

DOI 10.26886/2414-634X.6(50)2021.9

UDC 2-526:27-525.4]:2-282.3

**THE PRIEST VESTMENTS AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE
LITURGICAL ACTION AND
SUBJECT SPATIAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE TEMPLE**

Oksana Soroka, Postgraduate student

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9699-4406>

e-mail: oksanasv.if@gmail.com

Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University, Ukraine, Ivano-Frankivsk

This article deals with the priest vestments (i.e. priestly), as this kind of clothes is the most common and used in Ukrainian temples among all degrees of priesthood. Liturgical vestments have passed the period of long evolution, the characteristic feature of which should be considered as the deep symbolic meaning based on ornaments, iconography and colouring clothes. With the development and affirmation of Christianity the priest vestments have been of great variety. The cult features of the clerical clothing are those which symbolize hard work of a priest and also God's support which he feels while reading the Gospel. The clerical clothing reflect the dignity of a clergyman and its material, shape and decorative elements which are the part of artistic culture obey the idea of worship. Therefore, the priest vestments as a part of church art are sacred.

The theological and symbolic content of priestly robes in the context of liturgical rite and church in general is highlighted in the article. The analysis of the sources of prayer speeches, which give the brief comprehension of the meaning or symbolism of putting on every component (sticharion (alb), stole, a belt, armbands, phelonion) of the priest vestments. The symbolic meaning of all the elements of the clerical clothing has been interpreted, the ritual and sequence of its putting on have been considered.

Key words: clerical clothing, liturgical robe, Christ, symbolic meaning, worship, a clergyman, rite.

The research analysis. Exploring the designated subject matter of the article we've referred to the source of theology where the ritual function of worshipping is interpreted and priest vestments, their symbolic explanation and liturgical role are partly highlighted [2, 4-8, 10, 11]. The famous Ukrainian art critic T. Kara-Vasylieva in her article «Artistically functional role of the liturgical sewing in the temple ensemble» has analysed memorabilia of the liturgical needlework, which take part in the worship. The researcher considers the clerical clothing as a part of gold needlework which occupies a leading position among the kinds of church art and generally explains its functional and cult significance.

The article is aimed at finding out the role of the clerical clothing in the temple structure and highlighting its cult symbolic meaning.

Presenting the main material. With the development of the society clothes have become an integral part of everyday life. Their forming took place according to the historical conditions, reflecting socio-cultural events of a certain period. Clothes point out at the class, ethnocultural, professional background of a person, his or her status, age, sex etc. All that is revealed for the viewers via material, construction, colour, décor. Clothes demonstrate a person's individuality and carry general information about their owner. Thus all the people of different epochs formed their natural traditionally-symbolic signs of clothing which were obligatory for a certain status and a kind of profession.

Among the variety of professionally cult clothes, priest vestments (priestly) have been used since the ancient times for worshipping and during historically-religious periods looked different. The sacrament of the priesthood is responsible honour, the clergyman must show sainthood, purity and must differ in a special meaning for the believers to be able to see the holy and sacred in him. That's why the clergyman's duty is to show Christ whom he represents during Liturgy graphically, in prototypes and symbols.

Liturgy is service of people before the Almighty, worshipping in which the clergyman, all those serving in the church and parishioners take part. Besides this, Liturgy is a sacred and esthetic phenomenon in which kinds of decorative and fine arts, works (icons, crosses, banners, priest vestments etc) interact. They demonstrate the basis of Christianity and Bible events [3, p. 15]. Liturgy is the highest act of worshipping with sacred rites and symbolics of Christian cult that comes from Christ «however, the way it looks and is shaped is the result of the age evolution. Liturgy is God's and men's creation at the same time. St. Church with its true skill has built and decorated the liturgical temple, surrounded by the wreath of prayers and rites and included the best pearls of human creativity into it» [6, p. 17-18]. Priest vestments, their decorative and sacred peculiarities which are performed according to canonical prescriptions and are an integral part of the liturgical rite belong to one of the creative church «pearls». Owing to ornamental and colouring variety of clothes, the believers who take part in worship are capable of directing their thoughts to God in a special way, realizing due to the priest vestments in particular that during Liturgy Christ's sacrifice is in fact repeated.

The ritual of putting on priestly robes is included into the action of Proskomidia (the first part of Holy Liturgy, which symbolizes Christmas). The rank ascribes that the three-fold kiss in entering the temple and bows «eastwards» are followed by having the clergyman put on clothes (*i.e. sticharion, stole, a belt, armbands, phelonion*) [6, p. 166]. The cover also

belongs to the liturgical vestments (big – air, small square and crossed cover, which are mainly made in a set with clothes) for the Eucharist which are used to cover utensils with communion that take part in Liturgy. While putting on each component (item) of clothes the prayer is said which briefly interprets its meaning or symbolics. The clergyman in his vestments differ from those surrounding him, and prayers while clothes being put on are the symbols of dignity and remind that he in «the clothes of salvation» must worthily serve God [6, p. 168].

Characterizing spiritual content of priest vestments, the tradition ascribes to comply the following order in putting on clothes: firstly, alb, then stole, after that armbands, a belt and phelonion. Each of these elements has its own symbolic meaning, and realizing it one can understand the role of a clergyman during Liturgy much better [10, p. 53].

The sticharion in particular is common for all the degrees of priesthood and is the oldest liturgical clothing which must be white by all means symbolizing angelic purity of the clergyman and the light of his spiritual calling [11, p. 39]. Analysing patriarchal interpretation of the symbolic meaning of the alb one can point out some aspects.

First: holiness of God and luminosity of heavenly forces, Saint Ivan Posnyk in particular interprets the name of the sticharion as something showing Christ's body as white as a human one [10, p. 54]. This quotation is taken from the Gospel from Mark «And His clothes become bright, as white as snow, and not a single painter could bleach them so well on Earth!» (Mk 9:3).

As Krasnoseltsev point out the colour of the sticharion itself proves the symbolic similarity of the clergymen and the heaven forces who praise God constantly [10, p. 55]. The colour of the alb symbolizes incorruptibility, lordship, holiness and purity of Christ, who the clergyman represents during Liturgy.

The alb also means spotlessness of the dignity of priesthood [2, p. 85]. The clergyman's dignity should stay free from any sins and the priest himself putting on those clothes becomes a participant of God's grace, which defends that dignity which was given to him during the mystery of priesthood. Because of that putting on a robe, the priest reads special prayers which are based on the fragment of the book by the prophet Isaj, «I'll rejoice in the Lord. Let my soul be happy with my God, because He put the clothes of salvation on me. He put the clothes of righteousness on me, He put the wreath on me as if I were a bridegroom, and made me beautiful as if I were a bride!» (Is. 23:6), and also on the fragment of the book of Psalms, «And my soul will rejoice in the Lord. He'll make it merry!» (Ps. 90:10).

Eventually, the sticharion symbolizes the suffering of the Savior. It should be noted that due to the tortures, death and resurrection of Christ we've got an access to divine grace. The clergyman in this context

embodies Christ's sacrifice and his own readiness to go through any disbeliefs for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel. This symbolic aspect of the meaning of the alb in particular is described in the well-known Byzantine source, which was translated into the Slavic language in the Middle

Ages [9, p. 15].

Especially the topic of Christ's suffering in the context of the symbolic interpretation of the meaning of the sticharion sounds bright in the work by Kyryl Erusalimsky, whose point of view is given by the researcher M. Krasnoseltsev, «Christ's clothes, while he was suffering, became red, and the priests in their turn should always be ready to demonstrate whose pastors they are» [10, p. 57].

The robe the clergyman wears, symbolize a word of education as well which he shares with his believers and which must be the source of light. The works by Simeon Solunsky say that divine light must penetrate the bishop to make his preach clear, because the clergyman is called up not only to officiate but also to teach and purity, make the souls of believers as white as the colour of the alb [1, p. 240].

And the next component of liturgical vestments (i. e. stole) has also a symbolic meaning. The stole are put an over the alb and are the most important element of the clergyman's clothes. It's necessary to say, that the liturgical rules ban the priest to officiate without stole «the clergyman mustn't worship without stole. If it's necessary to officiate and there are no stole at hand; not to stop worshipping the priest must bless a belt or even a rope, put it on instead of the stole and thus worship» [5, p. 125]. The stole are usually decorated with seven crosses (six in front, one behind on the neck). It symbolizes Holy Sacraments, which can be performed by the clergyman except one (ordination – the Sacrament of the priesthood) and only a bishop has the right to perform it. Putting the stole on the hands of the newlyweds during the Sacraments of Marriage symbolizes absolute blessing of the Lord, a kind of reunion of two people in the church of Christ (pic. 1).

Symbolically interpreting the meaning of the stole the theologians also point out same aspects in it.

Firstly, it's superiority of the priestly ministry over any other kinds of church service, «the stole are the modification of the deacon's orar. Without losing the grace of deacon's rank, the priest puts on his favourite yoke of the priesthood and in this sense he is Christ's follower in his service to God and people, and in spiritual asceticism as well» [8, p. 134].



Pic. 1. Putting the stole on the hands of the newlyweds during the Sacraments of Marriage

Besides this, the stole print out that the priest obeys the son of God and must perform the service with a glance at Christ doing nothing without him [5, p. 127].

Another theological meaning which the stole are endowed is the fact that they symbolize the grace of the holy spirit which descended on the priest. The evidence of this is a pray which the clergyman says, putting on the stole, «Blessed God who pours his grace on his priests». Symbolically the stole mean graceful oils of priesthood, which rest on the neck of a person, who took the yoke of Christ. The stole the same as oils descend from a chest to feet, making the heart gentle and lighting up the whole body [7, p. 69].

Besides, the stole symbolize a yoke, which was put on the neck of the Saviour when he was led to crucifixion. A number of both Byzantine and ancient Slavic sources point to it [10, p. 64].

Some Byzantine sources also expand the spiritual meaning of the stole connecting it with the symbolics of deacon`s orar and sending it as a symbol of service to people.

Thus, wearing the stole symbolizes acceptance of divine power, obliges the clergyman to improve his own moral condition. The stole

themselves in a symbolic way give the priest a duty to be a bearer of the highest virtues. Herewith the grace of the holy spirit induces an servant to engage in the knowledge of God. It's necessary to state, that the process of gradual spiritual transformation takes place just at the time, when the clergyman gradually puts on his liturgical vestments.

The next element of the liturgical vestments, the symbolic meaning of which should be characterize is armbands. They symbolize on the one hand the process of creation, and on the other hand the symbolic tying hands for doing nothing sinful, but only to be directed to do good [10, p. 70]. Armbands remind the clergyman of chains, which Jesus was tied with. The priest puts on armbands only in full dress, tightening his wide sleeves of the alb with them.

A belt also has an important symbolic meaning among the elements of the liturgical vestments. Because every clergyman girdles a surplice and stole with a special belt, which is as other elements of liturgical vestments endowed with certain symbolic meanings.

Firstly, the belt symbolizes the power, which God gives for the service and struggle against the sin. Byzantine authors point out that the stole should be girdled to show symbolic readiness to fight against passion because «the clergyman girdled as a sign that he concentrates on spiritual virtues rejecting at the same time all the bodily» [4, p. 29].

Secondly, the belt symbolizes virtues and chastity of the priest, «Girdle me, Lord, with the belt of purity and extinguish carnal desires, let the virtue of restraint and chastity win in me» - that is the way how Catholic Encyclopedia characterizes this element of liturgical vestments [12].

In this context the belt as the component of clerical clothing is close in meaning with the belt of the monastic attire, after all, one of the three Evangelical councils which monks use, realizing their own calling, is perfect virtue.

Thus the process of girdling itself gives the priest such spiritual condition in which he acquires inner freedom and spiritual power. This process also continues

inner spiritual transformation of the clergyman, which takes place while he is putting on all the elements of liturgical vestments without exception.

A top sleeveless robe of the clergyman is called a phelonion or a vestment. The first ancient phelonions were square, and gradually round one-piece capes with the neckline, which closed the figure from a neck to feet. In Ukraine the original Greek form was been changed for convenience during worshipping into the phelonion which is short in front (to see hands) and long on the back (up to feet). When the clergyman raises his arms (during Liturgy), the raised ends of the vestment go to the sides, symbolizing wings. That reminds of his angelic ministry [7, p. 75]. Canonical in decorative expressiveness of the vestment is an embroidered cross on

the forearm, that symbolizes that one which the Son of God carried up the mountain of Golgotha.

The priest putting on the phelonion blesses and kisses it first and prays, «Let your clergyman, God, put on the truth, and let your righteous rejoice always, now forever and ever. Amen» [8, p. 122].

The headdress which is used by the clergyman only during the worship is the mitre. The term «mitre» from Greek means a headband, a head ornament. This element is borrowed by the Christian church from the Old Testament one. The mitre symbolizes the crown of thorns of the Savior, and putting it on a head, a priest or a bishop says a prayer, «Oh Lord, put a crown of valuable stones on the head» [7, p. 95].

Three veils of the holy gifts which, as it has been mentioned above, are made in the set together with the clerical clothing, have a special meaning in the context of the symbolic content. The first, that covers a paten is a small covering of quadrangular shape (sometimes cruciform, analogous, as for the chalice) (pic. 2) with ornaments in the centre. The second is cruciform cover on the cup. St. Eucharist reflects in its decoration the most. The central ornament of the cover can differ (Christ in the chalice, an isosceles cross depending on the church holiday or event, etc) and four edges are decorated with images of archangels with wings or elements according to those which are on the other components of the vestments. The last one is called air, the biggest, of square cut and covers a paten and a chalice, “And cover us with its wings” [3, p.24]. It’s symbolic that all coverings mean those veils the newborn Son of God was shrouded in. However, there are some theologians who identify coverings with the cloth, the dead body of Christ was shrouded in.

Researching modern priestly vestments of late XX – early XXI centuries we can say that sometimes they are found in the synthesis with artistical and decorative structure of the church. Besides liturgical clothing and veils in the church there are some ceremonial products which are aimed at interior arrangement. As for their sacred meaning and usage during the devine service there are no dogmatic norms, although producing and decorative expressiveness (fabric, colour, ornamental motifs, iconographic plots) imitate the style of liturgical vestments.



Pic. 2. Priest vestments and veils of the holy gifts.

One can judge about different holidays events and the days of remembrance in the church by the colour of clergyman's vestments. If the priest is dressed in dark clothes, it means that Holy Liturgy is held on the day of Lent. But not only vestments can differ. In many Ukrainian churches there is a tradition especially for individual events, holidays (Lent, Easter etc) to change all temple ritual works: (embroidered towels, banners, veils of church purpose and altar curtains (pic. 2-3).



Pic. 3. Temple ritual works.

In general this arrangement is performed in all churches differing in individual details which are dependent on financial capacity of the community and local traditions. For example, to Lent banners of light shades, embroidered towels on the icons, curtains on the royal gates, veils on the altar, on the lectern etc, are removed and changed into analogous items in claret (red) and violet. In this design the interior of the temple will be till Easter, till the worshipping on Holy Saturday, to be more exact, when

before reading the Gospel singing prayers «Rise from the dead, my Lord», the priest is dressed in light vestments. After finishing worship the whole church is set up and together with the service become a single whole in the liturgical process.

Conclusion. Liturgical vestments first of all carry the idea of moral and ethical perfection of the person who is dressed in them. In fact in the moral and ethical context they are a symbolic reflection of Christian virtues that guide the pastor and he persuades believers to live according to them. Another no less important aspect symbolically reflected in liturgical clothing is that the vestments induce the believers to the transformation, which is in spiritual and physical improvement of a clergyman's being. Exactly alternate putting on certain elements of liturgical vestments induces the priest to constant improving his internal state. Therefore, each of the components of clerical clothing is so important, as in full bishop's attire the clergyman represents Christ in a symbolic way, on behalf of whom he performs liturgy.

Література:

1. Вендина, Т. И. (2002). *Средневековый человек в зеркале старославянского языка*. Москва, МГУ, 378 .
2. Дмитриевский, И. (1993). *Изъяснение божественной литургии*. Основано на Священном Писании, правилах вселенских и поместных соборов и на писании св. отцов Церкви. Москва, репринт изд. 1894, 418.
3. Кара-Васильева, Т. (2008). Художньо-функціональна роль літургійного шитва в ансамблі храму. *Зб. наук. пр. ІМФЕ ім. М. Рильського НАН України*, 8, 15-26.
4. Красносельцев, Н. Ф. (1894). *О древних литургических толкованиях*. Одесса, 82.
5. Лосский, В. Н. (2012). *Очерк мистического богословия Восточной Церкви*. Москва, Свято-Троицкая Сергиева лавра, 342.
6. Соловій, М. (1964). *Божественна Літургія. Історія – розвиток – пояснення*. Рим, Записки ЧСВВ, 422.
7. Соловій, М. (1999). *Божественна Літургія: історія, розвиток, пояснення*. Львів, Монастир монахів Студійського Уставу, 440.
8. Одеания духовенства. (1983). Настольная книга священнослужителя. <http://www.odinblago.ru/nastolnaia_4/1#303> (2021, серпень, 24).
9. Панова, С. И. (2009). *Диатаксис патриарха Филофея Коккина в славянской книжной традиции XIV-XV в.: лингвотекстологическое исследование*. Автореферат дис. канд. филолог. наук. Москва, 28.
10. Севастьянова, С. К. (2011). Символика архиерейского облачения в трактовке Патриарха Никона. *Журнал института филологии Сибирского отделения РАН*, 2, 39-118

11. Хропот, Д. (2005). Стихарь, светлая одежда ангелов. *Встреча*, 3 (21), 37-41.

12. Herbermann, Ch. G. (2005). The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 4, 1800. <Work info: Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume 4: Clandestinity-Diocesan Chancery - Christian Classics Ethereal Library (ccel.org)> (2021, серпень, 25).

References:

1. Vendyna, T. Y. (2002). *Srednevekovyyi chelovek v zerkale staroslavianskogo yazyka*. [A medieval man in the mirror of the Slavic language]. Moscow, MHU, 378. [in Russian].

2. Dmytryevskiy, Y. (1993). *Yzъiasnenye bozhestvennoi lyturhyi*. [Explanation of the divine liturgy]. Osnovano na Sviashchennom Pysanyy, pravylakh vselenskykh y pomestnykh soborov y na pysanyy sv. ottsov Tserkvy. Moscow, reprints yzd. 1894, 418. [in Russian].

3. Kara-Vasylieva, T. (2008). Khudozhno-funktsionalna rol liturhiinoho shytva v ansambli khramu. [Artistically functional role of the liturgical sewing in the temple ensemble]. *Zb. nauk. pr. IMFE im. M. Rylskoho NAN Ukrainy*, 8, 15-26. [in Ukrainian].

4. Krasnoseltsev, N. F. (1894). *O drevnykh lyturhycheskykh tolkovaniyakh*. [About ancient liturgical interpretations]. Odessa, 82. [in Russian].

5. Losskiy, V. N. (2012). *Ocherk mystycheskoho bohoslavyia Vostochnoi Tserkvy*. [The essay of mystical theology of Eastern Church]. Moscow, Sviato-Troytskaia Serhyeva lavra, 342. [in Russian].

6. Solovii, M. (1964). *Bozhestvenna liturhiia. Istoriiia – rozvytok – poiasnennia* [Divine liturgy. History – development – explanations]. Rome, Zapysky ChSVV, 422. [in Ukrainian].

7. Solovii, M. (1999). *Bozhestvenna Liturhiia: istoriiia, rozvytok, poiasnennia*. [Divine Liturgy: History, development, explanations]. Lviv, Monastyr monakhiv Studiiskoho Ustavu, 440. [in Ukrainian].

8. Odeianyia dukhovenstva. [Clergy robes]. (1983). *Nastolnaia knyha sviashchennosluzhytelia*. <http://www.odinblago.ru/nastolnaia_4/1#303> (2021, August, 24). [in Russian].

9. Panova, S. Y. (2009). *Dyataksys patryarkha Fylofeia Kokkyna v slavianskoi knyzhnoi tradytsyy XIV-XV v.: lynchvotekstolohycheskoe yssledovanye*. [Diataxis of patriarch Philophei Kokin in Slavic book tradition of XIV-XV: linguistic and text analysis]. Avtoreferat dys. kand. fyloloh. nauk. Moscow, 28. [in Russian].

10. Sevastianova, S. K. (2011). Symvolyka arkhyereiskoho oblachenyia v traktovke Patryarkha Nykona. [Symbolic of bishop`s attire in the interpretation of Patriarch Nikon]. *Zhurnal ynstituta fylolohyy Sybyrskoho otdelenyia RAN*, 2, 39-118. [in Russian].

11. Khropot, D. (2005). Stykhar, svetlaia odezhda anhelov. [The sticharion, light clothes of angels]. *Vstrecha*, 3 (21), 37-41. [in Russian].

12. Herbermann, Ch. G. (2005). The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 4, 1800. <Work info: Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume 4: Clandestinity-Diocesan Chancery - Christian Classics Ethereal Library (ccel.org)> (2021, August, 25). [in English].

Citation: Oksana Soroka (2021). THE PRIEST VESTMENTS AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE LITURGICAL ACTION AND SUBJECT SPATIAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE TEMPLE. New York. TK Meganom LLC. Innovative Solutions in Modern Science. 6(50). doi: 10.26886/2414-634X.6(50)2021.9

Copyright: Oksana Soroka ©. 2021. This is an openaccess article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) or licensor are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.