

**THE CRISIS AMONG  
THE  
FRENCH CLERGY**

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The crisis among the French clergy by Abbe Houtin

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THE CRISIS  
AMONG THE FRENCH CLERGY

BY  
ABBÉ HOUTIN

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY  
F. THOROLD DICKSON

LONDON  
DAVID NUTT, 57 to 59 LONG ACRE  
1910

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## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

THIS translation has had the advantage of being critically examined by the author himself. It may therefore be taken as being published with Abbé Houtin's approval. The translator desires to thank him for many valuable suggestions. He also wishes to express his thanks to the Rev. Canon H. D. Jones, Rector of Upper St. Leonards, for kind assistance, while the translation was in progress, with some of the technical terms. Mr. Arthur Galton has kindly read through the proofs.

F. THOROLD DICKSON.

13 ALEXANDRA ROAD, ST. LEONARDS-ON-SEA,  
*December 31, 1909.*

## PREFACE

A critic<sup>1</sup> spoke recently of the reputation for daring which I have 'acquired in the choice and exposition of the subjects' that I treat of. If this appreciation were really accepted by everybody, this new book would not need any preliminary explanations. It would introduce itself.

Unfortunately, although all my published works have hitherto been frankly of the narrative and historical order, there are still some people who are willing to misunderstand their object. Father Condamin, of the Society of Jesus,<sup>2</sup> not long ago represented one of my books as 'a badly disguised attack on Catholic dogma,' and Father Fontaine,<sup>3</sup> of the same society, accuses me of wishing to 'install dogmatic anarchy in the Church,' and of preaching 'a secret, or at least a discreet, apostasy calculated to propagate such ideas in the bosom of the Catholic establishment.'<sup>4</sup>

It would be permissible, I imagine, to take no notice of these unfriendly suggestions. Nevertheless, in order that no one may be misled, I think well to repeat here a few statements.

No one more than myself would have liked to devote

<sup>1</sup> M. Roch de Chefdebiens, *Revue Augustinienne*, September 15, 1905.

<sup>2</sup> *Études*, June 5, 1906.

<sup>3</sup> *Vérité française*, September 12, 1905.

<sup>4</sup> *Science catholique*, May 1905, p. 510.



himself to the study of the past. But, without having wished it, I live in a revolutionary epoch in which the most ancient institutions are disintegrating, together with the ideas upon which they were based. I deem it my duty not to imitate those who, in spite of these upheavals, are able to confine themselves tranquilly to archæology. It is impossible for me not to hear distressing questions which everybody is asking, and to which in a rash undertaking of my young days I promised always to give an answer. It was through no action of mine, either, that my bishop, in person, expressly put them to me for the first time.<sup>1</sup>

Wishing to be honest towards myself and towards others, I have done my best to fathom them, and I have never hesitated to publish on thorny subjects the results of my researches. Deeming always that light is the most powerful agent of health and progress, I again make known to-day a little of what I have discovered. After so many years of experience and observation, it seems to me that, without presumption, I may have something to relate about the clergy of France, and I relate it.

I attack no dogma, I preach no apostasy. In a very confused situation, I simply attempt to inform a certain number of my co-religionists who suffer profoundly in their own hearts, and who argue without knowing very well what is the real question in dispute. Far from wishing to maintain ambiguities, all my books aim at dispersing them. The only people who can complain of this, and attempt to lead off on a wrong scent, are the individuals and the institutions who fish in muddy waters.

<sup>1</sup> See *Mes difficultés avec mon Evêque*, pp. 16-17.

For the last ten years there has appeared in the Church of France a phenomenon which it never produced before. Priests, in ever larger numbers each year, quit it to return to ordinary life. 'And if so many depart,' people add, 'how many more are not shaken!'<sup>1</sup>

At all times desertions have arisen in every body of men. A career which demands a complete and absolute renunciation must necessarily count some deserters. It is, therefore, not at all astonishing that proud and independent natures refuse sometimes to obey arbitrary or unjust orders, and prefer revolt to what they are led to consider a perpetual slavery.

Others abandon their vow of celibacy. To renounce the Church with the intention of taking a wife has always seemed so natural, that the vulgar crowd explains by this motive the majority of ecclesiastical apostasies. 'It is to go out by Luther's gate,' remark disdainfully those who wish to forget the traffic in indulgences.

The special character of numerous present crises consists in their arising from the intellect, and not from character or morality. They are mental tragedies. Those who depart declare that the dogma of the Church is false, and that they cannot live amid imposture and lies. They had thought to assume a sacred office, they do not wish to ply a trade. These are not erring men, they are men who have blundered. After having been dupes, they refuse to be accomplices.

How do those who had honestly professed their faith during long years come to lose it? How had they accepted opinions so ill founded?

<sup>1</sup> *L'Américanisme*, p. 458.

Why do the masters of the Christian doctrine remain incapable of refuting so murderous a charge as the accusation of complete and incurable error?

Such are the different questions which one hears being asked throughout France.

In order to reply to them with all accuracy, I have neglected no means of information. But as it is a question of very delicate affairs of conscience, and as I do not wish to injure anybody, it sometimes happens that I do not formally put in evidence certain facts or certain matters upon which my argument rests. People will give me credit, I trust, upon these points of detail, recognising in other respects that the book rests upon a solid basis. Sooner or later, in case of need, new proofs can be supplied.

Being desirous of rendering this treatise as accurate as possible, I at first published a considerable portion of it in a newspaper, and I forwarded the various chapters to the persons who were quoted or referred to.<sup>1</sup> Observations were addressed to me direct, or have been formulated by the press. I have dealt with them in so far as they seemed to me justified. If I have allowed errors to still exist, may they be pointed out. Having no pretension to infallibility, I shall be the first to rejoice in being replaced in the way of truth.

A. HOUTIN.

PARIS, *January 25, 1907.*

<sup>1</sup> The pseudonym signatures to these articles were a secret to nobody. The author was clearly designated, notably by Father Fontaine (*Science catholique*, May 1905, and *Vérité française*, February 26, 1906); M. Abel Sallé (*Express de Liège*, March 12; *Journal de Gand*, March 23, 1905); Canon Theodore Delmont (*Vérité française*, October 15 and November 3, 1906).