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The Gender and Genesis of the Sotana

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bus ride, hardly any other subject of conversation was introduced.

Which is, of course, as it should be. As a dramatist, Shakespeare is still unexcelled. He lived four centuries ago, but his plays are as contemporary as the atom—and their impact is almost as powerful.

May we hope for more films like this from Hollywood?

M. A. BERNAD

The Gender and Genesis of the Sotana

The *sotana* is so familiar to the people of the Philippines as a garb of their priests that they take it for granted and never give a thought to its origin. It is the inseparable and respected adjunct of the clerical state, and happy a father and mother on that day when their son reaches the major seminary and for the first time dons as a habitual garment this uniform of his vocation.

Walsh in *The Mass and Vestments of the Catholic Church* has the following interesting information about the *sotana*. He says that it was not until long after the twelfth century that the cassock or *sotana* became the exclusive garment of clerics. Prior to that time, it was the clothing of all alike, clergy, laity, male and female.

Formerly it was called the *pellicia* or *pelisse* (from *pelis*, a skin or hide) because sometimes it was made of the skins of animals, and even oftener of cloth lined with fur. This explains the name of the garment worn over it, the surplice or *superpellicium*.

It happens that the *sotana* resembles more the garb worn by women of western society than that worn by men, and this resemblance has led some to think of it as a feminine garb. But in fact, historically there is no such thing as a feminine garb. Historically, garments have held pretty much to two forms, gowns and trousers, and women and men have worn both types about equally. Sex is not the line of distinction. Rather it is climatic, trousers representing the arctic

form, gowns the tropical. In the Roman and Greek worlds, men, women and children, all wore tunics and gowns that enveloped most of the body from neck to feet. One of the things which the ancient Greeks and Romans remarked about the northern barbarians was that they wore *trousers*.

The Italian dandy of the Renaissance wore a short skirt, his lady a long one. The well-dressed noble of the court of Louis XIV wore a long brocade coat which was almost a gown, and his king at times an alb-like robe that was certainly one. When the Normans invaded England there was little difference between the attire of men and women, all alike wearing gowns.

Today in China the women of Shanghai wear trousers and those of Hongkong skirts. Turkish women wear trousers, Scottish Highlanders wear kilts, Eskimo women wear fur pants, Albanian and Greek men wear skirts.

The *sotana* is the common garb of the middle ages which has remained as the official attire of the Catholic (and many non-Catholic) clergy. By the Catholic clergy it is worn all over the world in liturgical functions, and in many parts of the world even as street dress, as here in the Philippines. The gown which professors wear in the classroom of many universities is part of the same tradition, and to see anything feminine in either is to betray a lamentable ignorance of history.

In the *Journal of East Asiatic Studies*, excellent quarterly of the University of Manila, there appeared in April of this year an article on "Transvestitism and the Religious Hermaphrodite in Indonesia" by Justus van der Kroef. The general idea of this article is that there is a religious connection in certain Indonesian religions between the religions themselves and the wearing of feminine apparel by men. The article is in a highly specialized field and there are few who could lock horns with the author concerning its main contention, least of all the present writer. We might, however, suggest to the author that he would be working more fertile soil if he saw in the coincidence of religion and sex in certain phenomena not a derivation of religious rites from sexual considerations, but rather a subtle attempt to clothe lust and perversion with the garb of religion, to make an honest woman out of them by marrying them to the noblest of man's activities, and thus to

deliver them from the restraint they might suffer under social disapproval. The author will not have far to seek for examples of this tendency; it is quite current in modern society, but fortunately for the most part it spares religion and turns to other disguises. Today it organizes beauty contests and fashion parades, promotes sun-bathing and "art" and seeks a thousand other euphemisms in order to indulge safely and respectably plain old-fashioned lust.

However, that is only said by way of parenthesis. The reason for advertng to Dr. van der Kroef's article is found in a sentence that occurs in the introductory paragraphs, and it is with reference to that sentence that the remarks on the origin of the *sotana* have been written.

Dr. van der Kroef quotes Crawley and Besteman as follows: "Through history the priesthood has a tendency towards effemination" and he adds himself (apparently) "as is evident in their dress today." Are we oversensitive in considering this a slur on the Catholic clergy of our time who wear the *sotana* as their ordinary garb? It seems that any ordinary reader would interpret the sentence in that meaning. If that is really what the author intends, then he himself is indulging a form of transvestitism, concealing the frayed rags of anticlericalism under the toga of pseudo-science. The explanation of the cassock or *sotana* is simple and historical and has nothing whatsoever to do with "effemination."

L. A. C.

Dr. Youngberg Chubckles.

The American Chamber of Commerce Journal runs an interesting section called "Let Your Hair Down". One of its items in the May 1954 issue was a letter to the editor from Stanton Youngberg, former Director of the Bureau of Agriculture, and professor of the U.P. School of Veterinary Science from 1914 to 1925. Among other subjects, Dr. Youngberg handled Veterinary Jurisprudence, which included professional ethics. Dr. Youngberg is holder of a DVM from Ohio