



The Dirty Laundry Ritual

A parody is a comic caricature, a ludicrous likeness, an absurd analogy, a ridiculous representation which exposes a particular reality by comparing it to another of a different order. Parodies can be a useful literary tool to expose the “red herrings” of diversions which distract attention from real issues. By the use of parody one can be direct yet subtle at the same time.

Living, as we do, in a dirty world, the clothing that I wear each day gets dirty, sweaty and smelly. So with daily regularity, I take off my dirty clothing, and piece by piece, I carefully cast them toward a clothes basket that is placed quite conspicuously against a wall in our bedroom.

There was a time in my life when I did not do this; when my clothes dropped onto the floor wherever my body happened to be when that particular item of clothing was removed. But when I married, certain social adjustments had to be made, and personal habits were revamped. I could no longer live like a bachelor “pig.” I had to “clean up my act.”

So I was introduced to, and greatly encouraged to participate in, this ritual of putting my dirty clothes in a basket. I now participate in that ritual every day, sometimes even more than once a day. I have perfected this ritual to a real art-form. It is performed in a specific sequence—first my shirt, then my pants, my left sock, my right sock, my undershirt and then my B.V.D.s Each piece, as it is removed, is carefully wadded up and is cast with just the right arching trajectory, and with a calculated amount of thrust, toward the basket.

Technique is important. The clothing wad has a tendency to unravel and create an aerodynamic drag effect that hinders its flight pattern toward the basket. Variety is essential or the ritual would become monotonous. Sometimes, therefore, I do a ricochet shot off the wall and sometimes I do a sky-hook or a behind-the-back shot. It is quite a show, I guarantee you—but I grant no private or public showings.

Why do I engage in this ritual so regularly and religiously? I do not like the consequences of failing to perform it. Much wrath and verbal abuse might be poured down upon my person when and if I were to fail to

practice the ritual. It is not worth the risk to neglect it. But, on the other hand, I have reached the point where there is a sense of accomplishment for having performed according to expectation. When I hit the basket with every article of clothing, I can strut around like a peacock, for I have that inner sense of self-affirmation and well-being: “I did it again! Another perfect job! Won’t she be pleased?”

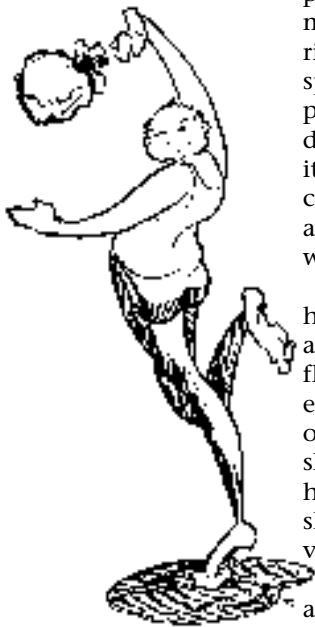
But when I miss the basket (it happens), there is a sense of disgust and failure, and I am obliged to go over, bend down, pick up the article of clothing, and try again. I have discovered that things just go better in life when I perform the ritual regularly and religiously, and do it right. I can then pat myself on the back and say with Jack Horner, “Oh, what a good boy am I!”

Does this seem rather silly and petty? Somewhat like an inane illustration of apparent insanity? What do you think God must think of the inconsequential rituals that people engage in so religiously, day after day, and week after week? Do those repetitive religious rituals have any more value in the sight of God than the ritual which I practice so religiously?

Recognizing that to live as a sinful “pig” is not conducive to good social adjustment, many have decided to “clean up their act.” So they get religious and begin to participate in the regular ritual of attempting to remove the dirty laundry of their lives, to remove the stained and soiled coverings of their behavior, and deposit them in God’s forgiveness basket.

Oh, the curious variety of contortions they go through: kneeling at benches and so-called “altars,” raising their hands, uttering confessions, crossing themselves, attending services, giving percentages of their income, etc. The variations of these rituals are almost innumerable!

Day by day they throw dirty apparel into the basket attempting to live a tidy Christian life. Some are quite accomplished in their religious performance. Their commitment level is high—their discipline is rigid—they have good techniques and execute according to precise rules and regulations. They are the





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Write us with your answers to any or all of the following questions. Try to keep each answer under 100 words.

- Do you think that your relationship with God has enabled you to be wiser? Tell us how.
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- What does God's grace mean to you—because of Jesus are you aging grace-fully?
- Are you less afraid of dying than you were when you were younger? If so, tell us what made the difference.
- How has your relationship with God changed over the years?
- You may now be a caregiver for another family member. Or you may need someone in the future to care for you. Tell us about the lessons we learn, in and through Christ, as we give and receive care.

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parodies...

ones who score high marks from the resident religious inspectors (otherwise known as “ministers” and “priests.”)

There are many, however, who are missing the mark. They are giving it their best shot, but they are failing miserably in aiming at the goal of perfection. Despite their best efforts they fall short of the performance which they perceive will earn them forgiveness and acceptance before God. Oh, the nagging guilt they experience for not being better achievers; for not being more successful in the proper removal of dirty laundry from their lives. Oh, the condemnation and wrath they expect from that One who watches over all such religious endeavors.

But, oh, the pride that swells up in the hearts and minds of those, who by their best persistent efforts, have temporarily performed up to the expectations imposed by that particular religious society. They await that phrase of acceptance from above: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” And failing to hear it, they perfect their aim and increase their efforts and try harder!

By this analogy, I am suggesting that many of the religious activities which people engage in are but empty and hollow attempts to deposit dirty laundry in the basket to please God.

It is one thing to religiously deposit your dirty laundry in the clothes-basket, but it is a completely different thing to engage in a form of the “Dirty Laundry Religion,” thinking that it is real, that it has benefit in the sight of God, that one's eternal destiny is tied to one's performance. That is tragic.

Repetitive rituals performed with religious regularity are, in and of themselves, of no value in God's sight. They are merely meaningless, monotonous motions. Irrelevant repetition! But when such activity is equated with meritorious benefit before God, then the religious exercise has become detrimental, destructive and dangerous. □

—Jim Fowler

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