

Clothed in Holy Garments: The Apparel of the Temple Officers of Ancient Israel

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There are a variety of approaches to holy writ.¹ Some feel the most valid methodological approach is exegetical—seeking to discover what the authors meant when they originally penned the words many centuries ago.² Some, on the other hand, feel that an apologetic approach is most correct—reading scripture in an effort to find “evidences” for one’s personal denominational persuasion. Certain students of scripture approach God’s word as literature—looking not for its doctrinal or theological teachings but for its beauty in structure or language. And there are, of course, a number of individuals who read scripture for its moral teachings—seeking to draw an application-oriented homily from what they read.

Perhaps it is no surprise that subscribers to these various schools of thought do not always agree with each other on which approaches are valid and which are not. Those in the exegetical camp, for example, sometimes feel that the homiletic approach “does violence to scripture,” as they say, by offering applications which were never intended by the original author. Those in the homily camp, on the other hand, sometimes argue that to not apply scripture to one’s personal

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situation is to miss the entire point of God's word. The dispute, which is more heated than many lay Christians realize, brings to mind the words of the Prophet Joseph: "Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?" (Joseph Smith—History 1:10). Regardless of which camp the reader falls into, what *is* certain is that many Christians throughout the centuries have felt comfortable with a homiletic approach to scripture. Such an approach was very common in the early post–New Testament Church, and it has been a popular approach for many modern commentators—including a fair number of Latter-day Saint authors.³

Among those who read scripture for its homiletic value, it has long been noted that the garments of the Aaronic high priest⁴ were, through their symbolic design, a teaching device given by divine revelation to the prophet Moses. Many Christian commentators suggest that the articles of apparel associated with this priestly office were designed as a type or foreshadowing of Jesus Christ.⁵ The author of the book of Hebrews goes so far as to call Christ the "great high priest" (Hebrews 4:14). Thus one commentator noted that "Aaron, as a High Priest, was a breathing statue—a type—of Christ."⁶ Another suggested, "The ways in which Aaron typified Christ are numerous and varied. In many respects he is to be considered the most illustrative type of the spiritual work of Christ to be found in the entire Old Testament."⁷ If this is the case, the symbolism associated with the priestly officiant's dress should have significance for followers of Jesus Christ, who in baptism "put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27), thereby becoming "the body of Christ, and members individually" (1 Corinthians 12:27, New King James Version). "When we *put on* Jesus Christ we accept him and his atonement, and we become like him."⁸ Consequently, the robes of the Aaronic high priest have the potential to teach us much about Christ and his attributes. They can also teach us about the corporate body of Christ and the ideal attributes of a faithful follower of the Savior. One expert on the garments of the ancient temple has noted: "As the High Priest was a type of the Great High Priest, Jesus, so the garments of the High Priest were typical of the character of Jesus Christ. Likewise, as the sons of the High Priest were priests and as we who are the sons of God are called to be priests, even so the dress of the priests typifies the character of the believers."⁹ Elsewhere we read that the officiant "represented all Israel when he ministered in the tabernacle."¹⁰ Accordingly, in the symbolic clothing of the temple high priest we may draw a message about the nature and attributes of the Messiah and also of the characteristics each

sincere follower of Christ should seek to develop if he or she seeks for an eternal inheritance in God's kingdom.¹¹

Naturally, this understanding of the priestly garments implies a reading of scripture done through the lens of a "believer"—one who acknowledges Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah, of whom *all things*, including the Old Testament, testify (see Moses 6:63). This being the case, it is expected that those who do not share this belief are prone to arrive at different conclusions. Reading the scriptures through a Latter-day Saint lens, or even through a general Christian lens, will lead one to interpret symbols differently than would be the case otherwise. For this reason, a strictly exegetical analysis is unlikely to produce the same Christocentric results. Instead, we may hope to find Christ in the garments of the ancient high priests through a more homiletic approach.¹² From a traditional Latter-day Saint perspective, however, we can assume that those ancient Israelites who were enlightened by the Holy Ghost understood the ultimate messianic types embedded in the garments.¹³ After all, the didactic symbols of which God makes abundant use are meant to open our eyes to greater truths—often, in fact, to the *greatest* truths.

The Linen Coat (Leviticus 8:7; Exodus 28:4, 39; 39:27)

The first item that was placed upon the high priest, immediately after washing (see Leviticus 8:6–7), was the linen coat. In Exodus 28:39 we read: "And thou shalt embroider the coat of fine linen." The Hebrew of this verse may also be rendered: "And thou shalt weave a shirt-like undergarment of fine white cloth."¹⁴ Josephus suggested that (according to the understanding of those in the first century) the coat or undershirt was "made of fine flax doubled" and that the "vestment reaches down to the feet, and sits close to the body."¹⁵ Another source submits that this undershirt's sleeves reached "to the wrists."¹⁶ Thus, this linen coat appears to have covered the entirety of the high priest's body.

Not only was this undergarment made of the finest of materials, but the making of it apparently required significant effort. Indeed, the Hebrew root word used for "embroidered" implies something akin to our modern damask¹⁷ (i.e., a lustrous fabric made with flat patterns in a satin weave). Thus, the garment is believed to have been skillfully woven so as to have a pattern within the fabric.¹⁸ The embroidery may have been a "checkered" pattern¹⁹ or one which utilized a design that looked like the Greek letter gamma (e.g., Γ).²⁰

The symbols contained in this single article of clothing are manifold. For example, the material of its construction, being pure white, is often seen as “an emblem of moral purity.”²¹ The ultimate referent of this symbol is Jesus Christ, who is our exemplar in moral purity and perfection.²² Thus on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) the priest wore the linen coat, which (in the minds of many Christians) indicated that he was officiating as a type of Christ (see Leviticus 16). It is important that the linen coat was placed upon the high priest as the very first article of clothing, since this demonstrates that moral purity is foundational. Likewise, this sacred undergarment “was a full-length garment covering the entire body,” which suggests to Christian commentators that Christ’s salvation is “for the whole man; body, soul and spirit.”²³ True moral purity requires totality, nothing lacking.

The embroidery pattern also contains important symbolic implications for the wearer and the viewer. One commentator notes that from a distance the linen coat may have appeared plain. However, “upon a closer examination there was skill and beauty attached to the make up [*sic*] of the fabric.”²⁴ If this is the case, the implications this has for Jesus Christ are significant.

To the many who take a casual glance at the “Jesus of Nazareth” and the “Man of Galilee” they see an ordinary yet good man, but study that character, look into that life, note those works, and meditate upon His words. Here is no ordinary person, even though he is found in fashion as a man. There is a Divine pattern most intrinsically worked into the human frame which reveals Him to be the Son of God.²⁵

Thus, the garment can remind us that something more than a casual look at the sacred is required if we wish to see and recognize the divine imprint.²⁶ This is as applicable to the doctrines of Christ as it is to Christ the man.

Beyond its reference to the Messiah, this linen coat may also allegorically suggest that the Church,²⁷ as a community of Christ’s followers, must be completely morally pure.²⁸ That moral purity can only be obtained *through* Christ, whom the garment is said to represent. The undershirt, therefore, can be seen as an invitation to the Church to “awake” and “put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem” (Isaiah 52:1). Additionally, the symbolism suggests that the Church of Christ is, like the linen coat, a work of fine craftsmanship, designed by heavenly hands and often referred to as a “marvelous work.”²⁹ The Church, like its namesake, often looks plain upon

a cursory glance. However, when sincerely and closely examined, the divine miracles and handiwork of God manifested in bringing it forth are apparent.

The Breeches (Leviticus 6:8–10; Exodus 28:42–43)

While the Leviticus pericope doesn't specifically mention it, Baruch Levine points out that "it is to be assumed that at the beginning of the robing the priests were wearing their linen breeches,"³⁰ which reached to the knees. These breeches, or underpants, were made of linen, which is *not* a product of animals (which are subject to death and corruption). Thus, they become a fitting symbol of both incorruptibility and immortality.³¹ From the perspective of a Christocentric reading of the passage, the implication is that Christ is both incorruptible and also immortal. By extension, the breeches can suggest to the observer that (in this increasingly immoral world) Christ's followers should not allow their lives to become corrupted. Significantly, the fact that these breeches cover the loins—in other words, the reproductive area—is itself a potential symbol that the wearer needs to control his appetites and passions, lest defilement and corruption ensue. As the faithful followers of Christ reject all that corrupts, they have reason to hope that through Christ they shall also obtain immortality and "eternal lives" (D&C 132:24, 55).

The Girdle (Leviticus 8:7)

The Aaronic high priest donned two separate girdles as part of his holy clothing: "one of which was fastened over the coat [or undershirt] and was assumed by the priests generally; the other was emphatically *the* curious, or embroidered, 'girdle of the ephod,' and belonged to the robes of the High Priest alone."³² Our focus here will be on the former of these—that which was common to high priest and priest alike.

According to Josephus, this inner girdle (over which other vestments were worn) was rather long; it was wrapped twice around the high priest and yet still reached to the ankles.³³ It was apparently worn on top of the coat (undershirt) and breeches (underpants), but beneath the other garb of the priest. The symbols associated with the girdle buttress the symbols of the linen coat beautifully.

In certain periods, in the ancient Near East, a girdle represented chastity and fidelity, including fidelity to covenants.³⁴ The fact that this girdle was used to bind up the loins suggests a likely origin of its symbolism. It potentially reminded the wearer of those virtues which must be tightly bound to the righteous

individual—virtues present in the character of Israel’s God and future Messiah. The fact that the girdle bound the coat and breeches close to the wearer’s body was important, for, as one commentator suggested, “This is nearly always a symbol of service, the girded loins denoting readiness for action. This must always be the attitude of the priest and it is certainly true of Christ.”³⁵ By implication, this hidden girdle can remind the Church of its need to be closely tied to the virtues of Christ and to ever be willing and ready to serve. This manifests the reality of the Christian virtues that the girdle symbolizes. The Lord’s words to the Saints in section 4 of the Doctrine and Covenants exemplify the implied meaning of the under-girdle. Saints must develop qualities such as “faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, diligence” (D&C 4:6). And in the spirit of those virtues, they must diligently attend to the needs of God’s children: “O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day” (D&C 4:2).

The Robe of the Ephod (Leviticus 8:7; Exodus 28:4)

The Lord informed Moses that this distinctive robe was to be made “all of blue” (Exodus 28:31)³⁶ and that it would reach past the ephod to the knee.³⁷ Remarkably, the robe of the ephod was constructed out of a single sheet of material; having no seams, only a hole for the head and arms. The neck hole was reinforced to insure “that it be not rent” (Exodus 28:32). Indeed, the garment was “made in such a way that it was not possible for man to rend it.”³⁸ At the bottom of the robe, stitched onto the fringe of it, were a series of alternating gold bells and cloth pomegranates.³⁹ According to Josephus, the practical function associated with these bells was to inform the priests and those within the temple precinct as to when the high priest was approaching the veil. It was hoped that upon hearing this sound “the people might have notice of it, and might fall to their own prayers at the time of incense [at the veil].”⁴⁰ Concerning the pomegranates, it is quite probable that their pattern was chosen due to their association with the promised land (see Deuteronomy 8:7–8; Numbers 13:23), which is a symbol of the celestial city. However, as will be demonstrated, their symbolic depth goes beyond that.

As a teaching device, a number of components of the robe of the ephod seem significant. First of all, the blue color of the garments is often seen as representative of the heavens—the abode of God. This color can symbolize the

spiritual or celestial nature of a thing.⁴¹ Thus Joseph Fielding McConkie associates the robe with Christ: "This [robe of the ephod] appears to have been a reference to the heavenly origin, character, and ministry of Christ, the great high priest."⁴² Another author suggests that if a person in the Bible was adorned in blue, it indicated that he or she was divinely sanctioned.⁴³ For members of the Lord's Church, then, the robe can symbolize the divine origin of the Church and the requirement that they maintain the Lord's sanction through striving to be a Zion people.

The fact that the garment was donned by the high priest *after* the linen coat has been seen is an indication that divine sanction comes only to those who have purified their lives and taken virtue to the entirety of their beings, confirming such virtue through their actions.

Additionally, the seamless design of the robe serves as a reminder that Christ's divinity has no beginning and no end. The inability to tear the robe, its having the strength of armor, can signify his divine call as God's Only Begotten.

How many would strip Jesus our Great High Priest, of His Divinity? But they could not and cannot. Every time man inflicted a doubt, saying: "If Thou be the Son of God" God was there to prove that He was. The Devil said: "If Thou be the Son of God" in Judea's wilderness, but he was vanquished with the "It is written". While Christ was on the Cross the people said, "Let Him save Himself *if* He be Christ the chosen of God" (Luke xxiii. 35). The soldiers said: "If Thou be the king of the Jews save Thyself" (Luke xxiii. 37). One of the malefactors joined the cry of doubt, saying: "If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us" (Luke xxiii. 39) But to all these "ifs" came the challenge of the resurrection on the third day. Man said "Is not this the carpenter's son?" (Matt. xiii. 55). God said: "This is My Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased" (Matt. iii. 17).⁴⁴

The people were free to reject Jesus' chosen and divine status, but their rejection could not change the fact that he was heavenly in his origin, authorization, and nature. For the Church, the fact that the robe was seamless suggests that they too must be seamless (i.e., one), for "if ye are not one ye are not mine" (D&C 38:27). If they who make up his Church seek that unity, they will be covered (protected) by Christ, just as the high priest was covered by the garment. The indestructibility of the robe can symbolize the fact that the Church

in its righteousness shall not be broken up by the cunning or strength of the natural man. The Lord brought to pass “the establishment of the kingdom of God in the latter days, never again to be destroyed nor given to other people” (D&C 138:44). The seamless garment reminds us of the necessity of seeking full obedience to God’s commands, so that apostasy—individual or collective—may never breach the protective parameters which we call “the Church.”

The pomegranates and golden bells along the bottom of the robe are equally rich in symbolism. Among other things, the pomegranate is known for its multiplicity of seeds. This seems to represent well both Christ’s role as father of all who are reborn through him and also the laws and ordinances of his gospel—each of which typify the Master. The golden bells, on the other hand, have been seen as a symbol of divine protection.⁴⁵ Thus, one commentator states: “This robe is a type of that which preserves from death.”⁴⁶ Owing to the fact that the sounding of these bells likely represented the “sounding forth” of the word of God, it is no wonder that they symbolize divine protection.⁴⁷ Christ, who sounded forth the word of God boldly and upon whose heart God’s word was inscribed perfectly, was granted protection until his mission was complete. He offers that same protection to those who are faithful to their covenants and callings—to those who heed his warning and the warning of his prophets.

The Ephod (Leviticus 8:7; Exodus 28:4, 6–7)

To date, there continues to be some debate within the scholarly community as to what exactly the ephod was. Thus the term remains untranslated in the King James Version. Most scholars maintain that it was an apron of unsurpassable beauty, having gold woven into it (see Exodus 39:3)⁴⁸ and being very colorful in its appearance. Matthew B. Brown speculates that the ephod may have been decorated with “figures” or symbols.⁴⁹ Regardless, we know that it was the outermost garment upon which the onyx shoulder stones and the breast piece of judgment were fastened. It was the vestment upon which some of the most emblematic and important features of the high priest’s dress were to be secured. And it was the location in which the Urim and Thummim was stored.

The symbolism in this particular garment is rich and extensive. First, upon the shoulder-straps of the ephod were found two stones—one on each shoulder. Inscribed on these were the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (six on either stone). By implication, the Messiah bares the burdens of covenant Israel, as do his authorized servants. For the Church, on the other hand, this symbol can be

seen as an invitation to keep the baptismal covenant to “bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light” (Mosiah 18:8). Christ, the high priest, and every member of the Church must each shoulder the burdens (spiritual and otherwise) of God’s children. That is what followers of the Messiah are called to do.

Beyond the aforementioned symbolism, aprons also served anciently as symbols for “priesthood”⁵⁰ and “work.”⁵¹ For Christians, the ephod signified Jesus’ diligence in moving forward the will and work of the Father; and it likely reminded the high priest of the ancient temple that he too was called to do the work of the Lord—a work that required priesthood power. For the Latter-day Saints, the ephod may suggest one of the major differences between them and other Christian denominations: restored priesthood keys and a divine call to build up the Latter-day kingdom before the return of the Son of God.

Lastly, the coloration on the ephod would have been deeply important. Exodus 28:6 commands, “Make the ephod of gold, of blue, and of purple, of scarlet.” As previously pointed out, blue (being the color of the sky) typically represents the heavens. Scarlet (or red) would have commonly represented the earth. As one text on the clothing of the high priest states, red “is the colour of the earth. Blue and Red are therefore opposites. The name Adam comes from a root word ‘Adham’ which means ‘red earth’, and from this he was made.” This same source notes that purple is “an intermediary colour to blend them [blue and red].”⁵² Thus, the ephod can imply that Christ was made in the likeness of man (red) that he might bring us back to the likeness of God (blue). By taking upon himself flesh and blood, Jesus was equipped to meet our every need and also to set the perfect example for us to follow. He was a combination (purple) of the divine (blue) and the human (red)—as are each of us, being the literal “offspring of God” (Acts 17:29). Finally, that thread of gold, woven into the ephod, can remind us of his eternal and celestial nature: “[Gold] is not affected by exposure to the air and it will not deteriorate if buried for thousands of years. Acid will not destroy it, and fire will not burn it; from these it only comes out purified.”⁵³ How perfectly this typifies Christ. And how significant is the invitation it offers to each of us to strive for life eternal through Christ’s blood and through the faithful observance of his words.

The Curious Girdle of the Ephod (Leviticus 8:7; Exodus 28:5–8)

As with the ephod, information concerning the pattern and appearance of the “curious girdle” is limited. Since this vestment was directly associated with

the ephod, it was only worn by the high priest. Unlike the inner girdle spoken of previously, the curious girdle would have resembled the pattern of the ephod in fabric and embroidery. One source notes, “The skillfully woven band [known as the curious girdle] seems to have been a girdle with which to fasten the ephod close about the waist (Leviticus 8:7). It was permanently attached to the ephod and made of the same material.”⁵⁴ As discussed above, a girdle represents fidelity or faithfulness to covenants as well as preparation for action.

Regarding the symbolism, the fact that the curious girdle (and the ephod which it bound) was worn *only* by the high priest indicates that certain functions and responsibilities were his alone to perform.⁵⁵ In obvious ways this seems to typify both Christ and the presiding high priest of the Church today (i.e., the Latter-day Prophet). For members of Christ’s Church, this symbol stands as a reminder that, while other Christians may serve in significant ways to spread the message of “Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2), Latter-day Saints have a mission and ministry which is unique to them. Theirs is a call which cannot be performed by any other.

The Breastplate of Judgment and the Urim and Thummim (Leviticus 8:8; Exodus 28:4, 15–30)

The breastplate of judgment was made from the same materials and in the same manner as the ephod. It was made, like the ephod, out of one continuous piece of fabric. The fabric was folded in half “upward to form a sort of pouch.”⁵⁶ It was a span in length and width (about 9x9 inches), thus forming a perfect square.⁵⁷ Upon the front of the breastplate were twelve stones, arranged in four rows of three, each stone being different from the others. Every stone was engraved with the name of one of the tribes of Israel. The breastplate was secured over the chest of the high priest by gold chains. The function of the breastplate of judgment was to serve as a pouch which held the Urim and Thummim—a device through which seers and prophets received revelation on behalf of covenant Israel. The book of Exodus records, “And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron’s heart, when he goeth before the Lord” (Exodus 28:30). According to the Jewish sage, Nachmanides, Moses didn’t make the Urim and Thummim—nor did anyone in Israel. It was given to Moses by God as a divine instrument of knowing and receiving.⁵⁸

The Christocentric symbolism associated with the breastplate of judgment and with the Urim and the Thummim is rich and diverse. To begin, the shape and the size of the breastplate are of significance. We are informed that the shape was a perfect square, 9x9 inches. In the description of the tabernacle the square is repeatedly present: we see it in the brazen altar (Exodus 38:1), the golden altar (Exodus 37:25), and the breastplate (Exodus 39:9). Each was required by God to be geometrically square—a symbol of balance, solidity, and equality. The number four typically symbolizes geographic completeness or totality.⁵⁹ In other words, if the number four is associated with an event or thing, the indication is that it will affect the entire earth and all its inhabitants. The breastplate over the heart of the high priest seems, therefore, to suggest Christ's love and awareness for *each* of God's children. The foursquare breastplate suggests that, through the Atonement of Christ, the entirety of the house of Israel shall be bound to Christ's heart just as the breastplate is bound to the heart of the priest. Significantly, unlike the twelve names written upon two stones on the shoulders of the High Priest, on the breastplate "each name is now on a separate stone so every individual believer in Him who has made the all-covering atonement has a special place in that all-prevailing intercession which is continually going on at the throne of grace."⁶⁰

Since the Urim and Thummim within the pouch was a revelatory device, its placement in the squared pouch can suggest Christ's desire to reveal himself to all of God's children. It potentially implies that Christ's word will eventually fill the earth.

Interestingly, the various types of stones fastened into the breastplate itself may also be significant.⁶¹ The stones in the breastplate are identical with the precious or semi-precious stones that, according to Ezekiel 28:13, were to be found in Eden, "the garden of God."⁶² This reference to the original garden of God could have served as a reminder to the high priest that his work as mediator was to seek to return humanity to its spiritual station "in the Garden of Eden, when man was free from all sin."⁶³ Accordingly, when Christ performs his intercessory work, it is to bring us back into the state that we were in at Eden—a state of innocence wherein we were permitted to dwell in the presence of the Lord.

Finally, two facts about the Urim and Thummim, that it was likely not of earthly make and that it was also concealed, can teach us two significant truths about Christ. First, his origins are not of this earth. Matthew records the query of the Jews:

And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?

Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?

And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? (Matthew 13:54–56)

Jesus was the Son of God—not the son of a lowly carpenter. Yet, as Isaiah reminds us: “He hath no form nor comeliness; and . . . there is no beauty that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2). His divinity truly is hidden from most.

In regard to the Church of Christ and how each of these symbols applies, note the following. Just as Christ's message and mission is to all the world, Latter-day Saints have a vocation to bless, serve, and convert the world to Christ and his ways. A requisite part of fulfilling that mission is having a love for our fellow human beings and a spirit of revelation that will guide us in teaching and ministering to individuals. Both of those necessary qualities are gifts of the Spirit.⁶⁴ Like the Urim and Thummim (with its individual names) over the heart of the high priest, we too must seek revelation and a spirit of love and compassion if we, as the Bride of Christ, will be of use to our Groom in this most sacred work. And like the stones with individual names, we are reminded through the symbolism that Christ knows us intimately; he knows our needs and our gifts. He can aid us in all that we seek to do in his name, and on his behalf. Finally, like the Urim and Thummim, this work is of God, not of mortals. Yet, it is as a bed of gold concealed. It is our responsibility to uncover it and bring it to the entire world.

The Miter and the Holy Crown (Leviticus 8:9; Exodus 28:4, 39–40; 39:30–31)

The miter of the high priest was made of linen. It was “of the distinctive design worn by royalty.”⁶⁵ Upon the front of the miter was fastened the “Holy Crown” which consisted of a golden plate that bore the inscription “HOLINESS TO THE LORD” (Exodus 28:36). Additionally, the holy crown was secured to the miter with “a blue lace” ribbon (Exodus 28:37).

Christ-centered symbolism can be found in the miter. For example, one commentator notes: “The head is that which denotes authority. It is the

head that controls the whole of the body. Christ as the Head of the Church controls that Church.”⁶⁶ Since linen is a “symbol of holiness and righteousness,”⁶⁷ it seems clear that “the linen of the miter speaks of the righteousness of the Lord.”⁶⁸ The fact that it was the attire of royalty suggests he is the King of Kings (Revelation 17:14). Additionally, the blue ribbon attaching the holy crown to the miter can point to the reality that Christ’s mind is that of the Father. He knows the Father’s will, and all that he says and does is an attempt to bring that will to pass.

For the priest and the parishioner, the miter is a potential reminder of what God has promised each of us: that we might become “kings and priests unto God” (Revelation 1:6).⁶⁹ It also informs us as to how this is to be done: we must develop the mind of God. As Elder Bruce R. McConkie noted, “[when we] walk in the light as he is in the light . . . [we] thereby have his mind. [We then] think what he thinks, know what he knows, say what he would say, and do what he would do . . . all by revelation from the Spirit.”⁷⁰ Though only the high priest was commanded to wear such an inscription, certainly what it represented was expected of all of God’s servants. Without personal worthiness, all we do in the temple or in the Church is but a mere form and a mockery of holiness! The high priest represented the people before God. Thus, God’s call to him to be holy before the Lord was, by application, a call to all in Israel to be holy before the Lord and to consecrate their hearts and minds to Jehovah. That declaration of “holiness to the Lord” was to influence their labors, their utterances, their thoughts and desires, and the paths they pursued—not just in the temple, but in their daily walk.⁷¹ Thus, symbolically speaking, all who donned the cap of the priest were really donning a commitment to live in holiness *before* the Lord because they had dedicated their lives *to* the Lord.⁷² The placement of the plate on the forehead can remind us of the fact that “it is the head that controls the whole of the body.”⁷³ “For as he thinketh . . . so is he” (Proverbs 23:7).

Conclusion

What we have offered above is but a homily—an application of ancient Jewish symbols seen through Christian lenses. But lest we assume we have looked “beyond the mark” (Jacob 4:14), let us remember the words of Nephi, who wrote: “Behold . . . *all things* which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of [Christ]” (2 Nephi 11:4,

emphasis added). “The literary evidence of that,” Elder Jeffrey R. Holland pointed out, “is seen throughout the holy scriptures.”⁷⁴ Jacob recorded that the scriptures “truly testify of Christ” (Jacob 7:11). In the book of Moses the Lord stated, “And behold, all things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath: all things bear record of me” (Moses 6:63). Clearly, the scriptures are replete with testaments of Jesus’ Messianic call and divine nature. As we have pointed out above, much of Christianity acknowledges that the sacred clothing of the high priest can serve as a symbol of the consecrated attributes of the Holy Messiah.

As the priest of the temple served to mediate Israel’s relationship with God, he too functioned as a type for the Redeemer. In donning the sacred garments, he served well as a representation of Jesus’ role on behalf of the covenant people.

Finally, the attire of the high priest has much it can teach those who trust in Christ for their salvation. Peter reminded us that, in all things, Jesus is our exemplar (1 Peter 2:21). As the clothing of the high priest has the ability to teach us what the Savior is like, it also has the potential to teach us what we must become if we wish to inherit eternal life in God’s presence. One commentator suggested that the function of the priestly garments “was to remind the Israelites that a powerful, holy and just God was indeed present with them in so far as the wearer of the garments was held to be linked to Him.”⁷⁵ As covenant Israel continues seeking to develop the attributes of the Great High Priest, they have reason to trust in his promises. The Apostle Paul reminded us, “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster . . . For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:24–25, 27). For Christians, this is the invitation of the garments of the high priest: to “put on Christ”!

Notes

1. See William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993).

2. An exegetical approach typically includes word-studies—trying to find the various shades of meaning behind the original Greek or Hebrew words.

3. Though this paper is a homily, I am not arguing generally for or against a homiletic approach either to scripture or to the clothing of the high priest. What this paper seeks to do is to report the Christocentric reading of these things by various interpreters and to suggest the implications of those readings for practicing Christians today.

4. The term *Aaronic high priest* in this paper will refer to the high priests of the Mosaic dispensation, primarily the direct firstborn male descendants of Aaron. See Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and David Rolph Seely, *My Father's House: Temple Worship and Symbolism in the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 59. However, the term should not imply that each held only the Aaronic Priesthood. We know, for example, that Moses' brother, Aaron, and his sons held the Melchizedek Priesthood. See John A. Widtsoe, *Priesthood and Church Government in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1961), 14; Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 411.

5. Along with the examples quoted directly within this paper, see also B. Maureen Gaglardi, *The Path of the Just: The Garments of the High Priest* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1971), 5: "There are, I suppose, numerous and undoubtedly profound volumes obtainable on the ministry and vestments of the High Priest. The great High Priestly office of Christ is the supreme lesson taught us by this type." Likewise, see Paul F. Kiene, *The Tabernacle of God in the Wilderness of Sinai*, trans. John S. Crandall (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977), 164: "The details of the high priest's garments speak of the Lord Jesus in His glory. They help us the better to recognize His incomparable qualities and the worth of His person, in order that we will love and honor our Lord more." Also, Stephen F. Olford, *The Tabernacle: Camping with God*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004), 123: "Each part of [Aaron's] attire speaks eloquently of the glories, virtues, and excellencies of our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ."

6. David Fenton Jarman, *The High Priest's Dress; Or, Christ Arrayed in Aaron's Robes* (London: W. F. Crofts, 1850), ix.

7. Kenneth E. Trent, *Types of Christ in the Old Testament: A Conservative Approach to Old Testament Typology* (New York: Exposition Press, 1960), 52. See also Ada R. Habershon, *Study of the Types* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1974), 183.

8. Donald W. Parry and Jay A. Parry, *Symbols and Shadows: Unlocking a Deeper Understanding of the Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), 27; emphasis in original.

9. C. W. Slemming, *These Are the Garments: A Study of the Garments of the High Priest of Israel* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1945), 22.

10. Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Exodus," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976–92), 2:466.

11. In this paper we will be examining the garments in the order in which they are described in Leviticus 8:7–9, while also drawing upon descriptions of these same articles in the book of Exodus. I freely acknowledge that the garments of the high priest likely underwent modification in Israel's later periods; see Margaret Barker, *The Great High*

Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 210. This article will be concerned primarily with the information Moses preserved for us in the Pentateuch, though (due to lack of detail in certain areas) we may occasionally look at other descriptions of the garments to arrive at a more complete picture. The reader will be benefited by briefly reviewing Exodus 25–30 (the revelation), Exodus 36–39 (the making), and Leviticus 8–9 (the investiture and inauguration of temple service). The scope of this article will not allow for a discussion of those details here. Suffice it to say, these three units are intimately related but describe different stages of implementation of God’s revelation to Moses.

12. Moreover, this homily will occasionally analyze symbols from a Latter-day Saint perspective, showing possible meanings hidden in the garments that provide one with a greater understanding of the specific work of this last dispensation.

13. Just like the New Testament writers who were quick to identify Christ in Old Testament symbolism, all men and women can benefit from understanding the symbolism which God has embedded in all things. This symbolism is designed to bear testimony of his Son. While we must “be watchful that we do not force the text and make it say things it does not say” (Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999], 37), our homiletic approach will imitate the allegorical methodology found in the New Testament and in the early church fathers; see, for example, Luke 24:27 or Augustine, “The Epistle of John,” Homily 2.1, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 7:469. Augustine states that *everything* in the Old Testament speaks of Christ, *but only to those who have the ears to hear it*.

14. This optional rendering is based on the following: “And thou shalt *embroider* [Hebrew: *shabats*, meaning to ‘weave’ or ‘plait’] the *coat* [Hebrew: *kthoneth* or *kuttoneth*, meaning an ‘under-garment’ or ‘shirt-like garment,’ sometimes rendered ‘tunic’] of fine *linen* [Hebrew: *shesh* or *shshiy*, meaning something ‘bleached white’ or of white ‘linen’].” Admittedly, scholars have translated the passage variously. I have offered only one rendering, but it does appear to be a valid rendering of the Hebrew. See Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 128, s.v. Exodus 28:39 and footnote 28:39; *Good News Bible* (New York: American Bible Society, 1978), 96, s.v. Exodus 28:39.

15. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 3.7.2, in *The Complete Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1981), 73. See also Kaiser, “Exodus,” 2:467 and J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* 2nd ed. (London: Soncino Press, 1962), 343. Josephus may or may not be right about the design of the clothing of the Aaronic high priest. Nevertheless, his explanation represents the views of his day—both Jewish and Christian. It is quite possible that the Christocentric reading of these items by Christians of the post–New Testament era was colored by explanations of the design given by first century witnesses like Josephus. In that regard, his views are germane to our study—particularly since our examination is homiletic rather than exegetical.

16. Leslie F. Church, ed., *The NIV Matthew Commentary in One Volume: Based on the Broad Oak Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 107. See also Patrick Fairbairn, *Typology of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1989), 242, n.1.

17. See Slemming, *These Are the Garments*, 25.

18. See Parry and Parry, *Symbols and Shadows*, 130–31 and Slemming, *These Are the Garments*, 25.

19. See Jacob Milgrom, *The Anchor Bible: Leviticus 1–16* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 502 and fig. 11, 506; James G. Murphy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Exodus, with a New Translation* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1874), 320; Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 4:340–41.

20. See Matthew B. Brown, *The Gate of Heaven: Insights on the Doctrines and Symbols of the Temple* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 1999), 104, n. 139. See also Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 91–138; John W. Welch and Claire Foley, “Gammadia on Early Jewish and Christian Garments,” *BYU Studies* 36, no. 3 (1996–97): 253–58. Brown states: “In the paintings of the Dura Europos synagogue (ca. 245 A.D.), Moses is depicted standing before the tabernacle dressed in a white robe that is decorated at chest and knee level with two different checkered marks. . . . Examples of Jewish clothing with marks shaped like the Greek letter *gamma* (Γ) have been recovered in archeological sites at Masada, Bar-Kokhba, and Dura-Europos.”

21. Murphy, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 320.

22. Parry and Parry have suggested: “Various parts of the ancient priestly sacred vestments symbolize aspects of the atonement” (*Symbols and Shadows*, 138). The whiteness of the linen coat has obvious connections to Christ’s ability to cleanse.

23. Gaglardi, *Path of the Just*, 28.

24. Slemming, *These Are the Garments*, 25.

25. Slemming, *These Are the Garments*, 25.

26. See Augustine, “The Epistle of John,” Homily 2.1, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series*, ed. Philip Schaff and Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—Series 1*, 7:469, who states that everything in the Old Testament “tells of Christ,” but only if you and I have the ears to hear what is being symbolically taught.

27. The “Church” of the Old Testament was quite different from the “Church” of the New Testament, just as the Church of today is quite different from the “Church” of antiquity; see John A. Tvedtnes, *The Church of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967). The use of the term “Church” here is intended generically, referring only to followers of YHWHY or Christ in any gospel dispensation.

28. Of course, commentators are extrapolating a meaning which was quite possibly foreign to Jews of the Mosaic dispensation, but which would have meaning to Christian readers of the Hebrew Bible. Holzappel and Seely have written: “There is no scriptural evidence for the clothing of the Levites, but Josephus records that at the time of Jesus the Levites had gained the privilege of wearing priestly linen robes” (*My Father’s House*, 60). Though we cannot be certain of how far back this practice goes, it is clear that it would have allowed all Levites to gain a greater appreciation for and understanding of the symbolism behind the linen robe—not just the high priest and Aaronic priests.

29. For examples, see Doctrine and Covenants 4:1; 6:1; 11:1; 12:1; and 14:1.

30. Baruch A. Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publications Society, 1989), 50. Eight articles of sacred clothing are mentioned in

association with the high priest. The four undergarments—the linen coat, the breeches, the girdle or sash, and the headband—were worn by all Aaronic priests who worked in the tabernacle or the temple. The four outer garments—the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim, the ephod, the robe, and the miter—were worn only by the high priest. See Kaiser, “Exodus,” 2:465.

31. See Brown, *The Gate of Heaven*, 81–82; Stephen D. Ricks, “The Garment of Adam,” *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake: Deseret Book, 1994), 709, 727, n. 23. While plants were technically also subject to corruption and death, they were not seen as symbols of such because their level of life was not equivalent to the level of life of an animal. Thus, animal products carried negative symbolic connotations, whereas linen carried positive ones. See also Trent, *Types of Christ in the Old Testament*, 56, who associates the “linen breeches” with “the righteousness of Christ.”

32. Jarman, *High Priest’s Dress*, 19; emphasis in original.

33. See Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 3.7.2. See also Brown, *The Gate of Heaven*, 84.

34. See Douglas R. Edwards, “Dress and Ornamentation,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:237; James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 138; Jack Tresidder, *Symbols and Their Meanings* (London: Duncan Baird Publishers, 2000), 134. See also J. C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 73–74; Hugh T. Henry, *Catholic Customs and Symbols* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1925), 69–70.

35. Slemming, *These Are the Garments*, 28. See also Gaglardi, *The Path of the Just*, 45: “Biblical girdles had various uses, the most common of which was to tighten the coat or clothes, bringing the folds together to enable the party wearing it to be prepared for work, or action such as running.” See also 1 Peter 1:13; Walter L. Wilson, *A Dictionary of Bible Types* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 196; Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 14.

36. The Hebrew word translated as “blue” here is also sometimes translated as “violet.” Though we are not explicitly told within the text whether the robe was made from linen, wool, or some other comparable fabric, commentators suggest it was most likely made of wool. See Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus*, 50; Sol Scharfstein, *Torah and Commentary: The Five Books of Moses* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Publishing, 2008), 259.

37. See Brown, *The Gate of Heaven*, 82; Milgrom, *The Anchor Bible: Leviticus 1–16*, 506, figure 11; Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, 342; Eerdmans’ *Handbook to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 169.

38. Slemming, *These Are the Garments*, 34.

39. See Levine, *JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus*, 50.

40. See Whiston, *Complete Works of Josephus*, 74, note.

41. See Ada R. Habershon, *Study of the Types* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1974), 95; Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols*, 40.

42. Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 111.

43. See Kevin J. Conner, *Interpreting the Symbols and Types* (Portland, OR: City Bible Publishing, 1992), 61.

44. Slemming, *These Are the Garments*, 34; emphasis in original.
45. They represent “divine protection” because they are said to scare away demons. See Milgrom, *The Anchor Bible: Leviticus 1–16*, 504.
46. Murphy, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 319.
47. Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, eds., *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 79.
48. See, for example, Carol Meyers, “Ephod,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, 2:550; John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1965), 241; Allen C. Myers, ed., *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 342; Kaiser, “Exodus,” 2:468; George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter’s Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1951–57), 1:1039; Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 122 (Hebrew Bible section). Some English translations render the Hebrew word “ephod” as “apron.” See, for example, James Moffatt, trans., *A New Translation of The Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 92 (Hebrew Bible section); J. M. Powis Smith and Edgar J. Goodspeed, trans., *The Complete Bible: An American Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 76 (Hebrew Bible section).
49. Brown, *The Gate of Heaven*, 86.
50. Conner, *Interpreting the Symbols and Types*, 141; Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 317.
51. Nadia Julien, *The Mammoth Dictionary of Symbols* (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 1996), 24. Cooper writes “fertility” (*Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols*, 14).
52. Slemming, *These Are the Garments*, 41.
53. Slemming, *These Are the Garments*, 39–40.
54. Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, 1:1039.
55. See Jarman, *High Priest’s Dress*, 3.
56. Kaiser, “Exodus,” 2:467.
57. Murphy, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 315.
58. See Ramban Nachmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, trans. Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1973), 2:481. Whether Nachmanides is right on this point is anyone’s guess. However, there seems to be scriptural support for his claim. For example, the Urim and Thummim mentioned time and again in the Hebrew Bible (Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65) never has an origin attached to it, and the one given to Joseph Smith by Moroni (see Joseph Smith—History 1:35) had belonged to Mahonri Moriancumer, and it was “given to the brother of Jared upon the Mount, when he talked with the Lord face to face” (D&C 17:1). Additionally, section 130 and Revelation 2 speak of a Urim and Thummim which will be given to “each individual” who proves worthy of an inheritance in the celestial kingdom—again implying divine origin. Abraham spoke of “the Urim and Thummim, which the Lord my God had given unto me” (Abraham 3:1). Thus, Nachmanides’s claim that this was not a man-made device finds support.

59. See Richard D. Draper, *Opening the Seven Seals: The Vision of John the Revelator* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 24, 77, 94; Mick Smith, *The Book of Revelation: Plain, Pure, and Simple* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998), 288; Robert D. Johnston, *Numbers in the Bible: God's Design in Biblical Numerology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1990), 61; Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *The Anchor Bible: Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 317.

60. Murphy, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 316.

61. The stones of the breastplate were sardius, topaz, carbuncle, emerald, sapphire, diamond, ligure, agate, amethyst, beryl, onyx, and jasper (Exodus 28:17–20).

62. The stones mentioned in Ezekiel 28:13 are sardius, topaz, diamond, beryl, onyx, jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle.

63. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press of the Hebrew University, 1983), 375–76.

64. See Marvin J. Ashton, “There Are Many Gifts,” *Ensign*, November 1987, 23; Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), s.v. “Gifts of the Spirit.”

65. Brown, *The Gate of Heaven*, 84.

66. Slemming, *These Are the Garments*, 118.

67. Slemming, *These Are the Garments*, 118.

68. Gaglardi, *Path of the Just*, 216.

69. “Dressing in special clothing in the temple denotes a change in role, from that of mortal to immortal, from ordinary human to priest or priestess, king or queen.” John A. Tvedtnes, “Priestly Clothing in Bible Times,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 666.

70. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987–88), 2:322.

71. Slemming wrote: “The mitre that adorned [the temple priest’s] head would speak of holiness of thought and control” (*These Are the Garments*, 127).

72. See Slemming, *These Are the Garments*, 124–25.

73. Slemming, *These Are the Garments*, 118. See also Gaglardi, *Path of the Just*, 216: “‘HOLINESS TO THE LORD’ is the ultimate complete holiness of the body, soul and spirit, essential in order for this old mortal to put on immortality when Jesus returns. All who have this hope certainly are purifying themselves today.”

74. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 159.

75. R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 92.