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Holy feigning in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*

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The purpose of this article is to uncover the meaning of holy feigning in the late-antique Christian text the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, or *Sayings of the Desert Fathers [and Mothers]*. Whereas stories in this text depict demonic feigning as a regular occurrence (demons often appearing in the guise of a fellow desert dweller), what I call 'holy feigning' depicts one desert Christian expressing empathy for the situation of another – and helping the other to change. By looking at two stories that are paradigmatic of holy feigning, I show that exemplary deceptive behaviour, though explicitly defying the otherwise consistent rhetoric of 'radical self-honesty' in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, paradoxically marks out the person who feigns as holy, discerning and imitative of Christ. In this article, I offer several suggestions for accounting for this seeming contradiction in the desert literature and propose how a spirituality of holy feigning might remain meaningful to readers of this literature today.

Introduction

Spiritual change rarely occurs in isolation. Without models, individuals lack resources for alerting them to the need to change. Throughout the history of Christian spirituality, mentors and disciples have shared their experiences in textual records that, in turn, have come to be useful to subsequent generations. The *Apophthegmata Patrum*, or *Sayings of the Desert Fathers [and Mothers]*, is one such record. As a late-antique anthology, it contains valuable testimony to the teachings, spiritual counsel and life experiences of Christian men and women, many of whom lived in Egypt.[1] These individuals are popularly known as the 'desert fathers' and 'desert mothers' for their ability to spiritually conceive and nurture Christian ascetics in what came to be identified as a protomonastic form of Christian discipleship, inclusive of ascetic practices and prayer.[2] Their stories and teachings promote a form of transparency not unappealing to modern readers – what the American Benedictine scholar Columba Stewart (1991) has called 'radical self-honesty'. This term can be used to describe not only an orientation cultivated by desert Christians toward would-be mentors, whereby disciples understood themselves to be expected to fully manifest their thoughts to mentors in order to receive meaningful counsel. It also describes what individuals expected of themselves during periods – often alone in the cell – preparatory to soliciting counsel.

A few stories in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, however, tell of desert Christians behaving deceptively in relation to one another: intentionally feigning, lying about and misrepresenting themselves. Whereas such deception occurred quite regularly when women donned men's clothing to live in isolated areas unmolested (Cloke 1995; Burrus 2004; Ward 1987) or when desert elders lied to inquisitive visitors about who they were in order to preserve their privacy, what I call 'holy feigning' features an exchange in which individuals lie about being more sinful than they, in fact, are supposed, by their audiences, to be. These feigners seem to have chosen this form of communicating with another because it allowed them to empathise with another and express solidarity with the other's situation, a situation for which no other behaviour was quite as efficacious in providing compassionate care and effecting the other's transformation.

The Greek word used to designate feigning in the most protracted of holy feigning stories in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (examined more fully below) is προεφασίζετο. Early Latin sources use the

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word *simulo*, in which we can hear the English cognate *simulate*. The feigning individual, in this case a desert father known as *Macarius the Great* or *Macarius the Egyptian*, is said to have invented struggles with temptation in order to identify with another individual who was struggling with tempting thoughts. The purpose of Macarius's disingenuousness was to encourage the other to relieve his conscience by admitting that he was struggling; thus, radical self-honesty is still validated in this story as a primary means by which the struggling desert Christian depletes the power of his or her temptations. Desert literature regularly represents the elimination of struggle with temptation via confession.[3] In light of the text's explicit identification of itself, in the prologue, as providing the reader with stories fit for emulation and to benefit the reader, we might ask: How could lying, in any form, be tolerated and even seemingly promoted by the communities that collected, transmitted and kept alive these stories? And, further, of what significance is this practice for subsequent readers of these stories? Does such a practice retain any practical value today as a resource for modern readers of the sayings to better understand how they, too, communicate with and care for others?

In this article, I contextualise holy feigning in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* to explain why it was an acceptable and even exemplary strategy for desert Christians, not just as a means of offering spiritual direction to one another and prompting an honest response, but also as a means of expressing fundamental solidarity with the vulnerable state of another. Because such feigning made possible this profound expression of solidarity, those who engaged in constructive feigning were able to maintain their status as exemplary individuals, even as holy individuals.

A troubling contrast: Demonic deception

One of the obstacles to perceiving how desert sayings that tell of holy feigning might edify readers, both in late antiquity and in our contemporary context, is the fact that many other stories in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* represent deception as a demonic strategy. By feigning, the demons are shown to have tried to distract Christians from their commitment to a specific form of Christian life, inclusive of ascetic behaviours and prayer. Even in Athanasius's portrait of an exemplary desert Christian, his *Life of Antony*, we find Antony teaching that demons 'pretend to be other than themselves …'; as if on stage, they 'play parts … changing their forms …' (*Life* 26–28). Repeatedly in the desert literature – as in scripture (Jn 8:44) – the devil is regarded as one who lies and cannot be trusted. Naturally, if demons were known to be demons, they might be more easily avoided; thus, they often appeared in deceptive forms, even in the guise of neighbouring desert Christians. Their intention? To persuade Christians to abandon whatever commitment they had made to a particular form of Christian life.

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3. For a useful study on the manifestation of thoughts during the exercise of spiritual direction among late-antique desert Christians see Hausherr 1990, 1955.

Just as these demons frequently appear in the guise of familiar neighbours, so too the actions they present as desirable were often familiar and even worthy actions – some other good deed in lieu of the one work to which these tempted desert Christians had dedicated themselves. For instance, one story tells of a young man approached multiple times by the devil in disguise, until at last he is persuaded to leave his cell and join a nearby faith community and partake of the Eucharist (*Sayings* 7.31). How strange it must have seemed to early readers to find the devil held responsible for such a seemingly worthy action! And what temptation did this represent to early readers and collectors of these tales, who likely lived in formal monastic settings? A temptation to join the faithful in the form of a lay congregation, abandoning their own religious commitment to a more cloistered form of religious life? Perhaps. Stories of this type enable us to detect a construction of values among early Christian ascetics and professed monastics. The ability to endure solitude was a privileged virtue; fortitude to withstand temptations to other forms of life was exemplary. Among variable goods, commitment to whatever form of life one had chosen was not to be compromised even by actions that brought one into conformity with other Christian behaviours, such as common worship and prayer in an ecclesial setting.

What then is the difference between demonic deception and holy feigning in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*? The difference does not lie in intention. Both forms of deceptive behaviour spring from an individual's intention to persuade another person to act in a certain way. However, what these individuals intended the other to do constitutes a significant difference. Demons are represented in the sayings, in a conscious echo of Satan's treatment of Jesus in the wilderness (Mt. 4:1–11, Mk 1:12–13, Lk 4:1–13), as designing opportunities for destructive distraction from an explicitly chosen vocation, whereas 'holy feigners' desire the rehabilitation of a struggling desert Christian and his or her commitment to a particular form of Christian life.

Holy feigning: Two paradigmatic stories

As troubling as demonic deception appears to be, its opposite – feigning so as to deliver another from becoming too deeply embroiled in trouble – was represented in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* as acceptable, the intent being rehabilitation, or the reconversion of individuals struggling with the temptation to abandon their commitments to a particular way of life. In this section, I will present two stories that uncover the various constituent elements of an interaction that could be called *holy feigning*, namely, (1) the particular vulnerable situation of a particular other, (2) deception as a strategy to express solidarity with the other and (3) the desired result being a fundamental change in the self-understanding of the one feigned to.

The first such story of holy feigning concerns two unnamed men who travelled to town, likely to market the goods they

had made while in the desert.[4] After one of them was waylaid by temptation and gave in to it, he told the other he could not return to his life in the desert because of his guilt (resulting from his assumption that, by sinning, he had irredeemably altered his status as a desert Christian). The exemplary desert Christian, however, convinced the other that he, too, had succumbed to the same temptation – though this was not true. In this way, he persuaded the man who had sinned that they should both return to their lives in the desert and repent together for 'their' sin. The moral of this story is explicitly endorsed by the citing of John 15:13 ('No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends'). Though this feigning might never have become known to others, the brother having successfully convinced the other that he had, in fact, sinned as well, there were other desert Christians living nearby who discerned the truth and used the occasion to teach one another and subsequent generations about the worthiness of such actions, using the Gospel to do so (interpreting the exemplary brother's merciful feigning as 'laying down one's life for a brother'). Significantly, the narrator of this saying changes the label of the person for whom one lays down one's life from the biblical citation's naming of 'friend' to 'brother'. Though such familial terms as *brother*, *mother*, *father* and so on are typical of the sayings, this particular alteration of the scriptural text alerts the reader to the particular setting in which feigning occurs. For the desert Christians, feigning was not something understood to occur between *friends*, but between people who had adopted a more intimate relationship with one another and, as a result of such relationships, felt a greater degree of responsibility for one another.[5] The transformation of the sinner in this story, through penance, is not elaborated; rather, it follows immediately upon the feigner's behaviour in prompting a new understanding of the self as capable of penance and change. The focus at the narrative's end is not on the transformed brother but on the transformed community, awakened to a new understanding of what love for one's brother looks like.

The second paradigmatic story of holy feigning tells of Macarius the Great learning of a brother's struggles with temptation. While visiting the struggling brother, Macarius elicits the other's confession of struggles by lying about his own non-existent troubling thoughts. It is important to clarify that thoughts and sin were known by the desert Christians to be separate experiences. Macarius does not lie about acting upon temptation (sinning) as the anonymous brother in the story above did, but he lies about his own susceptibility – and this distinction is important, for it alerts us to a real dimension of Christian experience: that we *are not* our thoughts. Indeed, the fourth-century desert Christian Evagrius Ponticus taught in his practical instructions concerning dealing with thoughts

that feigning before demons was a worthwhile strategy to mislead demons, who can only perceive the surface exterior of things and not their inner depths. These demons may be led to believe we are preoccupied with other tempting thoughts and not worth bothering if we feign before them (*Praktikos* 58).[6] A distinction between the self and its tempting thoughts is maintained throughout the literature of desert Christianity and proved a useful rhetorical device for compilers of this literature to depict interior struggles in a dramatic and compelling fashion.

The story of the encounter between Macarius and the struggling brother, Theopemptos, is the most protracted holy feigning story in the sayings collections. At its core, the story invites its reader to consider the ambiguity implicit in the word *holy*, for the holy Macarius is capable of deception. In her translation of the story in the Alphabetical Collection, Benedicta Ward translates the Latin *simulo* as 'admitting' tempting thoughts, radically changing the tenor of Macarius's words. For Ward, Macarius's holiness is contingent on his being able to bring forth into consciousness and speech personal failings in order to show Theopemptos the desert truth that one never gets beyond temptation. This truth is consistent with Abba Cyrus's teaching that absence of temptation means active sinning is occurring (*Sayings* 5.5) and with Abba Antony's teaching that temptation should be expected until the very end of life (*Sayings* 15.2). Temptation never goes away.

Nevertheless, John Wortley's more recent translation of this story faithfully reports Macarius's action as 'making out' that certain thoughts tempt him. Macarius does not even wait for Theopemptos to give him a clue as to what is bothering him; he jumps right into conversation: 'Look', he says, 'I have been all these years in the ascetic life, revered by all, and, elder that I am, the spirit of [lust] disturbs me'[7] (*Sayings* 18.13). Theopemptos exclaims that the same is true of him. The wall is breached. Macarius goes on to speak of other temptations and, in antiphonal fashion, Theopemptos agrees that each one bothers him, as well. Finally, Macarius advises more fasting, recitation of Scripture, and, most importantly: 'If an evil [thought] comes upon you, do not ever look down but always look up, and the Lord will immediately help you'.[8] The narrator tells us that Macarius has 'grounded' (στηρίξας) Theopemptos. The Greek word means 'to establish or support, to set firmly in place or resolve'.[9] It is a word used many times in the New Testament and its use in this particular story deserves fuller treatment. The translator's idea of the word as 'grounding' evokes not only the assistance to set

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4. For an insightful and detailed description of what life for desert Christians looked like see Lucien Regnault's 1990, 1998.

5. Carolinne White's fine book on fourth-century Christian friendship contains a chapter on these protomonastic relationships. She even cites this story as evidence of friendship. Moreover, given her definition of *Christian friendship* as derived from classical ideals of individuals supportive of one another in a shared pursuit of virtue, such an interpretation makes sense. However, the alteration of the word *friend* from the biblical text indicates that those involved in these relationships perhaps did not regard feigning as an activity a friend would engage in with a friend (see White 1992).

6. The English translator of Evagrius's *Praktikos*, a trained psychiatrist, expressed skepticism regarding this counsel: 'This procedure has always seemed to most spiritual directors an imprudent one'. John Eudes Bamberger, OCSO, 'Footnote 52', in *The Praktikos* (1972; repr. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 32.

7. *The Book of the Elders: Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Systematic Collection*, trans. John Wortley, Cistercian Studies 240 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 317. The Greek text reads as follows: Ἰδοὺ τοσαῦτα ἔτη ἔχω ἀσκῶν, καὶ τιμῶμαι παρὰ πάντων, καὶ ἐμοὶ τῷ γέροντι ὀχλεῖ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πορνείας (see Jean-Claude Guy 2005:56.

8. *Ibid.*, ἐὰν σοι ἀνάβῃ λογισμὸς πονηρὸς μηδέποτε πρόσχῃς κάτω, ἀλλὰ πάντοτε ἄνω, καὶ εὐθύς σοι ὁ Κύριος βοηθεῖ.

9. Danker (2000:945).

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firmly in place – as in a city's being well-founded, but evokes also the sense of renewing Theopemptos's understanding of his existential reality as a human creature, a being made of dust. Theopemptos and Macarius are both essentially 'of the ground' and, as such, their human lot is to be tempted. Membership in the human family incurs moments of fatigue in remaining committed to one's way of life and of desire to start anew elsewhere, in different circumstances.

Just as this story plays with the ubiquity of temptation, it also presents another common motif of the desert literature: though temptation and failure to resist it might be common enough occurrences in the desert, one's greatest failure is to consider oneself not only beyond the pale of forgiveness, so that repentance is not even attempted, but also beyond the pale of the human condition, impervious to human thoughts and experience. This particular story closes with the devil – the objectified source of temptation – discovering Theopemptos mysteriously inoculated against his suggestions, if only temporarily. The narration ends, telling us that Macarius returns to his cell and names Macarius, 'that holy man' (ὁ ἅγιος). Macarius returned to himself, having meaningfully connected with another through deception and assisted the other in recovering his sense of self.

Accounting for holy feigning

Having used two stories in particular that feature activities that I am calling *holy feigning*, I want now to offer several suggestions as to why a constructive form of feigning might be represented as exemplary in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers [and Mothers]*. The first suggestion has to do with the biblical text, cited broadly in the sayings, and its numerous precedents of deception. The Israelite kings Jehu and David feigned for exemplary, if in the latter case self-protective, purposes (see 2 Ki. 10 and 1 Sm. 21, respectively); the prophet the Apostle Paul spoke of becoming 'all things to all people' and of moderating his behaviour given his company, whether Jew or Gentile, free or slave, weak or strong (1 Cor 9:19–22); even Jesus Christ was seen by some as 'pretending to be human', as Jerome writes in his commentary on Galatians:

> That even very righteous men resort to temporary dissimulation for the sake of their own or others' salvation is not surprising when we recall that our Lord himself, who was free of iniquity and whose flesh was not sinful, pretended to take on sinful flesh so that by condemning sin in his flesh he might make us the righteousness of God. Jerome (2011:106–107).[10]

Jerome wrote in the fourth century and, in this commentary, alluded to his own training in rhetorical studies and how the matter of persuasion itself, whether in the law courts or political arena or academic classroom, entails some degree of feigning. By the next century, however, such language was troubling to such as Pope Leo, who contrasted God's 'feigning human appearance' when wrestling with Jacob and eating with Abraham with the actuality of his human appearance in the incarnation (*Letter 31*). However, even such seemingly

10. For the Latin text.

innocuous representations of the divine in Scripture, such as God's appearing in the Garden of Eden and asking Adam and Eve where they were (Gn. 3:9), alerts us to a mode of communication that is, essentially, deceptive in nature. Can we believe that God did not know where Adam and Eve were hiding themselves? Raising the question, nevertheless, gave Adam and Eve an opportunity to declare themselves and offer themselves to God's judgment. The divine question made space for a response that demonstrated the willingness of Adam and Eve to regain connection with God, despite having disobeyed divine prohibitions.

A second suggestion for the legitimisation of feigning in the sayings collection arises from the performative nature of asceticism in the Christian desert. Numerous scholars have shown how the desert Christians, and those who continued to tell their stories, understood their appropriation of the wilderness as a replacing of the martyrs' arena, not just as the site of spectacular struggles with temptation but also as the site of spectacular transformations of the body (Frank 2000; Leyerle 2001). The theatre, associated with an urban and secular society, might be seen as radically opposed to the desert environment and its ethos but, surprisingly, in several tales in the sayings collection, actors or actresses appear as figures capable of tutoring the desert disciple in dedication to the ascetic life; the actor's dedication to pleasing spectators is posed in analogical relation to the desert Christians' desire to please God.

A third suggestion arises from the historical context of religious persecution in Egypt in the third and fourth centuries. These moments of intolerance led some Christians, among them leaders of faith communities, to renounce their identity as Christians. Dealing with their return to faith communities when persecution waned required sensitive pastoral care, both for the lapsed and those resistant to receiving them back. In addition to providing pastoral care, theologians also responded to this situation by formulating an important development in sacramental theology to distinguish the minister of a sacrament from the divine efficaciousness of the sacrament itself. In Egypt, in particular, churches and even monastic settlements might advocate for or against lapsed Christians (Griggs 1990; Harmless 2004: 14–15); though this division remained unresolved and created tension between Christians for a long while in late antiquity, it also helped shape the way individuals thought of themselves as distinct from their actions.

These three suggestions, drawn from the literary, theological and historical contexts that frame the period in which the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers [and Mothers]* came into being, help us account for holy feigning in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*. Firstly, attaching feigning to exemplary figures, inclusive of biblical figures, and to the divine as represented in sacred writings enabled the compilers of the apophthegmatic collections to represent and conceive of desert feigners as imitating sanctioned deceptive behaviours. Secondly, that late-antique Christians understood the self to be an actor in a cosmic drama, in which divine and diabolical characters also

acted, shaped their understanding of the self as constructed of layers; what went on at the surface was known to be only a fraction of the whole. Manipulating appearances, just as actors on stage, was an activity they performed before others, God and demons, and themselves. Third, the need to distinguish between being and action, subsequent to periods of persecution, enabled Christians in the Roman Empire to further refine their understanding of their own experience as fallible, not as impervious to sin as they expected baptism and other moments of conversion to make them.

Constructive appropriation of holy feigning

These three approaches to contextualising holy feigning in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* involve ethical questions: is lying good or bad? Under what circumstances might lying be good or bad? How are we morally obligated to respond to deceptive tendencies in ourselves and others? While these questions are appropriate and help us understand how lying might or might not relate to the 'holy', a final approach to holy feigning in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* moves us from the ethical to the existential. The Dominican scholar Boniface Ramsey (1985) argues that a tradition loosely identified with the Eastern cultural context in late antiquity that permitted occasional deception and lying predates a tradition associated with a Western cultural context. This latter context has been largely shaped by Augustine, who, in the 390s, wrote important treatises against lying. Opposed to this context, Ramsey shows that the Eastern tradition – which provides a context for the desert sayings – took 'its force … from an intrinsic "human" and merciful quality … and from the fact that the "generous lie" [may be an] utterly natural response to an otherwise apparently impossible situation'. Ramsey's findings illuminate how the desert Christians may have understood the self and other as essentially mysterious. As such, they were less anxious than their Western counterparts to systematise ethical norms. That they were concerned with lying, however, can be shown by one poignant story about a desert father who is stricken with remorse because his praying of the psalms makes him a liar; as he articulates the words of the psalms, he is aware that he does not feel as the psalmist did about many things (*Sayings* 15.120). This remains, perhaps, a very contemporary problem!

We know that the stories of holy feigning in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* have value; they communicate something of importance within the tradition of Christian spirituality. This knowledge helps us dispense with the ethical question and also with the task of determining whether individuals such as the anonymous brother or Macarius were truly lying or not and whether they were right or wrong to do so. In some sense it would be quite legitimate to regard Macarius as feigning his feigning; after all, we know from human experience that nobody is perfect. Bracketing all that, we can focus on the experience itself and move from ethical to philosophical concerns in order to elaborate a constructive appropriation of the holy feigning stories in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*. To do so, I want to reflect on what happens existentially as one is with another. Is it useful to think of feigning as a way of preserving the integrity of the distance between ourselves and others in all our experiences and interactions?

In many cultures, white lies are part of the social currency, an expression of tact that leaves boundaries expansive enough to permit proximity without violation. A good illustration of this dynamic occurs in a desert story in which a disciple lies about observing supernatural evidence of the sanctity of his spiritual father (*Sayings* 18.2). Antoine Guillaumont (1975) understood this particular lie as motivated by a desire to preserve the secret of a particular desert father's holiness and that this desire exacted *au prix d'un pieux mensonge*. Can we do this, too, especially as we approach others? Though honest communication might be valued in forging authentic connections with others, could preserving distance also be a way of connecting with others, respectful of the essential chasm that divides our beings? Most importantly, can we let others, both the holy and the sinful, remain human without imposing categories upon them that constrict the possibilities for learning from each other? There is certainly danger in exalting holy persons beyond ordinary human experience. Though this exaltation may feel inevitable in our relations with others, especially with those from whom we desire some kind of training, it essentially obscures vision of the humanity of the holy person and model, as he or she is expected to have achieved such a degree of perfection as to no longer have anything in common with the person whom she or he might advise. This means that we let ourselves remain distant from another who may have something to teach us because he or she is 'too perfect', someone with whom we have nothing in common, no common language with which to speak. Such 'putting on a pedestal' allows us to simultaneously desire edification but to assume it is not possible; thus, we resist change.

Finally, to what extent do we have to be other than we are to meet the other authentically? To what extent does something that 'is' us – the truest version of ourselves to date – remain hidden to others, so that what 'is not' us inevitably appears? To what extent is feigning thus our only way of being? And how might honouring that feigning be a way of moving beyond categorical knowing and unknowing, a way of radical companioning of the other and even of oneself in situations that call for a transformation of one's thinking and being? I suggest that holy feigning is disruptive in a thoroughly beneficial way; it calls into question categorical divides between truth and lies, holiness and sin; and it creates space for fecund exploration of possibilities of self-transcendence and transformation. By experientially cultivating distance to understand our and others' behaviour as feigning, we enter into what the French feminist and philosopher Luce Irigaray (2002) has described as *co-belonging*. She writes that the whole of the human and of the relation between humans:

> require[s] virgin matter or space belonging neither to the one nor to the other but in which the one and the other can enter into presence, each one in relation to the other. What safeguards the

between-two as a place available for the entering into presence is the limit that each imposes upon oneself in the fidelity to self and to the space–time open through the respect of the other as such, of their irreducibility. (pp. 75–85)

Irigaray's vision of renunciation and virginity in light of relating to one another offers a compelling route for appropriating early Christian ascetic texts, such as the *Apophthegmata Patrum*. In the contemporary context, as fewer and fewer readers of this literature are ascetic themselves in the same way prior generations of scholars (monks and nuns) have been, how can reconfiguring asceticism, pinned to its etymological grounding in athletic training, be productive for new understandings of ways in which we train to be with one another? This training would constitute alternate practices of what Irigaray names *withdrawal* and *proximity*, and of what I call *feigning*.

Conclusion

Holy feigning in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* demonstrates a useful strategy to radically identify with and accompany another, much as Christ expressed radical commitment to accompanying humankind in becoming human. Seeing such stories as templates of the human experience of encounter and transformation, we also draw lessons from the sayings about how radically 'other' others remain to us and we to them. Recovering an understanding of the holy person as still capable of struggle and of resilience in that struggle does not necessarily compromise our understanding of the *holy*. Rather it expands the concept of *holy*, rendering it richer and more complex, with a richness and complexity befitting what we know of human experience. Further, feigning remains one way of understanding the difference between what is and what might be and allowing ourselves to preserve something of ourselves and others that is irreducibly other. The holiest person might do a seemingly unholy thing; the best way to be present to another person might be to wholly renounce who one is, or who one thought one was.

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