



# **Human Tragedy & Divine Comedy**



**TITLE & AUTHOR**

*Human Tragedy & Divine Comedy*  
By W D Furioso



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# Preface

“Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher,  
‘Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.’”<sup>1</sup>

“Vanity of vanities”. The Hebrew word Solomon used, which is translated *vanity* is *hebel*<sup>2</sup>, carries the meaning of *emptiness, something fleeting, insubstantial, or ultimately unsatisfying*, and by extension, *futility*. We find the same sentiment or perspective – better, the same truth – in the New Testament as well:

“20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. 23 And not only this, but also, we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. 24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastes 1:2

<sup>2</sup> Strong’s # H1892

<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:20-25

“For the creation was subjected to **futility**...” The Greek word Paul used which is translated *futility* is *mataiotēs*<sup>4</sup>, which carries the meaning of purposelessness, lacking lasting result.

## *Sinsanity*

So, why these two word studies in the preface of this article? I don't know of a better way to attempt to establish the context of this message. And that context is this: The world in which we live is, always has been, and always will be in the state which these two passages are describing. I trust that is not new information nor a novel idea to any reader who has been born “from above” – “born of the Spirit”.<sup>5</sup> My own personal description of the world is: “**insane**”. If one takes the time to objectively and honestly contemplate what we see when we look out at the doings of this fallen world, I think the word “**insanity**” is actually not in any way a hyperbole. I have come to understand the behavior of sin as that which can match the definition of “**insanity**”.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Strong's # G3153

<sup>5</sup> John 3:3-8

<sup>6</sup> Cf., Merriam-Webster: “a severely disordered state of the mind,” “unsoundness of mind” in law, and “extreme folly or unreasonableness”. Cambridge: “a very stupid, unreasonable, or dangerous action or situation.”

In any case, enough said in attempting to establish the context. The point of the article is to address these questions:

*“When we look out at the course of this fallen world, are we viewing a **tragedy** or a **comedy**?”*

*“How does God see it?”*

*“And how might He want us to respond to the fallenness of this world?”*

# Greek Drama

A *comedy* in the classical sense of the word is a play which has a happy ending. The word *comedy* is derived from the Greek word *komos*, meaning *happiness*, and *aidos*, meaning *singer*. In other words, a *comedy* is a work in which the writer or poet *sings* about a *happy event*. *Comedy* offers us a view of happiness even in the midst of our fallenness.

In Ecclesiastes 3:4, Solomon observed that, in the drama of human life, there is:

"A time to weep, and a time to **laugh**; a time to **mourn**, and a time to dance."

And in Ecclesiastes 7:3, Solomon also observed:

"Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better."

This reminds me of a favorite poem by Robert Browning Hamilton:

*I walked a mile with Pleasure,  
She chattered all the way;  
But left me none the wiser  
for all she had to say.*

*I walked a mile with Sorrow  
and ne'er a word said she  
But oh the thing I learned from her  
When Sorrow walked with me.*

While it is most certainly true that **Sorrow** digs down into the heart to create depth of meaning and character; **Laughter** also has its virtues, which I hope to highlight in this message.

The root of our English word *drama* is the same Greek word meaning *enactment*. In his "Poetics", Aristotle observed that the essential ingredient of **drama** was *mimesis* - **the imitation or representation of reality**.

In Greek *tragedy*, the character would be brought to the point of recognizing a **weakness** in his nature and character. And, while one of the functions of Greek *comedy* was to make the audience laugh, it also worked, through laughter, to show a view of life which would enable the audience to better understand themselves and their lives through recognition of their own **folly** and the **folly** of this life.

Aristotle also observed that in **drama** something took place which he thought brought the audience to a spiritual level and *purified* them. He called this *catharsis*. This is where the audience identifies with the characters in the drama. In the Greek *tragedies*, the audience could see, identify with, and feel their own

**human weakness** in the weakness of the character. In the Greek *comedies*, the audience could see, identify with, and laugh at their own **human folly** in the folly of the character.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *The Bloomsbury Guide To Human Thought*, Edited by Kenneth McLeish, 1993, London.

# Mourning & Laughing

**Mourning** and **laughing** are things that human beings do - and can benefit from doing together. In his epistles, the apostle Paul encourages us to both **mourn** and **laugh** *with one another*: Romans 12:15, in "*The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*", reads:

"Laugh with your happy friends, when they're happy; share tears when they're down."

Through this message, we want to learn more about the essence of **mourning** and **laughing**, as well as why and how we can benefit from these.

We were created in the image and likeness of God, so it is essential that we know and understand that **God Himself also mourns and laughs**.

**God Mourns**: Genesis 6:5-6 reads:

"Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD **was sorry** that He had made man on the earth, and He **was grieved in His heart**."

**God mourns**: He was sorry; He was grieved. Why? Because of the Fall of Man - "every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually". In his epistle to the

Romans, Paul spells out the gory details of the sin that is in all of us, and in the creation all around us:

“24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. 28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”<sup>8</sup>

“20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and

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<sup>8</sup> Romans 1:24-32

suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. 23 And not only this, but also, we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. 24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it."<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, what Paul has written – if dramatized – would be the ultimate Greek tragedy, so to speak.

We can all identify with Lot where Peter writes of him:

"...(he) was sick of all the immorality and wickedness around him....(he) was distressed by the wickedness he saw and heard day after day."<sup>10</sup>

With the Fall of Man, the world we live in was "baptized" in death.

Romans 5:12 says:

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."

We who have repented and have been baptized into Christ, know in the depths of our hearts that the true

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<sup>9</sup> Romans 8:20-25

<sup>10</sup> 2 Peter 2:7-8 *New Living Translation*

explanation of all human suffering is the result of Man's Fall away from God. I believe that this realization is a pre-requisite to our effectively understanding and receiving the Gospel.

When we survey human history and when we watch the drama of human life before our eyes today, like the Greek **tragedy**, we cannot help but to see, identify with and feel our own human suffering in the suffering of others. The root of the word and the concept of *compassion* is the Latin prefix, *com* meaning *together with*, and the verb, *pati* meaning *to suffer*. So as God mourns with us, we mourn with one another.

**But God also laughs:** Psalm 2:1-4a reads:

“Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His anointed, saying, ‘Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!’ **He Who sits in the heavens laughs....”**

God laughs? At what? **The folly of Humanity:** Because Man was created in the image and likeness of God, it says in Hebrews 2:6-8:

"(God has) made him a little lower than the angels; (God) crowned him with glory and honor and set him over the

works of (His) hands. (God) has put all things in subjection under his feet."

Yet, because of the Fall of Man, Romans 1:22 says:

"Professing to be wise, they became **fools.**"

Romans 3:10-12 quotes the psalmist saying:

"There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become **useless**; there is none who does good, there is not even one."

This grieves God. In Genesis 6:3 God said:

"My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because in his going astray he is corrupt, nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."<sup>11</sup>

In other words, the ways of fallen Humanity are so grievous and pitiable that God decided He would only put up with this nonsense from any one individual for 120 years – max!

But the opposite is also true: **Our human weakness can also be humorous and laughable.** What do we mean by **human weakness**? And why is it **humorous** and

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<sup>11</sup> *The Scriptures 2009 (TS2009)* - a literal English translation of the Bible published by the [Institute for Scripture Research \(ISR\)](https://www.AtChristsTable.org), a non-profit organization based in South Africa. |

**laughable?** Again: Man was created in the image and likeness of God – “a little lower than the angels”. God made him to be a ruler in the earth.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, it is not prideful for Man to see himself as a noble and royal creature. However, much of the time human beings act in ways that are much less than or quite beneath this nobility and royalty. Depending upon the particular situation, this is either **sad and pitiable** or **humorous and laughable**.

Am I suggesting that we **laugh at our human weakness** in the sense of also *laughing at sin*? Let me be very clear: I believe God is more righteous and holy than we can ever understand or imagine. But I think when we limit that righteousness and holiness to our human parameters, we end up with a righteousness and holiness which is lower than God’s, and even different from God’s. That is what the Pharisees did. Yes, I do believe that sin grieves God. But I want to ask the question: “*What is it about sin that grieves God?*” God actually is “holier than thou”; but can we imagine God having a “holier than thou” attitude? Is He like us when we are sinned against? Does He “take it personally”, so to speak? I believe that God can “handle” sin. In fact, He has already “handled” the problem of human sin in the complete and finished work of Christ. Sin is not a problem for God, in that sense. Neither do I think it offends Him personally the

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<sup>12</sup> Genesis 1:26-28

way we are offended when someone sins against us. What is offended? Our human pride. Does God have a pride problem? No, **what offends God about sin is the consequences – sin hurts the creatures that He loves.** Along with grieving the heart of God, I believe that sin also makes Him angry - especially when one human being sins against and hurts another – and most especially when the “haves” sin against the “have nots”.

So, sin grieves God, and angers God. **But sin also makes God laugh.** Psalm 2:4 tells us that it does:

“He Who sits in the heavens laughs.”

What is He laughing at? He is laughing at the *pride and arrogance* of Man in his **folly**. I think this is akin to parents being amused at their children trying to act “grown up”. Do you ever find that you are amused by someone’s *pride and arrogance* when they are actually making a **fool** of themselves? Are we able to laugh at our own *pride and arrogance* when we have actually made a **fool** of ourselves?

When does sin make God laugh? And when does sin make God grieved and angry? God laughs at Man’s pride and arrogance *when it is directed against Himself*. Psalm 2:4b says He “scoffs”. But it grieves and angers God when that pride and arrogance is *directed against other human beings*.

When should we be grieved and angered by sin; and when should we be able to laugh at it? **Like God, our response to sin should depend upon whom it is directed against.** When we see sin **against others**, we should be *grieved and angered* – especially when it is directed against the “poor” – the weak and afflicted. There are a number of Proverbs that tell us it is godly to hate sin.<sup>13</sup> Then, like God, when sin is directed **against ourselves**, we should *be able to forgive – and even able to laugh*. But what would we be laughing at? Like God, we would be able to laugh at **the human condition** – the *pride and arrogance* of Man in his **folly**.

But here is the big difference: God has no sin, nor folly. Therefore, God never sins, nor has folly of His own doing to laugh at. We, of course, sin all the time. When we sin, we should be grieved and repentant towards God and toward those whom we have sinned against. But after receiving forgiveness, are we able to laugh at our own sin? If we are, it is because we can identify ourselves as being part of the human condition. If we can't, then we think we are above the human condition – different, better than other human beings. Scripture calls this “Thinking more highly of yourself than you ought”.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Proverbs 8:13, 13:5, 28:16

<sup>14</sup> Romans 12:3

Actually, what is most often the case is that it is not really pride and arrogance, but rather an *insecurity and fear* which inhibits one from taking his place among fallen Humanity – that is, seeing himself as included in the human condition, and being able to **both grieve and laugh at his own weakness**.

What we are after in this message is to cultivate our ability to:

- **acknowledge our human weakness**
- **laugh at our human weakness**
- **receive God's strength in our human weakness**

# Abraham & Sarah

We can learn this from Abraham and Sarah. This is how Romans 4:19 describes the condition of Abraham and Sarah when God spoke to them about "the son of promise" He was to give them:

"(Abraham's) body (was) already dead (since he was about one hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb."

If you can visualize the pitiable sight of these two very senior citizens trying to make a baby, you may get a special insight into the actual folly of Mankind. In fact, Abraham and Sarah themselves laughed at the thought of it.

Abraham laughed first. We read in Genesis 17:

"15 Then God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.' 17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, 'Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?' 18 And Abraham said to God, 'Oh that Ishmael might live before You!'"<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Genesis 17:15-18

In other words, Abraham is saying to God: *"Oh, if You would just turn my folly into something truly spiritual."*

"19 But God said, 'No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. 20 As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. 21 But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.' 22 When He finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham."<sup>16</sup>

Sarah also laughed. We read in Genesis 18:

"9 Then said to him, 'Where is Sarah your wife?' And he said, 'There, in the tent.' 10 He said, 'I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. 12 Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?' 13 And the Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?' 14 Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.' 15 Sarah denied it however, saying, 'I did not laugh'; for she was afraid. And He said, 'No, but you did laugh.'"<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Genesis 17:19-22

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 18:9-15

# The Human Drama

If we are able to **acknowledge** our human weakness, and if we are able to **laugh** at our human weakness, the Lord's strength will be perfected in our human weakness.<sup>18</sup> We should not be afraid to laugh at life. That's O.K. with God - He's laughing too.

As was said earlier, in his "*Poetics*", Aristotle observed that the essential ingredient of drama was *mimesis* - the imitation or representation of reality – the reality of the human condition.

In Greek **tragedy**, the character is brought to the point of recognizing a **weakness** in his nature. And in Greek **comedy** the character shows a view of life which would enable the audience to better understand themselves and this life through a recognition of their own **folly** and the **folly** of the human condition.

Aristotle also observed that in **drama** something took place which brought the audience to a spiritual level and *purified* them. As previously mentioned, Aristotle called this *catharsis*. The audience identified with the characters in the **drama**. In the Greek **tragedies**, the audience could see, identify with, and feel their own **human weakness** in the **weakness** of the character. In the Greek **comedies**, the audience could see, identify

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<sup>18</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:9

with and laugh at their own **human folly** in the **folly** of the character.<sup>19</sup> This is exactly what the Lord would have us to do as we observe the **drama** of our own lives.

Listen to Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 12:

"9a And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.'"<sup>20</sup>

The word translated *perfected* is the Greek word *teleioo* meaning *to complete*, (literally) *to accomplish*, or (figuratively) *to consummate* in character.<sup>21</sup> In other words, God is saying: "*My power finds its completion or consummation in your weakness.*"

In response, Paul says:

"9b Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.  
10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *The Bloomsbury Guide To Human Thought*, Edited by Kenneth McLeish, 1993, London.

<sup>20</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:9a

<sup>21</sup> Strong's # G5048 from G5046, "*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*" and "*Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*".

<sup>22</sup> 2 Corinthians 9b-10

## *“Laughter is Good Medicine”<sup>23</sup>*

As I said previously, what we are after in this message is to cultivate our ability to:

- **acknowledge our human weakness.**
- **laugh at our human weakness.**
- **receive God's strength in our human weakness.**

So, what are the characteristics of those who are **unable to laugh** at themselves? They:

- take themselves too seriously.
- take the opinions of others too seriously.
- feel they need to establish their own self-image.
- get very shaken when their self-image is threatened.
- immediately jump to their own defense when they are so threatened.
- absolutely need the acceptance and approval of others.
- cannot afford to laugh at themselves because they are insecure and fearful.

What are the characteristics of those who **can laugh** at themselves?

- They have a living experience of the truth of Ephesians 1:6 – “...the glory of His grace, by which He

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<sup>23</sup> A saying based on Proverbs 17:22 and Psalm 126:2

made us **accepted** in the Beloved. That is, they know – by experience - that they are **accepted by God**, and therefore the acceptance and approval of others is secondary.

- They also have a living experience of the truth of Ephesians 3:17 – “...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you (be) **rooted and grounded in love...**” That is, they are “**rooted and grounded**” in the love of the Father. Their self-image is established in this fact. It is therefore unthreatened and doesn’t need to be defended by themselves.

In his “*Introduction To The Classics*”, Os Guinness wrote concerning the Greek playwright, Aristophanes (448-387 BC): “*His fundamental vision...is profoundly spiritual. Aristophanes was the first to see the full implications of comedy - to recognize that the comic imagination is essential in the movement toward hope and love. In fact, as he shows, those who choose a comic sprightliness and optimism in difficult situations are thereby enabled to renounce self-absorption and hence to endure and prevail.*”<sup>24</sup>

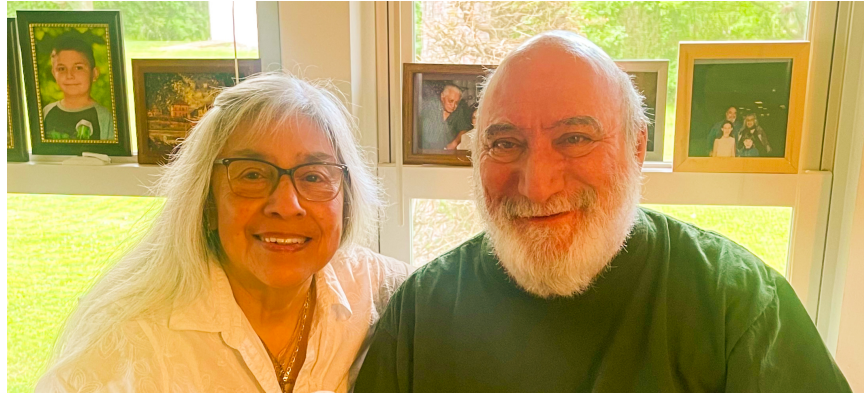
We should not be afraid to laugh at ourselves and laugh at life. It helps to prevent self-absorption. Again, our laughing is O.K. with God - He's laughing too.

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<sup>24</sup>Os Guinness, *Introduction To The Classics*, page 55

Bill & Frances Furioso

## At Christ's Table - ACTpublications



Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, discipled many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, he can no longer travel, so their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet... [www.AtChristsTable.org](http://www.AtChristsTable.org)

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