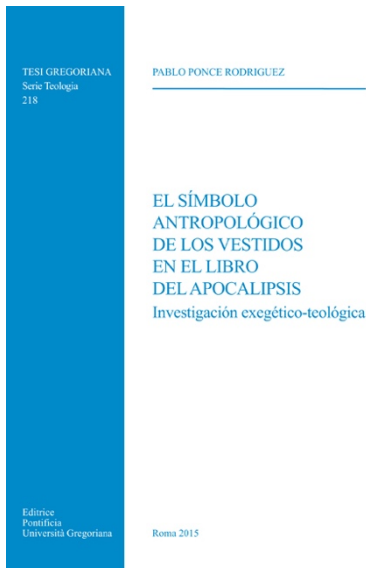


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**Pablo Ponce Rodríguez**

***El símbolo antropológico de los vestidos en el libro del Apocalipsis: Investigación exegetico-teológica***

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The Apocalypse of John is known for its habit of describing the characters' clothing in great detail, whether that of the risen Christ in Rev 1:13–16, the souls under the altar in 6:9–11 (who are given, of all things, white robes), or the great prostitute in 17:3–6. There are, therefore, very good reasons to write a doctoral dissertation about the symbolism of clothing in the last book of the Bible. The book under review is an attempt to do precisely this, directed by Javier López and submitted and accepted at the Pontificia Università Gregoriana in Rome in 2014. The starting point of the work is an observation by the author's "academic grandfather" Ugo Vanni that in the Apocalypse (and not only there) clothing expresses both a person's identity and relations.

After a brief introduction with an outline and a short *status quaestionis* (7–12), the first chapter (13–51) deals with the clothing of Christ, mainly a study of the two Christ-visions Rev 1:13 and 19:13. The second chapter (53–142) bears the title "El vestido del [!] hombre," with studies on Rev 3:4–5, 17–18; 4:4; 6:9–11; 7:9, 13–14; 11:3; 16:15; 19:14; 22:14—a fairly "mixed bag," as will be discussed below. The title (as with the English "man") oscillates between "male" and "human," since the third chapter is about "El vestido de la [!] mujer" (143–83), studying Rev 12:1–2; 19:7–8; 17:4, 16. The fourth chapter deals with the clothing of angels, featuring studies of Rev 10:1 and 15:6. A synthetic chapter on a biblical theology expressed in the symbols of clothing (largely focusing on the priestly role of Christians) concludes the book (203–18), leading to a general

conclusion (219–21). This is followed by a list of sigla and abbreviations (223–25), a slim bibliography (227–38), indices of authors (239–41) and biblical references (243–51), and the table of contents (253–57).

It may appear odd that I present the chapters as collections of studies of different passages, but this is how this book proceeds. All these studies/exegeses have the same clear structure: first a survey of the (literary) context, then the exegesis proper (which mainly consists of explanations of the key terms, for which Ponce Rodriguez mainly relies on proven and partly time-honored dictionaries such as *TDNT* (English translation of *ThWNT*) and *DENT* (Spanish translation of *EWNT*), as well as some commentaries, usually Aune and Beale); particular attention is paid to the aspect of verbal tenses, especially the perfect tense. Finally, a conclusion presents the results in a concise way. This procedure provides methodological transparency and thus allows a very disciplined approach to the texts in question. On the other hand, however, it occasionally diverts the author from his research focus while limiting the space for creative, focused, and independent research.

The structure of the book shows one possible approach to the topic—albeit one that invites some criticism. The chapters about the clothing of Christ (1) and that of angels (4) are not particularly controversial. Chapter 2, on the clothing of man, however, requires additional differentiation. It seems questionable whether (and with what result to expect) one can treat in one and the same chapter the metaphors of clothing in the proclamations to Sardis (3:4–5) and to Laodicea (3:17–18), the description of the twenty-four elders in the throne-room vision (4:4), and the heavenly host following the Christ-figure on the white horse (19:14). In the latter two cases, it is not at all clear whether the characters in question are to be understood as human in the same sense as the Christians in John's communities in Asia.

In chapter 2.8 (120–30), Ponce Rodriguez includes the hosts (*στρατεύματα*) of heaven (Rev 19:14) among the human characters whose clothing is described in Revelation. This exegetical decision, however, is by no means self-evident, given that these hosts come out of heaven and their white clothing connects them with the heavenly realm. The only argument Ponce Rodriguez adduces in support of his decision is that these hosts cannot be angels because, in that case, John would have said so as in Rev 15:6—a rather weak argument, as he seems to be fully aware (123: “*No pensamos que se trate de ángeles, ... Creemos, más bien, que se describe a los cristianos en su situación pre-eschatológica,*” emphasis added). This is exemplary for Ponce Rodriguez's style of argumentation. Greatest authority seems to lie with quotations from works (or published lecture notes) by Ugo Vanni and by Luca Pedroli (*Dal fidanzamento alla nuzialità escatologica: La dimensione antropologica del rapporto crescent tra Cristo e la Chiesa nell'Apocalisse* [Assisi:

Cittadella, 2007]), with both of whom Ponce Rodriguez regularly agrees, yet mostly without giving reasons. The book does not feature exegetical discussions of problems in the text studied; the author works without the weighing of the pros and cons of different solutions offered in previous research. What is more, he seems to be unaware of any literature or other documents from the Hellenistic world or early Judaism; his only encyclopaedia seems to be the Bible. This style may be acceptable in a M.A. thesis or comparable work, yet in a doctoral dissertation it raises questions.

Chapter 3, on the woman's (generic singular) clothing, seems to presuppose that there is something special about the female characters in Revelation that warrants their treatment in a chapter of their own (see also the disclaimer at 12 n. 21). This decision might receive some plausibility in dialogue with (in the broadest sense) feminist interpretations of the Apocalypse of John that compare the depictions of the female figures of the woman clothed with the sun (Rev 12:1), the great prostitute named Babylon (17:4), and the bride of the Lamb (19:7–8). There are indeed a number of studies in this area (ranging from Barbara Rossing via Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza to Tina Pippin), but Ponce Rodriguez seems to be entirely unaware of this discourse. Instead, he finishes by identifying the women of Rev 12 and 19 as “mujer esposa” (an identification that comes pretty much as a surprise on 181, with only unfounded assertions made on 146, 148) so as to have one female figure of positive connotations to be opposed to the undoubtedly negative character of the great prostitute of Rev 17.

On the whole, when measured by the standards applied to doctoral dissertations from other universities in other countries, this study suffers from what seems to be isolation from the ongoing discourse of research on the book of Revelation; secondary literature included in the bibliography, apart from dictionaries and great commentaries, is only a selective sample, mainly (though not entirely) from the school of Ugo Vanni and from the rather conservative, if not evangelical, camp. In fairness, however, the book appeared too early to permit fruitful interaction with the work of Robyn Whitaker and Nils Neumann (on visualizing description/*ekphrasis* in the Apocalypse) and Lourdes García Ureña (on color in the New Testament, especially the Apocalypse)—from which there would have been much to profit. Pablo Ponce Rodriguez's dissertation has undertaken one possible approach to the fascinating topic of the symbolism of clothing in the Apocalypse of John; there is more to be done.