

# Under the Cover of Clothing: Scripted Clothing Performances in the Apocalypse of John

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Abstract

Phrases such as “dressed to kill,” “power dressing,” “casual dress,” “sexy attire,” “dressed to impress,” “frumpy attire,” “dressed fashionably,” and “fashion statement,” are value laden and express cultural themes and narratives. Scattered throughout the Apocalypse are references to a cast of characters dressed and decorated in ways befitting their role in the unfolding drama of the eschaton. What is worn relates to their identity individually and collectively, their loyalties, and their epistemic authority. Furthermore, through deploying the trope of body ornamentation, the author of the Apocalypse forms impressions of those loyal or disloyal to God, extends the personas of friend and foe to make them visible in the public sphere, and eroticizes the body metaphorically to inform readers about his standards. Taking into account the functions of attire and adornment delineated by social psychologists, this essay proposes to examine the shifting course of values reflected in the clothing and ornamentation motifs deployed in the Apocalypse of John.

Nature has supplied every animal except human kind with some such covering for his or her body as fur, feathers, hair, scales, shells or a thick hide. But humankind has nothing but a thin skin, and for thousands of years human beings must have wondered about the world with no other covering—though the earliest humans may perhaps have been harrier than modern humans”

[Allen:11].

**W**hat you wear is what you are. While humans may not have been supplied with much covering to begin with, they have compensated for the lack ever since by covering up in creative ways. They wrapped themselves initially with some simple form of layered clothing for pragmatic reasons (protection from sun, wind, and cold) that soon evolved into intricate patterns of covering/changing the body for purposes of transformation, beautification, modification, manipulation, and masquerade. Mary Ellen Roach comments that for

thousands of years the human species has invested much time, thought, and energy in dressing and adorning the human body. Using cosmetics, paints, and other additives, removing or dressing the hair, applying pressure as in bindings, deliberately mutilating the skin by cutting or piercing, covering himself with material trappings such as clothes or eye-catching accessories, man has achieved many modifications of the body’s surface or contour” [Roach 1].

The communicative powers of dress as an expressive medium includes clothing and “visual as well as other sensory modifications (taste, smell, sound and feel) and supplements (garments, jewelry, and accessories) to the body which set off either

or both cognitive and affective processes that result in recognition or lack of recognition by the viewers” (Eicher: 1). Dress and accessories are signifiers of cultural and social values. Clothes and accessories are utilized by individuals/authors and groups to represent real world values and to conjure up illusory values (desirable or undesirable). Under the cover of clothing, a person’s identity is either revealed or disguised—in advertisements women are dressed to reflect what men wish them to be. Clothing as disguise plays an important role in manipulating an identity and belying its true nature; e.g., “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matt 7:15; 1 Sam 28:8; 2 Cor 11:13–14).

Clothes and accessories make gods and heroes immediately recognizable. At times gods are pictured dressed in robes of the commoner, and at other times clothes and accessories provide important clues to their identity (winged shoes worn by Hermes; the lion-skin of Heracles; the aegis for Athena). In Aristophanes, characters have personalities that are mutable, but whose attributes in terms of gender, status, and age are clearly marked out for the audience by changes of clothing. For

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example, Agathon is dressed in *Thesmophoriazusae*, Dicaeopolis is disguised in *Acharnians*, and Philocleon is subject to a make-over in *Wasps*. Prodicus tells the story of Heracles who, while pondering about whether to take the road of vice or virtue, is approached by two women of great stature. The one

was fair to see and of high bearing; and her limbs were adorned with purity, her eyes with modesty; sober was her figure, and her robe was white. The other was plump and soft, with high feeding. Her face was made up to heighten its natural white and pink, her figure to exaggerate her height. Opened eyed was she; and dressed so as to disclose all her charms. Now she eyed herself; anon looked whether any noticed her; and often stole a glance at her own shadow [Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, II. I. 27–30; Tredennick & Waterfield: 106–07].

The clothes and bodily decorum of the two women marked the divergent paths of vice and virtue.

Clothes have the power to transform the wearer and to reflect features of individual and collective personality. Clothing and accessories take on the function of a second skin that reveals something about the wearer or transforms her/him in some way. The police uniform along with the firearm reveals professional allegiance but also transforms an ordinary citizen into an enforcer of the law—the citizen is sanctioned to uphold the legal standards of society. Depending on what one wears, one’s philosophical, civil, national and religious identity is made a matter of public record. In others words, people and nations come to wear their cultural, social, and religious values—“clothing and ornamentation provided a visual vocabulary expressed in items of clothing and hair styles, accessories, jewelry, make-up and body decoration” (Lurie: 30). Clothes and adornment speak volumes—a language that speaks literally and metaphorically through color, shape, size, and texture of material (Lurie: 31).

Clothing and adornment in their various forms (color, texture, shape, size, etc.) are used to modify body surfaces, and these modifications have meaning for people interacting with each other. Attire and accessories provide visual cues through which individuals and communities communicate meaning about themselves and their social setting. Moreover, as in other forms of non-verbal communication (gestures, facial expressions, and body posture), dress and decoration (e.g., nose piercing) provide symbols and cues about social hierarchies within a community. The style of attire and type of ornamentation adopted by collective groups of people reflect communal norms and social values (the cynics of antiquity and the “flower people” of the sixties were anti-establishment). Clothing norms signify forms of collective behavior (e.g., from the extreme forms of collective behavior of Hitler’s Gestapo to the mild-mannered forms of collective behavior of the Amish and Hutterites). Group membership, group values, group status may be com-

municated through attire and adornment (e.g., the KKK, royalty). Maintenance of or departure from communal norms may be symbolized in a variety of actions and behaviors reflected in apparel and accessories (sack cloth and ashes).

The vocabulary of clothing and adornment includes actions and behaviours peculiar to the act of dressing—anomalous dressing (cross dressers; transvestites); robing or disrobing; stripping or being stripped; clothing partially or fully; covering or uncovering specific body zones, e.g., head, eyes, neck, feet, thigh, breast, face, abdomen, buttocks; covering certain areas of the body with double clothing; ordering items of apparel as to what is put on first, last, in which order, from the bottom up, top down, or middle moving outwards. Choice of color, style, fabric (linen, leather, denim, lace), shape, size, et al., are integral to the vocabulary of attire and adornment—each of these elements may be used to construct an appearance (individual or communal) for maximum public effect (Philo, *On Joseph* 120; Josephus, *Antiquities* 11.254; 19.344; Acts 12:21; Josephus *Jewish War*, 2.129).

Attire and adornment have a vocabulary because of their inherent symbolism. Consider the scope of information possible: one’s sex, age, group, nationality, religious affiliation, means of livelihood, social, economic, and marital status, political or military rank, personal achievements, loyalties, beliefs, and values, family connections, and trade or profession (red fingernails, rompers, lederhosen, fireman’s helmet, sports headgear, club tie, sable coat, wedding ring, judge’s robes, sergeant’s stripes, cap and gown, political buttons, the tartan kilt, veil, sun glasses, miter, etc.).

The body, understood as a social construct, permits individuals and communities to invest its various parts with significance in alignment with their social systems and values. The physical body—attired and ornamented, partially covered, unclad, or zonally clad—functions as a social landscape in condensed form to signal symbolically a kaleidoscope of social norms and values. Hence, ancient persons dressed and adorned themselves to play their part on the social stage and signified in their idiosyncratic costume their obligations, responsibilities and station in the social hierarchy. The color, texture, shape, type of material, the body zone uncovered or covered, arrangement of clothing and ornamentation were charged with positive or negative values to convey a social ethos that was reflective of a particular world view. In the words of Meier,

In dressing in a certain way, or in paying particular attention to costume, one not only played a role but dressed for it and these in turn expressed defining cultural themes and narratives. Thus could a scripted performance lead one on a journey whose unfolding story was strewn with clothes—literally into tyranny, gentlemanly statesmanship, philosophical apatheia, national restoration, purity, conversion, and ascetic freedom from the nudging seduc-

tions of the flesh [Meier: 1].

In an extensive inventory of clothing motifs in the Bible, Meier shows how clothing and beautifying accoutrements and the actions of robing and disrobing are deployed metaphorically to clarify theological and anthropological values. Both the body and creation are imagined as a perishable garment (Job 10:11; 13:28; 38:14; 39:19; Ps 51:6, 8; 65:13; 102:6, 26). God is pictured as adorned in splendid incorruptible garments, light, glory, majesty, dignity, or wearing the weapons of a warrior (Job 40:10; Dan 7:9). The heavenly emissaries are dressed in white, linen, or the clothing of divine holiness and glory (Ezek 9:3, 11; 10:2, 6, 7; Dan 7:9; 10:5; 12:6, 7). Divine punishment and blessing are depicted as garments that one puts on or off (Job 8:22; 29:14; Ps 30:11; 34:26; 109:29; 132:9, 16, 18; Prov 31:25). States of being, such as salvation and righteousness, are pictured as garments one puts on (Job 29:14; Ps 131:9, 16). Not surprisingly, the wicked are pictured as robed in vices (Job 8:22; Ps 35:26; Ps 73:6; 109:18/9, 29; 132:18). God is depicted as robed in marvelous incorruptible garments, the unrighteous in corruptible, and creation and the body wearing perishable garments finds its parallel in Ancient Near Eastern texts (Meier). In the *Descent of Ishtar* (Pritchard: 83), deities are portrayed as adorned in robes of grand splendor and glory. The gatekeeper divests Ishtar of her of bodily ornamentation as a sign of disfavor—the stripping precedes Ishtar’s descent into the netherworld.

What about then of the body uncovered? Being stripped of clothing can indicate moral bankruptcy, weakness, loss of status, or strength when, for example, the hero/heroine becomes a helpless victim, left at the mercy of his/her enemy, with no recognition, no assistance, no status. Agamemnon was killed in the bath when nude, Pelopia was stripped of her robes and then raped by Thyestes, Iphigenia’s clothes slipped when she was to be sacrificed, and Perpetua’s tunic ripped as she was being offered up in the arena. In a dream, Perpetua describes being stripped and turned into a man in preparation for gladiatorial battle (*Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, X, in ANTE NICENE FATHERS 3: 702). In the Haggadah, after both Adam and Eve had eaten the fruit they became naked and ashamed—prior to that their bodies had been “overlaid with a horny skin, and enveloped with the cloud of glory.” (in Barnstone: 34).

In the Hebrew Bible the naked body is used to depict a wide variety of conditions. Prophets are depicted as clothed in garments of hair (Isaiah; John the Baptist) or as having nothing with them and being naked as a sign of faithfulness under extreme pressure (*Martyrdom of Isaiah*, 1–5, in Charlesworth: 163–64). Israel’s relationship to God is often described using the analogy of clothing—as a nation clothed with divine characteristics and as a bride dressed to fit the occasion of commitment, choice, and faithfulness. Conversely, Israel is depicted as

a whore festooned with jewelry but soon to be stripped as sign of God standing in judgment on her faithless debauchery (Ezek 16:37, 39; 23:10; 29; Lam 1:8; Hos 2, 3, 9; Mic 1:11). Stripping means several things: literally, being stripped of one’s garments; metaphorically, being divested of one’s privileges and possessions. Take for example Job; his loss of clothes symbolized being stripped of his wealth and reduced to a state of abject poverty—the fall from riches to rags was a clear sign of God’s disfavor (Job 1:1/21; 22:6; Is 20:4). A flaunted nakedness became a symbol of sexual precociousness and the corruption of the nation Israel (Ezek 16:36/9; 23:18). Nakedness is also associated with human creatureliness and what signals the furthest limits from God (Gen 2:25; 3:7; Job 1:21; Qoh 5:15). Because of one’s creatureliness and the religious power inherent in nudity, one is required to cover up one’s nakedness before God (1 Sam 19:24). Haggadah states “as long as Adam stood naked, casting about for means of escape from his embarrassment, God did not appear unto him, ‘for one should not strive to see a man in the hour of his disgrace.’ He waited until Adam and Eve had covered themselves with fig leaves” (Barnstone: 34). Priests, in particular, are enjoined to cover up their nakedness—not to do so means shaming God and challenging his power and supremacy (Neyrey 1998: 24–25; 64–66: 205; Neyrey 1993: 119–25; Pilch & Malina 1993: 122).

### Social Psychology of Bodily Adornment

Social psychologists point out that in the social contexts of human interaction, clothes and related accessories are part of an individual’s *identity kit* (Goffman 1965: 246). These identity kits help humans to play out their social roles and lend credibility to those roles. Clothing and decoration provide important cues to aid interpersonal and intrapersonal communication. For example, clothing and decoration have value from the wearer’s perspective in conveying a desired impression. This process is called *impression management*, which “involves the control of appearance-related impressions that are communicated to others during social interaction” (Kaiser: 19). Impression management is a social process that results from impressions the wearers have of themselves relative to the standards and values of a community. Either deliberately upholding clothing and decoration conventions or flaunting them signals the wearers’ perspective of how they see their social roles playing out. The skin garments of John the Baptist create an appearance-related impression by which he communicates something about his perceived role and identity within a community. The leather garments do not just fall on the Baptist involuntarily but involve a deliberate choice in which his perceived identification with the classical prophets determines the selection of what he wears—an appearance-related impression that communicates his role as a prophet. The leather attire signals his intention to perform the

role of prophet on the margins of society. He is not a reed shaken by the wind. Soft robes, fine clothes of royalty and royal palaces all contribute to an extension of the wearer's persona, but stand in opposition to the enhancement of the Baptist's body. The Q Gospel reads, "Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who put on fine clothing and live in luxury are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you more than a prophet (Q 7:24b–27; Luke 7:24b–27; Matt 11:7–10). The Gospel of Thomas reads, "Why have you come out to the countryside? To see a reed shaken by the wind? And to see a person dressed in soft clothing, the rulers and powerful ones? They are dressed in soft clothing, and cannot understand truth" (Thomas 78:1–3).

Closely related to *impression management* is *impression formation*. The New Testament records that observant Judeans wore decorations called tassels on their garments. These decorations accentuated the hem of the garment so that the more important the person the more flashy the embroidery on the hem of the robe. The ornamentation of the garment's hem created appearance-related impressions designed to communicate status but also degrees of piety—an intentional outward display in a public space for the purpose of forming a lasting effect, opinion, or mental impression of the observant Judeans. Observers of those wearing ornately embroidered robes used clothing cues to assist them in understanding not only motive, but also degrees of piety and status. Kings also dressed to impress. Josephus records that King Agrippa intentionally amazed the crowd in the theatre when he entered attired in a garment "woven completely of silver so that its texture was indeed wondrous." In the sun, the king's cloak "was wondrously radiant and by its glitter inspired fear and awe on those who gazed intently upon it" (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 19.344; Acts 12:21). The robe celebrated his arrogant persona and designated his rank and function within society. Not only did his robe carry the complex sign of his authority and luxurious lifestyle, but its luxury also inspired astonishment and fear (Gordon: 13). He deliberately controlled, through his choice of dress in public, impressions of how he regarded himself, his status as king, and his effect on the crowd (Malina 1993: 82).

Moreover, dress and adornment contribute to the enhancement of one's external bodily self or persona. Here situational, social, and status contexts determine not only role but also the manner in which dress and adornment function as an extension of the body and self. First, attire and adornment extend the bodily self by increasing its sense of movement. Agrippa attired in his dazzling robe, Herod in his royal robes, and the observant in their garments of showy hemlines embellished bodily movement and spectacle in public space. The woman of Babylon

wore garments of luxury full of color, excessive material, and multilayered precisely because it was eye-catching in terms of movement and display. The movement of ostentatious clothing helped to exaggerate their actions of religious piety and political activity in public. In brief, the more generously proportioned the material of the garment, the grander the bodily spectacle.

Second, clothing and accessories increase the apparent size of the body and contribute to the wearer's power, authority, and higher status and honor (Kaiser: 41). Agrippa's silver cape heightened his stature and enlarged his head, contributing to the impression that he was *super king* and drawing the appropriate feelings of awe from the audience. The priestly vestments were designed to cover the body in multiple layers, each layer exaggerating the size of legs, torso and head. Moreover, the textures and colors of the different materials heightened the impression of size and imbued the wearers with power and authority in the context of holiness and separation from the people. These priestly accoutrements also contributed to an extension of the bodily self in terms of genealogy, gender, and geography.

Dress and adornment also play a function in displaying or emphasizing certain attributes of the physical body as well as concealing them for purposes of sexual attraction or repulsion. Anthropologists have argued that a body covered or selectively revealed is more erotic than one totally exposed. What is erotic and what should be covered or exposed is subject to social and historical variation. James Laver discusses the idea of *shifting erogenous zones* where, for example, parts of the body gain *erotic capital* if covered up long enough to render intrigue or become *sterilized zones* if they receive too much exposure over time. For example, in the 70's women's legs became a *sterilized zone* because of too much exposure through the style of the miniskirt. Style, fabric, color, shape, size of attire, what is exposed or not, how exposed (subtly or otherwise), what is accentuated or concealed—all these factors give the body in its totality or in its individual parts erotic capital.

In addition, clothes are symbolic indicators of status. The display of status through clothing and ornamentation appears to be a universal phenomenon. Attire and adornment are used to display wealth through the consumption of apparel visibly expensive or fashionable, to demonstrate prowess or skill in certain areas, to indicate religious piety or affiliation, to reveal a state of mourning or joy, to exhibit achievement, to indicate a marginalized state, to show a repentant state, to make publicly visible social stratification, to signal honorable and shameful status, and to demonstrate purity and impurity. The color of an item of apparel also serves as display for status and identity. In the ancient world, purple-dyed wool was very costly, and the quantity of it used in a garment was directly emblematic of the wearer's status—both honorable and dishonorable. Moreover, the quantity of wool used in a garment, especially white wool, also represented the wearer's status on a range of things such as

wealth, trade, class, purity and communal allegiance.

Given the desire for honor and the avoidance of shame in the world of antiquity, external show counted for much. Clothing display and adornment (sumptuous or not) advertised fears and ideals and became part of the interminable game of push and shove—where honor and shame, their loss or gain, were at stake (Horden & Purcell: 488–523). Clothing ideals were part of the larger social world in which social identity was agonistically nurtured and won or lost. But it was also a human’s physical body appropriately attired and adorned that served as a stage upon which honor, wholeness, and purity and pollution were displayed and claimed. Attitudes to purity and pollution determined not only what one wore, where, with whom, in which situation, but also determined the color, fabric, pattern, and style, of what one wore.

White, blue, purple, and scarlet were the colors of the gods, priests, profligates, saints and monarchs, either in combination or singularly. Silks, satins, linens, leather and wool draped the body of priests, kings, commoners, rebels, and the dissolute. Mixed or unmixed fabric, stitched or unstitched, embroidered or unembroidered, and draped or fitted adorned the bodies of monarchs, priests, rebels, and commoners. The number of pieces of raiment, whether one, three, four, eight, and twelve, attired the bodies of peasants, apostles, priests, revolutionaries, prisoners, martyrs and saints. Frequency and ritual in laundering clothes indicated not only status but also a concern for purity: being in contact with disease or other impurities, accidental or otherwise, required ritual purification of outer apparel. Attitudes to purity were also signalled by which zone of the body was exposed, covered, draped, highlighted, ornamented, and accentuated.

### Scripted Clothing Performances in the Apocalypse

As has been pointed out, the surface of the body is an especially compelling indexical sign. Bodily signifiers through clothing and decoration present an ever present semiotic for expressing identity and intention, for upholding the status quo or subverting it (Hendrickson: 15). In the Apocalypse of John, metaphorical applications, depictions of, and exhortations concerning dress, deportment and adornment of the individual and community reflect an identity of being an elect person or community broken with the world and living in opposition to its values. The eye-catching descriptions of clothing and ornaments signify the cherished ideals and hated aversions of the author (Meier: 2; Boyarin: 100; Pippin: 193–210). Not surprisingly then, a cast of characters each attired and ornamented differently occupy center stage and act out their social roles in the narrative of the apocalypse. For the purposes of this article, a select number of verses only will be analyzed.

TEXT	CHARACTER	TYPE OF CLOTHING
Rev 1:13	“Son of man”	Long robe, golden sash
Rev 3:4	“Persons in Sardis”	No soiled clothes; dressed in white; white robes
Re 3:17	“Unnamed braggarts”	Prosperous but naked; need to be clothed in white robes
Rev 4:4	“24 elders”	White robes; golden crowns
Rev 6:11	“Persecuted”	White robes
Rev 7:9	“Great multitude”	Robed in white
Rev 7:13	“Great multitude”	Robed in white
Rev 12:1	“Woman”	Clothed with sun; moon under feet; crown of twelve stars
Rev 15:5	“Seven angels”	Robed in pure bright linen; golden sashes
Rev 16:15	“Anonymous”	Clothed; not naked
Rev 17:4	“Woman”	Purple, scarlet; adorned with jewels, gold, pearls
Rev 18:16	“Great city”	Clothed in fine linen; purple and scarlet; adorned with gold, jewels, pearls
Rev 19:7	“Bride”	Clothed with fine linen, bright and pure; fine linen the deeds of the righteous
Rev 19:13	“Word of God/ armies of heaven”	Robe dipped in blood; armies of heaven, wearing fine linen white and pure
Rev 21:2–9	“Holy city/bride”	Festooned with jewelry
Rev 22:14	“Anonymous”	Washed robes

**REVELATION 1:13–16:** *1:13 and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. 1:14 His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, 1:15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. 1:16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.*

As stated earlier, the narrative path of the apocalypse is liberally strewn with clothes. A cast of characters occupies center stage, each attired and adorned differently. You are what you wear—as pointed out, clothes and jewelry are a part of each character’s identity kit that aids in playing out assigned social roles. In Revelation 1:13, the son of man is pictured adorned in a flowing robe with a golden sash encircling his chest. Setting aside for the moment the identity of the son of man (perhaps a celestial formation fleshed out in human form) or whether the clothing signifies priestly status, the attire provides clues about the wearer and the author’s values (Malina & Pilch: 38; Aune 1997: 93). Clearly the attire is visibly expensive and signals a

significant vision of a celestial phenomenon appearing in human form. While we are not informed of the color of the robe, perhaps it is possible to assume that because the sash is golden so also is the robe. It is not unusual for epiphanic Greek poetry to describe beings of celestial significance as attired in brilliant golden robes with accompanying accoutrement. Zeus is described as girding himself with gold about the body, seizing his gold whip and taking his seat in his chariot (*Iliad* 8:41–46). Poseidon clothes himself in raiment of gold, grasps his gold whip, and takes his stand upon his chariot (*Iliad* 13:20–27). Callimachus' *Hymn to Apollo* is typical, "Golden is the tunic of Apollo and golden his mantle, his lyre and his Lyctian bow and his quiver; golden too are his sandals, for rich in gold is Apollo" (32–35). The PAPHOS GRAECAE MAGICAE describe a god of immense proportions who is golden haired, having a bright appearance, wearing a white tunic and a golden crown and trousers (PGM IV 475–829; 695–99; Betz: 50; 52). Heroes are described in epiphanic language wearing similar attire: Aeneas is displayed as splendid in bright light, grand as a god, whose eyes shine out with power . . . like some work of silver or Parian marble chased with gold (Virgil, *Aeneid*, 19–20). Warriors often used the sash across the chest or the belt around the waist to secure a dagger or sword (Virgil, *Aeneid* 12.940–44).

Judging this celestial phenomenon by its attire and adornment, it is to be found in the company of gods, heroes and warriors. The flowing robe, the sash across the chest, the white hair, the eyes of flaming fire, the bronze feet, the thunderous voice, the brilliant face, and the sword in the mouth, are emblematic of grand movement and immense power sweeping the celestial spaces—one thinks of the brilliant, silver and gold, lofty movement of stars across the milky way. This heavenly constellation in human form so attired and adorned is a celestial spectacle sweeping across the sky to warn humans of portentous things to follow. The splendid, elegant robe and the sash round about the chest render the wearer with immense power, authority, and honor.

Words of warning are not enough—humans hear but do not hear—hence the appeal to the visual. Brilliant color and gleaming gold occupy visual space—it arrests to capture the eyes and open the ears. The robe and golden sash slashing across the chest help to emphasize the portentous words about to be spoken that concern human beings in the world below. Humans below, take notice of the events that are currently happening and the events that will be occurring soon (Rev 1:19). To ignore this warning is to do so at your own peril.

In an ecstatic state, the author of the Apocalypse perhaps envisions himself vicariously as a constellation entity wearing the robe and golden sash to create an impression of himself relative to his community and the world in which he finds himself. The celestial garments upon the author create an appearance related

impression by which he communicates his status as messenger with warnings of immense significance. Moreover, both his status and message are a benefaction from God through Jesus, who has robed him, to warn his community of the consequences of failing to differentiate itself from the nations around it. Human observers of this heavenly display will hopefully understand that he is entitled to the privileges and power that come with being a sky adventurer. He has been faithful to his benefactor Jesus and has been glorified by luxurious dress to lend gravity to the words he must speak to the humans below.

**REVELATION 3:4–5:** *Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. 3:5 If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels.*

In the ancient world, Sardis was a renowned center for its opulence, based largely on the extensive mineral deposits in the area. The most famous of these was the gold that washed down from the Pactolus stream to the city. It was also famous for its fertile plains, described by Strabo (13.4.5–6) as the "best of all plains." The chief products of the plain were grain, wheat, barley, and grapes; the Tmolus wine was famous in the Roman Empire. Vegetables of all kinds, olives, apples, nuts, etc., were also produced. With these resources Sardis became a centre of trade and industry in the ancient world. It was famous for its textile industry, the Sardinian purple rugs and gold-woven textiles, couch covers, cushions covered with tapestry, blankets, embroidery, and chitons are all specifically mentioned (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 2.48b; 15.690b–d; Vitruvius 2.3.3). According to legend, Arachne produced such a wonderful weaving that she provoked the jealousy of the goddess Athena, who turned her into a spider. Arachne is credited with inventing linens and nets, and her son Closter with the introduction of spindles in wool manufacture (Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 7.196).

The reference to non-soiled garments is sometimes taken to allude to the white garments of those just baptized (Murphy: 147). Charles argues that the white garments are an allusion to resurrection bodies (Charles: 82–83). Others suggest that clothes here function as a metaphor for a person's spiritual and moral condition (Aune: 222). Given the notable textile industry of Sardis, however, and the potential for citizens to wear ostentatious apparel and ornamentation, it is not surprising that the author of the Apocalypse mentions the condition and color of garments to make an important point. As has been shown, bodily surfaces clothed and adorned in certain ways serve as a stage upon which are displayed honor and the values of purity, holiness and communal affiliation. The author informs his readers and hearers that there are some in Sardis who have not permitted their garments to become stained or sullied and who are

attired in white. White garments were worn by priests (*Ant* 11.327, 331; 20.216–18; *Exod* 28:4; *Lev* 16:4), worshippers (*Acts of John* 38, in Schneemelcher: 226), Essenes (Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, 9.19; ANTE NICENE FATHERS 5: 135), heavenly messengers (*Shepherd of Hermas* 4.2.1, in ANTE NICENE FATHERS 2: 40; *Testament of Levi* 8.2; Charlesworth: 790; *John* 20:12; *Acts* 1:10; *Mark* 16:5; 2 *Maccabees* 11:8; Stone: 180), and God and Roman deities (*Dan* 7:9; *1 Enoch* 14:20; Charlesworth: 49). The dead were buried in white, and Jesus is garbed in a white robe at his transfiguration (*Mark* 9:2; *Matt* 17:2; *Luke* 9:29). Malina and Pilch argue that the white robes are essentially sky garments draped upon those who have been extraordinarily virtuous, loyal, and righteous. Being draped with white garments is a benefaction from God to honor those who have not fallen for the opulence and the defilement possible in Sardis.

Indeed, we are informed of their unstained garments—they have been careful not to get them stained or perhaps when stained, have frequently laundered them to remove the spots. Frequency and ritual in laundering clothes indicate not only status but also concern for purity. They are pure and whole because they have not succumbed to the temptations of Sardis. The whiteness of the raiment indicates the purity of the believer. Separation from the idolatrous culture of Sardis is the way to maintain purity. Thus, they are to exchange the dyed apparel of lavish display for the whiteness of unstained display to signal their intention to remain pure and separate from the dominant culture around them. Furthermore, they have resisted capitulating to the world at large and remained faithful to the community of believers in Sardis. Because they have maintained a pure state, they remain blameless before God, the community and the author; they walk in appropriate ways, they are counted as worthy, and they are regarded as conquerors. So dressed, they symbolically become what is to be imitated.

**REVELATION 3:17–18:** *For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 3:18 Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.*

Laodicea was a commercial hub renowned for its banking, its textile and carpet industry, and its “Phrygian powder” used in the making of eye salve. Here, once again, the opulence of the city puts its citizens under enormous pressures to capitulate to a life style of wantonness and shameless disregard. While claiming to be prosperous and in need of nothing they are in fact shamefully naked. The reference to nakedness is sometimes taken to refer to bodiless souls but here it would seem to function in an emblematic way best explained in a social context. The close association with the world has corrupted them and

exposed them for what they really are. Thus, while fully clothed in society’s finest apparel, they are nevertheless shamefully naked, seen by all.

Living intimately with the world, they have become prosperous in the eyes of the Laodiceans but poor and naked in the eyes of God and the author. Wearing what they wear has, in reality, stripped them of their pure garments and divested them of their privileges and possessions before God and the community. Clothed, they are yet characterized by a nakedness that exposes their creatureliness and sets them infinitely apart from God. Their nakedness also symbolically reveals the extent of their corruption, humiliation, shame, and pollution. Under the censure of nakedness, they are clearly marked as those outside the ambit of the community of believers at Laodicea. They are therefore encouraged to purchase white robes with which to clothe themselves.

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**The white robes are essentially sky garments draped upon those who have been extraordinarily virtuous, loyal, and righteous.**

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Although it is possible for the white robed ones to refer to the appropriately attired resurrected righteous, here it probably is to be taken as a social metaphor intended to shore up the identity of the author’s community and his authority. The author once more uses the discourse of clothing and nakedness to cultivate an adherence to his ethical and communal ideals. Metaphorical applications, depictions of, and exhortations to being robed in white reflect the identity of being an elect person broken with the world and living in opposition to its values. Being robed in white bespeaks one who is redeemed and no longer subject to the fleshly appetites of Laodicea.

**REVELATION 4:4:** *Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads.*

In a trance, the seer has a vision of a heavenly throne room in which is seated one who looks like jasper and carnelian. Around his throne are 24 thrones, and on those thrones are seated 24 elders dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. These elders, as part of the throne room scene, are appropriately attired in white robes and garlanded about the head with gold. The gold wreath is emblematic of office, distinction, honor, and glory perhaps of astral beings known as decans (Malina & Pilch: 73). These astral deities, so clad in white and gold-wreathed, symbolize purity, righteousness, and exalted status. As we have pointed out, bodily accessories increased the apparent size of the body, in this case the head, to create an impression of power, authority, and distinction. Moreover, these celestial personages robed in white contribute

significantly to the readers' and hearers' impression of the throne room scene. They are power wielders who are entitled to privileges not normally accorded human beings. The scene inspires awe, wonder, and fear. Yet, even though the scene is not part of human experience, those who are robed in white may still share in the reign of God and give their homage to him. Mere earthlings, greeted with such a scene, will be open to the author's epistemic formulations of what it means to belong to his beleaguered community.

**REVELATION 6:11; 7:9; 7:13:** *They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed. 7:9 After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. 7:13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from? I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

In spite of their ignoble deaths at the hands of the oppressors, the slaughtered are marked as honorable with their investiture in robes of white. An uncountable throng of every tribe, people and language have also been clothed in white robes and with palm branches in hand are standing, chanting, and singing before the lamb. They have been butchered for the sake of the lamb but have come out of the ordeal invested with robes washed white in the red blood of the lamb. Murphy suggests that either the white robes symbolize the resurrection bodies of the righteous sufferers, or their bodies already belong in heaven (Murphy: 147; 163; 211).

Cosmological realities, however, reflect on and speak to earthly social realities. The celestial display is intended to encourage those still on earth sorely tempted to abandon the honorable values of fidelity to the patron of the universe, patience/endurance in the face of pressure to capitulate, and noble death. The faithful ones attired in white reveal to those struggling to survive on earth that patient perseverance pays off. The message is a potent one: even in the throes of death, the body surfaces of these righteous sufferers are already being transformed to mirror their new heavenly bodies. While suffering, their bodies are in the process of being enveloped in white robes, they are expressing where they belong and thereby also subverting a seductive, earthly honor system that promotes infidelity, quick capitulation to oppressive forces, and escape from martyrdom. The act of being robed in white by the heavenly benefactor speaks of the divine patron bestowing honor upon them in their hour of shame. Their physical bodies, appropri-

ately attired in sky garments, serve as a stage upon which their new honor is displayed at the expense of those who have shamed themselves by virtue of disloyalty to the divine patron (Malina & Pilch: 118). The white robes, as part of this public exhibition, signal the significance of communal allegiance and loyal witness to the God of the cosmos in spite of enormous pressures to yield to the forces of evil. It also speaks of status transition—they will have the reward of leisure after coming out of the great ordeal. They have made the transition from the earthly realm to God's celestial temple and are thereby in a position to enjoy God's presence. They are the righteous ones whose garments have not been soiled by infidelity to the patron of the universe.

Moreover, it is not just an ordinary white color, a bland, off-white hue, but a brilliant whiteness that signals divine acknowledgment of their achievement and divine judgment upon the elite who wear dazzling clothes seeking honor (Malina & Pilch: 118). Paradoxically, the robes of those who have stood fast have been washed white in the blood of the lamb—variously interpreted as baptism, martyrdom, victory, purity, and festal procession (Aune: 475). Washing the robes signals a concern with contamination and its removal—ultimately only the blood of the lamb has the cleansing power to eliminate the stain of pollution.

**REVELATION 12:1:** *A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. 12:2 She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth.*

Once more the sky is pregnant with meaning—the vault of the sky rolls back to reveal a woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars upon her head. She is pregnant and in the agonizing throes of labor crying out in pain. The woman has been identified as Mary, the mother of Jesus, the bride as the heavenly Jerusalem, heavenly Israel, and an astrological figure (Virgo—identified as Atargatis, Isis, Demeter, Tyche) (Aune: 680; Harrington: 128; Boring: 152). She has been linked with the descriptions of the heavenly goddesses in the Egyptian, Hellenistic and Roman literature (Isis, Artemis, Hekate) (Aune: 679–81). Sun, moon and stars were considered to be deities—the woman clothed in them is thought to have dominance over them (Murphy: 278).

Determining the precise identity of this woman is not important for this article. There is no doubt that this sky vision of the pregnant woman portends well for the earth and its inhabitants—this sign, like the others, is intended to speak to the social realities of inhabitants upon the earth. The author dramatically uses the celestial stage and the medium of dress to deliver an urgent message to the residents of earth. Accordingly, the queen of the cosmos is dressed in keeping with her status. The more generously proportioned her garments, the grander is her power and authority (Kaiser: 41). Moreover, her sun-attire and diadem of stars contribute to the enhancement of her exter-

nal bodily persona and consequently enhance her actions in the night skies—her pregnant state, crying out in agony, giving birth. Her pregnancy and the subsequent birth of the child are good news to the citizens of the earth. Her (sky) child is the son of man and messiah who is enthroned on high and who will rescue all those suffering for his sake (Malina & Pilch: 163–65).

## Conclusions

Clothing and ornamentation serve an important function in the Apocalypse. Through items of covering and decoration are revealed not only the identity but also the levels of loyalty of the citizens of the earth. In addition, apparel and decoration clearly delineate boundaries on issues such as who is in/out, pure/impure, and what is honorable/dishonorable. The author desires to make absolutely explicit both the values he holds dear and those he despises. There is no room for compromise on these matters. What better way to display the absolute values of the time of the *eschaton* than through the discourse of clothing and body decoration? Characters arrayed in certain items of apparel exhibit values that speak louder than words. Clothing appeals to the sensuous and visual—the eye—and reinforces the uncompromising character of the message to the listener/witness.

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Special thanks to John J. Pilch, Ph.D. who has served diligently as Book Review Editor since 1982. He continues as a faculty member at Georgetown University and remains active in his avocation in music.

