THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

The Development and Significance of the Religious Habit of Men

A DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy

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By

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The Development and Significance of the Religious Habit of Men

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In light of the diminished status of the religious habit since Vatican II, this dissertation explores the development and significance of the religious habit of male institutes of the Western Church. Currently (2015), many older religious believe that consecrated life may be lived more faithfully without a religious habit, while a high percentage of younger religious desire to wear a habit as a visual expression of their consecration. This difference of opinion is a cause of tension within many religious institutes. Despite tremendous change in the use of the religious habit since Vatican II, the habit has received minimal scholarly attention, and practically none written in English.

This dissertation engages the initial legislative texts of numerous religious institutes in an effort to present the historical development of the habit of male religious of the Western Church. It also gives magisterial directives on the habit that have been issued throughout the history of the Church. The dissertation summarizes theological themes that have traditionally been connected to the religious habit, and it engages
theological interpretations that have emerged since Vatican II which have contributed to the diminishment of the religious habit.

Research into the development and significance of the habit of male religious of the Western Church affirmed the following ideas. First, distinctive attire has nearly always been an important element of male religious life. Second, magisterial directives have consistently aimed to restore the discipline of the habit when that discipline grew weak and to promote the habit in connection to poverty. Third, the religious habit has traditionally been connected with the notions of consecration, group identity, and rupture with the world. Lastly, the diminishment of the religious habit in the post-Vatican II period has been particularly influenced by the following ideas present in the documents of Vatican II: the “Universal Call to Holiness in the Church,” the Church’s “turn toward the world,” and a renewed emphasis on baptism as the fundamental source of the dignity of every Christian.

Time will reveal if future generations of male religious give the habit a more prominent role than it has been given in the fifty years since Vatican II.

Readers who may wish to contact the author are welcome to do so at bropete38@hotmail.com.
This dissertation by Peter F. Killeen fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Spirituality approved by Raymond Studzinski, Ph.D., as Director, and by Margaret Schreiber, S.T.D. and Gabriel O’Donnell, S.T.D. as Readers.

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Gabriel O’Donnell, S.T.D.
# CONTENTS

SIGNATURE PAGE........................................................................................................ii  

TABLE OF CONTENTS..................................................................................................iii  

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS...............................................................................................vi  

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..................................................................................................vii  

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.........................................................................................1  
A. The Religious Habit of Men as a Topic of Inquiry..................................................1  
B. Purpose and Methodology of this Dissertation......................................................5  
C. Clarification of Terminology....................................................................................9  

CHAPTER 2: THE RELIGIOUS HABIT OF MEN IN LATE ANTIQUITY......................12  
A. Unmarried Ascetics Living in Population Centers (2nd c. - 3rd c.)......................13  
B. The Development of Christian Monasticism in the East (3rd c. - 5th c.)..............15  
C. Desert Hermits in the East (3rd c. - 5th c.).........................................................17  
D. Cenobitic Monasticism in the East (4th c.)............................................................22  
E. Cenobitic Monasticism in the West (4th c. - 6th c.).............................................38  
F. The Habit of the Black Monks (6th c.).................................................................50  
G. Summary...............................................................................................................56  

CHAPTER 3: THE RELIGIOUS HABIT OF MEN DURING THE MIDDLE AGES.......58  
A. The Habit of the Black Monks in the High Middle Ages (6th c. - 9th c.)..............59  
B. Monastic Renewal (10th c. - 12th c.)..................................................................62  
C. Mendicant Orders (13th c. - 15th c.)....................................................................70  
D. Transformation of Men’s Fashion (14th c. - 15th c.).........................................84  
E. Summary...............................................................................................................84  

CHAPTER 4: THE RELIGIOUS HABIT OF MEN DURING THE MODERN ERA........86  
A. Clerics Regular (16th c.)......................................................................................87  
B. Triumph of the Catholic Reform (17th c. – 18th c.)............................................94  
C. Summary...............................................................................................................107
CHAPTER 5: MAGISTERIAL STATEMENTS WITH BEARING ON THE HABIT......108
   A. Pope Celestine I (428)..............................................................108
   B. Council of Chalcedon (451).......................................................110
   C. Fourth Council of Constantinople (869-70)...............................110
   D. Ut Periculoso (1298)..............................................................112
   E. Council of Vienne (1312-13)....................................................113
   F. Council of Constance (1414-18)..............................................116
   G. Council of Trent (1545-63)......................................................117
   H. Twentieth Century Legislation Previous to Vatican II...............121
   I. Summary..................................................................................123

CHAPTER 6: THE RELIGIOUS HABIT AS WITNESS........................................124
   A. Rupture with the World..............................................................125
   B. Group Identity............................................................................136
   C. Consecration...............................................................................145
   D. Poverty........................................................................................153
   E. Summary.....................................................................................166

CHAPTER 7: MAGISTERIAL STATEMENTS ON THE HABIT SINCE VATICAN II...168
   A. Perfectae Caritatis (1965)...........................................................168
   B. Ecclesiae Sanctae (1966)..............................................................172
   C. Speech of Paul VI to Superiors General of Women Religious (1967)...174
   D. Evangelica Testificatio (1971).....................................................174
   E. SCRIS Letter on the Religious Habit (1972).................................175
   F. Early Magisterium of John Paul II (1978-82)...............................178
   G. Code of Canon Law (1983)........................................................180
   H. Essential Elements (1983)..........................................................185
   I. Vita Consecrata (1996)..............................................................187
   J. Summary.....................................................................................190

CHAPTER 8: CHANGES IN UNIVERSAL AND PARTICULAR LEGISLATION.............192
   A. Canons in the 1917 Code of Canon Law and Its 1983 Revision.........193
   B. Legislation of Religious Institutes: Before Vatican II and Today........196
   C. St. Meinrad Archabbey..................................................................197
   D. Order of Friars Minor..................................................................200
   E. Order of Friars Preachers............................................................204
   F. Society of Jesus............................................................................210
G. Brothers of the Christian Schools

H. Summary

CHAPTER 9: DIMINISHMENT OF THE HABIT IN THE POST-VATICAN II ERA

A. The Fundamental Dignity of All Members of the Church

B. The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church

C. Deemphasizing Religious Consecration

D. The Church’s Turn Toward the World

E. Other Reasons for the Diminishment of the Religious Habit

F. Contemporary Theologians on the Diminishment of the Religious Habit

G. Summary

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

A. What Has This Research Accomplished?

B. Implications of this Research for the Future of the Religious Habit of Men

C. Further Research Projects

D. A Final Word

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Secondary Sources

AUTHOR’S CONTACT INFORMATION
# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AAS</td>
<td><em>Acta Apostolicae Sedis, Commentarium Officiale</em>. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1909-</td>
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<td>ACW</td>
<td>Ancient Christian Writers</td>
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<tr>
<td>CL</td>
<td><em>Cahiers Lasalliens</em>. Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1959-</td>
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<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>Cistercian Studies Series</td>
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<td>CSCO</td>
<td><em>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium: Scriptores Syri</em>. Louvain: Peeters, 1919-</td>
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<tr>
<td>DSp</td>
<td><em>Dictionnaire de Spiritualité</em>. Paris: Beauchesne, 1932-</td>
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<td>FCh</td>
<td>Fathers of the Church. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1947-</td>
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Chapter 1

Introduction

This introductory chapter addresses three questions: How does this dissertation approach the religious habit of men as a topic of inquiry? What is the purpose of this dissertation? What methodology does it use? Lastly, this chapter clarifies a number of terms.

A. The Religious Habit of Men as a Topic of Inquiry

The religious habit had been a consistent element in the lives of Catholic male religious, except during periods of political persecution, until a marked diminishment in this tradition took place after Vatican II. This diminishment was brought about in part by major cultural shifts within both Church and society that took place during the twentieth century. One of these shifts was generated by Pope Pius XII, who repeatedly requested that institutes of women religious update and adapt to the modern world by modifying, among many things, their religious habit. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council echoed this request in Perfectae Caritatis, the conciliar decree concerning the adaptation and renewal of religious life, and called upon all religious institutes, male
and female, to update where necessary their religious habit.\textsuperscript{1} Paradoxically, while official documents of the ecclesiastical hierarchy since Vatican II have consistently called religious to give high priority to the habit, many contemporary religious believe that religious life may be more faithfully lived without it.

The stark dichotomy between official legislation and lived reality helped cause the major question that lies behind the research of this dissertation: “Why do such a high percentage of contemporary religious dress in the common attire of lay persons?” A number of related questions also helped to give birth to this dissertation: What is it about the post-Vatican II era that caused such a momentous change in regard to use of the religious habit? Have religious always worn distinctive garb? Has there ever been a time period in Church history when religious dressed in common attire rather than in religiously-distinctive attire? Are those contemporary religious correct, who believe their consecrated life is lived more authentically without distinctive attire?

Differences of opinion about the value of the religious habit are a cause of tension within many religious institutes in 2015. The opinion of a contemporary religious as to the importance of the religious habit is frequently related to his or her age. The stereotype that younger religious highly regard the religious habit and that

\textsuperscript{1} Perfectæ Caritatis 17.
older religious are more circumspect about its value was affirmed by a study entitled *Recent Vocations to Religious Life: a Report for the National Religious Vocation Conference* (RVRL), which was published in 2009 by the *Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate* (CARA). This study reported that many Catholics who have entered religious life since the year 1993, especially those who were born after 1982, are attracted to wearing a religious habit.\(^2\)

Moreover, the religious habit has become a source of tension between different religious institutes. Groups that highly value the habit are often stereotyped as reactionary, while groups that maintain a more laissez-faire attitude toward the habit are frequently stereotyped as less-than-faithful. The aforementioned CARA report demonstrated that the most successful institutes in terms of attracting and retaining new members at this time (2009) are those whose members wear a religious habit.\(^3\)

A number of studies on religious life since the Second Vatican Council have focused on ideas such as religious consecration, the evangelical counsels, and the future


\(^3\) RVRL, 117.
existence of religious life itself. The religious habit, however, has received only minimal study. The most significant scholarly writing about the religious habit is written in Italian (Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione, 1974) and in Spanish (El Habito Religioso: Historia – Psicología – Sociología, 2011).\(^4\) The significance of the religious habit has been given very little attention in the English-speaking world. Outside of brief treatment in the New Catholic Encyclopedia and some articles in Review for Religious, the only English-speaking theologian with expertise on religious life that research yielded as having written about the religious habit is Sandra Schneiders, and she has written very little at that.\(^5\) Independent of this dissertation, there is almost a complete vacuum of English-language scholarship on the religious habit in the post-Vatican II era.

\(^4\) Scholarly articles on the religious habit in Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione (hereafter DIP) include: “Abito Religioso,” vol. 1, 50-79; “Costume dei Monaci e dei Religiosi,” vol. 3, 204-236; and “Vestizione,” vol. 9, 1951-1959. A magisterial pictorial catalog of the habits of institutes of the Western Church, as well as a scholarly history of the religious habit similar to that found in the articles of DIP, is: Giancarlo Rocca, ed., La Sostanza dell’Efimero: Gli Abiti Degli Ordini Religiosi in Occidente (Rome: Edizioni Paoline, 2000).

B. Purpose and Methodology of this Dissertation

The overarching purpose of this dissertation is to give a broad historical picture of the habit of male religious of institutes of the Western Church, so as to put the post-Vatican II diminishment of the habit into historical perspective. A number of lines of inquiry assist in approximating this goal. First, the dissertation traces the historical development of the habit of male religious of the Western Church. Second, it presents magisterial directives on the religious habit that have been issued throughout the history of the Church. Third, the dissertation summarizes major themes that have traditionally been connected to the religious habit. Lastly, it engages issues in regard to the religious habit that have emerged since the Second Vatican Council.

Though this dissertation has been motivated primarily by questions regarding the diminishment of the habit in the post-Vatican II era, it does not argue for or against the religious habit. Rather, this dissertation simply presents the facts about the religious habit as gleaned from two millenia of Church history. Only in the concluding chapter does the author briefly share some personal opinions.

The heritage of the habit of male religious of the Western Church is presented in a meaningful way by dividing religious life into three historical periods: Late Antiquity (2nd c. – 6th c.), the Middle Ages (6th c. – 15th c.), and the Modern Era (16th c. – Vatican II). Corresponding with these three epochs, chapters two, three, and four explore the religious habit as evidenced primarily in the initial legislative texts of significant male religious institutes. Chapters two, three, and four engage the initial legislative texts of various groups of male religious primarily to show the major contours of the historical development of the religious habit of men in the Western Church. In other words, these texts are mined so as to relate the meta-story of the male religious habit in the Western Church, from the earliest celibate ascetics living in urban areas until the various categories of male religious in existence today. How did the habit of one group affect the habit of a subsequent group?

In addition to showing the developmental evolution of the male religious habit, chapters two, three, and four engage the initial legislative texts of various religious institutes with the following questions in mind: Was any spiritual symbolism attached to the different elements of the habit of said group? Was investiture part of the entrance rites for acceptance? Was the habit distinctive from secular clothing? This last question

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was motivated by the present-day reality whereby many religious wear common attire rather than distinctive attire. Answers to all the aforementioned questions enable the dissertation to give a sufficiently broad rendering of the use and significance of the habit of male religious in the Western Church.

Occasionally, chapters two, three, and four explore the religious habit not only from an institute’s early rules and constitutions but from pertinent writings of a particular founder or from aspects of an institute’s patrimonial heritage. While the evolution of the habit of men religious of the Western Church is the primary concern of chapters two, three, and four, a solid grasp of the foundation period of this evolution requires foraying into some early monastic sources of the Eastern Church. Giving the evolutionary history of the religious habit of men from its beginnings in the second century until today would be a never-ending story, and thus chapters two, three, and four offer a substantial overview.

Chapter five presents magisterial statements from ecumenical and local councils, collections of Church law, and papal statements that directly address the religious habit. Chapter five covers from the fifth century up through immediately prior to Vatican II.

Chapter six summarizes major themes connected to the religious habit that emerged from the dissertation’s research. These themes are: rupture with the world,
group identity, consecration, and poverty. The early texts of religious founders and institutes are the major sources used to provide evidence that the religious habit has long been connected to these four themes.

Chapters seven, eight, and nine consider the state of the religious habit during the post-Vatican II period. Chapter seven presents magisterial statements on the religious habit that have been issued since the Second Vatican Council. Chapter eight compares and contrasts legislation on the habit that was issued in the decades prior to the Vatican II with legislation on the habit that is in force today. Chapter nine offers some of the most important reasons that have motivated the diminishment of religious garb in the post-conciliar period. It addresses why prescriptions from *Perfectae Caritatis* and the *Code of Canon Law*, as well as recommendations from the papal magisterium promoting the religious habit are frequently disregarded in our post-conciliar era. Chapters seven, eight, and nine will be helpful to anyone who would like to understand the post-conciliar situation of the religious habit.

A concluding chapter summarizes what the dissertation has accomplished, offers possible implications of this research for the future of the religious habit of men, and speaks of some future projects that might spring from this dissertation.
C. Clarification of Terminology

The dissertation frequently speaks of “male religious” or “men religious” to describe that type of Christian disciple who was part of a group or class of persons where celibacy was a major feature of their Christian commitment. While the earliest monastics were never described by the term “religious,” sometimes this designation is necessary in order to capture a collective sense of this Christian lifestyle throughout the centuries.

The dissertation interchangeably uses the phrases “religiously-distinctive attire,” “religious garb,” and “religious habit.” Most English language translations of the 1983 Code of Canon Law reserve the word “garb” for the dress of diocesan clerics and use the word “habit” for religious. While there is indeed a theological basis for this distinction of terminology, it is not significant enough to render “religious garb” an unfit synonym for “religious habit.” Because the official Latin version of the Code of Canon Law uses the same word habitus to refer to the attire of both diocesan clerics and religious, it is not critical that the word “garb” be reserved for the clothing of diocesan clergy.

Another important clarification is that while the religious habit of men has traditionally incorporated a tunic/cassock/robe/soutane, this garment is not an absolute necessity to a religious habit. The habits of some contemporary institutes of men do not incorporate a cassock-like garment in their religious habit. The Brotherhood of Hope,
for example, is a contemporary institute whose uniform habit consists of a pair of slacks and a congregational shirt.

Brotherhood of Hope

A final clarification is that “religious communities” and “religious congregations” refer in the context of this dissertation to religious institutes, not to local churches.

This dissertation advances scholarship on the religious habit of men in the hope of helping religious institutes, especially male institutes, make informed decisions about the role of their religious habit moving into the future. Religious life in the Western world will be healthier when the role of the religious habit moves beyond the present confusing situation that has accrued in the decades since Vatican II. The fact that the habit causes tension both within religious institutes and between religious institutes are

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two reasons why it is important for the academy to shed scholarly light on the development and significance of the religious habit.


Chapter 2

The Religious Habit in Late Antiquity (2nd c. - 6th c.)

The second to sixth centuries comprise a time period that is fundamental to understanding later developments of the religious habit. During the first three centuries the two initial forms of consecrated life entered the life of the Church: (1) asceticism, a disciplined and sexually continent form of life that was centered in populated areas and (2) eremiticism, an austere and sexually continent form of life that was usually located in remote areas. In the fourth century cenobitic (communal) monasticism developed in the East and then spread to the West, primarily during the fifth century. The sixth century saw the rise of “Benedictine monasticism,” which has had a perduring influence on monasticism in the West.¹ In order to understand the development of the religious habit in male religious institutes of the western Church, it is necessary to have knowledge of early developments that took place, generally speaking, in the East.

¹ “Benedictine monasticism” should here be understood as monasticism that was influenced by Benedict’s Rule for Monasteries. As a matter of precision, the term “Benedictine” as in the “Benedictine Order” is a nineteenth century invention due to the desire of the Holy See to organize into an administrative entity those autonomous monasteries that followed Benedict’s Rule for Monasteries.
A. Unmarried Ascetics Living in Population Centers

At the end of the first century and in the beginning of the second, there are occasional references to male ascetics who lived a life of sexual continence "in honor of the flesh of Christ."\textsuperscript{2} Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 - 215) wrote at length about this lifestyle in his treatise \textit{On Continence}. Along with voluntary poverty and general austerity, sexual continence was a constitutive element of early Christian ascetics, a lifestyle which over time evolved into monasticism. Generally speaking, the few references to Christian men who lived a life of continence in towns and villages during the first centuries of Christianity do not include information about their mode of dress.

One exception to this concerns “Christian philosophers,” some of whom practiced sexual continence and some of whom were married. Christian philosophers sometimes adopted a custom practiced by pagan philosophers of the Roman Empire, who replaced their customary Roman toga with the Greek pallium, a distinct type of cloak, as a sign of their role as a philosopher. The distinctive look of the Greek pallium set the philosophers of the Roman Empire apart. One such Christian philosopher who donned the Greek pallium was Justin Martyr (c. 100 - 165). We learn of Justin’s special

\textsuperscript{2} Ignatius of Antioch, \textit{Letter to Polycarp} 5, ANF 1:95; SCh 10:174. See also Clement of Rome, \textit{First Letter to the Corinthians} 38, ANF 1:15; SCh 167:162.
clothing in his Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, which indicates that Justin’s distinctive 
outfit motivated Trypho to engage him in conversation:

I was instructed, said he [Trypho], by Corinthus the Socratic Philosopher at Argos, 
not to despise, disregard, or neglect those who appear in this habit, but rather to 
show the utmost degree of civility to, and embrace all opportunities of conversing 
with them, that some advantage might accrue to one or other of us; and that it 
would be well for both, if either of us should be profited thereby. For this reason 
therefore, when I see anyone in this habit, I readily and willingly go to him, and 
have now accosted you civilly; these my companions also are in hopes of hearing 
something useful from you.³

Note that Trypho is favorably disposed toward those who “appear in this habit” and 
that he “readily and willingly” goes to such a person. Trypho’s favorable disposition 
toward those dressed like Justin Martyr raises the potential witness value that 
distinctive dress holds to reveal and define a Christian in a favorable light.

Tertullian (160-225), a married man, is a second example of an early Christian 
who adopted and advocated use of the Greek pallium. To his fellow Carthaginians, 
Tertullian defended his abandonment of the Roman toga in a brief work entitled On the 
Pallium. Tertullian concluded his defense: “Rejoice, pallium, and exult! A better 
philosophy has deigned you worthy, from the moment that it is the Christian whom

³ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho the Jew 1, ANF 1:194; Paradosis 47, ed. Phillipe Bobichon, 
(Freiburg: Academic Press, 2003); PG 6:473. Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260 – c. 340) also testifies to this in 
his Ecclesiastical History. “Justin, in philosopher’s garb, preached the word of God.” Eusebius of Caesarea, 
Ecclesiastical History 4.11.8, NPNF2, 1:184; SCh 31:175.
you started to dress.\textsuperscript{4} For Tertullian, Christianity was the true philosophy and the Christian was the true philosopher; therefore it was right for a Christian philosopher to wear the pallium of the Greeks.\textsuperscript{5}

B. \textit{The Development of Christian Monasticism in the East (3rd c. - 5th c.)}

Monasticism in its Christian form is traditionally dated as having arisen in the East around 250 A.D. The latter half of the reign of Roman Emperor Constantine I, during which tradition ascribes the promulgation of the Edict of Milan (313), brought about a more favorable situation for Christians. As the threat of martyrdom diminished, the religious fervor of Christians waned. In this political and religious context, thousands of Christians moved away from population centers in pursuit of a more fervent Christian life. During the fourth century, Christian monasticism was cultivated in Arabia, Asia Minor, Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. The great center was Egypt, where there developed three different types of monastic life, which roughly corresponded with three different geographical locations.


\textsuperscript{5} For further information on the influence of Greek dress on the Romans see Margarete Bieber, "Roman Men in Greek Himation," \textit{American Philosophical Society} 103, no. 3 (June 15, 1959): 374-417. Tertullian is mentioned on pages 411, 413, and 415.
The first type of monasticism, eremitic life, found its greatest flowering in lower Egypt. Associated with the eremitic life are persons such as Paul of Thebes and Antony of the Desert. The second type of Christian monasticism was groupings who usually banded together under the direction of a spiritual father. This designation is best associated with the Egyptian region of Nitria and Scetis and its most well-known representative is Evagrius Ponticus. The third type of Christian monasticism was cenobitic and is best associated with the territory of upper Egypt. Though its progenitor was Pachomius, the principal conveyor of Egyptian cenobitic monasticism to the West was John Cassian.6

Monastic life in early Christian tradition was present outside of Egypt as well. The eremitic life flourished in Syria even before its debut in Egypt. Simon Stylites is a notable representative. In Asia Minor the dominant type of monasticism was cenobitic. It was a learned and liturgical monasticism that first developed in the city of Cappadocia and is associated with St. Basil. In Palestine, especially in the fifth century, cenobitic monasticism also took “pride of place.”7


7 Ward, foreword to Sayings of the Desert Fathers, xviii-xix.
Today Christians generally emphasize the fundamental goodness of the human body as made in the image and likeness of God, whereas the primitive monks often operated from a dualistic mentality (i.e. body vs. soul, flesh vs. spirit) that considered the body as an obstacle to union with God. This mindset manifested itself in the early monks’ manner of dress.

C. Desert Hermits in the East (3rd c. - 5th c.)

With the early Christian hermits of Syria one encounters a rarity that is somewhat confounding to an investigation into the history and significance of the religious habit of men. Some of these Syrian hermits practiced total or partial nudity, which was only one of a host of peculiar customs. This odd practice was influenced by Manichaeism, with its negative attitude toward the body and the body’s demand for comfort. By placing themselves so definitively outside the norms of society, these hermits sought to give robust expression to their renunciation of the things of this

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world. Their renunciation of clothing was mistakenly thought to be a fuller expression of the renunciations that are affirmed during the sacrament of baptism.

Paul of Thebes (c. 227-340) is considered to be the first Christian hermit of the Egyptian desert. Jerome wrote *The Life of Paulus, the First Hermit* (c. 375), a hagiographical work that gives a credible detail about the garb of Paul of Thebes. Jerome wrote that upon Paul’s death, Antony of the Desert took Paul’s simple and unique tunic that was woven from palm leaves and wore it on the feasts of Easter and Pentecost. Because it is historically verifiable that Jerome visited Antony of the Desert in person, this detail about Paul’s unique tunic is plausible.

![St. Paul the First Hermit](image)

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Antony of the Desert (c. 251-356), the most prominent of the early desert hermits, is popularly celebrated as the “Father of Monks.” His inclusion in the *General Roman Calendar* is evidence of Antony’s importance. Antony’s prominence in early Christian monasticism is also highlighted by the plentiful number of sayings that are attributed to him in the *Apothegmata Patrum.* During his long duration in the Egyptian desert, Antony lived for many years as a solitary hermit and for a fewer number of years as the leader of a group of hermits.

**Anthony of the Desert**

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The *Letters of Antony*, written between 330 and 349 and deemed authentic by the majority of scholars, is the first of many sources that demonstrate an established tradition of particular dress among the early Egyptian monastics.\(^{13}\) Antony mentions the habit in five of his letters, in each case warning against “wearing the habit in vain.”\(^{14}\) Unfortunately, the context of these letters does not make it clear if they were written to cenobites or to groups of hermits living under the guidance of a spiritual father.\(^{15}\)

In letter three Antony speaks of the “habit of godliness.” He wrote of having “grief and tears” because of those who wear the habit but live in a manner that negates the faith and virtue it symbolizes: “But as for me, miserable prisoner in Christ, this time which we have reached is a time of joy, as well as grief and tears, for there are many of our generation who have put on the habit of godliness but denied its power.”\(^{16}\) In this same letter Antony also related that he “cried” over those who had given up the habit

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\(^{15}\) Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, 46-47.

and returned to their former way of life: “Over those who have considered the lengthy time, their hearts failing them, and who have laid off the habit of godliness and become like beasts, I cry.”17

In letter seven Antony expressed an unsettled spirit. He feared that a monk might fulfill St. Paul’s admonition against “having the form of godliness but denying the power thereof” by living in a worldly manner rather than a godly manner: “Truly, my beloved in the Lord, I am greatly troubled and vexed in my spirit, for wearing the habit and having the name of saints we are glorified in front of unbelievers; but I fear lest the word of Paul be fulfilled upon us that says, having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof (2 Tm. 3:5).”18

The Life of Antony, written by Athanasius of Alexandria in close proximity to Antony’s death, indicates the garments that Antony possessed: two sheepskins, a hair garment, and another article used when sleeping (possibly akin to a sheet or blanket). Athanasius put on Antony’s lips the following instructions as to how his garments were to be distributed upon his death: “And divide my garments. To Athanasius the bishop give one sheepskin and the garment whereon I am laid, which he himself gave me new,


but which with me has grown old. To Serapion the bishop give the other sheepskin, and keep the hair garment yourselves." 19 This reference gives us an indication of the apparel likely worn by other fourth century monastics of the Egyptian desert.

D. *Cenobitic Monasticism in the East (4th c.)*

This section offers testimony about the religious habit from four leaders in the development of eastern cenobitic monasticism: Pachomius, Basil of Caesarea, Evagrius Ponticus, and John Cassian. Pachomius relates the elements of the habit in a straightforward manner, Basil roots his discussion of the habit in Scripture, Evagrius offers spiritual symbolism on the habit, and Cassian gives an even fuller spiritual symbolism. This eastern witness manifested a clear tendency toward distinctive dress, and it influenced the development of cenobitic monasticism in the West.

Pachomius (c. 290-346) ranks among the Desert Fathers as the founder of cenobitic monasticism. He grew up as a pagan in southern Egypt, but became Christian while serving as a conscript in the Roman army. After baptism, Pachomius’ Christian commitment led him first to a life of social service, then to the tutelage of a local hermit, and eventually to his founding a monastery in the locale of Tabennisi, Egypt. Unlike the

desert environs of many early Christian hermits, Tabennesi was located in a habitable region on the banks of the Nile River. So many men joined Pachomius’ communal experiment at Tabennisi that it grew into a group of roughly a dozen monasteries.20

**Saint Pachomius**

The *Rules of Pachomius*, written in Coptic in the middle of the fourth century, is the oldest monastic rule in Christian history.22 It includes a series of regulations entitled

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21 Odoardo Fialetti, *De Gli Habiti Delle Religioni con le Armi e Breve Descrittion Loro* (Venetia: Marco Sadeler, 1626), 25.

Pachomius, three of which give instruction about the clothing of the Pachomian monks. Pachomius did not specify any spiritual symbolism in connection to the elements of the religious habit, as did later writers like Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian, but wrote about the habit in a straightforward manner.

The first precept from the Rules of Pachomius speaks of a mantle worn by the monks, which served to protect them against nighttime cold and when gathered in synaxis (chapel). The linen mantle, clothing proper to liturgical prayer, was not to be worn when working nor after the synaxis. “No one shall take his linen mantle with him when going to work, except with the superior’s permission. And in the monastery no one shall walk around wearing that same mantle after the synaxis.”

A second precept forbade the acquisition of garments that were not prescribed by the law of the monastery: “In his house and cell, no one shall have anything except what is prescribed for all together by the law of the monastery: no woolen tunic, no mantle, no soft sheepskin with unshorn wool . . . They shall have only what is distributed by the father of the monastery through the housemasters.”


24 Rules of Pachomius 81, CS 46:159-160; Boon, Pachomiana, 37.
mantle” in this precept is potentially confusing because the monks did indeed use a mantle to keep themselves warm at nighttime and during synaxis. This proscription probably prohibited the use of a mantle that was different from the one prescribed for all.

The aforementioned precept continues with a list of “equipment” that was part of the Pachomian monastic outfit: “This is their equipment: two linen tunics plus the one already worn, a long scarf for the neck and shoulders, a goat skin hanging from the shoulder, shoes, two hoods, a belt and a staff. If you find anything more than this, you shall take it away without contradiction.”25 In a later precept Pachomius stressed that a monk was not to change his wardrobe, nor add to it, without his housemaster’s permission: “No one shall change anything in his wardrobe without his housemaster’s permission. Nor shall they take anything in trade without his approval. And no one shall add anything to his wardrobe contrary to what has been established for them.”26

Pachomius gave specifications about the goat skins and hoods of the monks: “All the goat skins shall be belted up; and all the hoods shall bear the sign of the community

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and the sign of their house.” The requirement that goat skins be “belted up” was most likely so that the skins would not impede a monk from working. The signs that were to appear on each monk’s hood, one signifying the monastic community and the other specifying a monk’s particular house within that larger community, are evidence that Pachomius wanted his monks to be identifiable as belonging to a particular monastery and house. This custom brings up the issues of individual and group identity, which will be treated in chapter six.

Pachomius included a version of investiture in his precepts: “They shall strip him of his secular clothes and garb him in the monastic habit. He shall be handed over to the porter so that at the time of prayer he may bring him before all the brothers; and he shall sit where he is told.” Though Pachomius does not give many details describing the ritual of investiture, the phrase “They shall strip him. . .” suggests a formal communal setting rather than a private act in one’s cell.

Basil of Caesarea (329-379), Doctor of the Church, is known alongside Pachomius as the father of communal monasticism in Eastern Christianity. He was born into a wealthy and influential family in the central Anatolia region of modern-day Turkey.

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27 Rules of Pachomius 99, CS 46:162; Boon, Pachomiana, 40 and 156 (Coptic).

Highlights of his dramatic and fascinating life include attending the Council of Constantinople (360), succeeding Eusebius as bishop of Caesarea (370), and expending much energy combatting the Arian heresy as leader of the “neo-Nicene” movement.

Basil’s guidance for monastic life is primarily found in the Asketikon, a collection of questions and answers composed over the course of many years. The following references are to its final form, the so-called “Great” Asketikon. Basil’s teaching on monastic clothing is steeped in Scripture and reveals his practicality and common sense. The overall context of the Asketikon, combined with the witness of some of Basil’s letters, reveals that a common habit was part of the lifestyle of the cenobites for whom the Asketikon was written. Basil did not give a detailed description of the habit as did Pachomius or Cassian, but wrote about the habit in terms of a dress code, as would, in later years, Augustine, Benedict, and Francis. For Basil, the habit included a humble tunic, was adapted to the necessities of ascetic life, conformed to biblical examples, and was symbolic of renouncing vanity. Basil addressed the topic of monastic attire in “long responses” 22 and 23 of the Asketikon, in “short responses” 70, 90, 168, and 210 of the same, and in letters 1, 150, and 223.

29 For the evolution of The Asketikon see Anna Silvas, introduction to The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1-4.
Long Response 22 (hereafter LR) of the *Asketikon* asks: “What is the worthy and proper garment for a Christian?” Basil’s response shifted between what is applicable to any Christian and what was directly related to his cenobitic audience. Toward the beginning of his reply, Basil cited Mark 9.35: “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” If such humility was true for Christians in general it was certainly true for those aspiring to lead a monastic life (3). Clothing is an exercise of modesty in that it covers the body; it is also meant to protect one from the elements (14). One outfit should be sufficient for all purposes: night, day, going out, staying at home (15-17). Monastics should have a common style of clothing with a distinctive character (18-19). Distinctive dress is useful in bearing public witness to one’s profession and demands that one’s actions be consonant with their clothing (20-21). If a monk acts unseemingly even in the smallest thing, the public takes note and marks it against him. Because of this, a monastic style of clothing can guard the weaker from committing dishonorable deeds (25-26). A monk should be identified by his clothing, as is the soldier or senator (29). The same rules of simplicity and choice of readily accessible material are to be used concerning footwear (31).


31 Here and following, the numbers in parentheses refer to specific verses of Basil, *The Longer Responses 22, The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 220-223; PG 31:977-82.
LR 23 is entitled “Concerning the Belt.” Basil opined that those who lived monastic life in the past proved the necessity of using a belt (32-35). One engaged in manual work should use a belt (37). Cleaving very literally to Lk 3:11 and Mk 6:9, Basil affirmed that monastics were only to possess one tunic (39).

Further in the Asketikon are the “short rules” (hereafter SR), named thus because their replies are brief in comparison to the “long rules.” SR 70, 90, 168, and 210 pertain to clothing. In SR 70 Basil stated that the use of things beyond necessity was the result of avarice, hedonism, or vainglory. People who persisted in extravagance would incur God’s judgment. In SR 90 Basil allowed that a garment of haircloth was permissible at times because it was useful for humility of soul; apart from this, a second tunic could not be adopted. In SR 168 one learns that it was okay for a monk to point out if his tunic did not fit properly, but that he should not be preoccupied with the relative newness or quality of the material. SR 210 reveals Basil’s common sense. He stated that modest dress respects the purpose of a garment, takes into account the place, time, 

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and person who wears it, and allows for difference. Winter wear will be different from summer wear, that of the worker will be different from what is worn by the person at rest, the soldier different from the civilian, the male than the female.36

Some of Basil’s letters also give us insight into the clothing of the developing cenobites for whom he served as guide. Letter two, written to his friend Gregory of Nazianzus, affirmed the following: use of a belt, being mindful of the climate, using rough rather than soft material for the tunic, using materials that were frugal but of quality, the key being what is necessary rather than what might be desirable.37 The only place in Basil’s writings where he mentions color in reference to the habit is here in letter two: “As to color, avoid brightness . . . to aim at bright colors in dress is like women’s beautifying when they color their cheeks and hair with hues other than their own.”38 In Letter 150, Basil wrote to Amphilochius that monks should only possess one tunic.39 In Letter 223, Basil wrote admiringly of the ascetics who were influenced by the bishop Eustathius. Despite the questionable orthodoxy of these ascetics, Basil spoke


positively of their dress: “I thought that [their] lowliness of dress was sufficient
evidence of [their] lowliness [humility] of mind; and sufficient for my full assurance
was the thick cloak and the girdle and the sandals of untanned hide. And although
many were trying to lead me away from companionship with them, I did not suffer it,
seeing that they preferred the life of endurance to that of pleasure.”

Evagrius Ponticus (345-399) grew up in modern-day Turkey not far from St. Basil
and is the first person to write extensively on the spirituality of the Egyptian desert.
Though he was greatly influenced by Basil, Evagrius was not as attracted to Basil’s
charity-oriented cenobitic communities as he was to the vibrant intellectual life of
Constantinople, where Evagrius spent the early years of his ecclesiastical itinerary. In
Constantinople Evagrius fell in love with the wife of a government official, a crisis that
impelled him to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where he first took up the monastic way
of life. Evagrius eventually moved to a different cenobitic foundation in the Nitria
region of Egypt and eventually embraced a more eremitic lifestyle in the Egyptian
locale of Kells, where he lived the remaining fourteen years of his life. Evagrius is
unique among the Egypt monastics in that he was a cultured person and a gifted writer.

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Evagrius was very much influenced by Origen, a fact which contributed to Evagrius’ official condemnation as a heretic at the Second Council of Constantinople.\textsuperscript{41}

Evagrius explained the symbolism of the habit of Egyptian monastics in his \textit{Letter to Anatolius}, which serves as an introduction to Evagrius’ best known work, \textit{The Praktikos}. Evagrius’ description of the habit is the earliest known symbolic interpretation given to the different pieces of the monastic habit.\textsuperscript{42}

Evagrius related to Anatolius that the habit of the Egyptian monks was markedly different from what was worn by the general population: “You have well understood that not without purpose is this habit made in a form so very different from what other men employ for the style of their clothes.”\textsuperscript{43} Evagrius explained the symbolism of six different parts of the monastic habit: cowl, bare hands, scapular, belt, sheep-skin garment, and staff. Evagrius wrote that “the cowl is a symbol of the charity of God our Savior. It protects the most important part of the body and keeps us, who are children in Christ, warm. Thus it can be said to afford protection against those who attempt to

\textsuperscript{41} Information on the life of Evagrius can be found at John Eudes Bamberger, introduction to \textit{The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer}, CS 4 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), xxxv-xlvi.


\textsuperscript{43} Evagrius, CS 4:12; SCh 171:482-5.
strike and wound us.”⁴⁴ Evagrius’ inclusion of “bare hands” as part of the habit certainly comes across to us as strange. To Evagrius’ manner of thinking, the custom of bare hands was “a symbol of a life lived free of all hypocrisy. For vainglory has a frightful power to cover over and cast virtues into the shade.”⁴⁵ Evagrius’ explanation of the scapular, a garment not mentioned by either Pachomius or Cassian, included both its symbolic meaning and a description of its form: “The scapular, which has the form of a cross and which covers the shoulders of the monks, is a symbol of faith in Christ which raises up the meek, removes obstacles and provides for free, untrammelled activity.”⁴⁶ Evagrius faithfully conformed to monastic tradition by associating the habit’s belt with chastity: “The belt which they wear about their loins signifies their rejection of all impurity.”⁴⁷ Wearing a belt “about their loins” meant that the monk tightened a belt around his lower waist and used it to tuck in his tunic when working or going about so that it would not impede his movement. Symbolically, this meant that the monk was ready and prepared to fight against demons. Evagrius associated the

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⁴⁴ Evagrius, CS 4:13; SCh 171:484-5.

⁴⁵ Evagrius, CS 4:13; SCh 171:486-7.


sheep-skin garment with mortification: “To signify that they continually bear in their bodies the mortification of Jesus and check all the irrational passions, [they] wear also a sheep-skin garment.”\textsuperscript{48} Lastly, Evagrius spoke of the staff, which signified the dignity of the monastic life and served as a practical aid when journeying: “They carry a staff which is the tree of life that affords secure footing to those who hold on to it. It allows them to support themselves upon it as upon the Lord.”\textsuperscript{49}

Evagrius briefly referred to the prayer that accompanied a new monk at the ceremony where the candidate was invested in the habit. He wrote to Anatolius, “Whenever they confer this habit, the Fathers speak the following words to the young monks: ‘The fear of God strengthens faith, my son, and continence in turn strengthens this fear.’”\textsuperscript{50} Albeit brief, this is likely the earliest mention of an investiture prayer in all of Christian monastic literature.

Evagrius taught and influenced John Cassian (c. 360 - 435), who hails from a region that straddles modern-day Romania and Bulgaria and who is venerated as a saint by the Churches of the East. While in his twenties or thirties, Cassian entered a monastery in Bethlehem. From here Cassian made two journeys to acquaint himself

\textsuperscript{48} Evagrius, CS 4:14; SCh 171:488-91.

\textsuperscript{49} Evagrius, CS 4:14; SCh 171:490-1.

\textsuperscript{50} Evagrius, CS 4:14; SCh 171:492-3.
with the monastics of Egypt. Cassian described the habit of the Egyptian monks and the spiritual significance of each of its parts in *The Institutes of the Coenobia and the Remedies for the Eight Principal Vices* (hereafter *The Institutes*), a text whose chapters on the habit probably relied on the writings of Cassian’s former teacher, Evagrius. Though much of the subject material in *The Institutes* concerns the monks of Egypt, it was actually composed for monastic foundations in southern Gaul near present-day Marseilles. Thus, *The Institutes* marks a bridge from monasticism in the East to monasticism in the West. Cassian’s special contribution in regard to the religious habit is his extensive treatment of its spiritual symbolism.51

In the first chapter of *The Institutes*, entitled “The Garb of the Monks,” Cassian attached spiritual symbolism to specific garments or aspects of the monks’ habit. Cassian placed the monastic belt in the context of a monk being a soldier, an often-used image in early Christian literature: “And so, it is proper for a monk always to dress like a soldier of Christ, ever ready for battle, his loins girded.”52 It was also thought that wearing dead skin in the form of a leather belt was an image of death or mortification

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51 For background information on *The Institutes* see Boniface Ramsey, introduction to *The Institutes*, ACW 58 (New York: Newman Press, 2000), 3-8.

inasmuch as leather symbolized death: “Second, he should also be aware that in this very piece of clothing – his belt – there is no small mystery impinging upon him. For girding his loins and encircling himself with dead skin means that he is bearing about the morification of his members, which contain the seeds of wantonness and lasciviousness.”\textsuperscript{53}

In a section called “The Egyptians’ Hoods” Cassian relayed information about the small hood that covered the head and extended over a monk’s neck and shoulders. Cassian opined that this garment mimicked the Egyptian custom whereby children wore small hoods, which served to remind a monk to conform to the innocence and simplicity of children.\textsuperscript{54} Another section of The Institutes, “The Egyptians’ Colobia” speaks of the colobium, a long tunic-like garment with short sleeves: “They also wear linen colobia that barely reach the elbows and, for the rest, leave the hands free.”\textsuperscript{55} This detail might remind one of Evagrius’ inclusion of “bare hands” as part of the monastic habit. Similar to Evagrius, Cassian explained that a monk’s bare hands symbolize that he was cut off from the deeds and works of the world. As for the use of linen as a fabric

\textsuperscript{53} Cassian, Institutes 11.2, ACW 58:26; SCh 109:52-3.

\textsuperscript{54} Cassian, Institutes 3, ACW 58:23-4; SCh 109:42-5.

\textsuperscript{55} Cassian, Institutes 4, ACW 58:24; SCh 109:44-5.
for the colobium instead of the more customary wool, this suggested the notion of immortality, an idea consonant with the early Christian view. Cassian is the only early monastic author to write of cords as part of the habit. He wrote that Egyptian monks wore thin cords that descended from the top of the neck to their armpits. When tightened, the cords were used to gather a monk’s colobium (tunic) close to his body, so that he would be unimpeded to work. According to Cassian, the spiritual symbolism inherent in the cords was a call to work: “And if anyone does not wish to work, neither should he eat.”

Cassian named two monastic garments that Pachomius and Evagrius wrote about but did not specifically name: the mafort, a short cape, and the melotis, a goatskin. According to Cassian the short cape helped an Egyptian monk avoid the cost and showiness of worldly cloaks. Some scholars have suggested that the goatskin served as an image of vice and that wearing it was meant to remind a monk of the “former turbulence of his carnal passions.”

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58 2 Thes 3:10.

59 Ramsey, note 1.7, ACW 58:32.
Writing on footwear, Cassian recognized the use of sandals as a necessity of bodily existence and stated that sandals were a reminder that human beings could never be completely free of fleshly concerns.

But they refuse shoes as being forbidden by gospel precept . . . and they only put sandals on their feet. They understand that this use of them, with the Lord's permission, means that if, once having been placed in this world, we cannot be utterly removed from the care and worry of this flesh and are unable to be completely rid of it, we should at least provide for the necessities of the body with a minimum of preoccupation and involvement... But although they legitimately use sandals... they nonetheless do not allow them on their feet when they approach to celebrate or to receive the most holy mysteries.60

The practice of being shod or unshod when celebrating the Eucharist varied in Christian antiquity, so one can not say that the Egyptian monks reflected a universal Christian custom in regard to footwear at Eucharist.61

E. Cenobitic Monasticism in the West (4th c. – 6th c.)

Christian monasticism began to develop in the West in the mid-fourth century. Evidence suggests a fair amount of variety in regard to the religious habit during the initial centuries of western monasticism. The tunic was a prominent element of secular fashion during these centuries and persisted as such until at least the fourteenth

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60 Cassian, Institutes 9, ACW 58:25-6; SCh 109:48-51.

61 Ramsey, note 1.9.2, ACW 58:32.
century. The tunic was adopted as part of monastic dress, which for many centuries contributed an element of continuity between monastic dress and secular dress.

The most distinguishing feature of monastic dress in North Africa and Gaul was the pallium, a black cloak referenced earlier in connection to the Christian philosophers. Martin of Tours and his monks at Marmoutier, one of the earliest monasteries in Gaul (established c. 370), wore the black pallium. Martin’s monks also dressed in a tunic of camel’s hair and considered refined clothing to be a sin.

The famous Augustine of Hippo (b. 354) is certainly well-known as a bishop and theologian, but his monasticism is largely forgotten. In a work entitled *The Ways of the Catholic Church*, Augustine wrote about Egyptian monasticism as well as monasticism’s incarnation in Milan and Rome, which he became acquainted with following his baptism by Ambrose in 387. Augustine lived cenobitic monasticism after his baptism and subsequent return to his native Tagaste in modern-day Algeria. Three years hence,

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64 Severus, *St. Martin of Tours* 10.8, 110; SCh 133:274-5.

having moved to Hippo and been ordained a priest, Augustine again lived a cenobitic life. Subsequently elected bishop of Hippo, a role in which he served for thirty-four years, Augustine continued to pursue a kind of cenobitic life with fellow clerics that foreshadowed the lifestyle of canons regular.66

Augustine tells us about the clothing of monastics in three of his writings: The Work of the Monks, Sermon 356, and the Rule. The Work of the Monks, written c. 400 at the request of the bishop of Carthage, was an attempt to settle problems connected with monastic discipline in that locale. Augustine did not give a detailed description of the habit in The Work of the Monks, but he did complain about imposters who went about dressed as monks.67 This detail is evidence that in the North African monasteries of his day, monks likely wore habits that were distinctive. Augustine gave some specific indications about monastic clothing in his “Sermon 356,” which describes the way of life of the clergy who lived with him during his long tenure as bishop of Hippo. This sermon reveals that the clothing of the monk-clerics was held in common, and that they wore a linen tunic and a hooded cloak called a byrrus. We also learn that Augustine

66 The “regular” of “canons regular” is related to the Latin regularis, meaning “of a rule.” In contrast to secular or diocesan clergy, a “regular” is a religious because they live according to a rule.

wanted no luxurious clothing among his monk-clerics and that Augustine, as bishop, eschewed wearing anything more distinguished than what was worn by hisdeacons and priests.  

The Rule of Augustine, most likely written for monks of the “garden monastery” in Hippo that Augustine established before he was ordained bishop, includes eight prescriptions with mention of clothing, none of which describe the habit. Nor does the Rule of Augustine clothe the habit with spiritual symbolism or mention investiture as part of a rite of profession. The prescriptions connected to dress in Augustine’s rule promote common sense, poverty, and simplicity. A major emphasis is “that which is needed.”

According to the Rule of Augustine, the monastic superior is to make provision for each monk’s clothing and does not need to give exactly the same to each monk, so long as each one receives what he needs. A monk might be given something more in the way of clothing because he was used to living more comfortably before entering the

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monastery. Such a monk should not be the object of jealousy but rather should be considered weak. The monk who needs less should deem himself stronger and happier.\textsuperscript{70} Nothing about one’s clothing should attract attention. The monk is not to seek the approval of others by his apparel but rather by his edifying manner of life.\textsuperscript{71} The admonition against trying to attract attention through one’s clothing, which Augustine includes in a chapter that is partially directed at safeguarding chastity, is a warning against being flirtatious.

The \textit{Rule of Augustine} also says that clothing is to be kept and distributed from one place and is to be managed by either the superior or someone designated by him.\textsuperscript{72} Those in charge of clothing were to render cheerful service to their brothers and not delay in giving what was required by those in need.\textsuperscript{73} A monk is not to be concerned about what he is to wear at the change of season, nor about whether he is given back the original garments he turned in. The monk’s only concern should be that he is given what he needs. A monk who needlessly complains about his allotted clothing is to be

\textsuperscript{70} Augustine, Rule 3.4, in \textit{Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule}, 86-7.

\textsuperscript{71} Augustine, Rule 4.1, in \textit{Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule}, 86-7.

\textsuperscript{72} Augustine, Rule 5.1, in \textit{Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule}, 92-3.

\textsuperscript{73} Augustine, Rule 5.9, in \textit{Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule}, 96-7. Augustine, Rule 5.11, in \textit{Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule}, 98-9.
considered as lacking in the “inner garment of his heart.” If a monk receives clothing as a gift, it is not to be kept secretly but should be put at the disposal of the superior and then given to whoever needs it. The monk who secretly keeps such a gift is guilty of theft! Monastic garments are either to be cleaned by the individual monk or by a monk designated to take care of laundering. The superior is to decide the frequency of laundering so that one does not develop an inordinate desire for cleanliness.

The prescriptions on clothing in the Rule of Augustine influenced monastic life far beyond Augustine’s native North Africa. Sections of Augustine’s Rule were quoted by founders of monasteries in Gaul, Spain, and Italy in the centuries after Augustine’s death. Such founders include Fulgentius of Ruspe, Caesarius of Arles, Leander of Seville, Isidore of Seville, and Benedict of Nursia. The Rule of Augustine gained even greater influence beginning in the eleventh century when it was adopted by Augustinian canons. Since this time many religious institutes have used the Rule of Augustine as a basis for their own rule.

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74 Augustine, Rule 5.1, in Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule, 92-3.

75 Augustine, Rule 5.3, in Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule, 94-5.

76 Augustine, Rule 5.4, in Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule, 94-7


John Cassian appeared earlier in this chapter in the context of his important testimony regarding the habit of the Egyptian monks. Cassian also offers important witness to the development of the habit in the West. Around the year 404 an Origenist controversy motivated Cassian to flee Egypt and Palestine for Constantinople. At the bidding of John Chrysostom, Cassian went to Rome, where he was ordained to the priesthood. While in Rome, Cassian received an invitation to establish monasteries in Marseille, which he did beginning c. 415. Cassian remained involved with a number of monastic establishments in southern Gaul until his death (c. 435). In an effort to guide and reform monasticism in the Provence region of Gaul, John Cassian wrote The Institutes, which contains his important testimony, treated earlier in this chapter, on the habit of Egyptian monks. The fact that Cassian dedicated an entire chapter of The Institutes to the habit is evidence of the importance he attributed it.

In a section of the first chapter of The Institutes entitled “The Monk’s Garment,” Cassian wrote about the monastic outfit in its entirety. According to Cassian, the habit was to cover the body without being decorous, protect against the cold, and not nurture vanity. It was to be made from commonplace materials used by other monks, lack novelty of color, and be neither stylish nor filthy. Cassian was clear that monastic

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79 Cassian, Institutes 2.1, ACW 58:22-3; SCh 109:38-41.
garments should be distinctive from apparel used by common people: “It should be different from the apparel of this world in that it is kept completely in common for the use of the servants of God [monks].” Cassian rebuked monks who wanted to be more austere by using sackcloth as a fabric, instead of linen. No, sackcloth was “showy” and unsuitable for working. If a monk wanted to wear sackcloth in such a way that no one would see or know about it, that was a different story.

In a section entitled “On the Moderation of Observance” Cassian discoursed on the theme of, one might say, “letter of the law” versus “spirit of the law.” Cassian clearly comes down on the side of the “spirit,” reminding his Western audience that an exact imitation of the Egyptian monks was undesirable. Cassian thought that the monks of southern Gaul should don a monastic outfit that was humble, did not connote strangeness, and is in keeping with the climate of the area of Marseilles; wherefore the colobium (tunic) and sandals of the Egyptians would not suffice.

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80 Cassian, Institutes 2.1, ACW 58:22; SCh 109:38-41.


82 Cassian, Institutes 2.4, ACW 58:23; SCh 109:42-3.

83 Cassian, Institutes 10, ACW 58:26; SCh 109:50-3.
Cassian commented that if the monks were to imitate the small hood and melotis (goatskin) of the Egyptian monks, such a practice would invite mockery.\textsuperscript{84} His opinion on these garments raises the issue of distinctiveness. Cassian’s witness on this issue is noteworthy. Previously, Cassian advised that a monk’s garments should be different from the apparel used by commoners and be reserved solely to the monks; but here Cassian moderates this notion. In Cassian’s thinking, while a monk’s habit should be distinctive and reserved only to monastics, it should not employ garments that are completely foreign to common use.

Cassian’s reasonable advice to disavow as part of the monastic habit those garments that were strange did not always go heeded. Take, for example, the small hood of the Egyptian monks that Cassian told the monks of Gaul it would be unwise to imitate. Paradoxically, while the hood was eventually minimized in the East, it took on greater importance in the West, becoming so widespread that monks of the Western Church became known as “hooded men.”\textsuperscript{85} A less reliable though still plausible example involves the Egyptian melotis, a goatskin. As strange as the melotis would appear in sixth century southern Italy, Gregory the Great wrote in a hagiographical work that

\textsuperscript{84} Cassian, \textit{Institutes} 10, ACW 58:26; SCh 109:50-3.

\textsuperscript{85} G. M. Colombás, \textquote{Abito Religioso}, DIP 1:53.
Benedict himself donned the melotis when living as a hermit at Subiaco and that
Benedict continued to occasionally use it when he acted as abbot.86

Another source that was important to the development of western monasticism
is the Rule of the Master, c. 500-525, is an anonymously written monastic rule most likely
composed in the vicinity of Rome.87 It is by far the longest of all the extant monastic
rules compiled by Benedict of Aniane in his Codex Regularum from the ninth century.
The Rule of the Master contains two chapters that deal with the religious habit. The
Master’s use of phrases such as “holy attire,” “sacred habit,” “habit of Christ,” “our
habit,” and “clothing of a holy way of life,” all suggest that for the Master the monastic
habit was distinctive.88 These phrases provide evidence that already by the sixth century
there existed a theology of the monastic habit as religious clothing that had spiritual
significance.

In a chapter entitled “The Clothing and Shoes of the Brothers,” the Master gives a
straightforward exposition of the different elements of the habit that does not offer any

86 Gregory the Great, Dialogues 2.1 and 2.7, trans. Odo Zimmerman, FCh 39:59 (2.1), 70 (2.7); SCh 260, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé (Paris: Cerf, 1979), 128-9 (2.1), 157-9 (2.7).


88 Rule of the Master 90:68.78.80.82.85.86, 95:21, CS 6:264-6, 284; La Règle du Maître, ed. Adalbert de Vogue, SCh 106 (Paris: Cerf, 1964), 390-5, 446-7.
spiritual symbolism. The Master’s monks were to have different types of garments that honored the climate of the season. In winter the monks were to have a thick tunic (1), cloak of cloth (3), drawers of woolen cloth (3), and leggings or fabric footwear (3). In summer the monks were to have a tunic (4), cloak (5), and drawers (5) all made from a lighter material called linsey-woolsey. Provision was also made that a linen handkerchief be allotted to each monk during summertime weather, its purpose to alleviate perspiration (8). The Master also gave some precepts that were independent of climate. Monks were forbidden to wear drawers made of linen so as to maintain some difference between monks and clerics (6). The monks were also given a special garment only for use during spiritual exercises on feast days (7).

The Rule of the Master, similar to the Rule of Augustine, called for monastic garments to be kept in a central vestiary that was maintained by a custodian (9-11). Monks who were entering their week of kitchen service were to be given a tunic of sackcloth and a cowl of matting (21). If such garments got dirty during kitchen service

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81 In paragraphs dedicated to the Rule of the Master, the numbers in parentheses represent chapter verses.

82 Drawers made from linen are described as priestly clothing in Exodus 28:42 and 39:27.
that was no cause for embarrassment (22-23). On the evening of the last serving day, the server-monks were to wash their temporary serving garments and turn them over to the new server-monks (24).

As for footwear, the Master gave regulations that were cognizant of the season. During wintertime the monks were to wear “hobnailed” shoes (25), which come summertime were to be oiled and stored away in the vestiary (26). At nocturns in winter the monks were allowed footgear with fur (30). In summertime footwear consisted of nailed clogs (27) and wooden sandals for use at nocturns (29). The special footwear for use at nocturns was so that a monk did not dirty his bed with soiled feet upon his return to sleep.

The Master included brief details about investiture in chapter ninety, entitled “When Someone Enters the Monastery From the World, He is Not to Change His Garb or Receive the Religious Tonsure for a Year.”93 There is only mention of the investiture’s existence; no prayers or ritual actions are set forth. Before donning the habit, a novice monk underwent a probationary year intended to “cleanse worldly ways from the depths of his heart” (75). For the Master, the outward sign of the habit would make apparent to others that one indeed belonged to God (76), and so it was necessary that a

93 Rule of the Master, chapter 90, CS 6:260; SCh 106:378-97.
novice manifest this spirit before donning the habit. If one lived well the rules of the monastery when in secular clothing, then the habit would aid the new monk to be steadfast in living according to the Spirit (78). The clothing which the new monk divested himself of at his investiture was to be carefully stored in case he eventually left monastic life (83), in which case he was required to return his monastic garments (84).

The aforementioned articles from the Rule of the Master suggest that vesting in the habit was a sign of incorporation or membership into the monastery and a primitive form of monastic profession. Donning the habit made the candidate “one” with the community and was a daily reminder to the wearer of what was expected of him.

F. The Habit of the Black Monks (6th c.)

Benedict of Nursia (c. 480 - 550) is considered the father of Western monasticism. Sent to Rome by his family in order to pursue an education, Benedict’s desire to live a morally upright life led him to abandon the Roman educational scene in favor of pursuing a semi-eremitical life. While living as a hermit, Benedict developed a reputation for holiness and was called upon to serve as an abbot for a group of monks, who eventually rejected his leadership. Benedict later pursued another cenobitic project, which around the

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94 In the period here surveyed, the monks who followed the Rule for Monasteries by Benedict were known as “black monks.”
year 530 moved to the renowned Monte Cassino. It was here that Benedict most likely initiated the writing of his well-known monastic rule.

Benedict’s *Rule for Monasteries*, a relatively short document in its entirety, contains three chapters with relevance to the monastic habit: “The Sleeping Arrangements of the Monks” (chapter twenty-two), “The Clothing and Footwear of the Brothers” (chapter fifty-five), and “The Procedure for Receiving Brothers” (chapter fifty-eight). In his rule, Benedict writes of monastic clothing in terms of a dress code and, unlike Cassian, does not connect any spiritual symbolism to the religious habit. Benedict relied on both the *Rule of the Master* and the Latin version of Basil’s *Asketikon* in composing chapter fifty-five of his rule. The Master’s imprint is also found to a great extent in chapter fifty-eight, which also treats clothing. The *Rule of Benedict* became the standard of Western monasticism following the Carolingian Reform in the ninth century, when the Synod of Aachen (816-817) declared that all monasteries in the Carolingian Empire were to follow Benedict’s *Rule for Monasteries*.

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95 While the technically correct title for Benedict’s famous rule is *Rule for Monasteries*, this dissertation frequently employs the more commonly used title, *Rule of Benedict*.


Chapter twenty-two, which addresses the sleeping arrangements of the monks, says that they “should sleep clothed and girded with belts or cords” (22.5).\(^8\) The belts or cords of the monks would have been used to gather their tunics at their waist. The practice of sleeping clothed and girded with a belt or cord was a modicum of modesty and enabled the monks to proceed quickly to night vigils. Their belts or cords also served to raise a monk’s tunic when he was working or traveling.

Chapter fifty-five of the *Rule of Benedict*, which addresses clothing and footwear, manifests Benedict’s practicality and flexibility. The first fifteen verses of chapter fifty-five of the *Rule of Benedict* follow the basic outline of chapter eighty-one of the *Rule of the Master*. Clothing distributed to the monks was to vary according to the local conditions and regional climate (55.1).\(^9\) More clothing would be needed in cold regions and less in warmer ones (55.2). Specifics were left to the abbot’s decision (55.3). Such abbatial discretion is another hallmark of Benedict’s *Rule for Monasteries* and helps to give the *Rule* its flexibility.

In temperate regions a cowl and tunic were thought to suffice (55.4), but in winter a thick cowl was to be supplied and in summer one that was thin (55.5). Monks were also to have a scapular for work and both sandals and shoes (55.6). A monk was not to worry about the color or texture of his monastic garments; these were to be found locally and

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\(^9\) References to RB 55 that are indicated in parentheses can be found in RB 1980, 260-5.
purchased frugally (55.7). The abbot was to make sure that all the accoutrements of the habit fit the monk properly (55.8). The aforementioned details make it clear that, generally speaking, all the monks followed a dress code: tunic, cowl, scapular, belt, and sandals or shoes. But it is just as clear that Benedict did not legislate absolute uniformity for the habit. Unlike rules from later centuries, we do not find prescriptions in the Rule of Benedict as to exact colors, types of fabric, or dimensions and styles for the various garments.

When a monk received a new monastic garment, he was to return his well-used one, which was to be kept in the common wardrobe until such time as it was given to the poor (55.9). The same went for sandals or any other well-used items (55.12). Some scholars take Benedict’s injunction about donating monastic garments to the poor as evidence that Benedictine monks wore ostensively the same clothing as their male neighbors. According to this line of thinking, if the poor could wear the habits of the monks then there could not be anything distinctive about the monks’ clothing. García Colombás and Matías Augé, both scholars of religious life, tend toward this opinion. Colombás believes that what set the Benedictine monk apart was not his clothing but rather his tonsure (RB 1.7).  

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Benedictine scholar Terrence Kardong and fashion historian Rosana Pistolese both hold a different opinion. They maintain that even if some monastic garments could be donated to the poor, the habit in its totality was distinctive. Pistolese argues this position from the standpoint that the monastic tradition that Benedict wished to continue already had a distinct habit.\textsuperscript{101} For example, in composing chapter fifty-five Benedict used Basil and the Master, both of whom are clear about the distinct character of the monastic habit.\textsuperscript{102} The editors of RB 1980 also argue that the habit prescribed by Benedict in chapter fifty-five was distinctive and part of the long-standing tradition of distinguishing garb from the earliest days of Christian monasticism.\textsuperscript{103}

Absolute certainty as to what degree the monastic habit of the sixth century was or was not distinctive is a difficult question to answer since we do not have exact information as to the style of the garments named by Benedict in chapter fifty-five. We do know with certainty, however, that the sixth century cowl, tunic, and scapular were not specifically monastic dress; commoners of sixth century Central Italy wore these garments as well.

\textsuperscript{101} R. Pistolese et al., “Costume dei Monaci e dei Religiosi,” DIP 3:212. See also Kardong, Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary, 452.


\textsuperscript{103} Fry, et. al, RB 1980, 260-1fn55.1.
Faithful to the monastic tradition, Benedict legislated against superfluity (55.11). To emphasize this point, in chapter fifty-five Benedict used three times the word *sufficere*, which in context can be translated as “that which is enough.” Benedict thought that two tunics and two cowls were sufficient for a monk (55.10). Two of each would provide for a change at night and also allow a garment to be washed.

Chapter fifty-eight, “The Procedure for Receiving Brothers,” speaks about investiture as part of the rites of initiation. The aspirant, after a year of probation, was incorporated into the community with a true rite of profession (58.17-26). The last act of this rite was the change of clothing: “Then and there in the oratory, let him be divested of his own clothes and dressed in the clothes of the monastery” (58.26). While this verse affirms that the investiture was to take place in the oratory of the monastery, it does not speak of any prayers or ceremonial acts that accompanied the undressing and dressing.

While some scholars cite this “divesting and redressing” from the *Rule of Benedict* as evidence of a distinguishable habit, other commentators speak of it in terms of dispossession rather than in terms of the distinctiveness of the novice monk’s new monastery-issued clothing. For those who deny distinctiveness to the early

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104 References to RB 58 that are indicated in parentheses can be found in *RB 1980*, 266-71.

Benedictine habit, verse 58.26 has only the sense of dispossessing oneself of one’s personal clothing and beginning a new life of total dependence on the monastery. Within the context of verses 24-28, dispossession does indeed seem to be Benedict’s emphasis. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable that Benedict, considering his sources and influences, prescribed monastic clothing as distinctive garb which expressed the dispossession of secular life and the appropriation of monastic life in a particular monastery.

G. Summary of Developments to the Religious Habit of Men in Late Antiquity

The eastern witness of the writings of Pachomius, Basil, Evagrius, and Cassian all manifest a clear evolution or development toward distinctive monastic dress. What at first was common clothing in a particular monastic environment changed with the passing of time to become the exclusive clothing of monks, clothing which also acquired a symbolic theological significance.\textsuperscript{106} The western witness of Martin of Tours, Augustine, Cassian, the Master, and Benedict also manifests the same movement toward distinctive dress, though the western witness accentuated simplicity and poverty in clothing to a greater degree than distinctiveness. Some monastic garments such as the cowl, pallium, and scapular, were adopted from the clothing of common

\textsuperscript{106} Augé, El Hábito Religioso, 21.
people who used them for functional ends. Over time in the monastic milieu, however, they took on symbolic spiritual meaning.
Chapter 3

The Religious Habit of Men During the Middle Ages (6th c. - 15th c.)

The religious habit of men underwent a complex process of transformation during the millennium that spanned from the mid-sixth century until the end of the Middle Ages. The most significant development during this long stretch of centuries is that no longer did one simply wear the generic habit of a hermit or the generic habit of a monk. Rather, religious habits gradually came to specify membership in a particular religious community.\(^1\) The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries marked the beginning of a more profound separation between the style of dress of religious men and the style of dress of the common layman.

The same questions used to guide chapter two also direct this chapter’s investigation into the religious habit of men: What does the original rule of this particular institute communicate about its habit? Is any spiritual symbolism attached to its various elements? Is the habit distinctive from secular clothing? Is investiture part of the entrance rites for acceptance into this group?

A. The Habit of the Black Monks in the High Middle Ages (6th c. - 9th c.)

As Western monasticism expanded into cold climates, new garments became accepted as part of the monastic habit according to criteria found in the Rule of Benedict: “…because more is needed in cold regions and less in warmer” (55.2). Due in large measure to the freedom granted by the Rule of Benedict in regard to the habit, there came to be a multiplicity of forms and colors. As time moved further and further away from Benedict’s lifetime, the terminology of monastic dress was still known – tunic, scapular, cowl – but the precise shape and style of these garments were not recorded and were sometimes unknown.²

Into this changed situation of multiplicity and ignorance about the precise shape and style of monastic garments came Benedict of Aniane (750-821), an important point of reference in the continuing development of the monastic habit. Benedict of Aniane worked to renew monastic life in the Carolingian Empire at the behest of Emperor Louis the Pious, who desired that all the monasteries in his lands practice the same customs and follow the same rule. Toward this end, Louis set Benedict of Aniane over all the monasteries in his realm and called a series of meetings in Aachen (816-19) which

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aimed, among many things, to bring greater uniformity to monastic life. Monasteries in Carolingian lands were no longer to have customaries with regulations originating from different rules. One of the results of the meetings in Aachen called by Emperor Louis the Pious was the *Collectio Capitularis*, the first general code for all the monasteries of one geographic area in the history of the Western Church. Benedict of Aniane was the chief propagator and promoter of these regulations.

The *Collectio Capitularis* of Benedict of Aniane summarizes his reforming ideals and contains a number of provisions about the religious habit: adapting the habit to climactic conditions, the quality of the fabric, number of articles permitted, measurements of the hood on the cowl. The *Collectio Capitularis* references the cuculla in a noteworthy manner, stating that for three days following his profession a monk was to cover his head with his hood. The spiritual symbolism inherent in this provision

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expresses an aspect of the theology of monastic life; as a neophyte covered his or her head following baptism, the monk was to cover his head following profession.⁶

Ardo of Aniane, a contemporary and biographer of Benedict of Aniane, related that all was not well with the monastic habit before Benedict of Aniane’s reform, saying that “some monks adorned their habit as if with jewels.”⁷ Ardo also related that before the reforms enacted by the Synods of Aachen there was great plurality of dress and different styles of cowl worn by monks in the Carolingian Empire.⁸

Some would opine that a significant defect in the reform of Benedict of Aniane was its excessive attention to detail, something largely foreign to the moderation found in the original Rule of Benedict.⁹ For example, Benedict of Aniane instituted a uniform style of cowl whose length did not reach to the knees. He also included provision for garments not included as part of the habit in the Rule of Benedict: two woolen shirts, trousers, leather cloaks and coverings, and two capes.¹⁰ Benedict of Aniane’s attempts at standardization and reform of the monasteries in the Carolingian Empire were followed

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⁶ Augé, El Hábito Religioso, 23.
⁷ Ardo, The Life of Benedict of Aniane 37.1, 98; PL 103:378 (section 51).
⁸ Ardo, The Life of Benedict of Aniane 38.5, 100; PL 103:379-80 (section 52).
⁹ Augé, El Hábito Religioso, 23.
¹⁰ Ardo, The Life of Benedict of Aniane 38.5, 100; PL 103:379-80 (section 52).
by a mixture of monastic laxity and a politically changing world, both of which contributed to the birth of an important period of monastic renewal that brought forth changes to the monastic habit.

B. Monastic Renewal (10th c. - 12th c.)

New monastic groups attempting to reclaim primitive fervor arose during the tenth and eleventh centuries. These groups (as well as their founder and date of foundation) include Cluniacs (Berno, 909), Camaldolese (Romuald, 1000), and Cistercians (Robert of Molesme, 1098). These orders sought to go “back to the sources,” which in this context meant the Rule of Benedict and, especially for the Camaldolese, the witness of the Desert Fathers. The reality that all three orders claimed Benedict of Nursia as their inspiration, at least in part, contributed to the polemical atmosphere that sometimes pervaded the monasticism of the tenth to twelfth centuries. Each group wore a distinctive habit, which further contributed to the polemicism that sometimes existed between these different monastic groups. During the tenth to twelfth centuries the spiritual symbolism attached to the monastic habit further developed, and

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11 The Carthusians (Bruno, 1084), another reform movement from this time, did not use Benedict’s Rule for Monasteries.
in some cases the habit even acquired a penitential aspect, which was uncharacteristic of the monasteries that followed Benedict’s Rule.\textsuperscript{12}

The new monastic foundation at Cluny (established 909) emphasized liturgical prayer and the life of contemplation. Cluny’s great novelty was that from its inception it was under direct jurisdiction of the Holy See and thus exempt from the oversight of local authority, whether civil or ecclesiastical. Because of the privilege of being under the direct jurisdiction of the Holy See, it can be argued that Cluny was a precursor of the “institute of pontifical right.”\textsuperscript{13} At its height, over one thousand monastic houses were associated with Cluny, which gave it tremendous influence. All the novices throughout the Cluniac network professed their vows to the abbot of Cluny and all the local superiors were appointed by him as well.\textsuperscript{14}

The original abbot of Cluny, Berno, adopted for a rule of life the Rule of Benedict as adapted by the legislation of Benedict of Aniane. The Cluniac habit consisted of

\textsuperscript{12} Augé, El Hábito Religioso, 24.

\textsuperscript{13} An institute of “pontifical right” is an institute that has received formal approbation from the Holy See. Such a group can be distinguished from an institute of “diocesan right,” which receives its approbation from the local bishop. The distinction between these two types of institutes comes into play, for example, in such matters as dismissal, dispensation, and exclaustration, where the final authority would belong either to the Holy See or to the local bishop, in accord with the type of institute.

black-colored garments, which, because of Cluny’s vast influence, contributed in great measure toward black eventually becoming the characteristic color of Benedictines.\textsuperscript{15} Suggestive of Cluny’s reformist beginnings, Odo (+ 942), second abbot of Cluny, criticized the color and style of non-Cluniac monastic clothing in use at the time as “often decorated and flowing,” some monastic garments even dyed a bluish tint.\textsuperscript{16}

The natural rhythm of renewal and decline was no stranger to the grand Cluniac network. Its vitality diminished in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries mostly because of a changed political situation and because of difficult economic conditions. Reform efforts of Pope Gregory VII contributed to the rise of new monastic groups, who deliberately wore habits made from undyed and thus non-black fabric in contradistinction to the Cluniacs and in fidelity to the Rule of Benedict, which stated that “monks should not complain about the color or the coarseness [of the garments of their habit], but be content with what can be found in the district where they live and can be purchased cheaply.”\textsuperscript{17}

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\textsuperscript{15} Pistolese, “Costume dei Monaci e dei Religiosi,” DIP 3:214.


\textsuperscript{17} RB 55.7, Fry et al., RB 1980, 262-3.
\end{flushright}
The Cistercians, who originated at the Abbey of Citeaux in 1098, sought to “resurrect” the Rule of Benedict from being submerged under the weight of monastic customs that had developed at Cluny over time. The Cistercian order developed in a different way than the regal and feudal network that marked Cluny, though the Cistercians did follow the Cluniac governmental notion whereby all Cistercian monasteries were part of the Chapter of Citeaux. The Cistercians eclipsed the monarchical monasticism of Cluny and incarnated in embryonic form the religious order as we understand that term today, i.e. a body of religious houses scattered in different regions and linked together by legislative and disciplinary control.18

Simplicity and frugality in the Cistercian mode of dressing are the only things that can be considered novel vis-à-vis the habit of the Cluniacs; the specific garments of the habit – cowl, scapular, tunic – were the same. Initial Cistercian legislative texts, entitled the Summa Cartae Caritatis et Capitula and the Exordium Parvum, do not speak of the color of the garments of the habit but highlight frugality. The sole prescription on clothing in the Summa Cartae Caritatis bans the use of trousers and also bans cowls made with flocked pile fabric: “Clothing shall be simple and inexpensive, without underclothes [femoralia/trousers], as the Rule [of Benedict] prescribes. . . . The outer

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18 Knowles, From Pachomius to Ignatius, 27.
cowls shall not be flocked with pile on the outside; and the day-shoes shall be made of cowhide.”  

A second early Cistercian legislative text, the *Exordium Parvum*, in a section describing the first Cistercian monks who departed from Molesme, names clothing items that it claimed were contrary to the *Rule of Benedict*: “They rejected what was contrary to the *Rule of Benedict*, namely full mantles and furs, as well as shirts of fine linen and breeches.”  

The English monk and chronicler Orderic Vitalis gave evidence of Cistercian simplicity of clothing in his *Ecclesiastical History*, where he makes the brief statement, “Dyed clothes they do not use.”  

While today the Cistercians wear a white habit with a black scapular, this was not always the case. In the initial centuries of Cistercian life, the color of their habit was not the same everywhere, since it consisted of undyed wool from the locale of each monastery.  

The Cistercians contested various clothing customs of the Cluniacs as harmful to monastic observance, e.g. fur jackets, trousers/britches, and the black color of the

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22 Pistoiese, “Costume dei Monaci e dei Religiosi,” DIP 3:216-7. This article cites a number of works of art as evidence that the Cistercian habit evolved and was not necessarily uniform from region to region.
Cluniac habit. Exchanges between Peter the Venerable (+1156), ninth abbot of Cluny, and Bernard (+1153), founding abbot of the Cistercian foundation in Clairvaux, are noteworthy in this regard. Peter defended the Cluniac use of fur, citing the principal of climate in the Rule of Benedict and reminding Bernard that the rule only proscribed against superfluity and neither recommended nor forbade the use of fur.\(^23\) Peter claimed that the modest use of fur in cold climates - for the sick, the elderly, and the delicate – was an act of charity.\(^24\) Peter also defended the Cluniac custom of habitually wearing femoralia (trousers/britches), which the Rule of Benedict only allowed a monk when traveling, as necessary for hygiene and modesty.\(^25\) As for defending the black color of the Cluniac habit, Peter the Venerable criticized Bernard and the monks at Citeaux for the whitish color of their habit, calling it a novelty, the fruit of pride, and without foundation in the monastic tradition.\(^26\) Peter the Venerable felt that black was the most


\(^{24}\) Peter the Venerable, *Epistle 4*, line 17, in Constable, *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, vol. 1, 8.

\(^{25}\) Peter the Venerable, *Epistle 28.3*, line 19, in Constable, *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, vol. 1, 64. For further information on the Cistercian avoidance of trousers see English language commentary on Epistle 28.3 at Constable, *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, vol. 2, 117fn64.

appropriate color for a monastic habit because black was associated with repentance, whereas white was associated with glory, which was not the earthly reality of any monk. Included in the Cluniac reforming statutes of Peter the Venerable were proscriptions that called Cluniac monks to modesty in dress, to abandon colored cowls and special fabrics, and to use furs only made from goathair or shorn from sheep.\textsuperscript{27}

In this section of the dissertation, which is dedicated mostly to the monastic renewal, it is appropriate to say a word about the canonical movement, which often combined clerical life with communal religious life. Contemporaneous with the renewal of monasticism marked by the emergence of the Camaldolese, Carthusians, and Cistercians was a resurgence of the canons regular in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The Canons Regular of Prémontré, founded in 1120 by Norbert of Xanten, are representative of this resurgence. Twelfth century statutes on the Premonstratensian habit emphasize religious poverty.

The habit of the original Premonstratensian canons was undyed so as to respect the demands of religious poverty, and whitish in color, in imitation of other canons regular of the day. In order to emphasize that they were not monks, the

\textsuperscript{27} Peter the Venerable, \textit{Statuta Petri Venerabilis} 16-18, in Kassius Hallinger, ed., \textit{Corpus Consuetudinum Monasticarum}, vol. 6 (Siegburg, Germany: Apud Franciscum Schmitt, 1975), 54-6.
Premonstratensian hood was purposely designed to be much smaller than the hood on the cowl of most monks.\footnote{See Francois Petit, “Les Vêtements de Prémontrés au XII Siècle,” Anaclecta Praemonstratensia 15 (1939): 17-24.}

**Canon Regular of Prémontré\footnote{Hélyot, Histoire de Ordres Monastiques, Religieux et Militaires, et des Congregations Seculieres, tome two, 161.}**

New groups arising from the monastic and canonical reforms of the tenth to twelfth centuries added to the existing landscape of religious habits. Otto, Bishop of
Freising from 1138-1158, spoke of the variety of religious habits present across the twelfth century European landscape in his book, *A Chronicle of the Two Cities*.

Just as they glow within by the varied splendors of the virtues, so without they employ garments of varied colors... Some, leading the apostolic life, show forth in their very garb the purity of innocence since they wear a spotless linen robe. . . Others free from all outside occupations and portraying their angelic life in their garb figuratively portray its sweetness by the form rather than by the soft texture of their dress.\(^{30}\)

C. *Mendicant Orders (13th c. - 15th c.)*

At the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth, European society was changing. Increased population hastened Europe’s movement from a feudalism-based economy to one that was more urban-based. One result of this shift was that the monastic and canonical forms of religious life lost much of their power of attraction. Within this societal and ecclesiastical milieu evolved the mendicant movements, which eschewed many of the external practices of monastic life. The primary mendicant groups and the year of their foundation include Franciscans (1209), Dominicans (1216), Carmelites (1245), and Augustinians (1256).\(^ {31}\) The habit of


mendicants contained some elements derived from the traditional monastic habit, e.g. the tunic. The following section will look at the habit of the early Franciscans (Friars Minor) and that of the early Dominicans (Friars Preachers).

The term mendicant, derived from the Latin mendicare which means “to beg,” expresses well the original corporate and individual poverty which the mendicant groups practiced at their origins. In Historia Occidentalis, an important commentary on Church life in the thirteenth century, author Jacques de Vitry mentioned the modest clothing of the Franciscans in his description of their poverty:

These poor men of Christ carry on their journey neither purse nor pouch nor bread, nor money in their belts; they possess neither gold nor silver, nor do they have shoes on their feet. Indeed, no brother of this order is allowed to possess anything; they have no monasteries or churches, no fields nor vineyards, no animals, no houses, nor any other possessions, and they have no place to lay their heads. They do not use garments made from linen or pelts, but only woolen tunics with a hood. They use neither capes, nor cloaks, nor hats, nor any other such clothing.\(^32\)

In addition to their characteristic poverty, the mendicants combined the common life with various forms of priestly, missionary, or charitable activity.

The Franciscan habit represents a true shift in the history of the religious habit of men. Due to the practice of itinerancy, their habits were simpler and permitted greater

freedom of movement than did the habits of canons or monks.\textsuperscript{33} The Franciscan habit was modeled on the garb of a Christian pilgrim, who wore an undyed and frugal tunic.\textsuperscript{34} Christian pilgrims were noticeable for their hat, simple tunic, and walking staff.

**Pilgrims on their Way\textsuperscript{35}**

Because Francis wanted a habit inspired by the Gospel, the habit of the “Lesser Brothers,” as the Franciscans were initially called, was different in significant respects from that of either monks or canons. The “Later Rule” of the Lesser Brothers, which received papal approbation in 1223, speaks of two categories of habit, one for those entering their year of probation, i.e. new candidates, and a slightly different habit for those who had already promised obedience.\textsuperscript{36} After divesting themselves of their

\textsuperscript{33} Augé, El Hábito Religioso, 29.


possessions in favor of the poor, the rule stated that new candidates “may be given the
clothes of probation, namely, two tunics without a hood, a cord, short trousers, and a
little cape reaching to the cord.”\textsuperscript{37} Wearing a tunic is in continuity with the longstanding
practice of both monks and canons and was also in line with the custom of much of
thirteenth century European society; but there is also discontinuity. The Franciscan
friars replaced the monastic belt with a cord. There was no scapular. There was neither
the traditional black of the Benedictines nor the white of the canons. Francis allowed
short trousers, \textit{femoralia} in the language of Benedict, for the purpose of modesty.
Reminiscent of the practical discretion Benedict gave in his \textit{Rule} to the abbot, Francis
envisioned times when the minister might exercise latitude in regard to the garments of
the habit: “Unless at times it seems good…to act otherwise.”\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{37} Francis of Assisi, \textit{The Later Rule} 2.9, in \textit{Francis of Assisi: Early Documents}, vol. 1, 101; \textit{Opuscula Sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis}, 228.

\textsuperscript{38} Francis of Assisi, \textit{The Later Rule} 2.10, in \textit{Francis of Assisi: Early Documents}, vol. 1, 101; \textit{Opuscula Sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis}, 228.
Those brothers who were allowed to profess obedience at the end of their time of probation were given a tunic with a hood, which marked the difference between the professed friars and those in probation: “Those who have already promised obedience may have one tunic with a hood and another, if they wish, without a hood.” The Rule

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40 Francis of Assisi, *The Later Rule* 2.14, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, 101; *Opuscula Sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis*, 228. It seems contradictory that the professed, in addition to having a hooded tunic, would also have a tunic without a hood. The point was that the habit would distinguish
of 1223 allowed the use of shoes and instructed that the fabric of the habit reflect poverty: “And those who are compelled by necessity may wear shoes. Let all the brothers wear poor clothes and they may mend them with pieces of sackcloth or other material with the blessing of God.”  

We can presume that Francis’ stress on poverty in clothing meant that, in the beginning decades of the Friars Minor, the tunic and small cape of the Franciscans were not dyed. We can also safely presume that the color of the Franciscan tunic and short cape, in the initial era, could have been various shades - from grayish to brown - depending on what rough fabric could have been obtained in a particular region.

The Rule of 1223 does not give any spiritual symbolism to the garments of the early Franciscan habit; but a pious tradition coming out of the Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano indicates that the tunic of the early Friars Minor was shaped in the form of the cross. The Rule of 1223 does not speak of an investiture ceremony, but only

the professed friars from friars “in probation,” who definitely did not have a tunic with a hood. I am not sure what to make of this seeming contradiction.


42 Thomas of Celano, The Life of St. Francis 9.22, in Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, vol. 1, 201-2; see Analecta Franciscana, 10 (Quaracchi: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1941), 19.
states that the clothing “be given.” 43 We can safely presume there were two moments or rituals of investiture, for, as already mentioned, there was a slight difference between the habit of the novices and the habit of the professed. The bull Cum Secundum Concilium, issued by Pope Honorius III in 1220, mandated the creation of a probationary year prior to profession and thus is responsible for the difference in habits. 44 This same papal bull also forbade anyone who was not a professed member of the Order of Lesser Brothers from wearing their habit and gave approbation to bring ecclesiastical censure upon any such person who did falsely wear the habit of the Lesser Brothers. 45

A noteworthy story in regard to the Franciscan habit emanates from the seventeenth century, when heated tension arose between Conventuals and Capuchins over the authentic hood and form of the habit. 46 Painted images of Francis in the “true

43 Francis of Assisi, The Later Rule 2.9, in Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, vol. 1, 101; Opuscula Sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis, 228.

44 Pope Honorius III, Cum Secundum Concilium, in Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, vol. 1, 561; Bullarium Franciscanum, vol. 1 (Quaracchi: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1929), 6, n.5. This bull was reissued by Gregory IX and can be seen at Bullarium Franciscanum, vol. 1, 27, n.2.

45 Pope Honorius III, Cum Secundum Concilium, in Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, vol. 1, 561; Bullarium Franciscanum, vol. 1, 6, n.5.

46 There are three branches of First Order Franciscans: Friars Minor, Friars Minor Conventual, and Friars Minor Capuchin. “Conventual” refers to living in a convent or friary. Conventual Franciscan life grew out of the movement of mendicant friars from the European countryside into cities in the 1240s. Conventuals tended to be more “monastic” in terms of everyday living than Friars Minor who stayed in the countryside. The Order of Friars Minor Capuchin is a reform movement of the Franciscans that began in 1540. The word “capuchin” refers to the hood (cappuccio) of their habit, which was modeled on that of Camaldolese hermits.
habit” were circulated by rival groups of Franciscans, stoking tensions between them. A number of papal interventions sought to bring about resolution to the situation. Urban VIII issued a bull in 1630 that prohibited, under pain of excommunication, any further discussion of the “true” Franciscan habit. The controversy continued to simmer in the ensuing decades. In 1663 Alexander VII intervened over the same matter, issuing a bull that forbade books with written inscriptions connected to the image of St. Francis or which commented on the authentic hood and form of the original habit.

The mendicants known as Friars Preachers received papal approbation in 1216. Their founder, Dominic of Guzman, a trained theologian and canon regular, was convinced that the primary need of the Church in his time was a thoroughly-trained body of preachers to combat the heresies of the time. To this end he attracted a group of like-minded individuals. While Dominic initially thought to form his group in the mold of canons regular, the pull of the mendicant way of life was so attractive that by 1220 the Friars Preachers adopted the mendicants’ strict corporate poverty. The originality of the Friars Preachers was in adapting monastic life to their ruling purpose, namely doctrinal preaching. They modified communal observances by sometimes shortening

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the liturgy or mitigating choir or tempering fasting, all in an effort to facilitate study and preaching.49

The habit of the Friars Preachers does not represent an essential development in the religious habit of men as does that of the Friars Minor. The habit of the Friars Preachers was modeled to great degree on what Dominic wore when he served as a canon in Osma, Spain. In a significant departure from the attire of canons regular, the


Friars Preachers abandoned use of the surplice, which was the basic liturgical garb of a canon regular.\textsuperscript{51}

The primitive constitutions of the Friars Preachers (1206) includes a chapter entitled “Clothing,” which is embedded in a longer section of the text that was largely dependent on the rule of the Premonstratensians.\textsuperscript{52} Included are elements typical to a religious habit: cappa (mantle/overcoat), tunic, scapular, shoes and socks. Climate is alluded to as a practical consideration and there is particular stress on observing poverty in dress. To this end, the constitutions banned the use of linen and the use of pelts from wild animals because both were associated with the wealthy. The chapter on clothing in the primitive constitutions of the Friars Preachers is brief:

In regions where it is possible, the brethren shall wear clothing of coarse wool. Where this cannot be observed, they shall use common material. Let poverty be observed in the matter of cappas and no linen be worn next to the skin. No one shall wear more than three tunics and a woolen pelt in winter, or four without the pelt, which is always worn covered by a tunic. They shall not use the pelts of wild animals or furs of any kind. Tunics should reach down as far as the heel of the foot. The cappa shall be shorter, and shorter still the woolen pelt. Our scapulars should be long enough to cover the knees. Shoes and socks shall be


worn as necessity requires and the means of the house permit. No one shall wear gloves or leggins.\textsuperscript{53}

No mention is made here of the two capuches (hoods) worn by the Friars Preachers. One was attached to the scapular and the second one to the cappa.\textsuperscript{54}

The final chapter of the constitutions of the Friars Preachers includes some rules for the clothing of lay brothers. The habit of the lay brothers was the same as that of the clerics, save for a few exceptions. The brothers wore a long, wide, non-white scapular in place of the cappa (cloak) worn by the clerics. Also, the brothers’ regular scapular was grey, whereas that of the clerics was white. The exact rules on the clothing of the lay brothers reads: “They shall have the same clothes as the clerics except for the cappa, in place of which they shall wear a long, wide scapular, which unlike the tunic, shall not be white. They are permitted to have short grey scapulars of the same style as those worn by the clerics.”\textsuperscript{55}


\textsuperscript{54} The Primitive Constitutions of the Order of Friars Preachers, ch. 18, in Saint Dominic: Biographical Documents, ed. Francis Lehner, 223-4.

\textsuperscript{55} The Primitive Constitutions of the Order of Friars Preachers, ch. 37, in Saint Dominic: Biographical Documents, 251; Constitutions Primaevae: S. Ordinis Praedicatorum, 23-4.
Humbert of Romans, fifth Master General of the Friars Preachers (1254-1263), wrote a commentary on the prologue to his order’s constitutions that reveals a degree of diversity of dress among the early Friars Preachers. The early friars wore the same garments from region to region, but, according to Humbert’s witness, the color and/or style of those garments varied from place to place. Humbert was saddened that the Friars Preachers did not display uniformity in externals to the degree that, in his opinion, other orders did. Humbert’s disappointment at the lack of uniformity is a clue as to what the religious habit had come to mean: “It is the general practice among approved religious orders which live by common profession that they should display the highest degree of uniformity in external things, not only in their observances, but also in their habit. . . . It is with a certain sadness that we must realize how far we differ from the rest on this point.” Humbert described the diversity of dress among the Friars Preachers in considerable detail:

They [other religious] are uniform in the color, shape, size, and cost of their clothes; but we are not like that. One man has a black cappa, another a red one and yet another a grey one. Some people’s cappas have a wide opening, some have a very narrow one; some are very expensive, some are cheap and some are in between. One man has a narrow scapular, another a broad one; some of them have pointed hoods at the back, others do not. Some of them have a long neck opening, some have a short one, and some have folds at the cheeks and some do

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not. Some people have cappas which cover their whole tunic, while other have cappas improperly shorter than their tunics; some of them are so short that they attract attention, while others are so long that they attract attention. Similarly with scapulars: some are very long, some are very short. And it is the same with the laybrother: one has one kind of scapular, while another has one totally different in color and in all the other ways mentioned above. Other orders also observe uniformity in their shoes. But with us one man has black shoes and another has red shoes; some wear coarse, religious shoes, while others wear worldly, open shoes. Some are fastened one way, some are fastened in quite another way. Some of us have got into the way of wearing shoes so large that they almost come up to the knee, whereas others are very short, and some are in between.”

Though Humbert clearly preferred that his order legislate toward greater uniformity, he offered six tenable reasons why such diversity of dress existed: differences of custom and style among the various countries of the Friars Preachers had its affect; many friars who were aware of the diversity of externals considered it superstitious to make rules in regard to such things; the poverty of the order necessitated that they depend on what fabrics were given to them by people outside the order; it was not always helpful to have absolute uniformity; legislators were not anxious to burden the order with a multitude of constitutions; and legislators had been settling more pressing matters. Humbert followed this sixth and final reason, that of “more pressing matters,” by

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57 Humbert of Romans, Commentary on the Prologue to the Constitutions, in Early Dominicans: Selected Writings, 141-2; Beato Humberti de Romanis Opera de Vita Regulari, vol. 2, 5-6.

58 Humbert of Romans, Commentary on the Prologue to the Constitutions, in Early Dominicans: Selected Writings, 142-3; Beato Humberti de Romanis Opera de Vita Regulari, vol. 2, 6-7.
saying that he hoped future legislators would take up the issue of external uniformity because, according to Humbert, “It would certainly be beneficial if this were to be done.” 59

In Humbert’s opinion there were two unfortunate consequences to diversity of externals: diversity often disturbed friars who became aware of it and, secondly, the diversity caused confusion among those outside the order.

First of all, it disturbs the hearts of the brethren. The brethren are often disturbed when they are traveling round different places and see things being done differently from the way they are done elsewhere. And secondly it causes confusion among people outside the Order. Our diversity makes them think that we do not belong to a single brotherhood or make a single profession. So the text is quite right to say, “May we be found uniform in the observances of our canonical religious life,” and then to add, “so that this external uniformity in our manners may cherish the unity which we ought to preserve in our hearts” – unity of a single brotherhood and a single profession: this is directed against the first problem. “And that it may display our unity”: this is directed against the second problem. Those who are careless about this kind of uniformity and trouble the unity of charity among the brethren make it obvious that they have no sense of unity with the rest – internally, in their hearts. 60

59 Humbert of Romans, Commentary on the Prologue to the Constitutions, in Early Dominicans: Selected Writings, 143; Beato Humberti de Romanis Opera de Vita Regulari, vol. 2, 7.

60 Humbert of Romans, Commentary on the Prologue to the Constitutions, in Early Dominicans: Selected Writings, 143; Beato Humberti de Romanis Opera de Vita Regulari, vol. 2, 7-8.
D. *Transformation of Men’s Fashion (14th c. - 15th c.)*

The tunic was still in wide use among European men in the thirteenth century. In the fourteenth century a change in military armor from chain mail to plate protection was the catalyst that led European laymen to lesser use of the long tunic and greater use of form-fitting clothing that highlighted the shape of the human body.\(^6\) This change in male fashion marked the beginning of a more profound distinction between the religious habit of men and the normal clothing of European laymen.\(^{62}\) Whereas trousers became more and more the fashion among laymen, religious continued wearing the long tunic as an expression of identity and modesty, and thus the religious habit became an increasingly distinctive style of dress. The more distinct the religious habit became, the greater the tendency to venerate it and shroud it in an aura of sanctity.\(^{63}\)

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\(^{62}\) This change in male fashion also marked the beginning of a further separation between the clothing styles of European men and women. Male and female fashion remained quite separate until European women began wearing trousers in the twentieth century.

\(^{63}\) Augé, *El Hábito Religioso*, 34.
religious community. The movement toward a habit indicating membership in a particular group was strengthened by the monastic renewal of the tenth to twelfth centuries. Inspired by the ideal of apostolic life in the early Church, these monastic groups felt themselves called to greater simplicity of dress. The habit of the Friars Minor represents a real development in the history of the religious habit of men in that it differed from the religious garb of earlier forms of religious life (monastics and canons regular), e.g., cord instead of belt and no scapular. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, decreasing use of the tunic and increasing use of form-fitting “pants” among laymen led to greater distinction between the clothing styles of laymen and that of consecrated religious men. This divergence in clothing style, i.e., tunic-like garments for religious men and form-fitting garments for laymen, persisted until Vatican II.
Chapter 4

The Religious Habit of Men During the Modern Era (16th c. – mid-20th c.)

The centuries of the Modern Era witnessed the rise of clerics regular, clerical religious congregations, lay religious congregations, and societies of apostolic life. During this epoch the male religious habit repeatedly returned to the simple values of primitive Western monasticism but also perpetuated its medieval past by including garments that were distinct from secular ones, particular to each institute, and distinguishable according to the type of religious life. Though repeated calls for simplicity in regard to the habit were motivated by the reforming efforts unleashed by the Council of Trent (1545-63), the Baroque spirit of the seventeenth century sometimes had the paradoxical effect of moving the habit toward greater adornment. Innovations to the male religious habit put into place by clerics regular and then adopted by the new “congregations” continued without any essential developments until the changes that came about after Vatican II.

The same questions used to guide chapters two and three also direct this chapter’s investigation into the religious habit of men: What does the original rule of this particular institute communicate about its habit? Is any spiritual symbolism
attached to its various elements? Is the habit distinct from secular clothing? Is investiture part of the entrance rites for acceptance into this group?

A. Clerics Regular (16th c.)

In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, turbulent decades marked by the Protestant Reformation, there came about a new style of religious institute called clerics regular. In place of an obligation to pray the Liturgy of the Hours in common, clerics regular devoted themselves to preaching, to sacramental ministry, and had fewer required penitential observances than the monastic, canonical, or mendicant forms of religious life. Representative orders of clerics regular and their dates of foundation include Theatines (1524), Barnabites (1530), and Jesuits (1540), all founded before the Council of Trent. The clothing adopted by clerics regular marks a real development in the history of the religious habit of men. Clerics regular broke away from the attire worn by monks, canons, or mendicants and, though living a form of religious life, adopted the dress of secular clerics. The following section highlights the clerics regular known as the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), numerically the largest male institute of the Catholic Church.

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1 Characteristics of clerics regular are found at Knowles, *From Pachomius to Ignatius*, 61-68.
Like other clerics regular, the early Jesuits did not have a distinctive habit in the mold of monks or canons or mendicants, but took on the dress of “upstanding priests” of whatever region in which they were.²

The early Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, essentially composed by Ignatius of Loyola and officially approved at their General Congregation of 1558, spoke about


clothing in a chapter entitled “What Pertains to Poverty and Its Consequences.” This chapter set out the following three conditions for dress: “First, it should be proper; second, conformed to the usage of the country of residence; and third, not contradictory to the poverty we profess, as would happen through the wearing of silk or expensive cloths. These ought not be used, in order that in everything fitting humility and lowliness may be preserved for the greater divine glory.”

Like so many other founders and early rules, Ignatius and these early Jesuit constitutions stress poverty and humility in regard to clothing. Practically speaking, the aforementioned words about clothing being “proper” and “conformed to the usage of

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5 *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms*, statute 577, 238; *Constitutiones Societatis Iesu: Latinae et Hispanicæ*, 195-6. All footnote references to the “statutes” of the early Jesuit Constitutions use the numbering system given in *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms*. The General Congregation that officially approved these Constitutions in 1558 added a qualifying statute (578) to the second condition (“conformed to the usage of the country of residence”): “Or, at least, it should not be altogether different.” The same General Congregation added the following statute (579) to the third condition (“not contradictory to the poverty we profess”): “This refers to those to whom the house supplies new clothing. But in the case of those who are entering the Society, if they bring some expensive fabrics or the like, there is no difficulty in allowing their use. Nor is there any difficulty in someone’s wearing better but proper garments in some circumstance or necessity; but these ought not to be used for ordinary wear. Nevertheless it should be observed that all do not have the same bodily strength, nor does health of body belong to all, nor an age which favors it. Therefore care should be taken both for the greater particular good of such persons and for the universal good of many others; and what provision is possible should be made for the greater glory of God.”
the country” meant that the early Jesuits usually dressed in the style of clerical cassock worn by the diocesan clergy of a given locale. This translated into variously colored and styled cassocks, depending on the region: in Rome a black cassock, in Spain differently colored cassocks depending on the given area, in Brazil attire like the Jesuits used in Portugal, and in Beijing an adaptation of Mandarin dress.

Such plurality in Jesuit dress is mirrored somewhat in a few statutes of their original Constitutions that concern the clothing of novices. For example, during their two-year novitiate Jesuit novices did not wear the cassock worn by Jesuits of their region who had pronounced vows: “During this two-year period in which no special habit of the Society is received . . .” The Constitutions also gave discretion to the “one in charge of the house” as to whether novices would wear regular clothes or something else: “Although there is no specified habit, it will be left to the discretion of the one in

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10 Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms, statute 18, 27; Constitutiones Societatis Iesu: Latinae et Hispanicæ, 13, 6-7.
charge of the house to decide whether he will allow the novices to go about in the same
clothes which they brought from the world or have them wear others.”¹¹

While it is clear that the early Constitutions of the Society of Jesus did not
prescribe an official Jesuit habit, it is equally clear that the early Jesuits wore clerical
dress, which distinguished them from the laity. It cannot be reasonably argued that the
ey early Jesuits went about dressed as each one preferred. In a section of the Constitutions
entitled “Aids to Uniting the Dispersed Members with Their Head and Among
Themselves,” Ignatius recommended uniformity as a positive value: “Still another great
help can be found in uniformity, both interior uniformity of doctrine, judgments, and
wills, as far as this is possible, and exterior uniformity in respect to clothing, ceremonies
of the Mass, and other such matters.”¹²

Other statutes in the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus that deal with clothing
are reminiscent of the moderation of the Rule of Benedict. In these statutes, Ignatius
promoted mortification and self-abnegation, but did so in a way that sublimated them
to the more important value of preserving the body for God’s service and praise.

¹¹ Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms, statute 19, 28; Constitutiones
Societatis Iesu: Latinae et Hispanicae, F, 7.

¹² Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms, statute 671, 326; Constitutiones
Societatis Iesu: Latinae et Hispanicae, 8, 233.
Ignatius wrote, “In regard to food, clothing, living quarters, and other bodily needs, care should be taken with the divine aid that, while there is occasion for testing their [the novices] virtue and self-abnegation, nothing be lacking that is needed to sustain and preserve nature for God’s service and praise.”\(^{13}\) Ignatius also wrote of the fundamental purposes of clothing and recommended garments that resisted the vanities of the world: “In regard to clothing, its purpose should be kept in view, which is to keep off cold and preserve decorum. Beyond this, it is good for those who are in probation to take advantage of their garments as means to the mortification and abnegation of themselves and to trample on the world and its vanities.”\(^{14}\)

Why Ignatius did not institute a religious habit in the mode of established tradition lies in part because of his desire to break from the various models of religious life that were so under attack by Protestant Reformers. Another part of the answer is found in a personal experience of Ignatius during his time as a student at the University of Alcalá. During this time Ignatius and his five companions dressed, according to the description of an eyewitness, “down to their feet in clear, dull habits and wear rough

\(^{13}\) Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms, statute 296, 126; Constitutiones Societatis Iesu: Latinae et Hispanicæ, 3, 102.

\(^{14}\) Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms, statute 297, 126; Constitutiones Societatis Iesu: Latinae et Hispanicæ, C, 102.
shoes, which gives them the appearance of living the life of the apostles.”\textsuperscript{15} Recalling his experience at Alcalá later in life, Ignatius relayed to his Jesuit confre Luis Gonzalez de Camara that the reason why he had not prescribed a specific habit was that “in the beginning we lived as penitents and wore a different habit,” but that later he was convinced to dress in a fashion more typical of clerics because “what we wear matters little.”\textsuperscript{16}

While Ignatius and the early Jesuits did not legislate a religious habit, part of Jesuit heritage includes the development of a buttonless cassock with cincture that was indeed uniquely Jesuit. This cassock initially developed early on and by the early seventeenth century seems to have become almost universal in usage. This special cassock fell out of favor among the Jesuits after the Second Vatican Council, and is rarely worn by Jesuits today (2015).

\textsuperscript{15} Monumenta Ignatiana, series four, vol. 1 (Madrid: Monumenta Historica, 1904), 599.

\textsuperscript{16} Fontes Narrativi de S. Ignatio de Loyola et de Societatis Jesu Initii, vol. 1 (Rome: Monumenta Historica, 1943), 609.
In summary, one can say that Ignatius of Loyola set out flexible criteria for adopting religious dress. His principles were gospel-inspired and reminiscent of the norms for clothing found in the rules of Augustine, Benedict, and Francis. By adopting the garb of secular clerics, Ignatius broke from the tradition of earlier religious orders.

B. Triumph of the Catholic Reform (17th c. - 18th c.)

The Catholic Counter-Reformation, running from the Council of Trent (1545-1563) until the close of the Thirty Years War (1648), ushered a new chapter into the ongoing history of consecrated life. Clerical religious congregations and lay religious

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congregations came on the scene. The religious “congregation” was a new type of institute that differed from the religious “order” in that members of congregations made “simple” vows, whereas members of orders professed “solemn” vows.\textsuperscript{18}

Examples of clerical religious congregations, including their founder and date of foundation, are the Passionists (Paul of the Cross, 1720), Redemptorists (Alphonsus Ligouri, 1732), and Oblates of Mary Immaculate (Eugène Mazenod, 1816). Examples of lay congregations, including their founder and date of foundation, are the Brothers of the Christian Schools (John Baptist de La Salle, 1680), Congregation of Christian Brothers (Edmund Rice, 1802), and Marist Brothers of the Schools (Marcellin Champagnat, 1817).\textsuperscript{19}

Heightened specificity as to the details of the habit, not present to the same degree in legislation on religious dress from previous eras, is characteristic of the rules and constitutions developed by new orders and congregations after the Council of Trent. The confluence of an abundant number of new institutes and the ecclesiastical

\textsuperscript{18} Elio Gambari, \textit{Religious Life According to Vatican II and the New Code of Canon Law}, trans. Daughters of St. Paul (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1986), 65-66. When congregations first received approbation by the Church, solemn vows were reckoned to be indissoluble and precluded one from the right to inherit or own goods or property. Simple vows, on the other hand, were thought to be dissoluble and allowed one the right to inherit or own goods or property, though not personally use them under normal circumstances.

\textsuperscript{19} For a complete listing see \textit{Annuario Pontificio} (Vatican City: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 2012), 1430-1455 (clerical congregations) and 1455-1470 (lay congregations of men).
demand that each institute have its own unique habit helped produce greater attention to details regarding the habit. Though Church law emanating from the Council of Trent called for simplicity in the area of religious habits, the Baroque spirit of the seventeenth century sometimes produced the opposite effect.\textsuperscript{20} The Baroque spirit was manifest in the religious habit in ancillary items like insignias, emblems, and carrying the rosary externally. From the aforementioned congregations, one can site as examples of Baroque-inspired adornment the intricate insignia on the Passionist habit or the external rosary carried by the Redemptorists.\textsuperscript{21}

For the most part, male religious congregations - all of which were new - developed religious habits in the manner of clerics regular, which meant incorporating into their habit the dress of diocesan clergy rather than the medieval garments of monks, canons, or mendicants.

Because of the unconventionality of their religious habit and their founder’s unique emphasis on its importance, the following section will feature the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, a lay religious congregation founded in Reims, France in 1680. This institute was granted official approbation in 1725 by Pope Benedict XIII, a


\textsuperscript{21} Augé, El Hábito Religioso, 37.
Dominican. Their founder, John Baptist de La Salle, was canonized in 1900 and named the patron saint of teachers of youth in 1950. Unique in the history of the Catholic Church, the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is the first religious congregation composed solely of lay male religious whose exclusive ministry is the work of Christian education. From the outset, the Brothers have not been tied to a particular diocese and do not aspire to the priesthood. Prior to the establishment of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, similar groups of lay male religious attempted to become established in Europe, but they were all tied to a local diocese and did not persist much past the death of their respective founders.

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22 The original Latin version and an English translation of the papal bull *In Apostolicae Dignitatis Solio*, which granted official approbation to the Brothers of the Christian Schools, can be found in *Common Rules and Constitutions* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1947), v-xvii. The original Latin version, with an introduction in French, can be found in *Cahiers Lasaliens* 11 (Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptist de La Salle, 1962), 355-365.
A Brother of the Christian Schools

The rabat is an elongated, split, white collar. Adopted from the dress of diocesan clergy, the rabat is the only part of the habit that can be considered elegant. The religious habits of other orders and congregations did not include a rabat. Diocesan clergy, bishops, cardinals, teachers, lawyers, and judges also wore rabats, often different in size and color.

To emphasize its difference from clerical garb, De La Salle dubbed this modified cassock a robe.

Heavy, thick-soled shoes worn by the poor.

An ordinary seventeenth century Frenchman’s black hat. De La Salle widened the brim to set it off from the fashion of the day.

The capote served in place of a clerical mantle. The capotes worn by peasants of the Champagne region of France were shorter than knee-length and had a hood. To set it apart from the fashion of the day, De La Salle designed the Brothers’ capote without a hood, lengthened it beyond the knee, and gave it overly-long sleeves.

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23 Hélyot, Histoire de Ordres Monastiques, Religieux et Militaires, et des Congregations Seculieres, tome eight, 29. The Brothers of the Christian and Charitable Schools of the Infant Jesus was founded by the Minim Nicholas Barré. This short-lived religious congregation was mistakenly identified in the illustration seen above. The illustration undoubtably features a member of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, whose French title is Frères des Écoles Chrétienennes without, as is seen at the bottom of the illustration, “et Charitables” added on.
The earliest rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (1694) includes little about their habit. A chapter on poverty mentions clothing among those things that are held in common and gave the superior approbation to change or take away clothing when he deemed it proper. The Brothers’ robe and breeches are briefly mentioned in a chapter on chastity, and their headpiece, a calotte, is mentioned numerous times throughout the document. More substantial information on the Brothers’ habit comes from two other works authored by John Baptist de La Salle, the *Rule of the Brother Director of a House of the Institute* and the *Memorandum on the Habit*. Of all the founders included in this dissertation, John Baptist de La Salle is the only founder who wrote a document specifically on the religious habit.

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De La Salle wrote the *Memorandum on the Habit* in response to a pastor who wanted the Brothers to adopt a shoe-length clerical cassock and an ecclesiastical mantle that would make their habit more recognizable and respectable.\(^{28}\) John Baptist de La Salle’s defense of the Brothers’ religious garb in his *Memorandum on the Habit* includes a fairly detailed description of their robe and overcoat:

THE HABIT OF THIS COMMUNITY IS A KIND OF SHORTENED CASSOCK THAT REACHES TO THE CALF OF THE LEG. IT IS WITHOUT BUTTONS AND IS FASTENED ON THE INSIDE WITH LITTLE BLACK HOOKS FROM THE COLLAR TO JUST BELOW THE WAIST. FROM THERE DOWNWARD IT IS SEWN. THE SLEEVES REACH TO THE WRISTS, AND THE TIPS ARE FASTENED WITH CONCEALED HOOKS. WE CALL THIS HABIT A ROBE TO DISTINGUISH IT FROM A CLERICAL CASSOCK, FROM WHICH IT DIFFERS SLIGHTLY IN SHAPE. A CLOAK OR PEASANT’S OVERCOAT, WITHOUT A COLLAR AND WITHOUT BUTTONS IN FRONT, SERVES AS A MANTLE. IT IS FASTENED AT THE NECK WITH A LARGE HOOK ON THE INSIDE. RATHER LONG, THIS CLOAK REACHES AN INCH OR SO BELOW THE ROBE, COMPLETELY COVERING IT.\(^{29}\)

IN PLACE OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL MANTLE THE BROTHERS WORE A UNIQUE OVERCOAT THAT WAS A VERSION OF THE *CAPOTE*, A CLOAK WORN BY PEASANTS OF THE CHAMPAGNE REGION OF FRANCE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.\(^ {30}\) While the aforementioned details describing the Brothers’ robe and overcoat are totally unlike the general guidelines on clothing given by


Augustine, Benedict, or Francis, this level of detail reflects the cultural concern of the time and is characteristic of legislation on the habit developed by new orders and congregations after the Council of Trent.

De La Salle’s description of the Brothers’ habit in the *Rule of the Brother Director of a House of the Institute* offers details to an extent that seems exaggerated to contemporary sensibilities. De La Salle opened his description of the habit in the *Rule of the Brother Director* by stressing the perennial values of poverty and modesty, and also by specifying the type of fabric: “The Brothers of the Institute will be dressed simply and like poor people, but they will take care that their clothes are clean, respectable, and modest. The material of which their clothes will be made will be ordinary black, coarse, twilled serge, and their stockings will be of the same material.”31 De La Salle next spoke of the Brothers’ robe and mantle (overcoat), giving details that were not included in the *Memorandum*. In an effort to distinguish the religious habit from current fashion, the Brothers’ overcoat, called in French a *capote*, was adjusted to be pleatless and have extra-long sleeves.

They will have a robe and a mantle over it . . . both lined at the top only, the robe with linen, the mantle with serge. . . . The robes and mantles will be without seams in the back. The robes and mantles will have the same length and width as the body for which they are made; the sleeves will be fastened by hooks without

ornament. The mantles will not have pleats at the top; the sleeves will be extended to two feet off the ground.\textsuperscript{32}

Throughout the history of religious life, the habit has sometimes served to distinguish membership within religious institutes, i.e. religious superiors from those who are not, or lay religious from ordained religious, or those in solemn vows from those in simple vows. Such a custom existed in the Brothers of the Christian Schools as well. The “school Brothers“ and the “serving Brothers“ wore different-colored habits, a custom that was reflected in the \textit{Rule of the Brother Director}: “The robes and the stockings of the serving Brothers will be brown, like the Capuchin habit, and made in the same way as those of the school Brothers.”\textsuperscript{33} In the course of time these serving Brothers came to be regarded as second-class members. In fact, the phrase “first and second order Brothers“ came into being.\textsuperscript{34} Brown robes were discontinued by decree of the Brothers’ general chapter of 1810, when the Institute of the Brothers reverted to having all its members, whether teachers or not, wear black robes.


\textsuperscript{34} Maurice Hermans, \textit{L’Institut de Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes à la Recherche de Son Statut Canonique: des Origines (1679) à la Bulle de Benoît XIII (1725)}, CL 11:66.
To stress the level of detail given in the rules of new congregations and orders from the seventeenth century until Vatican II, included here is the remainder of the description of the Brothers’ clothing as given in the *Rule of the Brother Director*. It tells of the different garments, when they were to be worn, what they were to be made of, and even where they were to be tailored. No rule examined thus far in this dissertation has included this level of detail.

They will have breeches of sheepskin, treated with oil, cold-dyed with a violet color, and lined with white sheepskin. They will have a serge vest for winter and may have a vest of plain cloth for summer. The Brothers will also wear, but only in the house and in the school, a calotte, lined with wool, that can cover the ears. Those of the serving Brothers will be the color of their robe; those of the school Brothers will be black. Outside the house and the school, the Brothers will wear a hat, which will be six inches wide and four and a half inches high. They will have a collar made of black serge, lined with plain cloth, equipped in front with untreated cowhide, and fastened by two hooks. The clothing of the Brothers will be sewn with common thread or with wool. All the clothing, except the vest and the collar, will be made in one of the communities of each province, which will also supply the hats for all the other houses of the province. The Brother Superior of the Institute will designate the community for this purpose. They will also have rabats of plain cloth with bibs four inches long and three and a half inches wide. The undershirts will be made simply and without fancy cuffs. The Brothers will wear socks of plain cloth in the summer and of wool in the winter. They will also have black gloves of ordinary wool and use them only in school, where they will leave them with their signal. They will also have a handwarmer covered with black serge, which they will use in the house and elsewhere. Their shoes will be made of ordinary cowhide and two simple, plain, thick soles. The heels will not extend more than one inch in length from the soles. The shoes will be tied with a cord. Each house will make its own shoes.³⁵

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The *rabat*, a kind of linen neckwear used by the secular clergy, deserves special mention. Because linen was costly, this is the only part of the Brothers’ habit that can be considered somewhat luxurious. The *rabat* was not used by monks, canons regular, mendicants, or clerics regular.

De La Salle explained in the *Memorandum on the Habit* that the Brothers’ habit was neither clerical nor secular: “We were led to the conclusion that it would be better for them [the Brothers] to use a habit that is neither clerical nor secular.”

Historian Ronald Isetti aptly named the Brothers early habit a *tertium quid*, meaning something that is related in a way to two things but is distinct from both. The Brothers’ habit was related to the attire of clerics and to the attire of laymen, but it was also distinct from both. Isetti described the Brothers’ early habit thus:

From the attire of clerics, La Salle borrows the elongated, split, white collar (*rabat* in French) and the soutane (cassock). However, he shortens the latter to calf-length, has it cut from rough serge and then dyed black, loosens its shape, and has it fastened in the front with hooks and eyes rather than with buttons. To emphasize its difference from clerical garb, De La Salle dubs this modified soutane a *robe*. From the attire of laymen, he borrows the heavy, thick-soled shoes worn by the poor, an ordinary man’s black hat – purposely widening the brim to set off the Brothers from worldly fashion – and the coarse overcoat (*capote* in French) favored by the peasants of Champagne. The last, lengthened to

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37 Isetti, introduction to the *Memorandum on the Habit*, in *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 156.
reach eight inches from the ground, he also has cut from coarse serge and then dyed black.\textsuperscript{38}

John Baptist de La Salle thought it was better that a religious habit be distinctive from secular attire right from the foundation of a new religious community rather than becoming so over the course of time. He devoted an entire section of his \textit{Memorandum on the Habit} to “Reasons for Adopting a Distinctive Habit and for Keeping It.” It gives remarkable witness to the function of the religious habit and of its “power” to influence the human person.

In every community where the members share all their goods and live a common life . . . the habit either is distinctive from its foundation or becomes so eventually. It seems more suitable for the welfare of a community that the habit be distinctive from its foundation rather than become so later. . . . The members of this community . . . need some tangible token of membership in the community to draw them to it, to retain their allegiance once they join, and to lead them to observe its rule. Nothing is more effective in achieving these ends than a distinctive habit. . . . Monsieur Vincent judged that a distinctive habit was essential, in a sense, to hold the allegiance of the members of his congregation. . . . Before the adoption of this special habit, whenever the obligation to observe the rule was brought up, several said they had no more reason to do so than ordinary people because they appeared to be no different from them.\textsuperscript{39}

De La Salle firmly believed that it was virtuous for religious to be circumspect in their dealings with lay people and to be withdrawn from “worldly” concerns, both of

\textsuperscript{38} Isetti, introduction to the \textit{Memorandum on the Habit}, in Rule and Foundational Documents, 156-157.

\textsuperscript{39} De La Salle, \textit{Memorandum on the Habit} 34-8 and 41, in Rule and Foundational Documents, 187-9; CL 11:352.
which are perennial values of the religious life. As a consequence, De La Salle insisted that his Brothers eschew secular fashion.

A permanently distinctive habit will remove every chance of adopting the worldly fashions of ordinary people. . . . This distinctive habit encourages laypeople to look upon those who belong to this community as persons separated and withdrawn from worldly concerns. It seems appropriate that they have this notion about them so that the members themselves will not mingle too freely or converse too frequently with secular people and will maintain more reserve in their relations with them.⁴⁰

In regard to a religious’ posture toward “the world,” De La Salle had a very different stance than that of many contemporary religious.

After the lay teaching brotherhoods became established in the Church by the Brothers of the Christian Schools, other lay religious congregations of men founded afterward did not feel the same need for a habit that differentiated them from clerics to the same extent as did the habit of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Thus, other lay religious congregations adopted a more clerical cassock as part of their religious habit.⁴¹

⁴⁰ De La Salle, Memorandum on the Habit 35 and 40, in Rule and Foundational Documents, 188; CL 11:352.

C. Summary of Developments to the Religious Habit of Men During the Modern Era

The most substantial innovation to the male religious habit during the Modern Era is that clerics regular such as the Jesuits incorporated the dress of secular priests into their religious attire. This significant change was adopted by many of the new “congregations” founded during this time period. One also finds in the Modern Era more and more emphasis by religious communities on the exclusivity of their own religious habit. Another feature of the religious habit of men during this epoch was the growth of secondary elements like external rosaries and insignia. Such developments to the male religious habit from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries were continued without any essential innovations by those new orders and congregations that were founded in the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century prior to Vatican II.

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42 See A. Borrás, “Abito Religioso,” DIP 1:71. The proliferation of secondary elements was even more prominent among women religious.
Chapter 5

Magisterial Statements With Bearing on the Religious Habit of Men

Throughout the history of the Church there have been relatively few magisterial statements with bearing on the religious habit of men. This chapter presents such legislation as does exist from collections of Church law, papal statements, and decrees of ecumenical and local councils, beginning in the 5th century and continuing until the mid-20th century.

A. Pope Celestine I (422-32)

Pope Celestine I issued the first pontifical directive concerning religious habits in the history of the Catholic Church.\(^1\) Writing to the bishops of the Gallic regions of Vienne and Narbonne in 428, Pope Celestine reproached those who wanted the clergy of Gaul to dress in monastic garb. Pope Celestine wrote unapprovingly of clerics who “wore the pallium and belt, convinced they were being faithful to Scripture, but who did not live according to the Spirit.”\(^2\) Celestine exhorted the bishops that they and their clerics “needed to distinguish themselves from others through teaching, conduct, and


purity of spirit, not through clothing or ornamentation.” The pope also wrote negatively of “monks who lived close to society but who dressed in an odd manner, following custom more so than reason.”

Pope Celestine’s letter does not lend itself to making a precise determination of his attitude toward distinctive garb. It is possible that Pope Celestine was completely against priests and monks wearing distinctive garb, but it is just as likely that he was only against garments that were distinctive to the point of being odd. Whatever the case, Pope Celestine’s commentary is more understandable if one knows that up until the generation preceding Pope Celestine, the Church was often victimized by external persecution. At the time Celestine wrote his letter to the bishops of Vienne and Narbonne in the early part of the fifth century, the Church was still growing accustomed to public acceptance. Because the Church sought greater acceptance from society, it is reasonable to suppose that Pope Celestine wanted to promote similarity in dress between the men of society and the Church’s minsters.

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B. Council of Chalcedon (451)

In 453 Pope Leo I ratified the canons of the Council of Chalcedon, which was held in the East, near Constantinople. This council issued a number of canons in regard to the comportment and discipline of monks and clerics. Chalcedon’s fourth canon confirms the existence of a distinctive monastic habit by mentioning the habit in the context of monks who led a less-than-edifying lifestyle.

Those who truly and sincerely live the monastic life should be accorded appropriate recognition. But since there are some who don the monastic habit and meddle with the churches and in civil matters, and circulate indiscriminately in the cities and even are involved in founding monasteries for themselves, it has been decided that no one is to is to build or found a monastery or oratory anywhere against the will of the local bishop.  

C. Fourth Council of Constantinople (869-70)

The concerns of the Western Church were prominently reflected in the proceedings and canons of the Fourth Council of Constantinople even though the majority of prelates at the Council were from the East. In fact, this is the first council not accepted as ecumenical by the Churches of the East. During the High Middle Ages there was a problem with monks who, upon joining the ranks of bishop, dropped their monastic garb in favor of episcopal finery. Evidence of this lies in the fact that the

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Fourth Council of Constantinople issued a canon that forbade monks who were raised
to the episcopate to lay aside their monastic garb.

We decree that those who have devoutly embraced the monastic life and merited
the dignity of a bishop, should keep the appearance and garments of the
monastic habit and that holy way of life. None of them has the right to lay aside
that type of dress out of pride and wilful arrogance, lest he is found thereby to
violate his personal vows. Just as the continual wearing of the pallium shows the
bishop as given to ostentation and vainglory, so the laying aside of the monastic
habit exposes him to the same charges. Therefore, any bishop who . . . lays aside
the monastic dress, must either be corrected or be deposed by his patriarch.⁷

This canon was no panacea. The problem of monk-bishops abandoning their monastic
habit persisted for centuries. The Fourth Council of the Lateran (1215) reaffirmed the
aforementioned canon, which had been decreed nearly four hundred years previous:

“All bishops should wear outer garments of linen in public and in church, unless they
have been monks, in which case they should wear the monastic habit.”⁸ Five hundred
years hence, Pope Benedict XIII lamented the same reality in his constitution Custodes,
which called for “regular bishops” who abandoned their religious habit to be
suspended from the exercise of their episcopal office.⁹

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⁸ Fourth Council of the Lateran, canon 16, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 1, 243.

D. Ut Periculoso (1298)

The constitution Ut Periculoso (1298) was issued by Pope Boniface VIII, who reigned as pope during years when the mendicants were gaining ascendancy in the realm of religious life. Problems caused by religious going about incognito motivated Boniface VIII to issue Ut Periculoso, a decree which forbade a regular, under pain of excommunication, to “temerarily,” i.e. without reasonable cause, remove their habit. The legislation read: “In order that religious might be spared the dangerous occasion of wandering about, we strictly forbid them, whether they be expressly or tacitly professed, to remove their religious habit in the schools or elsewhere.”

Ut Periculoso had the force of universal law in the Church because it came to be included in the Liber Sextus, a collection of Church legislation that constituted part of the Corpus Iuris Canonici. Boniface’s decree prohibiting religious from “temerarily” removing their habit remained the fundamental source of law on the religious habit until the 1917 Code of Canon Law. The censure of excommunication attached to heedlessly removing one’s religious habit lasted almost six centuries. It wasn’t revoked until 1869, when Pius IX issued the constitution Apostolicae Sedis Moderationi.

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E. Council of Vienne (1312-13)

The Council of Vienne was held during the pontificate of Clement V, who reigned at the beginning of the Avignon captivity. Many decrees issued by the Council of Vienne were aimed at reforming ecclesiastical morals. One decree specified that religious and clergy who wore garments unbecoming of their state, such as a woolen band or linen cap on their heads, were to be disqualified, if applicable, from their ecclesiastical benefice. If a religious with an “administrative post” wore a gown (tunic) or tabard (short coat) that was lined with fur, he was to give up those things to the poor. A religious without an “administrative post” who owned such unbecoming garments was to give them to his religious superior.

He who holds a dignity, a parsonage or another benefice to which the cure of souls is annexed, as also any other priests and religious, whose outward garb should reveal their inner integrity, who without reasonable cause wear such clothing in public, or appear thus with a woollen band or linen cap on their heads, are, if beneficed, automatically suspended for a year from receiving the revenues of their benefices. Such other priests and religious are also disqualified for the same period from obtaining any ecclesiastical benefices. These and any other clerics who wear a gown or tabard which is furred to the edge and so short that the lower garment is clearly seen, if they are secular clergy or religious with administrative posts, are obliged to give the gown to the poor within a month. The other religious who do not have administrative posts are obliged with the same period to consign the gown to their superiors, to be used for some pious purpose.12

12 Council of Vienne, decree 9, in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 1, 365.
Another decree of the Council of Vienne was specifically directed toward the “black monks,” meaning primarily the monks of the Cluniac network. This decree gave very specific directives and suggested that monks betrayed gospel simplicity by wearing pretentious apparel. The first section of the decree speaks of the “upper garment next to their habit."

That nothing unbecoming or corrupt find its way into that field of the Lord, namely the sacred order of the black monks . . . we decree as follows. We forbid the monks all excess or irregularity with regard to clothes, food, drink, bedding and horses. We decree that the upper garment next to their habit should be black, brown or white, according to the custom of the region in which they live. The quality of the cloth should not exceed monastic moderation, nor should they seek what is expensive and fine, but what is practical. The garment itself should be round and not slit, neither too long nor too short; it should have broad sleeves extending to the hands, not sewn or buttoned in any way.

The decree continued with directives for the almuce, a hood-like shoulder cape worn as a choir vestment, and for shoes and other sundry items.

The monks should be content with an almuce of black cloth or fur in place of a hood, together with the hood of the habit which they wear, or by arrangement of the abbot they may wear unpretentious hoods which are open over the shoulders. They should not wear silk in place of fur. They may use large summer shoes or high boots for their footwear. None shall presume to wear an ornate

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13 The “black monks” was the term used to signify those monks who followed the Rule for Monasteries by Benedict, especially those of the Cluniac network. The designation “black monks” was used to distinguish such monks from the Cistercians, who were known as the “white monks.”

14 Council of Vienne, decree 14, in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 1, 370.
belt, knife or spurs, or ride a horse with the saddle highly ornamented with nails or sumptuous in any other way, or with a decorative iron bridle.  

The decree directed monastic superiors on the use of frocks (sleeved) and cowls (sleeveless):

In communities in which there are twelve monks or more, the abbot, prior or other superior may wear within the monastery walls a frock of the cloth customarily used for the frocks and cowls of the monastery; other monks in monasteries where frocks are customarily worn should use them also. In other monasteries, however, and in houses and priories where there is a smaller community, they should wear cowls which are closed and of becoming appearance.

The final part of this decree from the Council of Vienne continued with directives for what to wear when setting foot outside the monastery. By specifying its understanding of “cowl” and “frock,” this decree confirms that sometimes there was confusion over what was actually signified by the names of the monastic garments.

When the abbots, priors or other superiors and other monks set foot outside the monastery, they should wear a frock or a cowl or a closed cloak; if they wear the cloak, they should wear underneath it a cowl or, if they prefer, a scapular. When they put on albs or sacred vestment in order to minister at the divine offices, or when they are engaged in work, they may wear the scapular. Lest any uncertainly arises from the different meanings in different regions of the world of the words cowl and frock, we declare that by cowl we understand a long and full habit without sleeves, and by frock we understand a habit with long full sleeves.

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15 Council of Vienne, decree 14, in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 1, 370.

16 Council of Vienne, decree 14, in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 1, 370-1.

17 Council of Vienne, decree 14, in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 1, 371.
The Council of Constance, summoned by “Pope John XXIII” and held in Germany, focused on three things: (1) restoring unity to the Church by ending a schism caused by having, simultaneously, three sitting popes, (2) eradicating heresies like those spread by Wyclif and Hus, and (3) reforming corrupt morals. In the area of moral reform, the Council promulgated a statute entitled “On the Life and Probity of Clerics,” which in large measure was a reaction against new male fashions that came on the scene in Europe during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. During these centuries trousers began to supplant the traditional tunic among laymen. The Church reacted against form-fitting garments that highlighted the shape of the human body, especially when those fashions were adopted by clerics. Regulars are referred to twice in this statute issued by the Council of Constance.

Among the various faults of clerics and prelates this one has especially taken root, namely that many of them despise an appearance of ecclesiastical decency in their dress and delight in what is unbecoming. They seek to conform to the laity and they exhibit outwardly in their dress whatever they are thinking in their minds. Therefore, with the approval of this sacred council, we renew and order the careful observance of all the laws currently in force regarding the clothing, tonsure and habits of clerics, as to both shape and colour, and their hairstyles and the style and uprightness of their lives. These laws have been heeded far too little by both the secular and the regular clergy.18

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The second half of the statute condemned the use of ostentatious garments by the Church’s ministers, regulars included. The statute forbid items like long gloves and clothes with “slits” and furs.

Especially we order to be utterly abolished, with the same council’s approval, the abuse whereby in certain regions some clerics and churchmen, both secular and regular, and even (which we deplore still more) prelates of churches, wear long gloves that are unnecessarily large and sumptuous, extending to their elbows, and clothes with slits at the back and sides, with furs covering the edges even of the slit parts. . . . We condemn this unbecoming way of dressing for all churchmen and we forbid the wearing of such garments. Those who do otherwise are to be punished as transgressors of the canons.19

G. Council of Trent (1545-63)

The great reforming Council of Trent, which attempted to address the profound division in the Church resulting from the Protestant Reformation, dealt with ecclesiastical garb and the religious habit as one common issue. Trent’s fourteenth session, held during the pontificate of Julius III, issued a reforming canon that included the well-known phrase, “The habit does not make the monk.”20 This particular canon


20 Council of Trent, Decree on Reform, session 14, canon 6, in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 2, 716. The phrase habitus non facit monachum, “the habit does not make the monk,” is also found in Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night (c. 1601) and in Thomas à Kempis’ Imitation of Christ (c. 1418-27). The origin of this phrase is a decretal of Pope Gregory IX (served 1227-41): “…quod, quum monachum non faciat habitus, sed professio regularis” (“the habit does not make the monk, but his profession as a regular”). See Corpus Iuris Canonici, vol. 2, title 31, ch. 13, 573.
was primarily addressed not to regulars as such, but to the ordained, be they secular or regular. The canon demanded that clerics wear the garb appropriate to their station, lamented that fact that many clerics wore lay clothing in public, and set out punishments for those who chose not to obey.

Though the habit does not make the monk, clerics must nevertheless always wear the clerical dress appropriate to their own order so that they may show by the suitability of their outward dress the interior uprightness of their characters. Yet, so great has grown the rashness of some and their contempt of religion at the present time that, giving little weight to personal dignity and clerical honor, they wear lay clothes even in public, a walking contradiction, with one foot among divine things and the other among those of the flesh. For that reason all ecclesiastical persons . . . if after warning by their own bishop, even by a public order, they do not wear the proper clerical dress befitting their order and dignity and in keeping with the regulation and command of their bishop, they can and should be restrained by suspension from their orders, office, and benefice.21

Trent also took up the dress of clerics, some of whom would have been regulars, as a minor concern in four separate canons: session 22 – canon one, dealing with the comportment of religious; session 23 – canon six, dealing with the proper age that one could receive the habit; session 23 - canon seventeen, which pertained to minor orders; and session 24 – canon twelve, which dealt with the garb of cathedral canons.22

21 Council of Trent, Decree on Reform, session 14, canon 6, in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 2, 716.

22 Council of Trent, Decree on Reform, sessions 22-4, in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 2, 737 (canon 1), 747 (canon 6), 750 (canon 17), and 767 (canon 12).
The twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent, held during the reign of Pope Pius IV, issued the decree *De Regularibus et Monialibus* (*On Regulars and Nuns*; hereafter *De Regularibus*). This decree refers to the religious habit numerous times. *De Regularibus* said that “clothing,” which certainly signified the habit, was an area of discipline that needed to be preserved.

It is necessary for the ancient and regular discipline to be restored where it has collapsed, and to be pursued with greater constancy where it has been preserved. That this may come about sooner and more easily it has been decided to enact . . . that all regulars both men and women should arrange their lives according to the provision of the rule they profess; and that above all they should faithfully observe what belongs to the perfection of their profession . . . and to the preservation of common life, food, and clothing.\(^{23}\)

*De Regularibus* decreed that before making profession a religious must have a probationary period of at least one year from the time they received their habit.\(^{24}\)

The decree mentioned the habit several times within the context of those who wished to depart religious life. *De Regularibus* also stated that it was not acceptable to grant permission to a regular to conceal his habit.

A regular who . . . wishes for any reason to put off his habit, or even to depart in his habit without permission of superiors, is not to be listened to unless it is within five years from the day of his profession. . . . But if before this he puts off the habit of his own accord, he should not be allowed to put up any case, but be forced to return to his monastery and be punished as an apostate from religious

\(^{23}\)Council of Trent, *De Regularibus*, ch. 1, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2, 776.

\(^{24}\)Council of Trent, *De Regularibus*, ch. 15, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2, 781.
life. . . . No regular may be transferred to a less strict religious institute in virtue of any faculty; nor may permission be given to any regular to wear the habit of his institute in a concealed way.  

One of the great champions of the Council of Trent, Charles Borromeo, presided over a synod of the Archdiocese of Milan (1584) that decreed black as the only allowable color for the clerical cassock. This requirement affected not only secular clergy, but all the groups of clerics regular. This synod’s decision was a significant catalyst in the color black becoming the dominant color of the clerical cassock, not just in the area of Milan, but eventually by nearly all the Western Church.

In 1686 the Sacred Congregation of the Council of Trent, the body entrusted with helping implement Trent’s decisions, issued *Delationis Habitus*. This document decreed that no religious institute was allowed to have the habit of another religious institute.

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26 Archdiocese of Milan, *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis* (Mediolani: Pacifico Ponte, 1599), 413. Further directives on clothing given by the councils and synods presided over by Charles Borromeo are found in the *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis*, 170 (col. I) and 361 (col. II).


H. Twentieth Century Legislation Previous to Vatican II

In 1900 Leo XIII issued Conditae a Christo, an apostolic constitution through which institutes of simple vows were formally accepted as being a true part of the religious state.\textsuperscript{29} In 1901, following in the wake of Conditae a Christo, the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars issued a series of norms, one of which required that any new institute send a detailed description of their habit in the proposed constitution they sent to Rome for approbation.\textsuperscript{30} Pius X reiterated this norm in his motu proprio Dei Providentis (1906), which stated that explicit information on the habit must be transmitted to Rome before a new institute would be approved.\textsuperscript{31}

The 1917 Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law includes a number of canons that concern the religious habit. Canon 492.3 prohibited non-members and new religious institutes from adopting the habit of an existing institute: “Neither a name nor a religious habit already constituted can be assumed by anyone who does not belong to it.

\textsuperscript{29} Prior to Conditae a Christo, a person who professed simple vows, as distinct from “solemn vows,” was obliged to live as a religious but did not have the rights of a religious. A person in simple vows retained ownership of property but could not use it. This was to make sure that if the person left or was dismissed that they had financial assets to live on. Also, simple vows did not invalidate marriage. Simple vows were introduced by the Jesuits.

\textsuperscript{30} Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars, Normae Secundum Quas Sacra Congregatio Episcoporum et Regularium Procedere Solet in Approbandis Novis Institutis Votorum Simplicium 66-70 (Rome: Propaganda Fidei, 1901), 17.

or by a new religious institute.”32 Thus, the habit was not only distinctive of each institute, but its very property. Canon 540.2 forbade postulants to wear the habit of the institute, while canon 557 required novices to wear their habit. The 1917 Code also includes canons that directed the exclaustrated, secularized, or dismissed to stop wearing their religious habit (canons 639, 640.2, 648, and 669).

Canon 596 is very significant because it required religious to wear their habit practically all of the time: “All religious must wear the habit of their religious institute both inside and outside of the house, unless grave cause excuses, to be assessed in urgent necessity according to the judgment of the superior, even a local one.”33 Canon 596 of the 1917 Code is in continuity with Boniface VIII’s Ut Periculoso (1298), which required regulars to don their habit at “all” times.

Pope Pius XII (1939-58) made concerted and sustained efforts at reforming the religious habit, stressing the essentials of poverty and consecration. Because these efforts of Pius XII were directed for the most part toward women religious, they are beyond the scope of this dissertation.


I. Summary of Magisterial Statements With Bearing on the Religious Habit

Of the limited number of papal and conciliar directives concerning the religious habit throughout the history of the Church, the most influential piece of legislation was the constitution *Ut Periculoso*, issued by Boniface VIII in 1298. *Ut Periculoso*, which basically required religious to wear their habit at all times, was the fundamental source of law on the religious habit until the 1917 Code. In addition to *Ut Periculoso*, the Council of Trent (1545-63) issued two decrees that bear special mention. The decree Concerning Reform, from Trent’s fourteenth session, famously stated “The habit does not make the monk.” This decree outlined punishments for clerics and religious who persisted in wearing lay clothing. The decree Concerning Regulars, from the twentififth session, emphasized that the discipline of the religious habit needed to be preserved.

Most papal and conciliar legislation on the religious habit throughout the centuries has been aimed at promoting simplicity and ensuring that the habit witness to the religious life. As more and more religious institutes came into existence, especially in the Modern Era with the proliferation of congregations, Church legislation increasingly highlighted that each particular order or congregation have its own proper religious habit.34

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34 A brief article on the history of the religious habit from the perspective of a canon lawyer is: Elizabeth McDonough, “Habit and Habitus: Brief History,” *Review for Religious* 56.5 (1997), 547-52.
Chapter 6
The Religious Habit as Witness

The religious habit has traditionally been understood as giving witness to the following four ideas: rupture with the world, group identity, consecration, and poverty. An article on clothing in the Dictionnaire de Spiritualité highlights the religious habit as signifying rupture with the world and promoting group identity, and it alludes to the habit as a witness to poverty.1 Perfectae Caritatis speaks of the religious habit as an outward mark of consecration to God and also alludes to its connection to poverty.2 The 1983 Code of Canon Law states that the religious habit is both a sign of consecration and a witness of poverty.3

This chapter explores the meaning of each aforementioned theme traditionally attributed to the religious habit. It also gives historical examples, mostly from the early rules and constitutions of significant religious institutes, that affirm the habit as giving

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2 Perfectae Caritatis 17, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 2, 945.

witness to the themes rupture with the world, group identity, consecration, and poverty.

A. The Religious Habit as a Sign of Rupture with the World

The religious habit has long carried the meaning of “rupture with the world.” If one understands the word “rupture” to mean “break” or “breach,” the religious habit would be a sign that one has broken or breached their relationship with the world. “The world” is a notion that has had a complex relationship to Christian spirituality over the centuries. One significant aspect of the relationship between “the world” and Christian spirituality is the Church’s rejection of gnostic dualism, which denigrates the material but sees the spirit as good. While official Church teaching does not accept gnostic dualism, Christian spirituality has not infrequently tended in this direction.


Although the New Testament contains positive evaluations of the world, i.e. the world as physical universe and the world as human race, the world in the context of “rupture with the world” is a negative and symbolic reality that is used in a pejorative sense. New Testament examples of this negative sense of the world are found in the Pauline corpus and even more so in the Johannine corpus. The following are two examples: “We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God.” (1 Cor 2:12), and “The disciples do not belong of this world.” (Jn 15:19). Sandra Schneiders speaks of this negative meaning of the world in terms of its being in opposition to the Reign of God.

The one biblical meaning of “world” which is negative [is] namely the world as imaginative construction of reality according to the values and strategies of the prince-of-this-world in opposition to the world-construction of the Reign of God. This evil world is the world to which religious “die” . . . [and] which has always been the world religious rejected, fled, left, abandoned . . . as part of their total commitment to God in Christ. 

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6 An example from the New Testament of “the world” as physical universe is Romans 1.20: “Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made.” An example from the New Testament of “the world” as meaning the human race is John 3.16-7: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.”

7 Schneiders, Buying the Field, 66-7.
It is not “the world” of the physical universe or the human race that religious are meant to reject, but rather the world understood as a conception of reality that is shaped in opposition to the good.

The notion of “rupture with the world” is almost identical to the monastic concept of fuga mundi or “flight from the world.” Fuga mundi originated as a Christian concept within the context of pre-Constantine Christianity, when just being a Christian put people’s lives at risk. Such a dangerous milieu lent itself toward understanding the world as a dangerous place, filled with evil people and vices. Catholics who were imprisoned and awaiting death because of their faith sometimes envisioned their time in prison and their eventual martyrdom itself as a “flight from the world” that would bring them to a better place.8

After physical martyrdom became less of a threat, the early hermits and cenobites who moved into the desert or other uninhabited places also interpreted this movement as a “flight from the world.”9 Thus, it was through desert monasticism that physical separation from society became part of the tradition of fuga mundi. Such physical separation does not automatically connote a rejection of physical creation nor


need it be viewed as undermining the value of embodiment and everyday life. In the words of Philip Sheldrake, *fuga mundi* suggests “not a rejection of creation, but an alternative, counter-cultural critique of worldliness.”10 The most significant attribute of *fuga mundi* is actually positive, the quest for life in Christ.

*Fuga mundi* and “rupture with the world” are practically identical concepts, but there is one shade of difference. The fundamental similarity common to both “rupture with the world” and *fuga mundi* is the rejection of worldliness, or as previously mentioned, “a rejection of the world as imaginative construction of reality according to the values and strategies of the prince-of-this-world.”11 The fundamental difference between these two concepts is that physical distance and/or separateness is not constitutive of “rupture with the world,” but it is constitutive of the monastic concept, *fuga mundi*. Hermits and cenobites who “flee the world” also manifest “rupture with the world,” but there are many consecrated persons and lay Christians who manifest “rupture with the worldliness of the world” while at the same time living in close proximity to others and participating in the routine activities of human society.

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Understanding the religious habit as a sign of “rupture with the world” has been pervasive throughout the history of consecrated life. By breaking, to a greater or lesser degree, with the clothing customs of a given culture, the religious habit has been a marker of rejecting worldliness, of disavowing those elements of one’s person and culture (material, spiritual, social, individual) that do not foster life according to the Spirit of Christ. Evidence of the religious habit as a sign of rejecting “worldliness” is found in every type of consecrated life: eremitic, cenobitic, canons regular, mendicant, clerics regular, and religious congregations.

Representative of the eremitical life in connection to the habit as sign of “rupture with the world” is Antony of the Desert, who is considered the father of monasticism and who lived as a hermit for much of his time in the Egyptian desert. In one of his letters, Antony decried that some had given up the habit and returned to their former worldly manner of life: “Over those who have considered the lengthy time, their hearts failing them, and who have laid off the habit of godliness and become like beasts, I cry.”\(^\text{12}\) Here the habit stands for godliness and giving it up is associated with “becoming like a beast,” i.e., worldliness.

A western cenobitic source that gives witness to the habit as a sign of rupture with the world is the fifth century *Rule of St. Augustine*, which speaks numerous times of the habit in terms of “the clothing of the monastery” and of entrance into monastic life as a passing from “life in the world” to “this life of ours.”\(^{13}\) Another western cenobitic source, the pre-Benedictine *Rule of the Master*, anonymously written and most likely composed in the early sixth century, contains a chapter entitled “When Someone Enters the Monastery From the World, He is Not to Change His Garb or Receive the Religious Tonsure for a Year.”\(^{14}\) This title paints the monastery and “the world” in a dichotomous light. The Master connects the movement from world to monastery with the eventual transition from secular clothing to the monastic habit. The Master also directed that a novice spend a year “cleansing worldly ways from his heart” before receiving the habit.

Only when you have first cleansed worldly ways from the depths of your heart in the divine service will you finally change your garments as well, so that in your body it may from then on be apparent to all, and rightly so, that in your spirit you belong to God. . . . Then when you, still in your own clothes, have perfectly put into practice all that is contained in the rule of the monastery, you will remain steadfast, holier still, after receiving our habit.\(^{15}\)

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\(^{13}\) *Augustine, Rule 3.4*, in *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, 86-7. This resource has the *Rule of Augustine* both in Latin and in English translation.


\(^{15}\) *Rule of the Master*, chapter 90:75-6 and 78, CS 6:265; SCh 106:392-3.
For the Master, the habit would make apparent to others that one belonged to God rather than to the world.

A final cenobitic example comes from Hildegard of Bingen, who gave voice to the understanding of the habit as rupture with the world in her *Explanation of the Rule of Benedict*. In this work from the twelfth century, Hildegard speaks of the habit as a sign of contempt for the world, saying that a monk’s hood “signifies that he looks neither left nor right toward the world.”

*The Later Rule* of St. Francis, written in the early thirteenth century and representative here of the mendicant way of life, speaks of the “Lesser Brothers” as being “pilgrims and strangers in this world.” The habit of the Lesser Brothers was itself modeled on the garb of pilgrims. The early Franciscans dressed as if they were on a perpetual pilgrimage and living “beyond the pale” of this world.

An interesting example of the habit as sign of “rupture with the world,” one that is representative of clerics regular, comes from Ignatius of Loyola and concerns the Jesuit novices. The Jesuits did not have a habit per se, but dressed in common like the “upstanding priests” of a given region. During their two-year novitiate, Jesuit novices

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16 Hildegard of Bingen, *Explanation of the Rule of Benedict* 27, trans. Hugh Feiss (Toronto: Peregrina, 1990), 64; PL 197:1063B.

did not wear the cassock worn by the professed Jesuits of their province.\textsuperscript{18} The Jesuit director of novices had discretion in regard to the novices’ clothing: “Although there is no specified habit, it will be left to the discretion of the one in charge of the house to decide whether he will allow the novices to go about in the same clothes which they brought from the world or have them wear others.”\textsuperscript{19} Whether the novice director decided on common dress or allowed the novices to dress in their own garments, Ignatius recommended that their clothing resist the vanities of the world: “In regard to clothing … it is good for those who are in probation to take advantage of their garments as a means to the mortification and abnegation of themselves and to trample on the world and its vanities.”\textsuperscript{20}

A final example of the religious habit as sign of “rupture with the world” comes from the pen of John Baptist de La Salle and is representative of religious congregations, a form of consecrated life which entered into the life of the Church in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A man steeped in seventeenth century French spirituality, De La

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms}, statute 18, 27; \textit{Constitutiones Societatis Iesu: Latinae et Hispanicae}, 13, 6-7.

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms}, statute 19, 28; \textit{Constitutiones Societatis Iesu: Latinae et Hispanicae}, F, 7.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms}, statute 297, 126; \textit{Constitutiones Societatis Iesu: Latinae et Hispanicae}, C, 102.
Salle firmly believed it was virtuous for religious to be withdrawn from the concerns of the world and reserved in their dealings with lay people. As a consequence, De La Salle insisted that his Brothers eschew secular fashion.

A permanently distinctive habit will remove every chance of adopting the worldly fashions of ordinary people. . . . This distinctive habit encourages laypeople to look upon those who belong to this community as persons separated and withdrawn from worldly concerns. It seems appropriate that they have this notion about them so that the members themselves will not mingle too freely or converse too frequently with secular people and will maintain more reserve in their relations with them.21

In an article on clothing in the Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, author Marie Balmary notes a connection between the sacrament of baptism and the religious habit as a sign of a person’s rupture with the world. The connection is that the habit also signifies one of the truths effected through baptism, namely the passage from death to life, the entrance into a life of perfection.

[The religious habit,] as an anticipation of death and resurrection, can signify what baptism – the liturgy which includes moreover the gift of “white clothing” – already stated: the passage from death to life, the entrance into a life of perfection. Some laity may even have asked to receive the religious habit at the point of death.22

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21 De La Salle, Memorandum on the Habit 35 and 40, in Rule and Foundational Documents, 188; CL 11:352.

The religious habit as “an anticipation of death and resurrection” is a *prolepsis*, the representation of something in the future as if it already existed or had occurred. The habit has traditionally been thus understood, as a sign that one is living in the present with an abiding awareness of their eventual death and resurrection, as if those future events were already a reality in present space and time.

The sacrament of baptism itself is the foundation and beginning of one’s passage from death to life and a step into the life of perfection, a movement toward eternal beatitude with the Blessed Trinity. The graces of baptism give a baptized person the right to live with a proleptic vision, a way of seeing that views the present as if one were already experiencing their future glorification. The gift of white clothing at baptism is a sign that one has “put on Christ,”[23] which means that one has already risen with Christ, though understood in an anticipatory way.

Understanding the religious habit as a proleptic reality, as an anticipation of death and resurrection, loomed large for many centuries. In the latter part of the Middle Ages the habit went beyond a proleptic understanding and came to be understood as a help or even a guarantee of salvation. So strong was this belief that lay persons

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[23] Gal 3.27 (NABRE): For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.
frequently asked to be clothed in the religious habit at the point of death.\textsuperscript{24} Understanding the habit as a help or guarantee of salvation stemmed in part from legends recounting the supernatural origins of the habit of this or that particular order, legends usually without any historical foundation.\textsuperscript{25} An example of this is the brown scapular of Carmelites, which came to be thought of as a guarantee of salvation. The oldest source recounting the supposed apparitions of the Virgin Mary to St. Simon Stock is from the late-fourteenth or early-fifteenth century, some one hundred and fifty years after the foundation of the Carmelites. According to this tradition, the Virgin Mary appeared to Simon Stock with the brown scapular of the order and said, “This will be a privilege for you and all the Carmelites; the one who dies with it will not suffer eternal fire.”\textsuperscript{26} Such ideas fueled in the popular imagination an association of the religious habit with magical powers.

\textsuperscript{24} See Saggi, “Abito Religioso,” DIP 1:60.

\textsuperscript{25} Augé, \textit{El Hábito Religioso}, 30-1. The author recounts the legendary foundation of the religious habit of various orders.

\textsuperscript{26} Cited in L. Saggi, “L’ambiente della bolla sabatina; abito religioso e selvezza eternal in scritti medievali,” \textit{Carmelus} 14 (1967), 84.
B. The Religious Habit in Fostering Group Identity

In her article on clothing in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Marie Balmary states that “one of the obvious functions [of the religious habit] is to form, by the wearing of a uniform, a single body from all the individuals who compose it.”²⁷ The religious habit is one of the elements that contributes to a religious institute being recognized as a group. The uniformity of the religious habit, its commonness as dress, its sameness from person to person, helps a group to form an identity that is something more than a collection of individuals.

To say that the religious habit fosters group identity is to say that the religious habit is one of the characteristics by which a group is known. Thus, for example, a black tunic and scapular traditionally designates one as belonging to the Benedictines, a white tunic and scapular marks one as a Dominican, while the black robe and white rabat connotes membership in the De La Salle Brothers.

Sociologists categorize the religious habit, because it is a uniform, as a “commitment mechanism” that helps to bind an individual religious to the group and

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the group to the individual member. Sociologist Rosabeth Moss Kanter defines

“commitment mechanisms” as being

specific ways of ordering and defining the existence of a group. Every aspect of
group life has implications for commitment, including property, work,
boundaries . . . . These pieces of social organization can be arranged so as to
promote collective unity, provide a sense of belonging and meaning . . . . The
strength of the group and the commitment of its members will be a function of
the specific ways the group is put together. Abstract ideals of brotherhood and
harmony, of love and union, must be translated into concrete social practices.28

Kanter’s 1972 study of successful and unsuccessful North American communes found
that those communes with a large number of commitment mechanisms, with uniform
dress counted among them, were far more successful in terms of longevity than those
communes with fewer commitment mechanisms.29

Sociologist Patricia Wittberg, a Sister of Charity of Cincinnati, groups
commitment mechanisms into three categories: (1) boundary maintenance and common
activities, (2) sacrifice and investment, and (3) mortification and transcendence.30

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28 Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 75. The sociological theory behind common dress as a commitment mechanism can be found in chapter four of Kanter’s *Commitment and Community*. Benjamin Zablocki also treats the sociological theory behind common dress as a commitment mechanism in *Alienation and Charisma: A Study of Contemporary American Communes* (New York: The Free Press, 1980), 283-6.

29 Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, 75.

30 Patricia Wittberg, *Building Strong Church Communities: A Sociological Overview* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012), 104-5. These commitment mechanisms are based on the work of Rosabeth Moss Kanter; see footnote twenty-eight.
According to Wittberg, the religious habit fits in the first category (boundary maintenance and common activities) and is a powerful commitment mechanism because it creates boundaries by distinguishing those in a religious community from those outside the community. The religious habit demarcates multiple boundaries. The habit communicates that the one wearing it belongs to a particular religious institute and, in most cases, to the Catholic Church. In the pre-Vatican II Church those not dressed in a religious habit almost certainly did not belong to a religious institute. The religious habit “speaks” that its wearer is unavailable for marriage, while those dressed in secular fashion may very well be available as a potential marriage partner. The habit is also meant to communicate that the one wearing it is oriented above all else toward love of God and neighbor and that its wearer embraces a lifestyle marked by chastity, poverty, and obedience. People who do not wear a religious habit often orient their life by very different values.

Studying the religious habit under the aspect of uniform carries with it important considerations, both positive and negative. On the positive side, a uniform gives silent testimony that one belongs to something larger than oneself, a notion that seems to be built into our human DNA. J.C. Flugel, a prominent psychologist of clothing, indicates many positive aspects of uniform dress: it diminishes rivalry; it saves time and energy; it tends to better those with poor fashion sense; it eliminates cost for those caught up by
the whims of constantly changing fashion; it can connote availability for service.\(^{31}\)

Examples of secular uniforms that speak of belonging to something larger than oneself and the uniform of a player on a sports team or the military uniform. In terms of availability for service, think of the uniform of a policeman or woman or that of an airline attendant.

Giving up the singularity wrought through personal choice of clothing in favor of a uniform contributes to one’s feeling of belonging and, therefore, also gives a certain security. These feelings of personal belonging and security arise from being part of a group, which can enliven an individual by fostering close friendships, common memories, enthusiasm for group mission and, in the case of religious communities, support for religious faith and spiritual purpose.\(^{32}\)

But there are negative aspects of the uniform as well. Marie Balmary states that the religious habit as uniform “can also have a negative effect, function, or state, overwhelming the person to the benefit of the group.”\(^{33}\) The uniform tends to


\(^{32}\) Wittberg, *Building Strong Church Communities*, 126-7.

strengthen group identity and weaken individual identity. Hence, it is possible that the religious habit depersonalizes an individual to some degree, sublimating personal identity to group identity. This sublimation is particularly difficult in contemporary society, which perhaps favors the personal and is marked by individualism. Furthermore, many modern persons do not want to be reduced to the function indicated by a uniform.

All the historical forms of religious life give witness to the religious habit as fostering group identity. The most ancient monastic custom promoted group identity through uniform dress. For example, the oldest monastic rule in Christian history, the Rule of Pachomius, wanted each monk to wear the same monastic habit. This fourth century monastic rule forbade a monk from adding any novelty to his wardrobe: “No one shall add anything to his wardrobe contrary to what has been established for them.” The Pachomian monastic uniform included two badges, both of which fostered group identity. One badge signified a monk’s membership in the larger Pachomian monastic community, and the other badge signified a monk’s membership in a particular house within that larger community.

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34 Rules of Pachomius 98, CS 46:161-2; Boon, Pachomiana, 40 and 156 (Coptic).

35 Rules of Pachomius 99, CS 46:162; Boon, Pachomiana, 40 and 156 (Coptic).
Another eastern figure of the fourth century, Basil of Caesarea, gives witness similar to that of Pachomius. In his *Asketikon*, Basil links uniformity of the habit with group identity: “Accordingly it is fitting that we share a common style of clothing that is alike and of one form among ourselves . . . for all who tend to the same purpose and goal are for the most part consistent with each other.”

Even though the weight of evidence from early western monasticism points to use of a distinctive habit, it is important to note that the rules of Augustine and Benedict did not stress uniformity in regard to the habit, but rather stressed simplicity and frugality. The guidelines on the habit in the *Rule of Augustine* and the *Rule of Benedict* do not go beyond a dress code, and certainly do not clearly promote uniformity. For John Cassian, a prominent figure who bridges both western and eastern monasticism, the habit promoted group identity because it was to be reserved solely to the monks. Writing to the monks of Gaul, Cassian said of the monastic habit: “It should be different from the apparel of this world in that it is kept completely in common for the use of the servants of God [monks].”

During the Middle Ages the religious habit evolved to signify not only that one was a “hermit” or a “monk” in the generic sense, but that one belonged to a specific

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monastic community. Each order connected to the monastic renewal of the tenth to
twelfth centuries - Cluniacs (909, Berno), Camaldolese (1000, Romuald), Carthusians
(1084, Bruno), and Cistercians (1098, Robert of Molesme) - wore a distinctive habit that
contributed in large measure to the identity of their respective group. In fact, sometimes
the habit of one order became fodder for the negative criticism of another order. The
polemics between the black and white Benedictines are a good example of this. The
Cistercians negatively criticized some of the clothing customs of the Cluniacs as
destructive of monastic observance, such as black garments that required the extra
expense of being dyed. Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, in turn criticized Bernard
and the monks at Citeaux for the whitish color of their habit, calling it “a novelty, the
fruit of pride, and without foundation in the Benedictine tradition.”\textsuperscript{38}

An interesting development connected to the religious habit as fostering group
identity comes from the Society of Jesus in the sixteenth century. Recall that the Jesuits
did not develop a distinctive habit in the mold of canons, monks or mendicants, but
rather adopted the dress of the “upstanding priests” (diocesan priests who were

\textsuperscript{38} Peter the Venerable, \textit{Epistle} 28, in Constable, \textit{The Letters of Peter the Venerable}, vol. 1, 57 (Latin). See English language commentary on Peter the Venerable’s criticism of the Cistercian’s use of non-black cloth at Constable, \textit{The Letters of Peter the Venerable}, vol. 2, 116fn57.
diligent and holy) in whatever region the Jesuits were located. This radical choice, which distanced Ignatius and the early Jesuits from the canonical, monastic, and mendicant forms of religious life that preceded them, helped foster a group identity among the early Jesuits who understood themselves as a new kind of religious order.

The Memorandum on the Habit of John Baptist de La Salle, a late seventeenth century document, offers a treasure-trove of examples that witness to the religious habit as fostering group identity. In this document, De La Salle wrote of the habit in terms that speak to its being a “boundary marker,” distinguishing those in the community from those outside the community. For example, two constituencies who were being trained by the Brothers, country-school teachers and young men who wanted to join the congregation, did not dress in the habit. The unique appearance of the Brothers’ habit itself fostered group identity. The Brothers called their habit a robe, so as to distinguish it from a clerical cassock, and it purposely appeared as neither clerical nor secular. Other statements from De La Salle’s Memorandum on the Habit highlight how the habit

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40 De La Salle, Memorandum on the Habit 5 and 7, in Rule and Foundational Documents, 181-2; CL 11:349.

41 De La Salle, Memorandum on the Habit 12 and 18, in Rule and Foundational Documents, 184-5; CL 11:350-1.
functioned as a commitment mechanism by encouraging individual Brothers to identify with the group:

The members of this community . . . need some tangible token of membership to draw them to it, to retain allegiance once they join, and to lead them to observe the rule. Nothing is more effective in achieving these ends than a distinctive habit, which can be the hallmark of a community . . . Monsieur Vincent judged that a distinctive habit was essential, in a sense, to hold the allegiance of the members of his congregation. 42

Some magisterial documents give witness to the religious habit as fostering group identity. Papal directives occasionally decreed that each religious institute must have its own proper religious habit, thus strengthening the identity of particular religious institutes through their garb. Accompanying this idea were prohibitions stating that non-members could not wear the habit and that other religious institutes could not adopt it. Examples of papal directives that spoke of the habit in this way include Urban VIII’s Sacrosancta Tridentina (1642) and Delationis Habitus (1686), a decree issued by the Sacred Congregation of the Council of Trent. 43 The aforementioned ideas would become sacrosanct in the Code of Canon Law of 1917, which stated: “Neither a

42 De La Salle, Memorandum on the Habit 36-8, in Rule and Foundational Documents, 188; CL 11:352.

name nor a religious habit already constituted can be assumed by anyone who does not belong to it or by a new religious institute.”

C. The Religious Habit as a Sign of Consecration

Catholicism is replete with the notion of “consecration,” a concept that can be understood in various ways. In the context of the religious habit as a sign of consecration, the term itself is understood as the complete dedication of a person or thing to God and a concomitant separation from that which is ordinary. In an article on consecration in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, author Joseph de Finance speaks of consecration in a similar vein as “the act of rendering sacred a thing or person, of bringing about something of another order so as to introduce a character that goes beyond common understanding and use, of conferring on that thing or person a value that is not in proportion to other values.”

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45 See Joseph de Finance, “Consécration,” DSp 2:1576-83. Different types of consecrations are here treated: official, private, declarative, constitutive, as well as the agents and recipients of consecration.


47 De Finance, “Consécration,” DSp 2:1576. *La consécration est proprement l’acte de rendre sacrée une chose ou une personne, c’est-à-dire de l’introduire dans un ordre à part, de l’affecter d’un caractère qui la soustrait aux appréciations et aux usages communs, de lui conférer une valeur sans proportion avec les autres valeurs.*
The indispensible and fundamental consecration of the Christian life is, without question, baptism. But in addition to baptism, Catholic theology connects the notion of consecration to a number of other liturgical actions and things: the sacraments of confirmation and holy orders, the transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, elevation to the episcopate, and the solemn blessing of churches, altars, sacred vessels, cemeteries, and even time itself.48 Significant to the topic of the religious habit is the fact that Catholic theology also associates consecration with those who profess the evangelical counsels.49 It calls this religious consecration.

Religious consecration, of which the habit has been a longstanding sign, is profoundly related to baptismal consecration and to the consecration of confirmation. The relationship between baptismal consecration and religious consecration, a topic roundly discussed in the decades following Vatican II, will be treated in chapter nine. This section of the dissertation is limited to showcasing testimony of the religious habit understood as a sign of consecration, as a sign of one’s dedication and devotion to God.

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49 The evangelical counsels refer to chastity, poverty, and obedience. One binds him or herself to God in a special way by vowing to cooperate with grace so as to imitate the chaste, poor, and obedient Christ.
Throughout the history of consecrated life the religious habit has been understood as a sign of consecration and for many centuries the notion of religious consecration has been connected to vows. Beginning in the fourth century, the vow of virginity and its accompanying liturgical blessing was called a consecration. In later centuries religious consecration came to be understood as having greater breadth than solely the vow of virginity. Binding oneself to the evangelical counsels through vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience came to be recognized as constituting the character of religious consecration. This was the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, who spoke of the profession of vows as constitutive of religious consecration. The Second Vatican Council embraced Aquinas’ understanding of professing vows as that which constitutes religious consecration.

The religious habit has sometimes been affirmed as a sign of consecration in a kind of reverse manner, by highlighting the incongruity of wearing the habit while living in a manner that is not oriented to God. Antony of the Desert, the father of

50 Lohkamp, “Personal Consecration,” NCE 4:208. The “vow of virginity” pertains to women who never married or who never lived in open violation of Christian chastity, and who planned to remain unmarried so as to be a “spouse of Christ.” For males, who cannot truly be virgins in the strictest sense of the word, the phrase “vow of chastity” is used exclusively. This is understood as being sexually continent within a celibate lifestyle.

51 See Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologia, II-II, quest. 186, art.1.

52 See Lumen Gentium 44, in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 2, 885.
monasticism, gives examples of this in two of his fourth-century letters. In the first example, Antony expresses his sadness over the fact that some monastics wore the habit but “deny its power” by living in an ungodly manner: “But as for me . . . this time which we have reached is a time of joy, as well as grief and tears, for there are many of our generation who have put on the habit of godliness but denied its power.”\textsuperscript{53} Antony expressed his same concern over incongruous behavior in a second letter: “I am greatly troubled and vexed in my spirit, for wearing the habit and having the name of the saints we are glorified in front of unbelievers; but I fear lest the word of Paul be fulfilled upon us that says, having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.”\textsuperscript{54} For Antony wearing the sign of consecration that is the habit was a scandal if a monk did not embody what the habit signified.

The Rule of the Master, composed in the early sixth century by an unknown author, gives evidence of the religious habit as a sign of consecration in a chapter about the probationary year of new entrants to the monastery. The Master associates the habit with a spirit of belonging to God. One could replace the phrase “you belong to God”


with the words “you are consecrated to God” without changing the Master’s intended meaning.

But only when you have first cleansed worldly ways from the depths of your heart in the divine service will you finally change your garments as well, so that in your body it may from then be apparent to all, and rightly so, that in your spirit you belong to God [you are consecrated to God]. . . . Then when you, still in your own clothes, have perfectly put into practice all that is contained in the rule of the monastery, you will remain steadfast, holier still, after receiving our habit.55

Where the Master posited that the habit would bolster one’s resolve to remain steadfast in living out the rules of the monastery, one could substitute that the habit would help a monk to remain steadfast in his consecration to God.

Speaking furthermore about new entrants to the monastery, the Master refers to the religious habit as “that of his holy intention.” In doing so, the Master draws a clear connection between the religious habit and consecration. One can justifiably substitute the phrase “that of his holy intention” with “that of his holy consecration” and not change the import of the sentence.

When for a whole year from that day, then, he has faultlessly lived the full life of the monastery together with the rest of the brethren . . . let his clothing be exchanged for that of his holy intention [for that of his holy consecration]. . . . As long as they are still earning the habit of their holy intention [of their holy consecration] they shall not presume to eat with the abbot.56


56 Rule of the Master 90:79, 80, 82, CS 6:265; SCh 106: 392-5.
The most significant evidence in the founding rules and constitutions of religious orders and congregations that bears witness to the religious habit as a sign of consecration is not explicit but, rather, is implicit. This implicit witness of the habit as a sign of consecration comes from a combination of two facts. First, most religious rules and constitutions open with exhortative writing that roots their manner of life as one of consecration to God and all that this entails. Second, most religious rules and constitutions include a section on the religious habit. Because the religious habit manifests the religious lifestyle, and that lifestyle is one of consecration to God, the habit is a sign of consecration.

The sixth century *Rule of Benedict* provides a good example of this. The prologue to the *Rule of Benedict* refers to the monastic life as “a school for the service of the Lord,” a phrase that is clearly synonymous with consecration.\(^{57}\) A later chapter, “The Clothing and Footwear of the Brothers,” is dedicated to the subject of the religious habit.\(^{58}\) Because the habit is a sign of a special lifestyle, and that form of life is consecrated to God, then the habit is a sign of consecration.


A similar example comes from the Brothers of the Christian Schools, whose vow formula has always explicitly used the word “consecrate”: “Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, prostrate with profound respect before your infinite and adorable majesty, I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory as far as I will be able and as you will require of me. . .” The most visibly significant manifestation that a Brother consecrates (dedicates) himself to bring about God’s glory on earth is wearing his religious habit.

A number of magisterial statements throughout the centuries give evidence of the religious habit as a sign of consecration. A decree from the Council of Chalcedon (451) gives such evidence in reverse manner, by speaking against monastics who wear the habit but act like busy-bodies: “Those who truly and sincerely live the monastic life should be accorded appropriate recognition. But since there are some who don the monastic habit and meddle with the churches and in civil matters, and circulate indiscriminately in the cities . . .” Chalcedon highlights the incongruity of those who wear monastic garb but act as if they were not consecrated to God’s service.

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59 “Très-Sainte Trinité, Père, Fils, et Saint Esprit, prosterné dans un très-profond respect devant vôtre infinite et adorable majesté; je me consacre tout à vous, pour procurer vôtre gloire autant qu’il me sera possible, et que vous le demanderez de moi.” De La Salle, Rule of 1705, in Rule and Foundational Documents, 141; Règles Communes des Frères des Écoles Chrétienennes: D’après les Manuscrits de 1705, 1713, 1718 et l’Édition Princeps de 1726, CL 25:140.

60 Council of Chalcedon, canon 4, in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 1, 89.
The Fourth Council of Constantinople (869-70), speaking of monks who have become bishops, connects the monastic habit to a holy way of life, which is a life of consecration to God: “We decree that those who have devoutly embraced the monastic life and merited the dignity of a bishop, should keep the appearance and garments of the monastic habit and that holy way of life.” In other words, the Council connects the monastic habit to a monk’s consecration, and it did not want a monk to quit wearing the habit if he were asked to serve in episcopal ministry.

Other examples make the case that the religious habit should signify an upright life, which is a natural consequence of a life consecrated to God. The Council of Vienne (1312-13) stated that the habit should show forth one’s “inner integrity,” which is a synonym for consecration: “He who holds a dignity, parsonage, or other benefice to which the cure of souls is annexed, as also any other priests and religious, whose outward garb should reveal their inner integrity. . .” The Council of Trent (1545-63) stated that the habit should be a sign of one’s “interior uprightness,” another synonym for consecration: “Though the habit does not make the monk, clerics must nevertheless

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61 Fourth Council of Constantinople, canon 27, in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 1, 185-6.

62 Council of Vienne, decree 9, in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 1, 365. Dignitatem vero, personatum seu beneficium aliud obtinens, cui cura immineat animarum, nec non ceteri in sacerdotio constitute ac religiosi quilibet, quos oportet per decentiam habitus extrinseci morum intrinsecam honestatem ostendere. . ."
always wear the clerical dress appropriate to their own order so that they may show by
the suitability of their outward dress the interior uprightness of their characters.”

D. The Religious Habit as a Witness to Poverty

Poverty is a polyvalent concept. Poverty can refer to destitution, whereby people
lack the basic goods and means of support needed for a dignified existence, things like
food, shelter, clothing, medical care, education, and work. Poverty can also be
understood in a way that possesses a positive meaning. For Christians, who revere
material reality as God’s good creation, the positive value of poverty lies in eschewing
the disordered power, status, or prestige that often accompanies wealth. Understood
thus as a virtue, poverty tempers or disciplines disordered affections: the drive to
acquire unnecessary goods, the tendency toward avarice, the inclination to be
possessive. Among Catholics, poverty is most often embraced as a religious value by
consecrated persons, who usually profess vows or other sacred bonds in connection to
this virtue.

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63 Council of Trent, Decree on Reform, session 14, canon 6, in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 2,
716. “Quia vero, etsi habitus non facit monachum, oportet tamen clericos vestes proprio congruentes ordini semper
deferre, ut per decentiam habitus extrinseci morum honestatem intrinsecam ostendant…”

The vow of poverty professed by consecrated persons is ideally expressed both in fact and in spirit. “Poverty in fact” can refer to voluntary destitution or, as is most often the case, to a minimization of material goods and societal privileges so as to help one identify one with the Gosepl *anawim*, with the simple people of every time and place. Poverty in fact is thus best understood as an external reality. In the Gospels this is reflected by Jesus’ occasional demand for the total renunciation of possessing material goods, e. g. “Go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me” (Mt 19:21).

Poverty in spirit on the other hand refers to virtuous attitudes and behaviors such as detachment from people, places, and things, dependence on God, gratitude, generosity, and moderation. It is best conceived of as an internal reality. This is reflected in the Gospels by, for example, the beatitudes found in Matthew, one of which is “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:3). Experience proves that the commendable attitudes and behaviors connected with interior “poverty of spirit” are greatly aided and abetted by exterior “poverty in fact.” For Christian believers, the ultimate value of the virtue of poverty lies in recognizing Almighty God
as supremely worthy of one’s energy, affection, attention, and as being one’s most important “possession.”

Because clothing is one of the primary vehicles that human beings use to attract attention, assert power, flaunt prestige, and indicate status, the religious habit has been connected, since the beginnings of consecrated life, with both exterior poverty in fact and interior poverty in spirit. The religious habit has been both a means to and an expression of the “spirit of detachment” from material things and the “spirit of attachment” to God. Evidence of these functions of the habit is pervasive throughout all the centuries and in every form of consecrated life. What follows is a showcase of such testimony. Sources include the early rules and constitutions of male religious institutes as well as magisterial documents. What comes across more so than all else in regard to the religious habit and poverty is the call to Gospel simplicity and a warning against ostentation. Founder after founder wanted a religious habit that reflected simplicity and that inspired poverty of spirit. St. Augustine summarized this well: “You should not seek the approval of others through your apparel, but by your edifying manner of life.”

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Sometimes rules and constitutions did not stress a poverty of moderation but, rather, a poverty of voluntary destitution. During that period of Late Antiquity when physical martyrdom became less of a threat and Christianity became the state religion, thousands of Christians moved to the desert, especially in Syria and Egypt. Many of these Christians sought to live a “bloodless martyrdom,” which they expressed through a radical exterior poverty involving formidable deprivation and renunciation. An extreme example of such radical exterior renunciation are those hermits who practiced total or partial nudity. While the vast majority of hermits did not practice nudity, evidence from the Apothegmata Patrum and from hagiographical works on Paul of Thebes and Antony of the Desert all suggest that the attire of these first hermits was an expression of poverty in fact.

Pachomius, the father of cenobitic monasticism, also provides evidence of the religious habit as witnessing to poverty. Testimony on the habit from the Rules of Pachomius lends itself not to an interpretation of poverty that prized destitution, but

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rather an interpretation of poverty that sought to disconnect the monastic habit from any superfluity and luxury:

In his house and cell, no one shall have anything except what is prescribed for all together by the law of the monastery: no woolen tunic, no mantle, no soft sheepskin with unshorn wool. . . . They shall have only what is distributed by the father of the monastery. . . . This is their equipment: two linen tunics plus the one already worn, a long scarf for the neck and shoulders, a goat skin hanging from the shoulder, shoes, two hoods, a belt and a staff. If you find anything more than this, you shall take it away without contradiction.\(^69\) No one shall add anything to his wardrobe contrary to what has been established for them.\(^70\)

Basil of Caesarea, known alongside Pachomius as the father of communal monasticism in Eastern Christianity, thought that one habit was sufficient for all times and places: night, day, going out, staying at home.\(^71\) Basil regarded superfluity in connection to the monastic habit as the result of avarice, hedonism, or vainglory, and taught that monks who persisted in extravagance would incur God’s judgment.\(^72\) Basil advocated for clothing materials that were frugal but of quality and also advocated that

\(^69\) Rules of Pachomius 81, CS 46:159-160; Boon, Pachomiana, 37.

\(^70\) Rules of Pachomius 98, CS 46:161-2; Boon, Pachomiana, 40 and 156 (Coptic).


the tunic be made of rough rather than soft fabric. For Basil, the key was necessity rather than desirability.\(^{73}\)

The Western monastic witness given by Martin, Cassian, Augustine, and Benedict highlights a poverty of simplicity in connection to the habit. Martin of Tours considered a monk’s use of refined clothing to be sinful.\(^{74}\) John Cassian thought that a religious habit should be made from commonplace material and not be decorous, stylish, or novel in color, such that it would nurture vanity.\(^{75}\)

Augustine was a proponent of “that which is enough” and “less is more.” In his rule, Augustine wrote that a monk was guilty of theft if he secretly kept a gift of clothing rather than putting it at the disposal of his superior.\(^{76}\) If a monk was given something extra by way of clothing because he was used to living more comfortably before he entered the monastery that monk should not be the object of jealousy but rather should be considered weak. According to Augustine, the monk who needed less should think of himself as stronger and happier.\(^{77}\) The famous bishop of Hippo

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\(^{73}\) Basil, Letter 2, Saint Basil: The Letters, vol. 1, 21. This volume includes both the Greek and English translation.

\(^{74}\) Sulpicius Severus, St. Martin of Tours 15, 117; SCh 133:284-5.

\(^{75}\) Cassian, Institutes 2.1, ACW 58:22-3; SCh 109:38-41.

\(^{76}\) Augustine, Rule 5.3, in Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule, 94-5.

\(^{77}\) Augustine, Rule 3.4, in Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule, 86-7.
considered a monk who complained about his monastic clothing as “lacking in the inner garment of his heart,” a sentiment easily connected with poverty in spirit.78

Benedict of Nursia, the most influential figure of Western monasticism, does not directly speak of poverty in connection to the religious habit, but he does allude to this connection in chapter fifty-five of his sixth-century rule. Like many other founders, Benedict cautioned against superfluity, a sentiment he emphasized in chapter fifty-five by three-times using the word sufficere, meaning “that which is enough.”79 According to the Rule of Benedict, monastic garments were to be found locally and purchased frugally,80 well-used monastic garments and sandals were to be given to the poor,81 and two tunics and two cowls were sufficient.82

Disparaging remarks about the monastic habit reflecting ostentation rather than poverty were not infrequent. For example, Ardo commented in his ninth-century biography of Benedict of Aniane, a contemporary of Ardo, that “some monks adorned

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78 Augustine, Rule 5.1, in Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule, 92-3.

79 Benedict of Nursia, Rule 55.11, RB 1980, 262-3.


81 Benedict of Nursia, Rule 55.9 and 12, RB 1980, 262-3.

their habit as if with jewels.”83 Odo, second abbot of the reforming abbey of Cluny, made a similar disparaging observation in the tenth century. He negatively criticized the habits of non-Cluniac monks as “often decorative and flowing.”84

The monastic habit worn by Cluniac monks, who themselves had begun as a reform movement in the early tenth century, was rejected by reform groups of the eleventh century such as the Camaldolese, Carthusians, and Cistercians. These groups elected for habits made from undyed garments in reaction against the costlier Cluniac habit which required black dye. The English monk and chronicler Orderic Vitalis gave evidence of Cistercian poverty in his Ecclesiastical History, where he made the brief statement: “Dyed clothes they do not use.”85 An early Cistercian legislative text stated that Cistercian clothing “shall be simple and inexpensive.”86 A second early Cistercian legislative text claimed that certain clothing items used by Cluniac monks were contrary to the poverty recommended in the Rule of Benedict: “They rejected what was contrary to the Rule [of Benedict], namely full mantles and furs, as well as shirts of fine linen.”87

83 Ardo, The Life of Benedict of Aniane 37.1, 98; PL 103:378 (section 51).
86 Unknown Cistercian, Summa Cartae Caritatis 11, in The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality, 448.
In the thirteenth century the mendicant movement gave strong witness to the religious habit as an expression of poverty. The mendicants subsisted to great degree through the almsgiving of others and were intent on giving witness to the Gospel by means of their simplicity. A major aspect of mendicant spirituality was devotion to Jesus as one born poor and naked and who died on the cross in the same manner. This spirituality of the poor Christ was incarnated in the habit of the mendicants, especially in the habit of the Friars Minor, whose habit purposely broke from the traditional garments of monks and canons. In an important commentary on Church life in the thirteenth century, Jacques de Vitry set the humble clothing customs of the Friars Minor within the context of their poverty:

These poor men of Christ carry on their journey neither purse nor pouch nor bread, nor money in their belts; they possess neither gold nor silver, nor do they have shoes on their feet. Indeed, no brother of this order is allowed to possess anything. . . . They do not use garments made from linen or pelts, but only woolen tunics with a hood. They use neither capes, nor cloaks, nor hats, nor any other such clothing. The Rule of 1223 of the Friars Minor seems to allow the use of shoes only begrudgingly and instructed that the fabric of their habit reflect poverty: “And those who are


compelled by necessity may wear shoes. Let all the brothers wear poor clothes and they may mend them with pieces of sackcloth or other material with the blessing of God.”\(^90\)

The primitive constitutions of the Order of Friars Preachers also stressed the habit as a witness to poverty. Their constitutions declared that garments should be made from coarse wool, or at least common material, and banned the use of linen and pelts from wild animals, both of which were associated with the wealthy.

In regions where it is possible, the brethren shall wear clothing of coarse wool. Where this cannot be observed, they shall use common material. Let poverty be observed in the matter of cappas and no linen be worn next to the skin. . . . They shall not use the pelts of wild animals or furs of any kind.\(^91\)

The habit continued to be understood as a witness of poverty with the advent of clerics regular in the sixteenth century. Example of this is found in the early Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, which speaks about clothing in a chapter entitled “What Pertains to Poverty and Its Consequences.”\(^92\) One of the conditions for Jesuit dress was that it not contradict their profession of poverty:

First, it [clothing] should be proper; second, conformed to the usage of the country of residence; and third, not contradictory to the poverty we profess, as

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\(^90\) Francis of Assisi, The Later Rule 2.15-6, in Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, vol. 1, 101; Opuscula Sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis, 228.

\(^91\) The Primitive Constitutions of the Order of Friars Preachers, ch. 18, in Saint Dominic: Biographical Documents, 223-4; Constitutions Primaevae: S. Ordinis Praedicatorum, 10.

would happen through the wearing of silk or expensive cloths. These ought not
be used, in order that in everything fitting humility and lowliness may be
preserved for the greater divine glory.93

From the eighteenth century and representative of the religious “congregation”
is the original rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Similar to the early Jesuit
constitutions, the Brothers’ early rule speaks of the habit in a chapter entitled
“Poverty.”94 John Baptist de La Salle also described the Brothers’ habit in connection to
poverty in his Rule of Brother Director: “The Brothers of the Institute will be dressed
simply and like poor people, but they will take care that their clothes are clean,
respectable, and modest. The material of which their clothes will be made will be
ordinary black, coarse, twilled serge, and their stockings will be of the same material.”95
Like many founders, De La Salle incorporated the clothing of common peasants into the
habit of his Brothers. For example, De La Salle included as part of the Brothers’ habit a
version of the capote, a cloak worn by seventeenth-century peasants of the Champagne
region of France.96

93 Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms, statute 577, 238; Constitutiones
Societatis Iesu: Latinae et Hispanicae, 195-6.

94 De La Salle, Rule of 1705, 17:1-2, in Rule and Foundational Documents, 71; CL 25:70.

95 De La Salle and Truffet, Rule of the Brother Director of a House of the Institute, in Rule and
Foundational Documents, 214; CL 25:160.

96 Brother Bernard, The Admirable Guidance Shown by Divine Providence in the Person of the Venerable
Servant of God, John Baptist de La Salle, in John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies, 321-2; Frère Bernard,
The papal bull of approbation giving official approval to the Brothers of the Christian Schools as a religious institute connected the religious habit with the practice of poverty. This bull stated “that the robes of the Brothers be in keeping with the poverty and lowliness of the Gospel. . . and wholly foreign to the vanities of the world.”

This is but one example among many papal bulls issued to approve a new religious institute that connects the religious habit with the practice of poverty.

Probably the most significant magisterial document connecting the religious habit to poverty is the constitution Ut Periculoso, issued by Boniface VIII in 1298. Ut Periculoso made it an excommunicable offense for a religious to go about without their habit. The demand that religious wear their habit practically all the time, both in their religious house and outside, engendered and supported a simplicity of wardrobe that promoted poverty in spirit.

The Council of Vienne (1312-3) also connected the religious habit with the practice of poverty. In one decree this Council spoke of religious who wore garments

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unbecoming of their state, directing such religious to give up luxurious garments to the poor or to turn in such garments to their religious superior. In addition, the Council of Vienne issued a separate decree concerning the “black monks” of the Cluniac network. This decree suggested that the Clunaic monks betrayed gospel simplicity by wearing pretentious apparel.

That nothing unbecoming or corrupt find its way into that field of the Lord, namely the sacred order of the black monks . . . we decree as follows. We forbid the monks all excess or irregularity with regard to clothes. . . . The quality of the cloth should not exceed monastic moderation, nor should they seek what is expensive and fine, but what is practical. . . . They may wear unpretentious hoods. . . . They should not wear silk in place of fur. . . . None shall presume to wear an ornate belt.

A century later, the Council of Constance (1414-8) once again condemned the use of ostentatious garb among the Church’s ministers, regulars included. Its statute on this matter is quite specific and called transgressors to be punished.

Especially we order to be utterly abolished, with the same council’s approval, the abuse whereby in certain regions some clerics and churchmen, both secular and regular, and even (which we deplore still more) prelates of churches, wear long gloves that are unnecessarily large and sumptuous, extending to their elbows, and clothes with slits at the back and sides, with furs covering the edges even of the slit parts. . . . We condemn this unbecoming way of dressing for all

99 Council of Vienne, decree 9, in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 1, 365.

100 Council of Vienne, decree 14, in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 1, 370-1.
churchmen and we forbid the wearing of such garments. Those who do otherwise are to be punished as transgressors of the canons.\textsuperscript{101}

\textbf{E. Summary of Themes Traditionally Connected to the Religious Habit}

The religious habit has come to be understood as giving witness to four predominant themes: rupture with the world, group identity, consecration, and poverty. The major concept inherent in “rupture with the world” is the rejection of a worldliness that is at odds with Gospel living. Rupture with the world is practically identical to the monastic notion of \textit{fuga mundi}, except that \textit{fuga mundi} includes greater emphasis on physical separation. The religious habit as a sign of rupture with the world has permeated every era and form of religious life.

Even during the era before canonically recognized religious orders, the religious habit indicated that one was a hermit or a monk in the generic sense. With the advent of new types of religious life and the proliferation of specific groups, the religious habit took on more and more importance as a witness to group identity, highlighting the fact that one belonged to a particular religious family within consecrated life.

Evidence suggests that the religious habit has always, and in every era, been understood as setting one apart in special dedication to God. The religious habit is most

often referenced as a sign of consecration in ancient rules and constitutions by using
words and phrases that are synonymous with the notion of consecration.

Throughout the course of Church history, the religious habit as a witness to
poverty has most often expressed moderation rather than destitution. The history of the
Church is replete with negative criticism of religious habits that lack simplicity. Calling
consecrated persons back to Gospel moderation has often been coupled with a call to
simplify the religious habit.
Chapter 7

Magisterial Statements Since Vatican II That Concern the Religious Habit

This chapter presents magisterial statements on the religious habit from Vatican II until the present time. Magisterial statements from the past fifty years exhibit two general thrusts: a call to renew the religious habit and, secondly, a call to maintain the religious habit. The first major thrust, a call to renew the religious habit, actually began during the pontificate of Pius XII and was definitively strengthened by Vatican II's promulgation of Perfectae Caritatis, the Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life. This conciliar decree helped move the religious habit to a greater simplicity that is reminiscent of the religious habit in primitive Western monasticism. The second major thrust, a call to retain the religious habit, is in continuity with the eighteen hundred-year tradition of religious life and was a reaction against religious who have abandoned distinctive attire or greatly diminished its use during the post-Vatican II period. Magisterial statements from the past fifty years affirm over and over again the importance and value of the religious habit.

A. Perfectae Caritatis (1965)

Article seventeen of the conciliar decree On the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life, more commonly known as Perfectae Caritatis, stands within the entire history of
consecrated life as a very significant statement affecting the religious habit. The history of how article seventeen of *Perfectae Caritatis* came into being hints at how difficult it was for the Council Fathers to treat the religious life among the documents of Vatican II.

The Central Preparatory Commission charged with laying the groundwork for the Second Vatican Council asked the original “Commission for Religious,” which began its work in 1960, to consider the religious habit as one of four proposed areas for investigation. In 1962 the Commission for Religious produced an extensive schema (Schema A), which contained nearly two hundred articles, four of which treated, with great amplitude, the religious habit. The four articles on the habit in this original schema were entitled: (1) On the Honor Owed the Religious Habit, (2) Qualities of the Religious Habit, (3) The Obligation to Amend Deficient Statutes on the Religious Habit, and (4) The Obligation to Wear a Habit. The first of the aforementioned articles from Schema A, “On the Honor Owed the Religious Habit,” based itself in the thinking of Thomas Aquinas and affirmed that the habit is a sign of consecration, of separation

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1 The other three areas for investigation were (1) the renewal of religious life, (2) the union or federation of religious institutes, and (3) the privilege of exemption. *Acta et Documenta Concilii Oecumenici Vaticano II Apparando*, series 2, volume 2, part 1 (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1965), 410-11.


3 See Thomas II-II, q. 185, a. 8; q. 187, a. 6.
from the world, of holiness of life, and is to be worn with fidelity and dignity as something sacred.⁴

The Central Preparatory Commission called for a major redaction of Schema A. In 1963 a new and more concise schema of fifty-one articles, titled De Statibus Perfectionis Adquirendae (“States for Acquiring Perfection” - Schema B) was given to the preparatory commission. Schema B maintained three of the original four articles on the religious habit from Schema A, but gone was the third article, “The Obligation to Amend Deficient Statutes on the Religious Habit,” which was considered too juridical in nature.⁵ A further redaction resulted in a third schema, titled De Religiosis (“On Religious” – Schema C). This third schema included only nineteen articles, only one of which addressed the religious habit.

This lone article on the religious habit was part of a small group of articles from Schema C that were approved by a two-thirds majority of the Council Fathers and only required minor adjustments.⁶ Thus, Schema C’s article on the religious habit made its

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⁴ “De Habitu Religioso” 39, ADP, series 2, volume 3, part 1: 467: Habitus religiosus sive virorum, sive mulierum, cum ad personae consecrationem, separationem a mundo et vitae sanctitatem significandam ordinetur, ut quid sacrum fideliter et digne est deferendus atque ab omnibus in homore habendus.

⁵ ADP, series 2, volume 3, part 7, articles 33-5, 774-5.

way into the final redaction of the conciliar decree that was promulgated under the title
De Accommodata Renovatione Vitae Religiosae (“On the Appropriate Renewal of Religious
Life”).

The difficult evolution of the work of the commissions that resulted in Perfectae
Caritatis resulted in a solitary article on the religious habit (PC 17) that is concise and
precise. The article offered a set of norms for the religious habit that religious institutes
were to comply with, and called institutes to change their habit if it did not conform to
these norms:

The religious habit, an outward mark of consecration to God, should be simple
and modest, poor and at the same time becoming. In addition it must meet the
requirements of health and be suited to the circumstances of time and place and
to the needs of the ministry involved. The habits of both men and women
religious which do not conform to these norms must be changed.

Article seventeen of Perfectae Caritatis, quoted above, makes one mention of the
mysticism of the habit when it defines the habit as a “mark of consecration.”

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7 De Accommodata Renovatione Vitae Religiosae (Perfectae Caritatis) was officially promulgated

8 Histories of the development of Perfectae Caritatis: Wulf, “Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of
the Religious Life,” in Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, 301-332; Alberigo and Komonchak,
History of Vatican II, vol. II (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 476-9; Maryann Confoy, Religious Life and
Priesthood: Perfectae Caritatis, Optatam Totius, Presbyterorum Ordinis (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), 184-
206.

9Perfectae Caritatis 17, AAS 58 (1966): 710. An alternate English translation is given in Tanner,
Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, II, 945.
This instruction from the Council Fathers (PC 17) was the beginning of a sea change in the way many religious, especially women religious, presented themselves in terms of their outward appearance. While Perfectae Caritatis 17 resulted in affecting the outward appearance of female religious more so than male religious, the article applied equally to men. It called all religious to modify their habit if it did not adhere to the requirements included therein: simplicity, of “becoming” appearance, promoting health, suitability to time and place and to the needs of ministry.

The Council Fathers fully expected that religious would continue to wear a habit as part of their “appropriate renewal of the religious life.” The bishops intended that the habit be modified to fit the stated requirements of Perfectae Caritatis 17, but wholly retained.10

B. Ecclesiae Sanctae (1966)

Paul VI issued the apostolic letter Ecclesiae Sanctae in August of 1966, less than twelve months after the close of Vatican II. This motu proprio was especially important because it included norms designed to guide the implementation of Perfectae Caritatis and three other conciliar decrees. Paul VI stated that the norms issued through Ecclesiae

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Sanctae were to be observed on an experimental basis until the promulgation of a new Code of Canon Law. In *Ecclesiae Sanctae* Paul VI did not directly address *Perfectae Caritatis* 17, but Paul VI did include two norms connected to the religious habit. The first of these two norms stated that the local bishop could forbid religious clerics from wearing lay attire: “The local ordinary or the episcopal conference, to avoid things that would astonish the faithful, can forbid clerics, whether secular or religious, even the exempt, to wear lay dress in public.” 11

The second of the two norms connected to the religious habit in *Ecclesiae Sanctae* cautioned religious in mission countries not to give more attention to adapting their religious habit to the local culture than to encouraging those things that should be assimilated as an aid to holiness: “As far as the religious condition is concerned, care should be taken lest more attention be given to exterior forms (gestures, dress, the arts) than to the religious dispositions of the people that are to be adopted and the evangelical perfection that is to be assimilated.” 12

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C. Speech of Paul VI to Superiors General of Women Religious (1967)

Paul VI gave an important address to the superiors general of women religious in 1967, a time when religious life was in tumult in many parts of the world. In his talk, Paul warned the superiors general against “swinging the pendulum” from one extreme to the other as concerns the religious habit. Paul ardently affirmed the witness value of the habit:

Take care, above all of not going from one extreme to the other. The religious habit continues to be, through its simplicity and modesty, and following the long tradition of the Church and the wise prescription of the conciliar decree, a sign of consecration, a visible sign recognizable by all of the state of life of the consecrated virgin.13

While Paul VI addressed this particular message to women religious, what he stated about the habit was applicable to male religious as well.

D. Evangelica Testificatio (1971)

In 1971, Paul VI released the apostolic exhortation, Evangelica Testificatio, “On the Renewal of the Religious Life According to the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council.” This exhortation was meant to assist religious institutes on their path of renewal after Vatican II. Paul VI spoke forcefully about the religious habit in an article of Evangelica Testificatio entitled “Evangelical Exigency.” The pope wrote: “While We

recognize that certain situations can justify the abandonment of a religious type of dress, we cannot pass over in silence the fittingness that the dress of religious men and women should be, as the Council wishes, a sign of their consecration and that it should be in some way different from the forms that are clearly secular.”14 While the Council Fathers recognized the fittingness that religious wear secular attire in exceptional circumstances (“certain situations can justify…”), the exception often became the rule. In accord with the Council, Paul VI accepted that in some situations religious were justified in not wearing their habit. All the same, Paul VI issued Evangelica Testificatio in part to make it clear that the Council Fathers wanted religious to continue wearing their habit as a sign of consecration and that an updated habit should be different from secular dress.

E. SCRIS Letter on the Religious Habit (1972)

Cardinal Antoniutti, prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, addressed a letter to papal nuncios and apostolic delegates specifically on the religious habit.15 The prefect’s letter, dated January 22, 1972, communicated a number of

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15 Founded in 1586 under the title Sacred Congregation for Consultations About Regulars, this congregation has undergone a number of name changes. In 1908 it became the Sacred Congregation for Religious, in 1967 the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (SCRIS), and in 1988 it changed
points: (1) A competent superior could permit, in certain particular situations, a purely secular habit. (2) In affirmation of what Paul VI had recently communicated in *Evangelica Testificatio* 22, the habit was to be retained and to be manifestly different from secular attire. (3) Neither the form of the religious habit, nor when it was to be worn, was relegated to the judgment of individual members. (4) General chapters must modify the habit in keeping with the requirements of *PC 17*.

This important letter from the prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Religious is given below in its entirety because it summarizes the thinking of the Holy See in regard to the habit in the aftermath of Vatican II. The letter asked papal nuncios and apostolic delegates to make this information known, as appropriate, to pertinent constituencies within their territorial responsibility:

This Sacred Congregation has been receiving reports from various countries that religious men and women, in ever greater numbers, are abandoning the religious habit and even any distinctive external sign of consecration. On the other hand, many inquiries are being made as to what is the mind of the Holy See in this regard. It seems opportune to inform you of the type of reply this Sacred Congregation gives in such cases, trusting that Your Excellency will find ways of making this known whenever circumstances require it. “First of all, it is appropriate to state again that the religious habit has been considered by the Second Vatican Council as a sign of consecration for those who have embraced in a public way the state of perfection of the evangelical counsels (*PC 17*). Moreover, to its current name, the *Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life* (CICLSAL).

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16 This letter was alternately dated 25 February, 1972 in a special insert to the Bulletin of the International Union of Superiors General.
this concept has also been confirmed by the recent apostolic exhortation of His Holiness, *Evangelica Testificatio* (22). Nevertheless, religious institutes, in their general chapters may, and in some cases ought to, modify the traditional habit in accord with practical requirements and the needs of hygiene but they may not abolish it altogether or leave it to the judgment of individual sisters. The basic criterion to be observed is that the habit prescribed by religious institutes, even as modified and simplified, should be such that it distinguishes the religious person who wears it. On the other hand, purely secular clothes without any recognizable exterior sign can be permitted, for particular reasons, by the competent superiors to those sisters to whom the use of the religious habit would constitute an impediment or obstacle in the normal exercise of activities which should be undertaken in certain circumstances. Even in this latter case the dress of the religious women should not depart from the forms of poverty, simplicity and modesty proper to the religious state. It should always be ‘in some way different from the forms that are clearly secular’ (*ET* 22).” The foregoing applies, *mutatis mutandis*, also to male religious who should always be distinguishable from seculars by the use of the Roman collar or by some other visible and appropriately distinctive sign. I welcome this occasion to send you my very best wishes, and I remain yours faithfully in Our Lord.

*Card. Antoniutti*\(^{17}\)

The letter’s affirmation of *Evangelica Testificatio* 22, “[The habit] should always be in some way different from the forms that are clearly secular” is important. In the opinion of canon lawyer Elizabeth McDonough, this particular statement about the habit reflected

historical awareness and contemporary consciousness. A religious habit and secular attire are not presented here in opposition, as if one were sacred and the other profane. Rather, the distinction being made is entirely in keeping with the long tradition of religious garb, even when such attire originated as similar to the common garb of the peasants or poor. In other words, the distinctiveness that is

\(^{17}\) Notification of the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (January 22, 1972), in James O’Connor, ed., *Canon Law Digest 7* (Chicago: Society of Jesus, 1975), 534-5.
urged for religious in wearing a habit is that – precisely as a sign of consecration – the religious habit be different enough from merely secular attire that it be clearly identifiable, as was the case in centuries past.\(^{18}\)

F. Statements on the Religious Habit During the Early Magisterium of John Paul II (1978-82)

John Paul II spoke a number of times during the first eighteen months of his pontificate about the value of the religious habit. In an address to the International Union of Superiors General of Women, the pope asked the sister superiors to think deeply about the value of the religious habit:

And if your consecration to God is really such a deep reality, it is not unimportant to bear permanently its exterior sign which a simple and suitable religious habit constitutes: it is the means to remind yourselves constantly of your commitment which contrasts strongly with the spirit of the world; it is a silent but eloquent testimony; it is a sign that our secularized world needs to find its way, and one that many Christians, moreover, desire. I ask you to turn this over carefully in your minds.\(^{19}\)

John Paul’s sentiments quoted above, about the habit as a sign of consecration, echoed arguments used in the rejected first schema of what eventually became Perfectae Caritatis. That first schema included the following ideas: “The habit is to be worn in a permanent manner. It is a reminder of one’s commitment. It is a sign that religious


break with the sinfulness of the world. It gives silent testimony to the Divine. Our secular world needs the visual witness of the religious habit in order to find its way.”

To the religious of Brazil in 1979, John Paul spoke of the habit as helping to turn the thoughts of those who see it toward God: “All can see in our comportment and style of dress a sign by which they interpolate God.” John Paul II wanted religious to remain a visible leaven in society. To the Comboni Missionaries the late pope said: “You are in the world, but not of the world. Take care to be, wherever you go, inwardly and outwardly distinctive signs of Christ in your way of living and behaving, even in the habit which identifies you and indicates your presence in the midst of the people.” The former pope expressed similar sentiments to the religious of Ireland. John Paul exhorted them:

To you [religious brothers and sisters] and to priests, diocesan and religious, I say: Rejoice to be witnesses to Christ in the modern world. Do not hesitate to be recognizable, identifiable, in the streets as men and women who have consecrated their lives to God and who have given up everything worldly to follow Christ. Believe in the value for contemporary men and women of the visible signs of your consecrated lives. People need signs and reminders of God in the modern secular city, which has few reminders of God left. Do not help the

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trend towards “taking God off the streets” by adopting secular modes of dress and behavior yourselves!23


The present Code of Canon Law, which was promulgated in 1983 after almost twenty years of preparation, treats the religious habit in canon 669. Comprised of two paragraphs, canon 669 states: “§1. Religious are to wear the habit of the institute, made according to the norm of proper law, as a sign of their consecration and as a witness of poverty. §2. Clerical religious of an institute which does not have a proper habit are to wear clerical dress according to the norm of canon 284.”24 The canon just cited (669) is contained in a chapter entitled “Obligations and Rights of Institutes and Their Members.” Thus, the wearing of a religious habit is both a right and an obligation.25

A survey of three commentaries on canon 669, each written by a different canon lawyer, yielded opinions with shades of difference as to the obligation of religious to wear their habit. One canonist states that the requirement to wear a religious habit is

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23 John Paul II, “Address to Priests, Missionaries, Religious Brothers and Sisters,” point 9 (St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth, Ireland, October 1, 1979), AAS 71: 1172.


clear: “In this canon it [the Church] positively prescribes the wearing of the habit as a matter of clear obligation.”26 A second canonist thinks that there is only a requirement in the general sense: “This canon articulates a general obligation of religious, namely, wearing the habit or dress of the institute.”27 A third canonist maintains that an identifiable habit is required at least some of the time: “There is no doubt that the intent of the canon and its underlying presupposition is that religious, at least in the apostolate, ought to be identifiable and to dress simply.”28

The proviso of canon 669 from the present Code of Canon Law, “made according to the norm of proper law,” reflects the principle of subsidiarity. This stipulation grants to each religious institute the right to express in their own legislation what the habit consists of and when it is to be worn. Unlike canon 596 from the 1917 Code, which stated “All religious must wear the habit of their religious institute both inside and outside of the house, unless grave cause excuses...”29 canon 669 from the present Code does not specify where religious are to wear their habit.30 Discretion given to individual institutes

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by the present Code to determine the “what, when, and where” of their habit reflects the principle of subsidiarity and respects the tremendous diversity of traditions and circumstances among the great multitude of religious institutes throughout the world.  

Canon 669 from the current Code asserts that religious are to wear their habit “as a sign of their consecration and as a witness of poverty.” The first aspect, sign of consecration, is taken from Perfectae Caritatis 17. The second aspect, witness of poverty, was added to the Code partially through the inspiration of Evangelica Testificatio 22, where Paul VI wrote about the religious habit within the context of evangelical poverty.  

During the long preparation phase of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, a suggestion was made to change canon 669 by substituting the phrase “religious are to wear a specific sign of their institute” in place of the phrase “religious are to wear the habit of their institute.” This suggestion to replace “the habit” with “a specific sign” was rejected by the pontifical commission responsible for the revising the Code of Canon Law. The commission defended its rejection of this suggestion by citing Perfectae Caritatis 17,  

31 Smith, New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law, 837.  

Evangelica Testificatio 22, and two notifications from SCRIS concerning the religious habit (January 1972 and July 1972), all of which affirmed the religious habit as a specific form of dress and not just as a symbol added to secular dress. In light of this, canon 669 requires that a religious wear a form of dress that is specific to their institute and is recognizable as witnessing one’s religious consecration. The mere appendage of a symbol to otherwise secular dress does not fulfill this requirement of Church law.\(^{33}\)

The second paragraph of canon 669 states: “Clerical religious of an institute which does not have a proper habit are to wear clerical dress according to the norm of canon 284.” Jesuit priests, for example, fit the category of being religious of an institute without a proper habit. Canon 284, to which clerical religious without a habit are expected to adhere, directs clerics to wear suitable ecclesiastical garb in accord with episcopal conference norms and legitimate local custom. Canon 284, like canon 669, is silent regarding the times, circumstances, or other particulars regarding clerical dress. One example of a clarification on the issue of when to wear clerical garb is an instruction that was given to the clergy of the Diocese of Rome. It stated that

appropriate clerical dress should be worn for all liturgical celebrations, administration of the sacraments, preaching, and pastoral ministry.  

It is noteworthy that the American edition of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* translates the Latin *habitum* differently in canons 669 and 284. The American English version of canon 669, which is directed toward religious, translates the Latin *habitum* in two instances as “habit.” The translation of canon 284 on the other hand, which is primarily directed toward secular clerics, translates *habitum* as “garb.” This difference in translation reflects the understanding that a religious habit signifies more than does customary clerical garb. While clerical garb sets its wearer apart, the religious habit has the further meaning of special consecration to God through the evangelical counsels, especially that of poverty.

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H. Essential Elements (1983)

*Essential Elements in the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate* (hereafter *Essential Elements*) is a document authored by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes that was released in 1983. It is a summary of the “new” canons on religious life from what was, in 1983, the “new” *Code of Canon Law*. Written for institutes with an apostolic focus, *Essential Elements* speaks of the religious habit in two instances.

The first of these two references occurs within the context of a section that situates the religious habit among a series of elements (i.e., travel, entertainment, social contacts, place of residence) that have bearing on the public witness of religious.

Speaking of the religious habit within the overall context of public witness, *Essential Elements* states: “The totality of religious consecration requires that the witness to the Gospel be given publicly by the whole of life. . . . [Religious] wear a habit that distinguishes them as consecrated persons.”

This same article of *Essential Elements* makes the observation that the religious habit and other elements of public witness (moderation in terms of travel, entertainment, social contacts, place of residence) have both a limit and a promise in

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regard to their value as a public testimony to Christ. The article states: “These provisions alone do not ensure the desired public witness to the joy, hope, and love of Jesus Christ, but they offer important means to it.”

*Essential Elements* speaks of the religious habit a second time in a section on fundamental norms. This reference simply paraphrases canon 669.1 from the *Code of Canon Law*, saying: “Religious should wear the religious habit of the institute, described in their proper law, as a sign of consecration and a witness to poverty.”

There is diversity of opinion regarding the authoritative status of *Essential Elements*. Those who minimize the document’s authority point out the fact that *Essential Elements* is signed at the end as “from the Vatican” rather than bearing the official signature of the prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes. Some maintain that the lack of official signature happened because the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes could not garner the necessary votes among its own members in order to submit the document to their prefect for official signature. On the other hand, those who give *Essential Elements* more authoritative status point out that

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when it was released *Essential Elements* was sent to all the bishops of the United States and accompanied by a letter approving the document and signed by John Paul II.\textsuperscript{40} Supporters also point out that *Essential Elements* remains an official document on the website of the Holy See and that it persists as a kind of standard bearer for how the magisterium understands apostolic religious life.

I. *Vita Consecrata* (1996)

*After Perfectae Caritatis* and the *Code of Canon Law*, the third most authoritative document that treats the religious habit is *Vita Consecrata*, a post-synodal apostolic exhortation authored by John Paul II. This apostolic exhortation is the culminating document of the ninth ordinary synod of bishops, which bore the title *On the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the World* and which took place in October 1994. The *lineamenta* written to solicit feedback from bishops and leaders of religious and secular institutes in order to prepare for the synod elicited some commentary on the religious habit. Feedback on the religious habit in response to the

\textsuperscript{40} *Essential Elements* was sent to the bishop of the United States along with the accompanying papal letter on April 3, 1983. It initiated a study on religious life in the United States that was headed by Archbishop Quinn of San Francisco. *Essential Elements* was published nearly two months later for the Church at large (May 31, 1983).
lineamenta was summarized in the instrumentum laboris, a working guide for the bishops and observers who would participate in the synod.\textsuperscript{41}

The instrumentum laboris mentioned the religious habit in two paragraphs, the first of which spoke of the religious habit within the context of negative phenomena affecting consecrated life: “Some [responses] note to their regret that many men and women religious have abandoned the sign of the habit proper to their institute.”\textsuperscript{42} A second mention of the habit is included in a section of the instrumentum laboris on the future challenges and duties of consecrated life: “Many ask that women and men religious give silent proclamation of their consecration through wearing the habit of their institute.”\textsuperscript{43} These two references to the religious habit in the synod’s instrumentum laboris led to discussion on the religious habit during the synod itself, which resulted in an article on the religious habit in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, Vita Consecrata. The article reads:


The Church must always seek to make her presence visible in everyday life, especially in contemporary culture, which is often very secularized and yet sensitive to the language of signs. In this regard the Church has a right to expect a significant contribution from consecrated persons, called as they are in every situation to bear clear witness that they belong to Christ. Since the habit is a sign of consecration, poverty and membership in a particular religious family, I join the Fathers of the Synod in strongly recommending to men and women religious that they wear their proper habit, suitably adapted to the conditions of time and place. Where valid reasons of their apostolate call for it, religious, in conformity with the norms of their institute, may also dress in a simple and modest manner, with an appropriate symbol, in such a way that their consecration is recognizable. Institutes which from their origin or by provision of their constitutions do not have a specific habit should ensure that the dress of their members corresponds in dignity and simplicity to the nature of their vocation.44

The bishops and other participants at the synod on consecrated life recognized that use of the religious habit as called for in Perfectae Caritatis and legislated in the Code of Canon Law was far from normative. In Vita Consecrata 25, John Paul II used exhortative language such as “I join the Fathers of the Synod in strongly recommending . . .” to encourage religious to wear their habit.

One change reflected in Vita Consecrata’s treatment of the religious habit concerns those circumstances when religious are officially permitted to wear secular clothing. John Paul II wrote that in these situations the secular attire of religious must include “an appropriate symbol, in such a way that their consecration is recognizable.” This is a

change from a widespread interpretation of *Evangelica Testificatio* 22 given in 1972 by Cardinal Antoniutti, then prefect of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes. Cardinal Antoniutti’s letter stated that certain situations permitted a religious to don secular attire without even a recognizable symbol.45

J. *Summary of Magisterial Statements on the Religious Habit Since Vatican II*

The Council Fathers at Vatican II, as well as Paul VI and John Paul II, all stressed the importance and value of the religious habit. The call to simplify the religious habit that originated with Pius XII and was carried on by Vatican II and Paul VI represents a return to the simplicity of primitive Western monasticism. Emphasis on the habit in *Perfectae Caritatis* 17 and by Paul VI brought about a notable attenuation of the medieval mystique and Baroque spirit of the habit. John Paul II’s thinking on the religious habit meshes well with *Perfectae Caritatis* and Paul VI. The only shade of difference between John Paul II on the one hand and *Perfectae Caritatis* and Paul VI on the other hand is that John Paul II occasionally promoted the habit using arguments culled from the rejected original schema that evolved into *Perfectae Caritatis* 17.

Current legislation on the religious habit is contained in canon 669 of the *Code of Canon Law*. Canon 669 highlights the religious habit as a sign of consecration and as a

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45 See the Cardinal’s letter, referenced earlier in this chapter, and its accompanying footnote (17).
witness to poverty, and calls on clerical religious in institutes without a proper habit to wear clerical dress. The major difference between canon 669 from the current Code and its parallel in the 1917 Code is that canon 669 allows the proper law of each institute to determine when the habit is to be worn; the 1917 Code stated that the religious habit was to be worn “both inside and outside the house.” At present, the most authoritative interpretation of canon 669 is article 25 of the post-synodal exhortation, Vita Consecrata (1996). Here the late John Paul II echoed the sentiment of the synod Fathers in strongly recommending to religious that they wear their habit.

Research has not yielded any statements on the religious habit from either Benedict XVI or Francis.
Chapter 8

Changes in Universal Legislation and Particular Legislation

The official experimental period of religious life approved by Paul VI in his apostolic letter *Ecclesiae Sanctae* (August 1966) was meant to cease with the promulgation of a revised *Code of Canon Law*. Promulgation of the revised *Code* in 1983 necessitated that many religious institutes update their rules and constitutions. In light of major revisions to the *Code of Canon Law* and, following this, to the proper legislation of many religious institutes, this chapter compares and contrasts legislation on the religious habit from before Vatican II with that of similar legislation after Vatican II.

This chapter first looks at the 1917 *Code of Canon Law* and its 1983 revision, and secondly it scrutinizes pre- and post-Vatican II legislation on the religious habit from five different religious institutes: St. Meinrad Archabbey of the Swiss-American Congregation of the Order of St. Benedict, Order of Friars Minor, Order of Friars Preachers, Society of Jesus, and Brothers of the Christian Schools. These five institutes

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1 *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, Norms for the Implementation of *Perfectae Caritatis* 6 and 38.

2 For each institute the pre-Vatican II text used in this chapter is the one that was in force for that institute at the time of the Council. Sometimes said text was promulgated many decades before Vatican II (OSB Swiss-American Congregation - 1924, OFM – 1953, OP – 1932, SJ - 1956, FSC – 1947). The post-Vatican II text from each institute used in this chapter is that with legislative force in 2015, the year this dissertation was defended.
represent four different types of consecrated life: monastic, mendicant, clerics regular, and religious congregation.

A. Canons in the 1917 Code of Canon Law and Its 1983 Revision

The 1917 Code of Canon Law contained six canons which either mention or regulate the wearing of the religious habit by members of religious institutes. One canon proscribed non-members and new institutes from wearing the religious habit of an existing institute (c. 492.3). Three canons from the 1917 Code forbade the religious habit from being worn by: postulants (c. 540.2), exclaustrated members when not at official institute events (c. 639), and those who received an indult of secularization (c. 640.1.1). Another canon prescribed that novices wear the habit of their institute (c. 557). Very influential was canon 596, which stated: “All religious must wear the habit of their religious institute both inside and outside of the house, unless grave cause excuses, to be assessed in urgent necessity according to the judgment of the superior, even a local one.”3

The revised Code of Canon Law promulgated in 1983 has a number of parallels to the aforementioned canons from the 1917 Code: 669.1 (1983) and 597 (1917), 669.2 (1983) and 136.1 (1917), 687 (1983) and 639 (1917), and 692 (1983) and 640.1.1 (1917). Canon

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669.1 from the 1983 Code allows religious institutes to spell out in their own proper legislation what their habit consists of and the conditions under which their habit is to be worn: “Religious are to wear the habit of the institute, made according to the norm of proper law, as a sign of their consecration and as a witness of poverty.”

Canon 669.1 from the 1983 Code is a significant revision of canon 596 from the 1917 Code, which required that the habit be worn both inside and outside the house.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law and its 1917 predecessor have practically identical legislation concerning clerical religious in institutes without a religious habit. Canon 669.2 from the 1983 Code states: “Clerical religious of an institute which does not have a proper habit are to wear clerical dress according to the norm of canon 284.”

Canon 284 from the 1983 Code stipulates: “Clerics are to wear suitable ecclesiastical garb according to the norms issued by the conference of bishops and according to legitimate local customs.” The preceding two canons from the 1983 Code are parallels of legislation from the 1917 Code, which stated that religious clerics in an institute without a habit

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were expected to follow the provisions of canon 136.1, which in turn stipulated that clerics wear ecclesiastical dress in accord with the prescriptions of the local ordinary.

Canon 687 from the 1983 *Code* allows those on exclaustration to continue wearing their religious habit unless their indult determines otherwise. The parallel canon from the 1917 *Code*, c. 649, proscribed the opposite, saying that an exclaustrated member must cease wearing the religious habit altogether.

Canon 692 from the 1983 *Code* states that upon receiving an indult of departure, a former member of a religious institute no longer has the rights or obligations that arise from religious profession. Wearing the habit is implicitly one of those forfeited rights and obligations. The 1917 *Code* has a parallel proscription in canon 640.1.1, which explicitly denied those who receive an indult of secularization the right to wear a religious habit.

The 1983 *Code of Canon Law* does not have parallel canons to those in the 1917 *Code* that (1) forbade non-members and new institutes from wearing the religious habit of an existing institute, that (2) prescribed novices to wear the habit of the institute, or that (3) required postulants to dress in something other than the habit of the novices. The revised *Code of Canon Law* simply does not legislate on these matters.
B. Legislation of Religious Institutes: Before Vatican II and Today

The Benedictines of St. Meinrad Archabbey, the Order of Friars Minor, the Order of Friars Preachers, the Society of Jesus, and the Brothers of the Christian Schools all speak quite differently about the religious habit in their governing texts in force at the time of Vatican II as compared to regulations about the religious habit in their current (2015) rule of life. The following sections of this chapter compare and contrast regulations on the religious habit in force at the time of Vatican II with those regulations currently in force (2015).

Occasionally, the following sections also show how a particular canon on the religious habit from the 1917 or 1983 Code of Canon Law is incarnated in the proper legislation of a particular institute. For example, sometimes an institute’s legislative text in force at the time of Vatican II explicitly reflected canons from the 1917 Code by directly addressing the habit in connection to: non-members and new institutes (c. 492.3), postulants (c. 540.2); novices (c. 557); exclaustrated members (c. 639); those who receive an indult of secularization (c. 640.1.1); and wearing the habit both inside and outside the house (c. 596).

Current legislative texts of the aforementioned religious institutes incorporate to varying degrees the two canons on the religious habit that are part of the 1983 Code of Canon Law (canons 587 and 669). Current regulations in these institutes reflect canon
When they address questions such as: What does the habit consist of? When is it to be worn? Is the habit spoken of as a sign of consecration or as a witness to poverty? On one or two occasions current directives in the proper law of these institutes incorporate canon 587, which speaks of the habit in connection to exclaustrated members.

C. St. Meinrad Archabbey

Because every Benedictine monastery is autonomous, there is no legislative text other than the sixth-century Rule of Benedict that governs every Benedictine monastery in the world. This section features the Benedictine monks of St. Meinrad Archabbey, who belong to the Swiss-American Congregation of the Order of St. Benedict.

Benedictine Monks of St. Meinrad Archabbey

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The legislative text in force for the Swiss-American Congregation at the time of Vatican II, titled *Declarations on the Holy Rule and Constitutions of the Swiss-American Congregation of the Order of St. Benedict*, had four articles on the religious habit. The first of the articles detailed that monks were to wear a scapular “of smaller size” when sleeping.\(^8\) Another article stated that oblates were to wear a scapular without a cowl.\(^9\) A directive for “expositi,” monks who lived outside the monastery, said that inside the house expositi were always to wear their habit.\(^10\) The lengthiest of the four articles gave myriad details about the attire of the monks:

The monastic garb consists of the habit, the cincture, the scapular with the cowl and the cuculla, all of black color. Only solemnly professed monks wear the cuculla. The priests and the clerics wear the Roman collar and a cloth cincture. The Brothers, that they may be distinguished from the choir monks, wear leather belts. The cut of these garments shall be the same in the whole Congregation, and nothing shall be changed without the consent of all the abbots. . . . Let the brethren greatly love cleanliness of person as well as of clothing. . . . Everything superfluous and vain, whether in clothing of . . . should be eliminated.\(^11\)

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The current (2015) legislative text in force for the Swiss-American Congregation, which was promulgated in 1990, is titled *The Constitution and the Statutes of the Swiss-American Benedictine Congregation*. It has only one article on the religious habit: “In our Congregation the monastic habit is to be worn, according to the customary of each house.”\(^{12}\) A “customary,” which is a longstanding monastic tradition, spells out local legislation and expectations for one particular monastery. The customary of the Archabbey of St. Meinrad, which is located in the state of Indiana, says the following about the religious habit:

The habit is required for all liturgical services, with one exception: on days not following the Sunday schedule, the habit is optional at the Midday Office. The habit is worn when teaching or attending classes, or when giving formal conferences or presentations. In addition, the habit is worn for all community exercises (unless otherwise noted on the bulletin board), at the main meal of the day, and whenever indicated on the bulletin board (e.g. noon meal on Good Friday and Holy Saturday.)\(^{13}\)

While this prescription gives many details as to when the Benedictine habit is to be worn within the confines of the Archabbey, it does not give any directives regarding its use outside of Archabbey property. The customary says nothing about the habit as being a sign of consecration or a witness to poverty, nor does it speak of the color or

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individual items that comprise the habit. The garments that comprise the St. Meinrad habit and its usage outside the Archabbey are simply part of these monks’ unlegislated customs.

D. Order of Friars Minor

The legislative text of the Order of Friars Minor in effect at the time of Vatican II was promulgated in 1953. Titled The Rule and General Constitutions of the Order of Friars Minor, it included three full pages of directives on the religious habit that are grouped under five articles. The first of these articles addressed the habit in terms of poverty. Another article spoke of uniformity with respect to different aspects of the habit: mantle, outer habit, undertunic, undergarments, and sandals. The third article, broken into nine statutes spoke of the length of the habit’s different parts, forbade departure from prescribed dimensions, warned against extraneous décor, counseled punishment for those who flaunted directives, highlighted the duty of superiors in regard to the habit, and even counseled having a dimension chart in each OFM tailor shop.

Two articles on the religious habit in The Rule and General Constitutions of the Order of Friars Minor (1953) cited relevant canons from the 1917 Code in their footnotes. Citing canon 596, one of these articles stated: “The Friars shall wear the religious habit
both inside and outside the House.”\textsuperscript{14} This same statute made provisions for what to do in regions where it was not wise for the friars to wear their habit on the streets: “In those regions in which religious are prevented from wearing the habit of our Order outside the convent, it rests with the Minister Provincial to permit the use of the customary clerical garb, always with the obligation, however, of wearing the outer habit of the order within the convent.”\textsuperscript{15} Another article, citing the canon from the 1917 Code that forbade non-members from wearing the habit, stated: “The habit of the Order shall never be given to seculars, except when they wish to be clothed in it at burial.”\textsuperscript{16} Here we are reminded of the long-standing tradition of looking upon the religious habit as an aid to salvation.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14}Article 102.1, \textit{The Rule and General Constitutions of the Order of Friars Minor} (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1958), 51.

\textsuperscript{15} Article 102.2, \textit{The Rule and General Constitutions of the Order of Friars Minor}, 51.

\textsuperscript{16} Article 103, \textit{The Rule and General Constitutions of the Order of Friars Minor}, 51.

\textsuperscript{17} Chapter six mentioned that belief in the religious habit as being a help or even guarantee of salvation developed during the Middle Ages and led to the custom whereby lay people frequently asked to be clothed in the religious habit on their deathbed. See chapter six, footnote 24.
The most recent legislative text of the Order of Friars Minor is titled *The Rule, General Constitutions, and General Statutes of the Order of Friars Minor*.\(^{19}\) Originally promulgated in 1987, this collection of documents received its most recent updates in 2010. This current legislative text of the Order of Friars Minor speaks of the habit in article forty-eight of the *General Constitutions*. The first point of this constitution describes the elements of the habit, and the second point highlights a significant aspect of Franciscan spirituality, poverty.

§1 In accordance with the Rule and the tradition of the Order, the common habit of the Friars Minor consists of a brown tunic with a capuche, and a white cord.

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\(^{19}\) The *Rule* included in this overall document is “The Later Rule” of 1228, which was featured in chapter three of this dissertation.
The friars are to wear it as a sign of their Franciscan life. §2 In the use of clothes and footwear the friars are to be attentive to poverty and humility and are to refrain from anything which smacks of vanity.\footnote{Constitution 48, Rule, Constitutions, and Statutes of the Order of Friars Minor (Rome: Order of Friars Minor, 2010), 28.}

The aforesaid constitution includes two of the four themes traditionally attached to the religious habit: group identity and poverty. It alludes to group identity (“The friars are to wear it [the habit] as a sign of their Franciscan life”), and it mentions outright the notion of poverty (“In the use of clothes and footwear the friars are to be attentive to poverty. . .”). Note that the article does not specifically mention the habit in connection to consecration, which is one of the habit’s defining characteristics according to both article 17 of 

Perfectae Caritatis and canon 669 of the \textit{Code of Canon Law}.

Two general statutes from the legislation of the Friars Minor also refer to the religious habit. The first of the two statutes implicitly addresses the question, “When and where are Friars Minor expected to wear their habit?” The answer to this question, according to official OFM legislation, would seem to be “most of the time” because the pertinent statute permits “different clothing” only in “special circumstances.” The statute reads: “The Friars are permitted, in special circumstances, to wear clothes different from what is determined in article 48.1 of the \textit{General Constitutions}, in the
Particular Statutes, or by the Provincial Definitory.”

A second OFM statute directly mirrors the canon on exclaustration in the 1983 Code by explicitly stating that an exclaustrated friar retains use of the religious habit unless determined otherwise in an indult. The major difference between OFM legislation on the habit at the time of the Council and parallel OFM legislation today is the great simplification of contemporary OFM legislation. No longer are sandals prescribed; no longer specific undergarments; no longer a Franciscan crown (rosary); no longer a mantle in place of winter coat; etc.

E. Order of Friars Preachers

The official legislative text in use at the time of Vatican II for the Order of Friars Preachers was titled Constitutiones Fratrum S. Ordinis Predicatorum. Promulgated in 1932, this work contained eleven “paragraphs” on the religious habit that spanned four pages of text. An article titled “On Clothing” was divided into six subsections that included

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21 Statute 26, Rule, Constitutions, and Statutes of the Order of Friars Minor, 71. It would be interesting to know how “in special circumstances” is interpreted from province to province. In a personal email communication from an OFM Franciscan (USA Holy Name Province), this friar communicated that in his province the habit is not worn with the regularity as called for by the OFM Rule: “[The habit] tends to be used for formal occasions, or the convventual Mass, and some formal ministry - classrooms; parish Mass, etc. Some younger friars have taken to more frequent wearing in public, but older and middle-aged friars generally use more secular dress. And, different provinces have different customs; some seldom wear the habit even for Provincial Chapters.”

numerous details on the habit: those who could make decisions regarding the habit, the responsibilities of aspirants before receiving the habit, details concerning the habit-taking ritual, how novices were to wear a different scapular than the professed, that a friar assumed the title “Brother” after receiving the habit, that the habit was to be worn during the entirety of the novitiate unless deemed otherwise by the Master General, and that the date of a friar’s habit-taking was to be kept as part of his personal record.  

Another article on the religious habit from the 1932 *Constitutions of the Friars Preachers* was also divided into multiple subsections. This article gave, in comparison to contemporary sensibilities, a plethora of instructions regarding the friars’ habit. It named the exact garments of the habit and their colors, and the dress of the postulants. It stated that wool was to be used as the fabric of all the garments, and gave strict guidelines and parameters for tailoring. One subarticle cited canon 596 of the 1917 *Code of Canon Law* by stating that the habit was to be worn both inside and outside the house, unless there was serious cause for exception or civil law prohibited it. This same subarticle gave further instruction about when to wear cappas and surplices. Religious

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poverty was stressed multiple times. One especially noteworthy item is that this article cited the legend of Reginald of Orleans whereby he supposedly received the habit of the Order of Friars Preachers from the Virgin Mary.\textsuperscript{25}

Contemporary legislation for the male Dominican Order is contained in \textit{The Book of Constitutions and Ordinations of the Friars of the Order of Preachers}.\textsuperscript{26} This text was promulgated in 1998 and most recently updated in 2010. In sharp contrast to their 1932 \textit{Constitutions}, this present-day legislative text only speaks of the religious habit in six places.

The first instance of contemporary legislation on their attire has the habit, grouped together with cloister, silence, and penitential practices, as one of the supports that nurture regular observance:

\begin{quote}
All the elements that constitute and govern Dominican life through common discipline pertain to regular observance. Outstanding among these elements are the common life, the celebration of the liturgy and private prayer, the observance of the vows, the assiduous study of truth, and the apostolic ministry: to fulfill
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{25} This earliest source of this legend, which comes from a time period much later than the foundation of the Order of Friars Preachers, is found in Pedro Ferrand, “Legenda sancti Dominici,” \textit{Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum Historica} 16 (1935), 235. Cited by Matías Augé, \textit{El Hábito Religioso}, 30fn37.

\textsuperscript{26} As with most religious institutes, the Friars Preachers use the term “constitutions” to refer to their fundamental laws. They use the more unique term “ordinations” to refer to contemporary norms given for the execution of their constitutions (fundamental laws).
them faithfully we are helped by the cloister, silence, wearing the habit, and penitential practices.27

Friars Preachers28

The Book of Constitutions and Ordinations names the items of the contemporary Dominican habit and states the proper color of each garment: “The habit of the Order consists of a white tunic with a white scapular and capuce, with a black cappa and capuce, a leather belt and rosary.”29 An appendix to the aforementioned constitution gives somewhat detailed parameters for the measurements of the garments of the habit. It is included below as a rare example of contemporary legislation on the religious habit. The high level of detail is why it is included as an appendix.


29 Point 50, The Book of Constitutions and Ordinations of the Friars of the Order of Preachers, 16.
The tunic, closed in the front and back, is to reach to the ankles inclusively and no lower. The cappa should be four fingers shorter than the tunic, and the scapular a little shorter than the cappa and of such width as to cover the juncture of the sleeves with the tunic. The opening of both the white and the black capuce shall not be more than a palm’s breadth longer than the face. It shall not come down farther than the breastbone in front, and at the back not farther than four fingers below the belt; at the sides it shall extend from the shoulders no lower than halfway down the bone that is between the armpit and the elbow. (NOTE: Additional details on the color of shoes and of clothing worn under the habit, on simplicity of hairstyle, and on the need to obtain the provincial’s permission to wear a beard were suppressed by ordination of the General Chapter celebrated at Madonna dell’Arco in 1974.)

The appendix’s mention of legislation that was suppressed by a previous General Chapter offers one a glimpse into earlier Dominican legislation on the attire and the grooming expectations of a friar preacher.

The Dominican Book of Constitutions and Ordinations gives some parameters as to where their habit is to be worn: “The brethren should wear the habit of the Order in our convents as a sign of our consecration, unless for a just cause the prior provincial shall have determined otherwise. Outside the convent, ecclesiastical laws being observed, the direction of the prior provincial shall be followed.” By giving specific parameters for the habit’s use and by mentioning consecration in connection to the habit, the aforementioned “ordination” (norm) reflects two of the three major elements of canon

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30 Appendix 3, The Book of Constitutions and Ordinations of the Friars of the Order of Preachers, 147.

31 Point 51, The Book of Constitutions and Ordinations of the Friars of the Order of Preachers, 15.
669.1 of the Code of Canon Law. Canon 669’s important clause “according to the norm of proper law” is given life though this sentence of the ordination: “The habit is to be worn inside our convents…unless for a just cause the prior provincial shall have determined otherwise.” The habit’s relationship to poverty, a significant descriptor of the religious habit in canon 669, is not included in this ordination, nor anywhere else in the The Book of Constitutions and Ordinations of the Friars of the Order of Preachers.

The final two mentions of the religious habit in the Constitutions and Ordinations of the Order of Friars Preachers are included in a chapter that is titled “On Promoting and Fostering Vocations.” One piece of legislation states which friar preachers can lawfully grant the habit: “The Master of the Order, the prior provincial in his own province, the prior or subprior in capite of the convent in which the aspirant is to receive the habit, and their delegates can lawfully give the habit.”32 The final mention of the religious habit in the Constitutions and Ordinations defines when investiture can lawfully take place: “Vestition can take place before the beginning of the novitiate or during the novitiate according to the determination of a provincial chapter.”33

32 Article 175, Book of Constitutions and Ordinations of the Friars of the Order of Preachers, 43.

33 Article 176, Book of Constitutions and Ordinations of the Friars of the Order of Preachers, 43.
F. Society of Jesus

The Society of Jesus, an institute of clerics regular founded in 1540, has never defined in their legislation a specific religious habit. The earliest legislation of the Society of Jesus directed that members of the Society dress in such fashion that it “be proper . . . conform to the usage of the country of residence and . . . not contradict the poverty we profess.”34 The Formula of the Society of Jesus that was approved by Pope Julius III states that “In what pertains to food, clothing, and other external things, they [members of the Society] will follow the common and approved usage of reputable priests.”35 Having never been abrogated, these two directives were still in force at the time of Vatican II and continue to guide Jesuit custom today. These directives echo, in a sense, canon 136.1 from the 1917 Code of Canon Law, which instructed all clerics to wear decent ecclesiastical attire.

The Rules of the Society of Jesus in force at the time of Vatican II include three brief references to dress. The first reference affirmed poverty: “Food, clothing, and living

34 Article 577, The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, 238.

35 Formula of the Institute of the Society of Jesus approved by Julius III, 8, The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, 12. Pope Julius III approved this “formula” in 1550 through the bull Exposcit debitum. In 1550 one of the attributes of a “reputable priest” in Europe was that he wore a clerical cassock, which seems to imply that some secular clergy did not do this. See O’Malley, The First Jesuits, 341-2.
accommodations shall be such as are suitable for poor men.”36 The second reference
decreed that “no one should leave his room without being properly clad.”37 Being
“properly clad” finds echo in canon 596 of the 1917 Code, which stated that “all religious
must wear their habit both inside and outside the house.”38 The third and final reference
to clothing in the Rules of the Society of Jesus in force at the time of Vatican II spoke to the
issue of cleanliness: “Clothing should be kept clean and worn in a manner befitting a
religious.”39

The most up-to-date legislative text of the Society of Jesus is called The
Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms. This text consists of
the Constitutions, which hearken from the origins of the Society, and Complementary
Norms, which interpret and modify the original constitutions. These companion
elements of contemporary Jesuit legislation were included together in a legislative text
that was promulgated in 1995.

36 Summary of the Constitutions 25, Rules of the Society of Jesus (Woodstock, MD: Woodstock


38 August Coemans, Commentary on the Rules of the Society of Jesus (El Paso, Texas: Revista Catolica
Press, 1942), 308.

39 Rule of Religious Decorum 8, Rules of the Society of Jesus, 42.
All of the articles pertaining to clothing in the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* retain their relevance today because they have never been abrogated. Nevertheless, two contemporary norms on Jesuit dress give modern interpretation to those original constitutions. The first of the two norms mentions clothing in a section entitled “Common Life.” This norm stipulates that clothing should avoid superfluities. It also stresses that the general equality that should exist among Jesuits in regard to dress is not compromised if an exception is made because of a legitimate need.

In the Society “common life” should be understood as follows: As to food, clothing, and other necessities of life, superfluities are always to be avoided and the same standard of living of different communities and of the members in them are to be maintained, insofar as differences of ministries and of places allow. But if something is judged necessary for someone because of ill health or some other just reason, this is in no sense contrary to common life.

The second contemporary norm that concerns the clothing of Jesuits is found in a section entitled “Our Common Way of Living in External Matters.” This norm clearly relates clothing, among other aspects of life, to the poverty by which Jesuits profess to live: “Our manner of living, therefore, with respect to food, clothing, habitation . . . should be appropriate to ‘disciples of the poor Christ’ and not beyond what people of

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40 The following paragraph numbers from *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* (1996 English edition) deal with clothing: 18-9, 81, 292, 296-7, 577-9, 671, 768.

modest means can afford, those who must work hard to support themselves and their families.”

Jesuits Dressed in the Common Garb of Diocesan Priests

Neither the Consitutions nor the Complementary Norms speak of Jesuit attire as a sign of consecration, but both Consitutions and the Complementary Norms do indeed draw a connection between Jesuit dress and the practice of poverty. The Contemporary Norms of the Society do not spell out the garments of Jesuit dress because the custom for Jesuit dress continues to be what was approved by Pope Julius III in the Formulas of the Institute of the Society of Jesus: “In what pertains to food, clothing, and other external


things, they [members of the Society] will follow the common and approved usage of reputable priests.”

Especially applicable to the Society of Jesus is the second paragraph of canon 669 from the current (1983) Code of Canon Law: “Clerical religious of an institute which does not have a proper habit are to wear clerical dress according to the norm of canon 284.”

Canon 284 states: “Clerics are to wear suitable ecclesiastical attire according to the norms issued by the conference of bishops and according to legitimate local customs.”

While the contemporary norms of the Society of Jesus do not explicitly include elements of canons 669.2 or 284, the spirit of these laws seems to be present in article 577 of their Constitutions: “Clothing too should have three characteristics: first, it should be proper; second, conformed to the usage of the country of residence; and third, not contradictory to the poverty we profess.” Thus, Jesuit dress in most areas of the world is the black suit and Roman collar or clerical “tab” collar.

The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms do not spell out “when” and “where” Jesuits are to dress like “reputable priests,” nor do they indicate that practical directions for such are to be governed by directives from the local

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44 Formula of the Institute of the Society of Jesus approved by Julius III, 8, The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, 12.

45 Article 577, The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, 238.
Jesuit provincial or provincial chapter. The “when” and “where” of Jesuit attire is part of the unwritten customs of the Society of Jesus.

G. *Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*

The Brothers of the Christian Schools, a religious congregation founded in 1680, had two legislative texts in force at the time of Vatican II: *Common Rules and Constitutions* and *Rule of Government*. They were originally promulgated in 1947.

Between these two texts there are thirty-nine separate articles that pertain to the religious habit. Myriad topics are covered in these thirty-nine articles: when the habit is properly given, a description of the habit, what to do with unused robes, underwear, the habit’s relationship with poverty, the habit in connection to sports and recreation, the ceremony of investiture, the habit and common life, and the cleanliness of the habit.46

Offered here is a sampling of the thirty-nine articles pertaining to the religious habit that were in effect at the time of Vatican II. The examples include an article that pertains to poverty, another to uniformity, the third to canon 596 from the 1917 *Code of

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Canon Law, and a final example speaks of the use of the habit in countries inhospitable to the religious habit. One small but noteworthy detail from the Brothers’ pre-Vatican II legislation is that the word “Habit” always appears with a capital letter “H.” This practice emphasized the importance of the religious habit. The word “habit” appears with a lowercase letter in the Brothers’ contemporary Rule.

An article connecting the religious habit to the practice of poverty stated: “The Brothers shall not have anything of their own, but all things shall be for common use in each of the houses, even the Habit and other necessary things used by the Brothers.”47 Another article demanded uniformity of attire: “The Brothers . . . shall wear neither Habit, robe, mantle, nor shoes which are not like those of the other Brothers, both in material and in shape.”48 The article incorporating canon 596 from the 1917 Code of Canon Law read: “All the Brothers shall wear the Habit proper to the Institute, both inside and outside the house, unless a grave cause, in the judgment of the Brother Superior, or the Brother Visitor, or even of the Brother Director in case of urgency, excuses them, for such time as will be necessary.”49 The prescription on attire in

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countries inhospitable to the religious habit said: “In countries in which it is not advisble to go out or travel in the complete religious dress, the Brothers, with the authorization of the Regime, shall wear clothing that shall be plain, modest, and of black material, such as is worn by the clergy and other religious.”

The abundance of prescriptions on the religious habit in the legislative texts of the Brothers of the Christian Schools at the time of Vatican II (thirty-nine articles) stands in stark contrast to the relative paucity of prescriptions on the religious habit in the Brothers’ contemporary Rule (three articles). Officially approved by the Holy See in 1987 and most recently amended in 2008, the Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools includes one constitution (fundamental law) and two statutes (specific norms) that pertain to the religious habit. The sole “constitution” on the religious habit in the Brothers’ Rule incorporates all three major notions from canon 669.1 of the Code of Canon Law: consecration, poverty, and “the norm of proper law.” The constitution in the present Rule of the De La Salle Brothers reads: “As a sign of their consecration, and as a

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50 Article 2.15, Rule of Government of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (1947), 9-10.

51 What both De La Salle Brothers and Friars Minor term a “statute,” the Friars Preachers call an “ordination,” and the Jesuits a “norm.” All of these groups refer to their fundamental laws as “constitutions.”
witness to poverty, the Brothers wear the habit of the Institute determined in accordance with the Institute’s own law.”

The statute that further interprets the aforementioned constitution names the specific elements of the Brothers’ habit and promotes decision-making at the district (province) level, which would, in turn, be subject to the approval of the Superior General. The statute reads: “The habit of the Brothers is the robe and white rabat. Practical directions for the wearing of the habit may be given by the Brothers in charge of the Districts, taking local circumstances into account. These directions are submitted to Brother Superior for approval.” As a matter of precision, this statute does not name the color of the Brothers’ robe because its color varies from black to white to cream-colored, depending on the country. Though the color of the Brothers’ robe may vary, two things about the Brothers’ habit are always the same: the robe’s extremely simple style and the white “rabat,” a flap-like ornamental piece descending from the neckline that was common among lay professionals and diocesan clerics in seventeenth-century France.

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53 Statute 26a, The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, 41.
A second statute in the Brothers’ contemporary Rule names the habit in connection to the beginning the novitiate: “The beginning of the novitiate is marked by a special ceremony during which the candidate receives some symbols of his entry into the Institute such as the religious habit, the Rule, or a Bible.” This statute does not mandate that the habit be given at the beginning of the novitiate, but only that “the candidate receives some symbols . . . such as . . . .” This ambiguous language allows the granting of the religious habit to be optional, which seems to go against article 26 in the Brothers’ Rule itself: “As a sign of their consecration, and as a witness to poverty, the Brothers wear the habit of the Institute determined in accordance with the Institute’s


55 Statute 91b, The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, 84-5.
own law.” It is curious that the Holy See would permit legislation in the Brothers’ Rule that leaves open the possibility that a candidate to the Brothers’ life would never receive the religious habit. This seems to go against both the letter and the spirit of canon 669.1 of the Code of Canon Law.

H. Summary of Changes to Universal and Particular Legislation

The 1917 Code of Canon Law contained six canons with reference to the religious habit (492, 540, 557, 596, 639, 640), whereas the 1983 Code only has three (136, 284, 669). The most significant shift in canon law concerning the religious habit concerns when and where the religious habit is to be worn. The 1917 Code, reflecting a law in force since the papal decretal Ut Periculoso of Boniface VIII in 1298, stated that the religious habit was to be worn both inside and outside the house (c. 596). The revised Code of Canon Law allows the proper law of each religious institute to spell out when and where their religious habit is to be worn (c. 669.1).

All of the institutes included in this chapter, except for the Society of Jesus, have much more legislation on the religious habit in their pre-Vatican II rules and constitutions than in their current (2015) legislative texts. The Swiss-American Congregation of the Order of St. Benedict gives a clear example of this. Their directives on the habit in force at the time of Vatican II were divided into four articles, some of
which were multiple paragraphs in length. Their contemporary legislation consists of one sentence, which directs that legislation on the habit be given in the customary of each local monastery.

One notable shift concerning the Order of Friars Minor is that where their pre-Vatican II legislation called the friars to wear their habit both inside and outside the house, their current legislation explicitly states that friars are permitted in special circumstances to wear clothes different from the habit. Contemporary legislation on the habit of the Order of Friars Preachers has approximately seventy percent less wording than its pre-Vatican II counterpart. Notable in comparison to the Franciscans is that the Dominicans explicitly state in their contemporary legislation that the habit is to be worn inside the house.

The only discernable shift in legislation on attire in the Society of Jesus is the abrogation of the entire text in force at the time of Vatican II, which was called *Rules of the Society of Jesus*, but which in truth did not contain much legislation on Jesuit dress. The Brothers of the Christian Schools went from thirty-nine articles on the religious habit in their 1947 legislative text to a mere three articles in their contemporary rule. One discernable shift concerning the Brothers of the Christian Schools is that one of their three contemporary articles on the habit is worded in such a way that makes it possible for a candidate to enter the congregation without ever receiving the habit.
Chapter 9

The Diminishment of the Religious Habit in the Post-Vatican II Era

The Council Fathers at Vatican II, as well as numerous statements of the papal magisterium since the Council, and the curial congregation charged with governing religious institutes have each insisted on the importance of the religious habit. Despite this insistence, use of the habit in the post-Vatican II era is greatly diminished in comparison to the entire eighteen hundred-year tradition of consecrated life previous to Vatican II. Resistance to the habit and the preponderant use of lay attire by religious over the past fifty years is a complex reality that is sometimes mystifying to religious who were born after 1960, as well as for younger men and women who are presently discerning a vocation to religious life. These two groups frequently do not understand why many older religious are circumspect about the value of distinctive attire. This

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1According to 2009 CARA study on entrants to religious life, many people who have entered religious life in the United States since 1993 are attracted to wearing a religious habit. The study shows that significant generational gaps, especially between the Millennial Generation (born in 1982 or later) and the Vatican II Generation (born between 1943 and 1960), are evident throughout the study on questions involving the Church and the habit. See: Mary Bendyna and Mary Gautier, “Attraction to Religious Life and to a Particular Religious Institute,” Recent Vocations to Religious Life: A Report for the National Religious Vocation Conference (Washington: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University, 2009), 8-9 third bullet point, http://nrvc.net/study_overview/?return_url=study_overview (accessed May 4, 2011). Click NRVC/CARA Study. See also “Practices Regarding the Religious Habit,” 13.

222
chapter addresses some of the underlying reasons why many older religious believe that religious life is lived more authentically without distinctive attire.

Controversy over the value of the religious habit in the decades since Vatican II has been conditioned far more by the impulses of change unleashed by “prophetic interpretations” of conciliar texts than by the Council Fathers’ brief treatment of the religious habit in *Perfectae Caritatis* 17. The bishops at Vatican II fully expected and intended that the religious habit would continue as a prominent element of religious life; instead, their vision has been significantly altered.

While it is impossible to justify the abandonment of the religious habit from the “letter of the Council,” a number of themes taken up in light of the “spirit of the Council” have been used to argue that it is appropriate for religious to present themselves in secular attire. People who are less-than-enthusiastic about the benefits of religiously-identifiable attire often situate their reasoning within a combination of the following loci: (1) all members of the Church share a fundamental dignity that is rooted in baptism, (2) the universal call to holiness in the Church, (3) the primacy of baptismal consecration vis-à-vis religious consecration, (4) and the Church’s “turn toward the world” at Vatican II.
A. All Members of the Church Share a Fundamental Dignity That is Rooted in Baptism

In the pre-conciliar Church, the states of perfection (religious state, married state, secular priesthood, state of virginity) were frequently emphasized and often compared and ranked in writing about vocational discernment. The following lines from a book of “catechism lessons on vocation,” used by the Brothers of the Christian Schools for high school and college students in the decades before Vatican II, emphasized that the religious life constituted a higher state of perfection: “According to the nature and the dignity of the work required of each person is the degree of perfection to which he [or she] is called or invited. The perfection expected of religious, for example, is higher than that expected from the ordinary Christian.” 2 Another example that highlights the pre-conciliar tendency to compare and contrast the states of perfection is this line from the Baltimore Catechism: “Religious and clerics enjoy special canonical privileges and have many more obligations than lay people have.” 3

In the pre-conciliar popular mindset, the religious state was likened to a spiritual aristocracy. The idea that religious answered a higher calling in comparison to the laity was so pervasive in the pre-conciliar Church that many lay people oftentimes felt little


motivation to attend to their spiritual life beyond the basics of weekly Mass and occasional sacramental confession. In the popular mindset, any efforts in regard to the spiritual life that went beyond minimum requirements were reckoned to be the province of clergy and religious.

In an effort to inspire the laity in regard to their privileges and duties as temples of the Holy Spirit, partakers of the Body of Christ, and members of the People of God, the Council stressed the equal dignity of all members of the Church. *Lumen Gentium* chapter four, which is titled *The Laity*, stresses this shared dignity, of which baptism is the source. It is through baptism that all the faithful – clergy, religious, and laity - are “regenerated in Christ” and brought into the household of the Church.

Therefore, the chosen People of God is one: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism"; sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity. . . . For you are all 'one' in Christ Jesus”.4

This passage from *Lumen Gentium* is rich in naming many of the things that, in addition to baptism, unite the People of God: Jesus Christ, the Catholic faith, being sons or daughters in Christ (“filial grace”), the call to love of God and neighbor (“vocation to perfection”), salvation, hope, and charity.

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4 *Lumen Gentium* 32, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils II*, 875.
This same article from *Lumen Gentium* affirms the unity of the members of the Church in a way that seems to obliterate the inequalities that sinful humanity often promotes and succumbs to: “There is, therefore, no inequality in Christ and in the Church, with regard to race or nation, social condition or sex, because ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal 3:28).” Furthermore *Lumen Gentium* points out that, although there are different paths in the Church whereby some are called to pastor others, there is an equality of faith and of dignity in terms of building up the body of Christ: “If, therefore, in the Church all do not walk along the same path, nevertheless all are called to holiness and have received an equal faith in the righteousness of God (2 Pt 1:1). . . . There is a true equality of all with regard to the dignity and action common to all the faithful concerning the building up of the body of Christ.”

Stress on the equal dignity of all Catholics in *Lumen Gentium* has influenced attitudes toward the religious habit in the post-conciliar period. Belief that distinctive attire perpetuates a two-tiered mentality, whereby religious are thought of as first-class members of the Church and the laity are reckoned as second-class members, has motivated many religious to abandon the religious habit. While the Council Fathers

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5 *Lumen Gentium* 32, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils II, 875.

6 *Lumen Gentium* 32, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils II, 875-6.
most certainly sought to elevate the laity by stressing the dignity they share with religious and clergy alike, it was never anticipated that promotion of the laity would motivate religious to give up the visual witness of their special consecration.

Promotion of the laity in *Lumen Gentium* and in other documents of Vatican II contributed to a related development. Many lay religious (brothers and sisters) came to think of themselves more as lay people than as religious. As more and more religious brothers and sisters came to champion the dignity of the laity and to identify as lay people themselves, this identification had the effect of diminishing the importance of the religious habit. The “spirit of Vatican II” rather than what the conciliar documents actually said encouraged religious to think of themselves more as lay people than as religious. *Lumen Gentium* certainly affirmed religious as being a distinct group in the Church. For example, *Lumen Gentium*’s chapter four, entitled *The Laity*, states: “Although everything that was said about the people of God applies equally to the laity, religious, and clerics . . .”

This same chapter also states: “Under the title of laity are here understood all Christ’s faithful, except those who are in sacred orders or are members of a religious state that is recognised by the Church.”

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8 *Lumen Gentium* 31, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* II, 875.
B. The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church

In the decades between the first and second Vatican Council, the Church was frequently imaged as an institution of power, as the bulwark of exorbitant truth claims, as a juridical entity, or as the hierarchy. The Church as a vehicle to holiness did not rank high on the list of prevalent images of the Church. One commentator wrote: “One has to search the constitution on the Church prepared for the First Vatican Council with care indeed to find so much as an implicit reference to the vocation all Christians have to holiness.”

In the popular mindset at the time of Vatican II, true holiness was reserved to clergy and religious, who were looked upon as a spiritual aristocracy and as superior to the laity. As an antidote to this unbalanced view, the Council Fathers at Vatican II wanted to stress that all members of the Church are called to sanctity. A major fruit of this effort was chapter five of Lumen Gentium, “The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church,” which emphasized the Church as a work of grace where proof of Christ’s indwelling was the holiness of the Church’s members.10 Lumen Gentium’s chapter on the

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10 This section, which is on chapter five of Lumen Gentium, is based on three commentaries: Friedrich Wulf, “The Call of the Whole Church to Holiness,” in Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, vol. 1, 261-72; Avery Dulles, commentary on “The Call of the Whole Church to Holiness,” in The
universal call to holiness in the Church precedes a chapter in *Lumen Gentium* that is
devoted to religious. Treating the universal call to holiness before treating the “special
call” of the religious state was done on purpose, with an eye to affirming that every
Christian is called to holiness, not just religious.

*Lumen Gentium* affirms that both the hierarchy and “those cared for by it” (laity
and lay religious) are called to holiness: “For this reason everyone in the Church is
called to holiness, whether he [or she] belongs to the hierarchy or is cared for by the
hierarchy, according to the saying of the apostle: ‘This is the will of God, your
sanctification’ (1 Th 4:3).” *Lumen Gentium* attests that holiness is shown forth in the
lives of *all* the faithful, and that the roads to sanctity are many and various. Only after
first affirming the vocation to holiness in this broad context does the document make
special mention of the practice of the evangelical counsels as “providing a striking
witness to holiness.”

This holiness of the Church is shown continuously, and it should be shown, in
those fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful; it is expressed in
many different ways in the lives of those individuals who in their manner of life
tend towards the perfection of charity and in so doing are a source of edification
for others; it appears in a way especially suited to it in the practice of those

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*Documents of Vatican II: In a New and Definitive Translation With Commentaries and Notes By Catholic,
Protestant, and Orthodox Authorities* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), 65-72; Brian Mullady, *Light of

11 *Lumen Gentium* 39, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils II*, 880.
counsels which are usually called evangelical. The practice of the counsels. . . provides in the world, as it should, a striking witness and example of that holiness.\textsuperscript{12}

Catholic tradition has long understood the religious life as the “life of perfection” because it is ideally absent of those things that often impede service of God and neighbor. Thomas Aquinas treated the religious life as the most perfect state of life in his work \textit{On the Perfection of the Spiritual Life}. The writings of Vatican II use the term “perfection” in reference to the religious life, but they do not refer to religious life as \textit{the life of perfection}.\textsuperscript{13} The Council Fathers chose to put greater emphasis on the “perfection of charity” regardless of one’s state of life and lesser emphasis on ranking the degree to which a particular state of life would contribute to the perfection of charity.

\textit{Lumen Gentium} stressed that all Christians, regardless of their “condition of life,” are called to sanctity: “The Lord Jesus, the divine master and model of all perfection, preached holiness of life, which he himself both initiates and perfects, to each and every one of his disciples no matter what their condition of life.”\textsuperscript{14} The Council Fathers wanted to combat the notion that holiness was the special preserve of religious by

\textsuperscript{12} Lumen Gentium 39, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils II, 880.

\textsuperscript{13} For example, the Council Fathers rejected the title \textit{De Statibus Perfectionis Adquirendae} (The States for Acquiring Perfection), which was an early draft of what eventually became the decree \textit{Perfectae Caritatis} (The Perfection of Charity).

\textsuperscript{14} Lumen Gentium 40, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils II, 880.
affirming that every Christian is called to a life of perfection: “It is therefore evident to everyone that all the faithful, whatever their condition or rank, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and the perfection of charity.”

*Lumen Gentium* affirmed that there is only one holiness, not different types, though holiness can be fostered within different lifestyles and through varying duties: “In the different kinds of life and its different duties, there is one holiness cultivated by all who are led by the Spirit of God.” Such affirmation that there are a variety of forms where Christian holiness is embodied is, according to one commentator, an evolution in the history of Christian piety. For centuries, theological treatises spoke of two “ways” to heaven, that of the commandments and that of the counsels, the latter presented as the ideal. The Council, rather, emphasized that every Christian would grow in holiness if they embraced and cooperated with God’s will:

> All the faithful, therefore, whatever their condition of life, their duties or their circumstances, and through all of them, will grow daily in holiness if they accept all these things in faith from the hand of their heavenly Father and if they

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17 Friedrich Wulf, “The Call of the Whole Church to Holiness,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 1, 267.

18 Friedrich Wulf, “The Call of the Whole Church to Holiness,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 1, 267: “Undoubtedly the form in which the Christian message was still taught and embodied only yesterday was too reminiscent of its monastic origins, too much based on the assumption that the religious life is the ideal of Christian life as such.”
cooperate with the divine will by making manifest to all, even as they carry out their work here on earth, that love with which God has loved the world.\textsuperscript{19}

The way to holiness that works for an individual, according to their state of life and personal mission, became more important than whether one’s particular state of life was objectively higher or lower than another person’s state of life.

Many religious in the post-Vatican II era find support in the above sentiments for dressing in the same attire as lay people. The logic is that if holiness is one and if all members of the Church are called to this one holiness, then distinction in clothing, rather than promoting holiness, lends itself to thinking that there are actually different types of holiness, the better sort reserved to religious and the ordained. Part of this manner of thinking is that religious need to be holy, not appear holy. They do not need to stand out by the clothing that they wear.

\textit{C. Deemphasizing Religious Consecration}

Vatican II’s affirmation of baptismal consecration as the source of the common dignity of all Christians led some religious to deemphasize the importance of religious consecration. As Vatican II brought the primacy of baptismal consecration into focus, the place of religious consecration, in the minds of some, became relativized. The

\\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Lumen Gentium} 41, \textit{Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils} II, 883.
interplay between these two consecrations was the subject of lively theological discussion in the decades following Vatican II.20

Conciliar statements in Lumen Gentium and Perfectae Caritatis root religious consecration in baptismal consecration. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church states that while one has died to sin and been consecrated to God in baptism, the evangelical counsels “more intimately consecrate” one to God’s service:

Certainly by baptism they have died to sin and have been dedicated to God; however, in order to draw more abundant fruit from that baptismal grace, by profession in the Church of the evangelical counsels they aim to free themselves from obstacles which could hinder the fervour of love and the pursuit of perfection in divine worship, and they consecrate themselves more closely to the service of God.21

Perfectae Caritatis states that religious consecration is rooted in baptism and is a fuller expression of this sacrament. Furthermore, Perfectae Caritatis speaks of professing the evangelical counsels as responding to a divine call and as renouncing the world:

Members of each institute should recall first of all that by professing the evangelical counsels they responded to a divine call so that by being not only dead to sin (Rom 6:11) but also renouncing the world they may live for God alone. They have dedicated their entire lives to His service. This constitutes a


21 Lumen Gentium 44, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils II, 885.
special consecration, which is deeply rooted in that of baptism and expresses it more fully. 22

One can not claim that the conciliar documents say nothing substantial about religious consecration or that the Council, in stressing the importance of baptismal consecration, discredited or abandoned the notion of religious consecration.

While the conciliar documents in no way eliminate the value of religious consecration, some religious thought that emphasizing consecration in connection to religious life, because it implies a certain “being set apart,” was counterproductive. The author of an article on consecration expressed “triumphalism” as part of the reason why some post-conciliar religious hesitated to stress their special consecration: “An emphasis on consecration may not find much welcome among those who would view the ‘being set apart by God’ that is consecration as contradictory, or at least foreign to the Church as community, and a regression to triumphalism.” 23

Some of those who think that religious life is more faithfully lived without religiously-identifiable attire maintain that dressing in the religious habit mistakenly stresses religious consecration to the detriment of one’s fundamental and more important consecration, baptism. These religious believe that by not distinguishing

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themselves through their attire, they implicitly affirm that all the states of life—ordained, consecrated, laity—share a common dignity. Other religious want to deemphasize religious consecration altogether, because of the notion of being “set apart” that is implicit to it. For these religious, the habit is thought to be unhelpful because it sets one apart and can easily lead to an unmerited superiority whereby religious think of themselves as better than the laity. In this line of thinking, when religious dress the same as the majority of the People of God, this acknowledges and affirms the dignity that all Christians share because of baptismal consecration.

D. The Church’s Turn Toward the World

A perduring element of the spirituality of religious life across all the centuries and all the types of religious life is “renouncing the world.” This concept has been stressed to greater or lesser degree in different eras of Church history and in varying intensity according to the spirituality of individual religious institutes, but it has always been a constitutive element of the Church’s understanding of religious life. The habit manifests this spiritual stance by setting a religious apart. Even if the habit was discarded, the long-lasting tradition of tonsuring religious men expressed renunciation by setting them apart. The Council Fathers at Vatican II included this fundamental teaching on religious life, renunciation of the world, in Perfectae Caritatis: “Members of
each institute should recall first of all that by professing the evangelical counsels they responded to a divine call so that by being not only dead to sin (cf. Rom 6:11) but also renouncing the world [emphasis mine] they may live for God alone. They have dedicated their entire lives to His service.”

Renouncing the world in the spirituality of religious life suggests a renunciation of “worldliness,” which is traditionally understood as rejecting “lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life” (1 Jn 2:16). The physical separation of the early (and later) monastics from society, popularly known as fuga mundi or “flight from the world,” includes this rejection of worldliness, but does not imply a rejection of physical creation or need it be viewed as an undermining of the value of embodiment and everyday life. While Church teaching rejects the gnostic dualism that views material creation as evil and only the spirit as good, the spiritual rhetoric of religious life has not infrequently tended in this direction.

Unfortunately, the theologically-sound rejection of worldliness has sometimes moved in the direction of an actual rejection of physical creation, and/or corporeal embodiment, and/or everyday life. The following example taken from Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle is an illustration of a spirituality of religious life that seems to

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reject more about the world than just worldliness. De La Salle directed the following message to the Brothers of his fledgling congregation:

You ought to be glad to be treated this way, for you must be dead to the world and have no dealings with it. If you truly belong to God, you are the world’s enemy, and the world is your enemy, because it is God’s enemy. Therefore, behave toward it as such, and hold in horror all dealings with the world. Do not allow it to have the least opening to you, for fear that by dealing with it, you will share its spirit.25

Christian spirituality has often emphasized the world (human society and/or material creation), the flesh (human as a corporeal being), and the devil as the loci of temptations that entice one to sin (cf. Eph 2:1-3). Stressing the world as a place of temptation is neither the complete truth about the world nor its most important aspect. Emphasizing the world as a place of temptation has often overshadowed the truth that human society is comprised of beings who are created in God’s image and that cultures often have many Gospel-affirming aspects. Human society cannot be totally evil because those who comprise human society are made in God’s image and have been redeemed in Christ. Creation itself is fundamentally good because it was brought into existence by God and has also been redeemed by Christ, though it waits for the definitive fulfillment of its redemption at the eschaton.

By means of The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, i.e. Gaudium et Spes, the Council Fathers sought “to explain to all how it [the Council] understands the Church’s presence and activity in today’s world.”26 This pastoral constitution helped to recalibrate Catholic spirituality away from an overly dualistic mentality that emphasized the Church as filled with goodness and grace, and the world as filled with evil and sin. One author put it this way:

Reversing a long tradition of viewing “the world” as inimical to the Church, as a sphere divided from “the sacred” and to be converted and taught, the document on the Church in the Modern World [Gaudium et Spes] affirms the value of the world and confesses that the Church should be receptively reading from “the signs of the times.”27

The initial article of Gaudium et Spes proclaims the Church’s solidarity with the human family. The statement neither turns the Church away from the world nor castigates it:

“The joys and hopes, and the sorrows and anxieties of people today, especially of those who are poor and afflicted, are also the joys and hopes, sorrows and anxieties of the disciples of Christ. . . . For this reason it [the Church] feels itself closely linked to the human race and its history.”28

26 Gaudium et Spes 2, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils II, 1069.


28 Gaudium et Spes 1, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils II, 1069.
Even before the Council was called, some theologians and religious held the position that certain aspects of religious life (e.g. wearing the habit, taking religious names, living in fixed religious houses), rather than putting religious in solidarity with the world, were passé and unhelpful to the spread of the Gospel because they set religious apart from other human beings. A “prophetic reading” of elements of *Gaudium et Spes* and *Perfectae Caritatis* lent credence to the view that aspects of religious life which distinguished religious from lay people were contrary to the Gospel. The article on the value of human activity in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* lends itself to such a “prophetic” reading because the article encouraged Christians to embrace the world and its people: “The Christian message is seen, then, not as discouraging them [Christians] from building the world, or as leading them to neglect the wellbeing of their fellows, but as strictly obliging them to this as their duty.”²⁹ Passages such as this, which encouraged Christians to embrace the world and its people, fueled the idea of some religious that distinctive dress impeded them from becoming involved in the world.

Other lines from *Gaudium et Spes*’ article on the value of human activity contributed to closing a perceived gap between the sacred realm of the Church and the

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²⁹ *Gaudium et Spes* 34, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils II*, 1089-90.
secular realm of the world. The following passage affirms that the sacred can be manifest in secular human activity. It also affirms humanity as created in God’s image and God as the maker of all:

Individual and collective activity, that monumental effort of humanity through the centuries to improve living conditions, in itself presents no problem to believers; it corresponds to the plan of God. Men and women were created in God’s image and were commanded to conquer the earth with all it contains and to rule the world in justice and holiness: they were to acknowledge God as maker of all things and refer themselves and the totality of creation to him, so that with all things subject to God, the divine name would be glorified through all the earth.30

Recognition that secular human activity can fulfill God’s will is not new in the history of Christian spirituality. In this vein, one might recall Francis De Sales’ *Introduction to the Devout Life* or the practice of the presence of God of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection. While it is not new to recognize that secular human activity can fulfill God’s will, normal everyday activity and family life has certainly not received pride of place in the annals of Christian history as sources for fostering holiness. What is new, even revolutionary in a sense, is the fact that an ecumenical council made such optimistic statements about human activity in the world.

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Gaudium et Spes even affirmed that the Church receives good things from the world, which came across as revolutionary when Gaudium et Spes was promulgated: “Just as it is in the world’s interest to acknowledge the Church as a social reality and a driving force in history, so too the Church is not unaware how much it has profited from the history and development of humankind.”31 That the Church not only enlightens and purifies a fallen world, but actually receives goodness from it, helped to shift understanding about the relationship between the realms of the sacred and the secular. That the world and the Church mutually enriched one another called attention to God’s grace at work everywhere.

The implications of Gaudium et Spes’ affirmation of the world reverberated far and wide in religious life. Concerning the religious habit, it caused some religious to minimize the sacramentality of distinctive clothing. The thinking was that because the entire world is sacred ground where God’s grace is at work, there is nothing more sacred about a religious habit than the lay attire of regular people at work in society. Some religious took this idea as supportive of dressing in lay attire. To their manner of thinking, because God’s grace works in the world as well as in the Church, and because

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31 Gaudium et Spes 44, Flannery, ed., Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations, 214.
the secular is as infused with God’s grace as the seemingly sacred, the religious habit is no more a sacramental or sacred than the regular attire of lay people.

Where *Gaudium et Spes* helped turn the Church toward the world, some religious interpreted the habit as only turning them away from the world, making it more difficult to bring the Gospel to society and to assist their fellow human beings. Rather than affirming the fundamental goodness of the world as the arena of God’s creation, as redeemed in Christ, the locus of Jesus’ incarnation, and where human redemption took place, the religious habit was interpreted as accentuating society as an arena of temptation and as a rejection other people. Furthermore, the habit was interpreted as even denying the fundamental goodness of the human body. By concealing the shape of the body, the habit was thought to overemphasize the body as a locus of temptation. As a result, many religious set aside the habit and took up wearing lay attire most, if not all, of the time. This was done in an effort to highlight the fundamental goodness of creation and human beings, while not overemphasizing evil, temptation, and sin.

E. *Other Reasons for the Diminishment of the Religious Habit in the Post-Vatican II Era*

In general, and unlike many women religious, the majority of male religious in the United States retain use of religiously-distinctive attire, at least on certain
occasions. Depending on the specific institute, such occasions could mean: at liturgy, in the apostolate, or at specific province functions. While it is true that many male religious retain occasional use of the habit, it is undeniable that its use has markedly diminished in the post-Vatican II era. In addition to the influence of particular theological interpretations that have contributed to this diminishment, there are significant psychological and sociological trends that have impacted it as well. The following section explores three such trends: the movement of personal development and fulfillment within religious institutes, the movement away from formality in North American society, and the political dichotimization of the Catholic Church.

The lived reality of many apostolic/ministerial (non-monastic) male religious institutes allows latitude for members to personally decide when and where they will wear their religious habit. Approbation for this custom of personal preference is rooted in psychological influences that affected religious life especially in the 1970s and 80s. Whereas the traditional understanding of religious life sublimated an individual member’s “wants and desires” to the mission of the group, since Vatican II there has been greater emphasis in many religious institutes on personal growth and individual

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32 There are significant reasons why female religious have abandoned the habit to a greater degree than male religious. The evolution of many women religious from a modified habit after Vatican II to secular dress is treated in: Doris Gottemoeller, “Religious Habits Reconsidered,” Review for Religious 68.2 (2009), 181-91.
fulfillment. One theological observer of post-Vatican II religious life summarized this development thus:

While the classical notion of religious life meant that I must give my life to the service of the corporate mission of the community and thus my individual person and needs become of secondary importance, with the onslaught of psychological influences, the situation was reversed and the person, or subject, became the focus and the religious community became, in a sense, a springboard for my personal development and fulfillment. Thus choosing my employment, my clothing, my place of residence, etc. became part of the agenda of the “renewed” religious community. Seeking permissions and being “missioned” by superiors became instances of infantilization rather than marks of spiritual sacrifice for the common good. Thus the notion of belonging to a community was far less urgent and demanding. The canonical and spiritual bonds of profession were de-emphasized and one’s personal psychological and emotional “fit” in the community became the measure of vocation. As the subject became more of the focus of the project of religious life rather than the mission of the order or congregation, visible signs of membership became less important.  

One of the visible signs of membership that became less important was the religious habit. Personal preference in deciding to wear religiously-distinctive attire or not is certainly connected to this movement of “individual development and fulfillment” that has impacted many religious institutes in the decades following Vatican II.

A second consideration that has contributed to the diminishment of the religious habit after Vatican II is the increased prevalence of dressing casually in American society. Over the past forty years, the general culture of the United States has become

33 Gabriel O’Donnell OP, STD, email message to author, June 20, 2014.
more casual in terms of clothing than it was previous to the Sexual Revolution, and the Civil Rights’, Anti–War, and Women’s Liberation movements, all of which were in high gear between 1960 and 1980.

Most of the major social and political changes of this period had an effect on the fashions people wore. People throughout the West were becoming more aware of the need to respect different cultural traditions and to allow for individual differences. . . . By the 1970s tastes in clothing had become even more individualized. It was said that people could wear anything they wanted—and did. . . . This focus on individual tastes and expression helped earn the 1970s the nickname the "Me Decade."³⁴

Part of the individualization of dress was a movement away from formality and toward casualness. For example, whereas nurses traditionally wore a white uniform and cap when “on the floor,” they now wear “scrubs.” Americans used to dress up when traveling, going to a restaurant, or even attending a public sporting event. The custom of dressing up on such occasions has largely faded. The trend toward casual attire has had an affect on the practice of the habit. For many religious, what was once a very meaningful and appropriate sacramental has become an anachronistic outfit that feels too formal and out of place in most social situations.

Another factor that contributes to the diminishment of the religious habit in the post-Vatican II era is connected to the politicization of the Church in the United States

as well as in many other countries of the world. Not unlike the way many Americans identify categories such as Democrat or Republican and Left or Right, many Catholics understand certain aspects of Church life in dichotomies such as liberal/conservative and progressive/traditional. This theological dichotomizing has profound effect on the contemporary Church and on religious life as a microcosm of the Church.

The practice of the religious habit is not immune to the politicization of the Church. As a generalization, conservatives/traditionalists tend to be more accepting of religiously-identifiable attire, whereas liberals/progressives tend to be less accepting of it. As a result, the posture of a male religious toward the religious habit will sometimes depend on whether or not he wants to be identified with or disassociated from conservatives/traditionalists/the right or liberals/progressives/the left.

Some religious, more female than male, find support for adopting conventional attire in the fact that *Perfectae Caritatis* encouraged religious institutes to return to the spirit of their founder: “It redounds to the good of the Church that institutes have their own particular characteristics and work. Therefore let their founders' spirit and special aims they set before them as well as their sound traditions - all of which make up the patrimony of each institute - be faithfully held in honor.”35 Adopting conventional attire

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35 *Perfectae Caritatis* 2b.
in deference to the “spirit of the founder” is grounded in the logic that some founders instituted a religious habit whose garments exhibited a greater similarity to the clothing of common people at the time.\footnote{An example of a religious founder who was not in favor of having a religious habit too closely resemble conventional clothing is John Baptist de La Salle, founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He wrote: “It seems more suitable for the welfare of a community that the habit be distinctive from its foundation rather than become so later.” De La Salle, \textit{Memorandum on the Habit} 35, in \textit{Rule and Foundational Documents}, 188.}

A final consideration affecting the practice of the religious habit is, arguably, the most significant factor. For some religious, possibly most, the decision to wear or not wear their habit is strongly connected to social conformity. The deciding factor, rather than something theological, is whether they will fit in with the custom of the majority of other religious with whom they live and work.

\textit{F. Contemporary Theologians on the Diminishment of the Religious Habit}

One might think that the diminished stature of the religious habit since Vatican II and the tension that the habit causes within and between religious institutes would be catalysts for scholarly reflection on religiously-identifiable attire. During its existence, the journal \textit{Review for Religious} published a number of articles on the habit, and on rare occasions pieces on the habit written for general readership appear in Catholic periodicals. But as for scholarly work, there is very little on the subject of the religious
habit, especially in English. In terms of contemporary academics, Sandra Schneiders, an important voice concerning post-conciliar religious life, has written briefly on the religious habit. Matías Augé, a Spaniard, has written much more substantially on this subject. The following section relates the thinking of these two scholars on the diminished stature of the religious habit over the past fifty years.

Matías Augé is professor emeritus at the Institute of the Theology of Consecrated Life “Claretianum” in Rome, which is affiliated with the Pontifical Lateran University. He is a member of the Congregation of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, popularly known as the “Claretians.” Auge’s recent work, *El Hábito Religioso: Historia-Psicologia-Sociología* (2011), is an important contribution to scholarship on the religious habit. *El Hábito Religioso* deals in major part with the historical development of the religious habit of both men and women religious of the Western Church, and, to lesser degree, treats the habit in relation to psychology and sociology.

Sandra Schneiders is professor emerita of New Testament Studies and Christian Spirituality at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California and a member of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Monroe, Michigan. She has made significant contributions to the post-conciliar discourse on religious life throughout her scholarly career, publishing most recently *Buying the Field: Catholic Religious Life in Mission to the World* (2013), the third book of her trilogy on religious life. Although the
primary audience of Schneiders’ writing and speaking is women religious, much of her thought is applicable to male religious as well.

Augé suggests that the habit’s post-Vatican II diminishment, especially the fact that magisterial directives and ecclesial legislation on the habit are frequently disregarded, has been influenced by the “prophetic reading” of conciliar texts:

The prescriptions and recommendations about the habit that we have been reminded of are, in practice, frequently disregarded. This fact requires an explanation. The renewal promoted by the Second Vatican Council for all strata of the Church has produced a series of phenomena and initiatives that often come from what some groups understood as a prophetic reading of the ecclesial texts.  

He names a number of factors that contributed to the prophetic reading of ecclesial texts in relation to the religious habit: “On the one hand, this involved the accentuation of the Church as the People of God, the presentation of ministry as service, greater respect for the believer, for the believer’s conscience and creativity, the invitation to return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original foundational inspiration.”

Schneiders also recognizes that a certain way of reading conciliar texts played a large role in the diminishment of the religious habit. She says that the call of Perfectae Caritatis (17) to “merely modify the habit,” did not reflect the Church’s “profound

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37 Augé, El Hábito Religioso, 79 (translation mine).

38 Augé, El Hábito Religioso, 79 (translation mine).
change in worldview” and “new understanding of ministry.” Like Augé, Schneiders cites the Council’s teaching on the Church as the People of God as one of the factors that led many religious to “lay aside the habit altogether.”

Renewing congregations were reading *Perfectae Caritatis* through the lenses of *Gaudium et Spes* on the very new relation of the Church to the world and *Lumen Gentium* on the Church as the People of God, rather than reading *Perfectae Caritatis*, as it were, “on its own” as an exhortation to internal spiritual renewal with appropriate updating of lifestyle. Merely modifying the habit is the equivalent of the army replacing the “doughboy” uniform of World War I with the crisper uniform of today; the dynamics of relation to the non-uniformed and within the ranks of the uniformed do not really change. By contrast, laying aside the habit altogether expresses a profound change in worldview and the embrace of a new understanding of and dynamic in ministry.39

Matías Augé speaks warily of referring to the religious habit in terms that distinguish religious from their environment. He maintains that dichotomies such as worldly-spiritual and sacred-profane are connected to a questionable ecclesiology.

It is insisted upon that the habit distinguishes religious from the secular environment in which they live, and that people have necessity for this contact with the sacred . . . . These reflections are based on a fixed way of conceiving the role of the religious in the world and on a particular ecclesiology that we believe is questionable in light of a proper interpretation of the conciliar constitution, *Gaudium et spes*. When one speaks of “secularization,” “secular clothing,” “worldly customs,” or “suggestions of an easy laicization” to which a religious endeavors not to succumb to, one is utilizing theological concepts such as “sacred-profane,” and “worldly-spiritual” etc. that are very much improper. . . .

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Laity, as much as priests and religious, live in a secular world, not opposite it or – much less even – against it.40

Furthermore, Augé maintains that the metanoia required by the consecrations at baptism and religious profession are not meant to take a religious out of the world, but that these successive conversions are meant to be worked out within the world: “The changes required by baptismal consecration (and the successive priestly or religious consecration do not change the substance) take place, therefore, in the interior of a presence in the world. The problem is found therefore in terms of solidarity with the world, so as to bring the world to the Gospel of Jesus.”41

Augé’s belief that it is wrong for the religious habit to signify a posture against the world does not lead him to the conclusion that the habit is devoid of value. According to Augé, for the religious habit to be symbolically meaningful, it must “speak” values that religious aspire to testify to and use a “language” that is comprehensible to contemporary society.

Certainly, the habit must express in some way the values that religious life aspires to testify to in the midst of society. This requires that the religious habit use a language that is capable of being understood by the people of today, capable of communicating with the modern person, and of being an exemplary proposal.42

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40 Augé, El Hábito Religioso, 79-80 (translation mine).

41 Augé, El Hábito Religioso, 79-80 (translation mine).

42 Augé, El Hábito Religioso, 80 (translation mine).
According to Augé, in order to do this the habit needs to incorporate certain positive values of modern dress, including that of honoring the shape of the human body.

For this to happen, we believe that religious will have to accept, in the first place, the fundamental and positive characteristics of modern dress, that it be practical, hygienic, aesthetic, and economical. Today, functionality dominates in the world of dress, which is opposed to everything artificial and requires the respect of physiological laws: hygiene, comfort, liberty of movement, and a minimum of adornment. It is from here that the aesthetic values of clothing are mainly expressed, as a validation of the true form of the human body.⁴³

Augé points out that the general disposition toward clothing during other eras of human history do not correspond to current reality. This disconnect demands that modifications to a religious habit take many considerations into account.

To dress with a particular garment or not to dress that way, to go with shoes or to go shoeless, to cover one’s head with a veil or to go unveiled, is something completely different in distinct cultures and in disparate eras. It is thus that the disposition of other times, whereby the Fathers of monasticism and of the major religious institutes fixed the concrete characteristics of religious dress, are not in force – at least in large part – and do not correspond with current reality. Concrete solutions must arise from a set of considerations that are pastoral, cultural, and environmental etc., and be applied in the context of meaningful behavior that is understood as the following of Christ and of service to one’s brothers and sisters.⁴⁴

Sandra Schneiders maintains that the dominant form of religious life from the nineteenth century until the present has been greatly influenced by groups of clerics

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⁴³ Augé, El Hábito Religioso, 80 (translation mine).

⁴⁴ Augé, El Hábito Religioso, 80 (translation mine).
regular like the Jesuits, who passed on to many newer congregations “a quasi or at least metaphorically military understanding of both the spiritual life and ministry.”

Schneiders maintains that this “military model” of religious life, which envisioned itself as an army at war against the world, could no longer hold after Vatican II because of the new emphases the Council placed in the spheres of ecclesiology and missiology:

> The preconciliar form of apostolic religious life was rooted in an understanding of the Church and of its relation to the world which was actually contrary to the ecclesiology and missiology which emerged from the Council. The understanding of the world as the enemy of the Reign of God, the sphere of sin to be avoided, rejected, and eventually either converted or destroyed was actually abandoned by *Gaudium et Spes.*

Vatican II’s shift in emphasis regarding the Church’s relation to the world leads Schneiders to doubt the value of uniform dress: “If ministry is not a war and the religious congregation is not an army, does one need a uniform?”

While Sandra Schneiders questions the value of uniform dress, she does affirm the importance of visibility as “intrinsic to the public witness” of religious and important for attracting new members to religious life. Schneiders raises the question of

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45 Schneiders, *Buying the Field*, 392.

46 Schneiders, *Buying the Field*, 403.

47 Schneiders, *Buying the Field*, 399.
how twenty-first century religious might be visible in ways that do not come across as attention-seeking nor which necessitate “identical” or “bizarre” clothing.

Achieving corporate unity, the unity of a living body, rather than collective uniformity, is also part of the task of re-emerging into visibility in the contemporary situation. Visibility is intrinsic to the public witness which, as the Council said, is an important function of Religious Life in the Church. It is also important for attracting new members. The diversity of talents, training, interests, professions, and ministerial focus of members makes us less a work force of interchangeable parts and more a mobile, flexible team of ministers able to address a variety of needs. But how to be corporately and personally visible in a variety of non-ostentatious ways rather than through identical or even bizarre clothing or common dwelling or uniform work is a challenge we are still trying to meet.48

G. Summary of the Diminishment of the Religious Habit in the Post-Vatican II Era

The Council Fathers at Vatican II fully intended that the religious habit would continue as a prominent element of religious life. The documents of Vatican II do not support the diminishment of the religious habit, either explicitly or implicitly. However, many consecrated religious find support for their adoption of lay attire through theological interpretations that are based on a “prophetic reading” of conciliar documents.

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48 Schneiders, That Was Then…This Is Now: The Past, Present and Future of Women Religious in the United States (Notre Dame, IN: St. Mary’s College, 2011), 34-5. Though Schneiders was addressing the situation of women religious in the United States, her words are easily applicable to male religious.
Three ideas included in the documents of Vatican II, especially *Lumen Gentium*, led many religious to promote an egalitarian vision of Church membership that resulted in many religious laying aside the religious habit. These ideas include: the common dignity of Christians which is rooted in baptism, the universal call to holiness in the Church, and understanding baptismal consecration as the foundation of religious consecration. In accord with this more egalitarian vision of the Church, some religious, following *Lumen Gentium*'s fundamental division concerning the hierarchical structure of the Church (ordained and laity), chose to emphasize their being laity more so than their being religious. As a result, the habit and other marks of religious life fell into disfavor because they seemingly perpetuated a vision of religious life as separate from and subjectively better than other states of life.

The theological idea that has contributed most significantly to the diminishment of the religious habit in the post-conciliar period is, arguably, a certain interpretation of the Church’s “turn toward the world,” as elucidated especially in *Gaudium et Spes*. Because the habit is invariably at least somewhat different from worldly fashion, some religious view wearing the habit as directly opposed to the Church’s “turn toward the world.”

The movement toward greater personal development and fulfillment within religious institutes, the general tendency away from formal attire in society, and the
political dichotimization of the Catholic Church have each contributed to the diminishment of the religious habit in the post-conciliar period as well. But of all the issues that have contributed to the diminishment of the religious habit in the post-conciliar period, social conformity is arguably the greatest. Like other human beings, religious generally want to fit in with their primary social group, the other religious with whom they live and work.

Sandra Schneiders and Matías Augé have similar thinking about the theology of post-conciliar religious life, but their conclusions regarding the religious habit come across differently. In his scholarly study *El Hábito Religioso*, Matías Augé communicates an openness to religiously-distinctive attire as long as religious institutes make decisions on the habit that take pastoral, cultural, and environmental factors into consideration. In her brief treatment of the religious habit, Sandra Schneiders comes across as ambiguous. One the one hand, Schneiders gives the impression that religiously-distinctive and uniform attire is counter-productive for ministerial religious. On the other hand, she affirms that visibility is intrinsic to a religious’ duty to give public witness.
Chapter 10

Conclusion

This concluding chapter responds to three questions: What has this dissertation accomplished? What are the implications of this research for the future of the religious habit of men? What are some future research projects that might spring from this dissertation?

A. What Has This Dissertation Accomplished?

This dissertation was pursued in response to the question: “Why do such a high percentage of contemporary religious dress in the common attire of lay persons?” In order to examine my intuition that throughout the entire history of consecrated life religious have almost always worn distinctive garb, the dissertation needed to present the historical development of the religious habit of men of the Western Church, from the habit’s beginnings until today. As a result, and even though the dissertation was motivated by a contemporary issue, nearly two-thirds of the dissertation dealt with the habit in the tradition of religious life prior to Vatican II.

Chapters two, three, and four related the historical development of the religious habit of men, a subject about which, until this dissertation, there was little information in English. The dissertation treated the historical development of the male religious
habit primarily, but not exclusively, by using the initial legislative texts of various
groups of male religious. Laying the groundwork for a broad and encompassing picture
of the male habit in the Western Church necessitated beginning with the monastics of
the East who, especially through John Cassian, influenced monastic life in the West.
Beginning with these earliest monastics and continuing in chronological order through
the primary forms of male religious life, the dissertation related major developments in
the evolution of the male religious habit.

The dissertation revealed a number of prominent points concerning the male
habit during the period of Late Antiquity (2nd c. - 6th c.). First, early eastern monastic
witness manifests a clear evolution toward distinctive dress. Second, monastic sources
from Late Antiquity show that some monastic garments were adopted from the
clothing of common people who used them for functional ends, but which in the
monastic milieu, over time, took on symbolic theological significance. Third, western
witness during Late Antiquity manifests the same movement toward distinctive dress,
though the western witness accentuated poverty in clothing more than distinctiveness.

The most significant development to the habit of men religious during the
millenium that spanned from the mid-sixth century until the end of the Middle Ages
(15th c.) is that no longer did one simply wear the generic habit of a hermit or the
generic habit of a monk. Rather, religious habits gradually came to specify membership
in a particular religious community, a trend that was initially motivated by the onset of new monastic groups during the renewal of the tenth to twelfth centuries (Cluny, Camaldolese, Carthusian, Cistercian). The Franciscan habit represents another development to the religious habit during the Middle Ages; it substantially differed from the religious garb of earlier forms of religious life (monastic and canons regular). It was also during the Middle Ages, specifically the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, that there came to be a more profound separation between the style of dress of male religious and that of the common layman: male religious in tunic-like garments and the common layman in form-fitting garments. This divergence in clothing style persisted in large measure until Vatican II.

The most substantial innovation to the male religious habit during the Modern Era (16th c. – mid-20th c.) is that groups of clerics regular, such as the Society of Jesus, incorporated the dress of secular priests into their religious attire rather than incorporating the garments of monastics, canons regular, or mendicants. Other important developments to the religious habit during the Modern Era included greater emphasis by religious communities on the exclusivity of their own religious habit and the growth of secondary elements like external rosaries and insignia. Such developments to the male religious habit from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries were continued without any essential innovations by those new orders and
congregations that were founded in the nineteenth century, and in the twentieth century prior to Vatican II.

The texts used in chapters two, three, and four enabled this dissertation to show the major contours of the historical development of the religious habit of men in the Western Church. In addition to showing the developmental evolution of the religious habit, these chapters engaged the initial legislative texts of various groups of male religious with the following questions in mind: Was the habit distinctive from secular clothing? Was any spiritual symbolism attached to the various elements of the habit of this group? Was investiture part of the entrance rites for acceptance into this group? These questions enabled the dissertation to give a sufficiently broad rendering of the use and significance of the habit of male religious in the Western Church.

The texts used in chapters two, three, and four give plentiful evidence that the religious habit has nearly always been distinctive, to greater or lesser degree, from common attire. The primary sources of writing on the spiritual symbolism of the religious habit come from Evagrius Ponticus and especially from John Cassian, whose writings have long been used in monastic circles. Investiture was evidenced in the writings of Pachomius, Evagrius, Cassian, the Master, Benedict, and Francis, though not in the form of a post-Medieval established ritual.
The initial legislative texts of the various religious institutes used in this dissertation give plentiful evidence that the religious habit was meant to help its wearer inculcate gospel values into his own life and to give visible witness to one’s consecration. The legislative texts gave scant evidence that religious were permitted to wear anything but their habit. This is not to say that the “lived experience” of male religious throughout the centuries did not occasionally find them wearing lay attire. Actually, this was probably the case. If it were not, it would have been unnecessary to issue the disciplinary statements on the religious habit found in the papal constitution Ut Periculoso (1298) or in two of the decrees issued by the Council of Trent (1545-63).

In addition to the historical development of the male habit, the dissertation treated a number of related topics that have helped give a more complete picture to the tradition of the male religious habit in the Western Church, but which have received no attention or scant attention in the academy. These topics included magisterial statements made in regard to the habit, themes traditionally connected to the habit, changes in universal and particular legislation on the habit around the time of Vatican II, and reasons for the habit’s diminished use in the post-Vatican II era.

Chapter five showcased the relatively small number of papal and conciliar directives on the religious habit issued throughout the history of the Church but prior to Vatican II. These directives, spanning from the fifth century until the mid-twentieth
century, communicated the following concerns: religious bishops should not abandon their habit, religious should not remove their habit for undue cause, a habit’s simplicity and modesty are important, the discipline of wearing the habit is to be preserved, and no religious institute may wear or adopt the habit of another. The dissertation identified the constitution *Ut Periculoso* of Boniface VIII (1298) and two decrees issued by the Council of Trent (1545-63) as the most important magisterial directives on the habit prior to the twentieth century.

Chapter six identified and summarized the four predominant themes connected to the religious habit throughout the history of religious life: rupture with the world, group identity, consecration, and poverty. Early texts from founders and institutes were used to give evidence that the religious habit has long been connected to these themes.

Chapters seven, eight, and nine considered the religious habit during the decades since the Second Vatican Council. They treated the following topics: magisterial statements on religious garb since Vatican II, comparing and contrasting legislation on the habit from immediately prior to the Council with legislation on the habit today, and reasons that have motivated the diminishment of religious garb in the post-conciliar period.

Chapter seven centered on magisterial statements since Vatican II. The chapter summarized the evolution of the Council’s treatment of the religious habit, which
resulted in *Perfectae Caritatis* 17. While PC 17 is the only conciliar article on the religious habit, it ushered a new chapter into the history of the habit by calling religious institutes to update their habit so as to meet the requirements of simplicity, health, and suitability to ministry. Chapter seven also included a summary of the treatment of the religious habit in the revised *Code of Canon Law* (1983), and it related specific instances where Paul VI and John Paul II promoted the habit as an important element of religious life.

Chapter eight, which compared and contrasted legislation on the habit, showed that where previous canon law (1917) required the habit to be worn both inside and outside the house, the revision of canon law (1983) requires the proper legislation of each institute to address the question of when the habit is to be worn. Additionally, this showed that the religious habit was treated in greater detail in universal and proper legislation before Vatican II than in parallel legislation that is currently in force (2015).

The penultimate chapter of this dissertation identified and summarized reasons for the diminishment of the religious habit in the post-conciliar era. The chapter explained that many religious have largely set aside religiously-identifiable garb because they believe that common attire better expresses the new conciliar ecclesiology that turned the Church “toward the world.” These religious feel that common attire better fosters the witness that religious are meant to give to the Church and to the world. This particular chapter also summarized the post-conciliar thinking on the
religious habit of Matías Augé and Sandra Schneiders, two theologians of the religious life.

B. Implications of This Research for the Future of the Male Religious Habit

The findings of this dissertation have possible implications for the future of the male religious habit. First, some of the arguments for the sign value of the habit reviewed here suggest the likelihood that future generations of religious will affirm religiously-distinctive garb regularly worn as an important element of religious life. Second, this research may encourage religious institutes to adapt their habit to the needs of time and place so that it reflects and instills Gospel authenticity.

A number of factors point to the probability that the religious habit will return as a ubiquitous reality of religious life: (1) the habit has always been an important element of religious life, (2) the four ideas traditionally associated with the religious habit (rupture with the world, consecration, poverty, and group identity) continue to have validity in regard to religious life, (3) the magisterium has consistently promoted the discipline of the habit throughout the history of religious life, and (4) the majority of today’s younger religious desire to give visible witness to their consecration.

The early legislative texts and the writings of religious founders used to set forth the evolution of the male religious habit revealed that the habit has always been,
practically-speaking, an important element of religious life. The history of monasticism, both East and West, bears witness to this, as does every other type of religious life (canons regular, mendicants, clerics regular, congregations). Research for this dissertation yielded no evidence that non-distinctive attire was normative for male religious at any point in the history of religious life. While magisterial statements seeking to restore the discipline of the religious habit certainly point to periods where this discipline grew lax, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that, outside of periods of governmental persecution (e.g. French Revolution, following the 1917 Mexican Constitution) distinctive garb has always been normative for male religious. The fact that the religious habit has persisted as a staple of religious life through major ecclesiological shifts in the history of the Church suggests that the habit will also survive through the major developments to religious life brought about by Vatican II.

A second factor why religious garb will likely become more widely used in generations to come is that “rupture with the world,” an idea traditionally associated with the religious habit that has greatly been called into question during the post-conciliar period, continues to have validity in connection to religious life. For younger religious, unlike many of their older counterparts, the habit does not represent an unbalanced or negative posture toward the world. Today’s younger religious, along with the Council Fathers at Vatican II they never met, see no dichotomy between
wearing a religious habit and the Church’s recalibrated stance toward the world brought about by Vatican II.\(^1\) Because religious under fifty years of age have not, generally speaking, had to recalibrate their understanding of the Church’s relationship with the world, it can be argued that it is easier for today’s younger religious, and will be easier for future generations of religious, to embrace distinctive dress.

Attire that signifies rupture with the world continues to make good sense for religious life. In fact, every Christian is called to manifest “rupture with the world” by virtue of their baptism. In baptism the Elect renounce the world in the sense of renouncing worldliness: sin, Satan, and the glamour of evil. This rupture, which demands that a Christian interact prudently in society, is neither a wholesale rejection of the world understood as humanity nor a rejection of the world understood as creation. Because religious life is meant to intensify one’s baptismal commitment, it seems a logical consequence that religious should don attire that gives robust expression to this rupture or break with worldliness that is part of the call of every Christian.

Another reason why rupture with the world is still valid for religious life is that religious break with the normal pattern of human and Christian life in a way that

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continues to be helpful and positive for all members of the Church. By vowing to order their lives according to the evangelical counsels in imitation of the chaste, poor, and obedient Christ, religious give up things that in themselves are good: marriage, material possessions, legitimate autonomy. This rupture or break with the normal mode of living in the world removes potential impediments to loving God and neighbor. John Paul II called the witness of this rupture or break from ordinary modes of living an “authentic contradiction.” John Paul argued persuasively that visibly manifesting this authentic contradiction aids a religious to bear witness to Christ’s redemption of the human race:

The world needs the authentic contradiction provided by religious consecration, as an unceasing stimulus of salvific renewal. . . . It is precisely this witness of love that the world today and all humanity need. They need this witness to the Redemption as this is imprinted upon the profession of the evangelical counsels. These counsels, each in its own way and all of them together in their intimate connection, "bear witness" to the Redemption which, by the power of Christ’s cross and resurrection, leads the world and humanity in the Holy Spirit towards that definitive fulfillment which man and - through man - the whole of creation find in God, and only in God. Your witness [as religious] is therefore of inestimable value. You must constantly strive to make it fully transparent and fully fruitful in the world. A further aid to this will be the faithful observance of the Church’s norms regarding also the outward manifestation of your consecration.2

Celibate chastity, the most vivid sign of a religious’ rupture with the world, continues to give an important witness to people of our time, to believers and non-

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believers alike. Celibacy reminds others of the primacy of God, that this world does not comprise the entire story of human existence, and that our ultimate destiny is that place of beatitude where people “neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Mt. 22:30). By silently communicating their celibacy, the habit helps religious witness to the eschaton.

A third factor that supports an upcoming renewal of the religious habit is the fact that throughout the history of the Church the magisterium has consistently aimed to restore the discipline of the habit during those times when it grew lax. Examples of magisterial directives aimed at restoring the discipline of the habit come from myriad sources: conciliar canons (Fourth Council of Constantinople: 869-70, Council of Constance: 1414-18, Council of Trent: 1545-63); papal statements (Boniface VIII: 1298, Paul VI: 1963-78, John Paul II: 1978-2005); the Code of Canon Law (both 1917 and 1983); and, most recently, the post-synodal exhortation Vita Consecrata (1996). Although post-Vatican II magisterial directives on the religious habit have been disregarded by many older religious, this is less so the case with younger religious.3 Despite the rocky reality of the religious habit in the present, the overall history of religious life suggests that the efforts of the Church’s pastors to promote the discipline of the habit will be validated.

A final factor pointing to the probability that the religious habit will return as a ubiquitous reality of religious life is that younger religious desire to give visible witness to their consecration. The NRVC/CARA report “Recent Vocations to Religious Life” that was treated in the introductory chapter gives evidence of this. Anecdotal evidence of the attraction of younger religious to the habit is found in articles occasionally published in the Catholic press and even in the secular press. It is plausible to suggest that the inter-related ideas of group identity, esprit de corps, and the desire to belong are important factors that drive the attraction of young religious for the religious habit. While the desires for identity and belonging are probably magnified by the fragmented state of the contemporary family, these desires are perennial human needs that the religious habit helps to fulfill.

This dissertation may encourage religious institutes to adapt their habit to the needs of time and place so that it is capable of communicating Gospel authenticity to the wider society and building up that same authenticity in its wearer. The historical

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4 See page 2.

evolution of the male habit over the course of eighteen centuries gives ample evidence that, while tradition has its proper place, the religious habit as something fixed and unchanging cannot be the final word. An authentic religious habit should reflect noble simplicity rather than ostentation and should help religious to live both poverty in spirit and poverty in fact. If it does not do these things, an institute’s habit should be modified.

The post-Vatican II reality of the religious habit, whereby many male religious spend much time in non-distinctive attire, is not a development in the tradition of religious life, but is from my perspective, rather, a rupture within that tradition. Post-conciliar development in continuity with the tradition of religious life would have been to update religious habits so that they were, in the words of Perfectae Caritatis (17), “simple and modest, poor and at the same time becoming.” I would argue that genuine development would not have foregone religiously-identifiable garb altogether or only use it sparingly, but would manifest the simplicity and common sense that prevailed at the origins of Western monastic life.

The historical tradition of religious life consistently attests to the importance that the religious habit bear witness to poverty. As previously noted, references to the habit as a witness to poverty come from a cross section of sources: early legislative texts (e.g., Rule of Augustine); writings from founders (e.g., Memorandum on the Habit by John
Baptist de La Salle); conciliar decrees (e.g., Council of Vienne); and papal statements (e.g., Evangelica Testificatio of Paul VI). Reaction against religious communities whose attire did not identify them with poverty of life is one factor that was occasionally significant in the development of new religious communities, as seen in the development of the Cistercians, Friars Minor, and Jesuits. In light of this history, the religious habit of any institute should reflect a simplicity that helps religious to exercise poverty both in spirit and in fact.

The long tradition of the tunic/cassock/robe/soutane as a garment of the male religious habit is pertinent to distinctiveness, modesty, and contemporary notions of virility. In regard to distinctiveness, recall that until the fourteenth century the tunic was a prominent feature of the attire of both male religious and lay men in Europe. Thus, while the religious habit in its entirety was distinctive, the tunic lent a degree of similarity to the dress of both male religious and lay men. This fact should give a contemporary institute a measure of confidence to discern if the primary garments of their contemporary habit should incorporate more form-fitting garments that reflect the norms of contemporary Western dress. While the various styles of the male religious habit became, over time, fixed and unchanging, the overall history of the religious habit of men shows that the garments of the habit need not be set in stone nor distinctive to the point of being ostentatious.
When form-fitting clothing became more the norm for lay men in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, religious voices appealed to modesty as the reason why the tunic should persist as the primary garment of the male religious habit. Because the loose-fitting tunic reveals less of the body’s shape, it attracts less attention to one’s physicality and tempers the human tendency to lust. Such reasoning contributed to the persistence of the tunic/cassock/robe/soutane as the main garment of the male religious habit. On the other hand, the contemporary clothing norm of having garments that highlight the natural shape of the body seems to affirm the Catholic belief in the fundamental goodness of the body as created in the image and likeness of God. Contemporary institutes ought to consider how to best fashion a habit that holds in balance the notion of modesty, which tempers the human tendency to lust, with affirmation of the body’s natural shape, which can be given, to a degree, in recognition of the body’s fundamental goodness.

The tunic/cassock/robe of the traditional male religious habit needs to be considered in connection to the issue of male virility. Contemporary Western males generally do not wear tunic-like garments, while Western females, through the dress and skirt, do approximate such a style. In Western culture it is seemingly okay for women to adopt a more masculine style of clothing, but it is frowned upon when men adopt more feminine styles. Thus, the male religious who wears a traditional style habit
can easily be accused of sexual identity confusion and lacking virility. This reality should be considered in discerning the best style for a religious habit. Religious institutes of men would be wise to ask themselves if the traditional style of habit, which incorporates a tunic/cassock/robe, communicates to the people of their culture what they want it to.

C. Future Research Projects

Hopefully this dissertation will encourage further scholarly reflection on the religious habit. Such scholarship could help religious life in the Western world move beyond the present confusing situation that has accrued in the decades since Vatican II. Radical change in the use of the habit since Vatican II as compared to the entire history of religious life is a call to religious institutes to deepen their understanding of the habit’s purpose and necessity. The fact that the habit causes tension both within religious institutes and between religious institutes is another reason why it is important for the academy to shed scholarly light on the value that religiously-identifiable attire contributes to living the religious life with authenticity.

There are a number of future research projects that would be valuable to pursue in light of what has been accomplished in this dissertation. One potential project would be to identify and treat scriptural pericopes that have influenced the clothing practices
of religious. Such scriptural passages would surely include the prophets Elijah and
Elisha, as well as Christ’s precursor, John the Baptist. The clothing practices of these
three figures inspired the simplicity of the early Christian monastics. Mt 23:2-7 is
another passage that would likely be included in such a research project. This pericope,
wherein Christ denounces the scribes and pharisees for hypocritical piety and
exhibitionism, has profound implications for the clothing practices of religious. It
should motivate religious institutes to adopt habits that are modest and humble rather
than bizarre and attention-grabbing.

The scribes and the pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses.
Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow
their example. For they preach but they do not practice. They tie up heavy
burdens [hard to carry] and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they will not lift
a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen. They widen
their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. They love places of honor at
banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the
salutation ‘rabbi.’

A key element of this potential research project would be to complete a thorough
exegesis on those scriptural passages that have traditionally been cited in connection
with the clothing practices of religious.

A second potential research project concerns those communities of “women
religious” who at their foundation did not wear a habit in the vein of the cloistered

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6 Mt 23:3-7, NABRE.
nuns of their time. Such groups include the Order of St. Ursula founded by Angela Merici, the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary founded by Mary Ward, the Visitation Sisters founded by Jeanne de Chantal and Francis de Sales, the Sisters of St. Joseph founded by Jean-Pierre Medaille, and the Daughters of Charity founded by Louise de Marillac and Vincent de Paul. Because the aforementioned groups are sometimes cited as evidence that religiously-identifiable dress is not constitutive to religious life, it would be helpful to uncover all the details surrounding the attire of these groups at their foundation. What details are fact and what details are fiction? Were these communities of sisters eventually forced by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, against their wishes, to adopt a habit they did not want? To what degree did the aforementioned groups at their foundation wear common attire in uniform fashion, such that group identity was promoted and visual witness was given to one’s consecration?

Elizabeth Kuhns made a contribution to this topic of inquiry in her book, *The Habit: A History of the Clothing of Catholic Nuns* (2003). The aforementioned groups of non-habited sisters are also briefly treated in an article published in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*. Nonetheless, there is much room for further research on the

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7 The early clothing of these groups is treated briefly at Elizabeth Kuhns, *The Habit: A History of the Clothing of Catholic Nuns* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 107-111.

particular question of groups of sisters who at their foundation did not wear a habit in the vein of the cloistered nuns of their time.

Another research project that would be valuable to pursue in light of what has been accomplished in this dissertation would be to conduct personal interviews and focus groups on the subject of the religious habit. The present conversation (or lack thereof) concerning distinctive attire in Western religious life would be aided by publishing sociological research concerning the perceived function of a religious habit in contemporary society and in the Church. It would be particularly interesting to learn if a greater percentage of present-day religious would be open to wearing a habit if such attire was more normative amongst religious themselves. Personal interviews and focus groups could also shed light on the similarities and differences between women religious and men religious in regard to the post-Vatican II experience of the habit.

The personal interviews and focus groups involved in such a research project would be most authoritative if they included non-believers as well as a cross-section of the faithful (hierarchy, laity, and consecrated). Sources that include elements of such sociological research already exist, but they are outdated or incomplete. For example, many opinions of lay people and women religious toward sisters’ attire are included in
a number of articles published decades ago in *Review for Religious*, and the general disposition toward the habit of the bishop delegates to the 1994 synod on consecrated life is found in one line of the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (1996). Sociological research in regard to the attire of religious is a potential area of inquiry that could be very helpful in advancing conversation about the habit.

**D. A Final Word**

Evidence presented in this dissertation would argue for the habit as being normative for male religious life. Alongside this conviction, I am concerned that the present status of the habit, whereby many religious have completely set it aside, may contribute to a pendulum swing in the other direction and future generations of religious will embrace habits that are anachronistic and bizarre. That would not be good. I hope this dissertation is an antidote to the two extremes of “no habit” and “bizarre habit.” I also hope this dissertation promotes serious and sustained reflection.

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10 In *Vita Consecrata* 25, John Paul II implies that the body of bishops present at the synod would prefer religious to wear a habit: “I join the Fathers of the Synod in strongly recommending to men and women religious that they wear their proper habit, suitably adapted to the conditions of time and place.”
on the significance of the habit as something that helps religious live consecrated life
with authenticity and also helps raise to God the minds and hearts of those who see
religious dressed in distinctive attire.
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