

## LITURGICAL COLOURS

(Usage in Glasgow Cathedral)

People have asked about the different colours we use in the Chancel and we asked our Honorary Chaplain to contribute an article on this subject:

### Liturgical Colours

(or, Why This Thusness at the Holy Tables, the Pulpits, the Lecterns, and other Focal Points of Divine Service?)

It seems that from time to time various questions have been transmitted to the Minister concerning the 'godly practices' attendant on, and encouraging to participation in, Divine Service. The above summarized enquiry, 'why do we change the frontals, frontlets, pelmits, bookmarkers, clerical stoles and the like so that the colour scheme varies in different seasons?' has been graciously entrusted to the under-initialed to answer. Which we do willingly, for apart from obedience to our ecclesiastical superior, we attach great devotional value to the principles implied and applied. (If this sounds somewhat involved, perhaps the patient reader will excuse when we explain, that after lapse of goodly tale of years we have gone back to the hero and guide of our earlier days, the ocean-souled Baron von Hugel!)

Well, to 'come off it', here is first of all the idea. As in daily urbane walk and conversation it is customary to observe sundry well-tested and long established customs, so it is when 'our conversation is in Heaven', as St. Paul described our life in the Church. We vary our attire according to the situation, whether time of day, or the function to be attended. When we go to a marriage, we are differently vested, from when we go to pay our last respects at the house appointed for all living. Flamboyancy (subject, of course, to good taste) is in order at the former, but how heartless and out of place it would be at the latter! Gentlemen, even in these days of disconcertingly widened range of colours available for suiting, present themselves in the evening in black and white, or, less formally, in a dark outfit. A clergyman on duty wears dark shades, and on formal occasions and Sundays, a Roman coat (as it is called); and while officiating in the sanctuary he wears his robes (for the donning of each of which there is a special prayer). Certainly we all know that the 'brilliant superficiality' with which Dean Stanley managed to debunk the traditional explanation of the seemly garments, but this is but an instance of the Baron's 'clever people who cannot think'!

With these obvious reflections in mind we see how fitting, and desirable, it is to indicate the seasons of the Church's year by the use of consonant colours.

So that is why we change the appurtenances of Divine Service, varying the colours (as of course we do the music) according to the feast or fast being observed.

Now to particularize:

The Church's year which celebrates the complete cycle of the mysteries of our Redemption, from the long course of preparation since the grim necessity arose, until the sounding of the Last Trump, opens with Advent (commencing on Advent Sunday, being the Sunday nearest St. Andrew's Day), and so with the awesome thought of the Second Coming and of the Final Judgement. It is therefore a season of deep sobriety and penitence. The chosen colours are accordingly of a mourning nature, purple, violet or mauve.

At Christmas with the Epiphany, and with all the festivals when we contemplate Our Lord as the Everlasting SON, and our Saviour, our hearts are cheered by the colour white. This is clearly because dazzling white suggests purity, sanctity and heavenly splendour. Consider the Transfiguration when the chosen witnesses beheld the garments of the Master 'white such as no fuller on earth can white them'). Lent with Passiontide we recall the Fasting in the wilderness, and the deepening sorrows of the Man of Sorrows. The drapings are again sombre, black, violet or mauve. For sadly obvious reasons, Good Friday is accompanied by no decorations, no flowers, the Table, the pulpit, remain bare; the Bible without markers, the clergy wear no hoods. Everything says, 'behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow!'

Easter, the Queen of Festivals, the day of our greatest rejoicing, is the feast of our most radiant whites and golds, of the most splendid music (cannot you hear the trumpets sounding on the organ when the Master of the Musique accompanies the Stanford in B flat 'and the third day He rose again?') Ascension Day shares in these sublimities as a climax to the Great Forty Days, when everything cries 'Alleluia!'

At Pentecost the scheme is red in memory of the appearance of the 'cloven tongues as of fire'.

After Pentecost the predominant colour is green, the colour of nature. During this long season we ponder less the Events by which we have been redeemed than upon the graces which they have won for us and the duties devolving therefrom ('noblesse oblige'). The Cathedral, however, has adopted a way of its own during this period. It alternates month by month red and green. This is to combine parallel modes of the Western Church. Some provinces of

it date the Sundays of the second part of the year from Trinity Sunday (the first after Pentecost), while others preserve or revive the more ancient procedure of indicating their sequence after Pentecost: e.g. the Second Sunday after Trinity, is the third Sunday after Pentecost, and so on.

The few Saint's days observed by us are indicated either by red, when the saint suffered martyrdom, or by white when the witness was not sealed by his blood.

It may be added that this simple colour scheme is not that followed in every congregation or parish. There are, however, two main traditions to guide us: that of our forefathers known as the Roman scheme (now practically defunct among our separated brethren since epoch-making Vatican 11), and that of Sarum, in the historic diocese of Salisbury (hence, of course the name). Other centres of worship have their own customs, e.g. Lichfield – for information about which please consult The Master of the Musique!

As the source, the sustenance, the centre and the goal of our Christian life consist in the 'unio mystica', in uniting ourselves with our Lord in the mysteries of our redemption brought before us in the Church's year, it is manifest how fitting and cogent are these immemorial practices towards speeding us on our upward way, and also how indebted we are to our Minister for seeing to it that we are not bereft of our inheritance in the house where everything should say, 'Glory'.

Let the liturgical colours long continue among us to say, Stand fast! Lift up your hearts!

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