

A study on Dress Reform

(Please note that this is my personal opinion and does not necessarily reflect the views of other Adventists. I have wrestled with this issue for a long time and have found peace and can with confidence continue the work that the Lord has given me)

Reasons for Mrs. White asking for dress reform:

Women should clothe their limbs **with regard to health and comfort. They need to have their limbs and feet clad as warmly as men.** The length of the fashionable female dress (19th century) is objectionable for several reasons. {2SM 477.1}

1. It is extravagant and unnecessary to have the dress of that length that it will sweep the sidewalks and streets. {2SM 477.2}
2. A dress thus long gathers dew from the grass, and mud from the streets, which makes it uncleanly. {2SM 477.3}
3. In its bedrabbled condition it comes in contact with the sensitive ankles, which are not sufficiently protected, quickly chilling them, and is one of the greatest causes of catarrh, and of scrofula swellings, and endangers health and life. {2SM 477.4}
4. The unnecessary length is an additional weight upon the hips and bowels. {2SM 477.5}
5. It hinders the walking, and is also often in other people's way. {2SM 477.6}
6. Hoops are not convenient, modest or healthful...Their garments being kept from the body by hoops, it is impossible for them to receive sufficient warmth from their clothing, and their limbs are continually bathed in cold air. {How to Live, No. 5, pp. 66-74.}



HOOPS

Mrs. White's recommendation:

Whatever may be the length of the dress, females should clothe their limbs as thoroughly as the males. This may be done **by wearing lined pants gathered into a band and fastened about the ankle, or made full and tapering at the bottom**; and these should come down long enough to meet the shoe. The limbs and ankles thus clothed are protected against a current of air. If the limbs and feet are kept comfortable with warm clothing, the circulation will be equalized, and the blood will remain healthy and pure, because it is not chilled or hindered in its natural passage through the system.--How to Live, No. 6, pp. 57-64. {2SM 478.3}

The Bloomer/American

Costume



THE DRESS REFORM.

AN APPEAL TO THE PEOPLE IN ITS BEHALF.

WE are not Spiritualists. We are Christian women, believing all that the Scriptures say concerning man's creation, his fall, his sufferings and woes on account of continued transgression, of his hope of redemption thro' Christ, and of his duty to glorify God in his body and spirit which are his, in order to be saved. We do not wear the style of dress here represented to be odd,—that we may attract notice. We do not differ from the common style of woman's dress for any



At one point Spiritualists and other non-Adventists such as Mrs. Bloomer started adopting the shorter dress and pants and, because of the resulting confusion as well as extremism in the church, Mrs. White no longer advocated that style of dress and wrote:

"...because that which was given as a blessing was turned into a curse, the burden of advocating the reform dress was removed."--Ms 167, 1897

Christians should not take pains to make themselves gazing-stocks by dressing differently from the world. But if, in accordance with their faith and duty in respect to their dressing modestly and healthfully, they find themselves out of fashion, they should not change their dress in order to be like the world. But they should manifest a noble independence, and moral courage to be right, if all the world differ from them. If the world introduce a modest, convenient, and healthful mode of dress, which is in accordance with the Bible, it will not change our relation to God, or to the world to adopt such a style of dress. Christians should follow Christ, and conform their dress to God's word. They should shun extremes. They should humbly pursue a straightforward course, irrespective of applause or of censure, and should cling to the right, because of its own merits. {2SM 476.2}

Guiding Principles Enunciated.--I beg of our people to walk carefully and circumspectly before God. Follow the customs in dress so far as they conform to health principles. Let our sisters dress plainly, as many do, having the dress of good, durable material, appropriate for this age, and let not the dress question fill the mind. Our sisters should dress with simplicity. . {CG 414.1}

"Some have supposed that the very pattern given was the pattern that all were to adopt. This is not so. But something as simple as this would be the best we could adopt under the circumstances. No one precise style has been given me as the exact rule to guide in all their dress."--Letter 19, 1897.

“That which pertaineth unto a man/woman”

There is still another style of dress which will be adopted by a class of so-called dress reformers. They will imitate the opposite sex, as nearly as possible. They will wear the cap, pants, vest, coat, and boots, the last of which is the most sensible part of the costume. Those who adopt and advocate this style of dress, are carrying the so-called dress reform to very objectionable lengths. Confusion will be the result. Some who adopt this costume may be correct in their views in general upon the health question, and they could be instrumental in accomplishing vastly more good if they did not carry the matter of dress to such extremes. {2SM 477.7}

Deu 22:5 The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God.

In Bible times both men and women wore dresses, and yet it was not considered to be “that which pertaineth unto a man/woman”. It becomes an ‘abomination’ when a man or woman deliberately tries to imitate the opposite sex in dress to make a certain statement, usually for homosexual or immoral purposes.



Pants were not introduced as clothing for men until about 500 years ago in Europe and even today there are still cultures where men wear long or shorter dresses.

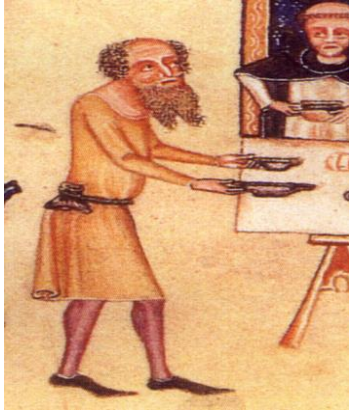
Men’s clothing (Middle Ages)

Dresses or tights (no pants yet)



Men’s clothing (1850’s)





An illustration from between 1325-1335



Modern kilt



An Indian man wearing a veshti or mundu



A Sri Lankan man wearing a sarong



Modern Arabian dress



WOMEN DRESSING “AS PERTAINETH UNTO A MAN”

UNKNOWN LESBIAN COUPLE, 1915

(They will wear the cap, pants, vest, coat, and boots“.) {2SM 477.7}



In modern times lesbians might or might not dress like men, and when they do dress like men, they adopt a very obvious manly style of dress. In many cases lesbians dress in a very feminine way, therefore wearing dresses today is no longer a guarantee of the femininity of the wearer!



It is obvious that the style of dress below, as an example, although it is a dress, is more immodest than the following pictures with modest tops and pants. It seems the issue is not whether a woman wears a dress or pants, it is an issue of modesty and health.





I don't think one could see this style of dress as "pertaining unto a man" and there can be no 'confusion' as to whether the person is male or female. It is also modest since everything that needs to be covered is covered!

Of course, above is a more casual style of dress and depending on the occasion the style would differ. In a church or formal setting one would dress differently, and a skirt or dress would fit the occasion better, for example:



It would be wise not to wear super tight-fitting pants or clothing, for reasons of health and modesty. It is not healthy to squeeze the lower abdomen into tight pants for the same reasons Ellen White spoke out against corsets, which restricted breathing and the natural function of the intestines and other organs. And then we often sit at our desks and computers for hours restricting the blood flow to the internal organs even further.

Furthermore, apart from being immodest, wearing tight pants or leggings, unless you are built like a pencil, could be very unbecoming for most of us!

From the numerous quotes regarding how we should dress, she pointed out that our clothes should be:

- modest,
- simple,
- healthful,
- neat and clean,
- good quality,
- tasteful.

How do we deal with the issue of dress in our church?

None to Be Conscience for Another, but Set a Worthy Example.--Do not encourage a class who center their religion in dress. Let each one study the plain teachings of the Scriptures as to simplicity and plainness of dress and by faithful obedience to those teachings strive to set a worthy example to the world and to those new in the faith. **God does not want any one person to be conscience for another.** {CG 429.2}

Talk of the love and humility of Jesus, but do not encourage the brethren and sisters to engage in picking flaws in the dress or appearance of one another. Some take delight in this work; and when their minds are turned in this direction, they begin to feel that they must become church tinkers. They climb upon the judgment seat, and as soon as they see one of their brethren and sisters, they look to find something to criticize. This is one of the most effectual means of becoming narrow-minded and of dwarfing spiritual growth. God would have them step down from the judgment seat, for He has never placed them there. {CG 429.3}

In answer to the questions that have recently come to me in regard to resuming the reform dress, **I would say that those who have been agitating this subject may be assured that they have not been inspired by the Spirit of God.** The Lord has not indicated that it is the duty of our sisters to go back to the reform dress. The difficulties that we once had to meet are not to be brought in again. **There must be no branching out now into singular forms of dress.**

New and strange things will continually arise, to lead God's people into false excitement, religious revivals, and curious developments; **but our people should not be subjected to any tests of human invention that will create controversy in any line.** {Ms 167, 1897}

There is a medium position in these things. O that we all might wisely find that position and keep it. In this solemn time let us all search our own hearts, repent of our sins, and humble ourselves before God. **The work is between God and our own souls. It is an individual work, and all will have enough to do without criticizing the dress, actions, and motives of their brethren and sisters.** {CH 605.1}

It is not your dress that makes you of value in the Lord's sight. It is the inward adorning, the graces of the Spirit, the kind word, the thoughtful consideration for others that God values. {CG 429.1}

Dress Not to Be Made a Subject of Controversy.-- There is no need to make the dress question the main point of your religion. There is something richer to talk of. Talk of Christ; and when the heart is converted, everything that is out of harmony with the Word of God will drop off. {CG 428.3}

"The dress reform was among the minor things that were to make up the great reform in health, and never should have been urged as a testing truth necessary to salvation. It was the design of God that at the right time, on proper occasions, the proper persons should set forth its benefits as a blessing, and recommend uniformity, and union of action."-- *Review and Herald*, October 8, 1867

The dress question is not to be our present truth. To create an issue on this point now would please the enemy. He would be delighted to have minds diverted to any subject by which he might create division of sentiment, and lead our people into controversy. {Ms 167, 1897}

It is too late now to become enthusiastic over any man-made tests. The great test for this time is on the commandments of God, especially the Sabbath, and nothing is to be brought in to draw the mind and heart from the preparation needed to meet it. {Ms 167, 1897}

Let us preach and live the present truth and "Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).
