

Review of: "Clergy Vestment: An Analysis Of The Ecclesiological And Theological Journey Of African Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches In South Africa"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Review: *Clergy Vestment: An Analysis of The Ecclesiological And Theological Journey Of African Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches in South Africa*. Abraham Modisa Mkhondo Mzondi. South African Theological Seminary (SATS)

Overall

This article has promise but requires considerable strengthening and clarification before it can be published.

The thesis of the paper is unclear. It seems mostly concerned with what might have spurred Pentecostal church leaders to adopt traditional clerical vestments of the sort used in Catholicism. If that is so, that should be made clear. At other points, the main tension seems to be between African Pentecostal-Charismatic attire versus African Indigenous styles.

The article has problems with scope, and its vast consideration of early Christian vestments, Reformation period garments, and the modern period seems overly broad, especially since there is no clear sense of the relationships between these diverse periods. As below, the article needs to distinguish levels of investigation and meaning and make clear what is at stake in the Pentecostal acceptance, rejection, or revision of clergy vestments. The article also needs to pay some attention to who or what influences various vestment choices. The argument needs to be organized so that it flows logically, and there needs to be clearer analysis, explanation, and clarification. As below, there are many vague claims that require greater specificity, clarity, and anchoring, as well as several paragraphs containing mere acronyms or lists which should be footnoted. Most of the English is straightforward and more or less clear, but there are a number of odd phrasings, and so the final draft should be proofed by a native English-language speaker.

Introduction

The article should begin by defining and explaining clergy vestments—perhaps offering an example or two and perhaps concrete descriptions of one or two vestment types. It should specify the historical period under investigation, possibly leading in with a vignette or anecdote, and then enter immediately into the core matters at stake.

Scope and Relevance

The article's scope is often too broad. You offer brief expositions of the meaning of clerical attire across various broad historical swaths such as 'the patristic period', but these swaths are so broad as to be almost meaningless, and their relation to Pentecostal churches in South Africa is not at all clear. The article does not need to explain what clergy vestment meant in every type of Christian church at all times in world history. But it does need to explain what clergy vestment meant in the particular context being discussed.

There are some nonsequiturs that need to be reevaluated and perhaps deleted, such as mentions of the dress of female parishioners and head coverings. Are these directly relevant to the thesis? If you cannot explain how these side discussions move your argument along and support it, you should discard or footnote this information. There is, for example, a quote about color whose relevance is unclear.

There are several paragraphs which list undigested facts: acronyms, lists of institutions, individuals. All paragraphs of undigested lists should be footnoted or expanded into prose which explains significance..

Importantly, 'Desktop research method' is not an accepted academic method. Van Maaren is quoted too often, and the article needs to cite more academic sources to enrich the narrative.

Meanings and Significance of Vestments; Levels of Analysis

The article mentions diverse meanings of vestments—e.g., identifying rank, according dignity to clerics, the product of dreams, visions and perhaps the 'Holy Spirit', as according ecclesiastical office, as apotropaic (protecting from evil), and as establishing links to the early Christian era. It needs to distinguish carefully between diverse meanings and functions. There are also areas of meaning which have been overlooked. For example, do clerical vestments tell us anything about clerical-lay relations? About the proper way to honor God? You may want to mention *adiaphora*, at least in a footnote—that is, the idea that some decisions (including how clerics attire themselves) are not especially meaningful theologically. The brief mention of a "white garment, sticks and worshipping barefoot" offers two diverse historical origins and explanations for this attire. Can you adjudicate between these and say more? Each diverse type of meaning should be analyzed in its own clear, distinct paragraph.

Importantly, the article needs to distinguish between levels of investigation and meaning, for at times, it discusses not ecclesiology or theology but rather the *political* meanings of vestments (as, for example, when churches adopt similar attire to affiliate). In cases of political affiliation, you might want to explain why and how certain churches decide to express solidarity visually, whether that affiliation is informal or official, and what that affiliation entails (i.e., does it mean sharing finances, parishioners, a political structure, jurisdiction, or something else?) You also have the level of *cultural* meaning (as when some leaders wish to declare allegiance to indigenous traditions) and the level of meaning of historical reference. Thus, if an ecclesiastical group adopts a miter hat, it might function as a gesture or reference to an earlier historical period, conjuring certain referential and symbolic meanings and probably also legitimating ones.

At times, you present wearing or not wearing specific vestments as if it is a yes-or-no decision. But it is not. The decision to wear or not wear certain things can be an attempt to reclaim an earlier period or a decision to reject some other idea. Again, you need to zero in on the meanings and significance of the specific vestment choices at the heart of your paper.

Then, though you mention bishop-like vestments and promise to speak about vestments theologically, you never actually discuss the theological meaning of bishop hats, which relate to the power of popes--who possess spiritual authority by virtue of their position as Christ's vicar on earth--and the so-called doctrine of apostolic succession.

Then, you cite several cases of borrowing or emulation but do not explain in concrete terms what these borrowings meant or how different models of vestments were transmitted. For example, the "inherited North American influence regarding the use of vestments" does not explain how a given church became aware of North American decisions or how and by whom decisions about vestments were or are made. For example, are decisions about clothes made democratically in churches? By fiat?

In sum, your analysis needs to provide more substantial insight into the meanings and niceties of vestment choices.

Culture and Context

There are several contexts about which you say little but which seem important to your discussion. These include the context of African Christianity, the political context of South Africa, and Pentecostalism. So, for example, it's not clear why many Pentecostal churches were founded in S.A. in the 1900s and what their stance on clerical attire meant. Nor do you explain why 1994 was a watershed in South Africa. You don't have to explain these contexts in depth, but you do need to add a sentence or two that connects vestment selection with the historical contexts in which they developed. Similarly, when you mention the decisions of "Reformers in the United States of America" to wear a tie and shirt, what did that attire mean, and how did that decision relate to historical context?

Similarly, you need to enter more thoroughly into the meanings of Pentecostalism and charismatic approaches to religious worship more generally. For example, Pentecostalism is known as being less focused on doctrine and more focused on performance and emotion. It tends to emphasize a more egalitarian political and ecclesiastical structure than other churches. This seems to relate to the tension between what you call a "less hierarchical and free ecclesiology" and a "formalized ecclesiastical hierarchy of bishops, presbyters, and deacons (Episcopalism)," but you need to spell the meaning of such matters out more clearly and explicitly. All of these points relate to the meaning of vestment choice and should be factored into your discussion.

Ecclesiology and Clerical Hierarchy

The matter of theological training seems to be of import in your discussion. Were you intimating that some churches adopted traditional bishop vestments to mask a lack of rigor? This part was interesting but unclear. (You suggest that some obtain the title of bishop by buying it. Traditionally, purchasing office was a heresy called simony. How is this not

simony?) Are the universities that train these bishops accredited, and are 'Bishops' from these universities viewed as legitimate? If the matter of training is relevant to your thesis about vestment choices, it needs to be made more explicit.

You also mention how Bishop Botwana retained the office of a bishop. This too seems especially important and worthy of explaining the wider historical significance of this office—and this again relates to the doctrine of apostolic succession.

Abstractions, Definitions, Clarifications

You should define unfamiliar terms at first usage, possibly in a footnote. These terms include 'clergy vestment,' Pentecostalism, and 'Classical' Pentecostal churches (You define 'Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches' as 'independent churches established in the 1980s, but this is not an adequate definition). Other terms that need defining: 'Reformed' churches, 'church uniform,' 'order ethics,' 'desktop research method,' 'Toronto Blessing,' Mosa Sono, 'the diaspora (why capitalized?)', dignity, accountability/leadership accountability [for what?], Asuza Street revival (you mention a "1906 Azusa Street revival event William Seymour led," but your reader may not know what this is). All abstractions require definition as well, including vague concepts such as 'Theological and ecclesiastical identity/finding one's identity.' There are, for example, many ways in which a leader or a church might 'find its identity': visually, theologically, socially, and so on. Try to clarify what you mean and offer concrete examples.

Language

The writing needs smoothing out throughout in terms of sense. The language should be varied (e.g., use alternate terms like 'clerical robes,' 'garments,' 'official attire'). There are run-ons, and verb tenses need to be made consistent. There are a few significant grammatical errors. Ex: 'Commonwealth Dominican' does not make sense in English. Also, avoid passive voice. A sample rewrite of a passively formulated sentence ["The above-mentioned trend is further noticed among those African Pentecostal-Charismatic leaders who associate with Archbishop Emmanuel Ketsekile"] would give it an active subject; thus, "African Pentecostal-Charismatic leaders who associate with Archbishop Emmanuel Ketsekile have followed this trend as well..." You do not need to cite references that are far afield of your topic or somewhat generic, such as Booth's Craft of Research.