

Why do your Ministers wear that Clerical Collar?

by Revd. Dr. Stephen J. Houston D.D.

and

The Reasons why Vestments and Clerical dress are worn by Clergy.

by Revd. Kenneth W. Collins B.A., M.Div.

Why do your Ministers wear that Clerical Collar?

1. That Collar is Biblical.
2. The Collar is not a "Roman" Collar.
3. A distinct dress code is Scriptural.
4. We don't mix up Biblical "Display" and "Tradition" with the "doctrines and tradition of men". We believe that God loves "Display" and "Tradition" as seen in the Old Testament.
5. We also believe how much God loves "Display" in heaven, as we find in the few Scripture passages that we have to describe heaven in the Bible.

This Ecumenical Church stands up for the wearing of the Clerical Collar. It is also mandatory for all of our ordained ministers to wear the Clerical Collar.

Where did the clerical collar originate from?

The collar is always part of a dress code for Protestant preachers and Lawyers in Europe. In days past, these individuals wore black and chose a white sweatband (cravat) to wear around their necks for the purpose of riding on horseback. This became personified in the UK by John Wesley, founder of the Methodists, who rode on horseback the length and breadth of England preaching the Bible. It was also the normal mode of dress for the Protestant Churches of Europe and it was not until the turn of the eighteenth century that the Catholic Church adopted it also. It was never a Roman Catholic style of clergy dress code before that time and not one picture of a Pope or member of the clergy can be seen wearing one. Sadly today most fundamentalist Protestants and some in other nations, erroneously think that the clerical collar is a Roman Catholic instituted style of dress code for their clergy and that Protestants should not wear it, because it represents "religion" and "tradition". This type of thinking is wrong. The clerical collar is a Protestant clergy dress code.

But where did it come from and how far back can we trace its origin and more importantly its scriptural importance?

Today, when you look at the clerical dress of the majority of religions, you will see that the leadership attire is very similar. The adaptations in headgear may be different but the style of robe and neckband are ostensibly the same. Because the Judeo-Christian faith is born out of middle eastern customs, the origin of Christian clerical attire can be narrowed down to a very definite style.

The thirty ninth chapter of the book of Exodus describes in detail how the Lord commanded Moses to make "the garments of ministry". Again in the book of Leviticus in the eight chapter and verse thirteen, tunics were brought for ministry. Modernist Christian anti-Semitic, anti Jewish "replacement theology" in churches has denied the God given institutions in the "spirit" of the Old Testament ceremonial law and replaced it with a variety of man made interpretations concerning ministerial dress code. The most abominable thing to God is for someone to minister to Him in a secular dress code, using the system of the world's style of attire to flaunt in worship before Him. The spiritual significance of the garments, or covering, before God when conducting Worship, is of absolute importance and reverence in His presence and will affect His presence.

The Priestly and Levite attire was carried by the Jews into captivity in Babylon where it was copied, adopted and adapted by the Persians and their Zoroastrian faith which influenced Manichaeism and Buddhism as far east as Mongolia and the Parsee's faith of India (the Bible word Pharisee being the same root word). While in captivity, a section of scholars within Judaism employed the same scrupulous study system as the Parsees did in their study of the Torah and other Holy books. This strand of studious form and its proponents became known amongst the Jews in captivity in Babylon as Pharisee or the group called "the Pharisees". At the time of Christ, "Pharisee" had become the description of a legalistic interpretation of the Biblical texts and a theological position. The Pharisees had not adopted Zoroastrianism and its beliefs, but rather its studious style of precision when studying. This, these Jewish "Theological Pharisees" applied to the Bible Law Prophets and Poets. Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees of Christ's time had a similar style of clerical attire, carrying on the developed style to become what Christ Himself would wear after His theological training. A robe (usually black) with a white Jewish prayer shawl wrapped around the neck. This same style of black robe and white neckband can be seen throughout Judaism, Christianity and Islam, with adaptations in other religions right up to the present day.

A distinct dress code is Scriptural!

"Yahashua" (Jewish phonetic for Jesus) told His disciples not to be called "Rabbi" in the marketplace of life. He also said, "to call no man Father on the earth, for we have only one heavenly Father in heaven." The reason that Jesus told His disciples these things was to instill humility and spiritual authority and for them to learn not to rely on the pride possible that comes with a title. John 13:13.

But, the Bible clearly teaches and historians of middle eastern customs agree, that Jesus of Nazareth was a "Rabbi" in the fullest Rabbinic code of Law and tradition. A lecturer from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem recently stated, "that Jesus was in the fullest sense a Jewish

clergyman and would in fact have had to have been one in order to do what He did and to say what He said". The reason being, that if anyone were to comment upon, teach, or read publicly from the Jewish scriptures, then they would have had to have been a Rabbi.

No one but a Rabbi can open the Word of God and teach from the Pulpit. Jesus would not have been able to assemble disciples or conduct a public ministry unless He was a Rabbi because the Jews would have stoned Him or the Herodians arrested Him. Therefore, Jesus, after His bar-mitzvah in the temple in Jerusalem, had gone through Yeshiva school and had become a Rabbi, reading and attending His local synagogue in Nazareth which was His custom. Jesus also wore clerical attire, which included a black robe over a white ephod (a cassock or ankle length shirt), with a white prayer shawl draped over His shoulders or wrapped around His neck. An expensive purple robe was permitted after the "Rabbi-Teacher" had gained disciples to His teachings and it was for this robe that lots were cast at the foot of the cross. The Roman soldiers had taken His robe off and put an scarlet robe upon Him, scarlet being the Roman color of Caesar or King. This they had done to mock Jesus and by also placing the crown of thorns upon His head.

We should repudiate the myth that Jesus was a poor, uneducated carpenter from Nazareth. All Jewish clergy had another profession. The idea that a slum dwelling Palestinian from a poor family, with His rough uneducated disciples was the "real Jesus", is a western Church contrivance which borders on anti-Semitism, because it completely disregards Jewish history and culture. Jesus was educated to the best Rabbinical standard and the majority of His disciples were also educated.

Destroying the myth!

Also, another myth promoted by the western church, is the foolish idea that the Pharisaical Rabbis only followed Jesus around to criticize Him. This again is plainly wrong according to historical Jewish culture. Jesus had been trained in the Pharisee tradition of study and it was customary that other Pharisaic Rabbis would attend a teaching given by one of their own, in order to contest, ask question about, or warn their fellow Pharisee if someone was out to get him. This is exactly what happened during the ministry of Jesus. This is also why Nicodemus came to Him by night, to find out the truth about His teaching. Jesus' human operation worked under and through the Jewish Law in order to fulfill it. Jesus was a Rabbi and when approached and called by His title "Rabboni", He replied, "and you have called me by my proper title, for indeed I am a Rabbi. It is also interesting to note two other things. Firstly, no one called Him by His first name, for that would have been familiar and derogatory. They called Him "master" or "teacher", "Rabboni" or "Rabbi". The second thing, is the perfunctory respect that the Sanhedrin had to give Jesus, even though they might have wanted to do other wise, but they could not because He was a Rabbi.

Now let us turn our attention to the early church. As Rabbis and their congregations became Christians, in fact the whole of Jerusalem was practically Christianized by 70 AD, the wearing of Rabbinical attire continued in the early church by the leadership. The "Apostles", having been Jesus' "students-disciples" now were "Teachers" in their own right. The Apostle Paul wore

rabbinical clerical attire and so the dress code continued throughout European history within Christianity up and unto the time of its present form This can be seen in the European legal system, where a white collar is worn showing two tabs hanging down, an adaptation which harks back to the old Jewish prayer shawl and of course the same is seen worn by the European Clergy.

In the Old and New Testaments, the Bible clearly teaches that there is a distinct difference between the Clergy and the rest of the congregation. Today, every Christian seems to think that they have the right to have their own "ministry", do their own thing for God and not be under anybody's authority. This is un-scriptural, heretical and a complete blasphemy against God given church government on the earth.

People should not speak evil about something that they do not fully understand or have not been fully educated about. People should not show their ignorance, just because a lot of present day preachers have systematically gone about pulling down the image and presentation of what a clergyman should look like in dress code. Remember, the collar, originally the prayer shawl, yokes us together with Christ in His Ministry on earth, rather than wearing a necktie and being tied to the world and its system.

Oh, congregations love to hear that there is no difference between the pulpit and the pew, because we are all equal in the sight of God. Well, we are all equal in the sight of God, but we are not all equal when it comes to His callings, His offices and His government within His operation on the earth through His Church. That is Scriptural and anyone who preaches otherwise, either preaches it in ignorance or in the "spirit" of rebellion.

The other important issue is, that the world know exactly what clerical attire stands for. Many have abused their position of being properly educated and ordained, but this is not a reason to throw away one of the biggest witnessing tools for the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, God does not want us to act presidential, modern or fashionable in the pulpit or in public life, but rather as signage for eternity, a visible confrontation promoting the inevitability of eternity and the need for people to make a personal decision about Him. It is a "black and white" issue.

by: Revd. Dr. Stephen J. Houston D.D.

The Reasons why Vestments and Clerical dress are worn by Clergy. by Revd. Kenneth W. Collins B.A., M.Div.

Preface: Although Rev. Collins is not an ordained minister in the Ecumenical Church worldwide, he has included an extensive array of frequently asked questions and answers that people have about the origins and reasons for clergy wearing Vestments and Clerical dress on his website. We include some of that information here on our website and we honor his work and give him credit for it by preceding and following the inclusion of his information with his copyright.

It must be stated that Rev. Collins comes from a totally different denomination than our own and therefore some of the attire and titles mentioned in his article are irrelevant to the Ecumenical Church Worldwide as our Ordained Ministers do not wear them or use them.

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Vestment is the term for special clothing worn by the people who conduct a worship service. Vestments have their origin in the ordinary street clothes of the first century, but have more or less remained the same as clothing fashions have changed. (Most Bible translations are not consistent with the names of articles of clothing, and in some translations, people go around wearing ‘garments.’ The original text is consistent and more specific.)

Today, vestments are designed to be worn over street clothes and serve a number of practical purposes: they conceal the distractions of fashionable street clothing, they remove any consideration of what constitutes appropriate attire, and they remind the [congregation](#) that the ministers are not acting on their own, but performing in their official capacities. Vestments are in almost universal use, although in some churches only the choir wears vestments. Common vestments include [albs](#), [cassocks](#), [chasubles](#), [robes](#), and [surplices](#).

Clerical is the term to describe the distinctive street clothing that clergy wear, such as black shirts with white collars. The shirt can be any color, but the public often does not perceive it as a clergy shirt unless it is black. There are two kinds, [neckband shirts](#) and [tab-collar shirts](#).

Firstly, let's talk about Vestments

_Alb

An alb, called a sticharion in Orthodox churches, is a plain, lightweight, ankle-length tunic with long sleeves. It is generally worn with a rope [cincture](#) around the waist. The word alb is short for the the Latin phrase tunica alba, which means white tunic; accordingly, albs are usually made of white or undyed fabric.

In the first century, the tunic was the first article of clothing that you put on in the morning. Working-class people wore knee-length tunics, while older people and people with less active occupations wore ankle-length tunics. It was possible to wear more than one tunic at a time for warmth, but it was considered gauche to wear a tunic without a cincture.

The tunic was originally sleeveless. Greeks and Romans thought sleeves were barbaric because barbarians wore them. (The barbarians lived in colder climates.) Tunics did not acquire sleeves until the third century, when a Roman Emperor came back from a military campaign wearing a tunic with sleeves—much to the horror of the fashion mavens of the day. A modern alb has sleeves because we need to cover street clothing that has sleeves.

In the first century, most people wore a himation over their tunics. The himation was a rectangular garment that was wrapped around the body. The designs on the himation, as well as its color and quality, varied depending on the wearer's sex, occupation, and social status. Because of the relatively precarious way it was worn and the way it hindered movement, people had to remove it when they were engaged in certain physical activities. For example, when blind Bartimaeus ran to Jesus in Mark 10:46-52, he threw off his himation. Matthew 9:20-22 tells about a woman who was healed when she touched the hem of His himation. In Revelation 3:5, 3:18, and 4:4 people are given white himatia. Perhaps the writer of Revelation wanted us to think of people who had received a white tunic at their baptism now receiving an elegant and triumphant white himation to wear over it. The himation never became a church vestment, probably because as servants, the clergy would have to remove it anyway.

Scripture tells us that Jesus wore a himation over a tunic to the crucifixion. The soldiers tore the himation in four pieces, but because the tunic was woven in one piece, they cast lots for it. Jesus' tunic would have been sleeveless and ankle-length—it was the same kind of tunic that the high priest wore when he entered into the Holy of Holies to atone for the sins of the people. Ancient writings from that period refer to seamless tunics, but the technology for weaving them that way was lost in the fall of the Roman Empire.

In the first four centuries of the Church, people were baptized in the nude. For propriety, they were baptized in three groups: men, women, and children; and female deacons baptized the women. When they emerged from the water, they were immediately clothed in a white tunic (a tunica alba, or alb). For this reason, the alb is a reminder of baptism and a symbol of the resurrection on the Last Day.

Anyone who has a leadership role in worship can wear an alb and cincture, whether they are clergy or lay people. Only clergy wear a [stole](#) over the alb. Albs are increasing in popularity not only because they are ecumenical, but also because congregations are increasingly eager to conform to the practices of the ancient Church. In addition, a person wearing an alb is dressed like Jesus.

Cassock

A cassock is a plain, lightweight, ankle-length garment with long sleeves, but no hood. The cassock is a clerical, not a vestment. It serves as an undergarment for vestments, namely the [surplice](#) (a type of [alb](#)) and the [stole](#).

If the cassock has buttons down the center of the front, from the neck to the ankles, it is called a Roman cassock. If it is double-breasted, it is called an Anglican cassock.

Cassocks are worn by both clergy and lay worship leaders, with or without a surplice. Only ordained clergy wear a stole over the surplice.

Cassocks are most common in Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox churches. The cassock-and-surplice combination is very common in Anglican churches. Some choirs wear cassocks with surplices instead of robes. John Wesley wore a cassock and surplice, because he was a priest in the Church of England.

Surplice

A surplice is a very lightweight blouse-like garment with sleeves. It is almost invariably white and it often has lace trim. A surplice is only worn over a [cassock](#), never by itself, and never over an [alb](#) or an [academic gown](#). The surplice is actually a type of alb that is designed to be worn over a cassock. The cassock and surplice combination is very common in Anglican churches, where it is worn by both clergy and lay worship leaders.

Cincture

A cincture, called a *poias* in Orthodox churches, is anything worn around the waist to gather or hold up clothing. Vestments often include cinctures made of cloth or rope. When a cincture is made of leather or plastic, or if it is used with street clothing, it is called a belt.

Here's a tip: If you have a small paunch, and you put the cincture around your waist, it will make you look like you have an enormous beer belly. If you put it at the level of your navel, it will look much better.

Now let's talk about Clerical Attire

The term 'clericals' refers to the clothing and accessories that clergy wear as street clothes, such as a [tab-collar shirt](#), which make it evident that they are clergy. The difference between clericals and vestments is that clericals are street clothes, while vestments are only worn during worship.

Clergy Shirt

A clergy shirt is a clerical, not a vestment. There are two types: [neckband shirts](#) and [tab-collar shirts](#). Though many people associate clergy shirts with the Roman Catholic Church, that is only because that their sheer size makes their clergy conspicuous. Clergy shirts (black shirts with white tabs or collars) are actually of Protestant origin. The Rev. Dr. Donald McLeod of the Church of England invented the neck-band shirt style. Protestant clergy had been wearing white preaching bands for quite some time; McLeod combined them with the detachable collar that was in use at the time. The Roman Catholic Church did not adopt them as streetwear for clergy until later. They modified Rev. McLeod's design into the tab-collar style. Rev. McLeod was a Protestant Minister.

Cope

A cope is an ornate cape-like garment worn by a bishop. In the ancient Church, bishops were generally elderly men who needed a cope to keep warm. The bishop removes the cope and puts on a [chasuble](#) to serve communion or breaking of bread.

Cross (pectoral cross)

Many people wear crosses around their necks as jewelry. If the cross is large enough to be seen from a distance and the chain is long enough to position the cross over the center of the chest, it is called a pectoral cross. Pectoral crosses are quite often worn over albs or cassocks, but seldom if ever over robes. While they look quite nice with vestments, they are too dramatic for street clothes. If you want to wear a cross with street clothes, use a small cross on a neck chain. Christians did not wear crosses or hang them on their walls until after crucifixion was no longer the standard method of capital punishment. Instead, the earliest Christians used the gesture of the [sign of the cross](#).

You will see a pectoral cross [over an alb](#) or over a [cassock and surplice](#).

Clerical Collar or Dog Collar

An Anglican nickname for the collar that accompanies a [neckband shirt](#)—it actually does look something like a flea collar, when you think about it!

Rev. Kenneth Collins, wearing a Neckband Shirt

A neckband shirt is a clerical, not a vestment. It is a type of shirt that has no collar, just has a thin band of cloth around the neck; hence the name. The shirt has a fly front; that is, a flap of cloth that covers the buttons that go down the front. Where you would expect to find a top button—the one you'd fasten before putting on a necktie—the neckband has two buttonholes that line up. There is also another button hole in the neckband in the center of the back.

The wearer puts on the shirt, then sticks a collar stud through the button hole in the back of the neckband, then another collar stud through the buttonholes in the front to fasten the two ends of the neckband together under the throat. The white plastic collar has three small holes in it; one in the middle and one at each end. The wearer slips the center of the collar over the collar stud in the front, then wraps the two ends around the back and slips them over the collar stud in the back. The end effect is a circular collar that goes completely around the neck.

Clergy shirts are Protestant in origin. The Rev. Dr. Donald McLeod of the Church of England invented the neck-band style. Protestant clergy had been wearing white preaching bands for quite some time; McLeod combined them with the detachable collar that was in use at the time. The Roman Catholic Church did not adopt them as street wear for clergy until later. They modified Rev. McLeod's design into the tab-collar style.

Neckband shirts come in all colors and fabrics, but the general public often does not immediately perceive them as clergy shirts if they are not black.

Tab-Collar Shirt

A tab-collar shirt is a clerical, not a vestment. It is a type of shirt that has a folded-down collar with an opening over the top button over the throat. The shirt has a fly front; that is, a flap of cloth that covers the buttons that go down the front. The shirt comes with a white tab that looks something like a tongue depressor. After putting on the shirt, the wearer slips the tab into place. The effect is a black collar with a white rectangle over the throat.

The terms “Roman collar” or “Roman shirt” refer to style, not origin. Clergy shirts are Protestant in origin. The Roman Catholic Church did not adopt them as street wear for clergy until the 19th century.

Tab-collar shirts come in all colors and fabrics, but the general public often does not immediately perceive them as clergy shirts if they are not black.

Robe

Rev. Dr. Stephen Houston wearing a robe

Many people use the term robe as a synonym for vestment, but in actual fact, a robe is not a vestment at all. It is an ankle-length gown with long sleeves, designed to be worn without a [cincture](#). There are four types of robes, all of which are modern forms of the academic robes that professors used to wear while on the job in medieval universities. The four types are choir robes, clergy robes, academic gowns, and judicial robes. Only the first three types are worn in church. All types of robes are designed to be worn over street clothing. The only vestment that can be worn over a robe is a [stole](#).

Choir robes come in a large variety of styles and colors. They give the choir a unified appearance. (However, choirs can wear [cassocks](#) and [surplices](#) instead of robes.)

Academic gowns come in [three forms](#) corresponding to bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees. The doctoral robe sometimes appears in church. It has puffy sleeves with three stripes on the forearm, indicating that the wearer possesses a doctoral degree. When they are used in church, academic gowns are most often worn without the square cap or the long, decorative hood down the back that normally complete the outfit. If there is a hood, the colors indicate the wearer's field of study and alma mater. ([You can find out the color code for the fields of study.](#))

Clergy robes mark clergy who do not have a doctorate degree or who do not choose to wear their doctoral robes. Even though most clergy have a masters degree, clergy robes are a modified form of the baccalaureate robe, probably because contemporary masters robes have an odd appearance. Clergy robes are nearly identical to judicial robes, except that clergy robes often have a sort of built-in stole; a wide stripe running down both sides of the zipper in the front, often with decorated with Christian symbols.

Unlike vestments, robes are not worn by lay leaders. The original purpose of the robe was to indicate that the wearer had the authority of academic credentials. John Calvin started the tradition of wearing academic robes in church. He was not able to wear vestments because he was not ordained clergy, but he did have an academic law degree. For that reason, clergy robes are most common in churches that are in the Reformed tradition, such as Presbyterian churches, and in other groups with Calvinist roots, such as Baptists. Choir robes are nearly universal.

People in robes are dressed like Calvin. People in [albs](#) are dressed like Jesus.

(In Europe, Academic and Clergy Robes known as the Geneva Gown is worn as the norm by Non-Conformist Protestant Clergy. They are: Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Free Presbyterians and some Baptist and Independent Methodists, as well as ourselves the Ecumenical Church Worldwide)

Of course, this only applies to conducting worship. Jesus forbade wearing worship attire in the marketplace, so we don't do that, except when we are street preaching or if we are involved in other acts of public worship:

Then in the audience of all the people he said unto his disciples, Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; Which devour widows' houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation. —Luke 20:45-47, KJV

Outside the context of worship, clergy must [dress plainly](#), because this makes them identifiable as clergy.

When a cross section of Clergy in America were asked what they chose to wear

The presiding minister of the church is often dressed differently from the congregation. Here are five of the most common alternatives. If you are unfamiliar with them, I have added links to my glossary. The question this week is this: Which does your pastor wear, or if you are a pastor yourself, which do you wear?

45% chose a business suit.

This is the only choice that in my crackpot opinion is completely inappropriate, because it is worldly. The church is not a business. A business suit is fashionable, it is comfortable, and it expresses the wearer's sense of style, and these are precisely the reasons why it should not be worn. Ministers are not supposed to be representing the changing fashions of this world, but the unchanging mercies of our God. Their primary concern should not be their own comfort, but the spiritual well-being of their congregation. They should not be representing themselves, but God. Business suits also allow the clergy to pass for a lay person, which means that newcomers and visitors might not know who the pastor is.

24% chose an alb.

The main difference between cassocks and albs is the color. (Cassocks are generally black, albs are generally white.) They are both adaptations of first-century tunics. They both mark the minister as performing in an official capacity, not as a private individual. Martin Luther wore an alb.

13% chose a cassock.

The main difference between cassocks and albs is the color. (Cassocks are generally black, albs are generally white.) They are both adaptations of first-century tunics. They both mark the minister as performing in an official capacity, not as a private individual. John Wesley and Ulrich Zwingli wore cassocks. I prefer a cassock myself.

13% chose a Geneva gown, often called a robe.

Geneva gowns originated in medieval times as academic gowns. The three stripes on the sleeve originally indicated that the wearer holds a doctorate degree. University professors used to wear them while teaching, and they are still common at academic convocations at secular colleges and universities. They are common in the Arminian tradition because Arminius and Wesley and his contemporaries wore one and in the Reformed tradition Calvin wore one. (Calvin was not clergy). However, Zwingli, who was also in the Reformed tradition, wore a cassock.

5% chose a clergy shirt with a white tab in the collar.

This is appropriate for leading informal worship and for public ministry where vestments are impractical, such as visiting the sick. The advantage of wearing a clergy shirt to visit people in the hospital is that everyone knows what you are and why you are there. You have quicker access and carry greater credibility with the hospital staff. Even a delirious patient can tell that you are a minister and not some casual visitor.

In the beginning: The early Church was organized the same way as the synagogue, though many Bible translations obscure this fact. Both the Church and the synagogue were led by one or more presbyters, which means elder and became the English word priest. If there were several elders, the leader was called the episkopos, which means supervisor and became the English word bishop. In the early days, bishops rode circuits, as the Apostle John did (Revelation 1-4). Deacons were the invention of the early Church. Their function is incompletely described in the New Testament, but they seem to have been administrators. Thus the early Church consisted of congregations served by deacons, run by priests, and supervised by bishops. Or if you dislike words of Greek origin, we could say that early congregations had a board, ministers, and a district superintendent.

However, if you get twenty people from different backgrounds to study the Bible in order to determine what the Bible says about how the Church should be organized, you will get about forty answers. They will all have very cogent arguments for their positions. Probably the reason why there is so much disagreement on this subject is because the New Testament doesn't

prescribe church government so much as it describes it. Here are some terms that are used by various churches and their general definition.

So, let's talk about some of these Christian titles and what they mean

Bishop

Bishop is the English version of the Greek word (episkopos), which means overseer or supervisor. (Note the progression from episkopos to piskop to bishop.) The qualifications for bishops are given in 1 Timothy 3, but there is no scriptural description of their duties. In the first century, the local church was headed by a bishop and the priests served as a board of advisors who also functioned as clergy under the bishop's direction. By the time of Ignatius at the end of the first century, the Church had grown. By that time, bishops had territorial supervision over several churches, while the presbyters were responsible for pastoral care of individual churches. Ignatius describes a system identical to the modern practice, well in accord with Titus 1:6-9 and the situation in the seven letters in Revelation. Bishops wear purple clericals.

In the historic church, a bishop is a regional minister, a priest with administrative duties over a group of churches in a territory called a diocese. Only bishops can preside at the rite of ordination. An individual bishop can ordain a deacon or a priest, but it takes three bishops to consecrate a new bishop. A Roman Catholic bishop must remain unmarried. An Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist or an Ecumenical bishop can be married. In the eastern Church, only unmarried priests can become bishops, and bishops are not permitted to marry.

Canon (person)

A canon is a priest who serves on the staff of a cathedral. The duties of a canon include conducting worship and performing pastoral services, especially when the bishop is visiting other churches in the diocese. If John Smith is a canon of a cathedral, he is called the Rev. Canon John Smith.

(The word 'canon' also has another meaning.)

Clergy

The word clergy comes from a Latin word that means "office holder." It refers to ordained ministers who are authorized to conduct the rites and sacraments of the church. Some clergy may have administrative duties at various regional and national levels of a church.

In some legal jurisdictions, clergy status may automatically empower a person to perform legally binding weddings; in others, clergy must obtain a license from the court. Courts generally do not require clergy to divulge what people have told them in confidence; this is often called the sanctity of the confessional. However, there can be exceptions. Many legal jurisdictions impose criminal penalties on clergy who do not immediately report information about certain types of crimes, such as suspected child abuse, even if the information was given in confidence.

Curate

Curate is an Anglican term for assistant pastor. The word cure is related to the word care. A curate is a person who takes care of a cure, that is, the congregation, viewed as a spiritual charge. Assistant pastors are usually assigned the duty of routinely visiting the members of the congregation who are sick, shut-in, or in distress; hence the term. The word curator (as in a museum) is related. See also [rector](#) and [vicar](#).

Deacon

The word deacon comes from the Greek word (diakonos), which means servant. The New Testament records the appointment of the first deacons in Acts 6 and lists their qualifications for office in 1 Timothy 3. The New Testament describes the function of the first deacons, but it does not lay down a general charter for the function of deacons in the church. Up through the fourth century, deacons had administrative functions, and because even the largest churches limited themselves to seven deacons, they often had more power and prestige than the presbyters, who nominally outranked them. This situation was corrected by the Council of Constantinople in AD 381 and by allowing larger churches to have as many deacons as they needed. Today, depending on the church, a deacon can be any of the following: a member of the [clergy](#); a lay minister; or a lay administrator.

Elder

Elder is the English word which translates the Greek word presbuteros (or [presbyter](#)), which came down to us in English as [priest](#).

Father

In Roman Catholicism, in Orthodoxy, and to some degree in Anglicanism, people often address [priests](#) as father. In general usage, if John Smith is a priest, he is called Father John, but if he is an Anglican priest, he might be called Father Smith. Protestants do not call their [clergy](#) father, based on Matthew 23:9, but they do not use the same reasoning to ban the term teacher (Matthew 23:10), so the prohibition is mainly a reaction against Roman Catholic practice. Groups who do use this term argue that the context (Matthew 23:1-12) only forbids Christian leaders to use titles such as father and teacher hypocritically or for self-promotion. They use 1 Corinthians 4:15 as an example of how the term father can rightly be applied to a Christian leader. However, if you are writing a letter to Father John Smith, the address on the envelope should say The [Reverend](#) John Smith.

Minister

Minister is the Latin word for doer of little deeds, as opposed to a magistrate, who is a doer of great deeds. In some churches, the word minister, if they are an "ordained minister" denotes a person who is charged with the spiritual care of a church. In most churches, "to minister" is a generic term that includes all who assist in worship, whether [clergy](#) or lay.

Pastor

Pastor is the Latin word for shepherd. This word refers to the ordained minister who is charged with the primary spiritual care of a local church.

Presbyter

The Greek word (presbyteros) is used in the New Testament for people who perform the functions of [clergy](#) in the Church. It means elder. The English word that developed over time from presbyter is [priest](#). (Note the progression from presbyter to prester to priest.) The qualifications for presbyters are given in 1 Timothy 5, but their duties are not listed in scripture. The office, function, and name came into the Church from the ancient synagogue.

Presbyters, that is, regular ordained clergy, wear black [clericals](#).

Presbytery

The word presbytery has several meanings in current use. In Presbyterian churches, it refers to a council of presbyters (elders) and a geographical area that corresponds to a [diocese](#). In the Catholic Church, it can refer to a priest's residence. Presbytery is also a synonym for [priesthood](#).

Priest

Priest is the English word that originated from the Greek word (presbyteros), which means elder. (Note the progression from [presbyter](#) to prester to priest.) Originally, this was the normal word for Christian [clergy](#). Over time it took over the meaning of (hierous or hierarch) and was extended by way of analogy to Jewish and then pagan clergy. Some groups avoid priest as if it were pagan, when it is in fact entirely Christian and scriptural in origin. The Greek word for a temple functionary is hierarch.

In many New Testament translations, the word priest is used to translate both presbyter and hierarch, which can confuse the reader. It gives the false impression that the Church has no clergy or that all Christians are clergy. The Greek New Testament teaches a hierarchy of all believers, not a presbytery of all believers—meaning that all Christians have direct access to God, but not all have administrative, supervisory, or sacramental duties in the Church. (See 1 Peter 2:1-10 in the original Greek.)

Priests, that is, regular ordained clergy, wear black [clericals](#).

Priesthood

Priesthood is a synonym for [clergy](#) in Anglican, Catholic, and Orthodox churches. The phrase priesthood of all believers comes from 1 Peter 1:4-10. In this passage, the word priesthood translates a Greek word that does not refer to [presbyters](#), but to people who have direct access to

God. Thus this passage says that all Christians have direct access to God; it does not say that all Christians are [clergy](#).

Rector

Rector is the Anglican word for the elected pastor of a financially self-supporting congregation. The term derives from the fact that if there are multiple [clergy](#) on staff in a church, the pastor has primary responsibility for directing the worship. Historically in the Church of England, the terms “rector” and “vicar” had different meanings, but today the distinction lies in the history of the parish. See also [vicar](#).

Reverend

The term reverend is an adjective that simply indicates that a person is a member of the [clergy](#). In the United States, it is abbreviated Rev; outside the United States, it is abbreviated Revd. If John Smith is a member of the clergy, you can refer to him in writing as The Rev. John Smith, or The Rev. Smith. If he has a doctorate degree, you can refer to him as The Rev. Dr. John Smith, or The Rev. Dr. Smith. When you are talking to him, you can address him as Reverend Smith, but it is usually considered impolite to call him just Reverend. If John Smith is clergy in another church, and you are unsure what to call him or you are uncomfortable with his customary title, call him Reverend Smith and no one will be offended. If, for example, you are a Protestant and you are speaking to a Roman Catholic priest who refers to himself as Father John, he will not be offended if you call him Reverend John, because it is actually correct. Nevertheless, most members of the clergy are humble and are not offended if you get their titles wrong.

When in doubt, refer to clergy as “Rev. So-and-so.” That way no one will think you are being disrespectful.

Vicar

In the Anglican Communion, if a church is not financially self-supporting and is unable to pay a full-time pastor, the bishop is nominally the pastor. The bishop appoints a priest to do the actual work. Since this priest is only functioning as a stand-in for the bishop, he or she is called a vicar from the Latin word for stand-in. When the church becomes self-supporting, its [vestry](#) calls and elects a [rector](#) to take the place of the vicar. Historically in the Church of England, the terms “rector” and “vicar” had different meanings, but today the distinction lies in the history of the parish.

Finally, Back to why Clergy should wear Clericals

There are situations in which clothing is very important. I found this out by accident once, when I walked into a furniture store, coincidentally wearing the same sort of shirt as the employees. I had to leave because the other customers expected me to wait on them.

Clothing conveys a message. A business suit says, "Money!" A police uniform says, "Law!" A tuxedo says, "Wedding!" Casual clothing says, "Me!" Clericals say, "Church!" Any of those messages might be valid in different contexts, so you have to make sure you are wearing the right clothes for the occasion. If you wear a business suit in a department store, people will mistake you for the manager. If you wear a tuxedo to a ball game, they won't ask you to play. If you wear a jogging outfit to a fancy restaurant, your clothing says, "I wandered in here by mistake," and the staff will treat you accordingly.

The word clericals refers to the special clothing that clergy wear outside of worship services, usually consisting of a white collar on a black shirt, combined with other clothing that is either black or grey.

If you are a pastor and you think you are aggrandizing yourself when you wear clericals, you'll be disappointed. The congregation quickly gets used to the clericals and they see them as badges of service, not honor. Clericals put you in the same functional category as bellhops, waiters, police officers, airline pilots, and so on. We do not dress to please ourselves, or anyone else for that matter; our manner of dress facilitates our service. It makes our function obvious to strangers. It makes our duties inescapable, and it constrains our personal conduct, because we can't disappear into the crowd when we are wearing clericals. Clericals mean that visitors don't have to ask, "Where is the pastor?" They know just by looking.

Clericals also have other advantages. They communicate to the congregation that you are not a proxy child, a potential date, a worldly expert, or a bosom buddy. It allows you to focus on the job of pastoring, without slipping and sliding into those role conflicts and boundary issues your denomination keeps warning you about.

A friend of mine, who was ordained in the United Church of Christ, was required by his ministerial association to wear a clergy shirt with a tab collar while he was traveling. He thought it was a huge imposition on his personal liberty, until he obeyed. On the airplane, he heard a confession, reassured a frightened traveler, and calmed a terrified child. He was delighted that a routine air flight had turned into pastoral ministry. If you are clergy and you've never worn a clergy shirt to visit people in the hospital, you should try it. The clergy shirt means you don't have to explain what you are or why you are there. The staff extends you all necessary courtesies, and even delirious patients know right off what you are. You can get in after visiting hours and quite often you don't have to pay for parking, even if you've never been to that particular hospital before. Of course the catch is, you have to be on your best ministerial behavior the entire time you are there, so this is not something you should try if your self-discipline is weak.

If I called the police because of a burglary in my house, I would not be reassured if the police showed up driving a sports car with his kids in the back, and wearing jeans and loafers. If I am in distress because of a crime, I want the police to arrive in a police car and I want them to be wearing freshly pressed uniforms. If I have just been through a burglary, I don't need a buddy, I don't need a narcissist expressing himself in his clothing, I need a policeman. I need a policeman

who will carry out the law, not his self-expression. I couldn't care less about who he is personally; I called him as a representative of a greater force. Similarly, if I am on my deathbed, facing the greatest spiritual crisis in my life, I don't want a buddy to come express himself. I want a properly uniformed and equipped minister of God who subordinates himself to his ministry, and who confidently and authoritatively represents God.

Our parishioners deserve nothing less.

When you visit people in the hospital or in jail, for example, what sort of message do you convey with your clothing? If you show up in casual clothes, you are trying to say, "I'm just one of the gang," but they hear the message, "I'm not taking this seriously." If you show up in a business suit, you are trying to say, "I'm a well-dressed capable person," but they hear the message, "I'm a man of the world."

When you are watching television, you can tell right off what sort of character has just appeared on the screen, because script writers take advantage of our cultural stereotypes to dress the characters to give us the right first impression. For example, if the character is supposed to be an inhibited secretary, they pull her hair back in a bun, put glasses on her face, and give her plain make up. When she loses her inhibitions, they signal the change by removing the glasses, letting her hair down, and improving her make up. Very few actresses play romantic scenes with their hair up in a bun.

So have you been paying attention to the way they dress the characters who are supposed to be clergy? Because women are relatively new to ministry, they almost invariably appear in tab-collar blouses. However, the men tell us what sort of ministers they are by the way they are dressed:

If the minister is a shyster who is fleecing his flock for their money, he is most often wearing a sports coat and tie.

If the minister is the manipulative type who is gradually transforming his congregation into a mind-control cult, he is most often wearing a well-tailored business suit.

If the minister is an activist who is crusading against the establishment, he is most often wearing casual clothing, with a tab-collar shirt under his sweater or leather jacket.

If the minister is competent and respectable, and if he is performing a valuable spiritual service (such as a wedding, funeral, or exorcism) in a dignified setting, he is most often wearing clericals on the street and vestments in church.

Objection: But Jesus Didn't Wear Clericals!

Now of course there is the objection that Jesus allegedly wore the clothing of the working man, not special clothes of the clergy. The assertion doesn't stand up to close scrutiny in Scripture. In many places, people walked up to Jesus out of the blue, addressed Him as "teacher," which the New Testament informs us is the translation of the word "rabbi."

Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?
—John 1:38, KJV

Without knowing who He was (that is, Jesus), they knew what He was (that is, a rabbi), because they asked him to do rabbinical things: to heal the sick, cast out demons, settle disputes, probate wills, and decide religious issues:

And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?
—Mark 10:17, KJV

If they thought He was a rabbi, these were reasonable expectations, because those were the duties of rabbis. However, in John 7, Jesus attends a festival at the Temple and even though everyone is talking about Him, they are unaware that He is among them in the crowd. Since there was no photography in those days, we can understand that strangers would not recognize Him by His face. There was no television newscaster to say, "Galilean rabbi draws large crowds with His controversial miracles—film at eleven."

But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. Then the Jews sought him at the feast, and said, Where is he? And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him: for some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people. Howbeit no man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews. Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. And the Jews marveled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?—John 7:10-15, KJV

So we have to ask: how could they know He was a rabbi in one circumstance, but not in another? Why were people surprised by His expertise at the Feast in John 7:10-15, when they took it for granted in situations such as Mark 10:17? The only explanation is that they knew by the way He was dressed. When they addressed Him as a rabbi, He must have been dressed like a rabbi; the surprise was not that He was a rabbi, but how He handled their requests. In John 7, they did not recognize Him as a rabbi, so they were surprised that He knew rabbinical things. He must not have been dressed as a rabbi. The only way He could attend the Feast "in secret" was to go without wearing rabbinical clothes.

While Jesus definitely did not wear a black shirt with a white collar, He obviously wore the first-century equivalent. So clergy who wear clericals are imitating Christ. I think the clergy who do not wear clericals have the more difficult position to defend.

Objection: Some People Have an Adverse Reaction to Clericals!

Conflict-avoidant people raise this objection, but there are two problems with letting other people's phobias dictate your wardrobe. The first is that you are not solving their problem by changing your clothes, you are only letting it fester unresolved. The second is that if you are driven by your own fears of what other people will think of you, you're on a slippery slope to second-guessing yourself into total ineffectiveness as the Rev. Milk toast. If someone has a problem with clerical dress, at least this exposes it so you can help them overcome it. I observe, however, that this problem is more apprehension than substance.

Recently, a colleague of mine visited my church. I knew he had a chasuble and that he liked it, so I invited him to bring it and wear it—which he did. One of my parishioners admired the chasuble. When I told her that he doesn't wear it in his own church because he's afraid his congregation won't like it, she looked very frustrated and said, "Sometimes you just have to assert yourself!"

A person who is assertive without being authoritarian or bossy is said to have a strong character.

Objection: But a Collar Would Make Me Look Catholic (or whatever)!

Don't bet on this one, either. One Sunday I went to lunch with some of my parishioners. The restaurant was so crowded that you couldn't exhale without saying "excuse me" to someone. As we got up to leave, we walked past a booth with a well-dressed family. Their son was sitting on a chair at the end of the table. The young man grabbed me by the hand and said, "Pastor!" Then he saw my face and was confused that I wasn't who he thought I was. He said, "You are a pastor, aren't you?" and I said, "Yes, I'm pastor of Garfield Memorial Christian Church," and gave his father my card. The father explained that they were members of a Lutheran megachurch that is nearby. The young man asked me, "Is Garfield a Lutheran church?" and I said, "No," and turning to his mother who was looking at me, I said, "However, if you sat in our church blindfolded, I bet you couldn't tell the difference." And the father nodded, saying we are all alike.

The reason this happened is that for the young man, the collar made me look Lutheran. To an Episcopalian, it would make me look Episcopalian. In some areas, it would make me look Methodist. Orthodox clergy have taken to wearing black shirts with white collars. Recently someone wrote to me to say that in his country, rabbis wear black shirts with white collars.

My parishioners who witnessed this exchange were very proud of their church. In their minds, it made our little church just as important as the Lutheran megachurch, because I received the same treatment as the Lutheran pastor for whom I had been initially mistaken. This is not a bad thing.

And by the way, the inventor of the clergy shirt, the Rev. Dr. Donald McLeod, was not Catholic.

Objection: None of This Applies to my Congregation!

You may be surprised on this one, too.

Some time ago, I attended the installation of a pastor. Her church was a startup, so the installation service took place in another church's building. She had worked out all the arrangements with the host pastor over the phone, so she had never seen him before. The startup church was Disciples of Christ and the host church was one of those independent community megachurches. Neither congregation had ever experienced clergy wearing clericals before; I was the only one there in a collar, so this was definitely the acid test.

I severely overestimated my travel time, so I arrived at the church much too early. As I was standing in the narthex in my clergy shirt, the guest of honor walked in the door. She walked right up to me and began thanking me profusely for everything I had done. She had mistaken me for the pastor of the host church—whom she had never seen before—even though she had no reason to expect the pastor of an independent community church to wear a collar.

About a half hour later, someone else mistook me for the host pastor, which was very embarrassing for him, because he was standing right next to me at the time. Later, I was mistaken for the host pastor a third time! Now all the other clergy were beginning to feel a little out of uniform, because I was the only one whom lay people perceived as clergy.

After the service was over, someone complimented me on my lovely wife, which was strange, because I'm not married. Then I realized that the person had met the pastor's wife and presumed I was her husband—after all, I was the one wearing the collar.

All this happened in an environment where it was not customary for clergy to wear collars.

The lesson is that if you dress like a minister, everyone will think you are one.

Full Circle

So we come full circle. Maybe if you are ordained clergy, and you wear a black shirt with a white collar, someone will come up to you and ask, "Pastor, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

A black shirt with a white collar makes you look like ordained clergy. If that is what you really are, why not dress like it?

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