

## Liturgical Vestments and Clergy Dress: Thoughts on Appropriate Forms and Variety in Western Europe and America

Initially I will look at some background issues of Orthodox Faith and ethnicity to set the context for my discussion on vestments.

The sense of ethnic identity is part of self-identity. Each man has a personal character and he also reflects family, tribal, and regional or national identities or characteristics. In Christ these are placed below the unity of Christ, in that each man takes his primary identity from Christ but his human identities are not destroyed and so a man retains his personal, family and national characteristics. Thus, in the age to come there are people of all nations as all nations and yet one nation in Christ. The diverse human characteristics are united in Christ and do not divide as they do in themselves apart from Christ. Diversity is retained in the unity of Christ, except where that diversity is contrary to Christ. This unity requires that there are Church practices that are uniform to incarnate the mystery of Christ in all people and nations because that which is required to tangibly present Christ in human terms needs to be one in material/practical form since the unity of Christ includes unity in matter as well as in spirit. However, in the same manner that divinity does not consume humanity in Christ, neither does the humanity of Christ consume our humanity and so human diversity remains.

The unity of Christ is such that the Church cannot be defined along national or ethnic categories. Local and regional churches can only be defined in terms of geographical limits, within which there can only be one church, that is a synod in the form either of the bishop with his presbyters, the local diocese, or of a metropolitan with his bishops, a regional episcopal synod. However, these territorial limits can be taken from the territorial boundaries of a nation as well as those administrative boundaries within empires or states. Thus, in regional terms the synod of bishops can be defined in as those living in a particular national territory, as long as the definition is territorial rather than by any other category. Thus, if members of the Church from other regions/nations enter a territory they attend the services of the churches of that territory/nation within which they have entered rather than establishing their own churches. An exception to this is to allow parishes of different languages within the same territory to enable understanding of the services for those from other language groups. We have historical examples of this in Constantinople with Latin and Gothic parishes. Such exceptions will tend to reflect national differences but these latter differences should not be the reason for the exception but only language to enable understanding, following the teaching of St Paul.

The present situation in the UK and the US, as well as other places outside the established regions of Orthodox Churches, is rather complicated. The long established local religious communities in these places are heterodox and as such are not in unity with the Catholic Church, that is the Orthodox Churches in communion the Patriarch of Constantinople. Thus, the Orthodox emigrants to the UK or to the US did not have preexisting places of worship nor local hierarchy to establish such places. These had to be provided from their home regions. Sadly, due to lack of coordination between Orthodox Patriarchs, we have the situation of a number of hierarchs establishing churches for immigrants in the UK and the US. This situation has led to a neglect of the territorial definition of churches and to definition along national/ethnic categories, which is contrary to the teaching of Christ. We need to repent of this. It is suggested that the only way forward is to appoint and recognise a local territorially defined hierarchal structure for the UK or US with its own synod, although overseen by one of the present Patriarchs. Also, this hierarchy must attempt to convert the heterodox back to Orthodoxy and allow the local peoples to take ownership of the church within their own territory.

The use of vestments could be helpful to distinguish the hierarchy of the UK or the US from the hierarchies elsewhere. This is not in order to separate them but to highlight that the churches in the UK and the US are not part of other national churches, although most members within the churches in the UK and the US may be descended from these other nations. The churches in the UK and US should be seen as local churches in their own right. A distinction of vestments helps to provide visual recognition of this local hierarchy and to break it from being considered part of a nationally defined group. Yet, in terms of being orthodox, the vestments need to be consistent with the traditional form of vestments used through the history of the Church.

To enable the choice of vestments, even though most religious groups in the UK and the US are heterodox, some of their heritage comes from an orthodox background and maintains orthodox standards manifested in the cultural context of the UK and the US. It would be wise of the orthodox hierarchy not to impose an exterior manner of dress upon the UK and the US but rather to take what is already within that region consistent with Orthodox Tradition and establish it for use of orthodox Christians in that region. This would allow the local peoples to have greater identity and ownership of the church in their territory, rather than the church arriving as a foreign institution imposing its own national cultures as well as bringing orthodox Tradition. While it is important that each region or nation is established in the international community and participates in customs that are required for relationships across this international community, otherwise the local community becomes

isolated and estranged, at the same time each region or nation should participate without losing the diversity of its own customs, where these do not go contrary to the international community. In orthodox terms the common customs of the international community are given in Holy Tradition, which is the common way of life in Christ as Christ that unity with Christ, yet the regional customs are maintained that of self-rule in synergy with Christ as maintaining God's image as man with the ability to govern. This governance is expressed in the diversity of customs within Tradition. For one national church to impose in entirety of its customs on another nation is to undermine and deny the self-rule of that nation thus denying the image of God in its people and the synergy of the relationship of God and man in deification.

A question that can be raised in considering the choice of vestments is whether vestments are an Orthodox uniform. That is: is the peculiar cut of vestments of Orthodox churches required as a uniform to separate them from the heterodox, who use different uniforms? If the answer is yes then what are the limits of variation in the cut of the vestments, such as between common Greek practice and Russian practice, to remain an Orthodox uniform? Historical evidence shows that vestments cuts are derived from a common source used both East and West. Any definition of an "orthodox" cut that does not encompass the vestments from the common source disconnects the vestments from their tradition. So stating that a particular cut of vestment used today is the correct Orthodox cut is only legitimate if it is shown that this cut has had a constant presence in time and place in the history of the Church. On the other hand any cut that retains identity with the common source should be a legitimate Orthodox cut of vestments. Looking at the vestments used in the west by heterodox, this would then include the conical Chasuble, which is the common traditional cut used East and West, and Gothic chasubles are also legitimate because they still retain an immediate connection to the original shape of vestment. One can see that present vestments have been shortened either on the sides in the west or in the front in the east to allow greater arm movement with increasingly heavily embroidered vestment material. Western albs also retain the traditional shape of the sticharion/alb. Stoles too are often closer to the traditional shape than the present eastern epitachelion. Both forms of vestment are legitimate in terms of orthodox Tradition.

So, if vestments are used as a uniform then they cannot be limited to those used today otherwise the vestments would be disconnected from their orthodox heritage and reduce what is Orthodox to the particular manifestation of some local practices today. Also, if vestments are a uniform in terms of heterodox then what would have if another local church falls into heresy? Would they be forced to change their vestments? By whom? Would the orthodox Churches change their vestments? Who has authority to order all churches to change? In the case of recent schisms, such as the Old

Calendarists, there has not been a change in vestments as unique uniforms of each group. Would using similar vestments to heterodox churches cause confusion? There may perhaps be some issues but generally most parishioners go to the church because it is identified as an orthodox parish in communion with such an orthodox bishop. The main factors for testing orthodoxy are not rite and vestments nor icons but that the president (presbyter or bishop) of the community is recognised by other orthodox hierarchy as being a legitimate priest; that is he is orthodox in faith and in communion with the Orthodox hierarchs and he is of good standing.

If one was to argue that vestments are part of the ethnic definition then there is a greater need to use different vestments in the UK and US, which are a different nations unless the Church in the UK or US gets defined in ethnic terms of another nation. The variation in vestments will help to break ethnic identity of local parishes being confused with national church identity in places beyond the territory of a national synod outside the UK or US. That is: it is legitimate for a particular cut of vestment to be standard within a national church as part of its self-identity but this should not be confused with Orthodox identity.

We already have a common practice of many clergy in the UK and the US wearing clerical clothing of the western churches in terms of street wear. Thus, there is an acceptance of western clerical clothing for Orthodox clergy and this should extend to liturgical vestments without implying a western rite. One may also question the use of western clothing for the clergy, not so much in terms of it being western, but in terms of it being appropriate for Tradition and piety. The custom across all churches until fairly recently was for clergy to wear a cassock as their basic garment. It would seem that this should still be the expected norm for Orthodox clergy, at least as a symbol of their commitment to Tradition rather than innovation. Using western cuts for cassocks for the reasons above would be legitimate. It also helps Orthodox faithful and clergy to recognise other clergy more easily than a dog-collar, or even less appropriate civilian clothing, may do so. The cassock is the common symbol of dress in the eastern churches and maintaining uniformity of this in the west, which was the standard in the west until recently anyway, would help to reinforce commitment to orthodox Tradition. In all this pastoral considerations need to be made and the main principle is that clergy should wear identifiably clerical clothing in public, whichever form that it may take.

Another question is that are vestments attached to rites? Vestments are primarily to identify clerical orders in the church. These orders are recognised across all regions and nations within which the Church is located. Thus, the vestments are rooted in the common tradition of identifying the clergy in their orders such as bishop, presbyter, deacon, sub-deacon and other orders; the clergy wear their

vestments first for their order then for the particular rite being used. The particular liturgy being used is a choice of one of a number of prayers for the offering and in the east both St John Chrysostom's and St Basil's rite are used without changing vestments to suit each particular rite. So, it should be quite appropriate for clergy in the UK and US to wear western cut vestments in serving the rite of St John Chrysostom or that of St Basil.

If one views Orthodox Tradition though as properly the Tradition as it is now held in any particular orthodox region or nation as the proper standard for Tradition rather than referring back to historical patterns then one would find it difficult to accept western vestments by the clergy in the UK and the US because they are not part of the present expression of Orthodox Tradition; it would be seen as a revival of something dead and properly buried: an innovation. However, if one views Tradition as those traditions passed on consistent with the Apostles and Fathers, western vestments are legitimate if they can be established to be a consistent variation on the common vestments worn by the clergy throughout the history of the church. Such evidence is clearly available and so it is almost desirable to use these vestments as a reminder of the Tradition so that we do not stray too far from it by a narrow range of its diversity being carried to an extreme without balance.

In conclusion, it is proposed that the use of traditional vestment cuts that are available in the west would both help those in the west to take local ownership and identity with the Church in their territory as well as help to keep the churches in touch with the early forms of Tradition that prevents tradition being identified with present local national practices and permits the full range of diversity permitted in the unity of the Church.