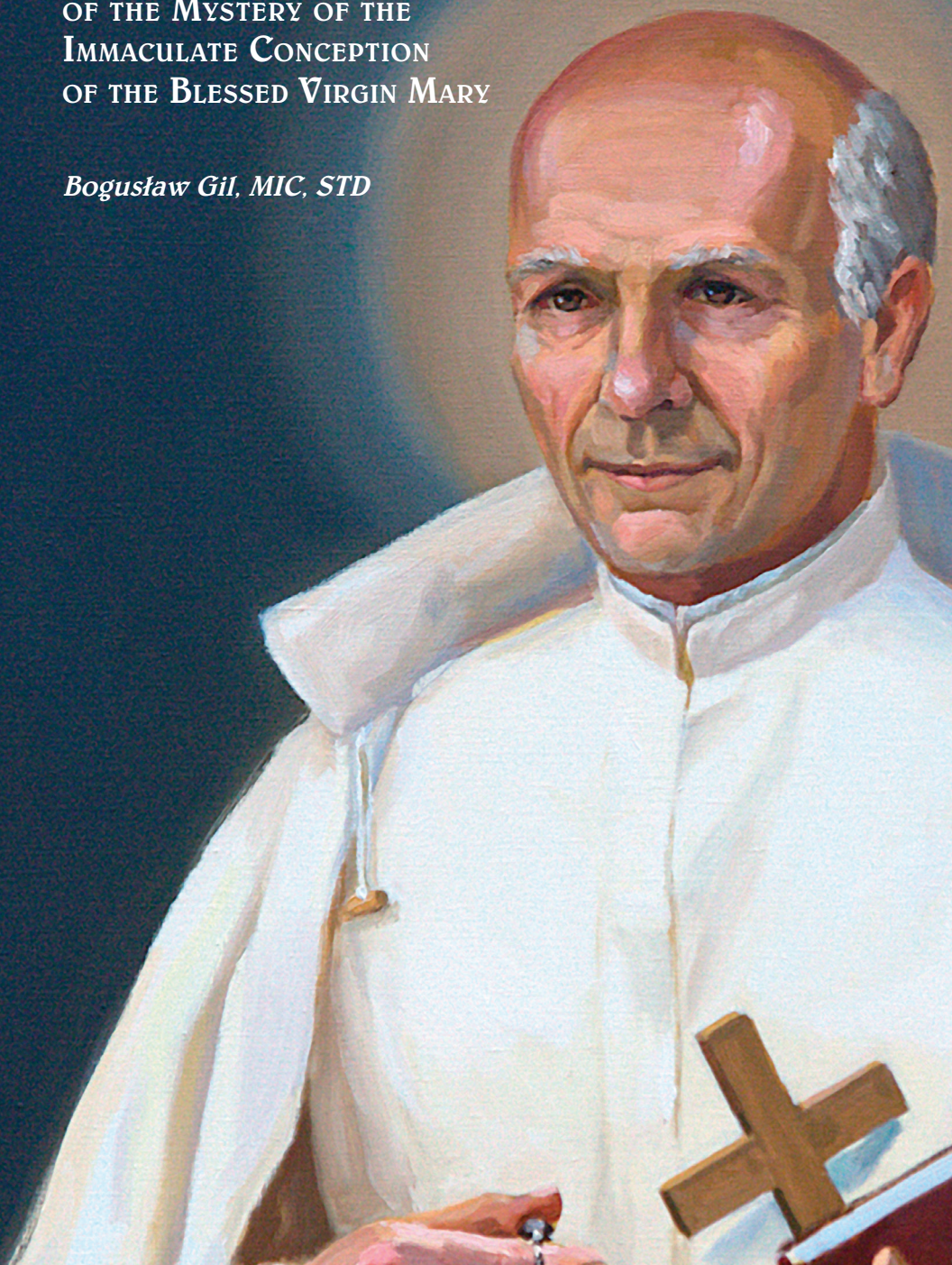


THE WHITENESS OF THE HABIT
OF ST. STANISLAUS PAPCZYŃSKI
IN THE LIGHT OF THE THEOLOGY
OF THE MYSTERY OF THE
IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

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**MARIAN
HERITAGE**
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Introduction

When two people sit down to play chess, the question usually asked is: Which color would you like to play? Their choice between white and black usually comes down to personal taste or sometimes even superstition. Occasionally, the decision might also be influenced by current trends or the players' mood at the moment. Someone used to prefer black, but with white being in vogue now, they'll opt for the white pieces and pawns. That's how it can be, and it likely happens in chess. The same may apply to fashion in clothing and home decor.

Yet, the choice to embrace or decline the white habit, which was restored for the Marians by the 2023 General Chapter, should not be driven by personal taste, fashion trends, or even individual piety. The wearing of a religious habit, or choosing not to, has always carried significant meaning,¹ and it continues to do so even in today's largely secularized world, which nonetheless remains able to recognize Christian values and symbols. St. John Paul II addressed this topic almost thirty

¹ It primarily concerns the outward manifestation of a complete dedication to God, affiliation with a particular religious order, the embrace of evangelical poverty, and the public testimony to Christ, a role to which those in consecrated life are uniquely called within the Church and the broader world. See: P. NAUMOWICZ, *Mariański strój*, Rzym-Warszawa 2010, pp. 7-10, in <[http://\(MarianskiStroj.pdf\)](http://(MarianskiStroj.pdf))>, February 14, 2025.

years ago in his post-synodal exhortation on the consecrated life. Highlighting the missionary and evangelistic essence of this Christian lifestyle, which stems directly from Christ's Paschal Mystery, the Pope instructs:

“Consecrated persons will be missionaries above all by continually deepening their awareness of having been called and chosen by God, to whom they must therefore direct and offer everything that they are and have, freeing themselves from the obstacles which could hinder the totality of their response. In this way they will become *true signs of Christ in the world*. Their lifestyle too must clearly show the ideal which they profess and thus present itself as a living sign of God and as an eloquent, albeit often silent, proclamation of the Gospel. The Church must always seek *to make her presence visible in everyday life*, especially in contemporary culture, which is often very secularized and yet sensitive to the language of signs. In this regard the Church has a right to expect a significant contribution from consecrated persons, called as they are in every situation to bear clear witness that they belong to Christ. Since the habit is a sign of consecration, poverty and membership in a particular religious family, I join the Fathers of the Synod

in strongly recommending to men and women religious that they wear their proper habit...”²

While the Marians may adhere to the clerical dress code set by the local Bishops’ Conference in their daily lives, as of 2023, the white habit — adopted by our Father and Founder “in honor of the shining with whiteness Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God” (*Norma Vitae*, IV, § 4)³ — serves as the formal clothing for the confreres and a symbol of their Marian identity. Thus, its importance and meaning need to be explored anew and reflected upon as a sign and symbol.

Given that P. Naumowicz’s work on the Marian clothing, referenced above, was published in 2010 and adequately covers the significance, history, and theology of the religious habit, it’s now pertinent to focus primarily on the issue of its color. It is generally known that “when Fr. Papczyński put on the white habit on September 15, 1671 [...]), he did so intend to promote devotion to the Immaculate Conception [...]. Others acknowledged that the white habit represented the *candorem Immaculatae Conceptionis* (‘radiance of the Immaculate Conception’).”⁴ Before exploring

² St. JOHN PAUL II, *Vita consecrata*, no. 25, Post-synodal apostolic exhortation, March 25, 1996.

³ This is my own literal translation of this sentence. It differs from the official English translation which is more free and less precise.

⁴ K. KRZYŻANOWSKI, footnote 3, in: ŚW. STANISŁAW PAPCZYŃSKI, *Pisma zebrane*, PROMIC, Warszawa 2016, pp. 48-49.

the relationship between the mystery of the Immaculate Conception and the color white, it's worthwhile to consider the significance of "whiteness" in culture and within Christianity, which stems from Biblical Tradition.

The Cultural Significance of White

White is categorized among the achromatic colors, which means it lacks any specific color dominance. This brightest hue comes from the blending of the three primary colors: green, red, and blue. White is the color of light that, when passed through a prism, disperses into the colors of the rainbow. Thus, as a blend of three colors, white represents completeness and the synthesis of distinct elements.⁵ In this light, the Founder's words about the "radiance of the Immaculate Conception" of the Mother of God, mentioned earlier, carry significant weight. We'll come back to this point later.

As the color of pure light, white symbolizes the renewal of life, particularly in its spiritual aspect. In terms of meaning, white is similar to gold, and like gold, it embodies both color and light. White also expresses transcendence. As the embodiment of full light, it can represent both a beginning and an end.⁶

⁵ Cf. B. BONAR, *Biel w liturgii – symboliką i kontekst kulturowy*, in: A. SIELEPIN J. SUPPERSON (ed.), *Szata liturgiczna*, Uniwersytet Jana Pawła II, Kraków 2016, p. 111.

⁶ Cf. *Ibidem*.

Within European culture, where the Congregation of Marian Fathers originated and where we primarily focus our discussion on whiteness, this color is most often a symbol of purity and innocence. White is chiefly the color associated with the Risen Christ, Immaculate Mary, angels, apostles, and saints. For Christians, within this broad European cultural context, white typically evokes notions of moral purity, goodness, innocence, and justice. Yet, in other cultures, the associations can be quite different. For the ancient Egyptians, this color was associated with death, infertility, and calamity. It was linked to the desert, which perpetually posed a threat to human existence.⁷ Likewise, in China and Vietnam, white is seen as the color of mourning, which is why the Chinese wear it at funerals. Vietnamese people, including baptized Catholics, adorn their heads with white sashes during the solemn events of mourning and funerals for their deceased.

It's worth noting, that in places where the Christian faith, or rather, European civilization, has influenced the indigenous culture, white has also come to symbolize celebration and rest. A prime example is Rwanda, where our Congregation has been active since 1984. In fact, in the Rwandan language, Sunday — *ku cyumweru* — translates to the "Day of

⁷ Cf. K. JUREK, *Znaczenie symboliczne i funkcje koloru w kulturze*, in: *Kultura-Media-Teologia* 6 (2011), p. 76, the whole article: pp. 68-80.

Whiteness,” or to be dressed in white. The missionary work of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Africa, known colloquially as the White Fathers for their traditional white cassocks, had a profound impact on the formation of the Church and the Rwandan state. The white of their missionary garb certainly had a substantial influence in forming the Christian identity of the local people whom they baptized. Color, indeed, plays a crucial role in shaping both the individual and collective identities of people.⁸ Choosing or changing a color often serves to define or highlight one’s identity. At its core, color holds symbolic meaning. It conveys a code that can impact, if not a person’s conscious mind, then certainly their subconscious, thereby affecting their reactions and choices.

To distinguish themselves from the Benedictines, particularly those from Cluny who wore black, the Cistercians chose the white habit, harking back to the original Benedictine tradition. Although St. Benedict did not designate a specific color for the monks’ attire in his rule, the prevailing practice during his era involved using simple, undyed wool or linen, which tended to be more white than black. As time passed, the initial practical reasons were overshadowed by the symbolism associated with the colors mentioned above.

⁸ See: *Ibidem*, pp. 71-73.

The medieval debate between St. Bernard of Clairvaux, a key figure in the Cistercian reform, and Peter the Venerable, the abbot of Cluny, aptly illustrates this. St. Bernard charged Peter with wearing the devil's colors. In response, he argued that black represents moderation and humility, whereas wearing white, the color of Christ as well as celebration and purity, signifies great pride.⁹ In truth, the debate wasn't about the colors themselves, but rather about the lifestyle of the Black and White monks and their adherence to the Founder's Rule. The proponents of the Cistercian reform criticized the Cluniac black monks for straying from the monastic ideal of poverty, forsaking manual labor, and taking on church titles and benefices. The white habit of the Cistercians was intended to symbolize a spirit of renewal and a return to the foundational ethos of St. Benedict and the monastic Fathers, living wholly for and with the Christ who emptied himself.¹⁰

It's hard not to notice a parallel with our Founder's situation, who, for reasons similar to those of the Cistercians breaking away from the Cluniac Benedictines, departed from the Piarists and adopted the white habit to honor the Immaculate Conception of Mary. He himself notes that "surprise overcame many who

⁹ Cf. B. BONAR, *Biel w liturgii*, op. cit., p. 117.

¹⁰ See. *I Cistercensi*, Storia dell'Ordine cistercense, in: <<http://Storia dell'Ordine cistercense – Gli elementi fondamentali della riforma cistercense>>, March 3, 2025.

saw that I went from being [dressed in] black to white" (*FDR* 8). While the whiteness of his habit was primarily and most importantly to honor the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, St. Stanislaus Papczyński's yearning for the renewal of religious life and his commitment to the original Piarist rule, particularly the evangelical poverty cherished by the founder of the Congregation of the Pious Schools, were also mirrored in his transition from black to white.

The Significance of White in the Bible

Since ancient times, white has held significant importance in the religion revealed through the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments. Although we will review them from this perspective rather briefly, it will be adequate for our considerations. Simultaneously, it should be noted that white held an equally significant role in various pagan cults and superstitions as it did in religions rooted in Biblical tradition. White was especially sought after for the coloring of animals used to symbolize different gods. For instance, the bull, representing the Babylonian weather deity Adad, was meant to be shown in white, and into the emerging city of Rome, the heavens gods were also to be carried on white animals. In ancient Mesopotamia, Ahura Mazda, the benevolent and supreme deity, was associated with this color and was also known as the

“white lord.” Greek priests donned white garments, as did the so-called Manichaeans. Thus, because white was linked to everything sacred and divine, it eventually became a symbol of moral purity and perfection.¹¹ This is how it came to be viewed in European culture, as previously mentioned.

In the context of the Holy Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments, among the three colors most commonly stated (white, black, and red), white stands out as the most important.¹² Beginning with the negatively-viewed whiteness associated with leprosy, which appears in numerous Old Testament passages (notably Ex 4:6; Lev 13:2-27; Num 12:10; 2 Kgs 5:27), through the beauty of the morning’s whiteness (1 Sam 14:36) or the cloud and the throne of the Ancient of Days (Rev 14:14; 20:11), it’s particularly important to focus on the whiteness of clothing, as this is what the color white most frequently symbolizes in the Bible, especially in the New Testament. The white garments mentioned in the Bible might naturally remind us of our religious habit, whose whiteness is similarly inspired by them. This pertains to the “white as snow” attire of the Ancient of Days

¹¹ Cf. M. LURKER, *Słownik obrazów i symboli biblijnych*, Pallotinum, Poznań 1989, p. 25.

¹² See: K. ROMANIUK, *Biblijne źródła „białości” Niedzieli Białej*, in: *Niedziela Warszawska* 17 (2003), in: *Biblijne źródła “białości” Niedzieli Białej* in: *Niedziela.pl*, March 11, 2025

described in the Book of Daniel (7:9), as well as the counsel from the wise man in the Book of Ecclesiastes, who advises: "At all times, dress in white and keep your head well anointed with oil." (Eccl 9:8). The white of these garments symbolizes primarily justice and innocence, yet it also signifies the Ancient of Days as the origin of these qualities. It is He who cleanses, pardoning the sins and faults of His people. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow" (Is 1:18).

In the New Testament, white garments will mainly symbolize the Risen Christ, who, through His Paschal Mystery, passes from this world to the Father (cf. Jn 13:1-4). As a prelude to this mystery of the Lord, the Transfiguration scene depicts Him in garments "dazzling as light" (Mt 17:2). This whiteness is so dazzling that no earthly fuller could ever imitate it (cf. Mk 9:3; Lk 9:29). As the Conqueror of death, hell, and Satan arises from the tomb on the third day at dawn, the clothing of the angel announcing this Good News at the empty tomb is "white as snow" (Mt 28:3). Likewise, the young man discovered by the women inside the Lord's empty tomb is dressed in a white robe (cf. Mk 16:5). In the depiction of the Ascension, two men clad in white garments approach the disciples and announce the Lord's return in glory (cf. Acts 1:10-11).

Yet, the Book of Revelation contains the most allusions to the symbolism of white garments. The one who possesses the seven spirits of God declares that those who have kept their garments spotless will walk with Him in white. "Anyone who proves victorious will be dressed (...) in white robes" (cf. Rev 3:1-5). The members of the church in Laodicea who weaken in faith are advised to purchase white garments for themselves, so they can "hide their shameful nakedness" (Rev 3:18). The elders seated on the 24 thrones in Heaven were all "dressed in white robes" (Rev 4:4). And upon the Lamb opening the fifth of the seven seals, His followers, who were destined to die, were given white garments (Rev 6:11). In the first liturgical reading for the Feast of All Saints, we hear: "After that I saw that there was a huge number, impossible for anyone to count (...) dressed in white robes and holding palms in their hands" (Rev 7:9). The white color of their garments is referenced again a little later, where the reason for this whiteness is explained: "These are the people who have been through the great trial; they have washed their robes white again in the blood of the Lamb". (Rev 7:14).

White: The Color of Christ's Passover

The passages mentioned above suggest that in the Bible, not all instances of white are the same. From the negative association of leprosy's whiteness, we progress to *the whiteness of the Resurrection's garments*. Indeed, in the New Testament, this color is primarily linked to the Mystery of Christ's Passover. As noted before, the reference to the whiteness of Jesus's garments emerges only within the context of the Transfiguration scene, serving as an announcement and preparation for the disciples to engage with the Lord's Paschal Mystery. Biblical scholar, Bishop Romaniuk asserts that "we arrive at the connections the Bible illustrates between white — whiteness and the process of moral transformation. (...) Those dressed in white are people who 'have washed their robes white again in the blood of the Lamb' (Rev 7:14), meaning they have been purified of their sins."¹³ This purification, however, is not just a symbolic ritual of sprinkling with hyssop, so that the repentant sinner may become clean and whiter than snow (cf. Ps 51:9), but it is the spiritual reality of a *new creation*, the result of the divinization of the nature of the person who sincerely believes in Christ. The eternal Word of God, through the Incarnation, unites with every human being and guides those who believe in Him to the

¹³ *Ibidem*.

fulness of salvation found in the mystery of His Passover.

However, this Passover is not merely a singular event, a historical fact now in the past; it is foremost an eschatological reality of salvation that exists in the Crucified and Risen Christ, who, as the Paschal Lamb, will never die again. Death no longer has dominion over Him, and as the Risen One, He lives eternally within the mystery of His redemptive death. The Cross on which the Crucified One hangs, present in every Christian home, symbolizes this profound mystery. The Resurrection is beyond the reach of physical sight. We only see the Crucified One. Yet, faith enables us to go beyond the barrier of death and to experience the true presence of the Risen One. Therefore, one can *meet* Him in this Mystery of His Passover within the Church, particularly through the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. A genuine encounter with Him results in a transformation of the heart and lifestyle. This is known as conversion (*metanoia*), which allows Christ to become our Passover (cf. 1 Cor 5:7), and our new way of living becomes our Passover with Christ.

Before the 4th century, when some Christian communities began to distinguish between the various salvific events¹⁴ that

¹⁴ "At the turn of the 4th and 5th centuries a historical perspective on the events associated with Christ began to emerge. As a result,

constitute the Mystery of Christ's Passover, the Church contemplated and lived this Mystery as a united whole. In the liturgy, which from the very beginning of the existence of the community of believers in Christ was the source and summit of their Christian life, this was expressed through a preference for the color white.

"The early Christians, much like in other aspects, did not directly follow Old Testament patterns regarding liturgical colors, but while keeping those in mind, they primarily favored the color white. (...) This is evident from Clement of Alexandria, who advises the faithful against wearing garments of various colors (...). The above view undoubtedly prevailed among the largest circles of the first

different facets of the salvific work began to be examined as distinct, unconnected events. The theology that was developing and being articulated through the liturgy during that period gradually started to drift from a comprehensive view of the paschal mystery. Leo the Great (d. 461) already celebrated separate feasts dedicated to one specific event. Over time, the notion of Christ's Passover started to be equated solely with His resurrection. The concept of redemption started to be viewed through the lens of atonement, and the understanding that redemption encompasses all salvific events, not merely the passion and death, began to diminish. During the era of post-Tridentine polemical theology, soteriology placed an even greater emphasis on concepts of atonement and merit, overshadowing the salvific role of the resurrection and ascension. This situation continued in Western Christianity up until the 20th century, when a "return to the sources" and ecumenical engagements led to a gradual resurgence of a holistic understanding of the paschal mystery." (A. WAŃKA, „*Misterium Paschalne Chrystusa*" *Pojęcie dawne i nowe*, in: *Szczecińskie Studia Kościelne* 1 [1991], pp. 60-61).

Christians, and for this reason, it can be assumed in advance that the clergy usually wore white liturgical garments”.¹⁵

Thus, white, associated from the very beginning with the Risen Christ and the reality of the paschal renewal of humanity and the world, became a symbol of the Church celebrating the Paschal Mystery both liturgically and through a new way of living. While the phrase “Paschal Mystery” emerges only with St. Justin Martyr and Melito of Sardis (who died in 167 and 180, respectively), the events of Christ’s Passion and glorification, considered as a single, indivisible salvific entity that this term comprehends, have been part of the Church’s Tradition from the very beginning. Usually, they are discussed in relation to Baptism. This is particularly demonstrated by the Letters of St. Paul. For example, let’s cite a passage from the Letter to the Romans, where the Apostle of the Gentiles states:

“You cannot have forgotten that all of us, when we were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into his death. So by our baptism into his death, we were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father’s glorious power, we too should begin living a new life. If we have been joined to him

¹⁵ A. J. NOWOWIEJSKI, *Wykład liturgji Kościoła katolickiego*, vol. II, Druk. F. Czerwińskiego, Warszawa 1902, p. 86-87.

by dying a death like his, so we shall be by a resurrection like his; realizing that our former self was crucified with him, so that the self which belonged to sin should be destroyed and we should be freed from the slavery of sin. Someone who has died, of course, no longer has to answer for sin". (Rom. 6, 3-7).

This freedom from sin and the old way of life, as well as purification in the Blood of the Lamb, was always expressed through the whiteness of the baptismal garment, from which the Second Sunday of Easter, called White Sunday, also took its name. "Upon emerging from the baptismal font, neophytes put on a garment, but it was not the same one they wore when approaching the sacrament. The garment had to be new, white, and shining, symbolizing the new life that started with their baptism."¹⁶ Therefore, the white garment of the neophytes has always symbolized a new life in Christ and with Christ from the beginning. For the Christians in ancient Rome, the significance was even more profound, as it was customary to wear white on one's birthday. Thus, the day of Baptism was perceived, even by pagans observing the white garments of the neophytes from the outside, as a day of new birth, *dies natalis*.

¹⁶ A. GRZYWA, *Symbolika szaty w starożytnych obrzędach katechumenalnych i chrzcielnych*, in: *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia* 13 (2000), p. 284.

Wearing white garments for seven consecutive days, up to the second Sunday of Easter (as Baptism was given only during the Easter Vigil liturgy), powerfully highlighted the eschatological aspect of Christian faith and life. In this way, the 4th-century Syriac theologian, Theodore of Mopsuestia, addressed the newly baptized, saying: "As you emerge from the water, you don a radiant garment: it symbolizes the future world — bright and shining, into which you have been ushered. However, once you achieve resurrection and are clothed in immortality and incorruptibility, you will no longer require this garment. You need it now, though, because you have not yet received these gifts in actuality but only as signs and symbols, a preview of the happiness to come."¹⁷

St. John Chrysostom, in explaining the mystery of the first week following Baptism to the neophytes, describes it as a symbol of the entire Christian life, stating:

"This spiritual wedding is drawing to an end. Be watchful, therefore! Just as in a physical marriage, all wedding festivities last seven days; so too have we celebrated our spiritual marriage for the same duration at the mystical table full of gifts. What am I saying? — for seven

¹⁷ TEODOR Z MOPSUESTII, *Homilia XIV*, cit. per A. GRZYWA, *Symbolika szaty w starożytnych obrzędach...*, op. cit., p. 285.

days? If you stay watchful, the celebration will endure eternally. Simply maintain your garment unblemished and radiant. By doing so, you will encourage the Bridegroom to love you even more deeply, and despite the passage of time, you will preserve your radiance and brightness”.¹⁸

The fact that this was not about external appearance or the aesthetic elements of the garment, which should symbolize the spiritual reality of conversion, is demonstrated by the following words of the holy bishop:

“Do not behave like those who, adorned in a magnificent garment and walking through the marketplace, are solely concerned with preventing a single drop of mud from staining it, though the soul would suffer no harm from this; after all, it’s just a garment that can be eaten by worms, worn out by time, and if it becomes dirty, it can easily be washed in water. However, if — God forbid — the soul were to be tainted, whether by word or by thoughts arising in the heart, it would fall victim to great misfortune”.¹⁹

¹⁸ JAN CHRZYSTOM, *Katecheza* 6, 25-26, in: IDEM, *Katechezy chrzcielne, homilie katechetyczne do tych, którzy mają być oświeceni oraz do neofitów*, U źródeł katechumenatu 1, trans. W. KANIA, Kerygma, Lublin 1993, pp. 95–96.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 23, p. 95.

With the day of their Baptism in mind, Christians ought to protect the brilliance of their garment, ensuring it is not sullied by the old way of life they have forsaken for the Crucified and Risen Christ.

The Immaculate Conception of Mary, Shining with the Whiteness of Christ's Passover

When our Father and Founder, St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński, ordered his spiritual sons that their attire “should be white in color, in honor of the shining with whiteness Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God”²⁰ (*Norma vitae*, IV, § 4), he was referring to both the outwardly visible purity of the religious garment²¹ and, most importantly, the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother, illuminated by the whiteness of Christ's Passover. The habit, which he took on “by divine inspiration” (*FDR* 14),²² was intended from the very beginning to symbolize this Mystery and serve as one of the most concrete ways to honor and spread it. It's hard not to notice the link between the white color of this habit and the whiteness of the baptismal garment. The white habit of our

²⁰ ST. STANISLAUS PAPCZYŃSKI, *Selected Writings*, PROMIC, Stockbridge 2022, p. 66.

²¹ „(...) dirty poverty can please no one.” (*Ibidem*).

²² *Ibidem*, cit., s. 1297.

Father and Founder, being “in honor of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady,” connects to the whiteness of the paschal garments discussed earlier. The Immaculate Conception of Mary and the Paschal Mystery of Christ are essentially linked. This represents a cause-and-effect connection. This is already apparent in the 1854 dogmatic definition, which clearly states that, *the most Blessed Virgin Mary, (...) in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, (...) was preserved free from all stain of original sin*. Thus, the whiteness that shines from the Immaculate Conception of Mary is fundamentally the whiteness of Christ’s Passover. The merits referred to in the dogmatic formula are the Mystery of His kenosis and exaltation, which is perhaps most eloquently expressed in the early Christian hymn found in the Letter to the Philippians (2:6-11).

The Mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, as a result and the initial fruit of the paschal renewal achieved by the Savior and existing within Him, vividly and paradigmatically illustrates the true essence of human salvation in the Crucified and Risen Christ, who is *our Passover*. It teaches us that salvation cannot be earned through what is often called personal righteousness and piety, as it is a pure gift of God’s grace. This gift can only be accepted or rejected. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (cf. Mk 16:16). Faith

is, therefore, the essential response of man, including Mary, to the gift of God's redeeming grace. St. Paul states that "all have sinned and are deprived of God's glory, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:23-24). Mary, although the first part of this statement does not apply to her, "stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently hope for and receive salvation from Him." (*Lumen gentium* [LG] 55). "Redeemed by reason of the merits of her Son and united to Him by a close and indissoluble tie, she is endowed with the high office and dignity of being the Mother of the Son of God, by which account she is also the beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit" (LG 53).

Thus, the redemption that the Virgin Mother receives is real in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Paschal Lamb, who, as the Risen One, lives eternally and has the power to save those who draw near to God through Him (cf. Heb 7:25). Mary, then, is the first person redeemed through the Paschal Mystery of the Son and participates in the Trinitarian life of God according to the measure of the gift of the *fullness of grace* (cf. Lk 1:29). By agreeing through faith to the Incarnation of the Word, she "gave to the world Him who is Life itself and who renews all things, and she was enriched by God with the gifts which befit such a role. It is no wonder therefore that the usage prevailed

among the Fathers whereby they called the mother of God entirely holy and free from all stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature” (*LG* 56).

The whiteness with which the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God radiates, according to our Father Stanislaus, symbolizes this new creation in her. This is a symbol of the Paschal Christ, the New Adam, from whom Mary, the New Eve, receives new life in the order of grace, thus becoming the “Daughter of Her Son.”²³ United with Him by a “close and indissoluble tie,” which is the Holy Spirit Himself, the uncreated Immaculate Conception

²³ “In the mystery of Christ, she is present even ‘before the creation of the world,’ as the one whom the Father ‘has chosen’ as Mother of his Son in the Incarnation. And, what is more, together with the Father, the Son has chosen her, entrusting her eternally to the Spirit of holiness. In an entirely special and exceptional way Mary is united to Christ, and similarly she is eternally loved in this ‘beloved Son,’ this Son who is of one being with the Father, in whom is concentrated all the ‘glory of grace.’ At the same time, she is and remains perfectly open to this ‘gift from above’ (cf. Jas. 1:17). As the Council teaches, Mary ‘stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently await and receive salvation from him.’ [...] Consequently, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the order of grace, which is a participation in the divine nature, Mary receives life from him to whom she herself, in the order of earthly generation, gave life as a mother. The liturgy does not hesitate to call her ‘mother of her Creator’ and to hail her with the words which Dante Alighieri places on the lips of St. Bernard: ‘daughter of your Son.’ And since Mary receives this ‘new life’ with a fullness corresponding to the Son’s love for the Mother and thus corresponding to the dignity of the divine motherhood, the angel at the Annunciation calls her ‘full of grace.’” (JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 8 and 10, Encyclical of March 25, 1987)

(as referred to by St. Maximilian Kolbe),²⁴ Mary can proclaim alongside St. Paul: “I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me.” (Gal 2:19-20). Filled with the grace of the Spirit to a degree that neither St. Paul nor any other creature in Heaven or on earth can match, Mary revealed herself to Bernadette Soubirous on March 25, 1858, not merely as the immaculately conceived but as the Immaculate Conception itself.

The young visionary from Lourdes sees her adorned in a white dress, cinched with a blue sash, and wearing a white veil. Nearly thirty years earlier, in 1830, St. Catherine Labouré beheld the Immaculate One in a vision, receiving the message of the Miraculous Medal, and she too was clad in a silk robe with a veil the hue of white dawn. The white color of the Immaculate Virgin Mother’s garments is less about Her own hue and more a symbol of Him from whom she derives her *original innocence*. Christ the Lord, as the Eternal Word of God Incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary, is her Son, yet simultaneously, her Immaculate Origin. He is before all things, and in Him, all things find their existence. He is the Head of the body, which is the Church, and He is the Beginning. The first-born over all creation (cf. Col 1:15-20). This includes His Mother as well.

²⁴ See: M. KOLBE, *Wybór pism*, ed. J. Bar, Warszawa 1973, 370/597–598.

The Immaculate life of Mary, symbolized by the brilliantly-white color of her dress and veil, should be seen as a synthesis of two graces: the gift of her immaculate beginning and the grace of her glorious end.²⁵ Both of these graces are Christ, the Son of God, in the Mystery of His Passover, through which God the Father renews humanity and the world, not through Adam, but through Christ (cf. Rom 15:22-26). Mary, created in Christ and for Christ, is the Immaculate Conception because, as John Paul II teaches, “in the mystery of Christ she is present even ‘before the creation of the world.’” “Embracing God’s salvific will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son, under Him and with Him, by the grace of almighty God, serving the mystery of redemption.” (LG 56). She is the Immaculate Conception because she never broke the *close and indissoluble tie* that unites her with the Son. She never saddened the Holy Spirit by whom she was filled and sealed (cf. Eph 4:30). Maintaining a perfect bond with Christ, the Virgin Mother “advanced in the pilgrimage of faith” (LG 58) and stood at the foot of the Cross not without God’s decree (cf. *ibidem*), “consenting to the immolation

²⁵ See: J. RATZINGER, *La Figlia di Sion*. La devozione a Maria nella Chiesa, Jaca Book, Milano 2005, pp. 59-68; M. G. MASCIARELLI, *Il segno della donna*. Maria nella teologia di Joseph Ratzinger, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2007, pp. 17-18; A. STAGLIANO, *Madre di Dio*. La mariologia personalistica di Joseph Ratzinger, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2010, pp. 47-49.

of this Victim which she herself had brought forth" (*ibidem*). She was actively present in the Cenacle alongside the Apostles "by her prayers imploring the gift of the Spirit, who had already overshadowed her in the Annunciation. Finally, the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all guilt of original sin, on the completion of her earthly sojourn, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen of the universe, that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords (cf. Rev 19:16) and the conqueror of sin and death." (LG 59).

The Immaculate Conception of Mary, shining with the whiteness of Christ's Passover, reaches its completion in Her Assumption, yet it also serves as a sign and symbol of the Church, which the Immaculate Virgin Mary typically represents and of which She is the Mother. "Taken up to Heaven she did not lay aside this salvific duty, but by her constant intercession continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and cultics, until they are led into the happiness of their true home." (LG 62).

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the Marians of the Immaculate Conception, established by St. Stanislaus Papczyński to serve this salvific Mystery, pray daily with

the words: ***May the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception, be our salvation and our protection!*** They also have the white habit of Father Stanislaus, radiant with the whiteness of the Resurrection. The Immaculate Conception, therefore, is the Risen Christ dwelling in Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the mystery of the Virgin Mother's salvation through the Paschal Christ, whose clothing is so dazzlingly white that no launderer on earth could make it so (cf. Mk 9:3). After all, no one can save themselves or pay God the ransom required for their own soul (cf. Ps 49:8-10). The grace of salvation, which in the life of Mary and every believer signifies hostility towards the Ancient Serpent and his deeds (cf. Gen 3:15), leads to a *rebirth through water and the Spirit* (cf. Jn 3:5), in order to be molded into the likeness of the Son of God (cf. Rom 8:29). Those who do not seek to justify themselves but embrace the freely given grace of salvation through faith are adorned with glory, similar to the Woman clothed with the sun and the moon beneath her feet (see Rev 12:1). This glory of the Resurrection is the attire of Christ and Mary. Therefore, the Marians are to dress themselves in such a manner as Jesus and His Mother.²⁶

²⁶ Cf. *Rule of the Ten Evangelical Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Chapter 10, Marian Press, Stockbridge 2023, p. 66.

Conclusion

The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, shining with whiteness, as the paschal identity of Mary, is primarily a soteriological reality rooted in the Mystery of Christ's Passover. It represents the most complete summary of the Catholic doctrine on grace and salvation.²⁷ It directly points us to Him who is the salvation and Savior of humanity and the world — the Lord Jesus Christ, Crucified and Risen, with whom the Virgin Mother is united by a “close and indissoluble tie.” Therefore, the whiteness of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, symbolized by the white Marian habit, is the whiteness of Christ's Passover.

It is highly noteworthy that during the era of Father Stanislaus Papczyński, when a vigorous campaign in favor of the Immaculate Conception was under way in the Catholic regions of Europe, particularly in Spain, to promote its dogmatization, many Franciscans, who, like Father Papczyński, had vowed to defend this truth even to the point of shedding blood, put on a blue habit as a symbol and color associated with Mary.²⁸ Yet, our Founder never referred to this practice, which he likely would have known about. Whenever he speaks

²⁷ See: J. RATZINGER, *La Figlia di Sion*. La devozione a Maria nella Chiesa, op. cit., p. 68, footnote 10.

²⁸ See: [http://\(I colori dell'abito francescano e la storia del saio di San Francesco – FRATI FRANCESCANI IMMACOLATA – GLOBAL WEBSITE\)](http://(I colori dell'abito francescano e la storia del saio di San Francesco – FRATI FRANCESCANI IMMACOLATA – GLOBAL WEBSITE), 2025.03.07), 2025.03.07.

about the Marian habit, which he considers one of the most crucial symbols of serving the mystery of the Immaculate Conception within his Congregation, he distinctly highlights its white color. This is especially pronounced in the Second Testament, where, reflecting on his life as he approaches his imminent transition to the Lord, Father Stanislaus will state:

“Having been dispensed from the oath of perseverance in the Congregation of Pious Schools by the authority of the brief of Clement X, having rejected the ecclesiastical benefices and prelatures which were offered me by two of my patron bishops (Trzebicki of Kraków and Gembicki of Płock), by divine inspiration, on the counsel of the most distinguished theologians and with the consent of the episcopal sees of Krakow and Poznań, *I assumed the white habit in honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Most B.V.M.*, and, [dressed] in it, presented myself to express my obedience and submission without delay to the Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Lord Archbishop Ranucci, the Apostolic Nuncio in Poland. (...). Father Joachim of St. Ann, elected as my coadjutor (...) I declare to be [my] successor as well, obliging his conscience, by the severe judgment of God, to be as strict as possible in ensuring that the religious Rule

imprinted by God be observed. (...) If Fr. Joachim, by consent of the fathers, be again confirmed as coadjutor, then I oblige him, by the awful judgment of God, that *he would not innovate anything in regard to the habit I have prescribed, or to the name of the Order; nor may he dare to impiously abolish the veneration of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary which we — quite unworthy — offer to Her Majesty through the recitation of the small Office of the Immaculate Conception and the entirety of the Rosary.* Similarly, as to introducing the use of “burning alcohol” [vodka], let him be aware that this [drink] is forbidden to him and to all, because that drink, by the hidden mercy of God, is foreign to our Congregation”.²⁹

Our Father and Founder mentions the white habit first here, even before the name of the Congregation. Therefore, there can be no doubt that, being bestowed upon the Marian Community in honor of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, it forms an integral part of the *divine vision of the Congregation* from its beginning, a vision that was imprinted into the heart and soul of our Father Stanislaus. The journey to understanding and embracing this habit cannot be driven by fleeting trends

²⁹ ST. STANISLAUS PAPCZYŃSKI, *Selected Writings*, op. cit., pp. 935, 937, 939.

or a mere liking for the color white, but rather through a personal, filial connection with the Founder Father and a yearning to serve the Mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, following his example. This desire is a gift from the Holy Spirit to those who sincerely dedicate their lives to Christ and the Church. *Pro Christo et Ecclesia!*



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