

# SCARF OR STOLE

## WHAT DOES IT MATTER?

Does it really matter what the clergy wear? - especially in these days of ecumenical experiment and debate? Since 1965 Canon Law has permitted varying kinds of vesture in the Church of England, so surely we do not need to make a fuss over these issues any more? At first glance that seems a reasonable argument, until you recall how much the things we do in worship affect the way we think about it. If such things were not important, why all the reordering of our churches, moving the communion table from the east end to the nave, and removing pews to form 'worship areas'? Similarly, what the clergyman wears affects people's understanding of the services and are 'teaching aids' of a sort. To wear one form of ministerial dress when the Word of God is read and preached, and a more elaborate form of dress for sacramental services, will say more to the onlooker than many clergy will wish to imply.

### UNITY OF MINISTRY

The Church of England has, ever since the Reformation, rightly stressed the unity of the ministry of Word and Sacrament. In the Ordinal annexed to the *Book of Common Prayer* the bishop's words

to the candidate he ordains to the priesthood (or presbyterate) are 'Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a Priest in the Church of God. And be thou a faithful dispenser of the Word of God, and of his holy Sacraments. ' He then delivers the Bible into the ordinand's hands saying, 'Take thou authority to preach the Word of God, and to minister the holy Sacraments. ' This twofold emphasis remains the thrust of the modern language ordinal of the *Alternative Service Book*.

The Reformers were well aware of the need to back up their words by the use of visual aids. So they emphasized the primacy of the ministry of the Word of God by requiring the bishops to give their ordinands a Bible only, and not the chalice and paten as well, which had been required in Cranmer's first ordinal of 1550. The second (1552) English Prayer book also reinforced this emphasis on the unity of the ministry by requiring that 'the minister at the time of the Communion and all other times in his ministration shall use neither albe, vestment, nor cope; but being archbishop or bishop, he shall have and wear a rochet; and being a preest or deacon, he shall have and wear a surplice onely'.

With the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559, which reintroduced the Second Prayer Book with only small amendments, the Elizabethan Advertisements of 1566 (sometimes dated to 1565) appear to reinstate this practice which would stress the unity of the ministry. This is certainly how it was understood generally in England for virtually 300 years.

## **INTRODUCTION OF STOLE**

It was only in the last century that the growth of the Tractarian Movement led to the reintroduction of the stole in the Church of England. In the life of Archbishop Tait it is recorded how, when he was Bishop of London, at the consecration of St Michael's Church in

Shoreditch, he requested a clergyman who was wearing a stole to take it off and added, 'I must ask the clergy of my diocese who are here today to wear the simple dress of the clergymen of the Church of England'.

In spite of such attempts to retain the Reformers' position, Anglo-catholics continued to press for the wearing of the stole along with other 'Mass' vestments in an attempt (especially after the Papal Bull of 1896 refused to recognize Anglican orders) to show that at the Communion they had the same 'intention' as Roman Priests.

Their persistency gradually led to the increased wearing of the stole by other clergy. Things came to a head in the 1950s when two leading Anglo-catholic bishops, Wand of London and Kirk of Oxford, refused to ordain candidates who would not wear a stole at ordination. Previously bishops had allowed a variety of vesture; many ordinands were ordained in the traditional scarf and hood, while a number of bishops at that time allowed those who so wished to wear the stole. Wand ordained his candidates at St Paul's Cathedral; those who refused the stole were given a private ordination by one of his suffragans in Fulham Palace Chapel. Kirk insisted that stole-less ordinands should be ordained by Letters Dimissory by another bishop, and Chavasse of Rochester usually obliged.

## **PROTEST**

It was at this time that some of the principals of the evangelical colleges protested on behalf of ordinands who were being subjected to this unwarranted pressure, and in response Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher wrote to all bishops and principals to instruct them that 'no candidate should be refused ordination on the grounds on his being unwilling to wear a stole'.

Fisher was conscious of the fact that the ritual prosecutions of the late nineteenth century had shown that such matters as the vesture of ministers were at least debatable, and so he pushed ahead with the revision of Canon Law. The intention of this was to authorise the variety of uses in the Church of England, without suggesting that any was preferable or more authentically Anglican, especially as the fifth paragraph of Canon 88, 'Of the Vesture of Ministers', states specifically that 'The Church of England does not attach any particular doctrinal significance to the diversities of vesture permitted by this Canon, and the vesture worn by the minister in accordance with the provisions of this Canon is not to be understood as implying any doctrines other than those now contained in the formularies of the Church of England'.

At the time that the revised Canons were being debated in the old Church Assembly, evangelicals, who were uneasy about the changes which would undermine their understanding of the legal position since the Elizabethan Settlement and the Canons of 1604, were reassured that the purpose of this revision was to recognize the variety of vesture in the Church of England not *not to impose uniformity*,

## **NEW TRADITION?**

Publication of the *Alternate Service Book* in 1980 included the revised ordinal, where it is stated that 'Where it is agreed that those to be ordained are to be clothed in their customary vesture, it is appropriate that this should take place at any time after the Declaration'. When this was first produced the agreement referred to was assumed by some to be between the candidate and his ordaining bishop; current practice suggests that it is more likely to be between the bishop and the dean or provost of his cathedral. As those appointed to such offices in the church today appear to be selected solely from among the clergy who are prepared to use

stoles, little consideration is given to the candidate who is not happy in conscience to be made part of this ceremony. Jasper and Bradshaw in their latest *Companion to the ASB* say (page 446) that 'A relic of the traditional vesting has returned in recent years, however. It is now customary for deacons to be vested after ordination with a stole over the left shoulder and tied under the right arm, and priests after ordination to be vested with a stole over both shoulders.'

There is consequently a tradition growing in our church that at ordination (in particular, but also at other 'diocesan' services in our cathedrals) clergy should conform to the norm and wear stoles, and ordinands agree to being vested in them.

Some bishops have even argued that if they allow evangelicals to wear scarf and hood, then Anglo-catholics should be permitted to wear the chasuble. This is strange reasoning, as the chasuble has never (until the revised Canons) been an accepted part of Anglican vesture, while the scarf and hood have been for three centuries and more the Anglican norm.

We are making these facts known at this time in a plea that bishops should be prepared to give more consideration to the sensitivities of their clergy, and especially of ordinands at a very important time in their lives, and allow flexibility in usage. The practice of the Church of England for 300 years prior to the advent of the Oxford Movement must not be laid aside as being of no consequence. In the Reformed Church of England clergy should be allowed to wear Reformed dress.

For further articles and other issues see

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