

THE PRIESTLY GARMENTS IN EXODUS 28:1-5 AND
PASTORAL MINISTRY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The research work titled “The Priestly Garments in Exodus 28:1-5 and Pastoral Ministry in Nigeria” focuses on the significance of the priestly garments in Old Testament priesthood and its implications for Nigerian Pastoral Ministry. The aim is to exploit the spiritual connotations of the features of the priestly garments mentioned in Exodus 28 for contemporary Christian Ministry. This study is an attempt to discover the importance and value of the ecclesiastical garments for pastoral ministry, particularly in Nigeria. This work uses historical and comparative approaches to the study of the significance of the priestly garments. Having studied the works of some authors on the subject of priesthood, this essay examines the source, features and purpose of the Aaronic priestly garments. It traces the historical development of priesthood in the Old Testament and the establishment of priesthood in the New Testament. Then, it compares the biblical priestly garments with the contemporary priestly garments called ecclesiastical garments. Moreover, it establishes the biblical evidence and the essence of the priestly garments in priesthood, which is perhaps not equal to the essence of the ecclesiastical garments in use in some denominations in Christian ministry around. The result of the study exposes the theological significance of the priestly garments and implies the rightful usage of the ecclesiastical garments in contemporary Christian ministry. Actually, the priestly garments were symbolic and indeed their symbolism should be translated properly in the contemporary Christian ministry. Each of the features of the priestly garments has spiritual implication which a minister has to portray in his discharge of his pastoral ministry. In the case of pastoral ministry in Nigeria, ministers are to be more careful and concerned about their spiritual life than the elegance of the ecclesiastical garments. However, this essay implores the contemporary church to encourage a proper dressing with a Christian modesty; which will reflect the glory of God and impose the honour of humanity, particularly that of a minister of God. There are more to the person of a minister in the Nigerian context than the clothes or garments he puts on. Therefore, the pomp and glamour attached to priestly garments in some denominations, especially in pastoral ministry in Nigeria are to be reviewed on the basis of their spiritual sustainability rather than their outfits. Generally to all ministers; it is time to put on the garments of righteousness, love and holiness which are the basis of Christian faith.

1.2 CONCLUSION

The submission of this essay reaffirms that pastoral ministry has its root from the levitical priesthood, and the priestly garments are symbolic appearance of a pastoral minister. However, it is agreeable to say that clothing serves to highlight and express the identity (perhaps of a minister). But much more is required by the minister when it comes to pastoral ministry in Nigeria. Because of the abuse of pastoral integrity in Nigeria, genuineness of the pastoral ministry has to be reflected in the character and role of the minister in the pastoral ministry. The minister has to put on the garment of righteousness and demonstrate godliness rather than flouting in regalia.

Although, this project work does not condemn the use of ecclesiastical garments, it emphasizes the truth behind the garment in line with the purpose stated in Exodus 28:2 "... for beauty and glory". The intention of God at the point of prescribing the garments for Aaron and his sons was to provide them with a kind of godly beauty and glory. So, if ecclesiastical garments will fulfill this obligation it

should not be fashion oriented. Moreover, godly beauty and glory cannot be displayed on the garment anymore but in Christ-like character (John 13:34-35, Phil 2:1-5, Col 3:5-10). This gives a better result of influence in pastoral ministry in Nigeria than the extravagant outfit of regalia. The thought of the hymn writer may be adopted as well “let others see Jesus in you”.

1.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Supporting the idea that the old has passed away, and there is a change of priesthood, the writer encourages ministers of God to be men of unquestionable character and that both their outward appearance and the inward values should speak about Christ the Lord and saviour, who has assigned the contemporary believers and elected ministers as priests unto God.

Also, while the levitical priesthood remains the biblical basis for the pastoral ministry, the value and tenet of the priesthood should be sustained despite the variation that the grace of Jesus Christ has given to all believers.

Ministers are required to dress properly and moderately to depict the glory and honour has expressed in the priestly garments prescribed by God in the book of Exodus twenty-eight. The dressing of the minister however should not be flamboyant and should be void of any trace of worldliness which is the case in our contemporary time. A priest or minister of the Lord should be distinguished from any other personality through his dress without missing words, just like the doctors at their duty posts are identified by their white “lab coat” which is their official dress.

Spiritually, the minister should be clothed with the garments of righteousness, holiness and love, by the expression of their faith in Jesus Christ. Otherwise, the “shame” of an unregenerated man will be seen once again.

In fact, the emphasis of pastoral ministry is not in the priestly garments but in the person of the minister. Jesus says “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:15-16). Therefore a true minister is not found in the garments he wears but in what is coming out of him, both in character and conduct. It is not so in this contemporary time, where charisma has overridden character and Christian conduct. Yet the standard and the yardstick of a true minister still remain. It is unbiased and divine. “God knows those who are his” (Titus 2: 10-11).

The priestly garments were the shadow of the reality in our own contemporary time. The garments are more symbolic than the literary fashion they portray. The present day pomp and glamour attached to the priestly garments in some denomination should be reconsidered in the light of this biblical truth.

Also the garments of the priest should be in relational equity with the people. This is in a sense to create a medium for an intimate rapport between the minister and people. In Jesus’ case, he was found to be in the same form with his disciples, and more so he went about in the fashion of his days. The value his garment got at crucifixion was the value His life gave to it, and not the material the garment was made of. But in our contemporary time, ministers seek value from the garments they wear at the expense of the personal life.

The priestly garments were acts of grace extended to an imperfect man, which imputed the righteousness of God upon him despite his unrighteousness. However, ministers of God should appreciate this unmerited favour. Some ministers were called in spite of the various atrocities they have committed. Hence ministers should live and discharge their duty to glorify God and be compassionate for the people who are still like they were before they too were transformed and called into the service of God.

The garments of righteousness, love and holiness can attract the lost to the saving grace of God than the ecclesiastical garments.