

## The Rhetorical Uses of Clothing in the Lives of Sacred Males

IN THE HEBREW BIBLE, GOD SENDS Ezekiel a vision about the dangers of consecrated, symbolic vestments. Yahweh instructs the prophet that “when they [the Hebrew priests] go out into the outer court to the people, they shall put off the garments in which they have been ministering, and lay them in the holy chambers; and they shall put on other garments, lest they communicate their holiness to the people with their garments” (Ezekiel 44.19).<sup>1</sup> The warning is conveyed that the clothing of the Hebrew priesthood, the sole reserve of the inner sanctum of the Temple and the altar, should not be visible in profane spaces. Hebrew sacred discourse contains meticulous descriptions of the ceremonial dress of male altar servants. The books of Exodus, 1 Kings, and Ezekiel include detailed regulations concerning the sanctification of material objects and the consecration of those who wear or carry them. Linen coats, turbans, caps, breeches, girdles, and the embroidered ephod comprise the most important material embodiments of the spiritual authority of the sanctified Hebrew priesthood. The intricate ephod, the jeweled breastplate, the urim and thummim (the sacred lots carried in the pouches of the breastplate), and the ceremonial headpiece signify the power of priestly intercession, Temple sanctification, and altar officiation (Exodus 28ff, 39.1ff; 1 Samuel 2.28; 2 Samuel 6.14; Ezekiel 21.26; Zechariah 3.5). Yahweh consecrates the Hebrew sacrificial table and all those who come in contact with it (Exodus 29.37), but divine power destroys those men who approach the hallowed space without wearing the proper ritual clothing (Exodus 28.43). The Temple precinct similarly requires the donning of appropriate sacred vestments and the cutting of the hair in a symbolic fashion (Ezekiel 44).

In contrast, the Christian scriptures offer very little information on the outward appearance of Jesus and his disciples. They wear the common attire of the Mediterranean—sandals, seamless shirts, and mantles (John

19.23; Acts 12.8). The simple clothing of the Son of God and his male votaries inverts the ritualized garments of the consecrated Hebrew priesthood. The charismatic power of these second-covenant holy men emanates from bodily and spiritual purity, not from altar status. The late antique Christian hierarchy, however, gradually transformed the simple, apostolic tunics of the gospels and Acts into a complex, ritualistic assortment of vestments that physically embodied the unique powers (*charismata*) of Christian altar servants and through which masculine sacred gender was constructed. Male garments increasingly represented the special status of hallowed men who dutifully served at the Christian sacrificial table. Whereas female metaphorical clothing personified repentance and submission, ritualistic male dress signified *charismata* and institutional authority.

### *Biblical Sacred Dress*

In the Hebrew Bible, the adornment of women’s bodies exemplifies the spiritual chasm between apostate humankind and the divine, while the elaborate ornamentation of the bodies of male priests represents divine consecration and power.<sup>2</sup> Late antique and early medieval ecclesiastical sources suggest that Christian writers appropriated Hebrew images of sacred space and objects. Jerome in his commentary on Ezekiel 44 advises the adoption of special, pure garments by those who hold the sacraments.<sup>3</sup> Early medieval church councils describe the Christian altar as the Holy of Holies.<sup>4</sup> Specific canons compare the Christian clerical tonsure with the unique hairstyle of Levite priests and claim that the lower clergy who carry enthroned bishops to mass are like the Levites who bore the Ark of the Covenant on their backs.<sup>5</sup> Hebrew discourse therefore contributed to the later Christian display of consecrated power through metaphorical clothing and hallowed objects.<sup>6</sup>

In Exodus (28.4), Yahweh instructs the Israelites to make for the male priests “a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a coat of checker work, a turban, and a girdle.” The Lord continues to specify the colors, fabrics, embroidery, engravings, jewels, and shape of each garment. The ephod and the breastplate both symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel. Aaron and his sons are to wear these symbolic garments when they “go into the holy place” and serve as priests (Exodus 28.5ff). The blue robe of the ephod was decorated with golden bells which safeguarded the priest from demons. The headpiece was engraved with the signet “Holy to the Lord” (Exodus 28.36). Yahweh warns that those priests who do not wear consecrated vest-

ments when they approach the altar shall “bring guilt upon themselves and die” (Exodus 28.43); hence, access to the sacred space surrounding the sacrificial table demanded highly ritualized costume:

The consecration of the bodies of Levite priests involves sacrificing animals, anointing the head with oil and garments with blood and oil (Exodus 29.7ff). Priests must perform ritual ablutions before they approach the holy altar (Exodus 29.4, 40.30–32). Yahweh also stipulates the size, decoration, and building materials of the Hebrew sacrificial table (Exodus 30.1ff). Sanctification of the altar is similar to the consecration of priestly vestments. Once sanctified through the ritual offerings, anything that touches the altar becomes holy (Exodus 29.37). Finally, Yahweh proclaims the uniqueness of priestly consecration: “This shall be my holy anointing oil throughout your generations. It shall not be poured upon the bodies of ordinary men” (Exodus 30.31–32). Anyone who attempts to emulate the sacred process of consecration and anoints an outsider “shall be cut off from his people” (Exodus 30.33).

Yahweh also consecrates the Temple built by King Solomon and reveals the heavenly dimensions of the second Temple to the prophet Ezekiel (1 Kings 9.3; Ezekiel 40.3ff). Divine revelation provides the prophet with detailed instructions for maintenance of the sacred space of the inner sanctum and the altar (Ezekiel 43.18). The book of Ezekiel (43ff) uses the mediums of sacred space, vestments, and hairstyles to identify individuals who are ritually pure or impure. After describing a series of ritual cleansings of the altar, God instructs Ezekiel that the uncircumcised and aliens will be excluded from the holy place. God commands the Israelites to separate themselves from the gentiles by trimming their hair in ritualistic fashion (Leviticus 19.27; Jeremiah 9.26; Ezekiel 44.20). Yahweh also stipulates the fabrics, garments, hairstyles, and sexual status of the priests who enter the sacred space of the altar. Special garments of linen are to be worn in the inner court, and wool is prohibited there.<sup>7</sup> When priests return to greet the laity in the outer court, they are to remove the sacred linen garments, which are only for use in the inner sanctum (Ezekiel 44.19). Hebrew scripture thus formulates the intricate process of sanctifying material objects and consecrating the men who wear or employ them. According to Exodus (29.21), the Hebrew priest and his garments “shall be holy.” Christianity accepts this legacy while rejecting the commandment that priestly consecration “shall not be poured upon the bodies of ordinary men” (Exodus 30.31–32).

In the Christian scriptures, rebellious second-covenant holy men don

the simple dress of Palestine. The clothing of the apostles is not sanctified through rituals—God consecrates material objects through the agency of the pristine bodies of Christ’s spiritual brotherhood: “And God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them” (Acts 19.11–12). Ceremonial costume does not reveal the spiritual prowess of the apostle Paul; rather, Paul’s modestly clad body itself is “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Romans 12.1), thereby radiating divine power. The humble garments of Jesus and the apostles comply with God’s commandment that consecrated men should not reveal their holiness to the laity through their sacred garb (Ezekiel 44.19). The self-presentation of Christ’s votaries is that of humble travelers, as Jesus commands in Matthew (10.9), “take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff.” The charismatic beggars of the Savior are to be “like men sentenced to death . . . ill-clad, and buffeted and homeless” (1 Corinthians 4.8, 11). Christ’s itinerant preachers are the moving icons of a new spiritual order. The gospels present them as seeking to invert the priestly hierarchy which (under the old dispensation) displayed itself to the world in an elaborate dress peculiar to its mission. Apostolic clothing is part of the larger rhetorical strategy of inversion; homeless beggars who had been social outcasts are transformed into chosen vehicles of divine power.<sup>8</sup> Nowhere in Christian scripture is there a portrait of ritualized apparel akin to the lavish description of the costume of Hebrew priests. The most specific depiction of evangelical garments is that of John the Baptist, who wears Elijah’s camel-hair mantle and leather girdle (Mark 1.6). John’s prophetic dress validates Christianity’s descent from the charismatic heroes of Hebrew scripture, for the Baptist is the “New Elijah” of the second covenant. Detailed physical descriptions of Jesus of Nazareth, however, are strikingly absent from the gospels.<sup>9</sup> Jesus is portrayed in terms of what he is to become, not in his mundane reality: “And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light” (Matthew 17.1–8; Mark 9.2–9; Luke 9.28–36). This sublime portrait, however, reveals only the eschatological physiognomy of the Son of God. Jesus’ earthly ignominious dress is yet another indication both of the insignificance of this world and the looming eschaton which will eradicate human-made structures.

A handful of textual clues concerning the earthly image of Jesus and the apostles are, however, given. Jesus’ outward demeanor is that of a

simple traveler who does not stand out in a crowd (Luke 24.13–31). He wears a seamless shirt and modest vestments (John 19.23). During the trial, Herod clothes Jesus in “gorgeous apparel” as a mocking gesture to the Son of God who wears the humble dress of the common people (Luke 23.11). Likewise, the Roman soldiers reclothe Christ in a purple cloak and crown him with thorns to ridicule his insignificant stature and presumed ambition (Mark 15.17). Like Jesus, the apostles dress in the everyday mantles and sandals of the Mediterranean (Acts 12.8).

The predominant fabric of the gospels is linen, which symbolizes Christ’s resurrection: “Then Simon Peter . . . went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself” (John 20.6–7). Christ abandoned the linen wrappings as evidence of his resurrection, and, like Elijah, he cast off his earthly raiment before entering paradise. In Hebrew scripture, linen is the consecrated fabric of the Temple; in the gospels, it represents bodily purity, righteousness, and resurrection: “The armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure” (Revelation 19.14). Unstained linen is, according to Christian scripture, ocular proof of sanctity: “Fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints” (Revelation 19.8). Linen is thus the unceremonial fabric of those who have transformed their bodies themselves into “living sacrifices.”

The elaborate ornamentation of male bodies in Exodus and Ezekiel evokes the separate and unique status of those who stand by the sacrificial table at the Temple. The common dress of Jesus’ disciples, however, inverts the decorative garb of the Levites. Jesus’ followers appear as ordinary members of the human communities they serve. Their uniqueness stems not from ritual garments but from unblemished spirituality. In later generations, this recasting of the appropriate clothing for holy men would become the basis for a male theology of the cosmetic that helped validate Christianity within the late Roman world.

#### *The Male Theology of the Cosmetic*

Jerome used his “re clothed” aristocratic friend, Pammachius, as the herald of the infiltration of charismatic power within the somber precinct of the Senate. Pammachius dresses in the toga (*toga pulla*) of the mourning or ignoble to signify his connection with the otherworldly authority of apostolic men, and he violates the inner sanctum of Roman power by wearing inappropriate dress. Jerome contrasts the symbolic garment of the empire,

the toga, with the austere, sordid garb of Christian ascetics in order to dismantle the varied political functions of the secular garment. The imperial Roman toga was a ceremonial dress that designated the status of the public person. Only Roman citizens could wear the toga, which gave Roman political ideals of *dignitas*, *gravitas*, and *respublica* visible expression. The woolen toga was used as a swaddling cloth, a blanket, and a shroud. The *toga pulla* (the dark-wool toga) was a mourning garment. Young, free-born boys wore a toga with a red border and a special amulet, the *bullae*, which signified that these youths were “off-limits for sex.”<sup>10</sup> Adolescent boys donned the *toga virilis* as a sign of their manhood. Men and female prostitutes wore the short toga. Proper women and elderly men used the long toga. Those who were generally regarded as “effeminate” wore the *toga vitrea*, or the “transparent toga,” which resembled the diaphanous short togas of female prostitutes. Candidates for political office put on the *toga candida* (the white toga). Senators wore a special imperial toga with a purple border in the Senate.<sup>11</sup> Roman law regulated the public dress of senators, and any senator who disobeyed the clothing ordinances was expelled from his office.<sup>12</sup> Clothing had to display the social, political, and economic status of the wearer because improper dress could potentially pollute Rome.

Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* discusses the public and political charisma of the “*viri boni et gravis auctoritatem*.”<sup>13</sup> The political toga, according to the first-century rhetorician, is part of the rhetorical performance of powerful Roman males, who therefore need instruction on the proper display of stately dress.<sup>14</sup> A well-trained politician throws the togas over his shoulder and gestures with his left hand as he paces back and forth speaking.<sup>15</sup> Quintilian specifies the amount of jewelry to be worn by dignified politicians, the manner in which they should hold their hands, and the proper length of the toga for various elements of Roman society: long togas for women, medium-length for senators, and shorter ones for centurions. Those men who improperly veil their bodies in public could potentially be accused of effeminacy or madness.<sup>16</sup> Proper use of the toga in Roman political life therefore proclaims both the somber *dignitas* of public men and the honor of service for the Roman *respublica*.

The enormous significance that the Romans attributed to the symbolism of clothing helps explain Tertullian’s attraction to the subject of Christian male dress. Although most church fathers were preoccupied with prescribing the appropriate dress of holy women, Tertullian, the great theologian of the Christian cosmetic, launched a polemic that proclaimed

the spiritual benefits of the Christian mantle over the toga of politics. Tertullian's *De Pallio*, written in the early third century, is a flamboyant piece that mocks the political and rhetorical uses of the Roman toga as established by Quintilian.<sup>17</sup> The Christian *pallium* (Greek *himation*) was derived from the rectangular long tunics and cloaks that had been the simple dress of nonpolitical persons.<sup>18</sup> The fourth-century council of Gangra acknowledged that philosophers had worn *pallia* to display their contempt for the world, and early church writers recognized this modest garment as the evangelical dress of Christ and the apostles.<sup>19</sup> Tertullian declares that the Roman toga, which is complicated to interpret and burdensome to wear, has been superseded by the humble dress of Christian holy men. He ridicules Quintilian's meticulous instructions concerning the proper vestment of the political body: the throwing of the toga over the appropriate shoulder, the constant rearranging of its many folds, the girding of the body underneath, and the lengthy time spent in donning the voluminous garment.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, the ascetic's *pallium* is simply thrown over the body. Tertullian asserts that the *pallium* had become the *signum* of Christianity, the "new philosophy" of the world.

Both Tertullian's *De Pallio* and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* employ the Stoic belief that the self-presentation of potent men should parallel their interior virtue. The Stoics were divided over what form that self-presentation should take.<sup>21</sup> On the one hand, certain Stoic philosophers, such as Musonius Rufus and Epictetus, argued that a man must not tamper with his natural appearance by adopting varied styles of dress and hair, but should allow his hair and beard to grow long in accordance with nature. On the other hand, Seneca reasoned that the cultivation of an undomesticated appearance may be only a ruse for getting attention.<sup>22</sup> Men should comply with conventional rules concerning dress and hairstyles, but that they should not go too far in following tonsorial customs. Seneca thus denounced those Roman patricians who plucked the hair off of their legs, arms, and groins, because depilation of bodily hair was the fashion of effeminate and male prostitutes. Urging moderation for the Roman public man, Seneca warned that excessive tonsorial concern would place a senator beyond the political pale, while an unkempt, feral appearance would hinder the public duty of the Stoic philosopher because it would alienate his intended audience.

Both the Stoic philosophy and Christian male theology of the cosmic connect self-presentation with political and charismatic power. Tertullian's *De Pallio* follows the Stoic thought of Musonius and Epictetus in

that his treatise champions unaffected masculinity over the elaborate dress code of Roman politicians. Early Christian ascetics donned humble, apostolic dress and allowed their hair and beards to grow long as outward *signa* of their contempt for the world and its hierarchies. In the Christian cosmic, an uncivilized appearance conveyed miraculous power and spiritual authority.

#### *The Sanctification of Material Objects and Altar Vestments*

The late antique church veered from the simplicity of this early Christian ideal and gradually embellished the bodies of male priests in order to display the unique relationship between altar servants and the divine. Between the third and seventh centuries, conciliar and papal legislation indicate that the ecclesiastical hierarchy created its own form of institutional dress. The late antique and early medieval episcopacy increased the frequency of legislative church councils in both the East and the West to address a host of issues, including sexuality and sacred clothing. The legislation of these various councils is difficult to interpret because it was piecemeal, localized, and inconsistently applied.<sup>23</sup> It is possible, however, to discern a consistent episcopal ambition to create a sacred space around the altar. In Exodus and Leviticus, Yahweh endowed the Hebrew sacrificial table with the power to sanctify humans and objects; Christians modeled their conception of their altar on the hallowed workings of its Hebrew forerunner described in Exodus and Leviticus.

Christian bishops transformed the altar from a wooden eucharistic table into a stone sacrificial table embellished with gold, silks, and saints' relics and covered by a lavish ciborium.<sup>24</sup> In Gaul, church councils required that the altar be anointed with chrism and blessed, that it be made of stone, that relics be placed in it, and that the *corpus Domini* be positioned correctly on it.<sup>25</sup> Bishops condemned altars that had been used by heretics or consecrated by excommunicated priests.<sup>26</sup> Canons regulated the lower clergy's access to space around the altar and the altar vessels.<sup>27</sup> As early as the sixth century, altar railings separated the laity from the consecrated clergy during the celebration of vigils and mass.<sup>28</sup>

Late antique theorists of sacred space equated linen altarcloths (*pallia*) with Christ's shroud because, like the shroud, the *pallia* covered the Christ crucified, who was personified by the sacrificial table.<sup>29</sup> By the end of the early medieval period, the altar was linked with the physical body and blood of Christ while the *pallia* represented Christ's mystical body or

the Church. The *Liber Pontificalis* records the increasing ornamentation of the “gold and silver-wrought” *pallia*.<sup>30</sup> Because altar *pallia* served the function of covering the body of Christ crucified, bishops outlawed the practice of wrapping ordinary corpses in them.<sup>31</sup> The Christian altar, like its ancient Hebrew prototype, sanctified all objects that came into contact with it.

Bishops reserved for themselves the special privilege of consecrating objects connected with the celebration of the eucharist. During the early Middle Ages, service chalices (*calices ministeriales*), censers, patens, and the pyx evolved as distinctive liturgical instruments. Bishops used a special oil (*oleum exorcidiatum*) to exorcise demoniacs and special water basins (*aqualmanile*) to wash their hands after they anointed babies at baptism.<sup>32</sup> They distributed consecrated pieces of bread (*fermenta*) throughout their districts in order to unify the churches under their control. Bishops decreed that no consecrated vessels were to be used for profane purposes and that non-consecrated ministers were forbidden to touch the hallowed objects.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, bishops banned the use of church furnishings for wedding celebrations.<sup>34</sup>

Liturgical furniture also served to separate altar servants from ordinary Christians. Late antique Mediterranean bishops sat on special chairs covered with linen, for linen’s lily-white purity symbolized righteous deeds (Revelation 19.8) and was used in memory of Christ’s burial and resurrection.<sup>35</sup> Gallo-Roman bishops sat on thrones (*cathedrae*) in accordance with the legend that Saint Peter had occupied a Roman *cathedra*.<sup>36</sup> The *Liber Pontificalis* claims that the first-century pope Clement inherited his *cathedra* directly from Jesus through the apostle Peter.<sup>37</sup> The elevated reading desk (*ambo*) magnified the power of the episcopacy, while the highly ornate interiors of cathedrals in Gaul contributed to the solemn ritual performance of the mass.<sup>38</sup> They were hallowed spaces, designed to augment and emphasize the eucharistic powers of the priesthood, evoking images of paradise with their dazzling lights, gorgeous hangings, and resplendent decorations.<sup>39</sup>

The most significant use of material culture to define unique spiritual status was the creation of a specific kind of sacred dress and hairstyle for those who celebrated the eucharist and moved within the sacred spaces of Christian churches. Certain items of ceremonial clothing and objects recalled particular events from the *vita Christi*. The deacon’s *pallium* (*pallium linostinum*) was worn over the left arm as a reminder of the towel with which Jesus had washed his disciples’ feet.<sup>40</sup> Sixth-century Easter vest-

ments were decorated with linen bands in memory of Christ’s burial and resurrection.<sup>41</sup> The late antique papacy gradually began to regulate the garments that were to be used only in liturgical rites. Pope Stephen I (254–257) mandated that priests and deacons should not use their consecrated clothing for ordinary work outside of the church.<sup>42</sup> Pope Eutychian (274–282) required special dress for burials.<sup>43</sup> Pope Silvester (314–335) distinguished between the clothing worn by deacons in the church and that worn by priests and bishops.<sup>44</sup> The Council of Agde (506) compelled priests to wear vestments, shoes, and even hairstyles that would distinguish them as pristine altar servants.<sup>45</sup> Such distinctions had become so elaborate by the fourth and fifth centuries that differences between the consecrated and non-consecrated were vividly conveyed by ecclesiastical vestments.

Symbolic dress became the primary way to distinguish rank, and ceremonial vestments themselves developed into the material reflection of the ecclesiastical “ladder of ascent” (*cursus honorum*). Pope Silvester established a complicated hierarchy based on eucharistic status (reader, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, guardian of the martyrs, deacon, priest, and bishop) that is reminiscent of the Roman *cursus honorum*. Subsequent church councils clarified the age and education level required for each clerical office.<sup>46</sup> During the third and fourth centuries, bishops isolated themselves from the proliferation of minor church officials by claiming apostolic and prophetic descent as well as by creating a distinctive material culture that included dress, furniture, and *signa* of office.<sup>47</sup> Church councils began to dictate the presentation of rank through symbolic vestments.<sup>48</sup>

The fourth-century Council of Laodicea allowed only the major orders to wear the forerunner to the stole, the *orarium*, although there was a difference between the deacon’s *orarium* and the *oraria* of priests and bishops.<sup>49</sup> The *orarium* of the high clergy was a scarf-like object worn around the neck as an ornament of rank. The deacon’s *orarium*, however, was transformed into a linen towel worn over the right shoulder as indicative of the diaconate’s service function.<sup>50</sup> Church councils stipulated that no official below the rank of deacon could put on the *orarium*. In sixth-century Gaul, a council forbade monks to wear *oraria*.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the increasing distinction between monastic and hierarchical dress parallels the subordination of the cloister to episcopal power.<sup>52</sup> Sixth-century bishops announced they would imprison priests who ignored the conciliar decrees and continued to wear secular clothing and carry weapons.<sup>53</sup> Ecclesiastical vestments became, like the Roman toga, the outward representation of the rank and piety of public men.

The *pallium* or *himation*, which developed into the paramount ceremonial vestment, eventually became the mark of an archbishop in the early Middle Ages.<sup>54</sup> Its adoption by the church hierarchy was reinforced by late antique depictions of Christ, the apostles, and even Moses in the *pallium*. A popular cloak worn throughout the Roman Empire, particularly by philosophers and intellectuals, the *pallium* served as a material representation of the motif of inversion embodied in evangelical discourse. This common cloak of the Mediterranean personified both the universal nature of the church and its specific origins among the charismatic poor of Judea. Gradually another type of cloak, the heavy woolen *paenula*, replaced the *pallium* as an ecclesiastical mantle, which was reduced to a circular scarf decorated with six violet crosses.<sup>55</sup> In this form, the Roman *pallium* lost all connection with its original function as a cloak and became instead a church vestment that represented episcopal authority. By the sixth century, the *pallium* had become a sacred garment, the threads of which were regarded as capable of working miracles.<sup>56</sup> The Council of Mâcon (585) decreed that archbishops must wear the *pallium* while they recite the mass.<sup>57</sup> Eventually, all archbishops were required to petition the papacy for the privilege of wearing the *pallium*, which had become the symbolic dress of metropolitan bishops.

Christianity inherited the practice of ritualistic hairstyle from the ancient Hebrews, who had used hair to indicate ritual purity and separation from neighboring religions by developing styles specific to the Hebrew *gens* and to sacred functions of priesthood. Long hair was forbidden in the Temple for trimmed hair signified repentance (Ezekiel 44.20). Consecrated Hebrew priests were not allowed to let their hair hang loose (Leviticus 21.10), and Temple ordinances prohibited men from shaving their heads.

For late antique Christians, the ultimate distinction between the ordained and the ordinary was the tonsure and, by the sixth century, it had become the *signum* of the angelic life for men in the West.<sup>58</sup> The tonsure first appeared in Rome in the sixth century, sanctioned by Paul's advice on short male hairstyles as well as by popular legends that Peter had been shorn by Christ or had demanded to be tonsured as a sign of his humility.<sup>59</sup> By the seventh century, the tonsure was such an important symbol of religious status that the Celtic and Roman churches fought over its exact conformation.<sup>60</sup> In the early-eighth-century life of the Anglo-Saxon bishop Wilfrid of York, a Gallic archbishop cuts the Anglo-Saxon's hair in the form of a tonsure to commemorate "the crown of thorns which encircled the

head of Christ."<sup>61</sup> Throughout the Middle Ages, the tonsure remained the most striking emblem of masculine religious status, required of any man upon entering the highest ecclesiastical offices.

Early medieval artisans designed special liturgical combs to be used only by altar servants. After a priest or bishop donned his vestments, he combed his hair with the ritual instrument, thereby symbolically reordering the divine cosmos before the act of consecrating the eucharist.<sup>62</sup> At Durham, the seventh-century Anglo-Saxon ascetic and bishop Cuthbert was buried with a pair of scissors and a comb to commemorate his "eternal tonsure."<sup>63</sup> Hallowed hairstyles, ritualized dress, and liturgical objects therefore served to elevate altar servants from the multitude of ordinary believers and even from unordained holy men.

The outward manifestation of the authority of priests and bishops sheds light on the subtle differences between eastern and western attitudes concerning institutional and extra-institutional power. In the early medieval West, members of the male hierarchy segregated themselves from the laity through symbolic dress and hair. Ritualistic clothing and hair served the western episcopal hierarchy as the outward symbols of apostolic descent and institutional authority against the charismatic power and unregulated dress of individual holy men. In the East, however, the individual charisma of the ascetic remained the model for power and local patronage.<sup>64</sup>

The symbolic meaning of clothing provides an excellent guide for measuring the tension between East and West concerning the role of asceticism and authority. When the iconoclastic Emperor Constantine V (741–775) aspired to usurp the power of the eastern church, he attacked the authority of ascetics who remained outside its institutional hierarchy by stripping them of their unique dress, the monastic *schema*, and by forcing them to put on wedding clothes as a symbol of their reintegration into the world.<sup>65</sup> Constantine denounced the *schema* because this rough tunic, rather than episcopal office, had imbued the eastern holy man with spiritual authority.<sup>66</sup> In Italy, however, Byzantines assailed the western church by stripping the *pallium* from the Roman pontiff Silverius (536) and reclothing him in a monastic habit.<sup>67</sup> This nicely captures the contrasting perspectives toward clothing and authority in Constantinople and Rome: in the East, removal of the monastic *schema* meant the eradication of extra-institutional power whereas in the West donning the monastic habit emasculated the wearer and annihilated his political power.<sup>68</sup>

The western episcopacy successfully absorbed the charismatic dress and persona of the Hebrew prophet and desert ascetic while carefully de-

lineating the hierarchical relationship between ascetic and bishop. As administrative officials, bishops expressed the *vita activa* through charitable acts, missionary work, estate management, and public construction projects.<sup>69</sup> Simultaneously, their claim to apostolic descent recast them as the heirs of Hebrew prophets and priests, thereby merging their administrative responsibilities with the spiritual prowess of powerful holy men, such as Elijah and Elisha, who had remained outside the traditional Hebrew priesthood. This sacred lineage led to the theological tenet that the Christian bishop had become an earthly conduit to God and a chosen receptacle for the Holy Spirit. Bishops possessed the spiritual gifts of the apostles, such as the ability to discern spirits and to prophesy; they counted the angels among their friends and benefactors; and, by the sixth century, they held the more radical charisms of healing, exorcism, resurrection, and *glossolalia* (1 Corinthians 12).

#### *The Masculinization of Sacred Space*

A crucial consequence of this unique melding of bureaucratic and charismatic power was the gradual but decisive marginalization of laymen and all women from sacred space.<sup>70</sup> Late antique and early medieval bishops curtailed women's access to ecclesiastical offices, male altar servants, liturgical objects, and the altar itself. Laymen and women were required to wash their hands before they entered the sacred space of the church, and women had to wrap their hands in linen cloth before they received the eucharist.<sup>71</sup>

A campaign for clerical celibacy in the early medieval West was part of this program. Episcopal councils sought to remove females from proximity to the daily lives of hierarchical men whose virginal status reflected the *imago Dei*. Conciliar legislation repeatedly argued that no woman could share a household with a male member of the major orders. Bishops' wives, or *episcopae*, were the primary targets of sixth-century legislation.<sup>72</sup> They were required to be celibate themselves, they were expelled from the episcopal hierarchy, and they were not allowed to remarry.<sup>73</sup> The language used to describe this refashioned relationship between cleric and wife was that of "brother and sister."<sup>74</sup> Any transgression of the spiritual kinship between *episcopus* and *episcopa* was defined as incestuous. The Council of Tours (567) ousted all women from the households of men, acknowledging that it was better for clerics to make their own vestments than to allow female "serpents" into their homes.<sup>75</sup> Eventually this strict separation of non-kinwomen from the major orders filtered down into the minor ones. The uncompromising legislation of the Council of Mâcon (585) required

the wives of members of both the major orders (deacons, priests, and bishops) and the minor orders (subdeacons, acolytes, lecturers, and exorcists) not to remarry after the death of their husbands. If these widows did marry again, they were handed over to a woman's monastery for life.<sup>76</sup> Thus what began as an attempt to regulate the number of times clerics could see their wives or how many witnesses were required when they spoke to one another ended in a total exclusion of non-blood kin from the living quarters of clerics. Women had to be kept away from clerics because the female sex possessed the power to corrupt sacrificial priests and to defile the body and blood of Christ.<sup>77</sup>

Women who had been admitted to the sacred ministry also became the objects of similar papal and conciliar prohibitions.<sup>78</sup> Pope Gelasius declared that women who presume to minister at the altar usurp the rightful offices of men.<sup>79</sup> Merovingian councils abolished the female diaconate, thereby ignoring scriptural precedent and Paul's praise of his own women friends who were deacons. The episcopacy also revoked the pastoral order of widows.<sup>80</sup> The Gallo-Roman episcopacy stressed that women's delicate nature rendered them unsuitable for even the lowest ranks of the major orders.<sup>81</sup> The repeated attempts to eradicate women's participation in pastoral works reflects the masculinization of the ecclesiastical *cursus honorum* and of the space around the sacrificial table.<sup>82</sup>

Several councils resolved to remove women from the hallowed space of the altar. The fourth-century Council of Laodicea ordered women not to approach the altar.<sup>83</sup> The Council of Tours (567) clearly separated the area around the eucharist from the rest of the church, and stipulated that laymen and women could not approach the area between the *cancelli* and the altar.<sup>84</sup> The protracted Council of Auxerre (561–605) regulated the liturgical behavior of the clergy and restricted women's access to sanctified objects. The most famous canons prohibited women from receiving the eucharist in their bare hands and from touching the altar cloth (*palla Dominicana*).<sup>85</sup> This policy reinforced a fifth-century papal prohibition on women and nuns touching and washing the *pallium* or placing incense within the sacred space of the church.<sup>86</sup> Sacred sex segregation influenced the architecture of medieval nunneries, which housed a specialized liturgical space for male priests, the sacristy.<sup>87</sup> The sanctification of the Christian altar, like its ancient Hebrew prototype, depended on the exclusion of the non-consecrated from the sacred boundaries of the sacrificial table. In addition to the architectural separation of the sexes, there were also gender-based liturgical divisions. Early Christian sources reveal that there existed male and female rites of baptism and exorcism. Ancient baptismal rites for

girls emphasize certain biblical texts, such as the gospel account of Mary Magdalene in the garden with the resurrected Christ.<sup>88</sup> The Gelasian Sacramentary contains sex-specific blessings for women and men who enter the monastic life and sex-specific prayers of exorcism.<sup>89</sup> There may have been special sections of churches consecrated for women, such as the *matroneum*.<sup>90</sup> Architectural historians and archaeologists have theorized that the Byzantine basilica Hagia Sophia reserved the second-floor gallery for women, leaving the ground floor for the men.<sup>91</sup>

Hagiographical sources also stress the ritualistic separation of the sexes. The sanctified soil surrounding the pillars of stylite saints functioned similarly to the consecrated space of a church altar. Inasmuch as Symeon Stylites displays his body as that of Christ crucified, his pillar symbolically serves as a kind of sacrificial table. Divine justice, therefore, strikes down women who approach Symeon's figurative pillar-altar.<sup>92</sup> Other male saints praise women who avoid meeting them in person.<sup>93</sup> Saint Augustine, according to his hagiographer, forbade women, including his sister, who was prioress of a convent, from entering his episcopal *domus*.<sup>94</sup> God miraculously unites the tombs of bishops and their wives whose marriages had remained chaste as a *signum* of their numinous spirituality. Celestial power, however, destroys the wives of bishops and priests who violate conciliar legislation by attempting to seduce their husbands or by penetrating the virginal, masculine space of the episcopal *domus*. Hagiographers manifest the virginal purity of male saints by asserting that demons attack depraved women who audaciously attempt to spend the night in their holy shrines. God miraculously establishes the innocence of bishops who are accused falsely of transgressing their vows of chastity and indicted for fathering children. Gregory of Tours in his *Glory of the Confessors* acknowledges that the wife of one priest broke church law by entering her husband's bed-chamber to defile him. When she crossed the threshold of his holy cell, however, she saw a shimmering *agnus Dei* on his chest, a vision that convinced her to submit to episcopal legislation.<sup>95</sup> Such sacred fictions furthered conciliar legislation and accentuated the increasing estrangement of the consecrated *servi Dei* from ordinary men and all women.

*The Rhetorical Uses of Clothing in the Lives of Martin of Tours and Germanus of Auxerre*

As the Christian hierarchy refashioned itself in the *imago Dei* and underscored its distinction from mundane society through symbolic clothing, ritualistic hairstyles, material objects, and sacred space, Gallo-Roman sa-

cred biographies of bishops increasingly stressed the charismatic and anti-institutional origins of the episcopacy. The empowerment of late antique holy men parallels the sanctification of institutional clothing. Two saints' lives, the *vitae* of Martin of Tours and Germanus of Auxerre, demonstrate how clothing was used in popular texts to exemplify the separation of the new Christian administration from its pagan roots as well as the appropriation of ascetic authority by the western episcopacy without the sacrifice of active political power.

The most treasured religious story in medieval France was that of Martin of Tours at the gate of Amiens clothing a beggar by dividing his soldier's cloak (Greek *chlamys*, Latin *paludamentum*), only to discover later that he had bestowed his garment on Christ himself.<sup>96</sup> This tale was recorded in countless works of medieval and modern art, including altar pieces, embroideries, and reliquaries. Martin's *chlamys* is no ordinary cloak, for it was worn by the most important Roman secular officials, emperors, and military officers, and never by Christian officials.<sup>97</sup> The *chlamys* is the same kind of garment that Roman soldiers had dressed Jesus in before the crucifixion (Matthew 27.28).<sup>98</sup> Thus the soldier Martin's re-clothing of Christ in the *chlamys* reverses the earlier cruelty of the Romans. Indeed, when Martin returned to camp, his fellow soldiers derided his mutilated garment, as centuries before their pagan counterparts had ridiculed Jesus in his mock *chlamys*.

In his sacred fiction Martin mangles his military dress as a *signum* of his future vocation. As Christ's "re-clothed soldier," he renounces physical weapons in favor of supernatural ones, such as the sign of the cross, sack-cloth, and ashes. As a bishop with wild hair and a sordid hairy tunic, Martin's physiognomy, miracles, and masculinity recall the prophets, apostles, and desert hermits. His physical presence is so awe-inspiring that, as he travels the roads of Gaul with his "shaggy tunic and black coat . . . swaying to and fro," his charismatic appearance frightens important officials.<sup>99</sup> Local communities in Gaul identify Martin as an apostle because of his "poverty-stricken clothing."<sup>100</sup> Sulpicius Severus, the saint's hagiographer, describes Martin in such allegorical terms so that his audience would naturally regard the saint as belonging to the same lineage as Elijah, John the Baptist, and the great desert fathers.<sup>101</sup>

The holy Martin's popular image as a prophet and bishop, promulgated through literary and artistic replicas, marks a transitional period in the history of Christian dress and institutional power. It is highly significant that, even though Martin possesses all the charismatic qualities of a great ascetic, he is nevertheless safely and firmly ensconced within the epis-



copal hierarchy. Sulpicius's *vita* uses clothing to emphasize Martin's break with the secular past through his rejection of official Roman dress, while at the same time the hagiographer portrays Martin as taking on Roman-like public responsibilities as a vigorous pastor, a charitable nurturer, and a local governor. Moreover, by the sixth century Martin's image as a hierarchical servant overshadowed his apostolic charisma; he is described as wearing the garments of a bishop rather than the fetid mantle of an ascetic.<sup>102</sup>

The other important *vita* from late antique Gaul, that of Germanus of Auxerre, portrays the charismatic bishop as heir to apostolic and Hebrew power through the metaphorical use of changed dress. Germanus, like Martin of Tours, renounces his commitment to secular life by transforming his official Roman dress. Germanus's monastic hagiographer, Constantius of Lyons, uses elements of material culture to describe the conversion of this Gallo-Roman lawyer. Like many of the aristocratic male saints of the fifth and sixth centuries, Germanus joined the ecclesiastical hierarchy after having served as governor (*dux*) of a Gallic province. To accentuate Germanus's conversion from a worldly leader to a Christian one, Constantius provides evocative details concerning his dress, furniture, and eating habits. Bishop Germanus wears a hair shirt under his tattered tunic and hooded cloak (*cucullus*), and he sleeps on an "Egyptian" bed made of pieces of sacking spread over rough wooden planks cemented with ashes. He uses his general's cape (*sagulum*) as a blanket.<sup>103</sup> He never removes his clothes, not even his girdle and shoes, and he always wears a reliquary around his neck. His diet of barley bread made from ashes is more rigorous than that of an ordinary monk.<sup>104</sup> As in the *Vita Martini*, the perversion of official civil dress is a *signum* of ascetic vocation and abrogates the secular past. And, like Martin, the wretchedly dressed Germanus remains a public man who serves as a Christian official, travels as an ecclesiastical diplomat, and establishes official ties with ruling elites in Italy, Gaul, and Britain.

Most hagiographical *vitae* of late antique and early medieval bishops emphasize regenerated power through outward appearance. In his *De Pallio*, Tertullian championed the feral appearance of Christian ascetics over the clothed *dignitas* of Roman politicians. In hagiographical texts, God grants exceptional holy men the right to wear only the "bristles of the body" in imitation of prelapsarian nudity.<sup>105</sup> In Gregory the Great's life of Benedict of Nursia, the papal hagiographer substantiates the cenobite's prophetic charisma by describing Benedict's tenure as an anchorite at Subiaco. According to Gregory, when shepherds discovered the holy man in his cave dressed in skins, they identified him as a wild animal.<sup>106</sup> The didac-

tic message of the passage is clear: before becoming the abbot of a monastery, Benedict had existed on the farthest periphery of society, as had his prototype, Elijah. Gallo-Roman hagiographers claim that Martin's monks at Marmoutier wear Elijah's camel-hair mantles, and they describe future bishops as Hebrew prophets.<sup>107</sup> The physiognomy of celebrants of the holy eucharist mirrors the shining face of the transfigured Christ; ordinary mortals glimpse the Holy Spirit upon the faces of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. When these custodians of Christ's body preach, laymen and women see angels speaking into their ears.<sup>108</sup> Balls of fire ascend from the heads of altar servants, and future holy men are born with tonsures.<sup>109</sup> Early medieval saints' *vitae* both vividly and subtly unite the charisma of uncivilized holy men with western episcopal authority.

Hagiographical discourse also conveys the lesson that local communities should respect the ceremonial dress of consecrated men. Divine power punishes the spiritually depraved who abuse the garments of the episcopacy. Gregory of Tours's *vita* of Bishop Nicetius of Lyons, which contains an unusually detailed description of the ceremonial dress of Merovingian bishops, gives an example of such punishments. After Nicetius's death, an episcopal rival distributed the dead bishop's garments, just as Roman soldiers had divided Christ's clothing. The bishop gave Nicetius's cape (*cappa*), which possessed supernatural power, to a degenerate deacon, who fashioned it into socks for himself. A demon, however, persuaded the deacon to stick his legs in a fire, upon which both the deacon's feet and the sacrilegious socks were consumed.<sup>110</sup> Gregory's other hagiographical narratives contain similar incidents of divine retribution for desecration of sacred clothing. For example, five thieves stole hallowed vestments and liturgical vessels from the shrine of Saint Saturninus in Clermont.<sup>111</sup> Four of the plunderers were killed soon afterward, and God blinded the remaining thief, who eventually returned the holy objects and regained his sight.

Sacred biographers thus instructed Christian audiences in the West that holy hair shirts and altar cloths possessed substantial spiritual power. In focusing on garments and other accoutrements, hagiographical discourse used material culture to draw firm lines that incorporated the repentant in the community and excluded the unrighteous. At the same time, that discourse made it clear that the hierarchy of the church, dressed in symbolic vestments, had the responsibility of supervising all of Christian life.

To change one's condition was to change one's clothes. To renounce profane ambitions and embrace new spiritual obligations called for exterior

signs of inner renewal.<sup>112</sup> The lives of Martin of Tours and Germanus of Auxerre employed the motif of changed dress to assert the charismatic origins of the episcopacy. Within a few generations, however, the reality of episcopal dress was very different from Sulpicius Severus's depiction of Martin of Tours as the Gallic Elijah in a hairy mantle. By the fifth century the western hierarchy had constructed a distinctive administrative dress—the *pallium*, *orarium*, *dalmatica*, *paenula*—to embody the responsibilities of the *vita activa*. The piecemeal development of complex liturgical vestments communicated and enhanced the power of those who performed the sacrificial action of the *sancta misteria*. The image of the ceremoniously clad bishop informed western Christian audiences that ascetic power had been subsumed by episcopal authority, while hagiographical accounts demonstrated to them that the institutional power of bishops had roots in the charisma of sacred males. The outward transformation of the bodies of holy men signified the suppression of earthly ambition and the birth of a spiritual power which united the charismatic and the institutional.

The institutional separation of church officials from non-sanctified, ordinary men and all women was manifested by the increasing sanctification of all objects associated with the eucharist and the altar. Individual male ascetics who did not assume public responsibilities, as did Martin and Germanus, were also rigorously excluded from the church hierarchy. Church councils prohibited women's access to offices, objects, and persons sanctified by proximity to the body and blood of Christ. Consecrated things, persons, and spaces were set against those regarded as profane or polluted.<sup>113</sup> This ritual process reflects (and descends from) Hebrew conceptualizations of sacred space that strove to isolate the sacred from the profane. As bishops were increasingly consecrated as "God's anointed" and "virginal administrators," women's authority within the church declined, as did the authority of individual holy men who stood outside the hierarchy.<sup>114</sup> Conciliar legislation, monastic *regulae*, liturgical texts, and hagiographical *vitae* contributed to the creation of a unique, male consecrated space that protected virginal men from the temptations of the flesh. Christian priests, like their ancient Hebrew prototypes, became members of an exclusive order distinguished by sacred dress, hairstyle, consecrated objects, and sexual status.

## 4

## God's Holy Harlots

The Redemptive Lives of Pelagia of Antioch  
and Mary of Egypt

IN CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURE, JESUS, LIKE ELIJAH and Moses before him, purifies himself in the terrifying desert, and the wasteland of Palestine provides the battleground for Christ's warfare with Satan: "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. And the tempter came to him" (Matthew 4.1-3).<sup>1</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, Moses sojourns in the deserts of Sinai in order to receive God's written revelation to the Israelites (Exodus 34.28). Elijah renews his spiritual potency in the wilderness around Mount Horeb, where angels nourish him while he rests under a broom tree (1 Kings 19.4-8). John the Baptist, who dresses in the charismatic garb of the prophet Elijah, preaches the urgency of repentance in the remote Jordan Valley before the looming eschaton (Matthew 3.1-17).<sup>2</sup> These four prototypical charismatic holy men all trusted in the solitary desert as the place of purgation, prophecy, and spiritual warfare. Four centuries after the crucifixion of Christ, Christian holy women and men also sought spiritual perfection in the deserts of Syria and Egypt.

The *vitae* of ascetic women and men reveal the theological messages central to any understanding of Christian desert spirituality.<sup>3</sup> Hagiographers recast the desert as a sacred terrain, where emaciated hermits recreate Christ's passion through ascetic practices. In return, God endows both female and male bodies with salvific powers.<sup>4</sup> Hagiographers constructed spiritual models of anchorites of both sexes to feature the theology of the crucifixion. Christ's sacrifice on the cross initiated both the expulsion of evil from the world and the rehabilitation of sinful humanity. Male desert *vitae* dramatize the militant aspects of this soteriology. The stalwart desert fathers purge the world of demonic influence, acting as militant guardians of humankind. The *vitae* of desert men chronicle the metamorphosis of

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# Sacred Fictions

Holy Women and Hagiography  
in Late Antiquity

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