

Liturgical Garments—Part 1: History and the Chausable

Clothing worn in liturgical services helps to reveal the liturgy's inner mystery. Scholars agree that in the first centuries of Christianity liturgical clothing in no way differed in form from that worn by people in ordinary life. When it did differ, it did so only in quality of material and/or in cleanliness. Thus Clement of Alexandria (d. ca. 215) calls for clothes that are both clean and bright. And Jerome (d. 420) states, "We ought not to enter into the holy of holies in our everyday garments, just as we please, when they have become defiled from the use of ordinary life, but with a clean conscience and in clean garments hold in our hands the sacraments of the Lord" (In Ezek 44:17). However, the early church expected bishops, presbyters and deacons to do dress specially for the liturgy, even more than the lay. This is documented by Origen (d. 253), Jerome, the Canons of Hippolytus, and by others.



Pope Honorius I (died 638);
mosaic in Sant'Agnese in Rome

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In the early Church, leaders were encouraged to place more importance on adorning their souls with noble virtues than their bodies with precious clothing. However, two factors in particular led to the establishment of special liturgical garb. The first was the Roman legalization of Christianity in the 4th century when the Emperor Constantine honored bishops on the level of civil magistrates. Senatorial sandals, the dalmatic and the ceremonial pallium all became signs of their office. The second factor was a dramatic shift in the style of men's secular clothing during the 5th and 6th centuries. When Germanic tribes invaded Rome, they brought their custom of wearing trousers, a type of clothing dictated by harsher northern

climates. Although the clergy adapted to the times, at the celebration of the liturgy church leaders continued to wear their traditional clothes. Later there developed the additional practice, as recorded by the synod of Narbonne in 589, of wearing liturgical vestments over one's ordinary clothes. Consequently, most of today's liturgical vestments can still trace a direct lineage back to the everyday clothing of imperial Rome.

Chasuble, Cope. The chasuble is the outer liturgical vestment worn by both bishops and priests. It originated from the ancient Greco-Roman *paenula* which was popular among the lower classes. It was an enveloping, poncho-like outdoor garment that reached down around the calves. For protection against the cold, it might also include a cap. Constructed from a semicircle of material, the *paenula* gathered around the body in a conical shape and was either sewn together or left open in the front. The narrower, sewn *paenula* was known also as the *casula* (= chasuble), that is, "little house."

When left open, it formed a cape-like garment, sometimes called the *pluviale* ("rain cape"), the probable origin of today's liturgical cope (*cappa* = "hooded mantle"). A larger *paenula*, the *amphibalus*, was made from up to a full circle of material (thus explaining how St. Martin of Tours could divide his cloak, give half



The chausable is the outer garment worn by Msgr. Matz (in the center).

[*capella*] to a beggar and still have enough to keep himself warm).

The paenula normally had no sleeves or arm-openings. Thus, in order to handle anything the wearer of the closed paenula had to reach down on both sides until the hands became free. This action resulted in having extra material falling in beautiful, but heavy folds from each arm. To allow easier, less-

encumbered use of the arms, the material used in later liturgical chasubles was sometimes cut back on the right side, often on both sides, or even in the front (e.g., the Eastern rite *phelōnion*).



Notice the cape form, without sleeves

By the 4th century the chasuble became one's normal outer clothing both within and outside of the liturgy. The earliest evidence that it was required for bishops and priests comes from the 4th Council of Toledo (633). When in the Middle Ages the laity no longer understood liturgical Latin and the presider through most of the liturgy faced away from the people, the back of the chasuble was often decorated with symbols and images to provide a visual explanation of the sacred rites.

Interesting evolutions: From the 13th century onward, owing to the rich brocades and encrustations, sometimes the stiffness of the material so impeded the wearer's arm movements, especially at the elevation of the host. This led to both sides of

the garment being reduced back to the shoulders. Throughout Europe, what resulted, along with the continued use of lighter, fuller chasubles, were national varieties of the sandwich-board vestment known today as the "Roman" chasuble. In the 19th century a hybrid of the two styles was created by extending material down the arms from the shoulders of a "Roman" type.



With the return by Vatican II to early liturgical sources, chasubles in recent times have been fashioned as real clothing once again, reclaiming the shape of the ancient *planeta*.

The chasuble remains the proper vestment for the bishop and priest celebrant at Mass and at other rites immediately connected with the Mass. The chasuble is to be worn over the alb and the stole. However, concelebrating priests are allowed to wear only an alb and a stole.



Notice that concelebrant, Fr. Chapman, is wearing simply the alb and stole (far right)