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ANNOTATION

Killeen, Peter F., Ph.D. “The Development and Significance of the Religious Habit of Men” Ph.D. Dissertation, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., 2015. 302 pp.

The author’s intent in this dissertation is to “shed scholarly light on the development and significance of the religious habit.” (11) He does so by providing, “a broad historical picture of the habit of male religious of institutes of the Western Church, so as to put the post-Vatican II diminishment of the habit into historical perspective.” (5) The topic is one that has received only minimal attention among post-Vatican II writings on religious life. (3) There has been no previous serious scholarship regarding the religious habit of men written in English. (4)

There are two parts to the dissertation. The first part outlines the major contours of the historical development of religious garb from late antiquity (Ch. 2) through the middle Ages (Ch. 3) to the modern era (Ch. 4), including an analysis of initial legislative and other patrimonial texts of various groups of male religious. This section includes magisterial directives on the habit that have been issued by the Church up to Vatican II (Ch. 5) and major themes that have been connected to the religious habit throughout the history of consecrated life (Ch. 6). The second part of the dissertation looks at Vatican II and its aftermath. It examines magisterial statements on the habit since Vatican II (Ch. 7), looks at legislative shifts between pre and post-Vatican II documents of exemplary religious orders (Benedictines, Franciscans, Jesuits, Christian Brothers) (Ch. 8), and offers a comprehensive, detailed analysis of post-Vatican II theological interpretations that contributed to the diminishment of the religious habit (Ch. 9). The concluding chapter (Ch. 10) ties together the threads of the argument, lays out some of the implications of the research, and suggests possible future research projects.

In his historical overview, Killeen traces the development of distinctive garb from the earliest examples of ascetics and monks. Late Antiquity (2nd c. – 6th c.) begins the evolution toward distinctive dress, moving from common simple clothing in a particular monastic environment to the exclusive clothing of monks, such dress acquiring symbolic theological significance in the process. Early monastic figures from both the East and the West (Evagrius, Pachomius, John Cassian, Basil, Augustine, Martin of Tours, Benedict, etc.) “manifest the same movement toward distinctive dress, though the western witness accentuated simplicity and poverty in clothing to a greater degree than distinctiveness.” (56)

During the medieval period (6th c. – 15th c.), the generic habit of a hermit or a monk evolved to indicate membership in a particular group, a movement strengthened by the monastic renewal of the 10th to 12th centuries. (85) The rise of mendicant orders with their apostolic outreach and radical simplicity, especially seen in the Friars Minor, brought about significant changes from earlier religious garb, and the late medieval development of form-fitting garments among laymen led to greater visual distinction between them and consecrated religious men who retained their tunic-like garb.

In the Modern Era (16th c. – 20th c.) new institutes such as the Society of Jesus, and later the new “congregations,” tended to adopt the dress of secular priests into their religious attire, while also emphasizing the exclusivity of their religious habit. Correspondingly, secondary elements such as external rosaries and insignia became more widespread (107).

In his research of the history of papal and conciliar directives on the religious habit, the author found these to be few and far between. Most historically significant was the 1298 requirement for religious to wear the habit at all times or incur excommunication (*Ut Periculoso*, Boniface VIII). This piece of legislation was reflected in canon 596 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law, which required religious to wear their habit, both inside and outside of the house. “Most papal and conciliar legislation on the religious habit throughout the centuries has been aimed at promoting simplicity and ensuring that the habit witness to the religious life.” (123) The witness dimension of religious garb throughout pre-Vatican II history centered around four predominant themes: rupture with the world (*fuga mundi*), group identity, religious consecration, and poverty.

Killeen determines that Vatican II’s *Perfectae Caritatis* §17 reflects the views of every pope since Paul VI about the religious habit, with canon 669 (1983) and *Vita Consecrata* (1996) as two of its more modern manifestations. He also provides examples of how most major religious congregations have simplified and broadened their post-Vatican II legislative texts regarding the substance and the wearing of their religious garb.

In a key section of the dissertation, he points out that “The implications of *Gaudium et Spes*’ affirmation of the *world* reverberated far and wide in religious life.” (241) While this conciliar document “helped to recalibrate Catholic spirituality away from an overly dualistic mentality” between the “world” and the Church, a “prophetic reading” of elements in such documents by many religious “lent credence to the view that aspects of religious life which distinguished religious from lay people were contrary to the Gospel.” (239) Additional elements that led consecrated religious to adopt lay attire came from *Lumen Gentium*: “the common dignity of Christians which is rooted in baptism, the universal call to holiness in the Church, and understanding baptismal consecration as the foundation of religious consecration.” (255) In accord with a more egalitarian vision of the Church “the habit and other marks of religious life fell into disfavor because they seemingly perpetuated a vision of religious life as separate from and subjectively better than other states of life.” (255)

Along with these influences from Vatican II, Killeen concludes that the “movement toward greater personal development and fulfillment within religious institutes, the general tendency away from formal attire in society, and the political dichotomization of the Catholic Church have each contributed to the diminishment of the religious habit in the post-conciliar period.” (255) The greatest reason for the habit’s diminishment is, perhaps, the pressure of social conformity, whereby “religious generally want to fit in with their primary social group, the other religious with whom they live and work.” (256)

In the final chapter Killeen articulates two implications from his research: “First, some of the arguments for the sign value of the habit reviewed here suggest the likelihood that future generations of religious will affirm religiously-distinctive garb regularly worn as an important element of religious life. Second, this research may encourage religious institutes to adapt their

habit to the needs of time and place so that it reflects and instills Gospel authenticity.” (264) There is no historical evidence that non-distinctive attire was ever normative for male religious, and the “fact that the religious habit has persisted as a staple of religious life through major ecclesiological shifts in the history of the Church suggests that the habit will also survive through the major developments to religious life brought about by Vatican II.” (265)

The dissertation closes with three future research project ideas: identifying and treating scriptural pericopes that have influenced clothing practices of religious, the circumstances surrounding communities of women religious who did not wear a habit in the vein of the cloistered nuns of their time, and sociological research about the perceived function of a religious habit in contemporary society and the Church, as evidenced through personal interviews and focus groups.