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Clothing the Body of Christ: An Inquiry about the Letters of Paul

The motto of the school where I teach — Saint John’s University in Collegeville, Minnesota — is *Induamur arma lucis*, Saint Jerome’s late fourth-century Latin rendering of Saint Paul’s first-century Greek invitation,¹ “Let us put on the armor of light!” (Rom 13:14), more literally, “Let us clothe ourselves with the armor of light!”² The invitation was part of the foundation of Saint John’s Abbey when Benedictines ventured before the Civil War from Saint Vincent’s Abbey — in Latrobe, Pennsylvania — to the Upper Midwest, where monks of Bavarian origins founded the school and dedicated themselves to educating poor, German Catholics in the spare farming region of nineteenth-century central Minnesota.³ As some areas of Minnesota had already been occupied and settled by national communities of Lutherans — Swedes, Norwegians, Finns, whose churches maintained the languages and customs of their ancestors — the pioneering monks ventured to a place just west of Saint Cloud, where the Benedictine monks were readily distinguishable in their black, hooded habits. While in Europe at

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¹ *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, ed. Bonifatius Fischer, Iohanne Gribomont, H.F.D. Sparks, and W. Thiele, 3rd edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 1983) 1765. An English cognate, “indument,” of the Latin word *indumentum* was used in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, and for a little longer in the scientific disciplines of zoology and botany. See “indument,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition (Oxford University Press 1989); Alcuin Library, Saint John’s University, 16 March 2010; <http://dictionary.oed.com> to “indument,” with etymology, citations, and date chart.

² I thank Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, Kimberly Belcher, the Minnesota regional group of the North American Academy of Liturgy (Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, 29 October 2009), and the members of the Early Liturgy Seminar of the NAAL meeting (Milwaukee, 9 January 2010), who reviewed this essay and offered assessment and criticism.

³ See Colman J. Barry, *Worship and Work: Saint John’s Abbey and University, 1856–1992*, third edition (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 1994) 3–24.

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the time of Martin Luther and the Reformation, Catholicism had been the Christian foundation and reforming Protestants the alarming novelty, in America the opposite was often the case, with Protestants — at first Puritans, then Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists — as the Christian foundation and Roman Catholics the social newcomers.⁴

A significant marker of social change in the religious landscape was clothing; the habits of monks, nuns, and priests signaled a new kind of Christianity, a consolation to pioneering German Catholics in Minnesota, a fright, perhaps, to Lutherans who had preceded them to the territory. That the monks chose *Induamur arma lucis*, “Let us clothe ourselves with the armor of light,” as the motto might have signaled their charge in the face of Protestant Americans. In a life cloistered from the established cultures, the monastic cowls hollered in silence, “We are here; we are Christian; we are not like you.” Clothing did that there and then as it does here and now, in religious and secular societies, marking people as alike and different by the similarities and dissimilarities of the styles, fabrics, and colors of their dress.

In four decades of the reform of Roman Catholic worship after Vatican II, even as many Christian communities maintain distinctive clothing for ministers and new members, virtually no critical attention has been accorded the New Testament witness about Jesus’ or the first-century church’s clothing.⁵ It’s a striking lacuna, for clothing is omnipresent in the New Testament, from the depiction of John the Baptist a few chapters into the canon — “John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather girdle around his waist” (Matt 3:4) — to him who sat upon the white horse “clad in a robe dipped in blood” a few chapters from the canon’s end (Rev 19:13).

Ignorance about clothing in the theological academy is not surprising in some ways, because for a long time studies have generally assumed that no ritual vesture was employed in the first few

⁴ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churaching of America, 1776–2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP 2006), especially “The Coming of the Catholics, 1850–1926”: 117–55.

⁵ Only four of the 9,100 pages of the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1964ff.) are accorded the theology of clothing in the New Testament; see Albrecht Oepke, vol. 2 (1964) 318–21.

centuries of Christianity: "There is one thing quite certain: at the beginning of the Christian era there were *no sacred vestments at all*, that is, no garments, whether of ordinary or special form, blessed and set aside for liturgical use. . . . It would be entirely fanciful to suppose that at the 'breaking of Bread' mentioned in Acts and elsewhere full modern ritual, whether East or West, was employed, or special vestments — still less those of modern type! — were worn."⁶ Such certitude about any issue regarding worship in antiquity piques suspicion, resulting in this reading of the scriptures for contrary evidence, particularly in the early stratum of Christian worship, the writings of the New Testament and, from there, in this inquiry, the earliest of that early stratum: the letters of Saint Paul. Although the total number of verses the apostle wrote about clothing are fewer in number than those he wrote about Baptism or the Lord's Supper, Paul wrote more often of clothing than of those rites.⁷

CLOTHING IN THE GOSPELS

This fledgling consideration of clothing in Paul's writings is also stirred up by how often the evangelists described and then amended details of Jesus' clothing, revelatory in at least two ways. The first way is when the same narrative is carried from one evangelist to another, and in the later version the garment is either changed or described differently. This is manifest, for example, in the synoptic narratives of the Transfiguration, in which the garment of Jesus, the *μάτιον*, is identical in all of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as is its color, white. Yet the evangelists modified how the garment is whitened or what quality the "white" of Jesus' clothing had. Mark wrote that Jesus' "garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them" (9:3), a close description of the laundering process that would be odd if clothing had had no relevance to the community for which he

⁶ Raymund James, "The First Appearance of Christian Vestments," *Orate Fratres* 12 (1938) 113–22, here at 114, with capitalization, punctuation (save the ellipsis) and italics as in original.

⁷ He wrote of Baptism in three letters — Romans, Galatians, and 1 Corinthians — and of the Lord's Supper in one, 1 Corinthians, but he wrote of clothing in five of the seven letters: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and 1 Thessalonians. There are no baptism or clothing references in Philipians or Philemon.

wrote. Matthew described that Jesus' "garments became white as light" (17:2), and, for his version, Luke describes the garment as "dazzling white" (9:29). One must at least entertain that each author edited the descriptions based on what he experienced of clothing in the community in which his Gospel would be proclaimed.

The second way is when in the same basic gospel narrative particular garments are different. This is so in a few stories, but most readily apparent in the empty-tomb narratives of the synoptic gospels, in which those announcing at the tomb that Jesus is risen wear a garment unique to that gospel. In the Gospel of Mark (16:5), for example, one finds "a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white stole" (στολήν λευκήν). In antiquity the "stole" of Mark meant a "long, flowing robe," "equipment," or "dress for battle."⁸

Matthew has not a young man at the tomb, but an angel, whose "appearance was like lightening, and his raiment white as snow" (28:3),⁹ "raiment" translating ἐνδύμα, a change from Mark's "stole."¹⁰ Matthew's "raiment" was more generic than Mark's "stole," since ἐνδύμα comes from ἐνδύειν, with the root (-du-) meaning "garment," and the prefix (en-) meaning "on."

Finally, in Luke (24:4), one finds neither Mark's young man nor Matthew's angel, but "two men" at the tomb dressed in "dazzling apparel" (εσθήτι αστραπτούση).¹¹ The qualifier, "dazzling," is uniquely Lukan and used only twice, here at the empty tomb and as a description of the kind of white garment worn by Jesus at the Transfiguration, "dazzling white." Yet — distinguishing the clothing at the empty tomb from Mark's "stole" and Matthew's "raiment" —

⁸ See *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, et al. (Oxford: Clarendon 1983; with revised supplement 1996) 1648 [Liddell]; *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ed. G.W.H. Lampe (Oxford: Clarendon 1961) 1261–262 [Lampe]; *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition, ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: Chicago UP 2000) 946 [Danker].

⁹ Liddell: 1992–993; Lampe: 1525; Danker: 1085.

¹⁰ Liddell: 561; Lampe: 469–70; Danker: 333–34.

¹¹ The noun is first, εσθήτι, "apparel," with the adjective αστραπτούση, "dazzling," following. The root of "dazzling," the αστρα- at the start, means "like stars." For εσθήτι, see Liddell: 696; Lampe: 551; Danker: 395–396; for αστραπτούση, see Liddell: 262; Lampe: 248; Danker: 146.

Luke employed another garment, εσθής, “apparel.” In pre-Christian times this “apparel” described what female prophets wore when proclaiming divine oracles,¹² striking because Luke had a penchant for female characters and prophecy. The new garment on the proclaimers of the resurrection suggests a link between the third evangelist’s tombic fashion and the theological, christological emphases of his Gospel.

The variants in synoptic portraits of what proclaimers of the resurrection wore are sometimes obscured in translations (perhaps by necessity), but some translations are attentive to the differences, as here with “stole” as a cognate of Mark’s στολή, “raiment” for Matthew’s ένδυμα, and “apparel” for Luke’s εσθής. If the synoptic evangelists varied details of the garb based on their experience of celebrating in their communities — as the evangelists did when describing the variety of rituals at the Last Supper¹³ — is it not possible that details and types of clothing were also amended to reflect garments in the traditions and experience of the assemblies in which the evangelists worshiped? We look at the earliest stratum of Christian literature to consider what the apostle Paul wrote about clothing and what the communities to which he wrote might have been doing in their rites that involved clothing.

CLOTHING AND INITIATION

Nearly all commentaries on Pauline texts about clothing assume that the inspired authors were writing not about actual clothing used in Christian rites — usually by calling the clothing terms “metaphorical” or “figurative”¹⁴ — or, alternately, commentators associate the clothing with Baptism, even though Baptism is not

¹² See Liddell, 969, who cites Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon* for εσθήτι as garments of women prophets.

¹³ See Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:15-20.

¹⁴ Many commentaries simply ignore the ritual possibilities of ενδυειν, but most not ignoring the ritual implications dismiss them with language such as a “figurative use of ενδύω,” as “this metaphor of clothing,” Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary 41 (Dallas: Word Books 1990) 156; “[T]he language is certainly figurative,” wrote Hans Dieter Betz, *Der Galaterbrief: Ein Kommentar zum Brief des Apostels Paulus an die Gemeiden in Galatien* (Munich: Kaiser 1988) 328–33; see also Franz Mußner, *Der Galaterbrief* (Freiburg: Herder 1974) 262–63.

usually mentioned in New Testament passages about clothing. Because of this inclination in commentaries and critical studies, the realization is sober that there are really only two passages that link clothing and Baptism, one from Paul, Galatians 3:23-28, and the other attributed to Paul, Colossians 2:9-12, so we begin with these two.

Galatians 3:23-28. We start with the earlier passage,¹⁵ Galatians, a letter that takes up one of Paul's major theological theses, the relation of faith and the law, from which he moves to Baptism: "Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have *put on*¹⁶ Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, no male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In commenting on the clothing of the passage, Hans Dieter Betz,¹⁷ drawing from — and in the end criticizing — Heinrich Schlier,¹⁸ writes that "the Apostle reminds the Galatians, as people whose *subjective* faith is wavering, of the *objective* basis of their existence. . . . The objective basis upon which the Christian existence rests and of which Paul reminds the Galatians is the official declaration of adoption, a legal act which took place at Baptism. . . . In other words, the objective basis of which Paul speaks is faith in Christ, but not the sacrament as a *ritus ex opere operato*."¹⁹

¹⁵ The majority of scholars posit that the Letter to the Galatians was written by Paul from Ephesus, which means that it was written in the year 54 or 55. Others posit that it was written from Macedonia, in the year 57. These few years of difference are not consequential for this argument. See Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday 1997) 467–82.

¹⁶ ἐνεδύσασθε, first aorist middle indicative.

¹⁷ Betz, 328–33.

¹⁸ Heinrich Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater*, Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament 7 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht 1971).

¹⁹ The Latin *ritus ex opere operato* means "from doing the work," meaning the "rite," with *ex opere operato* used commonly to refer to mere physical actions apart from the intentions of those who perform them.

Betz here goes on at length in his interpretation of the passage to distance Galatian faith, efficacious for salvation, from its ritual actions, or “works.” Though commenting on a mid-first-century letter of Paul, Betz’s separation of “faith” from “rite,” of subjective from objective, lines up the central (and Protestant) appreciation of interiority, faith, as distinct from the external works of ritual behavior, *ritus ex opere operato*. By Betz’s division Roman Catholic sacramentalism is the loser, and in the indictment he relates Catholic experience to “magic ideas” and “cultic formalism,” naming its sources in “mystery religions,” Gnosticism, Iranian background, ethnology, and primitive religions.²⁰

If we take the apostle’s words less polemically, Paul describes members brought into the Body of Christ as an act of getting dressed. One might project that his rhetoric about social divisions of race, slavery, and gender was predicated on a ritual action that blurred physical differences in the bodies of the initiated by covering them with uniform vesture, dressing a new body into which they were being incorporated.²¹ As in all rites of initiation, Baptism tied the initiated into a new society, rite as social glue, after which the individual has a new state of being, is bound to a new community, with webs of cohesion wrought by regular meeting, at which there may have been symbolic and oratorical reminders of the one-time, originating socially binding rite.

Since Paul’s Letter to the Galatians had already concentrated on the relation of law to faith, one of the distinctions that the apostle worked to erase in the earliest communities was between Jews and non-Jews, once church leaders in Jerusalem had decided, under Paul’s strong influence, that the Law was no longer of utter consequence in God’s regard.²² This social leveling was demonstrated by a clothing ritual if those ascending from the waters of baptism had been wrapped or clothed, individually or as a group, in similar garb. In the rhetoric of the passage, this indication was dispatched with few words, yet the proximity of clothing and Baptism warrants the inquiry — contrary to most (and mostly Protestant) scholarship

²⁰ Betz, 328–33.

²¹ On gender and clothing, see, for example, Wayne A. Weeks, “Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity,” *History of Religions* 13 (1974) 165–208.

²² Galatians 2:1–21, Acts 15:1–29.

about the New Testament and worship in Paul's communities — about whether the actions were actual or merely metaphorical. To counter the anti-Catholic bias of early New Testament criticism, which often nullified ritual language (as in the commentary by Hans Dieter Betz, above), I ask if the apostle's words might have depicted a ritual action of the Galatian church to dissociate its social values from the social values of the world outside the Church.

Paul employed the verb "to clothe," *ενδύειν*, whenever he wrote of the action of clothing. As with the verbs "to give thanks" (*ευχαριστέω*) and "to baptize" (*βατίζω*) in the writings of Paul,²³ the rites celebrated with social actions more than with things. Later, in the canonical gospels, "to give thanks" is predicated on the materials of bread and wine, and "to baptize" on water, but in this earliest testimony Paul's theology predicates God's presence not so much on things as on the interpersonal dynamism of Christian celebrations, on "to clothe" before the particular items of clothing as they will be manifest in the gospels.

One grammatical particular is consequential for hypothesizing that the clothing passages might have been, in whole or in part, initiatory. The Greek aorist tense indicates not only that an action happened in the past, but that it had happened only once. Unlike the regular assembly for the proclamation of the word and giving thanks to God, rites that took place repeatedly in the communities, in Galatians the apostle's use of the aorist form of "to clothe" suggests that it had taken place only once in each of the lives of those who received his missive. For this reason I have put the tenses of the clothing verbs in the footnotes. (As we will see, the passages in Part 2 of this essay, as below, are distinguishable because of a change in the verb form.)

Colossians 2:9-12, 3:9-14. As in the Letter to the Galatians, clothing is rhetorically proximate to Baptism in the Letter to the Colossians,²⁴

²³ For *ευχαριστέω*, see Romans 1:8, 1:21, 14:6 (twice), 16:4; 1 Corinthians 1:4, 1:14, 10:30, 11:24, 14:17, 14:18; 2 Corinthians 1:1, Philippians 1:3, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2:13, 5:18; Philemon 4; for *βατίζω*, see Romans 6:3 (twice), 1 Corinthians 1:13, 1:14, 1:15, 1:16 (twice), 1:17, 10:2, 12:13, 15:29; Galatians 3:27.

²⁴ A slight majority of biblical scholars do not accept that Colossians was written by the apostle Paul himself, but by a follower. If the majority is accepted,

but here the rhetoric draws more from Judaism, with which Paul, a Jew, and perhaps the Pauline author of this letter were familiar: “In him [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by taking off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with him in Baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.” It seems likely that the phrase “circumcision made without hands” refers to Baptism, which, for Jewish members of the Galatian fellowship, would have supplied them with a ready transfer to a new, irreversible, socially cohesive community, wrought by a rite of initiation that included stripping (*απεκδύσει*), washing, and clothing. In theology, christology, and paschal theology, this passage echoes Paul in the Letter to the Romans (6:3-4): “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried with him by Baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

Also, the Colossians passage uses a verb relatively rare in early Christian literature, “stripping,” here translated (in verse 11) as “taking off.” Taking off one’s clothes before Baptism is operative for imagining that the ritual stripping happened before entering the water, for when the author writes that those initiated were “taking the body of flesh off in the circumcision of Christ,” it would have indicated to hearers at Colossae — as is usually predicated only on later, post-New Testament rites — that those initiated took off their pre-baptismal clothes as a sign of taking off the “body of flesh,” in the author’s suasion. This is more convincing as we read a little further (3:9-14): “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have *put off*²⁵ the old nature with its practices and have *put on*²⁶ the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image

the letter is dated to the 80s of the first century, written from Ephesus. If the minority, the span to which the letter is ascribed is 61–63, by Paul or Timothy, from Rome, or to the years 54–56, from Ephesus. See Brown, 599–619.

²⁵ *απεκδυσάμενοι*, first aorist middle participle.

²⁶ *ενδυσάμενοι*, first aorist middle participle.

of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all. *Clothe yourselves*,²⁷ then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, with compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these [clothe yourselves in] love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." As the letter had had only "stripping" earlier (2:9-12), here the same verb, ἀπεκδυσάμενοι (3:9) is complemented by the verb for clothing, ενδυσάμενοι (3:10) and ενδύοισασθε (3:12).

As earlier with the Galatians passage, so here: Commentaries on these passages of Colossians find the sources of the rites in odd religions employed rhetorically to indict the ritual element as aberrant. Eduard Lohse, for example, writes that "the image of putting off and putting on a garment was widespread in the ancient world and was used in the mystery religions," after which he catalogues Isis' rites, images of animals, garments "filled with powers of the cosmos," "Gnostic texts," and pagan believers "taken up into the divine world and suffused with its light and power."²⁸

A quality shared by Galatians and Colossians passages is the erasure of social distinctions, which would have represented their cohesive society, visually manifest by similar clothing after baptism. The social reckoning of the newly baptized Colossians shares some ingredients with Galatians, "Greek and Jew," rendered with different words (and in reversed order) with "circumcised and uncircumcised," and also from Galatians "slave" and "free." Missing from Colossians is the Galatian "no male and female," but added here in Colossians are two new populations, "barbarian" and "Scythian," the latter its only appearance in the New Testament.²⁹

²⁷ ενδύσασθε, first aorist middle imperative.

²⁸ *Die Briefe an die Kolosser und an Philemon* (Göttingen: Van der Hoeck and Ruprecht 1968) 204-05.

²⁹ "Barbarian" appears in five other places of the New Testament, twice in Acts, at 28:2 and 28:4, three times in Paul, at Romans 1:14 and twice in the same verse 1 Corinthians 14:11.

Two more qualities of the Colossians passage are notable. The first is the image of “taking off” the “old nature with its practices” and putting on “the new nature.” As in Galatians, the translation here does not pick up the clothing aspect of the verb *ενδύειν*, but in both the clothing vocabulary would have acted in the imagination of the assembled who would hear or read the Pauline missive. The second quality, seen a number of times in Pauline correspondence, is the use of the rhetoric of clothing for immaterial characteristics, as here with the author’s command to “clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing and forgiving one another” (3:12). Predicating these social qualities on clothing verbs does not exclude that some material element of first-century Christian clothing was used in the rituals.

In the community at Colossae, there may have been rites of stripping and clothing, which the author or authors employed for emotional and social qualities and bonds. The same clothing verb is used four times in a passage at the end of 1 Corinthians (15:51-56): “Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must be *clothed*³⁰ with imperishability, and this mortal nature must be *clothed*³¹ with immortality. When the perishable is *clothed*³² with the imperishable, and the mortal is *clothed*³³ with immortality, then the saying shall come to pass: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory . . .!’” With all these verses, Galatians, Colossians, and 1 Corinthians, it seems the odder interpretation — if until now nearly universal in New Testament studies — that argues for the interior qualities without external expression. It need not have been either/or, either clothing or “compassion, kindness, lowliness,” and so on. Rather, clothing would have been a visual sign of response to God’s love and of the new initiates’ quickening to that love.

³⁰ *ενδύσασθαι*, first aorist infinitive.

³¹ Same form as previous verb, note 30.

³² *ενδύσῃται*, aorist middle subjunctive.

³³ *ενδύσῃται*, aorist middle subjunctive.

SWORDS, HELMETS, CHEST- AND HEART-PROTECTION

As mentioned earlier, the verbs of the first part of the article were, for the most part, in the past (aorist) tense, which lends weight to the possibility that the clothing rites were initiatory, or at least partially so, because the aorist tense indicates a past action done only once. This shifts in the passages to follow, where many of the verbs are in the imperative mood, indicating command, and the rhetoric of the passages complements the verbs because most take up Christian clothing at the end of time, for the language is militaristic, inciting those who would hear the passage to bear arms and wear protective clothing.

1 Thessalonians 5:5-8. As an emerging new religion, gradually growing independent of Judaism, Christianity was brand new when *1 Thessalonians* was written (50–51 A.D.);³⁴ indeed, at that time, as Jews and Gentiles were coming together in Christian communities for the first time, their faith and rites in flux. The rhetoric and theology of *1 Thessalonians* are not as arresting as Paul's rhetoric and theology in longer, more complicated epistles: Romans, say, or *1* and *2 Corinthians*. But *1 Thessalonians* piques attention about clothing in Paul's communities because — as leaders discerned what of other religions it would maintain or not — it does not mention Baptism: "You are all children of light and of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and *put on*³⁵ the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation."

As mentioned earlier, Galatians and Colossians are the only books in the New Testament in which the clothing and Baptism are linked. Here in *1 Thessalonians* clothing is not only *not* connected to Baptism but is of a whole different quality, for the clothing prescribed is military, with its "breastplate of faith and love" and "helmet" of "the hope of salvation." The absence of any text on Baptism at the time of *1 Thessalonians* — *1 Corinthians* will be

³⁴ See Brown: 457, 456–66.

³⁵ ενδυσόμενοι, first aorist middle participle.

the first, dated to 56–57 A.D.³⁶ — has not kept scholars from inserting Baptism, baptismal theology, and even a baptismal hymn into Paul's letter, as one finds in Gerhard Friedrich's work "a pagan, Jewish-Christian baptism song" in 1 Thessalonians.³⁷ Friedrich's argument for Baptism in 1 Thessalonians is common, yet this assumption is a problem because Baptism had not yet appeared in Christianity, and one cannot blithely predicate Baptism on a text where it is not mentioned. It reveals the long-standing assumption that Baptism was the *only* medium of initiation from the faith's emergence.

Romans 13:11-14. A few years later, to a community far from Thessalonika above, Paul wrote the following near the end of his theologically freighted Letter to the Romans: "You know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then put away the works of darkness and *put on the armor of light*; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But *put on the Lord Jesus Christ*, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." The passages from 1 Thessalonians and Romans share striking specific similarities. First, while Thessalonians mentions "light" and "darkness," "day" and "night" proximate to "breastplate" and "helmet," the passage from Romans also mentions "day" and "night," "light" and "darkness" in the same place where the "armor" appears. Second, Thessalonians mentions "sober" and "drunk," and Romans "drunkenness." Third, Thessalonians mentions "awake" and "sleep," while Romans also uses "to wake from sleep." While it must be more than coincidence that breastplate, helmet, and armor coincide with Paul's rhetoric about the end of the world in these three pairings, it is not possible to reconstruct what of the rites in Rome and Thessalonika might have connected Paul's rhetoric about military fashion with light and darkness, day and night, sobriety and drunkenness, and sleeping and waking.

³⁶ Brown, 512, 511–40.

³⁷ Gerhard Friedrich, "Ein Tauflied hellenistischer Judenchristen: 1. Thess. 1, 9f.," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 21 (1965) 502–16.

Ephesians 4:22-24, 6:10-17. Finally, two passages in the Letter to the Ephesians employ verbs of disrobing and clothing. First, in 4:22-24, the apostle advised the members of the community to “Take off your old nature, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and *put on* the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” The images of “old nature,” “new nature,” and “likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” have generally beguiled commentators into the same assumption we saw regarding the Letter to the Colossians,³⁸ that because “nature,” “likeness,” “righteousness” and “holiness” are generally interpreted as non-material objects, so the words of clothing are similarly to be taken as metaphorical. As before, this is possible, but it is also possible that what was “put off” and “put on” was part of the ritual behavior when the Ephesian Christians assembled and that the community expressed interior change by changes of behavior in church. Closer to the end of Ephesians comes that passage linked to 1 Thessalonians and Romans with its vocabulary of warfare: “Finally, find power in the Lord and be strong in his strength. *Clothe yourselves*³⁸ in the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand up against the machinations. For we are not fighting [merely] against flesh and blood, but against leaders, against authorities, against world-rulers of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in heavenly places. *Take up*³⁹ therefore the whole armor of God, that you may be able to resist the evil day and stand against all things. Be firm, therefore, your loins girded with truth, *clothed*⁴⁰ with the breastplate of righteousness, and shod with the readiness of the gospel of peace. In all, take up the shield of faith, with which you can squelch all the flaming darts of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

The common theological quality of all the passages in which Paul wrote of military garments is their anticipation of the end of the world. As 1 Thessalonians reminds its hearers, “Let us keep awake and be sober,” since “we belong to the day,” so Romans, too,

³⁸ ενδύσασθε, present middle imperative.

³⁹ αναλάβετε, first aorist middle imperative.

⁴⁰ ενδυσόμενοι, first aorist middle participle.

reminds those who hear it that “You know what hour it is,” “it is full time for you to awake from sleep,” for “the day is at hand.” Ephesians’ references are not so explicit, but its rhetoric of war and combat are common in Christian (and other religious) argumentation about the cosmic struggle of the end time. Given the distance, in time and place, between the letters to the Thessalonians, Romans, and Ephesians, it is quite amazing that the vocabulary, rhetoric, and defensive society of the books are so consistent.

Christian Clothes and Catholic Works. Martin Luther’s sixteenth-century indictment of the Roman Catholic theology of works was prophetic and necessarily corrective; still, not all ritual actions are the “works” of Luther’s corrective imploring. Works done to win God’s favor, attention, and love are erroneous, and Roman Catholics give thanks for the awakening of Luther’s teaching and the traditions that follow him. But communities of faith still act, still work, still clothe themselves, not to win God’s favor and love, but as expressions of their identity and as thanksgiving for the unearned gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. These are works, but works of acknowledging God, of social cohesion, of gratitude, not of begging for a share in God’s life, which is freely offered, freely received, regardless of how we dress (or undress).

Error concerning the meaning of works in liturgical life, I suspect, is what caused early Protestant biblical critics to erase many vital liturgical elements of the tradition by weak translations and by indicting them as works, *ex opere operato*. Yet in doing so they applied Luther’s theological criticism to rituals and ritual clothing that Luther himself had not excised. Jonathan Z. Smith writes of how biblical criticism linked Catholic traditions to non-Christian religions: “The pursuit of the origins of the question of Christian origins takes us back, persistently, to the same point: *Protestant anti-Catholic apologetics*. It will be my contention . . . that this is by no means a merely antiquarian concern. The same presuppositions, the same rhetorical tactics, indeed, in the main, the very same data exhibited in these early efforts underlie much of our present-day research, with one important alteration, that the characteristics attributed to “Popery,” by the Reformation and post-Reformation controversialists, have been transferred, wholesale, to the religions of Late Antiquity. How else can one explain,

for example, the fact that the most frequent distinction drawn in modern scholarship between the early Christian “sacraments” (especially the Pauline) and those of the “mystery cults” is that the latter exhibit a notion of ritual as *ex opere operato*?”⁴¹

Earlier we saw *ritus ex opere operato* in the commentary of Hans Dieter Betz on the Letter to the Galatians. Clearly Betz considered the clothing element as tainting the purity of Pauline Christianity, so he associated the clothing with heretics, mystery cults, and primitive religions. Jonathan Smith helps interpret this anti-Catholic bias, revealing that in Protestant biblical criticism the “‘apostolic community’ was essentially ‘Protestant,’ and the ‘mystery’ religions essentially ‘Catholic.’”⁴²

In this inquiry about clothing, I take up one aspect of the earliest Christian ritual tradition and suggest that ritual clothing has been excised from much of Christian imagination and its academy as a result of Protestant hegemony in biblical and historical criticism, which most times is a gift to Catholic faith and education, but at times carries anti-Catholic biases. In those early, post-Enlightenment days of biblical criticism, critics, then uncontested by Catholics, could maintain that “we do what Jesus and Paul did” only by neutralizing as metaphorical elements of the Bible they or their communities did not do or like. More candid would have been the recognition that “that was then, this is now,” and there might have been solid reasons — social, cultural, custom, perhaps hygienic — that rendered some aspects of the first-century’s inspired texts imitable and others not so. By looking closely at what is said of clothing in the letters of Paul, I seek to re-associate what about clothing was dissociated in early biblical criticism, then entirely a Protestant enterprise. The separation of the narratives of events of Jesus and Paul from writings about those events was not possible at the Reformation, but once biblical criticism separated events from the writing about the events, the window opened for a hierarchy of truths, for separating true, pristine (and Protestant) Christianity — wrought in the actions of Jesus and experience of

⁴¹ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1990) 34–35; emphasis in Smith, not added.

⁴² Smith, 45.

Paul — from false (and Catholic) accretions from mystery religions, Gnostic sects, Iranian backgrounds, and primitive religions. Thereafter commentators could, likely without intending to do so, divert attention from texts that might undermine a kind of liturgical fundamentalism that still reigns in many churches: We do it because Jesus or Paul did it. The clothing passages of Paul are among the traditions muted in biblical criticism.

Clothes at the Apocalypse. The helmet, sword, and breastplate of Paul's imperatives about the end of time are a theological precedent for the warfare and blood-stained garments of the Book of Revelation.⁴³ The military passages from 1 Thessalonians, Romans, and Ephesians are sobering for this reason, and they reveal that the apostle's rhetoric about clothing, as about many matters, is not simple. His effort to keep Jewish Christians in the new faith while also extending salvation to the Gentiles required complex nuance about ritual behavior; perhaps his wrangling with past and future tenses, with aorist and imperative verbs, reflect some of the complexity of clothing prescriptions in the culture and in the experience of the Jews and Gentiles to whom he preached.

The passages of Part 1, with their aorist verbs, commend the maintenance of clothing today as a vital ingredient of Christian rites as a sign and anticipation of unity in the Church. The common foundation of Baptism and its white garments are also a sign of the indivisibility of the Church, closing the boundary that is sometimes too wide between the ordained and lay baptized.

Clothing and the Evolution of Rites of Initiation. By the time of the emergence of the catechumenate and its elaborate rites of Christian initiation — known mostly from liturgical texts of the third-, fourth-, and fifth-century church orders — the processes of formation and initiation were complex, and likely the result of protracted evolution. The series of rites that made up initiation by the time of the emergence of church orders was likely the result of bringing together rites that in their first appearance were simple: One church anointed, another baptized; still another washed feet. One

⁴³ Blood-stained white robes, at Revelation 7:13-14; other clothing in 1:13, 3:5, 4:4, 7:9, 7:13-14, 14:14, 16:15, 19:15; weapons at 1:16, 2:12, 2:16, 2:27, 9:9, 12:7-17, 13:10, 14:14-16, 16:6, 17:16, 18:12, 18:16, 19:8, 19:13.

church stripped and re-clothed its new members, another church processed in darkness and lighted a fire or candles to brighten the society. The last writings of the New Testament, from the late first and early second centuries, were not far removed from the appearance of church orders, like the Apostolic Tradition at the beginning of the third century.⁴⁴ It seems too quick an evolution if the ritual ingredients were invented, integrated into the ritual tradition, and assembled into protracted rites all in the span of a little more than a century. More likely is that many of the ingredients were simple elements of communal worship when the New Testament books were written, and the writings bear remnants of the experience. How much the nakedness and clothing of the writings of this study — Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 Thessalonians — were part of rites of the first century is beyond what the evidence yields (at least so far), but I suggest that the complex of rites of the process of initiation in the third and fourth centuries emerged as a result of a gradual aggregation as churches learned of other churches' traditions, with adoptions and excisions in fits and starts. Bringing people together in faith and worship called for a reordering of ritual behaviors, with some juggling and invention toward the unity of formerly separate churches.⁴⁵

As churches joined one another in fellowship, a medium of their unity was the exchange and eventual complex taxonomy of rites. Baptism and clothing rites were ready natural complements, for — as celebrators at the Easter Vigil see — neophytes ascending from the waters of baptism clothed make a mess; as, perhaps, the communities depicted in Paul's writing to the Colossians and Ephesians reveal, the vulnerability of believers appearing and descending into the waters naked was then (and would be still) a powerful ritual sign, not lascivious. While cold, vulnerable, and dripping, the wet, ascending neophytes are re-clothed for practical

⁴⁴ Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, L. Edward Phillips, Harold W. Attridge, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary*, Hermeneia series (Minneapolis: Fortress 2002).

⁴⁵ See earlier work, Martin Connell, "Making Christ of the Man Born Blind (John 9:1-41): A Hypothesis," *Ecclesia Orans* 25 (2008) 311-33; idem., "On 'Christ' and 'Anti-Christ' in 1 John 2:18-27: A Hypothesis," *Worship* 83 (2009) 212-34; and "Nisi Pedes, 'Except for the Feet': Footwashing in the Community of John's Gospel," *Worship* 70 (1996) 517-30.

comfort and warmth, a powerful sign of God's and the community's embrace.

Clothing the Church. In studying and reconsidering the social dynamics of Paul's clothing rhetoric, we might say, retrospectively, that "Clothes make the Christian," for clothing might have erased the particulars of the appearance of many *bodies* by blending them visually into the one, sinless *body* of Christ.⁴⁶ One might then better say, "Clothes reveal the Church."

Through two millennia of Christianity, in spite of Baptism's dissociation from Easter and its seasons for centuries, the clothing of Easter remained; all the baptized were wrapped in the white of the Transfigured Christ and of the proclaimers of the resurrection. Through those centuries and still today, all ordained ministers of the Church — from pope to bishop, to priest, to deacon (and to many ministers of the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper) — vest first in white before adding any other ritual garment, a sign that the one-time (aorist), no-turning-back rite of initiation ties them all together in the Church, a foundation on which all ministry is predicated.

In the Fifty Days of the Easter season, presiders vest in white as a sign that in this span the Church gives thanks for and recalls the gift of Baptism, the community's reception of the vivifying gift of the Son of God, who by grace and Baptism we are. Easter white reflects the recent celebration of Baptism at the Easter Vigil and the sum of all the past baptisms of those in the congregation, manifesting the resurrected body of Christ.

⁴⁶ In 1 Corinthians, Paul himself distinguished the plural "bodies" (6:15) from the single "body" (6:13, 6:19); for example, "glorify God in your body" (6:20).



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