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C. S. Lewis and the Problem of Prayer

by Robert Moore-Jumonville

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Joan Chittister writes: “Prayer life is an awareness and acceptance of the self. . . . The temptation . . . is to pray as if we were more than we are. More pious perhaps. . . . But when all we bring to prayer is our holiness, what is the use of being there?” In other words, prayer is about honesty with God, and with ourselves. Chittister then asks: “What am I not facing in myself that really needs my prayer if I am ever to grow . . . to become fully human?”¹ That short paragraph aptly sums up the heart of C. S. Lewis’s spiritual theology regarding prayer. True prayer moves us toward spiritual honesty.

Published posthumously in 1964, *Letters to Malcom*, Lewis’s last book on prayer, was construed as a fictitious exchange of letters between two colleagues. On the first page Lewis agrees with his “friend’s” proposal that their conversation revolve around the topic of prayer: “Prayer, which you suggest, is a subject that is a good deal in my mind. I mean private prayer.”²

In fact, prayer stood at the heart of Christian spiritual formation for Lewis and surfaced frequently as an important theme in Lewis’s writing. In 1945, the essay *Work and Prayer* appeared in *The Coventry Evening Telegraph*. Then in 1953, *Petitionary Prayer: A Problem Without an Answer* was read to the Oxford Clerical Society; and in 1959 *The Efficacy of Prayer* appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*.³ His book, *Reflections on the Psalms*, largely an exploration of prayer, was published

1 Joan Chittister, *The Breath of the Soul: Reflections on Prayer*. New London; Twenty-Third Publications, 2009, 5.

2 C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcom: Chiefly on Prayer*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1964, 3.

3 C. S. Lewis, *Work and Prayer*, in *God in the Dock*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970: 104-107; *Petitionary Prayer: A Problem Without an Answer*, in *C. S. Lewis Essay Collection*. London: HarperCollins, 2000: 197-205; *The Efficacy of Prayer*, in *C. S. Lewis Essay Collection*. London: HarperCollins, 2000: 237-41.

Proceedings from the Francis White Ewbank Colloquium

in 1958. But Lewis also wove issues regarding prayer throughout other books as well: notably *The Screwtape Letters*, *Till We Have Faces*, *The Problem of Pain*, and *A Grief Observed*.⁴

In this paper, I hope to identify what Lewis considered as the fundamental problem of prayer. For a clue, we might begin by turning to the full title of Lewis's last book: *Letters to Malcom Chiefly on Prayer: Reflections on the Dialogue Between God and Man*. It's interesting to notice the phrase "dialogue between God and Man" here, because in the last years of his life Lewis painfully experienced God's silence as absence. He feared prayer might only consist of monologue, talking to oneself. Recall *A Grief Observed*, where Lewis laments in the early pages: "Where is God? . . . Go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence."⁵

Lewis, of course, struggled with abandonment issues. His mother, Flora, had been diagnosed with cancer when he was 10. In his early autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis recalls he had been taught that "prayers offered in faith would be granted." So he set out praying earnestly, with force of will; and he thought, yes, my mother will recover. Instead, she died. "The thing hadn't worked," lamented Lewis. Prayer hadn't worked. And when Flora Lewis died, Jack's childhood security and happiness vanished overnight: "No more of the old security. It was sea and islands now; the great continent had sunk like Atlantis." Late in life, his beloved Joy Davidman died, too.⁶

However, let us not fall prey to the sensationalist version of Lewis, as a man holding his faith in tatters at the end of his life, with the tabloid headline blinking above in cheap neon lights: "Cruel God Steals Lewis's Love."⁷ Doubt was nothing new in Lewis's life. In fact

4 C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1958; *The Screwtape Letters*. New York: HarperCollins, 1982; *Till We Have Faces*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1984; *The Problem of Pain*. New York: HarperCollins, 1996; *A Grief Observed* New York: Bantam, 1976.

5 *Ibid.*, 4

6 C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955: 20-21. On Joy Davidman's death and its impact on Lewis, see Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace: 257-78; and Alister McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life*. Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 2013: 341-360.

7 I intentionally overstate the case, here, in referring to the efforts of some, like A. N. Wilson, to 'debunk' the myth of Lewis. See A.N. Wilson,

he expressed the same sort of doubt about communication with God when he was 32 years old, and moving from atheism toward Christian faith. In a letter to his closest friend, Arthur Greeves, he wrote: “Often when I pray, I wonder if I am not posting letters to a non-existent address.”⁸ Lewis points to those times when our prayers seem to bounce off the ceiling. Yet he conveyed similar misgivings thirty years later in *Letters to Malcom*: “Are we only talking to ourselves in an empty universe?” Lewis asked. “The silence is so emphatic. And we have prayed so much already.” He was identifying “the haunting fear that there is no-one listening, and that what we call prayer is soliloquy: someone talking to himself.”⁹

Lewis’s words, here, represent a particularly modern version of the problem of prayer. In some ways, it parallels certain laments we find in the Psalms, or perhaps Job’s case against God. Yet in Psalms and Job, the reality of communication with God is never in question; the writers know God hears them, the only question is whether or not God cares. Job’s laments foreshadow the cries of the disciples in the boat as Jesus lay asleep in the midst of a raging storm: “Master, don’t you care if we perish?”¹⁰

But the modern anxiety is different. A modern thinker easily complains that talking to God is merely autosuggestion (as the early psychology of religion movement liked to assert), or a projection of something within us (as Feuerbach argued), or mere wish fulfillment (as Freud maintained). Lewis undoubtedly felt this intellectual pressure, which flowed out of the Enlightenment’s stress on the autonomy of human reason, and theology understood as anthropology.¹¹

Of course, Lewis wanted to be reasonable. Since the time he began addressing Britain through his BBC talks in the early 1940’s, he had been put in the position of answering questions for the ordinary Christian—men and women who wanted to believe but felt bewildered by the modern world.

C. S. Lewis: A Biography. New York: Norton, 1990: 282-310.

8 C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves, December 24th 1930. *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, vol. 1, ed. Walter Hooper. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2004: 945.

9 Ibid., 61, 67.

10 Mark 4:38

11 See Robert Moore-Jumonville and Robert Woods, “A Role-taking Theory of Praying the Psalms: Using the Psalms as a Model for Structuring the Life of Prayer,” *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 6 (2003–2005), 81-112.

Proceedings from the Francis White Ewbank Colloquium

Lewis served as spiritual director for many believers through his broadcasts, his books, and through the hundreds of letters he wrote each year in response to questions asked by his audience. Consider, for instance when, in 1944, Lewis agreed to visit a factory in Middlesex to answer questions about the Christian faith. The questions were incredibly diverse, ranging from the church's stance on venereal disease to the modern scientific assertion that life on earth is the product of random stellar collisions; to questions much more pastoral in nature—like this one: “Many people feel resentful or unhappy because they think they are the target of unjust fate. These feelings are stimulated by bereavement, illness, deranged domestic or working conditions, or the observation of suffering in others. What is the Christian view of this problem?” Who among us would like to respond to that question?¹²

My point is this: Lewis wanted to remove intellectual and theological obstacles for the common layperson if possible. It was something he discovered he was gifted at; and it was something he felt compelled to succeed at. And so another set of problems regarding prayer gradually arose in Lewis's mind, having to do with what he considered logical inconsistencies. He hoped he could shed light on these matters for his readers. Let me explain three such questions that Lewis addressed.

The first, and seemingly easiest, intellectual problem Lewis tackled appeared in his short essay titled *Work and Prayer* (1945). Why bother to pray at all? That's the question. Lewis observes: If God is all-wise, he already knows our requests before we ask them; and if he is all-good, then he will grant requests that align with his good and perfect will, and he will reject requests not aligning with that will. So why even ask? God already knows. Lewis concludes that God enjoys taking our prayers seriously. When God gladly listens to us, he grants us dignity as creatures (as co-creators, really) by allowing us agency to participate in the causality of the world he has made. Our prayers, then, can actually effect change in the world.

Nevertheless, in evangelical circles, one hears trite truisms about prayer bandied about—phrases like “prayer works,” or “prayer changes things”—statements which, of course, are true; right up to the point when they stop being true; right up to the time when it seems like your prayers aren't working; when nothing is “changing,” and your prayers only bounce off the ceiling.

At this point, Lewis confronts a second intellectual difficulty

12 C. S. Lewis, “Answers to Questions on Christianity,” in *God in the Dock*: 36-53.

INKLINGS FOREVER X

concerning prayer. Lewis declared in his 1959 essay *The Efficacy of Prayer* (i.e., the effectiveness of prayer), that to claim prayer “works,” to even use that language—to say, prayer is “effective”—invites confusion, since it poses more questions, problems, and doubts than it can possibly answer. Here’s how the essay begins:

Some years ago, I got up one morning intending to have my hair cut in preparation for a visit to London, and the first letter I opened made it clear I need not go to London. So I decided to put the haircut off too. But then there began the most unaccountable little nagging in my mind, almost like a voice saying, “Get it cut all the same. Go and get it cut.” In the end I could stand it no longer. I went. Now my barber at that time was a fellow Christian and a man of many troubles whom my brother and I had sometimes been able to help. The moment I opened his shop door he said, “Oh, I was praying you might come today.” And in fact if I had come a day or so later I should have been of no use to him. It awed me; it awes me still. But of course one cannot rigorously prove a causal connection between the barber’s prayers and my visit. It might be telepathy. It might be accident. . . . The question then arises, “What sort of evidence would prove the efficacy of prayer?” The thing we pray for may happen, but how can you ever know it was not going to happen anyway?¹³

Thus, the question of causal connection arises for Lewis: did this “prayer” obtain this “result”?

Consider, for instance, a medical miracle as an example of Lewis’s question of whether or not prayer “works.” We pray for a friend’s healing—and she gets better. But was it the prayer that “worked?” Or was it going to happen anyway? Was it just the doctor, and good recovery, and no subsequent infection? Or was it auto-suggestion (a psychosomatic cure)? What should we conclude? Lewis believed there are problems with trying to connect prayers and results. How do we really know if there is a connection? Don’t we simply invite confusion and doubt? As Uncle Screwtape counsels his nephew Wormwood: Don’t forget to use the “heads I win, tails you lose’ argument. If the thing he prays for doesn’t happen, then that is one more proof that

13 *The Efficacy of Prayer*: 237. In *Letters to Malcom*, Lewis re-shapes his earlier essays on prayer, while adding new material. One of the book’s chief themes revolves around prayer and causality, touching on issues such as human and divine agency, or the relationship between time, experienced as sequence by human beings and the divine timelessness of God where all prayers are answered in His eternal present.

petitionary prayers don't work; if it does happen, he will, of course, be able to see some of the physical causes which led up to it, and 'therefore it would have happened anyway', and thus a granted prayer becomes just as good a proof as a denied one that prayers are ineffective."¹⁴

Instead of considering prayer as effective or ineffective, then, as working or not working, Lewis points out the obvious fact that prayer is request. As a request, prayer becomes a relational matter. If we ask a friend for a loaf of bread, she may or may not grant our request. Thus, to remove the personal equation of the relationship (of prayer)—where the Person (God) may or may not agree to our request—makes prayer either too mechanical or too much like magic. Sometimes God will say, "Yes," sometimes, "No"—as with all relationships. If you ask someone to marry you—and they agree—is that an event you should try to manipulate, calculate, or scientifically explain?

Like Love, Prayer does not make sense in mechanical language. Real relationship goes well beyond formula, beyond certainty—remaining a mystery. Lewis, in the end, changes the direction of our desiring when he says: "But really, for our spiritual life as a whole, the 'being taken into account,' or [being] 'considered,' matters more than the being granted. Religious people [people of real, deep spirituality] don't talk about the 'results' of prayer; they talk of its being 'answered' or 'heard.'" Isn't that true? We want relationship most. And we most fear rejection. We want mercy more than miracle. Lewis elaborates: "We can bear to be refused but not to be ignored. In other words, our faith can survive many refusals if they really are refusals and not mere disregards. The apparent stone will be bread to us if we believe that a Father's hand put it into ours, in mercy or in justice or even in rebuke."

The third intellectual question Lewis sought to answer has to do with two kinds of petitionary prayer Lewis found in the New Testament—which seemed to him, quite incompatible. Lewis labeled these Two Types of Prayer "Type A" and "Type B."¹⁵ Prayer "Type A" represents the prayer of surrender, illustrated best by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus asks three times for "this cup" to pass from him; but ends his prayer saying, "Not my will, but your will be done." The example we are given by Jesus, then, is to put our prayers in this conditional form—perhaps all of them saying "Let this prayer

14 *The Screwtape Letters*: 148.

15 C. S. Lewis, *Petitionary Prayer*. Let me note the difference between prayer as petition (a request for myself) and prayer as intercession (praying on behalf of someone else). In what follows, Lewis really includes both of these in a single category—perhaps what we could label "asking prayer."

be answered, God, IF you so desire it.” We trust that God knows best, that God, who is all-knowing, all-loving, and all-wise, will not grant us a foolish request or one contrary to his will. Notice that we’re not praying here with any assurance that we will get what we ask for. We confess—at the outset—we don’t know what’s best. Lewis also points out that if we’re growing closer to God increasingly this sort of surrender will govern the heart of our prayer, our very longing and desire will be to want only what God wants. As Lewis says elsewhere, we will gradually learn to put first things ahead of second things. Lewis confessed he would be happy to stick to this one kind of praying: “If this were the only pattern of prayer, I should be quite content.”¹⁶

But then there’s another sort of prayer, the Type B prayer, a kind of prayer that Scripture also instructs us to use. In contrast to the subjunctive prayer of surrender, the Type B prayer instructs believers to ask boldly in the imperative that the request be granted. Although Lewis cites many NT texts to illustrate this kind of prayer, the clearest passage occurs in the synoptic Gospels: “Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”¹⁷ Or consider the clear call reverberating from John 14:13: “If in my name you ask me anything, I will do it.” Lewis concludes that it is impossible to both fully believe with confidence when praying and at the same time utter the conditional, “Thy will be done.” One cannot utter an imperative prayer in the subjunctive mood. Lewis admits near the end of his essay: “I have no answer to my problem, though I have taken it to about every Christian I know, learned or simple, lay or clerical, within my own [denomination] or without.”¹⁸

Fortunately, Lewis does not end this discussion of prayer on a completely negative note. Instead, he concludes by suggesting that the prayer of faith—ask anything in my name, and I will do it—perhaps ought to be the standard form of prayer, the norm, for Christians. Perhaps we ought to regard the worker of miracles, however rare, as the true Christian pattern and ourselves as spiritual cripples.¹⁹ Lewis resolves that he himself shall continue to pray the Type A prayer, “Thy will be done,” until God grants him the faith to pray the Type B

16 Ibid., 144.

17 Mark 11:23-24; and its parallel, Matthew 21:21-22.

18 Ibid., 204.

19 Ibid.

prayer, to “move mountains” by faith.

We have to admire Lewis’s honesty regarding his religious doubts, don’t we? James Huston, in an article on Lewis’s prayer life, emphasizes Lewis’s notion of prayer as “earthy” (not merely otherworldly) and as full of practical realism.²⁰ That amounts to another way of saying Lewis was honest. He was honest about his own struggles spiritually; that is partly why we feel we can easily follow Lewis on the spiritual path—because he walks alongside us, rather than simply barking orders from the director’s chair. Lewis had a “sane estimate” of himself.²¹ For instance, Lewis never approached the topic of prayer as an expert, but instead, as a common “lay person” (as a fellow pew sitter). In *Reflections on the Psalms*, Lewis confessed on the first page: “I write for the unlearned about things in which I am unlearned myself.”²² He went on to explain that sometimes it is better to ask questions of a fellow student—rather than the teacher—because the expert teacher faced the problem so long ago, he or she has long since forgotten what the problem felt like. “I write,” he claimed, “as one amateur to another, talking about difficulties I have met, or [insights] I have gained . . . with the hope that this might . . . help, other inexperienced readers. I am ‘comparing notes,’ not presuming to instruct.”²³

So, Lewis very much wants to come alongside us—as an ordinary man, as a Mere Christian. At one point, Lewis went so far as to confess: “The truth is, I haven’t any language weak enough to depict the weakness of my spiritual life. If I weakened it enough it would cease to be language at all. As when you try to turn the gas-ring a little lower still, and it merely goes out.”²⁴

Clearly, Lewis could admit his own weaknesses as a Christian. He declared: “I dare say I am a much more annoying person than I know.” Then he adds a thoughtful spiritual formation meditation: “Shall we, perhaps, in Purgatory, see our own faces and hear our own voices as they really were?”²⁵ Doesn’t this remind us of Orual’s unveiling? She’s descended to make her complaint to the gods, and she has tried. She has played all her cards, and then: “It was a great assembly, all staring upon me, and I uplifted on my perch above their

20 James Huston, *The Prayer-Life of C. S. Lewis, Knowing and Doing* (Summer 2006): 1-8, C. S. Lewis Institute (www.cslewisinstitute.org/).

21 Romans 12:3.

22 Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*: 1

23 *Ibid.*, 2

24 *Letters to Malcom*: 113.

25 *Reflections on the Psalms*: 8.

heads. . . . There were tens of thousands of them, all silent, every face watching me. . . . But on the same level with me, though far away, sat the judge. . . . It was a face veiled. . . . Uncover her,' said the judge."²⁶ And Orual stands exposed, naked, wearing Ungit's face.

Aye, here's the rub: the heart of Lewis's problem with prayer. His problem with prayer is not that we don't know what to pray, or how to pray, but that we fear to pray. It's not a result of lack of knowledge. It's not a result of faulty technique. We fear prayer because we fear being known. Precisely because prayer exposes us, it makes us want to run—like rabbits from a low hawk. We fear because prayer can put us into direct contact with God, with others, and with ourselves, and often we'd rather not know the truth. We don't want to "have faces." Prayer lures the turtle out of its shell, so to speak; and who wouldn't rather manage a controlled situation? Hence, in prayer we stand naked, vulnerable, and culpable. Therein lay the human condition: it's what Existentialists like to yowl about.

We could say that the problem of prayer is summed up succinctly in *Letters to Malcom*, where Lewis insists: "The prayer preceding all prayers is, 'May it be the real I who speaks. May it be the real Thou that I speak to.'"²⁷ Frequently, Lewis directs us to return to this prayer. I am so adept at deceiving myself. And in prayer, first I deceive myself about myself, and second, I deceive myself about God. Moreover, the devil is willing to give me all the help I need to assist me in my self-deception. Screwtape counsels his fellow fiend: "You must bring him to a condition in which he can practice self-examination for an hour without discovering any of those facts about himself which are perfectly clear to anyone who has ever lived in the same house with him or worked in the same office."²⁸

Do we really know ourselves: our motives, our inner workings, and our inner lurkings? Lewis elaborates on our human lack of self-consciousness in his essay *The Trouble With 'X'*. There is someone in your life difficult to live with. A friend who knows asks, "Why don't you tell her?" And your response is, "You don't know X. She will never admit her problem." But the problem, as Lewis describes, is not only with X; it's also with us. "It is no good passing over this with some vague, general admission such as 'Of course, I know I have my faults.' It is important to realize that there is some really fatal flaw in you: something which gives the others just that same feeling of despair

26 *Till We Have Faces*: 288-89.

27 *Ibid.*, 82

28 *Screwtape Letters*: 12.

which their flaws give you.”²⁹ Yet we hesitate to admit, don’t we, that we are just as bad (if not worse) than X?

We see this reluctance to accurately face our true self surfacing again and again throughout Lewis’s writing: in Edmund blaming his siblings while believing the White Witch; in Eustace’s blaming everyone else on the Dawn Treader; in Orual’s concealment of herself behind her veil and in her complaint against everyone else, including the gods; and in all of the characters queued up in *The Great Divorce* who encounter the purgatorial pain of seeing themselves ghostly, as they really are, fearing the exposure and ready to blame someone else:

“You’d be tired out before we got to the mountains. And it isn’t exactly true, you know.” ... “What isn’t true?” asked the Ghost sulkily. “You weren’t a decent man and you didn’t do your best. We none of us were and none of us did. Lord bless you, it doesn’t matter. There is no need to go into it all now.” “You!” gasped the Ghost. “You have the face to tell me I wasn’t a decent chap?”³⁰

If Satan leads us to a false assessment of ourselves—especially enticing us to run away from honest self-examination, next, he would tempt us to create a caricature of God when we pray. Think of J. B. Phillips’ classic little volume, *Your God is Too Small*—and a god too small is no god at all. Screwtape instructs Wormwood: “I have known cases where what the patient called his ‘God’ was actually located—up and to the left at the corner of the bedroom ceiling, or inside his own head, or in a crucifix on the wall. But whatever the nature of the composite object, you must keep him praying to it—to the thing that he has made, not to the person who has made him.”³¹

Eventually—and ironically—the devil’s plan includes turning our eyes back upon ourselves (especially in prayer). The diabolical scheme hopes to move us away from the reality of God, and away from any real choice that can be made by the human will in the present, and to move us, instead, toward subjective feelings or thoughts within ourselves—in other words, away from reality (God) and toward unreality (fabricated imaginings).³²

In the end, Lewis shows that we are afraid to face the true God because of what he might ask of us. Again and again, Lewis uses the example of the Honest Tax Payer, who agrees to pay taxes, but certainly

29 C. S. Lewis, “The Trouble with ‘X,’” in *God in the Dock*: 164

30 C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1973: 26.

31 *Screwtape Letters*: 18.

32 *Ibid.*, 16.

does not want to give more than his share. There's always a reservation in our hearts about what is given up.³³ Just so, we fear putting ourselves completely into God's hands. In a discussion of prayer as irksome duty Lewis admitted that "we shrink from too naked a contact, because we are afraid of the divine demands upon us which it might make too audible. As some old writer says, many a Christian prays faintly 'lest God might really hear him, which he, poor man, never intended.'"³⁴

We do not want to be known in prayer, in other words, because we do not want to have to change. That is why we leave our churches, marriages, and families—because we become too well known in these places—in all our hidden (Ungit) ugliness. We would rather remain veiled and not have faces. Besides, real, honest, relational prayer implies obedience. My father-in-law used to tell me the spiritual discipline underlying all spiritual disciplines is obedience. Else, why go through the practice, if you're not willing to play in the game?

But is real honest relational prayer even possible? Are we only returning to where we began—with the fear of silence and abandonment, with prayer as monologue and us stuck in a closed circuit of inner ramblings we cannot escape? Can we ever truly be honest to God? In *Letters to Malcom*, I think Lewis provides at least two practical paths of hope. First, he lays out the mechanics of the subject-object split—whether the real "I" can ever address the real "Thou" in earnest. Lewis does not sugar coat our predicament: he admits we often become mired in our subjectivity. Yet he believes a "re-awakened awareness" actually might recognize our subjectivity and the distance that spans between our perception and "rock-bottom realities."³⁵ On the one hand, the "I" and the "world" are only façades—subjective constructions I create, as though the world were a stage and I were an actor playing upon that stage.

Yet, on the other hand—and here's the good news—we might become aware of the very play itself, and step off the stage, as it were. I might honestly admit, my construct: "And in prayer this real I struggles to speak, for once, from his real being, and to address, for once, not the other actors, but—what shall we call Him? The Author, for he invented us all? The Producer, for He controls us all? Or the Audience,

33 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. New York: Macmillan 1952, 140; "A Slip of the Tongue," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Essays*. New York: Touchstone 1980: 137-143.

34 *Letters to Malcom*: 114.

35 *Ibid.*, 81.

Proceedings from the Francis White Ewbank Colloquium

for He watches, and will judge, the performance?”³⁶ Striving for self-honesty, then, we might step off the field as contemplative witnesses of the game itself. This represents a form of prayer often taught by contemplatives.³⁷

Second, let me point us to Lewis’s Chestertonian call to wonder and gratitude (as a form of prayer)—again, from *Letters to Malcom*. This sort of prayer also resembles Brother Lawrence’s practicing the presence of God, or the Buddhist practice of mindfulness, of appreciating the present moment. “If I could always be what I aim at being, no pleasure would be too ordinary or too usual for such [grateful] reception; from the first taste of the air when I look out of the window—one’s whole cheek becomes a sort of palate—down to one’s soft slippers at bed time.”³⁸ Through gratitude, any given moment may thus turn into prayer as adoration, as dialogue—as communion.

36 Ibid.

37 See, for instance: *The Cloud of Unknowing*, translated by Carment Acevedo Butcher, Boston: Shambhala, 2009; Martin Laird, *Into the Silent Land*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, and *A Sunlit Absence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; James Finley, *Christian Meditation*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2004, and *The Contemplative Heart*. Notre Dame: Sorin, 2000.

38 Ibid., 90.