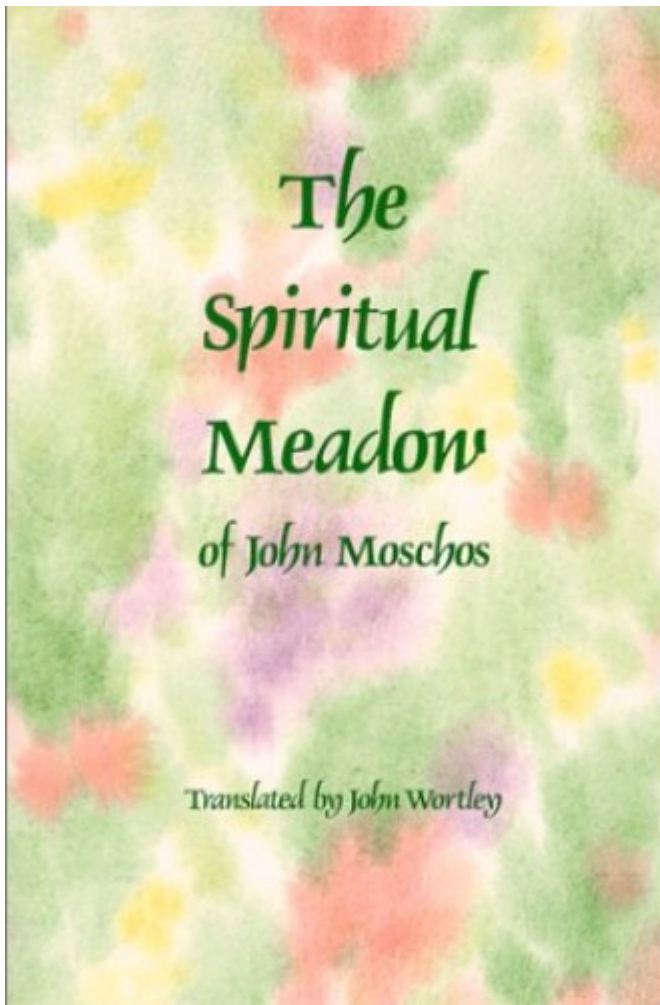


On reading a weird monk joke about underwear

By [Amy Frykholm](#)

January 17, 2013

In Review



The Spiritual Meadow

by John Moschos

Cistercian Publications

As I [mentioned](#) before, I've been reading this strange book called *The Spiritual Meadow*, written by sixth-century wandering monk John Moschos. One of the last stories in the book was as relevant to my daily existence as any story I have read in a long time. I have only the vaguest idea what it means, but I do know it's another weird monk joke. And this one was aimed directly at me.

The story goes like this: In the ancient city of Antioch, the church had various kinds of social services. "A man who was a friend of Christ" used to gather supplies and give them out to people in need.

Once he bought some linen undergarments from Egypt and was handing them out "in accordance with Matthew 25:36." One particularly poor man came, stood in line and received his linen undergarments. Then he came a second time and got another set. He came a third time and, finally, on the fourth time, the man who was distributing the undergarments singled him out and said, "Look, you have received a garment a third and a fourth time and heard nothing from me. Do not do this again in the future, for there are others afflicted like you and in need of good works." The poor man went away ashamed.

That night, the man distributing the garments had a dream. He saw Jesus descend from an icon. Jesus came toward him and took off the robe that he was wearing. Under it, he had on four pairs of linen undergarments that the man recognized. "Forgive me my faintheartedness," the man said to Jesus. "For I reckoned this matter in human terms." From then on, the story says, "he gave to all who asked with simplicity and joy."

Recently, people at my church's community meal complained because a certain person took two packages of donuts from the boxes of baked goods in the hallway. This is a common refrain. I wanted to make them feel like I was doing something about it, so I said, "Hey, Janelle, do you mind just taking one box of donuts and leaving one for someone else?"

Janelle looked at me and scowled a little. I have no idea if she did as I asked. But now I am picturing Jesus and Janelle sitting together sharing not one but two boxes of donuts, and I am wondering how to reckon donuts in spiritual terms.