



Tradition and Simplicity Inspired a Set of Catholic Liturgical Vestments

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Contextual Review and Concept

In the Catholic Church, vestments developed between the fourth and ninth centuries and derived from men's standard clothing of the time. To celebrate the mass, chasubles and dalmatics are worn over other sacred garments. As fashion changed in the sixth century, the clergy did not adopt the new fashions and continued to wear the older styles. By the Middle Ages, the styles were codified and have remained much the same throughout the intervening centuries (Dwyer-McNulty, 2014; Mayo, 1984). Ecclesiastical dress has thus become a form of fossilized fashion, a phenomenon where the garments worn seem frozen in time and continues to be worn even as other forms of dress evolved (Bradley and Homberger, 2015).

Expensive silks and elaborate embroideries have characterized priestly vestments since the Middle Ages. The status of the clergy is identified by their ecclesiastical dress. Two opposing themes have been seen in liturgical dress throughout Catholic Church history. On the one hand the vestments have tended to celebrate the Church hierarchy with ever more elaborate ecclesiastical dress, exalting the worship of God and Christ through beautiful vestments, and on the other hand, simplicity (seen in plain, unadorned clothing) was the focus of the early Church. There has occasionally been criticism of this focus on ornate design that may celebrate the individual rather than spirituality (Renne, 2010; Mayo, 1984). While simplicity and humility characterized the early Church, that focus was reduced over the centuries, however by the 1950s, the Catholic Church began to focus again on the values of equality and democracy. With our new Pope Francis, there is now a focus on downplaying distinctions between church leadership and lay members. Dress makes the values of humility and simplicity visible. These values are critical to Pope Francis, who has created a "none-too-subtle Vatican 'dress code'" (McGough, 2014).

Recently Pope Francis wrote a book in which he explains his values and faith that are based on humility (Pope Francis & Tornielli, 2016). Pope Francis favors a simple lifestyle, in opposition to the extravagance that characterized the lives of former popes. Pope Francis wears simpler vestments void of ornamentation. In turning his back on decades of costly, ornate silks and embroidered garments, and the traditionally red papal shoes made by Prada, Pope Francis clearly made a statement to the clergy (McGough, 2014; Horowitz, 2013).

Since popes set the tone for all priests, their values transmit down to the local level. A sartorial crisis happened when a new priest was assigned to my parish. He was a very big man, and the ornate but small liturgical garments left by the former priest were not usable. Soon thereafter a new deacon was appointed, and he was quite tall. Clearly, sets of new vestments were needed in all five liturgical colors for both the priest and deacon. The parish had no funds for this, so the garments needed to be done with a strict budget in mind.

Aesthetic Properties, Visual Impact, Elements and Principles of Design

The priest and deacon required that I make simple chasubles (for the Priest) and dalmatics (for the Deacon) following the traditional style worn through the ages. The five colors have been specified by church history, and I was not allowed to vary the hues by much. Pope Francis' focus on simplicity was eagerly embraced by the Priest and Deacon who asked me to follow the simple designs of the past but to keep it very simple. That is what I did. They wanted garments in cotton, and did not want silk, embroidery, applique or quilting. The only ornamentation

allowed was contrasting fabric on the yoke for the chasuble, and bands for the dalmatic. Because of the restrictions, few design elements were allowed. What that left was contrast and texture and piping in order to get visual impact.

Process, Technique and Execution

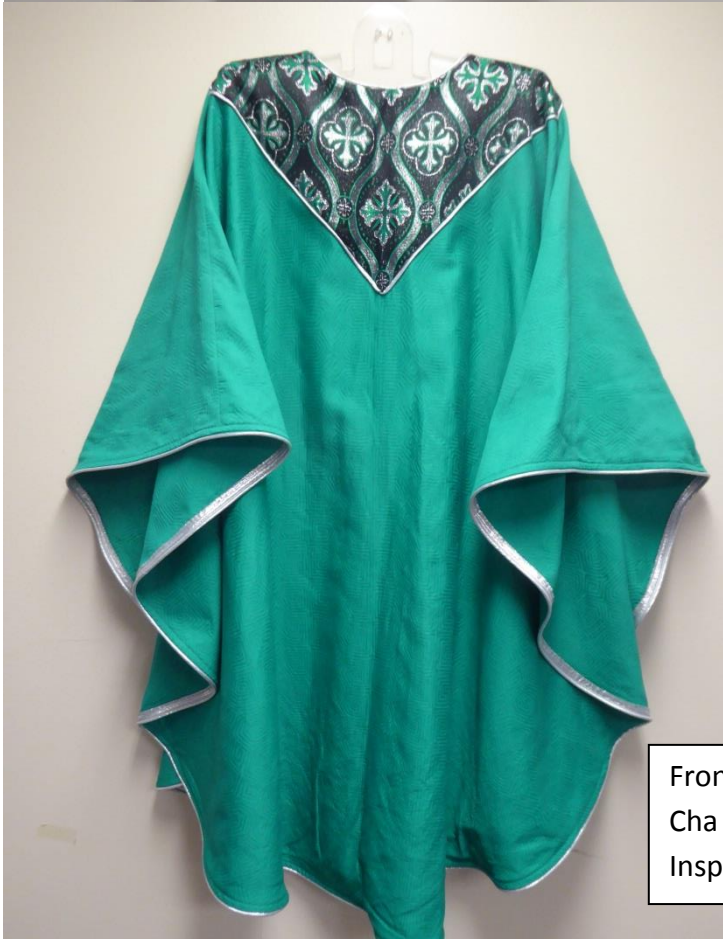
A review of both primary and secondary was undertaken to ensure that I stayed within the historical norms. I also interviewed priests at several levels of the Church hierarchy and found that I was not allowed to venture into anything original or innovative in terms of design or even nuances or shades of the liturgical colors (white, gold, red, green, purple). Some of these colors were hard to find in fabric shops, and I needed very wide fabrics at a reasonable price point. While the garments could have been purchased from specialty suppliers (for between \$300-\$3000 each) I had a small budget. Due to the width of the chasuble, I needed very wide fabrics. In the end, the line of 10 garments cost approximately \$3,000 in materials.

Design Contribution, Originality, Innovation, Relation to Existing Knowledge

Due to the constraints that I was given, I had a very well scripted set of rules that did not allow originality or innovation. All I could do was to simplify as much as possible. I had to do extensive research to ensure that I followed the Catholic Church's sumptuary laws, and in doing so I've replicated garments of the past but with modern construction techniques.

References

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Front, back and detail for Priest's
Chalice Title: Tradition and Simplicity
Inspired a Set of Catholic Liturgical