



Why Do Bishops Wear Purple and Cardinals Red and the Holy Father White?

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When talking about cassock or simar (cassock with a short shoulder length cape) colors, the Pope wears white, the cardinals wear red, archbishops wear amaranth red (kind of magenta) or purple depending on the occasion, bishops wear purple, monsignors wear black with purple piping, and priests wear black. In tropical climates, priests may also wear white, but it is a breach of protocol for them to wear white in the presence of the Pope, although a few have. With the cassock, they also wear a wide belt called a fascia. That is also the color of their office. The colored cassock is always worn when they are wearing the white surplus over, but sometimes for everyday wear, you will see a bishop for example wear a black cassock that has colored buttons, piping and fascia. A cardinal in the Philippines might wear a white cassock with a red buttons, piping, belt and hat. Bishops of religious orders will often wear the color of their order rather than purple.

Purple was traditionally the color of royalty because in order to dye garments that color in antiquity, it required the use of the small gland in a sea snail that lived in the waters off Phoenicia. Purple was the most expensive color to make therefore it became associated with royalty because they were the only ones who could afford it.

Bishops are considered Princes of the Church. As to the red color, it isn't from the bird. The cardinal bird actually takes its name from the color of Cardinal's cassocks. Cassocks also traditionally have 33 buttons down the front in symbolism of the number of years Christ was here physically, and 5 buttons on the cuffs to symbolize Christ's 5 wounds. Red has always been a color to represent Christ's passion, the fire of Pentecost and the blood of the lamb. Its association with Pentecost kind of made it the color of the Apostles, and therefore the College of Cardinals. White symbolizes truth, purity or the light of glory. White is the color that the newly baptized wear because it is seen as the color of the road to heaven (you know "walk to the light"). The Pope signifies our closest connection to that road.

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I had someone ask about the protocol about not wearing white in the presence of the Pope. It is called *Privilège du blanc*. Only female Catholic monarchs or the wives of male Catholic monarchs are allowed to wear white in his presence. A couple of years ago when Blair's wife wore white, there was quite an uproar. It used to be that men are supposed to wear morning coats or white tie and tails depending on the time of day. Women were supposed to wear black dresses and black mantillas. Now that is reserved for formal diplomatic meetings and pretty much optional, but still wearing white is a no-no. This applies to papal audiences at the Vatican.

Look also <http://www.catholicchurch.aboutphilippines.ph>