

THE CHASUBLE AND OTHER LITURGICAL VESTMENTS

The Purpose and Symbolism of Vestments
For the Pastor and his Liturgical Assistants



Painting of a Lutheran Divine Service In 17th century Hamburg, Germany

...ministers act in the place of Christ, and do not represent their own persons, according to
48] Luke 10, 16: *He that heareth you heareth Me.*

Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article VII & VIII.47,48

At the outset we must again make the preliminary statement that we 1] do not abolish the Mass, but religiously maintain and defend it. For among us masses are celebrated every Lord's Day and on the other festivals, in which the Sacrament is offered to those who wish to use it, after they have been examined and absolved. And the usual public ceremonies are observed, the series of lessons, of prayers, vestments, and other like things.

Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV.1-2

BACKGROUND

Unlike the Old Testament Levitical Priesthood (see Exodus 28:1-43), there are no divinely prescribed vestments neither for the Apostles nor the pastors after them. However, the Church, in her time-tested wisdom saw the gradual development of vestments uniquely identified with the clergy and other liturgical assistants (deacons, acolytes, etc).

While there are no Scriptural requirements for vestments there are no laws against them either. This being said, the lack of neither a command nor a prohibition does not mean that such things should be dealt with without careful thought, purpose, a view to the larger church throughout the ages.

In his chapter covering vestments in the book, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, John T. Pless notes:

...liturgical vestments developed out of ordinary civilian dress of the late Roman empire. Between the fourth and ninth centuries these items of clothing became ecclesiastical garments invested with specific liturgical meaning. Liturgical attire developed from two basic types of Roman clothing: an indoor tunic and an outdoor cloak. The indoor tunic survived as the alb, while the outdoor cloak became the chasuble, and, eventually, the cope. [...] Only after the clothing of Roman antiquity was in regular use in the church's liturgy was the theological meaning assigned to the various garments. [pp.219,220]

This development from the early church continued through the Middle Ages and into the Lutheran Reformation era. Pless writes on the attitude of the various Lutheran and non-Lutheran Reformers on vestments:

The question of vestments had to be faced by the Reformers. The Anabaptists and the Reformed rejected vestments as detestable reminders of the papal church. For Luther, vestments belonged within the realm of Christian liberty. [...] Article XXIV of the Apology states that the Church of the Augsburg Confession [the Lutheran Church] has not abolished the Mass but celebrates it every Sunday and on other festivals and maintains "traditional liturgical forms, such as the order of lessons, prayers, vestments, etc." The research of Günther Stiller and Arthur Carl Piepkorn demonstrates that the historic vestments (alb, chasuble, and stole) continued to be used in many places within the Lutheran Church [Germany, Scandinavia, etc.] well into the 18th century. For the most part

these vestments were rejected by the proponents of Calvinism, Pietism, and Rationalism. It was under these alien influences that the black gown of the academy [or judges] enters into liturgical usage in the Lutheran Church. [pp.221, 222]

PURPOSE OF VESTMENTS

The purpose of vestments is threefold: to cover the person serving publicly in the liturgy; to indicate an office; and to reverently and joyfully bring color and symbolism to the visual sense in the Divine Service. Using the historic vestments also gives a visual indication of our continuity with the church throughout the centuries. We do not claim to be a new church or teach new doctrine but are confessing the apostolic faith. Contrary to the radical Reformers and the later Pietists, Lutherans did not desire to communicate anything whereby someone would conclude we are a new church or anything less than reverence before the altar of Christ in the Divine Service.

THE VARIOUS HISTORIC VESTMENTS COMMONLY IN USE

Alb – from the Latin “alba tunica” (white garment) – This is the basic garment that may be worn by the pastor and any other assistants (deacons, acolytes, crucifers, etc.) serving with liturgical duties in the Divine Service or other orders (Matins, Vespers, etc.). This vestment covers the person and is white as a reminder of the righteousness of Christ and His forgiveness that covers our sin. It provides a white background for clergy with a stole and/or chasuble over the alb.

Surplice – This white garment is simply a more flowing and looser form of the alb that is traditionally worn over the black cassock. It has the same symbolism as the alb. In longer standing traditions the surplice is used for non-Communion services such as Matins and Vespers, for weddings and funerals, or sometimes for lay assistants in the liturgy (deacons, acolytes, choirs, etc.). Historically, it was first developed as a looser fitting version of the alb so as to allow a heavy fur coat to be worn underneath it in colder climates in Europe in times when there was no heating system invented yet.

Cassock – was a closer-fitting black garment that was originally the street wear of clergy and academics (professors) in the Middle Ages. It was close-fitting around the arms and top and loose from the waist down to the ankles. Its color was black to indicate solemnity and humility. The cassock was the fore-runner of the modern clergy shirt and white collar – the everyday uniform of pastors. Technically speaking, it is not a vestment but simply a daily clergy uniform and

sort of “undergarment” at least liturgically speaking. The blackness of the garment indicates death and sin, while the white collar indicates the holiness of the God’s Word which is spoken. The cassock (without a clerical collar) may be worn by any lay liturgical assistant under the surplice (or cotta).

Stole – a neck-piece or scarf-like cloth in the color of the seasons of the Church Year with appropriate Christian symbols adorning it. For pastors it hangs straight down in two equal lengths. For deacons it is worn as an attached sash, diagonally across the body. For each it indicates the office held by the man serving. For pastors it is first placed on them in the rite of ordination. The stole should not be worn by those not ordained (laity, vicars, acolytes, confirmands).

Tippet – the tippet is particular kind of stole, sometimes called a preaching stole or preaching scarf. It is always black and not particularly adorned. It is worn by ordained pastors for the prayer offices (Matins and Vespers) and other orders where he preaches in that particular service, most often on weekdays.

Chasuble – a circular or oval shaped garment worn over the alb and stole only by the ordained pastor who is serving as celebrant of the Lord’s Supper in the Divine Service. The chasuble is made in the colors of the Church Year and matches the stole and other altar paraments. It is an exclusively Eucharistic (communion) garment. It brings adornment and emphasizes the reverence we have for the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. The chasuble has been the standard communion vestment of clergy through the ages, including Lutheran clergy in better times.

Cope – Developed from a cape and of similar origins as the chasuble, the cope often featured a hood-like design on the back. It is customarily used by the pastor in processions, ground-breakings, for blessing Palms on Palm Sunday at a solemn Vespers, or when conducting rites outdoors in colder weather. It is also used by bishops being honored at particular solemn or festive occasions.

Cincture – a robe or band-like belt to hold together the alb folds, symbolizing readiness for service.