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CHURCH LINENS

A Guide for Altar Societies



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FOREWORD

There are two chief sources of authority that govern matters treated of in this booklet: (1) the rubrics printed in the front of every Altar Missal; (2) the decrees of the Sacred Congregation of Rites (S. R. C.), which have the same authority as the rubrics. These decrees are, as a rule, answers to rubrical questions submitted to the Congregation from all parts of the world. They interpret or supplement the rubrics, and at times forbid, sanction, or tolerate customs; and they allow or disallow the use of certain materials for liturgical purposes.

The sources mentioned above are commented on by what are known as approved authors, that is, men who have made a study of the subject and whose writings have the approval of the proper ecclesiastical authorities. Only books of this type are referred to in the following pages. Some may wonder why there should be so many references to rubrical and interpretative sources in a manual intended for altar societies. There really is no cause for wonderment, however. It is unthinkable that a booklet of this kind, which treats of matters pertaining to the altar, should see the light of day unless it were thoroughly documented so that a

pastor may be certain that his altar society is following the regulations laid down by the Church and not some variety of homemade rubrics. Let it be said, too, that this is not an archeological treatise but a brief statement of the current practice of the Church.

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CHURCH LINENS

MATERIALS FOR ALTAR LINENS

Two kinds of material may be used in making altar linens: (1) Linen proper, a cloth woven from the fibers of flax, which is so common and so well known that no description is necessary; (2) Hemp cloth, authorized for optional use instead of linen by a general decree issued by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, May 15, 1819.

To most Americans the term "hemp" has but one meaning — a rough, coarse cloth wholly unsuitable for use on or about the altar. After extensive inquiry, the information condensed in the following paragraph was obtained regarding the kind of hemp that may be substituted for linen.

There are two distinct classes of fibers called hemp: (a) the true or soft hems from which a thin, white, linenlike cloth can be made; and (b) the various fibers from which the rough, coarse cloth and cordage are manufactured. Only the former is considered here. (1) Hemp is more nearly like flax than any other fiber. (2) Italian hemp is the finest in the world; Japanese hemp ranks next. (3) Linen, not hemp, is

used in Italy for church purposes. (4) At the present time the largest stores in the United States do not keep fine white hemp cloth in stock, but it can be imported. (5) According to information given the writer by the United States Tariff Commission, no fine hemp fabrics have been made here in recent years. (6) A sample of the best-quality Italian hemp indicates that it bleaches perfectly white, but the weave is not so close nor is the surface so smooth as that of fine linen.

THE ALTAR CLOTHS

The altar cloths must be made of linen or hemp. A general decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites forbids the use of any other materials even if they are equivalent to, or better than, linen or hemp for cleanliness, whiteness, or firmness. This ruling applies not only to altar cloths but also to corporals, palls, purificators, amices, and albs.¹

There must be three altar cloths on every altar on which Mass is celebrated. The upper cloth should cover the entire surface of the table of the altar, and at each end go down to the floor, but without touching it. The other two cloths (or one doubled to supply the two required thicknesses) need cover only the whole altar table.²

The very best practice is not to allow the top altar cloth to hang down over the front edge of the altar table; instead, it should lie along the edge. If it hangs below the edge, it is apt to become frayed and soiled. However, there is no law prohibiting the overhang. In fact, it is actually permitted to ornament the front edge of the cloth and the two ends with a border of linen or hempen lace on which may appear figures of the cross, monstrance, angels, chalice and host, and the like.³ It is recommended that the lace be not more than 7 to 10 inches deep, and that it be mounted separately on a linen tape which ought to be deep enough to allow it to hang below the fall of the altar cloth.⁴ A piece of colored material may be placed under the lace to set forth the figures. The use of such ornamented cloths as these should be restricted to feast days.

Despite the above permissions, the plainer an altar cloth is, the better. Moreover, if the altar is provided with a frontal (antependium), there would seem to be no purpose in covering the upper part of this with a border of lace.

Dom Roulin in his learned work finds in the altar cloth occasion for both sadness and rejoicing. "I have seen," he sighs, "altar cloths bordered with enormous lace figures, on which were depicted the alleged portrait of a saint, a view of a church, symbols and signs

of various sorts. The altar was lost to view behind a barrage of lace, and the altar cloth contained no trace of the flowing white linen which should fall down at either end. . . . Now, although all altar cloths do not present us with such exaggerated and antiliturgical productions, yet it must be said that their embroideries and dangling lace are in the best shop-window style and calculated to arrest the attention of the curious. But let us take heart! these things have not got it all their own way; the simple and pure spirit of the Church is always alive somewhere. There are cathedrals, seminary chapels, abbeys and parish churches where the altars are covered with cloths of fine linen and without any ornament. They cover the *mensa* [altar table] completely, but do not come down over the front as much as one centimeter; and they fall down at either end almost to the ground. They have everything they should have, and they are perfect altar cloths. They remind us of the winding sheet that enshrouded the Body of our Lord; they are exquisite in taste and they breathe the odor of humility. They are, if I may so express it, like the perfectly simple yet simply perfect costume of a noble lady."⁵ The altar cloth that Dom Roulin has in mind is in accordance with both the spirit and the letter of the liturgy.

When candles are placed on the altar, as during Benediction, extra cloths should be placed under them

— one at the Gospel side and another at the Epistle side — to protect the altar cloth.⁶

THE CORPORAL

Since the corporal comes in direct contact with our Lord's sacred Body, it is the most important of all the linens used at the altar. It must be made of linen⁷ or hemp.⁸ No other kind of material may be used.

There must be no embroidery or embellishments on its surface. No cross is allowed in its center.⁹ Since altars are of different sizes, so too must the corporal vary in dimensions. It should be large enough to accommodate the chalice, the paten, and the ciborium and its cover, when the latter has been removed. A corporal 18 or 20 inches square will usually meet these requirements. It is improper to use a corporal which is so large that either the altar card must rest upon it, or the corporal must rest against the lower part of the card. A practical method of determining the proper size of the corporal for a given altar is to make a square piece of linen which, when hemmed, will fill the space between the front edge of the altar and the altar card, less one inch. If the corporal is flush with the edge of the altar the celebrant's chasuble may rub against it when he turns to face the people as at *Dominus vobiscum*.

The corporal may have a border of fine lace, but it is better without it. Lace, unless it is very narrow,

easily crumples and becomes unsightly. As far as hemstitching is concerned, let an experienced lady tell it: "Hemstitching is inadvisable on any kind of altar linen as it always gives way long before the rest of the material shows any sign of wear."¹⁰

The practice of having a small cross in red thread worked into the corporal near the front edge to indicate the side that should be toward the celebrant, is criticized by liturgists. "Since it has no purpose, and will necessarily give some difficulty in collecting the fragments on the corporal," to quote one comment, "we think it well to omit it."¹¹ And Father O'Connell says, "Marking one fold with a small cross is not prescribed, and is meaningless."¹² The small cross, in its origin, may have been a silent concession to those who were a bit hazy regarding the proper manner of folding (and unfolding) the corporal. If there is more than one approved method of doing this, it has not found its way into the books that interpret the rubrics. The two following paragraphs are for the benefit of the laundress who folds and irons the corporals; for the sacristan who puts the clean ones into the burses; and for the subdeacon and deacon at solemn functions.

How to fold a corporal: "He folds the corporal with both hands beginning with the fold nearest to himself, which he places over the central fold; over this he puts the back fold; then the right fold over it, and finally the left over the right."¹³ When folded,

it is put into the burse in such a manner that the edge of the last fold is toward the opening of the burse, and against its top. To hark back to the laundress: a corporal that has been properly folded will form nine practically equal squares when unfolded.

How to unfold a corporal: If a corporal has been folded correctly and placed in the burse correctly, it is not easy to see how it can be unfolded incorrectly. The unfolding can be expressed in four words: left, right, back, front; so, too, its folding, but in the reverse order.

The corporal must be scrupulously clean,¹⁴ nor is it allowed to use one that is torn, or one that for any reason is unfit for use. Such corporals are to be burned and their ashes put into the sacrarium.

The corporal should be well starched and very smoothly ironed. It is difficult, if not impossible, to collect the fragments of the Host on an insufficiently starched corporal.

The corporal that is placed in the tabernacle should be cut to fit the tabernacle floor in size and shape. It, too, should be well starched. A small cross in colored thread might be worked into it to distinguish it from Mass corporals and other linens. Bishop Van der Stappen recommends that this corporal be changed four times a year.¹⁵

The corporal upon which the monstrance stands during Benediction should likewise be designed to fit

the place of exposition, if there be one. The border of such a non-Mass corporal might be very modestly ornamented; the placing of anything gaudy in such a place would be a gross exhibition of bad taste.

THE PALL

The pall is a square piece of linen or hemp which is used to cover the paten and chalice.¹⁶ Originally, pall and corporal were one piece of cloth.

The pall is usually about 6 or 7 inches square. It consists of two to four thicknesses of linen starched stiffly enough to enable it to support the chalice veil without bending. This stiffening may be achieved likewise by inserting a piece of cardboard between two pieces of linen.

The upper side or surface of the pall may be ornamented with embroidery in colored silk, or covered with real cloth of gold or silver, provided no black color or symbol of death is used.¹⁷ It is required, however, that the lower side, the real pall, be entirely plain, be made of linen or hemp, and be readily detachable for washing.¹⁸ As ornaments for the upper part of the pall Bishop Van der Stappen recommends the cross or other emblems of the Passion;¹⁹ but symbols of the Holy Eucharist are equally appropriate.

"Speaking generally," says Dom Roulin, "since the pall has to be washed, it is much simpler to have on it nothing but a small cross. . . . Keep the proportions,

embroider the cross and the border in red thread, and you will then have a pall far better than one with tortured design, or one overloaded with or denuded of all ornament."²⁰ A lace border on a pall can seldom be called an ornament. "We think that plain linen palls are in every way the most serviceable."²¹ "Lace edging on a pall, it may be remarked, is not only undignified, but especially when starched, creates difficulty in handling."²²

Above all question of taste or ornamentation is the matter of cleanliness. This is absolutely essential. The pall is handled more frequently than the corporal, and it is more likely to become soiled.

THE PURIFICATOR

The purificator is a piece of linen or hemp²³ which is used to wipe the chalice and the priest's fingers, and at times the ciborium. If a purificator is made for a particular chalice, an appropriate length is twice the height of the chalice plus the width of the cup. Since chalices differ in height by at least three inches, and their cups in diameter by two inches or more, it is evident that no hard and fast rule can be given for purificators in general. A good average size is 12 by 18 inches. The cloth is folded twice on itself lengthwise, giving a triple thickness.

A small cross in colored thread worked into the center will serve a double purpose. It will distinguish

the purificator from the finger towel; and it will indicate the place, and the only place, where the purificator should be creased so that it will fold easily and lie flat when placed on the paten at the Offertory. This is preferable to the M-method of folding, with its three creases.

THE FINGER TOWEL

There are no regulations regarding the size of the finger towel or the material from which it is made. The rubrics merely require that it be clean.²⁴ A towel 16 by 20 inches should be sufficiently large. Like all altar linens it ought to be white, and it is recommended: (a) that when ironed it should be folded in four lengthwise; (b) that it should not be pleated; (c) and that, as Dom Roulin says "it should be without any wretched tags of lace."²⁵

THE CREDENCE COVER

The credence table should be covered with a white linen or hemp cloth. On feast days, this covers the table on all sides, down to the floor.²⁶ On less solemn occasions, it covers the top of the table and hangs down somewhat at the two ends after the manner of an altar cloth, but shorter.²⁷ On Good Friday, and on days of mourning and penance, the cloth covers only the surface of the table.

THE COMMUNION CLOTH AND PATEN

The Communion cloth is a plain white linen cloth²⁸ attached to the Communion rail on the inside. It should extend the full length of the rail, and be about two feet wide.

On March 26, 1929, the Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments issued an Instruction which requires, in addition to the cloth, the use of a Communion paten in the distribution of Holy Communion. "The Communion paten does not do away with the Communion cloth spread at the altar rail. It is an additional precaution to safeguard the fragments of the Sacred Species. It is not blessed."²⁹ Since the introduction of the paten, the faithful no longer hold the Communion cloth; it is laid along the flat top of the rail. This should be observed whether the paten is held by the communicants or by a server who accompanies the priest.

The Instruction covers another matter that is of importance to sacristans, nuns, or anyone else whose duty it is to fill the ciborium with small altar breads. To quote: "In reference to the hosts, the rectors [pastors] shall take care that the fragments that so easily adhere to the hosts are removed, and that, before Mass is celebrated, they are cautiously and carefully brushed off, and if there is a very large number of hosts to be consecrated, they shall be gently shaken in a sieve." The "brushing off" referred to above is done with the

fingers, not with a brush. The pertinent part of the Instruction is given in the Appendix to Wuest-Mullaney's *Matters Liturgical*.

THE BURSE FOR THE COMMUNION PATEN

After the Communion paten has been purified by the celebrant, the server puts it into a burse or receptacle to protect it from dust. An appropriate burse can be made by sewing together on three sides two pieces of linen, chamois skin, or any other washable material. To keep the paten clean, it must be washed frequently with hot water and soap. When dried, it should be rubbed vigorously with a soft, dry cloth. In cleaning the paten, it is neither necessary nor advisable to use silver polish or any other kind of abrasive. A well-polished paten will feel very much at home in a spotlessly clean burse.

THE FRONTAL (ANTEPENDIUM)

The frontal or antependium is the cloth that covers the entire front of the altar, and the back as well, if that can be seen by the congregation. It is prescribed by the rubrics for every altar upon which Mass is celebrated.³⁰ The frontal is the clothing of the altar and its true liturgical decoration. Ordinarily, it corresponds as far as possible with the color of the feast or of the office of the day.³¹ But if a Requiem Mass is celebrated at an altar on which the Blessed Sacrament is reserved,

the frontal, like the veil of the tabernacle, must be violet.³²

The material for the frontal is not prescribed. It is usually the same as that used in the sacred vestments, but it may be of any precious fabric: silk, damask, brocade, velvet, real cloth of gold or silver; or silk mixed with other materials such as wool, cotton, or linen; or linen alone may be used.

It may be ornamented with embroidery or with bands of brocade, braid, or fringe. To these may be added a monogram or a symbol. If one of these latter is employed, it should be intelligible to the faithful, or it will puzzle or distract rather than edify them. Its design should be characterized by simplicity and good taste. There are several good books on the subject.³³

It is forbidden to expose on the altar for public veneration an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus separate from His person. Such images may be used for private devotion only.³⁴ This holds good also for the two Hearts of Jesus and Mary.³⁵

Frontals are moderately expensive, and not every church can afford a full set; nor is this really necessary. As far as color is concerned, the rubric given above states that the color corresponds *as far as possible* with that of the feast or office of the day. We shall let two eminent authorities tell how even poor churches can solve this problem: "A suggestion may be made here for churches which cannot afford a full set of

The rubrics of the Roman Ritual direct that the tabernacle "be decently covered with a veil."⁴² The veil, or canopy as it is called, must be sufficiently full to cover not only the sides of the tabernacle but also the top, where it is gathered in and bordered with a fringe or tastefully adorned in some other way.

The material of the veil is not prescribed. In selecting it, the standard should be the best that can be afforded. Suggested materials are silk, silk poplin, damask, brocade, real cloth of gold or silver, or any other rich fabric. The veil should drape gracefully; it should, therefore, not be lined.

As to the color of the veil, it may be always white; but real cloth of silver may replace white;⁴³ and real cloth of gold may be used instead of white, red, or green.⁴⁴ Where the arrangement is possible, it should conform to the liturgical color of the day. It will then correspond with the color of the celebrant's vestments and with that of the frontal. This is the preferred practice and the one that is observed in Rome.⁴⁵ Black may never be used. In Requiem Masses and on All Souls' Day the color of the veil is violet.⁴⁶

A curtain hanging before the door of the tabernacle does not comply with the rubrics of the Ritual. Unfortunately, many of our altars are so constructed that it is impossible to veil the tabernacle properly. An architect or a good carpenter can often remedy this defect in a wooden altar.

The veil is a certain sign that the Blessed Sacrament is in the tabernacle. If the Sacrament is not actually present the veil should be removed, just as the sanctuary lamp should be extinguished.

The hanging of another veil of white silk in the interior of the tabernacle just back of the door is merely tolerated. It is in no way prescribed, nor even recommended, and it does not take the place of the exterior veil prescribed by the rubrics.⁴⁷

The interior of the tabernacle must be either gilded, or it must be lined with wood covered with white silk.⁴⁸ "If the interior of the tabernacle is gilt it need not be lined with silk or any other material."⁴⁹

THE CIBORIUM VEIL

When the ciborium contains the Blessed Sacrament it must be completely covered with a veil of white silk, which should be richly ornamented.⁵⁰ This veil should not be lined.

Dom Roulin gives some good advice regarding the correct form of the veil. "Notice," he says, "that the ciborium cover is a *veil*, and not a kind of case made of four pieces of stuff joined together at the top. . . . The ciborium veil is rightly conceived if it is made perfectly circular, with a small round hole in the middle for the cross or knob at the top of the ciborium lid; if the material is very soft and light the sacred vessel will

frontals. Gold thread is permitted to stand for any color other than that of the penitential season.³⁶ Consequently a gold frontal hanging on a rod and lined with violet, will meet all requirements, even [that of] a Requiem Mass at a high altar where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved; for in this case both the frontal³⁷ and the tabernacle veil³⁸ must be violet, and not black. All that is needed is to lift the rod and reverse it when required."³⁹

"It is quite possible," says Dom Roulin, "to have a simple and inexpensive altar, a block of stone, or even a neat woodwork frame containing the altar stone, and a frontal to cover it tastefully. It is not essential that the frontal be embroidered. A piece of silk damask in yellow and white, or red and yellow, or a single color, red, or green, or whatever it may be, is all that is required. One may allow oneself the addition of a monogram, or of a fringe along the upper edge or along the lower edge of the frontal; or one may have two or four vertical bands, hanging like stoles from the upper edge. The monogram and the orphreys are distinct improvements if they are well proportioned and rightly adjusted. They are certainly to be preferred to the narrow strips of gold lace, stiff, monotonous, and not appreciably decorative, that are stitched onto certain frontals."⁴⁰

Although the rubrics and the decrees of the Sacred Congregation of Rites make no exception, it seems

to be the common opinion of approved authors that the frontal may be dispensed with if the altar is formed in the style of a sepulcher, or if it is ornamented with metal decorations or with precious stones or with figures. In other words, a frontal should not conceal something more beautiful than itself. Most of our "artistic" altars look better and are more apt to inspire devotion when they are vested with the frontals prescribed by the rubrics.

THE FRONTLET

The frontlet is a 6- or 7-inch strip of colored material, with or without fringe, which hangs over the upper part of the frontal and extends from one end of the altar to the other. "It is a practical necessity when the frontal itself is hung on rings beneath the altar, in order to hide the hooks or rod, should these be used. It may be tacked onto one of the under altar cloths. It should be strongly mounted on coarse linen, and will thus prevent the cloth from slipping. . . . It is doubtful if the frontlet need conform to the color of the frontals, and for the sake of convenience and economy a plain red frontlet will suffice for ordinary occasions—red being the color that will go best with white, green, and purple."⁴¹

THE TABERNACLE VEIL

The Latin word *tabernaculum* means tent, and it is the veil that causes the tabernacle to resemble a tent.

be gracefully and fittingly covered by a veil thus conceived and executed."⁵¹

THE MONSTRANCE VEIL

The monstrance should be covered with a white veil when it stands on the altar both before and after exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.⁵² The material of which this veil is made is not prescribed. A soft white silk is recommended.

A good veil may be fashioned in either of two ways. It may be made to fit the monstrance somewhat loosely, the top and upper parts consisting of two pieces of material sewn together at the edges. Or it may be simply a square or oblong piece of silk the middle of which rests on the top of the cross that surmounts the monstrance. In either case, to drape properly it must hang free and not be so long as to touch the altar cloth.

The second method is the one that Dom Roulin has in mind: "We have said, and we repeat, that the beauty of these veils is in their folds, which are their leading characteristic and chief decoration. A monstrance veil, in length nearly twice the height of the monstrance, and of a silky material, will fall in most graceful folds; it is a great mistake to spoil it with lining. The veil, then, must have no lining, and above all, no decoration."⁵³

If a sermon is preached while the Blessed Sacrament is solemnly exposed on the altar, a veil or banneret should be placed before It.⁵⁴ While no particular material is prescribed, silk should be preferred. The color is, of course, white, the color proper to the Blessed Sacrament. The veil may be plain, or it may be ornamented in a simple and tasteful manner with fringe and a symbol of the Blessed Sacrament.

THE AMICE

The amice should be made of linen or hemp;⁵⁵ cotton, wool, or any other material is forbidden.⁵⁶ Its dimensions are not prescribed. A good average size would be 30 inches wide at the top and 24 inches long. It is rectangular in shape, with two tapes sewn to the top corners. The tapes, each at least 48 inches long, may be of any color or material. The amice may be ornamented for feast days, but it is better plain.

A small cross⁵⁷ should be embroidered midway between the tapes on the upper part of the amice not more than two inches from the top. This location of the cross has the sanction of some of the best authorities.⁵⁸

THE ALB

The alb must be made of linen or hemp;⁵⁹ cotton, wool, or other materials are forbidden.⁶⁰ The size of

the alb will naturally depend on the stature of the person who wears it. When girded and properly adjusted, it should completely cover the cassock of the wearer and reach within two or three inches of the floor.

The ideal would be that every priest should have his own alb, made to fit; but where there are many priests, and many visiting priests, it is evident that the ideal is often impossible of realization. Average measurements must be taken into consideration, and the following are given by Wilby: neck to hem, 58 inches; length of sleeve, 24 inches; diameter of sleeve, 24 inches, narrowing to 16 around cuff; diameter around hem, 4 yards; shoulder yokes, 5 by 8 inches; neckband, 20 inches by 1; depth of front placket, 13½ inches;* under-arm gussets, 5½ by 5½ inches.⁶¹ The same authority holds that the material should never be coarse; however, a fairly heavy, coarse weave is serviceable for hard wear.

The following average measurements from another source will be useful: for a person 5 feet 8 inches in height the correct length of the alb (allowing an inch for girding) will be about 5 feet, with a sleeve of about 23 inches. For one who is 5 feet 10 inches, the

*Comment on the above measurements: 1) It is evident that the 24-inch "diameter" of the sleeve refers to the pattern, not to the finished sleeve; 2) A placket 13½ inches deep should be regarded rather as a minimum, and a depth of 16 or 17 inches would not be excessive.

length will be about 5 feet 2 inches, and the sleeve 25 inches.⁶²

The alb may be fastened in front by strings or by a button; or it may have no opening in front, but a round or square opening at the top large enough to admit the head.

The rubrics prescribe nothing regarding the ornamentation of the alb. They seem to suppose that it is a plain linen garment, such as Dom Roulin describes in these words: "Let us be more precise and consider now the beauty of a simple, unadorned alb, which is beautiful for the very reason that it is simple. If an alb is made of linen of good quality, if it is neatly arranged on the person according to the directions of the rubrics — 'properly raised and adjusted all around' — instead of being smoothed out at front and sides to the semblance of a great zinc cylinder and with a mass of pleated folds bunched up at the back, then the simple alb will do very well indeed even for a feast day. It will be a very dignified vestment and one very superior to those albs adorned with networks of flowers, with bobbin or crochet lace, with white or red embroideries. . . . But [he adds] we must not be narrow-minded in these matters and we must not be supposed to forbid any ornamentation on albs, even for feast days."⁶³

The Church does permit some ornamentation of the alb,⁶⁴ such as lace or silk insertion, or a continuous

band of brocade or embroidery and the like round the skirt, and narrower bands round the wrists. Stiff material should not be used in these bands so as not to interfere with the flexibility of the alb. Lace, too, is permitted on the lower part of the skirt and on the cuffs.⁶⁵ Lace used on an alb should be strong in texture and bold in design so as not to appear effeminate.⁶⁶ A colored foundation is permitted under lace, and this ordinarily should be the color of the wearer's cassock. All authorities stress the point that great restraint should be used in the ornamentation of albs. This is especially true with regard to lace. As an ornament it is a sign of joy and is, therefore, appropriate for festive occasions, and correspondingly out of place on ordinary days and in seasons of penance and mourning. It should be borne in mind also that "on ecclesiastical dress the amount of lace worn is a sign of rank, and so deep lace should be worn only by prelates (its length being in proportion to their rank)."⁶⁷

THE CINCTURE

This may be made of any strong material, but silk should be used only for prelates.⁶⁸ The cincture should be neither too thick nor too stiff, and one that is too short is useless. The familiar, flexible, lead-pencil-size cincture is best.

A cincture must have considerable length since it is put round the waist doubled, and the tasseled ends,

before being tucked in at the waist, ought to be long enough to reach the bottom of the alb. To be usable by different persons it should not be less than 12 nor more than 14 feet long. The tassels should be of medium size. In color it may always be white, or it may be of the same color as the vestments.⁶⁹

THE SURPLICE

Historically, the surplice is an abbreviated form of the alb. The material is not prescribed, but because of the origin of this vestment, linen would be appropriate for a priest's surplice. The material should be flexible and abundant, the garment reaching to the knees and having long, wide sleeves. A round or square opening at the top admits the head of the wearer. The plain surplice, without ornament of any kind, is recommended by all authorities. Ornament of somewhat the same sort as is used on an alb is not forbidden — but the less ornament the better. Pleating is not an ornament; it's a nightmare.

"I need hardly point out," says Fortescue, "that artistically the beauty and dignity of this garment are entirely a matter of long, full folds. A long surplice falling in folds, with wide sleeves — one, in short, made according to St. Charles's rules — is an exceedingly handsome garment."⁷⁰ Thus, an Englishman points out the ideal; an American laments over what is only too often the real: "Unfortunately," says

Wapelhorst, "manufacturers and dealers offer for sale surplices that provoke ridicule rather than afford edification, garments devoid of all taste and elegance."⁷¹ These strictures can be verified by examining the pages of some of our church goods catalogues in which, among other things, the all-lace surplice is the rule, and cloth the exception. And Bishop Van der Stappen reminds us that the surplice is "a garment that ought to be made of cloth, not of lace."⁷² See the illustrations of good and bad surplices in Roulin's *Vestments and Vesture*, pp. 30-32. The pastor is likely to have a copy of Father O'Connell's *The Celebration of Mass*. In its many pages of illustrations, note the exceptionally long surplices, the vestments, the altar, and the credence cover.

With us, the cotta has to a great extent replaced the dignified garment described above. The cotta is a shortened surplice extending to the hips, with wide sleeves that reach to the elbows. It is a convenient garment, and there is no legislation that forbids or restricts the wearing of it. But it is by no means the ideal.

And altar boys' surplices! If the altar society is responsible for either the making or the purchasing of these garments, it is suggested that the members in full council assembled discuss the following inquiry: Why make an altar boy, who looks both handsome and at home even in a football suit, look like a sissy

in the sanctuary? Why doll him up in a cute little bunny-tail, powder-puff, floating-rib-length lace or cloth thing misnamed a surplice? Little wonder that servers traditionally unvest so hastily and, often enough, hang their surplices on the floor. The proper vesture for an altar boy is a black cassock long enough to cover his white "cords," and a cloth surplice that reaches to his knees. The custom of vesting servers in capes, sashes, and other imitations of the costume of prelates is foreign to both the letter and the spirit of the liturgy.

THE ALTAR COVER

At all times when an altar is not being used, the altar cloth is covered to protect it from dust, stains, or soiling. The cover is made of any kind of becoming material, silk or linen, baize or velvet. Green and red are the favorite colors; St. Charles Borromeo recommends the former. Any color but black may be used. A violet cloth is appropriate for penitential seasons.⁷³

The cloth should cover the whole surface of the altar table. It might be a little wider than the table and a little longer so that it will hang down a few inches both in front and at each end. The edges may be scalloped, embroidered, or ornamented with fringe.⁷⁴ This covering must be removed from the altar during divine services,⁷⁵ except as noted below.

It is known by various names, dust cloth, altar protector, and the quaint name *vesperale* or *vesper cloth*.

since in at least Pontifical Vespers it is not removed from the altar, but at the incensing of the altar at the *Magnificat*, is merely folded back, thus leaving the front half of the altar cloth uncovered.⁷⁶

WASHING SACRED LINENS

Canon Law prescribes that "purificators, palls, and corporals which have been used in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass must not be given to any lay person, nor to Religious, to be washed until they have been previously washed by a cleric in major orders; and the water used in this first washing shall be poured into the sacrarium, or, if there be no sacrarium, into the fire."⁷⁷ This washing should be done in a vessel that is used for no other purpose. There is no legislation to the effect that these linens must be washed more than once by a cleric.⁷⁸ Additional washings may be done by any member of the laity, man or woman.

Used purificators, palls, and corporals may be handled only by clerics and by those who have charge of the sacristy; these, too, are allowed to prepare the chalice in the sacristy, nor need they use a cloth in handling it.⁷⁹

VEIL OF THE MISSAL STAND

The rubrics prescribe that the Missal on the altar should rest on a cushion,⁸⁰ or on the familiar missal stand made of metal or wood.⁸¹ The stand should be

covered with a silk veil corresponding in color with the vestments of the celebrant. In Requiem Masses no veil is used. Bishop Van der Stappen would omit the veil also when the stand itself is beautiful, that is, when it is made of silver or of elegantly carved wood.⁸²

LITURGICAL COLORS

The liturgical colors are white, red, green, violet, and black. The legislation regarding color applies only to the fabric out of which the vestment is made. It does not apply to the added ornaments or to the lining, all of which may be of any suitable color. Real cloth of gold (not merely gold-colored cloth) may be used instead of white, red, or green, but not for violet or black.⁸³ Cloth of silver may be substituted for white.⁸⁴ Rose-colored vestments are permitted on the third Sunday of Advent (*Gaudete*) and on the fourth Sunday of Lent (*Laetare*). If a church has no vestments of this color, violet is used.⁸⁵ Blue is forbidden except by special indult.⁸⁶ Vestments of colors so mixed that no one color clearly predominates, are forbidden.⁸⁷ In other words, a vestment that is used as a white vestment on one day may not be worn as a red vestment on another day.

Violet, as a liturgical term, means a red violet, not the blue violet which is the actual color of the flower. Since violet is the liturgical color for vestments worn on penitential days, the darker shades of the red violet

are best.⁸⁸ What a medley of violet colors greets the eyes of the faithful on Vigils, on the Ember Days, and during Advent and Lent! The vestments, the frontal, and the tabernacle veil, each with its own tint or hue, are only too often in striking contrast with one another. And in Passiontide the veils of the crucifix and statues may contribute an additional tint. How much more becoming and dignified it would be if one hue, and *as far as possible* only one, were seen everywhere in the sanctuary.

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