

The King's Wardrobe Nassau. 21 April 2013.

As I am sure you know, George Beverley Shea – perhaps the greatest gospel singer of all times – certainly the best loved – went to be with the Lord this past Tuesday – at the great age of 104.

Personally, I enjoyed a quote of Bev Shea which I came across last week.¹

Apparently, when interviewers once asked him why Billy Graham never led his audience in song himself, as many other preachers did. Bev Shea replied that things were better as they were, for, as he put it, Mr. Graham suffered from 'the malady of no melody'.

I suppose that of all the 500 or so songs and hymns which Bev Shea recorded,² one of those which my wife Linda and I have loved the most is that written by a man from the UK, a Mr. Henry Barraclough. The hymn is entitled, 'Ivory Palaces'. The chorus reads ...

*Out of the ivory palaces,
Into a world of woe,
Only His great eternal love
Made my Saviour go.*

And the opening lines of the first three verses read ...

*My Lord has garments so wondrous fine,
And myrrh their texture fills ...*

*His life had also its sorrows sore,
For aloes had a part ...*

*His garments, too, were in cassia dipped,
With healing in a touch.*

These words were based on a verse from one of David's Psalms – from Psalm 45 ... 'All your garments are fragrant with myrrh and aloes³ and cassia⁴.

Both Jews and Christians agree that the subject of Psalm 45 is the Messiah – and we might note that verses 6 and 7 are quoted by the writer to the Hebrews in the New Testament as referring to the Son of God, our Lord Jesus.⁵

The Psalm can be properly described as 'the Psalm of the King' – 'king' being a title occurring no less than six times. But the psalmist unites his verbal picture of the mighty and majestic Warrior King, armed and equipped with weapons for both near and distant combat,⁶ with that of the Bridegroom at His marriage.⁷

In the Psalm, the Bride is noted for her beauty and her glory, together with her many-coloured robes interwoven with gold. For his part, the garments of the Bridegroom are saturated with three costly perfumes.

This morning I want to speak to you about the Fragrance of our Lord's Garments.⁸ And to invite you, if I may put it that way, to probe, to peer, with me into the King's wardrobe, where we discover eight hangers: holding, in order ...

*swaddling clothes;
a garment with a distinctive hem;
a shining white raiment;
a towel;
one very full hanger, holding a seamless coat, a splendid robe and a purple cloak;
a hanger holding linen cloths;
a garment to the foot; and, by far the most ominous and solemn ...
a blood-stained vesture.*

First then, the swaddling clothes. Mary, we read, 'brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger'.⁹ Those swaddling clothes speak loudly to me of the Saviour's matchless grace and condescension. As the apostle Paul once expressed it, 'you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich'.¹⁰

And these clothes formed part of the sign given by the angel to a group of shepherds keeping night-watch over their sheep: 'unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger'.¹¹ And to think that this was the

self-same One spoken of as 'clothed with majesty and girded with strength',¹² and as 'clothed with splendour and majesty'.¹³ Behold Him now, wrapped in swaddling clothes.

In those days, it was the common practice to wrap strips of cloth tightly around the limbs of young infants to prevent these limbs being distorted while still weak. But who is this, pray? This is He whose arm, in another sense, is strong – to say the least. 'The heavens are yours' wrote Ethan the psalmist, 'the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it, you have founded them ... You have a mighty arm'.¹⁴ Here then we meet something of the mystery of the incarnation.

Just think ... God's only begotten Son became Mary's firstborn Son. 'Who is like the Lord our God', the psalmist asked, 'who dwells on high, who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth?'.¹⁵ And the One to whom it is an act of enormous condescension even to take notice of His creation, has deigned to stoop from His throne 'on high' to an animals' rough feeding-trough – to that which somebody once described as 'the first real Kingsize bed!

I suggest that the label to be placed on this hanger should be 'The King's condescending grace'.

Secondly, there is a garment with a distinctive hem. We read in Luke 8 of a woman with an issue – a discharge – a flow – of blood, who 'came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased'.¹⁶

The gospels make it clear that hers was a hopeless medical case. Mark tells us that she 'had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse'.¹⁷ Luke, himself a physician,¹⁸ confined himself to the comment that she 'could not be healed by anyone'¹⁹ – not, that is, until today! 'She felt in her body that she was healed', we read.²⁰ And the Lord felt something too. 'Jesus, perceiving in Himself that power had gone out of Him'.²¹ But that power proved more than sufficient.

'Who was it that touched me?' He asked. When those around Him denied having done so, Peter protested, 'Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!' But Jesus insisted, 'Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me'.²² Not that this was the first time. On an earlier occasion, we find that a great crowd of people had 'sought to touch Him: for power came out of Him, and healed them all'.²³

I speak of the garment as having 'a distinctive hem' because the Book of Numbers refers to the distinctive 'cord' – or 'thread' – of blue which all Jewish men attached to the fringes (or tassels) on the border of their garments.²⁴

Interestingly, the incident of the healing of the woman is intertwined with that of the raising of the daughter of Jairus, a local synagogue ruler ... 'interesting' because the time-note of 'twelve years' features in both incidents.

There can be no doubt that, in the case of Jairus, he would gladly have given everything he had to hold onto something which he loved and had enjoyed for the past twelve years; whereas, in the case of this poor afflicted woman, she had already given everything she had in unsuccessful attempts to rid herself of something which she hated and had endured for the past twelve years.

As Jairus, the woman was at her wits' end – Jesus was her last and only hope. What a story! A woman healed and made clean by power which went out from our Lord. Surely the label to be placed on this hanger must read 'The King's power'.

Our third hanger holds a shining white raiment. Now we read that, on the so-called Mount of Transfiguration, 'as He prayed ... His raiment became white and glistening'.²⁵

It is more than likely that this scene on the mountain took place at night. I note, for example, we are told that He withdrew into the mountain to pray – something it was His custom to do at night – that His disciples were heavy with sleep (along it seems with some here this morning!), that there was a point when they (His disciples) fully woke up, and that it was 'the next day' that they came down from the mountain.

He was 'transfigured' we read before three highly favoured disciples,²⁶ who were struck – as we might expect – by the change to His most visible features; namely, to His face and to His raiment. His raiment, says Matthew, became white as the light.²⁷ Mark says that His raiment 'became radiant (became gleaming), exceedingly white, like snow'. His transformed raiment, Mark notes, could not be bettered either by nature, or by any amount of human toil.²⁸

For his part, Luke says that 'His raiment became white and glistening'²⁹ – where the word Luke uses, translated 'glistening', carries the meaning 'as bright as a flash of lightning' – being a strengthened form of the word rendered

'shines' in our Lord's prophecy that 'as the lightning *shines* which lightens from one end under heaven to the other end under heaven, so shall the Son of man be in His day'.³⁰

His raiment certainly shone white ... as white as the light, as white as the snow, and as white as the lightning flash! But what shall we write on the label to go on this hanger? Let's ask the one apostle who was there and who wrote about it. Of the experience which he and the other two disciples had 'on the holy mount', Peter wrote, 'we were eyewitnesses of His majesty (of His magnificence)'.³¹ Thank you, Peter – an 'inspired' choice, if you don't mind me saying so! On this label we shall gladly write 'the King's majesty'.³²

Which brings us to the fourth hanger – that carrying a towel. Here we read from the opening section of John 13 'Jesus ... rose from supper, and laid aside His garments, and taking a towel, wrapped it around His waist. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel wrapped around Him'.³³

We note that John first stresses that our Lord was then fully conscious of His own dignity and greatness 'Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands'.³⁴ And the One who knew that into His hands the Father had given all, now takes His disciples' feet into His hands as He deigns to wash them. The word translated 'towel' is in fact a Latin word – and is the very word used by the Roman historian Suetonius³⁵ to describe (quote) the 'short linen *tunics* of slaves' which the Emperor Caligula compelled some of his senior senators to wear.³⁶ It is by no means impossible therefore that it was a slave's apron which our Lord put on.

That the washing of somebody else's feet was an action often performed by a slave is clear from the words of the recently-bereaved Abigail in the Old Testament, when David proposed marriage to her. ... 'let your handmaid', she replied, 'be a bondwoman to wash the feet of the servants of my lord'.³⁷

Indeed, according to the teaching of the Jewish Rabbis, the washing of a master's feet was so menial and so degrading a task that it was not required of a Jewish slave. As one Rabbi expressed it, 'the sages said, 'A Hebrew slave must not wash the feet of his master'. This was something a Gentile slave was expected to do, but not a Jewish slave'.³⁸

Yet Jesus was *not* the disciples' slave. He was their Lord and Teacher!³⁹

I suspect that Peter's exhortation that Christians should 'clothe themselves *with humility*' – where the word 'clothe' refers to something tied with a knot, and in particular to the apron or overall of a slave⁴⁰ – that Peter's exhortation reflects a personal reminiscence on his part ... his vivid recollection of our Lord's action in the Upper Room.

Thank you again, Peter. There can be no doubt that the label to be fixed to this hanger must be 'the King's lowliness'.

Hanger number 5 is rather full. For it holds a seamless coat,⁴¹ a splendid robe,⁴² and a purple cloak.⁴³ From this hanger we learn, not of our Lord's humility, but of His humiliation.

To be stripped of His clothes was no small part of the shame of His crucifixion.

Both Old and New Testaments draw attention to the stripping of our Lord's garments ... 'I can count all my bones', Jesus says prophetically in Psalm 22, 'They look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots for my clothing'⁴⁴ – to which the Gospel adds that the four soldiers 'crucified Him and divided His garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take'⁴⁵ – including the seamless coat which represented a kind of bonus for one of the four.⁴⁶ For, as a condemned criminal, all our Lord's earthly possessions were automatically forfeit and became the property of His executioners.

Rewinding the video for a moment, part way through our Lord's trial, Pilate had earlier referred our Lord's case to Herod Antipas, who was, for his part, delighted, having wished for some time to see Jesus and, hopefully, to see Him perform a miracle for his benefit.⁴⁷ But it was not to be. For our Lord answered him nothing. Bitter with disappointment, Herod treated Jesus as an object of contempt, arraying Him in some bright and elegant robe – possibly out of his own sumptuous wardrobe. Antipas, unlike his father (Herod the Great), had been made only a 'tetrarch' by the Romans – and not a king. And it seems as if, by means of the splendid robe, Antipas was saying, 'So *you* are charged with being a king, are you? Well, in which case you have achieved more than I ever did!' And then Herod 'sent Him again to Pilate'.⁴⁸

Where, immediately following Pilate's capitulation to the Jewish rulers and sentencing of Jesus to death by crucifixion, 'they (Pilate's soldiers, and indeed the whole cohort) clothed Him in a purple cloak (in all likelihood some discarded military cloak), and, plaiting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him'.⁴⁹ And then they proceeded to pound the thorns into His head with a sturdy reed. Both the splendid robe and the purple cloak depicted the

Saviour as an object of contempt and derision ... who, out of love for us, 'endured the cross, despising the shame'.⁵⁰

There can be no doubt. The label to be placed on this hanger must be, 'The King's humiliation'.

Hanger number 6 holds only some plain linen cloths. Rather surprisingly perhaps, these were supplied by two members of the leading Jewish council of our Lord's day. Listen to the apostle John as he explains what happened. 'Joseph of Arimathea ... asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission', John records – adding that 'Nicodemus also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices'.⁵¹ And, because of the sequel, it is from these linen cloths that we learn of our Lord's breath-taking victory over death and the grave.

For John wastes no time in telling next how, early on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene had raced away from the tomb where Joseph and Nicodemus had so carefully laid our Lord's body, to report to Peter and John that the large stone which had sealed the only entrance to the tomb ... that the stone had been moved, and that, presumably, His body had been taken away – by person or persons unknown.⁵²

Then it was the turn of the two apostles to do the running. At different moments both apostles entered the tomb, and at different moments both apostles 'saw the linen cloths lying'.⁵³ But truth was that only John grasped the significance of what they saw ... namely, that the linen cloths lay in an orderly fashion, with the face cloth folded in a separate place. The tomb gave no indication of any haste or disturbance. This was not the work of any tomb raiders!

As John recorded later, 'He saw and believed'. Believed what? Believed that Jesus had risen from the dead – and in all probability that His body had simply passed through the linen cloths. For John knew that it had been a very different story with Lazarus, whom Jesus had once raised up. Then, when He, our Lord, had 'cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out", the man who had been dead came out, his hands and feet bound with linen cloths, and his face wrapped with a cloth'. Which is why, as John recalled, Jesus had then said to those around, 'Loose him, and let him go'.

Yes, Lazarus had been raised, but he hadn't passed through the linen cloths. For he had the same kind of body he had occupied before ... and one day he would die again. He therefore came out of *his* tomb by way of the very same door through which he had been carried in. But, when the Lord Jesus rose, He burst out into other dimension – with a resurrection body that had no problem in passing through either the sealed stone door or the stone walls of His tomb ... and that, unlike the body of Lazarus, had no further need of either the linen cloths or the face cloth. He would never die again.

We hear afresh His word this morning, 'Fear not, I am ... the living one: and I became dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore'.⁵⁴ Yes, He, the living One, once entered the, to Him, alien territory and realm of death. But He did not stay there! 'Up from the grave He arose'. Which is why the label attached to this hanger must be 'the King's victory in the realm of death'.

The seventh hanger holds a garment which reaches to the foot. In Revelation 1, the apostle John records, 'I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the midst of the lampstands one like the Son of man, clothed with a garment reaching to the feet, and with a golden sash around His chest'.⁵⁵

John now saw the glorified Lord '*in the midst*' of His lampstand-churches. Once, John wrote of Him, 'He went out, bearing His cross, to the place called ... Golgotha. There', John said, 'they crucified Him, and with Him two others, one on either side, and Jesus '*in the midst*'.⁵⁶

But His suffering on the cross is now forever past, and His transcendent glory filled John with awe. Overpowered by the sight, John fell prostrate at the Saviour's feet ... just as later would the most exalted of the heavenly intelligences.⁵⁷

Not long before the Lord's crucifixion, in the so-called Upper Room, John had pillowed his head on the Lord's bosom.⁵⁸ But now John's place is not on His breast, but at His feet.

As I see it, the 'garment reaching to the feet' and the 'golden sash' probably suggest the High Priestly office of our Lord. I note that the description of the garment and the sash worn by the glorified Jesus matches almost exactly the description of the clothing worn by Israel's High Priest in both Old and New Testament times. For example, the word translated 'a garment reaching to the feet' is the word which the Greek Old Testament uses to describe the robe of the Jewish High Priest.⁵⁹ Just as the word translated 'sash' is the same in both Testaments.

The Jewish historian Josephus (who wrote not long after our Lord was here, and using the same words) said that 'The High Priest is adorned with ... a long robe, *reaching to his feet* ... which is tied tightly around him with a *sash*⁶⁰ ... telling us also that the priestly robe 'is girded to the breast a little above the elbows'⁶¹ – around the chest, that is.

John informs us that he (John) was known personally to the High Priest of his day.⁶² And it is surely not unreasonable to assume that the apostle was therefore familiar with the High Priest's garments as described by Josephus. I suggest then that John would have readily understood the significance of the 'garment reaching to the foot' and of the 'sash' worn by the Son of man.

But I note that, although the sash of Israel's High Priest had (quote) 'gold interwoven', the sash worn by the glorified Lord Jesus is all – is wholly – of gold ... pointing us to our *great* High Priest, who has passed through the heavens into the immediate presence of God, and who is now always able to help and to save! For me, the label to be placed on hanger number 7 should be that of 'the King's glorious priesthood'.

And so to the last hanger in the King's wardrobe, holding as it does a blood-stained vesture. This garment belongs to a time still future, and, as you might therefore expect, you will read of it toward the close of your Bible ... in Revelation 19 'I saw heaven opened', the apostle John wrote, 'and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war ... He is clothed in a vesture dipped in blood ... and the armies which are in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and pure ... and He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.'⁶³

Having earlier seen the Bride of the Lamb (a company made up of all true believers), and how she is dressed for her marriage, we might expect John next to be shown the *Bridegroom* and how He is dressed. But John does *not* see our Lord Jesus Christ as *the Bridegroom*. Instead, he sees Him as a mighty (but righteous) Warrior-King, and is shown how *He* is dressed as such ... 'clothed', we read, 'in a vesture dipped in blood' ... the blood, I believe, not of the Conqueror Himself, but of His foes, of whom He says in Isaiah 63, 'I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spurted on my garments, and stained all my vesture'.⁶⁴

The point for us to grasp is simply that one day 'He (the Lord Jesus) will put down all rule and all authority and power, for He *must* reign'.⁶⁵ And the label to be placed on this – our last – hanger has to be 'the King's second advent and reign'.

And so, it is no exaggeration to say that, according to scripture, our Lord's garments span both His advents – exuding the fragrance of His condescending grace, of His power, His majesty, His lowliness, His humiliation, His victory in the realm of death, His present glorious priesthood, and of His coming advent and reign.

And so, back to Psalm 45 ... where the psalmist says of the King, 'He is your Lord, and so worship Him!'⁶⁶ And well we might when we recall the refrain of the hymn often sung by George Beverly Shea ...

*Out of the ivory palaces,
Into a world of woe,
Only His great eternal love
Made my Saviour go.*

Footnotes

¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/18/arts/music/george-beverly-shea-billy-grahams-singer-dies-at-104.html>

² <http://www.georgebeverlysheamusic.com/>

³ Aquilaria Agallocha.

⁴ Cassia Lignea, ISBE.

⁵ 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The sceptre of your kingdom is a sceptre of uprightness. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions', quoted in Hebrews 1. 8-9. This is one of seven Old Testament passages which the writer quotes to demonstrate the immeasurable superiority of our Lord to the angels.

⁶ Having sword and arrows, Psa. 45. 3, 5.

⁷ Psa. 45. 8-15.

⁸ Scripture says little about the clothes Jesus wore. We know what his cousin John the Baptist wore. We know what the religious leaders wore. But the clothing of Christ is nondescript: neither so humble as to touch hearts nor so glamorous as to turn heads.

⁹ Luke 2. 7.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. 8. 9.

¹¹ Luke 2. 11-12.

¹² Psa. 93. 1.

¹³ Psa. 104. 1.

¹⁴ Psa. 89. 11, 13.

¹⁵ Psa. 113. 5-6.

¹⁶ Luke 8. 44.

¹⁷ Mark 5. 26.

¹⁸ Col. 4. 14.

¹⁹ Luke 8. 43.

²⁰ Mark 5. 29.

²¹ Mark 5. 30.

²² Luke 8. 46.

²³ Luke 6. 19 (cf. Matt. 14. 34-36).

²⁴ Num. 15. 38. Luke agrees with Matthew (9. 20) in limiting the touch to the κράσπεδον of the garment. This probably comes ultimately from Mark 6. 56. The word is used for the tassels the Israelites wore on the four corners of their garments (Num 15. 38-39; Deut. 22. 12).

²⁵ Luke 9. 29.

²⁶ Matt. 17. 1-2.

²⁷ Matt. 17. 2.

²⁸ Mark 9. 3.

²⁹ Luke 9. 29.

³⁰ Luke 17. 24.

³¹ 2 Pet. 1. 16-18.

³² At this point we take our leave of Luke.

³³ John 13. 3-5.

³⁴ John 13. 3.

³⁵ Pronounced, 'SWĒ-TŌ-NĒ-AS'.

³⁶ 'Nor was he any more respectful or temperate in his dealings with Senators, forcing some of the most senior to run behind his chariot for miles, clad in their togas; or wait on him, dressed in the short linen tunics of slaves, at the head or foot of his dining-couch', Suetonius, 'The Twelve Caesars: Gaius Caligula', paragraph 26. There were "few rulers in all the history of the world who were as crazy, cruel, conceited, and arbitrary as the Roman Emperor, Caligula" Ferrill, Arther, Caligula, Emperor of Rome, Thames and Hudson Ltd, London, 1991.

³⁷ 1 Sam. 25. 40-41.

³⁸ 'The washing of a master's feet was a menial task which was not required of a Jewish slave', C. K. Barrett, The Gospel according to John, an Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text, page 366. 'The task was reserved for Gentile slaves ...', G. R. Beasley-Murray, John in the Word Biblical Commentary, page 233.

"Scripture says, 'you shall not make him serve as a slave', Lev. 25. 39. Hence the sages said, 'A Hebrew slave must not wash the feet of his master, nor put his shoes on him, nor carry his things before him when going to the bathhouse ... for it is said, 'But over your brethren the children of Israel you shall not rule, one over another, with rigour, Lev. 25. 46. But one's son or pupil (disciple) may do so'", (Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael (a midrash on Exodus), Tractate Nezikin on Exodus 21. 2.) See ...

<http://www.publishersrow.com/Preview/PreviewPage.asp?shid=1&clpg=1&pid=1&bid=410&fid=31&o=135386096506>

2, pages 1172, 1174.

³⁹ John 13. 3-14.

⁴⁰ Vincent's Word Studies and Robertson's Word Pictures on 1 Peter 5. 5.

⁴¹ John 19. 23.

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- ⁴² Luke 23. 11.
⁴³ John 19. 2.
⁴⁴ Psa. 22. 16-18.
⁴⁵ Mark 15. 24.
⁴⁶ John 19. 23-24.
⁴⁷ Herod Antipas ruled as 'Tetrach' over Galilee and Perea from 6 AD to 48 AD.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod_Antipas#To_c._29_AD
⁴⁸ Luke 23. 11.
⁴⁹ Mark 15. 17; John 19. 2.
⁵⁰ Heb. 12. 2.
⁵¹ John 19. 38-40.
⁵² John 20. 1-2.
⁵³ John 20. 5-6.
⁵⁴ Rev. 1. 18.
⁵⁵ Rev. 1. 12-13.
⁵⁶ John 19. 17-18.
⁵⁷ Rev. 5. 8.
⁵⁸ John 13. 23.
⁵⁹ For example, Exod. 28. 4; 29. 5.
⁶⁰ Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book III, Chapter VII, Section 4.
⁶¹ Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book III, Chapter VII, Section 2. (See the Brill translation, Book 3, Section 159 ...
<http://pace.mcmaster.ca/york/york/showText?text=anti&textChunk=nieseSection&book=3&chunkId=159&version=en>
glish)
⁶² John 18. 15-16.
⁶³ Rev. 19. 11-15.
⁶⁴ Isa. 63. 3.
⁶⁵ 1 Cor. 15. 25.
⁶⁶ Psa. 45. 11.