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The Poetry of Conduct: Sanctification in George Herbert and C.S. Lewis

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"All mortals tend to turn into the thing they are pretending to be."
– C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters (50)*

To anyone familiar with the biography and writings of C.S. Lewis, the many affinities between Lewis and George Herbert come as no surprise. When asked in 1962 by *The Christian Century* about which works did the most to shape Lewis's "vocational attitude" and his "philosophy of life," Lewis responded with (among other things) George Herbert's *The Temple* (qtd. in Downing *xi*n2). In his spiritual autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis explains how, when he was a young atheist, "all the books . . . were beginning to turn against" him (in other words, the books by Christian authors were unsettling his comfortable atheistic position), George Herbert's work had the most profound impact:

> But the most alarming of all was George Herbert. Here was a man who seemed to me to excel all the authors I had ever read in conveying the very quality of life as we actually live it from moment to moment; but the wretched fellow, instead of doing it all directly, insisted on mediating it through what I would still have called "the Christian mythology." (*Surprised* 214)

Lewis eventually joined Herbert in faith, embracing the "Christian mythology." But the two men have more in common than their Christian beliefs. Their spiritual and literary lives are replete with resonances. Lewis scholar Don W. King unearths several references Lewis makes about Herbert that reveal his admiration for the seventeenth-century Christian poet. For example, in a letter to one correspondent, Lewis writes, "Do you read George Herbert[?]. . . . He's a good poet and one who helped bring me back to the Faith"; and to another, "George Herbert at his best is extremely nutritious"; and (in *Surprised by Joy*), referencing Herbert's "Sinne (I)": "A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere—'Bibles laid open, millions of surprises,' as Herbert says, 'fine nets and stratagems.' God is, if I may say it, very unscrupulous" (qtd. in King 69–70). King describes Herbert's inspiration for Lewis in terms of three "voices": "poetic, pastoral, and pathos" (67). Especially because Lewis knew and admired Herbert, but also because of their shared faith, many other points of overlap might be mentioned. One that has yet to

be more fully explored is their thinking on spiritual formation or (to use the older and more theological term) "sanctification."

Sanctification, (from the Latin *sanctus* or holy) describes the process or means of becoming more virtuous and has historically been cultivated in ways that are often thought of as religious, like prayer, Bible reading, attending religious services, fasting, alms-giving, serving, and other "good works." The word is closely related to the adjective "saint" or adverb "saintly." One etymological resource[3] quotes Lewis's *The Problem of Pain* as an example of the modern understanding of sanctification:

> Perhaps you have imagined that this humility in the saints is a pious illusion at which God smiles. That is a most dangerous error. It is theoretically dangerous, because it makes you identify a virtue (i.e., a perfection) with an illusion (i.e., an imperfection), which must be nonsense. It is practically dangerous because it encourages a man to mistake his first insights into his own corruption for the first beginnings of a halo round his own silly head. No, depend upon it; when the saints say that they—even they—are vile, they are recording truth with scientific accuracy. (67–68)

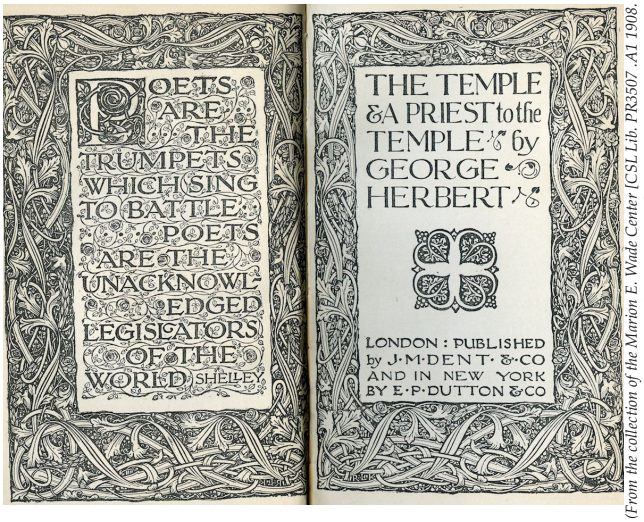
But while there are clear etymological and popular connections between sanctification and saintliness, Herbert's and Lewis's depictions of the means of sanctification go beyond traditional religious practices. For these authors, all of life becomes a field for spiritual growth. While not denying the efficacy of religious disciplines (indeed, much in Herbert's and Lewis's writings recommend them), Herbert and Lewis both highlight three effective domains for spiritual formation that are not commonly thought of as particularly religious or saintly. Indeed, these values are typically associated with secular power and influence rather than spiritual growth or sanctification. They are courtesy, posture, and appearance.

Much has been written about Herbert and courtesy.[4] Work has been done on posture and appearance in Herbert's poetry and prose.[5] But comparatively less attention has been paid to Lewis on these themes. Reading Lewis with Herbert in mind, the parallels are striking. Courtesy, posture, and appearance: for both authors, there is a compatibility, indeed even a heuristic synergy, between faith and these ostensibly "worldly" values.

Courtesy

In common parlance, courtesy might mean no more than good manners; for example, holding open a door for someone. While this thoughtfulness is indeed courteous, the modern term retains only a remnant of the rich history, resonances, and meaning that it carried for Herbert and Lewis. As might be guessed, courtesy has its European roots in the courts of medieval

monarchs where "courtliness" was more than a polite convention or decorative flair to behavior. Rather, courtesy was a signifier of rank, loyalty, and faith in a particular worldview that respected worldly hierarchy as a reflection of a transcendent hierarchy. Examining Herbert's and Lewis's use of this concept will help us better understand how both authors view it as a medium of sanctification.



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The title page from C.S. Lewis's copy of George Herbert's The Temple.

We need only a reminder of Herbert's oft-cited "court hopes"[6] and the numerous allusions and references to courtliness in *The Temple* and *The Country Parson* to recall Herbert's affinity with courtesy. Critics from M.M. Mahood in 1949 to contemporary Herbert scholars like Michael Schoenfeldt and Cristina Malcolmson discuss the significance of courtesy in *The Temple* (Herbert's volume of English devotional poetry): "*The Temple* is . . . a kind of spiritualized courtesy book" writes Schoenfeldt (5), and the speaker of many of Herbert's poems is "an upper-class man trained . . . in the rituals of courtesy" says Malcolmson (112). Of Herbert's prose, Ronald Cooley observes that *The Country Parson* (Herbert's book of practical and spiritual advice for clergy) "seeks to address the deficiencies of both the old and the new clergy, using the method of criticism and exhortation . . . that was the standard device of courtly literature" (36). Herbert's *The Country Parson* is (as I argue elsewhere) a pastoral manual modeled on the Renaissance courtesy book: "As the courtesy book author sought to model proper behavior and manners for the courtly gentleman, in *The Country Parson,* Herbert used 'all possible art' to set down the 'form and Character of a true Pastour' that he and his fellow clergy may have a 'Mark to aim at'" (Wolberg 224).[7]

In Herbert's poetry, courtesy is a way to eloquently depict the earthly court as (at best) a lower form of, and (at worst) a temptation away from, the heavenly court. Speaking to God in "The Temper (II)," for example, the poet pleads, "Let not thy higher Court remove, / But keep a standing

Majestie in me."[8] About lines 4 and 5 in "Jordan (I)"—"May no lines passe, except they do their duty / Not to a true, but painted chair?"—Helen Wilcox comments, "The object of the poet's 'duty' should be the 'true chair' which is God's throne. Chairs competing for the poet's attention include the throne of the earthly king (hence the reference to 'My King' in line 15), and the seat where a 'painted' Petrarchan mistress sits" (202). Marion White Singleton, in *God's Courtier: Configuring a Different Grace in George Herbert's* Temple, argues persuasively that "[Herbert] patterns a rejection of the court of this world: a rejection that takes years to make, that demands relinquishing much of what has constituted the 'self,' that exacts the replacement of worldly values and perspective with those of the court and the king of heaven" (6). Singleton describes Herbert's conviction regarding the paucity of earthy courtliness: "[Herbert] is telling his age that the courtly ideal is played out, deeply corrupt, riddled with contradictory demands, unactualizable. He is configuring himself as a courtier in order to reconstruct the pattern of courtliness as a recovery of whatever ideal *potentia* it might still possess." Singleton sums up Herbert's treatment of courtesy: "[Herbert's] reconstruction transforms the idea of a worldly courtier into the ideal of God's courtier" (7). For Herbert, the courtly ideal of the world is so far inferior to the heavenly that total renunciation and transformation are needed.

For C.S. Lewis, on the other hand, courtliness seems a positive good. In his famous treatise on courtly love, *The Allegory of Love,* Lewis describes the genesis and growth of courtly love and courtesy. He attributes the birth of the twin phenomena to the women of the eleventh-century Provençal court: "The [highest ranking] lady, by her social and feudal position, is . . . the arbitress of manners and the scourge of 'villainy'" (13). Eventually courtesy comes to circumscribe the ideal manners and morals of Western nobility—at least in literature. Of course, the morals of courtly love do not strictly comport with Christian teachings. Lewis writes, "The courtly sentiment is, from the outset, an escape, a truancy, alike from vulgar common sense and from the ten commandments. . . . Yet the truancy is felt to be, in some flawed and fragile way, a noble thing: the source of every virtue except chastity" (172). In *Allegory*, Lewis traces the development of courtesy through *The Romance of the Rose*, Chaucer, Gower, and finally to *The Faerie Queene*, where he concludes with Spenser's reshaping of courtly love from illicit, adulterous love to love within marriage. Thus by the Elizabethan age, Lewis suggests, courtly love and courtesy have been baptized and made serviceable to a Christian world.

For Herbert, the relationship of earthly to heavenly courts seems to be one of contrast and competition, in which the heavenly court is infinitely superior to the earthly. For Lewis, however, there is more of a comparison, where the earthly court is raised up or ennobled by the likeness to the heavenly, and the source of true courtliness in the earthly realm is the courtliness

of heaven. For Lewis, courteous behavior signifies a nobility of heart, mind, and soul. In his treatment of *Faerie Queene,* Lewis writes,

> To Spenser . . . there is no essential difference between poetic beauty and the beauty of characters . . . and behaviour. . . . We are to conceive of *courtesy as the poetry of conduct*, an 'unbought grace of life' which makes its possessor immediately loveable to all who meet him, and which is the bloom . . . on the virtues of charity and humility. (*Allegory,* 351–52; my emphasis)

Lewis was known for his focus on courtesy in his scholarly writings. Perhaps it was his love for the work of great writers—including Spenser and Herbert—that redeemed the courtly trope for Lewis. Or perhaps it was his long study of medieval and Renaissance texts in general that led Lewis to see courtesy, not as an obstacle to, but as more of a possible source of, grace. In both secular and religious texts, Lewis found courtesy to be a sign of goodness that has its source in heaven. In a book entitled *Patterns of Love and Courtesy: Essays in Memory of C.S. Lewis*, P.C. Bayley notes that

> [b]y the time Spenser wrote, the word "courtesy" had long carried a profound spiritual sense. . . . The Pearl poet called our lady "Quene of cortasye" (456–57), and the writer of *The Young Children's Book* found that courtesy came from heaven. . . . Chaucer quite naturally calls the son of God "the curteis Lord Jhesus Crist" (Parson's Tale, 245); and the courtesy of God or of Christ is a commonplace in medieval literature. (198)

In the same *Festschrift*, D.S. Brewer remarks about Lewis as a scholar of the *Gawain* and *Pearl* poems, "Lewis himself knew these poems well, and [their] courtesy was a quality he loved" (54).

In both Lewis's scholarly and popular writing, courtesy is never far from his imagination. That "courtesy was a quality he loved" is amply illustrated across Lewis's oeuvre. To those familiar with the Chronicles of Narnia, the courtliness of Lewis's fantasy world is a large part of its appeal. When we step into Narnia, we are stepping into a quasi-medieval courtly world. From the White Witch's initial temptation of Edmund—"You are to be the Prince. . . . But you must have courtiers and nobles"—to the final scene of the four Pevensie children as "two Kings and two Queens with the principal members of their court" riding out to hunt the White Stag with highly formal and courteous language and behavior, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* depicts a world of high courtesy (40, 202). To Narnia fans, only one name need be mentioned to call up the epitome of the perfect courtier: Reepicheep. When we encounter this most courteous of mice in *The Voyage of the Dawn*

Treader, he is described thus: "Its left paw rested on the hilt of a sword, very nearly as long as its tail. Its balance as it paced gravely along the swaying deck, was perfect, and its manners courtly" (11). Saluting Lucy, "Reepicheep put forward his left leg, drew back his right, bowed, kissed her hand, straightened himself, twirled his whiskers, and said . . . 'My humble duty to your Majesty'" (11–12). Reepicheep could indeed be a model of Castiglione's courtier as described by Lewis: "[T]hough all is serious, all is graceful, spontaneous, and unconstrained" (*English Literature* 306).[9] Or, as Lewis describes the courtier of Capellanus, he is "truthful and modest . . . and ready to return good for evil. He must be courageous in war. . . . He must at all times be courteous" (*Allegory* 34). The courtliness of Reepicheep is only one example among many that might be cited in depicting the high courtesy of Narnia.

That Herbert and Lewis used courtesy to different ends (Herbert to glorify the heavenly court above all and Lewis to reflect the heavenly in the earthly) does not diminish the significance of the shared preoccupation. At the heart of courtliness is an assumption they shared of hierarchy (earthly and heavenly): the lesser owes fealty and honor to the greater and the courtesy of the lower reflects the nobility of the greater. For example, about Castiglione, Lewis writes, "The courtier is not judged by his success in winning the prince's favour; the prince is judged by his worthiness to have such a courtier" (*English Literature* 306). We might observe that Narnia and even Aslan are exalted in the readers' eyes by the nobility and courtesy of Aslan's "courtiers."

Posture

Courtesy and posture in the early modern period were inextricably linked. Nonetheless, there is a distinction, as courtesy is expressed through demeanor and words, while posture is an expression of the physical body in space. This was an age where courtesy was not a mere nicety but indicated actual social obligations and status. Bows, curtsies, tipping one's cap, and other physical courtesies reflected a real-world relationship between the persons involved.[10] In *The Country Parson*, Herbert encourages courteous posture to mirror the proper relationship between spiritual Lord and vassal. Regarding his congregants, for example, Herbert recommends that,

> the parson having often instructed his people how to carry themselves in divine service, exacts of them all possible reverence, by no means enduring either talking or sleeping, or gazing, or leaning, or half-kneeling, or any undutiful behaviour in them, but causing them, when they sit, or stand, or kneel, to do all in a strait and steady posture. (231–32)

Herbert's poetry, too, underscores the close connection between the posture of the body and the actual relationship of a man and his spiritual

Lord. For example, toward the end of "The Church-Porch," (the opening poem of *The Temple*), Herbert depicts the correspondence between posture and the "reverence and fear" a man feels before God:

> When once thy foot enters the church be bare. [That is, be bare-headed; remove your hat.] . . .
> And make thy self all reverence and fear.
> Kneeling ne're spoil'd silk stocking. (22)

Herbert's "The Priesthood" speaker enacts physical and spiritual prostration:

> Only, since God doth often vessels make
> Of lowly matter for high uses meet,
> I throw me at his feet. (*Temple* 161)

For Herbert, like most early moderns, courtesy and appropriate posture are integral to relationships between persons, including human and divine ones.[11]

Like Herbert, Lewis believes there exists an essential connection between physical courtesies and relationships, bodies and souls. In *The Four Loves,* he uses a posture metaphor to distinguish between Eros and Friendship: "Lovers are always talking to one another about their love; Friends hardly ever about their Friendship. Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; Friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest" (61). Again, posture is more than a pose; for Lewis it depicts the real nature of a relationship—between friends, lovers, superiors and inferiors, and a person and his God.

Lewis's concern with posture as related to hierarchy and courtesy informs his criticism as well as his popular writings. In a chapter entitled "Hierarchy" in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, Lewis explains the nobility and appropriateness of courtesy embodied in posture as it appears in Milton's great poem. Lewis writes, "[Milton] delights in the ceremonious interchange of unequal courtesies, with condescension (a beautiful word which we have spoiled) on the one side and reverence on the other" (79). As specific examples Lewis cites,

> "[Milton] shows us the Father 'with rayes direct' shining full on the Son *'o'er his scepter bowing'* as He rose (vi, 719, 746); or Adam 'not aw'd' but *'bowing low'* to the 'superior Nature' when he goes out to meet the archangel . . . or the *courtesies of lower to higher angels* as 'is wont in Heav'n Where honour due and reverence none neglects' (iii, 737)." (*Preface,* 79–80; emphasis mine)

In concluding the chapter, Lewis writes, "The heavenly frolic arises from an orchestra which is in tune; the rules of courtesy make perfect ease and freedom possible between those who obey them" (81).

In Narnia, there is much bowing and kneeling, especially before Aslan, the great lion king. Courtesy and posture work simultaneously, as when Aslan knights Peter after Peter kills the monstrous wolf in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*: "'Hand [your sword] to me and kneel, Son of Adam,' said Aslan. And when Peter had done so, he struck him with the flat of the blade and said, 'Rise up, Sir Peter, Wolf's-Bane'" (145). As in all knightings, one kneels to show one's submission to one's lord and rises to signify the status-changing distinction received, posture providing an eloquent tableau of submission, honor, and nobility.

Lewis does not limit the importance of posture to the realms of scholarship and fiction; he takes it to the very heart of practical spirituality. In one of Lewis's most popular works, *The Screwtape Letters*, a senior devil, Screwtape, gives advice to his nephew, Wormwood, on how to keep their human "patient" from experiencing the benefits of prayer. He advises that Wormwood prevent his human subject from kneeling to pray. Screwtape writes,

> One of their poets, Coleridge, has recorded that he did not pray "with moving lips and bended knees" but merely "composed his spirit to love." . . . That is exactly the sort of prayer we want. . . . At the very least, [humans] can be persuaded that the bodily position makes no difference to their prayers; for they constantly forget, what you must always remember . . . that whatever their bodies do affects their souls. (16)

Keeping in mind that the speaker here is infernal, by turning the advice around, we can see Lewis's view that posture in prayer is significant, and kneeling is appropriate and efficacious.[12]

In his *Letters to Malcolm, Chiefly on Prayer*, Lewis makes this point more positively. Assuming that kneeling is an aid to prayer, Lewis yet allows for some practical caveats (including, in other letters, exceptions for those who are unable to kneel due to disability or age), as in this passage: "When one prays in strange places and at strange times one can't kneel, to be sure. I won't say this doesn't matter. The body ought to pray as well as the soul. Body and soul are both the better for it. . . . The relevant point is that kneeling does matter" (21–22). For Lewis, as for Herbert, posture does indeed matter. And because bodies are physical as well as the locus of the spirit, posture is related to the larger theme of appearances and realities.

Appearances

Appearances (as distinct from) realities (or "seeming" as opposed to "being") is a central theme in Renaissance courtesy literature. Machiavelli famously writes: "Nothing is more necessary than to seem. Everyone sees what you seem to be, few know what you really are" (50–51). Taking "moral sound-

ings" in the world of courtesy, J.L. Lievsay calls authors like Machiavelli and Castiglione "whited sepulchers" for their central contention that "it is better to seem than to be" (45). Separating appearances from realities as a means to power for personal gain is often at the heart of the secular courtesy world but could not be further from the spirit and goals of Herbert or Lewis. However, both writers acknowledge the importance of virtuous "seeming" when properly understood and practiced. In fact, both suggest that appearances can have profound mimetic effects on spiritual realities. For Herbert and Lewis, the sanctified exercise of outward appearances and behavior may have an edifying effect on the inwardness (or spiritual formation) of the self and others.

Examples of this abound in *The Country Parson*.[13] The short chapter "The Parson in mirth" shows how Herbert's parson must sometimes employ "seeming" to bless others' "being." Here Herbert explains that, although the pastor's inner temperament is "generally sad," he must often appear pleasant and cheerful in order to more effectively teach and do good to his hearers:

> The Countrey Parson is generally sad, because he knows nothing but the Crosse of Christ, his mind being defixed on it with those nails wherewith his Master was. . . . Nevertheless . . . knowing that pleasantnesse of disposition is a great key to do good . . . wherefore he intermingles some mirth in his discourses occasionally, according to the hearer. (267:27–268:8)

Herbert's outward focus in *The Country Parson* is, in fact, an intentional opposition to the inward movement of *The Temple.* Like all courtesy authors, Herbert's concern in *The Country Parson* is with a man in society, and his purpose is to improve his outward appearances.[14] Herbert writes, for example, that the parson must master patience and mortification because these are "the two highest points of Life, wherein a Christian is *most seen*" (227:4). He suggests certain techniques for preaching with the assurance that they *"appear exceeding reverent, and holy"* (234:1). He recommends courteous dialogues, after which he comments, "such discourses *shew very Holy*" (234:36). In fact, Herbert advises the pastor to use "*all possible art*" in his preaching and visible life (all emphases mine). But unlike the earlier fathers of courtesy, Herbert's end goal is not personal gain or power, but the edification of himself and his flock. The appearances of the parson, the parishioners, and the church are all treated throughout *The Country Parson* to the end that realities might be made more holy.[15] This is not to say that inner realities may not be effectively addressed through more conventionally religious avenues (prayer, Bible reading, good works, etc.), only that, in some cases, addressing the outer forms is the most efficacious means available—or as Herbert puts it: "If not by the best way, by any way"—to make us good (244:5).

(Photograph by Richard Avery, 2010. Public Domain.)

Statue of George Herbert, sculpted by Jason Battle, on Salisbury Cathedral in Salisbury, England.

Lewis likewise believes that sometimes addressing the outer man is the most effective approach to reach the inner. In *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, he acknowledges the possible misunderstandings this practice might engender. Of mistakes Milton's critics sometimes make, he writes, "A confusion [arises] between the organization of a response and the pretence of a response. Von Hügel says somewhere, 'I kiss my son not only because I love him, but in order that I may love him.' That is organization, and good. But you may also kiss children in order to make it appear that you love them. That is pretence, and bad. The distinction must not be overlooked" (55). But while Lewis acknowledges the possibility of pretense and hypocrisy, he still holds that one might kiss one's son "in order to love him." This kind of behavioral aid to sanctification is further explored in his popular writings. His chapter in *Mere Christianity* entitled "Let's Pretend" could have been called "Fake It Till You Make It." Here he distinguishes between two purposes of pretending: one resembles Machiavelli's approach, and the other demonstrates his and Herbert's use of appearances. He writes simply: "There is the bad kind where the pretence is there instead of the real thing. . . . But there is also the good kind, where the pretence leads up to the real thing." He illustrates this thus:

> When you are not feeling particularly friendly but know you ought to be, the best thing you can do, very often, is to put on a friendly manner and behave as if you were a nicer person than you actually are. And in a few minutes . . . you will be really feeling friendlier than you were. Very often the only way to get a quality in reality is to start behaving as if you had it already.
> (*Mere Christianity* 188)

In the chapter "Charity" in *Mere Christianity*, Lewis begins by asserting that "love, in the Christian sense, does not mean an emotion. It is a state not of the feelings but of the will" (129). He goes on to say, "it would be quite wrong to think that the way to become charitable is to sit trying to manufacture affectionate feelings" (130). No. For Lewis, sometimes the best way to mold the inner man is to behave outwardly as one should, despite the dearth of inner realities. He writes, "The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor, act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him" (131).

Regarding our love for God, Lewis makes a similar argument:

> People are often worried. They are told that they ought to love God. They cannot find any such feeling in themselves. What are they to do? The answer is the same as before. Act as if you did. . . . Ask yourself, "if I were sure that I loved God, what would I do?" When you have found the answer, go and do it. . . . Christian Love, either towards God or towards man, is an affair of the will. If we are trying to do His will we are obeying the commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." (*Mere Christianity* 132)

Lest readers should misread this as a sort of self-help technique rather than praxis within sound Christian theology, Lewis clarifies:

> Now the moment you realize "Here I am, dressing up as Christ," it is extremely likely that you will see at once some way in which at that very moment the pretence could be made less of a pretence and more of a reality. You will find several things going on in your mind which would not be going on there if you were really a son of God. Well, stop them. Or you may realise that, instead of saying your prayers, you ought to be downstairs writing a letter, or helping your wife to wash [the dishes]. Well, go and do it.
>
> You see what is happening. The Christ Himself, the Son of God who is man (just like you) and God (just like His father) is actually at your side and is already at that moment beginning to turn your pretence into a reality. (*Mere Christianity* 188–89)

"Turning pretence into reality" is at the heart of both Lewis's and Herbert's use of appearances in sanctification. As with Herbert, it would be misreading Lewis to conclude that he is somehow advocating an Aristotelian view of virtue or some kind of salvation (or even sanctification) by works. Lewis himself is careful to clarify that it is God who is doing the work of salvation and sanctification:

> And now we begin to see what it is that the New Testament is always talking about. It talks about Christians "being born again"; it talks about them "putting on Christ"; about Christ "being formed in us"; about our coming to "have the mind of Christ." . . . After the first few steps in the Christian life we realise that everything which really needs to be done in our souls can be done only by God. (*Mere Christianity* 191–93)

In a final brilliant twist of imaginative speculation, Lewis suggests that the idea of appearances turning into realities as a means to sanctification is, in fact, God's own "pretending":

> I have been talking as if it were we who did everything. In reality, of course, it is God who does everything. We, at most, allow it to be done to us. In a sense you might even say it is God who does the pretending. The Three-Personal God, so to speak, sees before Him in fact a self-centred, greedy, grumbling, rebellious human animal. But He says "Let us pretend that this is not a mere creature, but our Son. . . . Let us treat it as if it were what in fact it is not. *Let us pretend in order to make the pretence into a reality."* God looks at you as if you were a little Christ: Christ stands beside you to turn you into one. (*Mere Christianity* 193; emphasis mine)

In *The Country Parson*, Herbert argues that outward forms of holiness may contribute to the parson's own spiritual formation, indeed, to his very understanding of truth. In a chapter entitled, "The Parson's Knowledg," Herbert makes the first principle of his biblical hermeneutic not academic or intellectual, but experiential and personal. Citing John 7:17 (Jesus said, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" [King James Version]), Herbert insists that the first step in understanding the scriptures is to attempt to "lead a holy Life" (228). He explains, "wicked men, however learned, do not know the Scriptures, because they feel them not, and because they are not understood but with the same Spirit that writ them" (228). In other words, only one who is really trying to please God will understand God's truths. In Augustinian terms, rather than "*Credo ut intelligam*" ("Believe to understand"), the first principle of *The Country Parson's* hermeneutic seems to be "*Sanctus ut intelligam*" ("Holiness for understanding"). In fact, the entire outward focus of *The Country Parson* is best understood in the light of this hermeneutic.

Remarkably, in *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis alludes to the very same verse, John 7:17, to make a strikingly similar point. Relating his own journey to faith, Lewis describes attempting virtue before his conversion. He confesses:

"Really, a young Atheist cannot guard his faith too carefully. Dangers lie in wait for him on every side. *You must not do, you must not even try to do, the will of the Father unless you are prepared to 'know of the doctrine'*" (*Surprised* 226; emphasis mine). Lewis goes on to describe how his early attempts at holiness opened his eyes to his true spiritual depravity, which helped lead to his conversion: "For the first time I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me: a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was legion" (226). Attempting to live a holy life (trying to "do the will of the Father") was a failure, but it was key to Lewis's self-understanding and his understanding of the scriptures: "*Sanctus ut intelligam*."

Hermeneutics of Humility

For George Herbert and C.S. Lewis, the ostensibly secular themes of courtesy, posture, and appearances play significant roles in their understanding of spiritual formation. For some scholars, this has been a stumbling block. Critics like Stanley Fish have accused Herbert of a "holiness" that is "wholly made up of external marks, of signs" and being one who exercises "a massive insincerity" (39–40). But this is surely to read Herbert in the most cynical light possible. Should we not read these authors (and indeed all authors) with a hermeneutic of humility, keeping in mind the larger context of their lives and writings? Of course, outward behavior may be used hypocritically and deceptively. Like anything, courtesy, posture, and appearances have been twisted to nefarious ends. (This state of affairs underlies biblical warnings such as, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess" in Matthew 23:25.) Machiavelli encouraged the disjunction between "seeming and being" for the Prince's accumulation of power. However, Herbert and Lewis are neither pharisaical nor Machiavellian in their use of appearances. Because courtesy, posture, and appearances have been used improperly—and what has not?—this cannot mean that there are not good and proper uses for them. These good uses both Herbert and Lewis strive to employ.

Another misunderstanding regarding these subjects in Herbert and Lewis stems from thinking about them apart from genuine Christian faith. But neither Herbert nor Lewis would have advocated any such thing. On the contrary, for both men, these positive external forms go hand-in-hand with authentic faith as understood broadly in the Anglican tradition.[16] For both Herbert and Lewis, proper courtesy, posture, and appearances accompany and strengthen faith and, in some cases, may be seen as a kind of "good works" that only arise from genuine faith.

There is no doubt that Lewis benefitted from what he learned in reading Herbert. Comparing Herbert to Spenser, Lewis writes: "[Spenser's] rustic

and humble piety of . . . temper—that fine flower of Anglican sanctity . . . meets us again in Herbert" (*Allegory* 328). Among other things, Herbert's attention to courtesy, posture, and appearances may have informed Lewis's thinking on these themes. In any case, George Herbert and his "fine flower of Anglican sanctity" made a serious and lasting impression on C.S. Lewis. Lewis's biographer, George Sayer, tells us that, in his final days, Lewis was reading George Herbert's poetry (Sayer 408). One might imagine these two great Christian writers soon afterwards meeting in heaven and (in the imagery of Herbert's "Love III," lines 17–18) sitting down at God's table courteously, and, with proper posture and appearances—yea, and proper realities too—"tasting God's meat."

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Notes

[1] A shortened version of this article was first read at the George Herbert Society Conference, "George Herbert and Eloquence," at Cambridge University, Cambridge, UK, June 2022.

[2] To these quotes might be added *Letters to Malcolm, Chiefly on Prayer,* where Lewis references Herbert's poem "Conscience" (46).

[3] *Etymonline*, an online research resource.

[4] Many critics have commented on Herbert's poetry and the courtesy tradition; see, for example, M.M. Mahood, Marion White Singleton, Michael Schoenfeldt, and Cristina Malcolmson.

[5] See my "Posture and Spiritual Formation: Sanctification in George Herbert's The Country Parson and The Temple."

[6] Izaak Walton in his *Life of George Herbert* famously uses this phrase to depict Herbert's change of fortune (or rather his understanding of God's calling) and career from a courtier to a country parson.

[7] That this "Mark" should be presented in the form of secular courtesy literature is an unexpected but explainable phenomenon that my book, *All Possible Art,* attempts to establish. For a brief treatment of this argument, see my "All Possible Art: George Herbert's The Country Parson and Courtesy."

[8] Helen Wilcox glosses "standing Majesty" with, "A permanent royal presence; the opposite of a court or throne which 'removes' (line 15)" (197).

[9] Lewis maintains that Thomas Hoby's 1561 English translation of Italian Baldessarre Castiglione's handbook for courtiers, *Libro del Cortegiano* (1528), "built [the] courtly ideal" of the Elizabethan age. On Castiglione's achievement Lewis writes: "He is retrieving, with modifications, the medieval ideal; the knight and lover who might, to our endless loss, have been simply rejected in favour of the half Plutarchan, half Machiavellian, Great Man, is recalled and refashioned and set forward on a new career, with the characters of poet, patron, and philosopher now added to him" (*English Literature* 305–306).

[10] See my "Posture and Spiritual Formation."

[11] These and other examples we might cite regarding posture in *The Temple* call to mind Arthur Woodnot's picture of Herbert prostrating himself before the altar at the Bemerton church on the day of his ordination and make the story sound rather likely. See Walton's *Life of George Herbert,* 395.

[12] See S.T. Coleridge, "The Pains of Sleep" lines 3–5. To be fair to Coleridge—and, of course, Screwtape would not be—the quote Screwtape employs here comes at the beginning of the poem "The Pains of Sleep," where Coleridge recalls how he prayed ineffectually under the influence of opium. As the poem goes on, Coleridge returns to a more traditional, voiced prayer: "But yester-night I prayed aloud / In anguish and in agony" (lines 14–15). I am indebted to Malcolm Guite for this insight. Screwtape, in a rare moment of truth, in fact admits, "to human animals on their knees [God] pours out self-knowledge in a quite shameless fashion" (Lewis, *Screwtape Letters* 17).

[13] For more on this, see my *All Possible Art,* especially chapter 5, "Seeming and Being in *The Country Parson.*"

[14] For the rationale behind this see my *All Possible Art,* chapter 2, "The Country Parson and Contemporary Clerical Manuals."

[15] As Joseph Summers observes, some readers are "shocked" by this attention to appearances, but "Herbert recommended devices for gaining the appearance of holiness on the assumption that appearance should correspond with reality" (101).

Christopher Hodgkins has argued in a similar vein that Herbert was not opposed to using externals for the benefit of internals. In his discussion on the "externals of worship," Hodgkins concludes that Herbert "shared the 'Old Conformist' idea of a reformed British church: to purify the church's forms meant to clarify [not discard] them" (Hodgkins, "The Church" 241). While never losing sight of the "internalizing impetus" of Herbert's *Temple,* Hodgkins reminds us that Herbert "shared Cranmer's idea of a 'legible' church, celebrated it in his verse, and sought to revive it through his pastoral manual and practice" (220).

[16] Russell M. Hilliar has suggested that such a reading "locates the text's emphasis on appearance and good works within a theological framework that is exactly the opposite of Herbert's own" (13). However, nothing in this discussion of courtesy, posture, and appearances suggests that Herbert (or Lewis) believed that true holiness can be achieved by the unregenerate or solely through human endeavor. *The Country Parson* reflects a solidly Calvinistic and reformed theology—one in which conversion and faith precede and make possible good works. (See Lewalski, Hodgkins [*Authority, Church, and Society in George Herbert*], and Veith. See also my chapter, "George Herbert's *The Country Parson* and John Calvin's Pastoral Advice.")

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