

Fabulous, Father!

By [Daniel Schultz](#)

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The Guardian [calls our attention to an "ideal church show"](#) taking place yesterday and today in Manchester. Not New Hampshire, the other one, in the North of England.

Now, ordinarily a church supplies expo wouldn't capture much of our attention, besotted as it is with term papers and reality television. But the Guardian notes that this particular gathering will include a clerical fashion show, apparently featuring bespoke garments for the ecclesiastical set. One presenter quips,

I have very little interest in church vestments but the CRE North catwalk may become a Damascus Road. I have always wanted to be a model cleric but perhaps I will have to settle for being a clerical model.

That from a "Rev. Taffy." A bishop weighs in, a bit more substantively:

It will be interesting to see the variety of clergy robes produced by contemporary designers at CRE North. The church has modernised so much in the past 20 years and what clergy wear reflects that change. Gone are the 50 shades of grey and in has come a spectrum of colour and design which can be seen in everything from a Church of England royal wedding to the humblest Christening in one of our smaller churches.

I have never understood the cult of the black gown myself, or, for that matter, the appeal of a white alb and an off-the-Cokesbury-rack stole. Yes, yes, simplicity. Academic tradition, learned clergy, whatever. Sunday is a festival, and while it's not to everyone's taste or means to dress like a shore-leave cardinal on Mardi Gras, there's simply no reason not to inject a little joy into the vestments. And no, that does not mean your best Jars of Clay t-shirt, scrub.

What the good bishop and the Rev. Taffy miss, however, is how the literal fabric of worship honors people whose work has traditionally gone unnoticed. The fashion show in Manchester is meant in part to highlight local boutiques willing to clothe the

parish priest for a modest sum. But as any good cleric could tell you, a small army of third-world seamstresses and weavers would be happy to do the same.

Closer to home, many of us can remember growing up with a mother or grandmother who was nothing short of a miracle-worker with scissors and a needle. One of my most treasured possessions is a quilted, rainbow-patterned stole, one of a set my mother made for each of the children of our home church who went into ministry.

Obviously, I'm proud to wear something by Mom, and obviously, it's fun to have something that very few other people can say they have. But the stole shows off not just my mother's talents but also those of her mother, who taught her how to sew. Through Grandma, the stole represents the stitching of anonymous generation after generation of church women and their substantial-yet-invisible contributions to the church. I really do think about that every time I put it on, and I really would be proud to show it off on a catwalk.

I suspect Mom doesn't need the work, though. Besides, you could make the same kind of argument for puppets, another hand-crafted product on display at the "ideal church show." I'll take a pass on those and suggest you do the same. But the next time the pastor shows up wearing a dalmatic chasuble embroidered with something that looks like Noah's Ark by way of Willie Wonka, take a deep breath and remind yourself that somebody's grandma made that with love.