

## The Use of Clerical Attire at CPC New Haven

It is not uncommon for people from other gospel believing churches to be surprised when they discover that the ordained pastors at CPC wear clerical attire--either the Genevan robe or the clerical collar -- in various services of worship or special pastoral activities. For some it is associated with non-protestant churches, or even churches they associate with being non-missional or gospel centered even. Others see it as pretentious perhaps, or maybe even snobbish.

We understand! And yet, for those who understand the heart and rationale for their use, we believe that to understand the meaning and significance of the clerical attire is to accentuate the Christ centeredness that we seek to express in everything CPC New Haven does. Here then are the reasons why our ordained pastors wear clerical attire, albeit briefly summarized. \*

In an age of clerical personalities and celebrityism (including the “hip/not so hip” shoes and cloths as personality identifiers), the robe/collar seeks to veil the “person” in a way that elevates the sacred mediatorial *office* of pastor when acting “in office.” Relevant contexts might include corporate worship (ministry of word and sacrament), last rite visits in hospitals (and subsequent funerals) weddings and other such events or activities wherein the person ought to decrease that Christ, acting in office, might increase.

Likewise, in an age wherein we see more and more self-appointed and charlatan ministers, the clerical robe/collar is an attempt to reestablish the idea that the pastor serves at the pleasure of Christ as discerned by an apostolic designed church via the process of ordination and the laying on of hands. Admittedly, anyone can purchase a robe or collar and wear it. But ordinarily, the use of clerical attire at least raises the question as to jurisdiction and authority.

Commonly, sometimes cynically, the collar is described as “the dog collar.” Perhaps ironically it isn’t such a bad analogy. The minister when acting in office is acting under a vow of poverty wherein he enslaves himself to Christ in everything he says and does on his behalf as Christ’s under-prophet, priest, shepherd-king. Frequently, the apostle Paul describes his acting in office as “a slave to Christ (Rom 1:1). Especially relevant is Paul’s description of his ministry (and all offices in succession such as the office of pastor).

*This is how one should regard us, as slaves of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 1Cor. 4:1*

Many find that the robe/collar, in so far as it veils the person and unveils the office of Christ, makes it feel more “safe” to engage the office of minister—especially to the degree that the clerical robe/collar is a means to minimize various social distinctions in so far as both parties adhere to the symbolism of the clerical attire. For instance, my family has always found it comforting to receive holy communion from the hands of their minister acting in office (via the clerical attire) vs. their husband/father via his person (Please don’t read too much into that 😊). In small ways even, I have noticed how just wearing it prevents me from making even a sympathetic gesture to my family in a way that would distinguish them from others—again, something that I think my family desires in worship.

Finally, especially as pertaining to the use of the clerical collar, I can imagine that many are thinking— Why is my church going Roman Catholic or Anglican or.... Would it surprise you to know that actually the clerical collar originated in the Presbyterian Church? That's right! For many of the reasons just noted, during the reformation many churches adopted the Genevan robe as their preference (derived from the academic and judicial context). Subsequently, there was the desire to distinguish the sacred character of the biblical office of pastor from the academic use especially such that in 1865 the Rev. Donald Mcleod, a Presbyterian minister in Glasgow Scotland, invented the clerical collar.

The Presbyterian inspired clerical collar was later adopted by other denominations including the Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran and even some Baptist churches. Admittedly, while the clerical collar was historically distinguished as the Presbyterian form of clerical attire, the historical distinction has been lost upon the modern person.

*\*A Qualifier.* We distinguish the clerical robe or collar as a "form" vs. an "element" in pastoral practice. That is, we don't believe it is prescribed in scripture by good AND necessary inference (the principle of interpretation that binds conscience—or makes something an "element" in pastoral praxis). Rather, as a "form" of pastoral practice, it is derived with the principle of interpretation "by good" (only) inference coupled with an analysis of the various circumstances and cultural context that we live. In short, pastors are not bound to wear clerical attire.