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Miscellanea

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Miscellanea

The Matter of Vestments and Clerical Garb

Even a superficial observer will have noticed that of late in our circles there has been an increasing interest in, and use of, clerical vestments and clerical street garb. As might be expected, however, there is a decided lack of uniformity. Each pastor has been more or less a law unto himself.

As regards clerical street garb, there are those who prefer to dress like the average layman. We have heard it said that this emphasizes the universal priesthood of all believers. Others affect what they hold to be proper clerical street wear. Here the range is extremely wide. Some use the single standing collar with a string bow tie or a four-in-hand, both in black, atop a white shirt, either soft or stiff-bosomed. Some use the full-dress wing collar, white shirt, black bow tie or black four-in-hand, or a tie of other colors. An ordinary sack suit or a morning frock coat with striped trousers, or a Prince Albert, complete this ensemble. Some wear the Canterbury or Cathedral collar, with a rabat, a rabat vest, a full clerical vest, or a vest that buttons from the waist to the neck. A black sack suit, or one in Oxford gray, or a navy blue, or even a pinstripe sack suit, or a Prince Albert, or a morning frock coat with striped trousers, may complete the combination. In the summertime one may see a white Palm Beach suit worn with the clerical collar and vest or some other light-weight suit of almost any color. Occasionally one sees a gray sack suit with gray rabat or rabat vest. Again, the style of rabats or vests varies: some show the entire collar, others cover the collar almost completely, and still others have an opening in front that varies in width from one to three inches. In short, whether the average layman's style is followed or whether there is an attempt at clerical garb, there is not the slightest semblance of uniformity among our clergy. This includes the color of the shoes worn with any of the above-mentioned combinations. One is just as apt to see tan or white as black, depending largely on the degree of the pastor's rugged individualism or upon his aesthetic sensibilities.

The same is true of the vestments for chancel and pulpit wear. The black Genevan gown still holds first place in many sections of the Church. In some places, in summer, the same style gown is used, only in white. Some cling to the bands. Others have discarded them, and one may see almost any style and color of shirt and collar protruding above the Genevan gown. Others use a black gown, with military collar, a white clerical collar atop; sometimes other-style collars are wedged into this kind of neck

style, including bow tie or four-in-hand. Those who wish to be more liturgical add a black or even colored stole to this combination.

Then we have those who have adopted the traditional cassock and surplice, some with, some without, the stole. Again, there is no uniformity. One sees the Roman cassock in some churches, in others the Anglican. Some wear the surplice over the Genevan gown. Some men conscientiously doff the surplice and stole before going to the door to greet their people after service; others greet them fully vested. Some wear silk or nylon or rayon surplices; others, cotton or linen; and still others use the choir cotta. Some men are painstakingly careful to have their surplices spick and span, others wear them soiled and wrinkled.

In a few instances the chasuble is used at the Holy Communion. Occasionally one sees also the alb, the amice, and the maniple.

There are those among us who view these developments with considerable alarm. Others greet them with bitter invective. Still others see in them a reaction, at long last, to what they hold to be the un-Lutheran Genevan gown. And yet others hail them as a long-overdue return to the traditional Lutheran usage of the Reformation age.

It is true, the entire matter belongs into the field of things indifferent, even as Article VII of the Augustana puts it: "Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should everywhere be alike."

It is also true that there are such things as good order, fitness, and propriety, and some of the usages referred to above certainly militate against one or the other of them. Certain combinations ought to be taboo as much as the wearing of a sport shirt with tails would be at a formal function in polite society. Cleanliness and careful grooming are also conditions *sine qua non*.

It is also true that it is not absolutely necessary that a minister's street garb differ from that of any well-groomed layman; even as it is not absolutely necessary that the minister appear in anything other than his street clothes in the chancel or pulpit.

But when all this has been said, it still remains true that our American people expect a pastor to represent his office also in the matter of dress, and our own Lutherans, by and large, are disturbed when their pastor, in his varied official functions, cannot be distinguished from a Holy Roller preacher, or from a Roman priest, or from an Anglican rector.

Is it not time, therefore, to raise the question whether all those of us who are interested in the matter of clerical garb and vestments ought not get together to determine, if possible, a suitable Lutheran ministerial street garb and fitting Lutheran vestments?

W. G. POLACK

Are We Going High Church? *

The following item in *The Lutheran* depressed me a little. It was accompanied by a picture with this caption: "High Church Vestments were Worn." Here is the descriptive paragraph:

"The *Formula Missae et Communis*, as published in 1523 by Martin Luther, featured the opening service of the meeting of the Western Conference, Maryland Synod, in St. Paul's Church, Funkstown, last month. The Rev. Ralph H. Miller, Brunswick, was deacon, and Pastor Raymond M. Miller, Funkstown, the celebrant. Acolytes were William Renner and Richard Ricketts, while James Powell served as crucifer. Traditional eucharistic vestments were used. The celebrant wore cassock, amice, alb, stole crossed over the breast and bound with a cincture, and a simple chasuble."

I don't like it. Recognizing that liturgy, by and large, is a matter of Christian liberty as long as it does not involve false doctrine, I still don't like it. Recognizing also that it happened in another church body than my own and might therefore be said to be none of my business, I still don't like it.

1. I don't like it because I know it has frequently happened that as interest in the *content* of religion decreased, interest in the *form* increased. Increasing interest in form is a bad sign. Where does this road lead to? If the whole Church moved in this direction, where would it stop? Wouldn't the experts on liturgy discover ever new refinements and additions in order to demonstrate their expertness? Along that road the Church moved once before, in the Dark Ages. Would we, too, finally arrive at the point where it was more important to turn just so, bow just so, fold the hands just so, genuflect, kiss the altar, elevate the host, etc., than to preach and sing and pray the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all simplicity and sincerity? Is it important to God that the officiating pastor have six different official vestments on at Communion? If not, then it isn't important to me either.

2. I don't like it because it tends to place a false emphasis on the value of antiquity. Why go back to the *Formula Missae* of 1523? Within three years Luther had changed it to a German service, the *Deutsche Messe*. But the *Formula Missae* is earlier; it is the original form of Lutheran service! So what? If antiquity is itself a virtue, why not go back a year or two further and get the full-fledged Catholic Mass? I can show you a still more excellent way. Why not go back to the days immediately after Pentecost when the Church was filled with the Spirit, but worshiped quite simply in private homes—no churches, no altars, no vestments except the everyday garb of the worshipers? That was the most ancient form of all. Antiquity is no criterion of desirability.

* An editorial in *The Lutheran Outlook*, written by Dr. J. A. Dell. Reprinted by permission.

3. I don't like it because it emphasizes pomp and ceremony, and I don't care for pompous preachers. The baptismal formula recorded by Tertullian (very ancient, by the way) included a renunciation of "the devil, his pomp, and his angels." That of Cyril of Jerusalem (also very ancient) renounced "Satan, his works, his pomp, and his service." I have seen ministerial processions in which men appeared in plain black preaching robes, others with black robe and white surplice, others with robe, surplice, and stole. One wears a cotton surplice, but another must have the best, so he procures one of shiny silk. The stoles can also be simple or magnificent—but they tend to become more and more glorious (I think of what Jesus said about "making broad their phylacteries"). In such a procession of the clergy you yourself might know that the plain church mouse in the simple black robe was the most learned, the most humble, and the most sincere Christian of the lot. But the average layman would suppose that the one decked out in the most gorgeous trappings must surely be a clergyman of superior rank. And the trouble is that the one who is so dolled up begins to think so, too.

4. I don't like it because it tends to be divisive. As sure as you get a "high church" wing in our Lutheran Church, you will get a "low church" group to oppose it. We have in this country a Lutheran Common Service. That does not mean "common" in the sense of "ordinary" or "mean" or "low," so that there would also be "high" or "extraordinary" or "superior" services. No, it means common in the sense of "universal," "used by all." Let's keep it that way.

