honneur," [Jean-Baptiste Thiers], *La Sauce-Robert ou avis salutaires à Mrs Jean Robert, grand archidiaque de Chartres* (Paris?: [n. pub.], 1676), 4.

⁵⁶[Jean-Baptiste Thiers], *La Sauce-Robert, ou avis salutaires à Mrs Jean Robert grand archidiaque de Chartres. Seconde Partie* (Paris?: [n. pub.], 1678). Thiers reveals that Robert was acquainted with the archdeacon of Josas, who would later win his action brought to confirm his right to appropriate deceased priests' belongings (5).

⁵⁷[Jean-Baptiste Thiers], *La Sausse-Robert justifiée* (Paris?: [n. pub.], 1679), 7–8.

to his friend in which he examines ‘*Whether an inferior cleric may lawfully accuse his superior*’” (17–22), the author reflects on the differences between the ranks of archdeacon and pastor and concludes that an incumbent’s office is “fixed, unchanging, permanent, long-lasting” [“fixe, constante, permanente, durable”] whereas archdeacons only enjoy “a fleeting and temporary jurisdiction” [“une jurisdiction passagere et momentanée”] (17).⁵⁸ Thiers accepts that the archidiaconal function has evolved from the seven primitive deacons, yet asserts that pastors are the successors of the seventy-two disciples that Jesus Christ chose to preach his Gospel (17). Therefore, for Thiers, the transitory supervision that archdeacons exercise within the hierarchical structure amounts to “a reversal of the Church’s proper structure” [“un renversement du bon ordre de l’Eglise”] (18). This stress on the presbyteral office suggests that Thiers was influenced by the doctrines of Edmond Richer (1539–1631).⁵⁹ Richer held that members of the clergy were the successors of the seventy-two disciples commissioned by Christ (Luke 10:1), and as such they enjoyed a parity with bishops in church governance, though his was later to become “part and parcel of the Jansenist movement.”⁶⁰ Jean Gerson and other authorities such as Hugh of St. Victor supported this idea of a parochial succession.⁶¹ Richerism emerged among the lower clergy during the second half of the seventeenth century, as a result of which some “curés perceived themselves as an independent corps with a significant role within the Church.”⁶² This outlook certainly seems to correspond with Thiers’s sphere of interests, and his dislike of upper ranks of simple priests may have sprung from a desire to remove impediments to cooperation between priests and their ordinaries.

If Thiers subscribed to a more democratic concept of the clergy, it is all the more surprising that, in his many conflicts, he never crossed swords with a bishop. In fact, given his long history of participation in, or even initiation of, ecclesiastical disputes, it is remarkable that he was able to leave his incardination within the diocese of Chartres for the parish of Vibraye within

⁵⁸In the preamble addressed to “Monsieur de Riantz, Procureur du Roy au Chastelet de Paris,” Thiers signals the inclusion of “une Lettre pleine d’érudition écrit que M. Thiers en 1677,” 1–6 (5). The actual letter is dated 10 February 1677 (26).

⁵⁹Edmond Richer, *De Ecclesiastica et politica potestate, liber unus* (Paris: [n. pub.], 1611). For a history of the early stages of the theory, see Monique Cottret, “Edmond Richer (1539–1631): le politique et le sacré,” in *L’État baroque: regards sur la pensée politique de la France du premier XVIIe siècle*, ed. Henry Méchoulan (Paris: Vrin, 1985), 159–177. Seventy-two is the number mentioned in the Vulgate, though Greek texts mention seventy.

⁶⁰Dale K. Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560–1791* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996), 68.

⁶¹D. Catherine Brown, *Pastor and Laity in the Theology of Jean Gerson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 41.

⁶²Richard M. Golden, *The Godly Rebellion: Parisian Curés and the Religious Fronde, 1652–1662* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 74.

the neighboring diocese of Le Mans in 1691. The mysterious circumstances surrounding his transfer may be explained by supposing that the bishop of Le Mans was confident of enjoying Thiers's dynamic future support. The prelate who provided a new home for Thiers, Louis de La Vergne-Montenard de Tressan, had inherited a diocese suffering from a split between his immediate predecessor and one of his archdeacons. Michel Le Vayer had defied the bishop of Le Mans on at least two occasions.⁶³ He was still in office when Tressan was installed in the diocese in 1671, which he headed until his death in 1712.⁶⁴ Thiers had already established his credentials as a defender of bishops' entitlement to modify feast days celebrated within their dioceses. His logic in presenting his case focuses on his insistence that recent and contemporary canonists and theologians concurred that "each bishop may do within his own diocese that which the pope may do over the world, except for those things specially reserved to the Holy See."⁶⁵ The implicit, unwritten extension of this maxim is that pastors have a corresponding power within their own parishes, despite the machinations and intrusions of archdeacons and other diocesan officials. Alison Forrestal underlines how the "disciplinary drive" behind the notion of visitations "brought new questions, and even dissension, on the precise level of authority that prelates commanded over the clergy operating in those territories"; Trent's aim of consolidating the efficiency of the clergy gave birth to a new wave of discord between bishops and archdeacons, archdeacons and priests, pastors and curates over their respective rights, often expressing decades of nascent friction between rural and urban institutions.⁶⁶ Thiers's stance may therefore embody rural resistance to the escalation of these procedures, as well as synthesizing his personal beliefs of the parity of priests with bishops. Either way, his position is a surprisingly radical one. About the same period that Thiers moved to Le Mans, the bishop of Saint-Pons was obliged to take action against the archdeacon of Saint-Pons after the latter vigorously objected to amendments made to the

⁶³See *Arrest de la Cour de Parlement donné au profit de MM. Les Archidiacres* (Le Mans: Olivier, 1654), and *Factum pour M. Le Vayer Conseiller, Aumosnier ordinaire de la Reine, Doyen de l'Eglise Royale de saint Pierre, et Grand Archidiacre du Mans. Contre Messire Philbert Emanuel de Beaumanoir de Lavardin, Conseiller du Roy en ses Conseils, Evêque du Mans* (Le Mans?: [n. pub.], 1657). The first issue concerned the revenues of one of the archdeacon's charges, and the second dispute began in 1655 when Le Vayer summoned a diocesan assembly without the bishop's permission (2).

⁶⁴*Répertoire des visites pastorales*, III, 44.

⁶⁵"Chaque Evêque peut dans son Diocese tout ce que le Pape peut par toute la Terre, horsmis dans les choses qui sont specialement reserves au S. Siege," [Jean-Baptiste Thiers], *Consultation faite par un avocat du diocese de Saintes à son curé. sur la diminuation du nombre des festes Ordonnée dans ce Diocese, par Monseigneur l'évesque de Saintes* (Paris: Du Puis, 1670), sig. â2r.

⁶⁶Alison Forrestal, *Fathers, Pastors and Kings: Visions of Episcopacy in Seventeenth-Century France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 216.

local liturgical calendar, resulting in fewer feasts.⁶⁷ This cleric seems to have surpassed Thiers in his tendency to degenerate into calumny, for he produced a libel in which he compares his bishop to a rabid animal spewing out venom.⁶⁸ Having a collaborator like Abbé Thiers under his patronage, within the likely context of having offered him an attractive escape route from Chartres, must have appealed to Tressan; his trust in the lively cleric was later confirmed when Thiers dedicated two treatises to the prelate.⁶⁹

IV. CONCLUSION

The various incidents of heated exchanges and subsequent legal proceedings over the use of the stole reveal that, for some ecclesiastics, this garment had become a potent focus of dignity. The vehemence of reactions against perceived slights associated with its use suggest that it occasionally acted as a release for underlying tensions between minor clergy and archdeacons, or between bishops and chapters, and it is not without a sense of justice that Thiers labored to produce one of his most substantial treatises to justify its unrestricted use by pastors. The polemic surrounding the stole embodies a reaction to the profound shifts brought by the reforms of the Council of Trent, infringing on parochial life somewhat later in France than in other Catholic countries in Europe; Craig Harline and Eddy Put have documented how Mathias Hovius faced robust opposition from a cross-section of his clergy when implementing ecclesiastical reforms in the Low Countries.⁷⁰ Moreover, the nature of and limits to the office of pastor were the object of lively theological discussion throughout the early modern period, with Thiers, as we have seen, upholding the controversial theories of Gerson and Richer.⁷¹ At first glance, it might seem extraordinary that so much energy

⁶⁷*Requête Présentée à Mrs du Parlement de Toulouze, les Chambres assemblées; par Messire Pierre-Jean-François de Persin de Montgaillard Evêque de S. Pons. Contre Mr. D'Olargues Archidiacre de Saint Pons, et Conseiller audit Parlement (Toulouse?: [n. pub.], 1684), 1.* Thiers would later write a tract in support of three bishops in which he provides their respective pastoral letters on the subject, together with his defense of their decisions. See *Dissertations ecclésiastiques sur le pouvoir des évêques, pour la diminution ou augmentation des festes par Messigneurs les Evêques de Saintes, de La Rochelle et de Perigueux* (Paris: Dezallier, 1691).

⁶⁸*Requête Présentée à Mrs du Parlement, 7 and 15.*

⁶⁹Jean-Baptiste Thiers, *Traité de l'absolution de l'hérésie, Où l'on fait voir, par la tradition de l'Eglise, que le pouvoir d'absoudre de l'Hérésie est réservé au Pape et aux Evêques, à l'exclusion des Chapitres et des Reguliers, exemptions de la Jurisdiction des Ordinaires* (Lyon: Plaignard, 1695); *Critique de l'Histoire des flagellans, et justification de l'usage des disciplines volontaires* (Paris: Nully, 1703).

⁷⁰Craig Harline and Eddy Put, *A Bishop's Tale: Mathias Hovius Among His Flock in Seventeenth-Century Flanders* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000).

⁷¹René Taveneaux, *Le Catholicisme dans la France Classique, 1610–1715* (Paris: Société d'Édition d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1980), I, 45–46.

was invested by all sides in as trivial a matter as the circumstances in which a stole could be legitimately worn. These early modern stole disputes reveal more than anything the subjectivity of the label of pettiness; no one believes their cause to be minor, certainly not the immediate participants in these animated dramas. I have already commented on how these rows occurred within the framework of implicitly understood parameters, and in this they mirror the spectacular aspects of seventeenth-century French society.

Thiers was doubtless sincere in his sense of wronged justice; most of his works are animated by a deeply held desire to improve the caliber of the clergy or to extinguish superstition.⁷² He mercilessly disparaged, for example, the practice of his colleagues leaving their estate to the Church, urging that such money should go directly to the poor.⁷³ It should be remembered, however, that Thiers ultimately sympathized with the visitation's principal purpose of controlling and thereby improving diocesan clergy; he objected to the display of archidiaconal authority becoming an end in itself during these visits. The striking paradox of the implementation of visitations in France during this period is the unintended consequences of creating cleavages at even the parish level, since this tactic was part of a wider movement of reform, a major objective of which was that "the anarchy caused by competing authorities had to be eliminated."⁷⁴ The stole cases underscore the many instances of resistance to, and acceptance of, reform on a localized level. Like the daily, unseemly vying for royal favor at Versailles that centered on the order of seating arrangements or on the prerogative of assisting the sovereign while he undressed, for some clerics the stole became a visible focus symbolizing their aspirations to a certain degree of independence. The stole was an unusual choice over which to engage in such highly contested battles, and not simply because of its modest dimensions: as Thiers underlined, without any apparent trace of irony, this garment traditionally signified the wearer's acceptance of the virtues of humility and obedience.⁷⁵

⁷²Abbé de Rancé appreciated Thiers's loyalty to him, despite his exasperation at the latter's excessive sentiments in his defense of Rancé's spirituality: Thiers's *Apologie de M. l'Abé de la Trappe, contre les Lettres du Pere Denys de Sainte Marthe de la Congregation de S. Maur* ([Grenoble]: [n. pub.], 1694). See *Abbé de Rancé: Correspondance*, ed. Alban John Krailsheimer (Paris: Cerf, 1993), IV, 297 and 425.

⁷³Jean-Baptiste Thiers, *De la Plus solide, la plus necessaire, et souvent la plus negligée de toutes les devotions* (Paris: Nully, 1702), II, 630.

⁷⁴Joseph Bergin, *Cardinal de La Rochefoucauld: Leadership and Reform in the French Church* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), 114.

⁷⁵Thiers, *De Stola*, 375–82.