

Antje Bednarek-Gilland<sup>1</sup>  
Hermann-Peter Eberlein<sup>2</sup>

“The pastor’s new clothes”:  
Reclericalisation of Protestant clothing  
in German-speaking countries since 1970<sup>3</sup>

This article illuminates the changes in the way pastors dress in German-speaking Protestantism. It is based on a historical analysis of clothing conventions from the invention of liturgical clothes for ecclesiastical personnel since the 1970s. Our point of departure is the abolishment of liturgical vestments in favour of non-liturgical garments during the Reformation and, since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the subsequent reversal of this development, i.e. the reintroduction of liturgical vestments. This development is mirrored in clerics’ civilian clothing. We refer to this reversal process as a ‘reclericalisation’ of Protestantism in regards to clothing and critically assess its sources and merits. A major point in our argument is that liturgical clothes communicate theological and political meanings as well as social status. Changes in the clothing system therefore have wider consequences which need to be considered in light of the Protestant Churches’ theological and social roles today.

**Key words:** liturgical vestments, sartorial communication, distinction, tradition, Protestantism, social status

---

<sup>1</sup> Social Science Institute of the Evangelical Church in Germany in Hanover; antje.bednarek@gmail.com.

<sup>2</sup> Lutheran pastor in Wuppertal, Germany.

<sup>3</sup> We would like to dedicate this essay to Wilhelm Gräß.

## Introduction: Tradition and clothing

### The social and political significance of clothing

Clothing practices, be they of groups or entire societies, constitute a sign system in their own right. Differences in the fabric used, colours, fashion styles and type of garment can signal gender, age, profession, status, ethnic belonging and political leanings. Classical and contemporary sociologists alike are aware of the cultural significance of clothing practices. Georg Simmel wrote two influential essays on clothing as part of the ‘fashion system’ which set the agenda for how this topic was discussed by sociologists for quite some time (Gronow 1993). Simmel’s analysis of clothing emerged within the framework of class, and seeing that “naturally the lower classes look and strive towards the upper” (Simmel 1957: 545), he found that fashion always ‘trickles down’ from the upper classes to the lower classes. A class-based analysis of clothing can also be found in Pierre Bourdieu’s epochal book *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1992). Studying clothes in the social sciences thus has some precedents, and empirical studies in this field exist as well.

An impetus for studying clothes is that they carry weight and meaning in everyday and institutional life. One item of clothing worn by one individual person can, in fact, symbolise complex political positions and even worldviews. To give a few examples: in recent years, the wearing of the hijab, the Muslim headscarf for women, in public places has aroused some debate about multiculturalism, religion and tolerance. There are historical precedents for this kind of discourse in which clothes play a crucial role. A prominent historical example for the political significance of clothing is found in the *sans-culottes* in revolutionary France: *not* wearing the common type of knee-breeches, the *culottes*, was, during that time, associated with “espousal of a politics of radical populism” (Wrigley 2002: 21) because of the political stances of the men who eschewed them (and who were therefore called ‘*sans-culottes*’)<sup>4</sup>. In exactly the same way, wearing Russian peasant clothing at Peter the Great’s court or continuing to wear the fez in Kemalite Turkey, both of which had been the established ways of clothing and both of which had, by reform-minded power-holders, been outlawed, signalled adherence to tradition and political opposition (Kreise 2005; Ruane 2002). Political position, in these examples, is not only communicated in one’s clothing but is also valorised by it. The wearer signals support for a specific contemporary political opinion, a way of life and also for the specific relation to the past which is cherished within this group.

This does not mean that all clothing is always a meaningful act of political import; most of the time in everyday life people dress in ways that are appropriate considering the occasion, the fashion of their times and the setting in which

---

<sup>4</sup> Wrigley (2002: 23) quotes a similar example of pieces of clothing representing entire groups of people and their worldviews. Some reports from this time refer to ‘*bonnets de laine*’, the woollen hats, thereby meaning the population at large, or ‘the people’.

they will have to interact with others, and although these everyday activities can be examined critically there does not always appear to be an obvious reason for doing that. But, like the totem which symbolises – and constitutes – ‘the people’ and their culture in Durkheim’s theory of religion, clothes too can symbolise and evoke complex meanings (Durkheim 1969). As Bourdieu argued with reference to the religious field, in stratified societies this is particularly the case in transition periods (Bourdieu 2000). Clothes can play an important role in different interest groups’ fights for power because they can be employed as substantive evidence in contestations over the meaning of the past – the past to be left behind in the view of some stakeholders and, on the opposing side, the past that is to be preserved. Different historical accounts carry with them different lenses through which we can interpret our societies and which inform us in our search for how we should live today<sup>5</sup>. This is because clothing practices are one embedded aspect of everyday and institutional culture; they change as social and institutional structures change.

### Professional clothing in institutional contexts

Institutions with rigid hierarchies which are expressed sartorially such as the military or the Roman Catholic Church prescribe certain clothing practices. As the uniforms or robes worn by members of either institution follow regulations and are predominantly designed to communicate clearly the rank of the wearer, controversy about the meaning of specific pieces of clothing is much rarer than it is in the civilian public realm. Personal values, social position outside the institutional hierarchy and other markers of identity are not communicated by uniform professional attire which can only be varied within quite narrow perimeters set by the institutional clothing regulations. For example, when the new pope was announced in March 2013, commentators, eager to gain insights into his character, focused on his dress which was the most obvious difference from his predecessor. Pope Francis “is turning out to be a sartorial minimalist, reflecting his more humble, understated approach to the papacy” (“Washington Post”, 28 March 2013), said one commentator. As the symbolic content of the robes which Pope Francis decided *not* to wear is fixed – for instance, he declined to wear the velvet mozetta cape for public outings – this kind of interpretation is legitimate. Pope Benedict XVI, in contrast, who wore designer shoes, has been referred to as “something of a clotheshorse” (“New York Times”, 8 March 2013). Deviations from the regulated institutional standard generally require a justification of sorts. Given that

---

<sup>5</sup> Historical research on attire has turned around the field of life course studies, for example. Intrigued by the similarity in attire between children and adults in medieval paintings, Philippe Ariès (1973) in his studies on conceptions of the life course in European history, has shown that until the 17<sup>th</sup> century childhood had no specific meaning. Children were considered small adults and therefore wore the same clothes as adults. This has shown the contemporary conception of childhood as a biologically determined distinct phase of the life course to be a social construction which emerged during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century.

the Christian churches consider modesty a value, Francis' own well-established modest character and his elevated position combined to justify the choice of less complex robes. Such deviations as well as more subtle changes in institutional clothing conventions are relatively easy to observe and, in combination with the reasoning given for them, provide interesting insights into the social and cultural structures in our societies.

Before the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, religious persons did not distinguish themselves in their appearance. Their clothing resembled that of the working population at large (Konrad 2005). By the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, however, a special monastic habit existed (Konrad 2005: 83). With its plain cut and colour (back then, mostly grey), the habit represented the monastic ideals of poverty, chastity and obedience. It drew a 'textile boundary' between the monastic commune and the secular world (Konrad 2005: 83). This boundary has been preserved even as monastic orders, in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have aligned their clothing regulations with those practiced in the church generally (Schwaiger 2003: 341). Professional clothing generally serves the purpose of emphasising the wearer in her or his functional role within the institution. The values and meanings communicated by professional clothes depend on the institution in and for which they have been designed.

### Clothing in Protestant churches

Like Catholic clerics, Protestant religious officials dress in accordance with distinct clothing traditions. Since the Peace of Augsburg of 1555 which granted territorial princes within the Holy Roman Empire the *ius reformandi*, i.e. the right to determine the confession within their territory, individual Protestant churches in Germany have been organized in larger regions, the so-called *Landeskirchen*, or regional churches<sup>6</sup>. Among the Protestant confessions only the adherents to the *Confessio Augustana*, i.e. the Lutherans and, as of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the Reformed Churches, however, were licensed by imperial law. Church rule according to territorial authority means, amongst other things, that the powers that be (e.g. a duke or the council of a free imperial city) also govern the territorial church (*summus episcopus*). As a consequence, the church has been in the dependent position for most of its existence, playing a non-sovereign role in the territorial political apparatus. Church constitutions detailing rituals, doctrine and religious customs within the territory, as well as state laws, were decided by the territorial authorities. Religious robes have therefore never been homogeneous across the German regions, but followed different codices in different regions.

Generally speaking, official religious robes, first and foremost, consist of the traditional (Catholic) vestments such as the alb (deriving from the *tunica alba*, the

<sup>6</sup> The Free Churches did not emerge until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They do not form part of this analysis as their membership numbers as well as overall significance within the German inter-confessional landscape is rather minimal. (citation?) This is just information as to our authorial intention and thus should not require a source as justification.

white tunic), girdle, dalmatic, chasuble, maniple, etc. These kinds of tunics, over-shirts, coats and belts are what one would normally refer to as ‘liturgical robes’. Stole and chasuble (a cape-like garment worn over the alb) as well as dalmatic and maniple are connected with specific degrees of ordination within the church hierarchy. The stole, for example, which is a narrow strip of material hanging down over the shoulders, is the sartorial symbol per se of Catholic priesthood. “The Christian origins [of the stole] are derived directly from a scarf worn by Roman officials as a sign of rank – the stole and pallium<sup>7</sup> have a common origin as a status symbol” (Mayo 1984: 171). The clerical collar is common in the Roman Catholic and Anglican Church and serves to identify a clergyman<sup>8</sup>. It is worn with the cassock or dark civilian clothing<sup>9</sup>. Collar and liturgical robes are worn by Anglican clergy and officials in the Scandinavian Lutheran churches; the latter have preserved the office of bishop and define clerical positions as emerging in apostolic succession. Protestant pastors in German-speaking countries are usually associated with the black academic gown which is also worn by judges and scholars; hence the name.

Within the German Lutheran, Reformed and United *Landeskirchen* which form the Evangelical Church in Germany (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland – EKD), as well as in Austrian and Swiss Protestant churches, changes in pastors’ attire have become noticeable since the 1970s<sup>10</sup>. Whilst during the ‘roaring Sixties’ an informalising tendency was noticeable, among pastors of the younger generation especially the reverse tendency has spread to communicate one’s position as a member of the church even in one’s everyday attire, mostly by wearing a clerical collar and, if admissible, a pectoral cross (Dieckmann 2013)<sup>11</sup>. Changes which effect more formality are noticeable and have been discussed as regards official robes as well, i.e. those worn whilst performing the liturgy. The re-introduction of the alb and the widespread and rather controversial introduction of the stole as a seemingly ordinary part of Protestant official clothing are the most significant of these changes.

<sup>7</sup> Similar to the stole in shape and function, the pallium is “a long woven band or scarf of white wool marked with six dark crosses, and worn around the neck and shoulders with the ends hanging down in various ways, by patriarchs, archbishops and some other bishops” (Mayo 1984: 161).

<sup>8</sup> Outside the church, the collar was often the only symbol of priesthood (Mayo 1984: 144).

<sup>9</sup> Roman Catholic clergy are obligated to wear the clerical collar, or an equivalent item of clothing, in the public sphere.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Evangelical’ here is synonymous with ‘Protestant’. It refers to the mainline Protestant churches in Germany (the majority of which are Lutheran by confession) and bears no association to the evangelical movement (e.g. tele-evangelism). The EKD only affiliates the three mainline Protestant churches. The Evangelical Free Churches are not affiliated with it.

<sup>11</sup> The debates surrounding the wearing of official pectoral crosses (by general superintendents or bishops) over the civilian attire are worthy of investigation in their own right. Being special symbols which signify a function that is effective beyond the parish boundaries, such crosses exist in most of the Lutheran and also the United *Landeskirchen*; but they are controversial. In the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland, for example, which has had an official pectoral cross since its attainment of sovereignty in 1952, the cross is permitted.

### Empirical studies on religious clothing

Empirical sociological studies on clothing tend to focus on the role official robes play for the wearer's personal identity. Manuela Grossmann and colleagues, for example, are studying clothes guided by the question "which strategies do female pastors follow to manage their liturgical visibility" (Grossmann et al. 2013: 239). Robes can be used for emphasising the ritual character of parts of the liturgy, and they can also provide a kind of (Goffmanesque) face for the wearer who thereby becomes invisible as a person (Grossmann et al. 2013). This latter point has been made in a similar way by Marta Trzebiatowska (2010) and Robert Gugutzer (2012). Trzebiatowska found that Catholic nuns, when wearing their religious habit in public, are perceived in their role as a religious rather than private person which has different ramifications in their social interactions (Trzebiatowska 2010). Trzebiatowska concludes that "the habit makes a nun in so far as it constitutes an advertisement of her services" (Trzebiatowska 2010: 58). That the symbolism of religious clothing is widely recognised as sacred and divine is the prerequisite condition for that. Gugutzer's interviews with nuns and monks highlight the importance of the habit as an essential aspect of their everyday lives, making a holistic religious experience possible (Gugutzer 2012). Gugutzer's interviewees described the wearing of the habit in idiosyncratic ways as "feeling enveloped by love" and the comfortable, wide design of the habit as "leaving lots of room for Jesus" (Gugutzer 2012: 196–97). Trzebiatowska and Gugutzer show that the symbolic meaning of the habit is part of religious persons' embodied everyday life.

Differing from these empirical studies, we adopt a non-empirical, historical-hermeneutical perspective for this essay. We focus on changes in religious clothing in German Protestantism as such and of the symbolic content of religious clothing. Our scope is thus comparatively wide. This being said, we would hope that empirical studies on the changes we are describing here will be carried out in future.

In the following section, we describe the recent changes in German Protestant pastors' dress in their historical context. In doing so we differentiate between official robes worn whilst performing the liturgy or acting in the official capacity of a pastor and civilian robes for all other occasions. We rely for this historical account on archival documents, church regulations, secondary literature on Protestant clothing in Germany and, as concerns more recent developments, on some observations which we have collected ourselves. Most of the specific examples we use derive from the Rhineland region in the West of Germany the history of which one of us (Eberlein) has researched in a variety of contexts.

We are guided in the pursuit of this topic 1) by an interest in the symbolic meanings of religious clothing, 2) the desire to understand why these changes are occurring now, and 3) the urgent need to understand the political significance of these changes, i.e. their effect on power relations among participants in German Protestant churches. The impression we have reached based on the evidence presented here is that a formalising process has been underway since the 1970s which

involves the reintroduction of religious vestments which the Reformers sought to leave behind and that, in this process, social structures which were and are common among Catholic clergy are being introduced into German Protestantism. The term ‘reclericalisation’ which we explain in the discussion section of this paper is intended to capture the essence of these changes.

## Religious in the German Protestant Landeskirchen

### Historical development before the 1970s

#### Official robes

Following the Reformation and the abolishment of much of what had marked and continued to mark Catholic liturgical practice, the question arose in the Reformed German-speaking territories as to what one should do with the medieval liturgical robes<sup>12</sup>. There was no longer any use for them in Reformed territories as preachers presided during the liturgy in their civilian robes, which in this case was the attire common for academics: a black great coat which in due course became the academic gown<sup>13</sup> and which was, according to Spanish fashion, worn with a white ruffled collar. The collar went through various changes in breadth and form, and at times the wide ruff collar, also known as ‘millstone collar’ for its shape, was customary. Different from today, the academic gown and collar were not viewed as liturgical robes as they were worn, together with the black biretta (a velvet hat), as everyday plainclothes – and not only by pastors but also by other scholars. The reason for *not* seizing on clothing as an opportunity to mark out one’s status was that Swiss as well as Lutheran Reformers believed that distinctions of rank between ordained pastors and lay people are levelled in baptism. Not emphasising distinctions of rank, to the Reformers, therefore followed from their theological convictions<sup>14</sup>.

Developments were a lot less unified in the Lutheran territories, although there too the priesthood of all believers is a core doctrine<sup>15</sup>. In the old Lutheran churches questions of outward order (which includes the issue of clothing) belonged to

<sup>12</sup> Electoral Palatinate, Nassau in Rhineland-Palatinate, Lippe in North-Rhine-Westphalia, East Frisia; similar developments in the Swiss Reformed cantons.

<sup>13</sup> Also called preacher’s gown. We refer to it as academic gown throughout in order to highlight its origin as a civilian garment for those who had attained a doctoral degree.

<sup>14</sup> In the Swiss Reformed Church, official robes are still not subject to regulation as they are in Germany. Even today, pastors can choose what to wear during the performance of the liturgy. The black academic gown is, for them, one option among many others. For an interesting empirical study on clothing and gender in the Swiss Reformed Church, see Grossmann et al. (2013).

<sup>15</sup> In the early years of the Reformation, all those wishing to reform the church were referred to as ‘Evangelicals’. In time differences arose between individual groups and their followers esp. on the meaning of the Eucharist, baptism and the relationship between state and church. By 1530, a separation had occurred between those following Martin Luther and those siding with Reformers like John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland and Martin Bucer in Germany.



Il. 1. Academic or preacher's gown with Lutheran (split) bands

Source: Antje Bednarek-Gilland



the *adiaphora*, i.e. the eschatologically irrelevant things, which could be handled according to personal taste (Elert 1931)<sup>16</sup>. Martin Luther himself, for instance, preached robed in the black great coat but presided over the Eucharist wearing his priestly robes, i.e. alb and chasuble. Many territorial churches practiced a similar division between the two parts of the liturgy until the last remaining liturgical robes disintegrated. In accordance with their use in the Eucharist, alb and chasuble were preserved more often than other pieces of clothing, whereas the stole, symbolising the Catholic priesthood, was viewed as less relevant, particularly so since it could not be worn with the academic gown: the clash between the academic gown’s meaning of ‘scholarly rationality’ and the stole’s meaning of ‘servant of God’ was intolerable (Gottesdienst-Institut der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern 2007; Piepkorn et al. 1987; Schatz 2004). Elsewhere new liturgical vestments were not acquired, particularly since the disintegration of the old robes occurred simultaneously with the Enlightenment and the rise of Pietism, neither of which, if for different reasons, saw good reasons for preserving the priesthood or its vestments. Renouncing the use of liturgical robes and wearing instead the civilian robe worn by the academic estate, was regarded as a sign of progressive, enlightened thinking.

By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century at the very latest, German Lutheranism had given up the idea of special liturgical robes for church services. A rich diversity of forms developed, some robes still resembling their liturgical cousins from earlier times, although on the whole the academic gown worn with a short clerical coat became dominant across the territories (Piepkorn et al. 1987: 82). Naturally, the less widely used and thus the more out-dated the *civilian* robes of the clergy became, the more they began to be perceived as pastors’ special *official* robes, particularly so since the majority of church-goers, more so in the countryside than in urban regions, never encountered the robes and gowns worn by professors and solicitors. Their only association of the academic gown was with pastors, and so it by and by assumed the status as the pastor’s official robe. The transformation of the academic gown as a pastor’s official robe received added support in a decree issued in 1811 by King William III. of Prussia, which ruled that professors, solicitors, judges and public prosecutors *as well as* Protestant and Jewish clergy *have to* wear the academic gown with bands and biretta at all times. In its simple elegance, the academic gown gelled quite nicely with the fashion *zeitgeist*, and so the rest of the German princes also adopted it as the official robe for their pastors.

Up to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, none of the vestments commonly worn by Protestant pastors truly originated in liturgical robes<sup>17</sup>. All of them have evolved

<sup>16</sup> Werner Elert’s epochal and indispensable *Morphology of Lutheranism* is highly illuminating on the topic of this indifferentism, which should be viewed as a clear expression of the high degree of freedom which existed in ancient Lutheranism. This freedom, which ultimately defines the Lutheran Church exclusively by the verbal liturgy, i.e. hermeneutically, distinguishes it from both the Roman Catholic as well as the Reformed Churches.

<sup>17</sup> The Alsatian academic gown represents the only exception to this. A black stole of shiny satin is integral part of this gown without, however, being recognisable as such. It appears like a special decoration of the gown.

from civilian robes and conform to 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century fashion (Hansen 1954: 125–46; Kybalová et al. 1976: 155–73).

### Civilian robes and civilian clothing

A particular set of civilian robes for Protestant pastors did not exist in German Protestantism up the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The academic gown which was the civilian robe of those with academic degrees was the common attire both within as well as out with the church. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, the academic gown was seen to be old-fashioned and therefore fell out of use outside the lecture hall and the church. It was replaced by what was fashionable at the time: knee-breeches (culottes) and a knee-length coat (justaucorps). Both were mostly worn in black which was seen to be elegant and bourgeois in equal degree. Since this particular set of civilian robes was at the same time the identifying vestment of the lower Catholic clergy (whose tonsure was customarily covered by a wig), misidentifications between the confessions occurred frequently. The bands worn by Catholics as well as Protestants across Europe both helped and hindered the misidentifying of clergy: they had developed from the falling collar and were “adopted as conventional dress by the clerical, legal and academic professions in the early eighteenth century” (Mayo 1984: 135)<sup>18</sup>. Protestant pastors wore the bands at the time as part of their otherwise inconspicuous outdoor clothing.

Exceptions to the rule of not identifying as a Protestant official out with the church occurred in situations in which high-ranking Protestant officials felt the need or were urged to outwardly demonstrate their equal standing opposite Catholic clergymen. Within the social hierarchy of the *Ancien régime*, for instance, the general superintendent of a territory was viewed as equal in rank to a Catholic bishop because he administered a territory similar in size to that of a diocese. However, unless it was decided to specifically order civilian garments expressive of the high position, a general superintendent too appeared rather inconspicuous in public<sup>19</sup>.

This changed when the frock-coat became the universal robe in male fashion during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Pastors naturally wore it just as everyone else did. The version of the frock-coat known as the *Lutherrock* (Lutheran frock-coat) is a special, knee-length and high-necked variant with a stand-up collar and a single row of

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, the photograph of the linguist Colin Hardie (1906–1998) wearing a wing collar, white bow-tie and bands in Coren (2012: 61) or the well-known photograph of Harold Macmillan at his inauguration as Chancellor of the University of Oxford on 30 April 1960.

<sup>19</sup> The German theologian, philosopher and poet Johann Gottfried Herder commissioned two special robes to be made for a journey through Italy in 1788 and 1789. Following Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s advice who, whilst in Rome, frequented artistic circles almost exclusively, Herder felt he could not take his “black frock” with him as it would insufficiently convey his status as general superintendent and chief consistorial president of Saxony-Weimar: “And now I have to have one made here because I cannot be seen in society in any of my other robes; they will always be thought to be tailcoats [...] So I have to incur twice the costs because I have to buy a black and a purple one [...]” Letter to his wife Caroline Herder, 11 October 1788 (Meier, Hollmer 1989: 156) The purple colour identifies the robe to be purchased as a bishop’s cassock.



II. 2. Lutheran frock-coat with wing-tip collar

Source: Antje Bednarek-Gilland

buttons. It developed into a kind of civilian attire for Protestant theologians, albeit it was not adopted everywhere, nor by the majority of pastors.

Apart from the Lutheran frock-coat, then, which has neither ever been fashionable among Reformed pastors, nor was ever worn much in large parts of West Germany, there has never been a special kind of civilian attire for religious offices in German-speaking Protestantism. Therefore, whilst paintings and sepulchral monuments of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century show pastors in their academic gown, since the Enlightenment they are depicted decked out in contemporary fashionable clothing.

### Changes since the 1970s<sup>20</sup>

The main changes which have occurred since the 1970s are the reintroduction of the alb and the stole as part of Protestant pastors' official robes, and, as civilian attire, the almost exclusive use of the Lutheran frock-coat among pastors in trans-regional offices. There has, furthermore, developed a tendency for the clerical collar to be worn in public.

#### Official robes

Reflections about which robes might be appropriate for contemporary Protestant services intensified in the course of the liturgical revival movement of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hofhansl 1984). An important prerequisite for officially re-addressing the clothing question are the growing neo-Lutheran confessionality and the blossoming ecumenical movement<sup>21</sup>. The latter acquaints afresh German Protestants with Lutheran Churches elsewhere, e.g. in Scandinavia, which had preserved priestly vestments and the notion of apostolic succession. By mid-century, liturgically and high-church oriented circles within the German community of pastors were deeply ensconced in a debate about the academic gown as central item of Protestant official vestments. Besides the colour symbolism – black as the colour of mourning thought to be inappropriate for conveying the good news of the Gospel – which is an important consideration, the fact that the academic gown has never been a liturgical garment as such plays a role<sup>22</sup>. Possessing a much

<sup>20</sup> The date is not discrete as the changes which we describe here must have started in the 1960s already. However, the documentary sources identify 1970 as first official record in Bavaria (Gottesdienst-Institut der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern 2007) and 1972 in Alsace-Lorraine (Hofhansl 1984).

<sup>21</sup> The Evangelical Free Churches in Germany were not affected by the liturgical movement as far as we can tell. Liturgically, they are much less formal than the EKD churches. Some of them could be classed as non- or anti-liturgical churches.

<sup>22</sup> Bearing in mind that all religious garb including alb and chasuble emerged from everyday clothing and, through usage and the passage of time, were *transformed* into vestments, this is a bit of a moot point.

longer lineage the alb is currently demanded to replace the academic gown, the chasuble playing a role in some congregations, too.

The stole is part of this set of changes although this vestment has a different origin. It has always marked out the office of priesthood and it has always been a status symbol. The stole can be worn in liturgical colours in which case it changes throughout the year, or it can be a multicoloured stole which is worn all year around. In some churches, pastors started wearing alb and stole on special occasions even before the debate about whether this should be allowed had officially become settled.

The contrast between the academic gown and the alb with stole is indeed considerable and noticeable (see Il. 2). The black colour of the academic gown is supposed to detract from the person of the wearer so as to let the verbal aspects of the liturgy assume elevated significance. The white colour of the alb and the bright stole, in contrast, emphasise the bodily movement of the wearer and thus they foreground both the person performing the ritual as well as the performativity of the liturgy itself (Gottesdienst-Institut der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern 2007).

In 1993, the Lutheran Liturgical Conference of 1993 officially accepted that “over the past ten years the wearing of bright-coloured liturgical robes has been taken on by the governing bodies of churches and by synods, both of whom also recognise and appreciate the associated intentions regarding the church service as a whole” (Lutherische Liturgische Konferenz Deutschlands 1993: 32). It was agreed that in most cases pastors who wish to wear bright-coloured robes need to ask their respective church council for permission (Lutherische Liturgische Konferenz Deutschlands 1993: 31). The Regulations on Official Robes of the Protestant Church of the Rhineland of 2008, likewise, establish:

§ 3: *Official robes*: The official robes of the servants of the Word consist of the black academic gown with white bands or white collar. In addition, a round, flat biretta made of black velvet may be worn out of doors. § 4: *Alb and stole*: (1) Instead of official robes as according to § 3 servants of the Word may also wear a coat-alb (without turtle neck or hood) made of a natural-coloured woollen fabric and a stole in the liturgical colour. (2) A stole may also be worn with the official robes according to § 3, generally in liturgical colours.

Pastors generally wear the stole hanging down on both shoulders, whilst deacons wear it diagonally crossing over the chest and clasped tight at the hip. Everyone else assisting in the service can wear either the alb or the academic gown<sup>23</sup>.

Two things are remarkable here: Firstly, the alternative official robes concentrate on alb and stole. There is no official re-connection to the chasuble as a traditional garment although it has always been more common in German Lutheranism than the stole. In this sense, the changes do not exclusively consist

<sup>23</sup> Bar some regional and situational exceptions; see fn. 20.



Il. 3. Alb and stole

Source: Antje Bednarek-Gilland

of a re-adaptation of something old, which is what the champions of an alternative set of official robes like to claim, but also contain genuinely new elements. Secondly, the wearing of the stole over the academic gown is now permitted. Traditionally, this has always been an absolutely unthinkable combination as it theologically connects the office of teacher (academic gown) with that of the priest (stole) in a highly dubious way. That it has become possible to do this at all bears the typical signs of a compromise solution in which the stole, of all things, is permitted. The enhanced emphasis placed on the stole shifts the meaning of pastoral office towards the notion of priestly order in apostolic succession<sup>24</sup>.

### Civilian robes

The Lutheran frock-coat is still part of pastors’ civilian attire, but its use has changed. During the 1950s, groups of pastors would wear this coat for its decent and sombre appeal at festive civilian occasions, such as e.g. the visit of a regional bishop, the superintendent or the EKD president. Today, in contrast, only the visiting bishop would wear the Lutheran frock-coat whilst the attending pastors would be clad in their best suits or costumes. The Lutheran frock-coat, then, has evolved from a garment worn by all pastors into a kind of “uniform for the upper clergy” (Gottesdienst-Institut der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern, 2007: 13) in Lutheran *Landeskirchen*.

Similar to the changes in traditional official robes, the clergy shirt and clerical collar, both of which are common in the Anglican Communion, became more popular with Lutheran pastors as civilian attire – especially so, surprisingly, among young Lutheran curates who, as an older pastor comments, “take great pleasure in status” (Dieckmann 2013: 27). Those who wear clergy shirts are not yet in the majority, but they are not a laughable minority either. And it is not only traditionalists who prefer the clergy shirt and clerical collar: two former chairmen of the Evangelical Church in Germany, Manfred Kock and Wolfgang Huber (Il. 3), have both been photographed with clerical collar on many occasions and neither of them can be considered a traditionalist.

The ‘dog-collar’ shirt and white clerical collar are often worn at international ecumenical meetings and can there also be seen in combination with a suit and topped off by a Lutheran frock-coat to boot (Gottesdienst-Institut der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern 2007: 13). The clerical collar is apparently a *sine qua non* item of religious clothing in the international ecumenical movement and could have been brought ‘back home’, as it were, from international events. In Germany itself, the clerical collar worn by a Protestant pastor has no precedents, quite in contrast to the bands which had been worn in public up to

<sup>24</sup> This assessment is substantiated by § 6 (3) of the Regulations on Official Robes of the Protestant Church of the Rhineland which establishes that during Communion “with sick or invalid members of the congregation and in other special circumstances [...] the stole can be worn by itself, i.e. without other robes”. The stole, then, becomes the exclusive sign of the religious office.

the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Scandinavian Lutherans have not used the clerical collar either. Traditionally, as portraits of bishops reveal, out with the church service Scandinavian Lutheran clergy wore a (normal) collar or bands. The clerical collar, then, is a fashionable Anglicism with far-reaching symbolic consequences. Exceptions such as military chaplaincy aside, the clerical collar does not play a role in the German-speaking Reformed Churches.

### Summary

Whilst the Reformed churches in Germany abolished religious vestments directly following the Reformation, Lutheranism preserved them in many places without using them, however. Distinctions between different levels in the church hierarchy were rejected and religious dress for Protestants thus became unified. The academic gown, originally not a special religious vestment, by and by transformed into one as pastors stopped wearing it in public. Up to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was no special civilian attire for Protestant pastors. The Lutheran frock-coat was adopted for this purpose and worn by all pastors in public from then onwards. In official as well as civilian attire, distinctions of rank did not exist. The common baptism of all believers was the foundation for this socio-cultural structure.

Things started to change in the post-war era. Desiring to reconnect to tradition, the alb and the stole were reintroduced as official vestments. By the 1990s, this shift has been complete so that today multiple options exist for what a pastor might wear when performing the liturgy. The academic gown is criticised in many quarters for its sobriety and its civilian origins. As regards civilian clothing, a status distinction has been introduced using the Lutheran frock-coat which is increasingly worn by pastors in trans-regional offices. All Protestant pastors may, and increasingly do if it is permissible, wear the clerical collar and other symbols of their profession such as the pectoral cross in public.

Both as regards official and civilian robes, distinctions and status symbols have proliferated. During the church service, alb and stole place heightened emphasis on the person conducting the service which elevates their position over that of the congregation. Outside the church, in public places, religious persons no longer blend in but, quite to the contrary, stand out due to various religious symbols which adorn their everyday dress. This reintroduces social relations redolent of Catholicism. The term *reclericalisation* therefore seems apt for capturing the deeper meanings of these changes.

The changes that are occurring are justified by reference to church traditions. In a cultural context in which the past is constantly re-discovered and always spectacularly appreciated, the further back in the past one can (seemingly) legitimately locate precedents to current practices, the better (Lowenthal 1998). For Protestant churches seeking to legitimate their authority afresh, this then means going back to Reformation times or, if they are so inclined, to also include (parts



of) the Catholic pre-Reformation legacy. The further into posterity the lineage reaches, the stronger the claim based on it, the ‘true’ garments being those which have endured the longest through the passage of time. The Lutheran frock-coat is a case in point: although, since it is so relatively young, it does not relate to Luther at all, the name itself places it back *in illo tempore* when Luther preached in Wittenberg. Time-honoured stability is suggested and this increases the (status-endowing) value of this piece of clothing.

### Discussion: Reclericalising German Protestantism?

We define reclericalisation as the reintroduction of traditional religious vestments and the concomitant renewed emphasis on distinctions in form and status between a kind of clerical estate and lay people on the one hand and, on the other hand, between higher-ranking religious officials and lower-ranking ones. This is a distinction the Reformers rejected. The reclericalising shift is preceded by a continuation of the general practice of preserving tradition whenever possible which has marked at least the Lutheran churches up to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (and, in some regions, even later). Even the decree of 1811 recommended the preservation of still-existing vestments. At the same time, however, they were hardly used in day-to-day ministry and in many places they were regarded mainly as institutional heritage. A shift in the meaning of institutional heritage has obviously occurred but this is a subject which deserves attention in its own right which we cannot grant it here.

The changes have a profound effect on contemporary understanding of the ministry. By and large, the practice of the ministry before as well as after 1970 corresponded to Lutheran orthodoxy which in turn depended on the *Confessio Augustana* as well as a range of other Protestant confessions. However, reintroducing the alb and stole and thereby returning to pre-Enlightenment practices means rejecting elements of Enlightenment and rationalistic traditions of Protestantism which, as a result, changes its modern-day substance. Moreover, this stance of rejection can come in tandem with the encouragement to become aware of Lutheranism’s “submerged Catholicity” (Schatz 2004: 123). Within the ecumenical movement, calls like this can be heard often. The term ‘Catholicity’ is apt here as it suggests an understanding of the ministry equivalent to that of the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church. The fact that the stole rather than the chasuble is currently the focal point in changes to official robes suggests that a catholicising shift is indeed taking place, especially since the stole, completely contrary to Lutheran tradition, is being worn *over* the black academic gown. Assuming that this is not just an expression of unreflective love of bright colours (for which the so-called ‘rainbow stoles’ give ample opportunity), the emphasis on the stole is indeed a revolutionary change of which we will say more below. It is clear

that Lutheranism, by virtue of these lines of argumentation, is already becoming somewhat 'Catholicised'.

Now for the pastor's new everyday clothes: The reintroduction of the Lutheran frock-coat results in growing status differentiation among Protestant officials. The misleading name of this coat, establishing an alleged lineage to Luther's own time, transforms it into an item of clothing whose main purpose it is to identify its wearer as a higher-ranking religious official:

Differentiation by means of dress evinces that, contrary to Protestant understanding of the ministry, it has become common practice to distinguish between 'upper' and 'lower' clergy. This no longer adequately expresses the notion that in Protestantism there is only one ministry and that all leading and supervisory positions within the Protestant churches are not of divine foundation but emerge from human law (Gottesdienst-Institut der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern 2007: 13).

As this undercuts the notion of the equal ministry of all Protestant pastors, the reintroduction of the Lutheran frock-coat functionally constitutes part of the re-clericalisation process in German Protestantism.

Entirely a sign of re-clericalisation, the adoption of the white clerical collar sounds the bell for a novel interpretation, perhaps even for a meaningful shift, in the Reformation understanding of the ministry. It does not have any kind of precedent in the German Lutheran tradition. Establishing it as part and parcel of the general return to tradition is nothing less than a revolutionary change disguised as an attempt at restoration. It is unlikely that this is done inadvertently, say, because the historical sources have not been studied closely enough. It is much more likely that tradition is referred to in an attempt to create legitimacy for recent changes.

#### Why are the changes occurring now?

In the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the churches emptied, as conventions were increasingly doubted and as the religious market widened, German mainline churches slipped into a crisis. Alternative spiritualities and new religious movements proliferated, inviting followers to introspection, contemplation and reflection. Visually, new religious movements especially of Eastern provenance made a lasting impact. Eastern religious symbols are part of mainstream Western culture today<sup>25</sup>. Muslims, too, express their religious faith visually in their headwear and clothing (Plüss 2013). The Protestant churches with their lack of symbolism have to compete with the opulent symbolism of the Catholics, the lively colourfulness of Eastern religion, and with the spreading of Islam which has assumed a steady

<sup>25</sup> The dispersion and interweaving of these symbols in German everyday culture is indeed quite thorough: it has recently been commented in several national newspapers that, in terms of home decoration, Buddha figurines and other Eastern goddesses are replacing the traditional German garden gnome.

presence and visibility especially in urban life. The new visibility of non-Christian religions is one of the conditions influencing the changes we have described.

At a community fair in Berlin-Neukölln in 2007, for instance, the pastor of the Lutheran Nikodemus Church was seen wearing a clerical collar. Religion being visible and palpably important in many of the Muslim communities living in Neukölln, it may appear as a sensible move to increase the visibility of one’s own religion so that families at the fair can identify the person who is responsible for ‘Christian cult’ in the area. The Berlin theologian Wilhelm Gräß, in fact, calls for inner-city churches to do precisely this, i.e. to assume a much more visible and self-confident position among other religious competitors. Using the market metaphor, Gräß argues that urban consumers have spiritual needs and desires “which need to be translated pictorially. The icon and the brand are needed” (Gräß 1996: 174). Gräß is convinced that inner-city churches in particular need to offer more spiritual experience and more emphatic rituals in order to appeal to the spiritual needs of city-dwellers. Richer ‘costumes’, as it were, could be viewed as a step towards this goal.

In German churches and in public places, the clerical collar likewise serves to increase visibility because it is widely known through the mediatisation of religious officials in British and American television programmes and feature films. Comments made by the Bishop of Thuringia in the course of defining the new clothing regulations hint in this direction. He refers to the “changed receptive behaviour” (Lutherische Liturgische Konferenz Deutschlands 1993: 38) of contemporary church-goers and names the modern media as the main factor behind this change. He further notes that the “spiritual content is no longer conveyed predominantly by logical argumentation but through imagery with symbolic content” (Lutherische Liturgische Konferenz Deutschlands 1993: 38). The image, in other words, slowly replaces the word. The result of this tremendous shift could be that, just as the academic gown became transformed into an official robe by usage over time and expectations of the congregation, the clerical collar becomes part of all Protestant pastors’ clothes.

The adoption of alb and stole and the sporting of the clerical collar in public contribute to a new visibility. The more specific the clothing of the religious official becomes, the better recognisable he or she becomes for religious seekers. Because the churches are losing members they are trying to reconnect to their past and its rich symbolism and forms. They developed at a time when there was little religious competition between churches, thus allowing for a complex system of differentiation within the church to develop (Bourdieu 2000). A connection to these days is symbolically created through the reintroduction of a variety of robes which indicate more inner-institutional life than may actually be the case.

### The symbolism of the pastor's new clothes

Whilst the alb can be justified by reference to tradition and institutional heritage, the stole is a different matter altogether, for it is and always has been a status symbol. It invests the wearer with elevated status. The differentiated use of the stole makes it possible to distinguish between pastors and deacons, i.e. between the different hierarchies of church officials in the performance of their religious duty. This means that the persons participating in religious rituals in the Protestant church are differentiated in status (high/low) *from one another* by virtue of wearing special vestments. Furthermore, the symbolism of liturgical vestments establishes a sharp distinction between *those performing the religious office and lay people*. This becomes particularly obvious when we compare this practice with the simple – and increasingly out-dated – practice of the pastor presiding in his academic gown and non-ordained others who assist during the service wearing a dark-coloured suit or costume.

Although the high/low-dichotomy has more weight in terms of official roles, it has also been fully reintroduced, and with more intricate distinctions, outside the church proper. In the past, pastors used to dress in line with bourgeois fashion when not performing religious duties. Today, by their civilian clothes, Protestant pastors performatively create a distinction between what should be called the 'upper clergy' (who wear the Lutheran frock-coat) and 'lower clergy' (who wear 'ordinary' civilian clothing, possibly accompanied by the clerical collar). Expressing one's profession outside the church has the potential to draw attention, to the person as well as the ministry. Recognition as a religious official is, under these circumstances, not exclusively bound to the performance of religious rituals in the seclusion of a church building; it is ensured to be possible in the civil sphere, as well. Pastors, one could say, become recognisable as an estate. This is why the use of the term 'clergy' which is normally avoided within German Protestantism seems so apt.

The renewed distinction of rank among Protestant pastors and between pastors and laity re-establishes a 'textile boundary' which separates the church from the world (Konrad 2005). After all, the social order which emanates from the new dress regulations is one in which stark differentiations between persons of rank and persons without are assumed. The symbolism both of the 'upgraded' liturgical vestments and civilian clothing signals a departure from the simplicity and relative openness in terms of class of clothing practices before 1970. If our analysis is correct, then the new textile boundary is simultaneously a new class boundary.

## Conclusion

This essay focused on changes in Protestant clothing practices both as concerns liturgical and civilian attire. Analysing both, we conclude that a process of recleri-

calisation is currently taking place. This means that forms of distinction which mark clerical hierarchies in non-Protestant churches are revitalised in Protestant dress in order to affect distinctions a) between pastors in trans-regional offices and (local) pastors and b) between religious officials as a whole and lay persons. Reclericalisation can occur directly such as when liturgical items of clothing are reintroduced (alb and stole), and it can also transpire in a rather indirect way (Lutheran frock-coat). The use of the white clerical collar is a clear case of invention of tradition when it is used in German-speaking Protestant churches. Reclericalisation occurs within the church as well as in civil society, and in both spheres it contributes to the creation of status-based boundaries between classes and groups of people. It is an institutional practice which is more prevalent in some German regions than in others.

The social and cultural consequences of the changes which we have illuminated here are likely unintentional. We do not imagine that pastors actively seek to restore a social order based on stark dichotomies between haves and have-nots or higher- and lower-ranking individuals. Rather, we recognise that “legal regulations and tendencies regarding ecclesiastical dress are in almost constant flux” (Lutherische Liturgische Konferenz Deutschlands 1993: 32). At the same time it is important to us to highlight that clothes do communicate more than appreciation for tradition or love for colours which is a strong explanans for the inroads the stole is currently making. Especially when it comes to intricate cultural systems such as ecclesiastical dress the symbolic content of individual pieces of clothing and the context in which they are worn play an important role. Religious vestments are, after all, invested with theological meaning. They are not just multi-coloured robes which can be used as is aesthetically expedient.

Further research is needed on several points raised here. A thorough empirical investigation of pastors' perceptions of the different kinds of vestments and the reasons for wearing them would certainly be worthwhile in the light of the argument we have presented. It might also be interesting to look at the intersection between changes in clothing practices and mediatisation of religious practices at large. Furthermore, rich empirical material would make it possible to clarify the conceptual boundaries between clothes as symbols of belonging to an estate or as connected to other kinds of social order. Lastly, we imagine that illuminating the extent to which the return to traditional cultural symbols and practices also occurs in other aspects of institutional life within churches or church-like communities might also be rewarding.

## Bibliography

- Ariès P., 1973, *Centuries of Childhood*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin.  
Bourdieu P., 1992, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London: Routledge.

- Bourdieu P., 2000, *Das religiöse Feld. Texte zur Ökonomie des Heilsgeschehens*, Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz.
- Coren M., 2012, *J.R.R. Tolkien. Der Mann, der 'Herr der Ringe' erschuf*, Königswinter: Heel.
- Dieckmann C., 2013, *Eine Feste Burg*, "ZEIT Magazin" 12, 14 March.
- Durkheim É., 1969, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, New York: Free Press.
- Elert W., 1931, *Morphologie des Luthertums*, vol. 1, München: Beck.
- Gottesdienst-Institut der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern, 2007, *Evangelisch betucht: Katalog zur Ausstellung mit Gottesdienstgewändern und Amtstracht*, Nürnberg: Tümmels.
- Gräb W., 1996, *Neuer Raum für Gottesdienste – Raum für neue Gottesdienste?*, in: P. Stolt, W. Grünberg, U. Suhr (eds.), *Kulte, Kulturen, Gottesdienste. Öffentliche Inszenierung des Lebens*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Gronow J., 1993, *Taste and Fashion: The Social Function of Fashion and Style*, "Acta Sociologica" 36(2).
- Grossmann M., Kühni S., Suri O., Walti C., 2013, *Visuelles Auftreten von Pfarrerinnen im Gottesdienst. Eine explorative Studie aus der Deutschschweiz*, "Pastoraltheologie" 102(6).
- Gugutzer R., 2012, *Verkörperungen des Sozialen. Neophänomenologische Grundlagen und soziologische Analysen*, Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Hansen H.H., 1954, *Knaurs Kostümbuch. Die Kostümgeschichte aller Zeiten*, München/Zürich: Knaur.
- Hofhansl E., 1984, *Gewänder, Liturgische Theologische Realenzyklopädie, Bd. 13: Gesellschaft/Gesellschaft und Christentum VI – Gottesbeweise*, Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Konrad D., 2005, *Ordentlich – passend – angemessen. Schönheit im Kloster*, in: G. Mentges, B. Richard (eds.), *Schönheit der Uniformität. Körper, Kleidung, Medien*, Frankfurt/New York: Campus.
- Kreise K., 2005, *Turban and türban: 'Divider between Belief and Unbelief'. A Political History of Modern Turkish Costume*, "European Review" 13(3).
- Kybalová L., Herbenová O., Lamarová M., 1976, *Das große Bilderlexikon der Mode. Vom Altertum zur Gegenwart*, Gütersloh/Berlin: Bertelsmann.
- Lowenthal D., 1998, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lutherische Liturgische Konferenz Deutschlands, 1993, *Liturgische Kleidung im Evangelischen Gottesdienst*, Hannover.
- Mayo J., 1984, *A History of Ecclesiastical Dress*, London: B.T. Batsford.
- Meier A., Hollmer H. (eds.), 1989, *Johann Gottfried Herder: Italienische Reise. Briefe und Tagebuchaufzeichnungen 1788–1789*, München: C.H. Beck.
- Piepkorn A.C., Schöne J., Seybold E., 1987, *Die liturgischen Gewänder in der Lutherischen Kirche seit 1555 (Ökumenische Texte und Studien)*, Lüdenscheid/Lobet: Ökumenischer Verlag.
- Plüss D., 2013, *Kopftuch, Turban und Salutistenmütze. Die Aussenwahrnehmung religiöser Kleidersymbolik im öffentlichen Raum*, in: M. Glavac, A.-K. Höpflinger, D. Pezzoli-Oligati (eds.), *Second Skin: Körper, Kleidung, Religion*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Ruane C., 2002, *Subjects into Citizens: The Politics of Clothing in Imperial Russia*, in: W. Parkins (ed.), *Fashioning the Body Politic: Dress, Gender, Citizenship*, Oxford: Berg.

- 
- Schatz H., 2004, *Historische Bilder zum Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gottesdienst*, Ansbach: 3 K-Verlag.
- Schwaiger G., 2003, *Mönchtum Orden Klöster. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart. Ein Lexikon*, Munich: C.H. Beck.
- Simmel G., 1957, *Fashion*, “The American Journal of Sociology” 62(6).
- Trzebiatowska M., 2010, *Habit Does Not a Nun Make? Religious Dress in the Everyday Lives of Polish Catholic Nuns*, “Journal of Contemporary Religion” 25(1).
- Wrigley R., 2002, *The Formation and Currency of Vestimentary Stereotype: The ‘sans-culottes’ in Revolutionary France*, in: W. Parkins (ed.), *Fashioning the Body Politic: Dress, Gender, Citizenship*, Oxford: Berg.