

**The Congregation of Holy Cross and the Evolving Religious Garb:  
That Worn in the House and That Worn “On the Street”  
By the Priests and the Brothers**

**Presented at  
The 2021 Holy Cross History Conference  
University of Notre Dame by  
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**On Friday, April 23 at 8:00 PM**

## Introduction

The focus of this short presentation was to determine when the street dress for the brothers (Roman Collar with the black string) was standardized and promulgated by either a general or provincial chapter. As I began to think about this topic, I decided to look through the hundreds of photos of brothers and priests in various forms of not only street attire, but also the attire that was to be worn in the houses at the University of Notre Dame and in all places where the priests and brothers lived in large groups. Let me just scan through the 20 or 30 photos I selected. The variety, even in the more formalized yesteryears, is quite amazing.

The first new awareness for me is that it is very difficult to find a photo of either Blessed Basile Moreau (1799-1873) or Superior General Gilbert Francais (1893-1926?) wearing a cape. And it is also rare to find photos of Edward Sorin (1814-1893) and the other superiors general, including Christopher J. O'Toole (1906-1986), who were photographed not wearing the cape. Beginning with Germain-Marie LaLande (1911-1996), and all subsequent superiors general, the modern era begins: clerical shirts with a modified white piece of plastic inserted in slits in the black-wrap-around collar.

In the 1943 edition of Moreau's two volumes of circular letters, is included Moreau's *Sketch of the Life and Works of M. L'Abbé Jacques-François Dujarié, Pastor of Ruillé-Sur-Loir* written sometime after 1857. On page xiii he writes:

The necessity of choosing some style of dress for the little Congregation was accentuated now that the members were broken into different groups. This made it desirable that they adopt some Habit which would show they all belonged to the same family, and at the same time, set them off from the world as men who had broken with its vanities and its tastes.

Moreau then relates that Dujarié (1767-1838) travelled to Le Mans to “discuss the question of a religious habit with the proper authorities.”<sup>1</sup> Those authorities were “[f]illed with esteem and veneration for the zeal...and piety of this saintly pastor,”<sup>2</sup> and they sent him back to Ruillé with a Habit that had been agreed to by Bishop Bouvier. “It consisted of a kind of black cassock without the train, buttoned to the waist and made of common cloth, a white rabat, cloth skull cap and short trousers as well as a flat-topped, broad-brimmed hat.”<sup>3</sup> If we look at Brother Harold Ruplinger’s (1926-2009) famous painting depicting Dujarié handing out habits to the first four recruits in 1820, they each received a soutane and that is it—no rabat and none of the other accoutrement that created the standard Habit for the Brothers ca 1860.

The first mention of a Habit in a circular letter is Letter No. 1 addressed to the Brothers on November 8, 1835 written at Le Mans about its reception and whose francs would pay for it:

**Reception of the Habit:** The expenses of taking the habit are charged to the postulants. They are admitted to this ceremony only after one or two months of trial in the house. These expenses will never exceed thirty francs. The duration of the novitiate is for two full years.

Twenty-three years later, in Circular Letter No. 92, January 1, 1858, Moreau feels the need to draw attention to the fact that “for the last ten years I have often heard remarks of the variety of dress occasioned by differences in dress of the professed Josephites and the novices.” Because of all of the variety, Moreau decides he needs to legislate on the official Habit. “I have decided that henceforth there will be uniformity in this religious

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid xiii

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

garb.” To wear two or more habits is “unknown in other congregations approved by the Holy See. I have thought it well also to reestablish the wearing of the house-cap in place of the skull-cap as this head-dress strikes me as being more becoming to the teacher. Besides, it resembles the biretta more closely without, however, actually being such. These are the only modifications I make in the habit of the Josephites.” Ever frugal with community funds, however, he ends with this proviso. “In the meantime, everyone will wear what he actually has and will conform himself to the present prescriptions only when he needs new supplies.”

There were still members taking liberties with habit modifications in 1859 forcing the Father Superior to write in Letter No. 104 that “It is not permitted to introduce the slightest modification in the religious habit, such as adopting for one’s hat a silk band with two tassels, as do certain ecclesiastics; with still less reason may one wear a silk hat.” Hat tassels continued to be a problem so, once again, Moreau calls attention to infractions in Letter No. 132, October 8, 1860. “I believe it is my duty to forbid the use of the tassle [*sic*] which some wear on their hats, as also the little watch pocket which some have inserted in the cassock underneath the cincture in such a way that the watch chain can be seen very prominently.” Finally, at least for Moreau, in Letter 134, October 30, 1860 he needs to “take the opportunity to reply to certain questions that have been put to me.” And the very first answer is “According to our Rule, the habit for the novices is the same as for the professed with the exception of the little statue, which is proper to the professed.” He is referring to the statue of St. Joseph holding the Child Jesus and a staff sprouting lilies pictured in this slide.

What does the above have to do with street dress? The Habit described was worn both in the house and on the streets of French villages in those very early days. When

Father Sorin and his band of six brothers come to the United States in 1842, however, another series of issues emerges regarding both house dress and that worn in and around the University of Notre Dame and South Bend. Some of the photos I have included show the American brothers in various forms of both house and street Habit.

There is not much said about a promulgated habit in the States; in fact, little is written about habits at all, prior to the General Chapter of 1920. Yet there is a lot of hectoring about brothers and their dress in an unpublished manuscript attributed to Brother Aidan O'Reilly (1877-1948), the first brother archivist of the US Province of Brothers, written sometime in the "Gay Nineties" when Aiden states declaratively: "[F]or the Brother of Holy Cross the 'nineties were anything but gay." Why? The answer is a resounding Father John A. Zahm (1851-1921)!

With the untimely death of Father William Corby (1833-1897), the Provincial Superior, Superior General Francois appoints his successor, Father Zahm, which sent shivers up and down the spines of almost every Brother in the United States, Canada and Bengal—throughout the civilized and not-so civilized world! This was so much the case that in 1901, a group of eleven brothers "picked up the courage" to send a petition to Francois stating their grievances about the choice of John Zahm. It took five years to be *sincerely heard* [author's italics], but by the end of the General Chapter of 1906, Zahm was out. Among the Brothers' grievances was Zahm's toxic penchant for humiliating the brothers whenever his Teutonic icy ire was ignited or he just felt the need to exercise ecclesiastical superiority. Among the many very legitimate grievances against Zahm, and some like-minded clerics, were those regarding what brothers could and could not wear. Should the brothers be allowed to wear the Roman collar or a white surplice at Mass? According to Brother Aiden, Brother Marcellinus Kinsella (1847-1914)

“used to tell of Father [Patrick] Colovin’s (1842-1887) bringing up in the General Chapter [of 1906] a proposal that the Brothers’ habit should be changed, should be shorten to the knees, so that it would not resemble a cassock so much. Afterward he [Colovin] left the Community and eventually hobo-like took to the road, dying in Dayton, Wisconsin as a diocesan priest]”<sup>4</sup>

At every turn, when reading this enthralling and gut-wrenching paper, it seems there was the need to put the brothers in their place. And that place was no place at the table, quite literally as they were regarded as cheap labor and never, never to be seen in any way looking like a cleric. Zahm and some of his like-minded ecclesiastics, were deep-sixed by the likes of Brothers Englebert Leisse (1858-1942), the first brother president of Holy Cross College in New Orleans, and Brother Marcellinus Kinsella, the first brother principal of Central Catholic High School, and the marvelously humble and gutsy Brother Paul the Hermit McIntyre (1858-1920) who was elected the First Assistant Superior General during the 1906 General Chapter. Brother Aiden recalls that when it came time to sign the grievance-letter to be sent to Francais, Brother Paul the Hermit “had been taken down with one of his frequent illnesses and had to be supported in his bed in St. Joseph’s Hospital to sign the document. As he did so he grimly remarked that he would rise from his grave to sign the document.”

And now fast-forward onto the General Chapter of 1920. What I thought would be short is now taking on length—yet the gossip is so enticing!

The year 1920 is when “[A]ll the members of the Chapter were impressed with the danger incurred by our Brothers’ going out and travelling in a dress entirely civilian.”

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<sup>4</sup> Fifth president of the University of Notre Dame who left Holy Cross because of a very rocky relationship with Superior General Rev. Edward Sorin was released from the Congregation in 1882. When he died in 1887, his body was returned to the University and is buried in the Community Cemetery.

For all of the details for this “impression of danger,” you need to refer to Brother Walter Davenport’s (1928-2004) 1995 History Conference paper “Our Ladies’ Beggars: The *Ave Maria* Canvassers.” It is another gut-wrenching chronicle about the brother canvassers, still regarded as such slave labor that some had to sleep on park benches toward the end of month when their meager room-and-board funds ran low. Canvassers were still being stopped by police in many cities and, often, accused of being bogus “priests” well into the mid-1950s. In fact, on January 31, 1957, a photo appeared in *The Michigan Catholic* of Brothers Vitus Schwartz (1894-1993) and Jonas Moran (1915-2000) with policemen, now clowning for the camera. Under the photo is printed:

“PICKED UP FOR QUESTIONING—Two members of Detroit’s Police dept. graciously posed for this picture with Bro. Vitus, CSC (Schwartz) (center), and Brother Jonas Moran, CSC, Tuesday. Pretending to “book” the brothers is Patrolman Keith Whitehead. His scout car partner is Patrolman Fred Van Antwerp. Residents of Precious Blood parish called the police on Brother Jonas on Monday night, thinking he was a “bogus priest.” (MC Photo by Utykanski.)

The General Chapter goes one to add: “The habit does not, of course, make the religious, but it at least points him out as a religious to the eyes of the public and constrains him to exemplary conduct. The committee [regular discipline] has accordingly judged it fitting to determine a specific kind of collar to be worn by our Brothers, so that they may be distinguished from ordinary citizens. The Provincials will see to it that this important regulation be strictly attended to.” Famous last words on the issue of the proscribed Habit for anyone in Holy Cross. And the comment about a habit constraining one to “exemplary conduct” is as bogus as any written in the last 200 years.

The Provincial was Charles L. O'Donnell (1884-1934) who sends a Circular Letter to all members of the Province without a number nor a date on the copy I received from the Notre Dame Archives. In this letter he informs all Holy Cross clerics that the Holy See is alarmed because of "the growing tendency in America, both secular and religious, to laxity in observing the dictates of clerical dignity and decorum in matters of dress." Black is the color for clerical dress, yet there are those who have been seen wearing "grays, stripes and other more or less worldly colors," and in "too many cases the cut of their clothes suggests rather the man of fashion than the man of prayer." Archbishop P. [Pietro] Fumasoni-Biondi (1872-1960)<sup>5</sup> ends, and I paraphrase: this is to come to an end immediately.

O'Donnell tells his clerical subjects that this is something that cannot be ignored, so "our religious must strictly comply with the law of the Church." Therefore, all worldly colors are to be dyed immediately to black, or must be tossed out if dying will not be appropriate. No Moreau frugality this time! Finally, the black applies to vacations too, but if you work for the Boy Scouts or at a boys' camp, "you may lay aside the regular clerical dress" yet only with the direct permission of the Provincial.

Fast-forward again to the Chapter of 1951 that promulgated the revised *Constitutions*. What a difference 31 years makes! "Constitution 9", Statutes 76-80 now really sets down the law with lengths and circumferences of medals and crosses down to the seven-sixteenths of an inch. And then there are the collars and cords and cuffs, habit lengths, and spaces between buttons, and which ones show and which ones do not, and how many are to be under capes. And then there is that damnable watch pocket and, of course chains and fobs, and then what happens to capes in hot climates,

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<sup>5</sup>December 14, 1922 Fumasoni-Biondi was named Apostolic Delegate to the United States. on December, 14 1922 until 1933 when he was elevated to a Cardinal Priest.



and what is worn in the house and on the street, and black as opposed to white fedoras (ah, hats, hats) and when they are to be worn. With a final great, exasperated huff: “All religious are to wear the habit in the house.” The members that made up this committee on the regular discipline had obviously had it. With this Leviticus-like legalism, they shout: It is consummated! *Quod scripsi, scripsi* with a double exclamation point! Unfortunately, because of Covid and so many restrictions for the use of the Notre Dame archives, I have yet to find the promulgation of the Brothers’ collar and its description. Let this drawback whet the appetite for the next paper and, perhaps, the final chapter for the 200-year Habit odyssey.

There is much more, yet I will now do the last fast-forward to the *Constitutions and Statutes* “Given at Rome, September 15, 1988.” “Constitution Five,” Statute 55, and I can quote all of it.

Our consecration is a public one, for we are called to stand forth in service and witness. It is desirable therefore that we ordinarily be known and seen as members of the congregation. In conformity with the customs in the local church and the decision of our provincial chapters, we wear attire appropriate for religious. The symbol of the congregation, the cross and anchor, is worn to identify us as members of Holy Cross.

One cannot get much more succinct than that. Case closed once again? Perhaps, yet the male peacock in each of us is difficult to keep in the cage. He does need to spread that phantasmagoric tail occasionally with tassels and bangles and beads and flotsam and... “and here we go around the prickly pear.” I will not beat you up again with those many photos. As the world churns, I close.

