

The Met Essay  
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Fashion and religion have two things in common, change. Fashion itself is synonymous with the word change. It is constantly moving. One day something can be “in” and “trendy”, and in the blink of an eye it can be considered a “out” and a fad. Religion is such a broad topic. There are over 4,000 different religious practices throughout the world, and with each one comes change in beliefs and customs (Vergote, 1997). Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana however were able to merge these two words together and create several religious themed fashion collections over the past few years. As they were both born and raised in Italy, a country where 88% of their population is Roman Catholic, it can be assumed that their upbringing was somewhat ecclesiastical (Oviedo, 2015). This assumption can actually be proven fact as the designers unapologetically identify as Italian Catholics (Mower, 2018). In a grander aspect, one might even conclude that it was Dolce and Gabbana’s regional influence that prompted their ideas and decisions for their religious themed garments and runway shows.

Dolce and Gabbana is an Italian fashion house that was founded in 1985 by Domenico Mario Assunto Dolce and Stefano Gabbana (Craven, 2008). Dolce was born in Polizzi Generosa, Italy on September 13th, 1958 (Reinach, 2018). During his childhood Dolce worked at his family owned clothing business (Reinach, 2018). Stefano Gabbana was born in Milan on November 14th, 1962 (2018). They originally met in 1980 in Milan where they worked together as assistant designers for the designer Giorgio Correggiari (2018). Their designs over the years have been very much inspired by the Sicilian culture, “The Leopard” a 1963 movie by Luchino Visconti being a major influence for their Mediterranean style (Reinach, 2018). Amongst their professional relationship they also shared a romantic relationship that ended in 2005, fortunately they decided to continue to work alongside each other for their brand.

Upon first walking into ‘Heavenly Bodies’, an exhibit that demonstrates Catholic Imagination through fashion at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, one is immediately graced with Dolce and Gabbana's 2013/14 Fall and Winter Evening Dress Collection. Here there are five different dresses, each a little different but typically of the same concept. Lengths at, or right above the knee and embroiderys of polychrome beads, crystals and pearls. The pieces are also of neutral tones and depict faces of the pre-Ciccione Madonna and child. The collection is meant to pay homage to the Byzantine and Venetian mosaics of the Cathedral of Monreale (Anderson, 2016). Four years later Dolce and Gabbana continued to use Catholicism as inspiration for their designs. In a recent show on February 25th of this year that debuted their 2018/19 Fall and Winter collection, the duo’s goal was to pay homage to the baroque Oratorio di Santa Cita church in Palermo, Sicily, Dolce’s hometown (Mower, 2018). They called it their Fashion Devotion collection and it began with drones in the shape of Communion crosses carrying different Dolce and Gabbana handbags. Contrary to the collection broadcasted at the MET from a few years prior, their new collection included brighter and bolder colors such as green, cardinal red and Venetian pink. Some even contained profane slogans on sweatshirts such as “Fashion Sinner”. However the designers have consistently used extreme embroideries and sequins, as well as odd shapes in their religious themed designs to date.

If any two people were destined to merge religion and fashion together it was Dolce and Gabbana. Not only do they themselves represent the change that exist in both of the words, through factors such as their sexuality as Catholic men, but they also are able to use their provincial influences to create fashion in a way that is more than just style, but a lifestyle. As the world evolves, so does fashion and religion and Dolce and Gabbana do a great job of showing how.

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