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In Early Modern England, Christian mysticism was often associated with religious “enthusiasm” and was, therefore, discouraged by the Church of England. Those with a temperament which drew them to this intuitive and affective approach to spirituality often found themselves misunderstood and persecuted. Accusations against them ranged from heresy and superstition to perversion and madness. Despite this climate of fear and suspicion, mysticism did not die out. Protestants, as well as Catholics, still claimed to experience mystical phenomena and strove to understand the source and meaning of these experiences. Because of the lack of an overarching tradition of mystical teachings in the Church of England, Protestant mystics developed their own individuated explanations and interpretations of these phenomena.

Examining the lives of individual mystics in their historical contexts and through the lens of their own writings provides a way to analyze how contemporary pressures from religion, politics, epistemology, and science affected their approaches to understanding their experiences. This study examines the lives and writings of a variety of Early Modern English mystics. After the initial review of the literature and methods in Chapters 1 and 2, Chapter 3 focuses on the mystagogical texts of the recusants Benet of Canfield and Augustine Baker, examining how their Protestant education and their law training influenced the writing of these vernacular manuals and the effects of the popularity of these works. Chapter 4 examines ecstatic imagery in the poetry of Robert Southwell and Richard Crashaw. Both authors use their depictions of this type of mystical experience to create liminal spaces through which they invite readers to seek spiritual transformation. Chapter 5 then analyzes the autobiographical writings of the religious radicals John Bunyan, George Fox, and Jane Ward Lead with an emphasis on the overlapping elements of

their experiences, their individuated responses, and the influence of those responses on others both locally and nationally. The final chapter discusses how the nature mystics Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne used contemporary popular sciences in an attempt to legitimize mysticism in an era of growing emphasis on empiricism and rational thought. In each of these chapters, we see how the selected authors' responses to various mystical phenomena, as recorded in their writings, affected not only their own lives, but the lives of others within their faith communities and throughout the nation at large. Examining these responses reveals how their individuated approaches to understanding and interpreting mystical phenomena, in turn, influenced their contributions to English literature, religion, and society.

THE ANATOMY OF JOY: TRANSFORMING
PERCEPTIONS OF MYSTICISM IN THE
EARLY MODERN PERIOD

by

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For my mom, June A. Fowler and my brother,

Donald S. Fowler—thanks for believing in me.

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1621, Robert Burton (1577-1640), Doctor of Divinity and vicar of St. Thomas' Church in Oxford, published what would soon become the widely popular book, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. In this voluminous work, Burton attempts to catalog melancholia in all of its variant forms and manifestations, examining its causes, symptoms, and treatments. In doing so, he draws upon humoral theory as explicated by such Greek, Latin, and Arabic physicians as Hippocrates, Galen, Avicenna, and Laurentius. Burton analyzes melancholia's connection to black bile and the physical, mental, and spiritual maladies produced by imbalances of this humor. In the process, he draws upon nearly every extant medical text of his time as well as an astonishingly wide range of historical and literary sources ranging from the ancients, through the Middle Ages, to the Italian Renaissance. The result is a synthesis of medicine, philosophy, ethics, religion, poetry, and literature.

In the third part of this ambitious project, Burton examines the agonies and ecstasies of melancholy as manifested in the condition known as lovesickness. According to humoral theory, lovers can suffer from this malady if they feel rejected, if they suffer from unrequited love, or if their beloved is absent for an extended period of time. The resulting imbalance in their humors can lead to melancholia which manifests itself as a type of madness. Burton is particularly interested in a species of lovesickness which he terms religious melancholia, in which the one

who is afflicted dotes on the beloved [in this case God] to the point of madness, inevitably leading to excesses of zeal, enthusiasm, schism, and superstition:¹

I will shew the...pythonissas, sibyls, enthusiasts, pseudoprophets, heretics, and schismatics in these our latter ages...all the world...cannot afford so much matter of madness, so many stupendous symptoms, as superstition, heresy, schism have brought out: that this species [of love melancholy] alone...more bespots and infatuates men, than any other..., does more harm, works more disquietness to mankind, and has more crucified the souls of mortal men...than wars, plagues, sicknesses, dearth, famine, and all the rest.²

Burton blames religious melancholia for causing the suffering of untold multitudes through the religious upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. According to him, this pernicious disease is born in an excess of black bile brought on by too much fasting, contemplation, and solitariness,³ expressing itself in bizarre and dangerous ways:

Their symptoms I know not how better to express, than in that twofold division, of such as lead, and are led. Such as lead are heretics, schismatics, false prophets, imposters.... They have some common symptoms, some peculiar. Common, as madness, folly, pride, insolency, arrogancy, singularity, peevishness, obstinacy, impudence, scorn and contempt of all other sects....Peculiar symptoms are prodigious paradoxes, new doctrines, vain phantasms, which are many and diverse as they themselves....Now what these brain-sick heretics once broach...be it never so absurd, false, and prodigious, the common people will follow and believe....and all in the end become mad; either out of affection of novelty, simplicity, blind zeal, hope and fear, the giddy-headed multitude will embrace it, and without further examination approve it.⁴

¹ Burton, Robert, written under the penname Democritus Junior, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Project Gutenberg, EBook #10800. 13 Jan 2004. Web. Part 3 Section IV. Member I. Subset 2. 6351. For information on seventeenth-century theories concerning the physiological seat of the soul and the pathological diseases which affect it, see Thomas Willis, *Two Discourses Concerning the Soul of Brutes, which is that of the Vital and Sensitive of Man*, Englished by S. Pordage (London: Printed for Thomas Ding at the Harrow near Chancery-Lane End in Fleetstreet Ch. Harper at the flower-de-Luce against St. Dunstan's Church in Fleet-Street, and John Leigh at Stationer's Hall, 1683).

² Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Part 3. Section IV. Member I. Subset 1. 6311.

³ Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Part 3. Section IV, Member I, Subset 2. 6456.

⁴ Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Part. 3. Section IV. Member I. Subset 3. 6562, 6567, 6573-4.

Burton equates numinous experiences with schismatic Christianity and mental illness. According to him, religious melancholics believe themselves to be divinely favored and infect others with their delusions and hallucinations, teaching heresy, inspiring schism, and fomenting rebellion. The *Anatomy of Melancholy* thus becomes a polemic against what he terms the “pseudo-Christians” and “brain-sick heretics” of both Roman Catholic and radical Protestant churches.⁵

Burton was not alone in his perception of the dangers of religious enthusiasm, nor in his equation of intuitive approaches to spirituality with heresy, superstition, and mental instability. Speculative approaches to Christianity, which were growing in influence in the Early Modern period, were set in opposition to approaches to spirituality which were labelled as superstitious or enthusiastic. Christian mysticism is one such approach which was so labelled.

Mysticism is now used to describe a broad range of religious and not-so-religious experiences; the term itself has, perhaps, lost the sacredness and respect which once surrounded it and has fallen into suspicion of superstition and madness. *Mysticism* can mean so many things that it has come to mean essentially nothing. Such has not always been the case. For fifteen centuries, mysticism encompassed the heights of religious experience in Western Christianity. Evelyn Underhill defines it as “the direct intuition or experience of God.”⁶ The mystic, therefore, is one who is not satisfied with a spirituality based only on knowledge *about* God, but thirsts to know God Himself. Stephen Fanning, building upon this definition, asserts that “historically mystics have not always occupied an odd corner of Christianity” as they are often perceived

⁵Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Part 3. Section IV. Member I. Subset 2.6551, 6442-6444; Subset 3. 6562, 6567, 6573-4. Burton names Anabaptists, Separatists, Brownists, Barrowists, familists, and Amsterdamians in his list of those most susceptible to religious melancholy.

⁶ Evelyn Underhill. *The Mystics of the Church*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1964.), 9.

now.⁷ In fact, quite the opposite is true. Early and medieval Christianity began as a mystical religion whose purpose was to lead people into a direct experience of God.

By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Western Christian perceptions of mysticism in England were being transformed. Modern theologian Urban T. Holmes suggests that a connection exists between contemporary events and what is being expressed spiritually within a culture.⁸ Protestant religious and political reforms branded traditional Catholic approaches to contemplation and mysticism heretical and superstitious. These reforms found expression in popular poetry and on stage. For instance, Edmund Spenser, in his *Faerie Queene* (1590) presents the magician Archimago in the guise of a Catholic contemplative calling forth evil spirits and casting spells. Likewise, Shakespeare presents the French mystic, Joan la Pucelle (Joan of Arc) as a demonically inspired heretic and whore in his *First Part of Henry VI* (1591). In addition to the effects of political and religious reforms, Christian humanism, which exploded in popularity during the Renaissance, encouraged major shifts in epistemological understanding, and the rise of new empirical and “scientific” approaches to knowledge questioned the validity of mystical experiences.

As a form of worship Christian mysticism no longer fit the dominant paradigms of rational, empirical thought and was seen as undermining the authority of religious leaders and potentially endangering believers through its acceptance of divine inspiration and personal revelation. For the mystic, the Scripture was not the only way of discerning the will of God, and interior prayer led to a direct and powerful relationship with the Divine which could and often did conflict with established religious conventions.

⁷ Fanning Stephen. *Mystics of the Christian Tradition*. (London: Routledge, 2001.), 219.

⁸ Ware, Corinne. *Discover Your Spiritual Type: A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth*. (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute Publications, 1995), 108.

Despite the growing condemnation throughout this period, believers with a mystic temperament still thirsted for a deep, meaningful, affective spirituality which often led them away from the accepted speculative and ratiocinating forms of worship becoming ever more popular in England. When they could not or would not draw upon traditional templates of Catholic mysticism to explain their yearnings and guide them in their growth, believers developed their own interpretations of their experiences, changing mysticism in the process. Acknowledged by Church fathers, applied by medieval worshippers, and transformed by Protestants, mysticism may have seemed antithetical to the changes which were occurring in politics, religion, epistemology, and science during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but it provided a much needed counterbalance to the kataphatic and speculative approach of the rational spirituality which was growing in popularity. It did not die out; it simply evolved, and continues to evolve, providing believers with what they most desire, a deep, abiding relationship with their God.

Considering the contexts of these transforming perceptions of Christian mysticism during the Early Modern period, *The Anatomy of Joy* examines how this approach to spirituality survived in a society becoming ever warier of religious “enthusiasm” and “superstition.” In this project I use the imaginative and religious literatures of the period as lenses through which to examine these changes of perception, identifying a four-pronged attack: political, religious, epistemological, and scientific. Imaginative literature, because of its highly figurative qualities, allows for the presentation and exploration of mystical ideas in a form which makes them more palatable to an audience who otherwise may not have been comfortable with this increasingly unorthodox approach to Protestant worship. Religious literature, in the form of conversion narratives, spiritual autobiographies, and devotional diaries, allows for introspection and spiritual reflection; therefore, it is a very natural form of literature through which to explore and express

one's own spiritual progress whereas in the form of devotional manuals, religious literature can aid the spiritual progress of others.

The benefits of studying the transformation of perceptions of mysticism in Early Modern England through these types of literature are threefold. First, such a study helps to shed light on a neglected area of Early Modern research. Second, it enlightens our understanding of the reasons why some mystics seek to come to terms with their numinous and mystical experiences through the process of writing about them. Third, it provides insights into how medieval mysticism began to grow into the myriad forms in which it appears today, and how those forms, both trusted and mistrusted, manifested themselves during the Early Modern period.

The above mentioned neglect stems in part from our modern attitudes toward religion. Many see it as outdated or irrelevant and try to avoid it, believing it to have little to no place in a secular society of the twenty-first century. In such a view, religion is defunct and studies of religion are only interesting or challenging if they help to debunk superstitions and oppression. Spirituality becomes problematic, an awkward subject in academic circles hesitant to acknowledge anything beyond the empirical. Nevertheless, the study of the interior mentalities of men and women as expressed through their spirituality can offer a rich spectrum of potentialities, especially during an era in which religion is a major social paradigm. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, religion, politics, and the lives of the English are so intricately intertwined that they cannot be easily disentangled. Each affects the others, giving insights into the beliefs and motivations behind much of what is believed, communicated, and acted upon. Therefore, examining the spiritual lives of Early Modern English mystics, how they recorded their spirituality, and how those writings in turn influenced others is a field which is rich with potential.

In addition, whereas the hesitation on the part of critics to identify the speaker with the author is usually very wise, in the case of spiritual writing, and in particular of mystagogical texts (whether poetry or prose), such hesitation can actually impede the critical analysis of content, for the genre itself purposefully turns inward, exploring the mystic's inner, spiritual life and progress along the unitive way. In mystography, the speaker and the author are one, and should be identified together. In fact, Anthony Low argues that mystical writings only qualify as such if the speaker is relaying what the "author-mystic" has actually experienced:

While modern critics rightly teach us not to rush in and confuse the writer with his protagonists, it is increasingly evident that the two are seldom wholly separate either. Mysticism, as mystics agree, is a matter of experience, not book learning. Poetry cannot be an authentic reflection of mysticism unless its writer is a mystic; or, if one wishes to make the fine distinction, the writer must give his reader the impression he has experienced what he writes of. As Vaughan notes, it is a curious dishonesty to claim experiences in an area like this falsely.⁹

An author-mystic attempts to transcribe into written form an experience which by its very nature is ineffable. Despite the difficulties inherent in the task, generations of mystics have made the attempt either as a way to help themselves work through the meaning of their experiences or as an aid to guide others along the same path. However, Protestant mystics, not having an established mystical tradition from which to draw, were forced in the Early Modern period to either turn to the Catholic tradition or develop their own interpretations of their experiences. Some author-mystics recorded these new interpretations in their writings, helping to enrich their audiences' perceptions of and approaches to mysticism in the process.

The Early Modern English authors included in *The Anatomy of Joy* all genuinely believe themselves to have either been in direct or intuitive contact with the Divine. These mystical experiences, regardless of the form they take, become part of the internal motivation of the

⁹ Anthony Low, *Love's Architecture: Devotional Modes in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*. (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 261.

author, driving the author to understand better their source and meaning. This process of discovery and interpretation in turn is expressed through their writing in various ways using various genres. Therefore, learning about these experiences in the context of both the authors' lives and the social and historical contexts in which they lived helps in understanding how they approach the mystical elements of their writings, how they interpret their experiences, how they adapt mysticism within the context of their particular situations, and how their writing is received by their contemporaries. For this reason, *The Anatomy of Joy* includes biographical information about the authors relevant to the analysis of their mystical writings.

It also examines relevant historical, social, religious, and medical contexts for these writings. I do not specialize in any of these fields, but I am a literary scholar. However, texts are composed by living people who, in turn, are the products of forces both internal and external. Situating these individuals as accurately as possible within the context of these forces helps to show how they, in turn, influenced both the writing and the reception of the authors' texts. Because mysticism is an affective approach to spirituality, those methods of literary criticism which acknowledge the importance of the emotions and help to interpret their influence have been useful, especially in regards to interpretation of interiority.

However, as scholars of Affect Theory and Phenomenology are usually hesitant to acknowledge experiences beyond those which can be empirically measured, these approaches can help only just so far in analyzing affective approaches to spirituality which claim intuitive and/or direct knowledge of an ineffable God. Regardless of whether a scholar believes in the existence of the divine or not, approaching any author's work under such a pretext cannot help but limit the analysis. For that reason, *The Anatomy of Joy* does not attempt to judge the authenticity of the mystical experiences recorded by the selected authors. It does, however, attempt to understand what mysticism is for those who believe in the phenomena and how that belief influences the

authors' identification of the source of the phenomena, their meaning, and their purpose. It also attempts to understand how these experiences influence the authors' writings and how those writings in turn influence others. In this way, it is my hope to create a more accurate picture of how mysticism changed and was in turn changed by the lives of these individuals.

With the adaptation or removal of traditional Catholic approaches to understanding mysticism and guiding the development of mystics, more individuated responses to numinous experiences became possible. The result was a range of highly individualized and diverse approaches to understanding these phenomena. Because of this diversity, the second chapter, "Mysticism in an Era of Changes" will define mysticism and related terms, differentiating them from modern concepts of political millennialism and apocalyptic prophesy. It will then provide an overview of recent scholarship on mysticism in the fields of psychology, social anthropology, and theology in order to provide avenues from which to approach the complexities of the mystical experience in general and how these theories may be at work in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The third chapter, "Approaching the Divine: The Mystagogical Manuals of Benet of Canfield and Augustine Baker," focuses on Protestants who, because of their numinous encounters, chose to turn to the Roman Catholic Church in order to understand their experiences. In doing so, they brought with them their former Protestant education and training as lawyers which they then used to refresh and revitalize mysticism during the Counter-Reformation. Examining the reaction of both Benet's and Baker's contemporaries and the accusations of heresy made against both the writers and their texts reveals insecurities concerning the undermining or bypassing of religious authority. In addition, it reveals the tensions which existed between mysticism, an intuitive approach to devotion, and the more ratiocinating and speculative forms of

worship which were becoming predominant both in England and on the continent during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Chapter Four, “Hearts Aflame: The Fire of Divine Love in the Works of Robert Southwell and Richard Crashaw” examines religious ecstasy, one of the most common popular associations made with mystical experience and, arguably, one of the most controversial. When viewed as liminal spaces, these moments of union with the divine become transformative, reshaping the recipients’ perceptions of God, self, and others. By incorporating these experiences into their poetry, the two chosen authors invite others to share in the intensity of the experience and be transformed as well. Thus, in a way, the poems themselves not only represent threshold experiences but open liminal spaces of their own where readers can enter, encounter the fire of divine love as depicted in the verse, and be spiritually renewed.

The next chapter, “Hearing the Call: Nonconformists, Schismatics, and Visionaries” focuses on mystics who represent the great fear of nationally institutionalized religion: zealous “enthusiasts” who cannot or will not conform. Because of several self-proclaimed prophets and visionaries which had led violent rebellions on the continent in the name of Church reform, mystics began to be equated with schism and rebellion in the popular imagination. Young mystics in seventeenth-century England thus not only had the task of trying to understand their experiences without the benefit of having a long mystical tradition to which to turn, but they also had to navigate the fears and suspicions of their fellow Protestants who had never had such an experience and who thus suspected both their source and motive. These young mystics had either to find a way to explain their experiences within the acceptable limits of their faith communities, or reject those limits and establish new faith communities. Both paths are represented by the chosen authors. Compelled by their encounters with God, these men and women exert pressure on various aspects of seventeenth-century Protestant Christianity from a reinterpretation of the

meaning of the priesthood of all believers, to a re-examination of the patriarchal nature of Protestant ideology, to a rejection of the Pauline interdict forbidding women a voice within the church. Thus, while these mystics do not incite violent rebellions, they do become a force for change, both countering and confirming popular fears.

The final chapter, “Walking with God: Nature, Mysticism, and Contemporary Epistemology and Science,” examines the ways in which some Early Modern mystics strove to legitimize their experiences in the popular perception and counter suspicions of illness and madness. One such approach was to draw upon contemporary popular epistemologies and sciences such as Christian humanism, alchemy, and Hermetic medicine. They provided mystics with a way to explain numinous and mystical encounters within the conceptual frameworks of popularly accepted knowledge systems while still acknowledging their source in God. The chosen authors, Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne, are both nature mystics who experience the presence of God most strongly while in nature. They both attempt to understand these experiences through the lens of Early Modern “science.” However, coming of age in different generations, each perceives mysticism as fulfilling a different spiritual need. Whereas Vaughan, the converted Cavalier seeks spiritual regeneration for himself and others, Traherne, who grew up in a more peaceful time, focuses on spiritual joy. Together, they provide an interesting glimpse into the ways in which mysticism served the different needs of succeeding generations.

In conclusion, the darker allegations against mysticism, allegations of delusion and madness, rebellion and witchcraft did not, indeed could not, extinguish it during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Instead, believers who were drawn to an apophatic and affective expression of their faith adapted mysticism to their needs, leaving their imprints on this ancient approach to worship, just as the Western Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox churches had previously. Changes in religion, politics, epistemology, and science during the Early Modern

period all contributed to an atmosphere which viewed the Roman Catholic traditions concerning mysticism and its vehicle of contemplation in an increasingly negative light. With the very real threat of persecution from the State and religious authorities, Christians who were inclined toward mysticism found training in and expression of this form of worship more difficult than in previous generations. Yet, despite the difficulties, mysticism did not die out as some may have thought. Instead, it adapted, finding myriad new ways in which to express itself.

CHAPTER II

MYSTICISM IN AN ERA OF CHANGES

In the Early Modern period, the perception of mysticism both among the clergy and the laity was already in a state of expansion and transformation. People who reported having mystical and numinous experiences were just as likely to be suspected of demonic possession, heresy, or madness as they were to be respected as holy and saintly. A person who had dreams or visions or who exhibited other phenomena associated with mysticism could be found to be self-deceived or accused of deliberately displaying a fraudulent spirituality in hopes of deceiving others. This growing distrust of mystics and of the mystical tradition in Western Christianity has its roots in perceived challenges to authority. Mystics sought God, desiring a close, personal relationship with the Divine. They claimed moments of union in which they felt the presence of God touch and transform their souls. They reported visions, dreams, and revelations which sometimes contained prophetic messages, and they exhibited the trance-like symptoms of ecstatic union during which mystics described being taken completely out of themselves and brought into the presence of God. Previously, during the Middle Ages people who had such experiences were respected as prophets, visionaries, and living saints. They were sought as spiritual guides and served as advisors to kings. Their prophetic insights and seal of divine approval gave them a certain level of authority whether the individual mystic was male or female.

However, in the fourteenth century at the height of its popularity as a legitimate part of Christian spirituality, the mystical way came to be more and more under attack by those who respected mystics of attempting to bypass the established priestly hierarchy in their approaches to God and of using their claims of mystical union and of prophetic insights to garner social and

political power. These suspicions were particularly strong when the mystic was a woman, for then she also appeared to be pushing against the “natural” masculine hierarchy and claiming illegitimate power.¹

The perceived dangers of bypassing established authority were manifested in reactions by both Church and State to groups labeled as heretical because they stepped outside of established approaches to God. The Beghards and Beguines are two such groups of laymen and women who did not officially become part of a Church sanctioned monastery, but who lived in semi-monastic communities where they sought God and supported each other in their daily life.² Because they were not under the direct control of an abbot or a bishop and because some of the Beghards and Beguines claimed mystical and numinous encounters with the Divine, they were accused of heresy and eventually stamped out. Mystical Beguines such as Marguerite Porete (c. 1248-1310) were even burned at the stake.³

The Lollards provoked similar responses.⁴ Although they made no claim to mystical experiences, they did step outside of established hierarchies by desiring more direct approaches to

¹ One example would be the controversial mysticism of Margery Kempe. For more information, see Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe, Norton Critical Edition*, Trans. Lynn Staley (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

² The Beghards and the Beguines were active in the Low Countries of Northern Europe during the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. They devoted themselves to God and lived in poverty and celibacy, but they did not take religious vows. For more information, see Walter Simmons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

³ Marguerite Porete was a French-speaking mystic and author of *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. She taught pure love and was burned at the stake for her teachings on 1 June 1310. For more information, see Emilie Zum Baum and Georgette Epiney-Burghard, *Women Mystics in Medieval Europe* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House, 1989), 143-175.

⁴ The Lollards were followers of John Wycliffe who, in the mid-fourteenth century, led a religious and political movement demanding Church reform. They were branded heretics and persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church. For More information, see Richard Rex, *The Lollards* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

God and His Word which bypassed the priestly order. Margery Kempe, a self-proclaimed mystic of fifteenth-century England describes how on numerous occasions she was accused in her travels around England of being a Lollard and a heretic because of her willingness to confront male-dominated Church hierarchies and reveal visions and prophetic insights which she claimed had been given directly to her God.⁵ Kempe is a good example of the growing suspicions surrounding mystics because she also reports being accused of counterfeiting her spirituality, of being deceived by devils, and of being afflicted with madness and hysteria.

When the Protestant reformation began in the early sixteenth-century, mystical approaches to spirituality frequently came under attack from both sides of the religious divide. Roman Catholics suspected it of undermining priestly and thereby papal authority. Protestants shunned it as part of the Catholic tradition and thereby papish and filled with superstition. Despite these flanking attacks, mystical approaches to spirituality did not die out during the Early Modern period. Instead, mysticism underwent a transformation. Protestant mystics, who were either unwilling or unable to draw upon the long mystical tradition of the Catholic Church, developed *their own* approaches within the context of *their own* spirituality and specific interests, pushing the boundaries of definition, method, and interpretation from the inside. Meanwhile, the perception of mystical approaches to spirituality by non-mystics heightened in suspicions of heresy, fraud, occult activity, and mental illness. These outside pressures manifested themselves in a wariness of “enthusiasm” which was feared to foment rebellion, accusations of witchcraft, diagnoses of religious melancholy, and unfavorable representations in popular literature and drama. These Early Modern perceptions of mysticism have influenced how this approach to spirituality is perceived even in Modern Western cultures. Therefore, this chapter will start by defining *mysticism* and its related terms. It will then examine modern scientific approaches to

⁵ Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe, Norton Critical Edition*, Trans. Lynn Staley (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

understanding mysticism as a psychological and social phenomenon through empirical research. Although this data applies to modern mysticism, I believe that it can be used with caution to provide insights into the changing perceptions of mysticism which were taking place during the turbulent era of reformation, rebellion, and restoration in sixteenth and seventeenth century England.

Defining *Mysticism* and Related Terms

Religious scholars such as Denys Turner would argue that *mysticism* is a modern construction formulated by common-core theorists such as William James who are searching for a common element shared by all world religions.⁶ Granted the term *mysticism* as a word did not enter the English language until the eighteenth century.⁷ However, the terms from which it is derived, *mystic* and *mystical*, have both been in use in the English language since the fourteenth

⁶ Denys Turner, "Mysticism," *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, Ed. Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason, and Hugh Pyper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 460-462. This view of mysticism is essentially that of a theoretician. It is abstract and experimentalist, and has little to do with the "mystical experience" as it is described by various Christian mystics through the centuries. In contrast, constructivists such as Stephen Katz eschew the possibility of finding a common-core of religious experience and reject the suggestion that mystical experience presents such a possibility since the experience itself is mediated by language which is itself constructed culturally and historically. For more information about James' common-core theories of mysticism see William James, Lectures XVI and XVII, "Mysticism," *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, Centenary Edition (London: Routledge, 1902, 2002), 294-332.

⁷ *The Oxford English Dictionary* lists the first appearance of the word, *mysticism* in 1724 by Anthony Collins in his *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion: In Two Parts: The First Containing Some Considerations on the Quotations Made from the Old in the New Testament*. Collins used the term derogatorily for what he perceived as the obscure meanings attached to tests by allegorists: "Just as remote from the real literal sense of Hoseah as the mysticism of the allegorists, and... altogether as obscure to the understanding" (ii.242). However, in 1736 H. Coventry used the term *mysticism* to refer to "the belief in the possibility of union with or absorption into God by means of contemplation and self-surrender; belief in or devotion to the spiritual apprehension of truths inaccessible to the intellect": "How much nobler a Field of Exercise...are the seraphic Entertainments of Mysticism and Extasy than the mean and ordinary Practice of a mere earthly and common Virtue!" (In his *Letters of Philemon to Hydaspes; Relating a Conversation with Hortensius upon the Subject of False Religion*, Conv. i.ii.59). "Mysticism, n." OED Online, December 2014, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/124654> (accessed March 08, 2015).

century to refer to people or concepts “having a spiritual character or significance by virtue of a connection or union with God which transcends human understanding.”⁸ The concept goes even further back. For fifteen centuries, mysticism encompassed the heights of religious experience in Western Christianity. Evelyn Underhill defines Christian Mysticism as “the direct intuition or experience of God.”⁹ The mystic, therefore, is one who is not satisfied with only a spirituality based on knowledge *about* God, but thirsts to know God Himself. Stephen Fanning, building upon this definition, asserts that “historically mystics have not occupied an odd corner of Christianity” as they are often perceived now.¹⁰ Quite the opposite is true. Christianity began as a mystical religion whose purpose was to lead people into a direct experience of God. Therefore, it is a part of a process within Christianity and is not a religion unto itself: “Mystics embark upon their pursuit of God within the community of belief and worship on the basis of studying the biblical text, participating in the Church’s liturgical and sacramental life, and reading the classics of the mystical tradition.”¹¹

According to the Church Fathers, there here have traditionally been different mystical paths by which to experience God’s presence: the apophatic and the kataphatic. The first claims inspiration from the Apostle John: “Beloued, now we are the sonnes of God, and it doeth not yet appeare, what wee shall be: but we know, that when he shall appeare, we shall bee like him: for

⁸ "Mystic, n. and adj." OED Online, December 2014, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/124647> (accessed 8 March 2015); "Mystical, adj." OED Online, December 2014, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/124648> (accessed 8 March 2015).

⁹ Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystics of the Church* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 9.

¹⁰ Stephen Fanning, *Mystics of the Christian Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2001), 219.

¹¹ Bernard McGinn, “Mysticism,” *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 20.

we shall see him as he is” (I John 3:2).¹² In this Johannine approach, mystics change through the transformative nature of this perfect vision of God, gradually shedding the negative aspects of their character and growing into His likeness, exhibiting in their own lives the godly characteristics of “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, [and] temperance.”¹³ This transformation is a gradual process in this life, and is never fully achieved. The Johannine vision of God itself is so filled with the light of his glory that the humanity of mystics blinds them to its full radiance, producing a brilliant darkness often described as light surrounded by clouds.¹⁴ This metaphor is commonly used by apophatic mystics such as the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* (14th c.) to attempt to describe the inability of a mortal, limited human to understand an eternal, omnipresent, and omniscient God.¹⁵ He will, by His very nature, remain a mystery, hence the term *mystical theology*.¹⁶

Literally meaning the secret knowledge of God, mystical theology differs from dogmatic or speculative theology in that it allows for the believer not only to know and to understand

¹² All Biblical scriptures, unless otherwise noted, will be from the 1611 version of the King James Bible which is contemporary with the time and country focused on in this dissertation.

¹³ The fruit of the spirit are listed in Galatians 3:22-23.

¹⁴ “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:4-5).

¹⁵ *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, Trans. A. C. Spearing (London: Penguin, 2001).

¹⁶ In the Hebrew Scriptures, the image of Moses ascending into the clouds on the top of Mount Sinai to meet with God is a perfect illustration of this same concept. Moses seeks God’s glory but God refuses to reveal Himself completely, saying, “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see mee, and liue” (Exodus 33:20). Instead, God places Moses inside of a crevice in the rock, and places a hand over him to protect him as he passes by: “And I wil take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my backe parts: but my face shall not be seene” (33:23). This passage illustrates well the tension between the mystic’s desire to see God for who He truly is, and the inability of the mystic’s humanity to see and comprehend the full truth. For a much more in-depth examination of mystical theology see Pseudo-Dionysius’ work by that name: Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology. Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, Trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 133-142. See also *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, Trans. A. C. Spearing (London: Penguin Books, 2001).

revealed truths about God, but also to experience those truths directly to varying degrees.¹⁷ This experiential knowledge “is never entirely separable from an equally immediate and experimental union with God by love” which has three distinguishing characteristics:¹⁸ first, it is utterly different from yet realer than any previous knowledge of God or of His love; second, it affects the person at the deepest spiritual levels and is distinct from mere intellectual understanding; third, while it brings the mystic absolute certainty of the presence and love of God, it is incommunicable to others.¹⁹ The mystic cannot adequately articulate in words either the experience of God’s presence or its transforming effects on the spirit, nor does the mystic often wish to reveal these deeply personal and affective moments of union. The mystery of God is only enhanced by these brief glimpses of His glory.

Apophatic mysticism is balanced by kataphatic mysticism which is more Pauline in its approach: “I am crucified in Christ. Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the son of God, who loved me. And gave himself for me.”²⁰ This Pauline approach is Christocentric, affective, and sensual in that it relies on the five senses. Kataphatic mystics focus on the humanity of Christ, and they describe their experiences of union using concrete imagery as in sweet smells, melodious sounds, and delicious flavors. They may describe the presence of God as a warmth or a fire burning within the heart or as a well of tears pouring from the soul through the eyes. Richard Rolle is one such

¹⁷ David Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition*, (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1961), 2.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 2-3.

²⁰ Galatians 2:20.

kataphatic mystic in the English mystical tradition.²¹ Arguably, Margery Kempe is another.²² The sensual nature of this approach to worship does also include more erotic imagery such as that which is invoked by St. Bernard of Clairvaux in his *Sermons on The Song of Songs* and which finds its way into the imagery of spiritual espousal, spiritual marriage, and ecstatic union.²³ Mystics do not have to be exclusively apophatic or kataphatic in their approach; instead, they may incorporate both. Saint John of the Cross (1542-1591) is a good example. His mystical treatise, *The Dark Night* (16th c.) is apophatic, yet his exquisite, mystical poetry is very sensual and kataphatic.

Both approaches lead to mystical union which is the ultimate goal of the mystic.

Arguably, in the Catholic Middle Ages there are four stages of mystical union: incomplete, full, ecstatic, and transforming.²⁴ Incomplete mystical union is also known as the prayer of quiet.

²¹ Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, Trans. Clifton Wolters (London: Penguin, 1972). Rolle's descriptions of God as a Fire of Love burning in the heart of the believer is one such kataphatic approach to mysticism as is his use of sensual imagery in connection with numinous encounters with the divine: pleasant melodies, sweet scents, etc.

²² Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe, Norton Critical Edition*, Trans. Lynn Staley (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001). Kempe's emphasis on the person of Christ and her descriptions of the emotive and physical aspects of her numinous experiences (tears, burning sensations, sweet sounds, etc.) make her approach to mysticism kataphatic.

²³ See Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on The Song of Songs, Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, Trans. G.R. Evans (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 207-276; see also Hollywood, Amy, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995.). In this branch of kataphatic mysticism Jesus is identified with the Beloved in the *Song of Songs* and the soul of the mystic (always seen as female regardless of the gender of the mystic) is identified with the Bride. The mystical union of the two is called spiritual espousal for the two one through identification. Most mystics are very careful to separate the spiritual union from any hints of a physical one, yet the imagery which they use to describe this union is very sensual and erotic. Margery Kempe is one writer who does not distinguish between spiritual and physical union. Intimacy between Christ and her soul is most clearly described in her report of a vision in which He gives her permission to "boldly, when you are in bed, take me to you as your wedded husband... take me in the arms of your soul and kiss my mouth, my head, and my feet as sweetly as you will" (Chapter 36). Although such imagery is startling, it is still within the tradition established through *The Song of Songs*. See Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Norton Critical Edition, Tans. Lynn Staley (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 66.

²⁴ Augustin Poulain, "Contemplation," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), *New Advent*, (accessed 9 Mar. 2015).

Divine action upon the soul brings a state of calm and peace, but distractions can still break through. In full union, the soul is completely occupied with God, yet the senses continue to operate unlike in ecstatic union where they do not. Ecstasies may involve trancelike states in which the mystic is completely unresponsive to external stimuli but is completely aware of the presence and activity of God within that person's spirit. Ecstasies are usually short but life-changing. The fourth type of mystical union, transforming union, is also known as spiritual marriage, and it involves a habitual consciousness of the active presence and assistance of the Divine in the life of the believer.²⁵ While all of the stages of mystical union are characterized by some awareness of Divine presence, the higher the stage, the stronger this presence is manifested. Even so, it is difficult to describe to those who have not experienced it. The soul feels as if it has been penetrated by an interior touch which may be accompanied by a feeling of absorption, fusion, or immersion, hence the term, *union*.²⁶

No mystical union can be produced at will; neither is it the result of any form of reasoning or imagination; nor can it be controlled as to its type, degree, or timing. Instead, a mystical union is a gift from God received by the mystic. Usually, it is brief, but the length of time may fluctuate with each union. The mystic's understanding of God may be illumined in some way or the Divine mystery of God may be emphasized, yet mystics through the ages have rarely liked to discuss their personal experiences. They usually prefer instead to discuss mystical union in conjunction with scripture or through mystagogical treatises aimed at guiding others into "the consciousness of God's presence."²⁷

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ McGinn, "Mysticism," 20.

The significance of the effect of the mystical experience on the life of the mystic is important because the Christian tradition has always insisted that the only way to validate the claims of mystics is through the impact their inner transformations have upon their lives and the lives of those they influenced.²⁸ These inner transformations produce lasting effects upon the soul, notably an increase in compassion, tranquility, and joy, and the experience leaves the mystic with an impulse towards virtue and a deep humility. If it does not, then the validity of the mystical union itself is suspect.

Contemplation is the vehicle of mystical union, but to understand contemplation, it is necessary to understand its place in relation to prayer in general. There are four degrees of prayer: vocal prayer, meditation, affective prayer, and the prayer of simplicity. Vocal prayer is common; it is initiated by the will of the person who is praying and involves that person's powers of reasoning and resolution. Meditation, also known as methodical prayer or the prayer of reflection, comes in many varieties, but it usually involves reading or reflecting on specific passages of scripture or events in the life of Christ. Once again, this type of prayer is initiated by the person who is praying and the powers of reasoning, reflection, and imagination are actively engaged. Unlike these first two levels of prayer, the next two are not completely under the control of the will, nor do they rely on the powers of reasoning and reflection. Instead, they are acquired in that they are received through the instigation of the Divine and are more varied and less structured than the previous two degrees of prayer. Affective prayer often manifests itself through the gift of tears. The contemplative will sometimes feel a deep compunction, an awareness of sin in oneself and others and a grief that such sins cut one off from the presence of God.²⁹ Tears may be shed on behalf of one's own soul or on the behalf of others. Sometimes the identity of the soul on

²⁸ Ibid., 19.

²⁹ For more information of the gift of tears and the doctrine of compunction see Irénée Hausherr, *Penthos in the Christian East* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1982).

whose behalf the contemplative is praying is revealed, sometimes it is not; regardless, the tears are real, they are heartfelt, and they are instigated by the Divine rather than by any normal emotional reactions to feelings of guilt, shame, or pity. The gift of tears may also be bestowed as a manifestation of *agape* love for fellow humans and as a manifestation of the love of God.³⁰

Likewise, the prayer of simplicity is not governed by the reason. Instead, simple thoughts or sentiments are acquired through the action of the Divine. The thought will come easily and with frequency without any effort on the part of the contemplative. This spontaneous prayer is dominant among other thoughts and is expressed in very few words. The dark night of the senses, which St. John of the Cross describes, is one type of this prayer.³¹ This dark night usually occurs before entering the higher levels of contemplation, and the experience itself is extremely bitter and purgative. The contemplative's gaze is riveted on God, and a deep and constant yearning for union with the Divine burns within the soul, yet the dark night is characterized by grief and spiritual aridity. Undeveloped and confused ideas of God recur persistently and independently of the will, attachments to material goods and sensual desires detach from the soul as distractions, and temptations which interfere with the contemplative's love of God are stripped away. During this extremely painful process, the prayer of quiet gradually begins to emerge, bringing with it higher forms of contemplation which lead to mystical union and its early manifestations of visions, revelations, or ecstasies.

³⁰ Margery Kempe is one famous example of a medieval English woman manifesting the gift of tears. For more information, see *The Book of Margery Kempe, Norton Critical Edition*, Trans. Lynn Staley (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

³¹ For more information on the dark night of the soul and of the senses see St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night. John of the Cross: Selected Writings*, Ed. Kieran Kavanaugh (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

Within the Christian mystical tradition, St. Augustine (354-430) was the first to categorize visions into three types: corporeal, imaginative, and intellectual.³² The first are seen with the eyes of the body, the second with the eyes of the mind. Corporeal visions present themselves to the senses as if they had physical substance. They can be seen and heard, and sometimes other senses are engaged as well. The English mystic Richard Rolle (1300-1343) records in his *Fire of Love* (1343) corporeal visions involving sweet aromas and tastes as well as physical sensations such as the warmth of spiritual fire in the bosom.³³ The second term *imaginary visions* can be easily misunderstood to mean invented or made-up by the mind; however, in this context, *imaginary* simply refers to *images* seen within the mind instead of with the physical eye. The mind does not create imaginary visions; it only receives them as the eyes receive corporeal visions. Divinely inspired dreams are a particular variety of imaginary visions received by mystics. The third category of visions, intellectual, does not involve any images but only knowledge which is received directly without any visual or imaginary intermediary, indeed sometimes without even words.

Visions, as well as revelations and ecstasies, may occur during the initial stages of higher contemplation, but they usually subside as the mystic advances. The visions, while divinely inspired, may still cause confusion when interpreted through the lens of humanity. The mystic can unconsciously alter the vision in a sincere attempt to relate and interpret it to others. Also, images within visions are often metaphorical and meant to relay spiritual truths, yet they can be misunderstood to express exact historical or archaeological details. If misinterpreted in this way, different visions can seem to contradict each other. The mystic may also believe that a vision or

³² Augustine, *De gen. ad litt.*, 1. XII. vii. For an English translation see Augustine, *On Genesis: The Literal Meaning of Genesis, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, Tran. Edmund Hill, Vol.13 (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1990), 464-506.

³³ For more information, see Rolle, *The Fire of Love*.

revelation is absolute when it is only conditional. A good example would be the biblical character Jonah, who wanted to believe because of his own prejudice that God's warning of the destruction of Nineveh was an absolute decree, and he was extremely disappointed when he discovered it was only conditional. Ninevites believed the warning, turned from their offending ways, and averted the destruction, thus angering Jonah who wanted to see them burn.³⁴ Of course, one must also acknowledge the possibility that a truly inspired vision has been altered by an amanuensis or an editor in the process of recording it. Regardless of these many ways in which a divinely inspired vision can become corrupted in transmission, not from God to the mystic, but from the mystic to others, a true, divinely inspired vision can be determined by the impulse to Divine love and virtue which it produces. False visions, delusions, and lies cannot lead to the same kind of stability or positive change in the spirit of the one who receives them. Even Jonah had to face his own prejudice when confronted by Divine compassion.

Current Trends in Religious Psychology and Social Anthropology

Mystics often claim an awareness of the presence of God and an experience of unity with the Divine, claims which are consistent regardless of when or where the mystic lives and which can be alarming to some who suspect the cause to be fabrications or illness. However, psychologist, Ralph W. Hood, Jr. asserts that there is no scientifically proven connection between mystical experiences and pathology.³⁵ Instead, studies have consistently shown that "mysticism is a normal phenomenon, reported by healthy and functioning persons struggling to find a

³⁴ Jonah 3:1-4:11.

³⁵ Ralph W. Hood, Jr., Peter C. Hill, and Bernard Spilka, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach*, 4th ed. (New York: Guildford Press, 2009), 371.

meaningful framework within which to live out this experience as foundational.”³⁶ Such individuals tend to be generally tolerant, innovative, and open to new experiences.³⁷ According to research conducted by psychologists in the United States, Britain, and Australia since the 1960s, “35% of persons sampled affirm some intense spiritual experience” determined by the researchers to be mystical and/or numinous.³⁸

In this dichotomy, a mystical experience is defined as producing a sense of union. In Christian mysticism, this union is with God, and the individual believer maintains a sense of self while being subsumed in the Divine. Walter T. Stace refers to this sense of union as “extrovertive mysticism.”³⁹ He contrasts it with “introvertive mysticism” in which the mystic experiences a union where individuality appears to be lost, a sense of “no-thing-ness” prevails:⁴⁰ “A numinous experience is an awareness of a ‘holy other’ beyond nature, with which one is felt to be in communion.”⁴¹ The word itself comes from the Latin word, *numen*, which refers to the power of a sacred object.⁴² In a numinous experience, the “holy other” (or God) initiates contact with the

³⁶ Ibid., 380.

³⁷ Ibid., 371.

³⁸ Ibid., 346. This number is derived from a number of studies. In a series of surveys using the Bourque question (“Would you say that you have ever had a ‘religious or mystical experience’—that is, a moment of sudden religious awakening or insight?”), 32% answered in the affirmative. In several other studies by separate researchers using the Greeley question (“Have you ever felt as though you were close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?”), 35% of the respondents answered “yes,” and when the Hardy question was used (“Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?”), 33% responded positively in Britain and 43% in the United States. For more information, see Ralph W. Hood, Jr. et al, *The Psychology of Religion*, 343-347.

³⁹ Walter T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1960), 131.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 225-226.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 226.

mystic and elicits a response. The mystic then feels drawn to seek God but is simultaneously awed by Divine majesty and holiness. In contrast, the “creatureness” of the mystic is emphasized.⁴³ The numinous (sense of presence) and the mystical (sense of union) form two parts of one whole although some mystics may experience one more than the other. As God is believed to be the one who initiates these contacts in Christian mysticism, some of these experiences are unanticipated and lead the recipient to seek for explanations and understanding within religion.⁴⁴

As empirical research has clearly and conclusively determined that approximately a third of the normal population of the United States, Britain, and Australia have experienced either a sense of presence or of unity with the Divine, a logical question would be, why are mystical experiences perceived to be so rare? The answer is that most people who have had these experiences do not talk about them with others.⁴⁵ This lack of communication may very well be the reason for the persistence of the belief that mystical experiences are unusual or are indicative of mental illness. Quite the contrary, research has consistently found that mystical experiences are more likely to be associated with psychologically healthy individuals who have a sense of well-being than with those with pathology or social dysfunction.⁴⁶ In addition, these experiences are more common among women than men; they “tend to be age-related, increasing with age; [and]

⁴³ Ibid. See also the *Book of Margery Kempe*. Margery claims having multiple numinous experiences over a period of many years. Awed by the holiness of the God she encounters, her own weaknesses and failures become evident to her. As an acknowledgement of her frail humanity and of her status as a created being, she repeatedly refers to herself as a “creature.”

⁴⁴ As an example, Margery Kempe describes having a mystical experience which cures her of a disorder which had afflicted her both mentally and physically. Afterwards she seeks to understand her experience by having the writings of famous mystics such as St. Birgitta read to her. She also visits mystics such as Julian of Norwich, describing to them her experiences and asking whether they seemed to really be from God or whether they were deceptions. Thus her unanticipated mystical experiences compel her to seek explanations and understanding about their source and meaning.

⁴⁵ Several studies through the years have focused on the communication patterns of people who have had mystical experiences. For more information, see Hood, *The Psychology of Religion*, 347.

⁴⁶ Hood, *The Psychology of Religion*, 347.

they are characteristic of the educated and affluent.”⁴⁷ Interestingly, Ralph W. Hood, Jr. found that those individuals who are primarily personally religiously committed had the most mystical experiences while those who are primarily institutionally religiously committed had the fewest.⁴⁸

Hood’s two categories align well with those of Gordon Allport, one of the founders of humanist psychology and the developer of the I-E scale which has been adapted by many researchers.⁴⁹ As measured by this scale, intrinsically motivated individuals are those who *live* their religion whereas extrinsically motivated individuals are those who *use* their religion. The first group of people, having embraced a creed, endeavor to internalize it and to follow it fully: “Other needs, strong as they may be, are regarded as of less ultimate significance, and they are, so

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 339-340.

⁴⁹ Lee A. Kirkpatrick and Ralph W. Hood, “Intrinsic-Extrinsic Religious Orientation: The Boon or Bane of Contemporary Psychology of Religion?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 29.4 (Dec. 1990), 442-462, *JSTOR* (accessed 5 Feb. 2015). Although the I-E scale has been accepted for years by researchers in the field of the Psychology of Religion, Lee A. Kirkpatrick and Ralph W. Hood have called the usefulness of this instrument into question. Their argument is based on several factors. First, the precise definition of “religious orientation” needs to be decided upon by researchers. What exactly is being measured? Is it personality traits, cognitive styles, or motivational systems? They suggest that if researchers are interested in the influence of personality in religious motivation, they should start with a theory of personality and investigate how it relates to belief and behavior. Likewise, if they are interested in motivational questions, they should begin by developing a theory concerning motivation itself, then investigate how religious belief and involvement relate to it. Second, they note that the Intrinsic Dimension is poorly defined because of its multiplicity of meanings, and the E Dimension, while better defined in terms of motivation, must be broken into Extrinsic-Personal and Extrinsic-Social subcategories in order to be useful to researchers. Based on these perceived problems, Kirkpatrick and Wood recommend three possible solutions. The first involves splitting the I-E Scale into three, rather than two measurable components, separating Extrinsic-Personal and Extrinsic-Social into separate and distinct categories. The second involves abandoning the I-E Scales altogether and designing a new instrument based on a more precise theoretical framework whether that have two, three, or more factors. Their third option involves reconceptualizing the entire approach and developing alternative ways in which to measure religious motivation, belief, and behavior, drawing upon already existing scales used in social and personal psychologies. Three years later in 1999, Ralph W. Hood and Peter C. Hill produce a volume entitled, *Measures of Religiosity* which reviews over a hundred different scales produced by various researchers to measure numerous aspects of religion in psychology. Six of those scales pertain to spirituality and mysticism: The Index of Core Spiritual Exercises (Kass et al. 1991), the Mysticism Scale (Hood 1975), the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (Hall and Edwards, 1996), The Spiritual Themes and Religious Responses Test (Saur and Saur, 1993), The Well-being Questionnaire (Moberg 1984), and the Spiritual Well-being Scale (Basset et al. 1994).

far as possible, brought into harmony with the religious beliefs and prescriptions.”⁵⁰ These individuals have turned toward God and away from self. On the other hand, those who are extrinsic may turn toward God, but they also still have themselves firmly in mind. Religion serves their personal needs and interests: “to provide security and solace, sociability and distraction, status and self-justification. The embraced creed is lightly held or else selectively shaped to fit more primary needs.”⁵¹ Not surprisingly, people who claim mystical or numinous experiences most often are either intrinsic in their religious motivation or are drawn to become intrinsic. They internalize their beliefs and attempt to live them out in their daily lives.

Such individuals may also exhibit the traits which Allport assigns to religious maturity. Rather than focusing on self-gratification and how a religious institution can benefit them, those who are religiously mature focus on how they can please God. They learn to objectify the self, examining their own lives, reflecting insightfully on their strengths and weaknesses, and developing the ability to laugh at themselves good-naturedly. In addition, they have a unifying philosophy of life which provides them with structure and meaning.⁵² Such persons have a tendency to be rich and complex in their sentiments, dynamic in their character, consistent in their morality, and heuristic in their thinking.⁵³ While mysticism is not in itself an indication of religious maturity, it has the capacity to draw the mystic towards spiritual maturity and thus has been accepted by respected religious thinkers who regard it as encouraging the highest levels of spiritual attainment.

⁵⁰ Gordon W Allport and J. Michael Ross, “Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice,” *Journal of Personality and Social Study*, 5.4 (1967), 432-443.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Gordon W. Allport, *The Individual and His Religion: A Psychological Interpretation* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1951), 52-74.

⁵³ Ibid., 57.

An important part of this spiritual advancement is prayer, specifically contemplative prayer, which has also traditionally been associated with mystical experiences.⁵⁴ Modern researchers such as Hood, Poloma, and Gallup have found that those people who prayed or meditated regularly, especially those who were intrinsically religious tended to have more mystical and numinous experiences than those who were extrinsically religious and who prayed petitionary or other forms of prayer.⁵⁵ Bimodal consciousness, a heuristic model proposed by theologian Urban T. Holmes, theorizes that there are two separate but interrelated modes by which the human mind processes the experience of prayer.⁵⁶ The action mode is one of control while the receptive mode is one of surrender. Action mode focuses on logic, analysis, and prediction, demanding explanations and operating in a realm of signs, concepts, and systems. Because of the frameworks by which it processes prayer, action mode limits the possibilities of awareness. Receptive mode, on the other hand, focuses on intuition, operating in the realm of symbols, rituals, and stories, allowing for new and expanded awareness. For those who have been socialized to operate primarily in active mode, receptive mode can be a challenging, even frightening experience. However, for those who are comfortable with it, prayer becomes a deeper, richer, more satisfying experience than is accessible through action mode alone.

⁵⁴ Although contemplative prayer has recently become associated with the Emergent Church and with various New Age movements, it has been a traditional part of Christian worship for nearly two millennia. In its most basic form, contemplative prayer involves fixing one's gaze on Jesus in faith, and in order to minimize distractions during prayers times, those practicing contemplative prayer often seek solitude and silence.

⁵⁵ Hood, *The Psychology of Religion*, 367; M.M. Poloma and G.H. Gallup, Jr., *Varieties of Prayer: A Survey Report* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991).

⁵⁶ Urban T. Holmes, III, *The Priest in Community* (NY: Seabury, 1978), 9-34; *Symposium on Consciousness: Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, February 1974*, Ed. Robert E. Ornstein (NY: Penguin, 1977), 26-52, 67-88; Urban T. Holmes, III, *A History of Christian Spirituality: An Analytical Introduction* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 5.

Psychologist, Arthur Deikmann believes that the sense of awareness of the presence of God, which is reported by mystics, becomes possible when they move from an action mode of consciousness to a receptive one.⁵⁷ He calls this process of shifting, de-automization.⁵⁸

Automization comes from the idea that society influences the way its people learn to think. When that society values the action mode of consciousness, it emphasizes that mode, and people learn to automatically use it predominantly in their thinking. Therefore, the de-automization process involves breaking through into the receptive modes of thinking, which are still part of the subconscious, but which have been de-emphasized. The same people who are capable of de-automization and the resulting deeply sensible prayer are usually those whose religious motivation is intrinsic rather than extrinsic.

Liminality (both intrinsic and de-automized) is another method by which one can approach an understanding of mysticism. Victor Turner, one of the founders of symbolic and interpretative anthropology, divides human relationships into two types: structure and anti-structure. The first are defined by assigned roles, statuses, and offices, usually having a jural-political character, while the second exist instead within the common human condition and are more spontaneous, symbolic, and immediate.⁵⁹ Anti-structure functions as a leveling field in which the normal hierarchies are temporarily suspended, or at least de-emphasized, and members of a community become relatively equal for short periods of time. Turner refers to this

⁵⁷ Arthur Deikmann, "Implications of Experimentally Produced Contemplative Meditation," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 142 (1966), 101-116.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 131-132.

unstructured state as “communitas,” and “positive values [are] associated with it; good fellowship, spontaneity, warm contact...[and] unhierarchical, undifferentiated social relations.”⁶⁰

Turner examines communitas in its connection with ritual and liminal spaces. According to him, liminality is a state of transition, of ambiguity or disorientation during which individuals are moving from a pre-ritual status but have not yet attained the status which will be held when the ritual is complete.⁶¹ They are in essence standing on the threshold between their former sense of identity and their new one. These in-between moments can have a dramatic influence on the shaping of a person’s sense of identity, dissolving it to a certain extent, and creating both disorientation and the possibility of new perspectives. To Turner, these moments of liminality “must eventually dissolve, for it is a state of great intensity that cannot exist very long without some sort of structure to stabilize it...either the individual returns to the surrounding social structure...or else liminal communities develop their own internal social structure, a condition which Turner calls ‘normative communitas.’”⁶² Although Turner attributes liminal experiences to being predominantly positive moments of transition and renewal, Agnes Horvath argues that they can also be periods of uncertainty, anguish, and existential fear.⁶³

Turner confines his approach through the specific setting of small, African tribes like the Ndembu which he studied in Zambia.⁶⁴ However, researchers such as Horvath argue that the

⁶⁰ Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Selected Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 104.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Peter Homans, *Jung in Context: Modernity and the Making of Psychology* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979), 207.

⁶³ Agnes Horvath, *Modernism and Charisma*, (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁶⁴ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 131-132.

concept of the “threshold experience” can be applied in a broader capacity to aid in the historical and sociological understanding of specific events.⁶⁵ She uses these experiences to examine the rise of political regimes. Other researchers such as Timothy Carson suggest that liminal spaces can also be associated with sacred spaces.⁶⁶ Examples abound of biblical figures existing in moments of transition while in the presence of God: Jacob’s dream (Genesis 28:12-19), Moses’ encounter with the burning bush (Exodus 3:2-4:17), and Isaiah’s vision of the throne of God in the Temple (6: 1-13) are but a few examples of sacred spaces aligning with moments of liminality. In each of these instances, the individual reports a numinous experience in which he both felt the presence of the divine and received sacred or revelatory knowledge. Thus, liminal spaces seem to be moments in which mystical and/or numinous experiences can occur. Although most liminal spaces are not mystical, most mystical experiences do appear to share common elements of the liminal: they are brief, intense, transforming, and outside the normal social hierarchies. They also hold the potential to bring either moments of union and joy or uncertainty, anguish, and existential fear.

Despite the persistence of misconceptions linking mysticism with pathology, the facts collected by both religious psychologists and social anthropologists over the past several decades suggest that mystical and numinous experiences are part of a normal, healthy spiritual life for at least a third of the population. The people who experience them tend to be religiously committed but not necessarily institutionally committed, and they have usually internalized their faith, walking it out on a daily basis. They are often able to see themselves objectively and tend to be

⁶⁵ Agnes Horvath, *Modernism and Charisma*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁶⁶ Timothy L. Carson, “Chapter Seven: Betwixt and Between, Worship and Liminal Reality,” *Transforming Worship* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 61. Carson examines the ways in which worship can be understood in the context of the *communitas* of the church community (*koinonia*). As believers enter into worship, they are theoretically entering into a liminal space where they worship corporately to be transformed and to be sent back out into the world to serve God.

drawn toward internal forms of prayer which expand awareness and encourage receptivity. Of this group, which includes many different religious faiths, those who are Christian are not likely to be satisfied with a spirituality based only on knowledge *about* God, but they will thirst to know God Himself, seeking an awareness of the presence of the Divine and a willingness to listen for His voice. Their experiences tend to have a positive, transforming effect on their lives, encouraging emotional and psychological stability as well as religious maturity.

Theory of Spiritual Types

How does mysticism as an expression of spirituality fit within Christianity and how might it be influenced by society? These are important questions to consider when investigating the transforming perceptions of mysticism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. According to theologian, Urban T. Holmes, III, Christian spirituality involves the call to know God, to be receptive to the presence of God in one's life. God discloses Himself to the believer, and the believer receives the communication.⁶⁷ But *how* a believer receives such communication needs to be examined more closely. Prayer is the traditionally accepted vehicle, yet different times and different forms of Christianity have had very different perspectives on what types of prayer are and are not appropriate. Theological differences themselves are often driven by changing perceptions within the community of believers. People are social creatures, and it is inevitable that social values and forms of expression will influence their spirituality even as the reverse is also true. These mutual influences shift the forms of prayer and the methods of approach to God which are acceptable at that time for that group of people.

⁶⁷ Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, 1.

Holmes has selected two scales by which to map these shifting patterns of spirituality through history. The first measures whether the accepted approaches to spirituality are more kataphatic or apophatic.⁶⁸ As in describing types of mysticism, kataphatic approaches to spirituality in general are imaginal, encouraging a believer to build an image of God through what is known; thus a heavy emphasis is usually placed on scripture and on the Incarnation. When St. Paul attributes the nine fruit of the spirit as coming from God, the kataphatic approach builds a conceptual image of God as having those particular qualities and of Christ as embodying those qualities in his life.⁶⁹ Therefore, this approach, because it adds to what one knows, or at least what one thinks one knows about God, can be identified as positive, with a plus sign on the spectrum of spirituality.

Apophatic approaches would therefore be identified with a negative sign as they focus primarily on what God is not. For example, if the kataphatic approach builds an image of God as the source of love, then the apophatic approach would acknowledge that God cannot be hatred. While apophatic approaches acknowledge scripture, they tend to emphasize the mystery of God and the inability of humans to fully comprehend the Divine. This ineffability is sometimes compared with intense spiritual light which by its nature blinds those who attempt to perceive it directly. Thus, apophatic approaches attempt to perceive the Divine indirectly through emptying the perception of all that is not God.

The second scale measures whether a particular type of spirituality is more speculative (illuminating the mind) or affective (illuminating the heart).⁷⁰ Speculative spiritualities tend to

⁶⁸ Ibid., 3-5.

⁶⁹ All biblical references will be to the 1611 edition of the King James Bible unless otherwise noted. In Galatians 5:22-23, St. Paul lists the fruit of the spirit as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance.

⁷⁰ Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, 4.

emphasize reasoning and ratiocination. Analysis, interpretation, and systematization are common to these approaches. Affective spiritualities, on the other hand, emphasize the emotions. Affective approaches may encourage weeping for the sufferings of Christ or the tribulations of others as well as rejoicing in the Lord. Holmes has taken this scale of measurement and overlaid it as a vertical axis on the horizontal line of kataphatic/apophatic measurement. Most forms of Christianity fall within one of the four quadrants created by the resulting grid: speculative/kataphatic, kataphatic/affective, affective/apophatic, or apophatic/speculative.⁷¹

Charting the quadrant of the spirituality of a particular community of believers at a particular time in their history can aid in determining the shifting patterns of their spirituality, for instance, a shift in dominance from apophatic/speculative to speculative/ kataphatic or from speculative/ kataphatic to kataphatic/ affective.⁷² Holmes' theorized connection between these shifts and the dominant contemporary social institutions is an area ripe for research. A tentative example might suggest that during a period of political stability and security a speculative/kataphatic spirituality becomes dominant with its emphasis on rationalism and intellectualism. Perceptions of God are based on current interpretations of accepted evidence. This is exactly what can be seen developing among Protestants in sixteenth century England. Under the Tudor monarchy, with Elizabeth as head of the Church of England, the Middle Way encouraged a rational Christianity and discouraged forms of religious enthusiasm and claims of divine inspiration.⁷³ Such claims had been believed to lead to rebellions such as those incited by

⁷¹ Ibid., 4-5.

⁷² Ibid., 8-10.

⁷³ The Middle Way was developed by the Elizabethan Settlement (from 1558) which sought to find a workable balance between Protestant reforms and continuity with liturgical, ceremonial, and clerical traditions. For more information, see Christopher Hodgkins, *Authority, Church, and Society in George Herbert: Return to the Middle Way* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993).

the Anabaptists on the continent with their prophetic claims and their sometimes violent demands for religious reform.

However, not all Protestants were happy with this so-called Middle Way by any means. Some of those who were persecuted, such as the Quakers, also claimed an intuitive and experiential connection with God who gave them prophetic utterances to share. Even within the Church of England itself, groups of believers such as the Philadelphia Society formed around individuals who claimed a personal connection with the Divine, a connection through which they received prophecies, visions, and dreams. Such cases suggest that a lack of a sense of security and a collapse of stability may encourage a more affective/apophatic approach to spirituality with believers thirsting for the consolation of a personal connection to a compassionate and unchanging God, an anchor in the uncertainties of their world. Apophatic approaches admit the inability to understand the full purposes of God in allowing times of suffering, even as faith is strengthened by emphasizing what God is not: He is not cruel; He is not unjust; He is not arbitrary; He does not abandon His people, etc.

Thus, one's approach to God appears to be influenced on at least three different levels: personal, communal, and national. Patterns of spirituality may shift with shifting centers of dominance. Factors might include a whole range of possibilities from events in one's personal life, to socialization by a community of believers, to mandates from a national religious authority. These are all extrinsic factors, affecting an individual's spirituality from the outside. Theologian, Corinne Ware suggests an intrinsic factor as well. She theorizes that an individual is predisposed toward certain types of spirituality.⁷⁴ These spiritual types, like personality types, form part of the temperament of that individual and express themselves in the style of worship to which that

⁷⁴ Corinne Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Type: A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth* (Bethesda, MD.: Alban Institute Publications, 1995), 1-53.

individual is attracted as well as repulsed. Those who do not have the same spiritual type as the congregation to which they are a part, often feel as though they do not “fit in” and that their spiritual needs are not being met. If Ware is correct, then tensions will necessarily exist among the spiritual types of individuals and the patterns of spirituality accepted by the social and religious institutions of which they are a part. These tensions may manifest themselves in a multitude of ways from minor feelings of dissatisfaction to outright rebellion.

Ware identifies four spiritual temperaments based on Holmes’ schema: Type-1 (speculative/kataphatic), Type-2 (kataphatic/affective), Type-3 (affective/apophatic), and Type-4 (apophatic/speculative).⁷⁵ Type-1, she describes as an “intellectual” spirituality which is drawn primarily to scripture and sermons with prayers being always language based, whether aloud or silent.⁷⁶ This is the type of spirituality which was becoming dominant during the Protestant Reformation and has had a major influence on Christianity today, especially in the churches of the American Bible Belt. Holmes identifies the excesses of this form of spirituality as “rationalism,” an over-intellectualizing of one’s spiritual life to the point of becoming dry and dogmatic, labels which are perhaps unfairly attached to Puritanism of the seventeenth century.⁷⁷

Ware describes Type-2 spirituality, kataphatic/affective, as being more “heartfelt” than the intellectualism of the first type. An emphasis is still placed on an anthropomorphic image of God, especially through the Incarnation of Christ, but it is the relationship with Christ that is important.⁷⁸ Prayers are still language based, but they are less formalized and more extemporaneous, sometimes being mixed with intense emotion. Extreme excesses of this form of

⁷⁵ Ibid., 36-45.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 37-38.

⁷⁷ Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, 4-5.

⁷⁸ Ware, *Know Your Spiritual Type*, 39-40.

spirituality may lead to pietism which Holmes defines as a confusion between “subjective, superficial feelings with theology”⁷⁹ He condemns it as suffering from “sentimentality, Biblicism, personalism, exclusionism, fideism, and anti-intellectualism,” claiming that “it flourishes in self-congratulatory small groups” where it is “impervious to criticism because it recognizes no canon of truth outside the subjective meaning of its membership.”⁸⁰ Pietism usually follows as a reaction against particularly dry, dogmatic periods of theological sterility such as in the fifteenth century following the rise of nominalism.

The third category of spiritual types is the affective/apophatic. This type is introspective and intuitive, and to them, the inner world is just as real as the outer one. For this reason, believers with this spirituality type live lives which others may consider austere and even ascetic, not because they wish to punish themselves, but to eliminate worldly distractions which are not important to them and which may actually interfere with their goal of union with the Divine.⁸¹ They often feel uncomfortable in settings which emphasize sermons and programs; instead, they retreat in order to seek quiet and solitude, the better to focus on contemplation. Their prayers tend to be interior, actively waiting to hear from God rather than speaking to Him, and for this spiritual type, it is the journey to the Divine which is important, even if He is beyond all rational understanding. The excesses of withdrawing too much may manifest themselves in Quietism, in which the mind becomes wholly inactive, no longer thinking or willing on its own account, but waiting for God to act within it.⁸² This can be dangerous, even fatal to morality. Yet, a believer

⁷⁹ Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, 9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

⁸² Edward Pace, "Quietism," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 12. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), *New Advent* (accessed 8 Feb. 2015).

with a healthy Type-3 temperament is likely to be optimistic and to be willing to explore their spirituality, writing and publishing inspirational and uplifting works which in turn fuel the spirituality of others.⁸³ While this is not the only spiritual type which produces mystics, it is an important one, and many of the writers discussed in later chapters will share this spiritual type.

The fourth and final spiritual temperament is the apophatic/speculative. This is another of the spiritual types often associated with mysticism. It is intellectual and focuses on the mysteries of God, expressing itself in practical ways. According to Ware, this type of spirituality has a sturdy idealism and passion for transforming society and rectifying wrongs; therefore, it equates prayer and theology with action.⁸⁴ In excess, however, it can lead to encratism in the forms of extreme asceticism and rigid morality.

Each of these four spiritual types must be held in balance with the others in order to avoid falling into the excesses of any one particular quadrant. Tensions between opposite approaches can lead to misunderstandings which can in turn erupt into hostilities, especially when one approach to spirituality attempts to dominate others, even within a single worshipping community. In the case of England of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Protestant Reformation with its growing emphasis on reason and speculative approaches to spirituality, sparked internal dissents, some of which led directly to the English Civil War.

Changing England

England of the Early Modern period underwent a series of rapid changes. Changes in government effected changes in religion, especially in regards to the establishment of a Protestant State religion and the development of the Middle Way, an attempt at reconciliation between

⁸³ Ware, *Know Your Spiritual Type*, 42.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

adherents to High Church and Low Church within what would later be known as the Church of England. The Middle Way discouraged religious “enthusiasm” which was believed to be recently responsible for fomenting rebellion and violent attempts at religious reform on the continent. One group in particular played a major part in these perceptions. Certain factions of Anabaptists, who claimed prophetic inspiration, did indeed rebel against established religious authorities and attempt violent coups on the continent. By discouraging prophecies, visions, dreams and other forms of “enthusiasm,” the Middle Way sought to discredit such claims of divine inspiration, thereby also discrediting traditional forms of mysticism which sought either intuitive or direct experience of the Divine. Mystics sometimes reported numinous experiences such as visions, revelations, or ecstasies received from God. Such intuitive approaches to worship now fell under suspicion. Of course, the general Protestant mistrust of Roman Catholicism and its teachings was a deciding factor in the mistrust of Catholic mystical traditions.

In addition, changing ideas of the nature of knowledge and language significantly influenced the acceptable styles of religious writings and sermons. The traditional medieval, multi-leveled exegesis of scripture was gradually being replaced by a more succinct organization and plain style. Elaborate allegories with little to no solid connection to the biblical text were replaced by rational expositions based on the context of the scriptural passages. The literal meaning of scripture was stressed, and typological interpretations of the Old Testament were maintained only as long as the pre-figurations of Christ were consistently visible. Thus, of the four levels of medieval interpretation, the literal and the typological became favored, while the allegorical and anagogical levels fell into more and more disfavor.⁸⁵ As these latter, spiritual

⁸⁵ For more information on these changes see Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, UP, 1979). See also Christopher Hodgkins, *Authority, Church, and Society in George Herbert: Return to the Middle Way* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993).

interpretations of the divine mysteries were part of the mystical tradition, when they fell into disfavor and suspicion, so did mysticism.

The New Science and changing perceptions of psychology and medicine also played a part in the changing perceptions of mysticism during the Early Modern period. Humanism emphasizes rationality and the ability of the human mind to discover truth in the natural world through empirical evidence and inductive reasoning. As the popularity of the new scientific approach grew and writers such as Bacon and Descartes promoted it, fields of received knowledge such as religion, history, and literature gradually fell into disfavor. Although the dividing line between science, sorcery, and alchemy can be a little blurry during the Early Modern period, the experimentation and discovery involved in Early Modern “science” and exploration became more and more respected. Mysticism, as a received tradition, again came under suspicion. Charges of superstition, heresy, and even witchcraft were made against some mystics, while others were accused of lunacy. Writers such as Robert Burton, in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, diagnosed some mystics as suffering from a severe form of religious love melancholy, emphasizing associations with madness and hysteria.

Changing Mysticism

A shadow fell over mysticism in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Suspicions of madness and enthusiasm caused many Protestants to shun this path of worship. Allegations of superstition raised fears of demonic deception and the occult. Even today, these fears still linger. One of the banes of modern research in mysticism is the mistaken connection many people make between mystical and paranormal phenomena. In numerous studies the two have been correlated. For instance, several General Social Surveys included extrasensory

perception (ESP), clairvoyance, and contact with the dead with mysticism as a single factor.⁸⁶

This correlation illustrates the link in the modern popular mind between mysticism and the paranormal. However, conceptual writings of mysticism within Christianity consistently and clearly differentiate between these two phenomena and with all practices considered “occult.” Ecstatic manifestations such as visions and revelations could seem to be forms of ESP or clairvoyance, but they are different. Paranormal activities such as these are usually believed to originate in the innate abilities of the psychic. In contrast, numinous mystical experiences within Christian traditions are not reliant on any psychic ability, nor can a mystic access them at will. They are imparted from God for His own purposes and at a time of His own choosing.⁸⁷ The mystic is a passive recipient of the vision or revelation. Even so, these visions need to be examined very closely and tested before being accepted as divinely inspired.⁸⁸

Nor do genuine mystical experiences within the Christian traditions have anything to do with contacting the dead. Such practices of divination are condemned in the scriptures. After

⁸⁶ Hood, *The Psychology of Religion*, 248. The General Social Surveys of 1984, 1988, and 1989, asked questions concerning ESP, clairvoyance, contact with the dead, and mysticism as part of a single factor of their survey. The four questions were as follows: ESP—Have you ever felt as though you were in touch with someone when they were far away from you? Clairvoyance—Have you ever seen events that were happening at a great distance as they were happening? Contact with the Dead—Have you ever felt as though you were in contact with someone who had died? Mysticism—Have you ever felt as though you were close to a powerful spiritual force outside of yourself? For more information, see J.W. Fox, “The Structure and Stability of Social Antecedents of Reported Paranormal Experiences,” *Sociological Analysis*, 53 (1992), 422.

⁸⁷ An example of a mystic making the mistake of believing he could discern the will of God on his own can be found in the story of the prophet Nathan. When King David asks him if it is the will of God that he should build him a temple in Jerusalem, Nathan affirms the request without first consulting God. He is then corrected by the Almighty who denies the King’s request. Nathan must admit his presumption and correct his mistake by relaying to the king that his son may build the temple, but he may not (1 Chronicles 17: 1-15).

⁸⁸ The sources of false visions and revelations were believed to be manifold; Demonic deceptions, melancholia, mania, humoral imbalances, and dietary complaints were a few of them. Although the reference is from a much later century, I am reminded of Ebenezer Scrooge’s explanation of his vision of Marley’s ghost as the effect of an undigested piece of potato (Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*). For more information, see Jean Gerson, *On Distinguishing True from False Revelations*, *Jean Gerson: Early Works*, Trans. and Ed. Brian Patrick McGuire (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), (3.40).

Samuel's death, King Saul had removed from Israel all who "had familiar spirits, and the wizards" (1 Samuel 28:3). However, when the Philistines came against him and the King could not receive guidance from God by legitimate means, "either by dreams or by Urim, or by prophets" (1 Samuel 28: 6), he resorted to the Witch of Endor to summon the ghost of the prophet Samuel.⁸⁹ Thus, Saul tries to step around the prohibition against occult methods of foretelling the future by specifically summoning a prophet of God. However, Samuel rebukes him for trying to find a loophole: "Wherefore then doest thou aske of mee, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy" (1 Samuel 28: 16). As a genuine mystic, Samuel only receives the prophesies which God gives him. He does not have an innate ability to determine the future. If God is not speaking to Saul through living prophets, he will not speak to Saul through a dead one either. The King's mistake is in believing that the dead have an innate prophetic ability which bypasses the mystic's reliance on God for any visions and revelations. Resorting to a witch to summon the dead through a familiar spirit was definitely considered an occult practice and an illegitimate method of obtaining guidance. It had nothing to do with legitimate mysticism and was strictly prohibited as a form of necromancy. In addition, medieval theologians taught that spirits summoned through such practices were most likely demons disguising themselves as the deceased in order to deceive.⁹⁰

Witches, wizards, familiar spirits, and ghosts were linked with demonic activity in the Middle Ages. Paranormal powers came through diabolical means which Christians were taught to fear and shun. This raised the question of how Christians were to be sure of whether a mystical or numinous experience was divinely inspired or whether it was a demonic deception. How could one be sure? Texts such as one written by Jean Gerson, the Chancellor of the University of Paris,

⁸⁹ For the whole story, see 1 Samuel 28: 3-25.

⁹⁰ See Tertullian, *De anima*, LVIII, *Patrologia Latina*, II, 793.

in 1402 were used to aid in distinguishing true from the false visions.⁹¹ His treatise “opens with the argument that “as the true expression of religion comes under attack through heretics’ sophisticated arguments, so too lying angels try to abrogate the authority of true and holy revelations through sophisticated deeds and the trickery of magicians.”⁹² One should never be too hasty to accept a vision as true, nor should one be so hard as to believe them all false.⁹³ Gerson compares the difference between divine revelations and diabolical trickery to the difference between a genuine coin and a counterfeit one.⁹⁴ He stresses that the examination of mystical and numinous experiences must focus on an examination both of the revelation itself and of the character of the claimant.

According to Gerson if the revelation itself does not take place exactly as it is predicted or if it encourages questionable behavior, it is to be suspected of being false.⁹⁵ As for the recipients, those who have the pride to think that they deserve to have ecstatic visions and revelations deserve instead to be deceived, for these are gifts totally dependent upon Divine grace and not on any merit on the part of the recipient.⁹⁶ The genuine mystic also displays discretion through a willingness to receive advice or counsel from those in authority and to seek the truth.⁹⁷ Gerson himself was a spiritual advisor, and he felt strongly that anyone who claimed to have

⁹¹ Jean Gerson, *On Distinguishing True from False Revelations*, 334-364.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 335.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 338. “This coin of spiritual revelation, like gold, is to be examined mainly on five points: weight, flexibility or malleability, durability, conformity, and color. This can be done in accord with the five virtues from which the evidence is taken for legitimate spiritual coin. Humility provides weight; discretion malleability; patience durability; truth conformity; charity provides color.”

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 334.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 349-350.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 338-343.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 343-347.

special experiences or revelations needed to have those claims examined closely by spiritual leaders with discernment. Unwillingness to do so is a sign that the experiences do not come from God, but from demons or mental illness.⁹⁸ Other characteristics of the genuine mystic, according to Gerson, are patience and charity (*agape*). If these five spiritual fruits (humility, discretion, patience, truth, and charity) are not present in the character of the claimant, then the visions or revelations are not to be accepted as genuine.⁹⁹ Instead, demonic deception or melancholia¹⁰⁰ should be considered as their possible origins.

Contemporary beliefs in the reality of demons and their malevolent activities may seem strange to the modern mind; however, during the Early Modern period (in contrast to the Middle Ages), there was an upsurge in accusations of witchcraft and the use of familiar spirits in England. According to social anthropologist, Mary Douglas a fascination and fear of the occult occurs in societies where individuals have a low sense of personal power and feel tyrannized by forces outside of themselves and beyond their control. The source of these forces can be interpreted as supernatural and identified with malevolent entities such as witches and demons.¹⁰¹ Peter Brown further suggests that these periods of insecurity can occur when a society feels “challenged, through conflict, to uphold an image of itself in which everything that happens, happens through articulate channels only—where power springs from vested authority, where admiration is gained by conforming to recognized norms of behavior, where the gods are

⁹⁸ Ibid., 3.44.

⁹⁹ Ibid., Introduction. 49.

¹⁰⁰ Melancholia will be discussed later in more detail; however, it is worth noting here that physicians in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period believed that imbalances in the humors could cause an overabundance of black bile which could cause dreams, delusions, and hallucinations which could seem to be mystical but were not.

¹⁰¹ Mary Douglas, Introduction, *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), xxvi.

worshipped in public, and where wisdom is the exclusive preserve of the traditional educational machine.”¹⁰² Such is the situation in which England finds itself during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Power is consolidated first under the influential personalities of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I then under Cromwell. Under each of these regimes, organized political opposition becomes increasingly difficult; authority is disseminated from the top down and is given most often to those favored by people in power. The government controls worship and encourages an education which socializes as much as it teaches knowledge.

In England at this time, the term “witchcraft” was very loosely defined and could apply to any kind of magical or ritual activity which seemed to work through occult methods.¹⁰³ Therefore, the contemporary scientist performing experiments could just as easily be mistaken by the ignorant of performing occult activities as could the village “cunning woman” who healed with herbs and incantations. The label of “witch” was already “readily attached by Protestant polemicists to the ritual operations of the Catholic Church. Theologians invariably distrusted any claims to supernatural activity which their own religion did not authorize.”¹⁰⁴ For them, witchcraft did not have to involve malevolent magic but only heretical beliefs, and whether the witch hurt other people or not, death was deserved as punishment for being disloyal to God.¹⁰⁵ In

¹⁰² Peter Brown, “Sorcery, Demons, and the Rise of Christianity from Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages,” *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, Ed. Mary Douglas (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), 22.

¹⁰³ Keith Thomas, “Anthropology and the Study of English Witchcraft,” *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*. Ed. Mary Douglas (London: Tavistock, 1970), 48.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 49.

fact, current belief held that “those which seemed to be very religious people, and would constantly repair to Sermons near them” might actually be witches.¹⁰⁶

Contrary to what one may expect, it is the most highly educated individuals in England at the end of the sixteenth century who most strongly support a belief in the occult.¹⁰⁷ These educated individuals upheld and even propagated beliefs in witchcraft, creating in some instances a witch craze, the motivations of which should not be ignored. Hugh Trevor-Roper focuses on how the generally well organized and orderly cities of the early Renaissance were essentially transformed into princedoms.¹⁰⁸ The “extravagance of the rulers was sustained by a system of official corruption which threatened to sap the prosperity of the people. As the seventeenth century approached, their increasing splendour heightened the intrigue-ridden atmosphere of the court; great fortunes were made and spent, and great names met disaster.”¹⁰⁹ Below these rich and influential patrons were the ranks of clerics and court officials. Among these men were those intellectuals who steadfastly believed in the occult and feared the evil influence of witches: “These insecure competitors only too easily saw the universe as a counterpart of their society. Their cosmos was dominated, not by God as a spiritual equivalent of a mighty patron, but by other dangerous humans competing against them unfairly with demonic powers.”¹¹⁰ Peter Brown has found that the majority of writings about witchcraft were produced by those members of the society whose status was not fixed but achieved and, therefore, highly insecure, such as court

¹⁰⁶ Alan Macfarlane, “Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart Essex.” *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, Ed. Mary Douglas (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), 88; John Stearne, *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft* (London, 1648).

¹⁰⁷ Hugh Trevor-Roper, Chapter 3. *Religion, Reformation, and Social Change, and Other Essays*. (London: Melbourne Macmillan, 1967).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 46-89.

¹⁰⁹ Douglas, Mary, *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, xxxi.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xxxii.

officials and academics.¹¹¹ Where such beliefs are prominent, according to Brown, there are also “pockets of uncertainty and competition in a society increasingly committed to a vested hierarchy in church and state.”¹¹² Anyone who strayed from officially sanctioned methods of worship could be suspected and accused of occult practices just as could anyone whose rise to power seemed inexplicable to those who envied the position and the prestige.

When witchcraft beliefs are prominent, the motivations of both individuals and the community need to be examined. At the personal level, accusations of witchcraft may be motivated by a jealous desire to attack rivals when relationships are normally competitive.¹¹³ Both Cardinal Wosley and Anne Bolyn were accused of occult practices in bewitching Henry VIII in order to rise in his favor.¹¹⁴ Later, Oliver Cromwell would be suspected of making a pact with the Devil on the eve before the Battle of Worchester.¹¹⁵

Accusations may also be made in order to withdraw community protection and support from individuals with an anomalous position in society.¹¹⁶ For instance, an old widow may be accused of being a witch in order to justify not giving her alms. Alan Macfarlane found just this sort of situation occurring in sixteenth-century Essex where widows were dependent on begging from their neighbors, a situation which led to accusations of witchcraft and the resulting

¹¹¹ Brown, “Sorcery, Demons, and the Rise of Christianity,” 24.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹³ Mary Douglas, *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, xxv.

¹¹⁴ Thomas, “Anthropology and the Study of English Witchcraft,” 55; Alfred Frederick Pollard, *Wolsey* (London: Longman, Green, and Company, 1929), 101; *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, Ed. James Gairdner (1887), Vol. X, p. 70. *EBook*. (Burlington, Ontario: Tanner Ritchie Publications in Collaboration with the Library and Information Services of the University of St. Andrews, 2005).

¹¹⁵ Wilbur Cortez Abbott, *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937-1947), Vol. II, 458.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

withdrawal of aid.¹¹⁷ In 1617, Thomas Cooper “warned the godly...to forego indiscriminate charity and especially to be hard on suspected witches, ‘to bee straight-handed towards them, not to entertain them in our houses not to relieve them with our morsels.’”¹¹⁸ This example illustrates how, at the community level, accusations of witchcraft can result in the denial of communal support and responsibility. What specifically happens within that community when accusations of witchcraft are made depends on “the state of community politics and on what pattern of relationships need redefining at that time.”¹¹⁹ Generally, however, the result is a perception of “internal goodness attacked by external power.”¹²⁰ Douglas identifies two main patterns of belief which affect communal response. In the first, the accused witch is seen as an outsider, not really a true member of the community, and is thus renounced and expelled (sometimes with violent and fatal consequences as in the infamous witch burnings).¹²¹ Thus, the function of the accusation is to redefine the accused person’s relationship with the community.¹²² A literary example of the witch as a diabolically inspired outsider can be seen in the stage representation of the French mystic, Joan de Pucelle (Joan of Arc) in Shakespeare’s *Henry VI Part One*. Joan claims to have received prophetic visions from God, detailing how she is to help liberate the French people from English control. However, in the course of the drama, the source of her inspiration is revealed to be diabolical rather than holy. Shakespeare gives Joan a scene in which she attempts to call upon demonic aid promised to her by Satan in their contract; however, she is refused and left to face the English and her sentence of witchcraft and heresy alone. In this one stage representation is

¹¹⁷ MacFarlane, “Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart Essex,” 81-99.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 93-4; Thomas Cooper, *The Mystery of Witchcraft* (London, 1617).

¹¹⁹ Douglas, *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, xxv.

¹²⁰ Ibid., xxvi.

¹²¹ Ibid., xxvi.

combined, both the suspicion of the mystic as a demonically inspired witch masquerading in the guise of the righteous and of the identification of the witch as “Other,” especially an “Other” with whom one is engaged in a power struggle, in this case, control over France.

In the second pattern, the accused witch is recognized as a member of the community, but is seen as an internal enemy. Attacks upon fellow community members are usually identified by a particular list of signs, and the evidence of those signs becomes evidence of an attack on the community itself as much as on any single individual.¹²³ The accused witch may be seen as a member of a rival faction, a dangerous deviant, or an internal enemy with dangerous outside liaisons.¹²⁴ In the former, the purpose of the accusation then involves redefinition of faction boundaries, the realigning of hierarchies, or the forming of community splits.¹²⁵ However, if the accused witch is perceived as a dangerous deviant (as some mystics were), the function of the accusation then becomes the control of deviance in the name of community virtue.¹²⁶ Finally, if the accusations centered around what are perceived to be dangerous contacts with an outsider,

¹²³ Douglas, *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, xxvii.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid. Although she was not accused of witchcraft, the Beguine and French mystic, Marguerite Porete comes to mind as an example of this type of community dynamic. Because she dared to write her views concerning Divine Love in Old French rather than Latin and because those views were dangerously close to those of the Free Spirit movement, considered heretical at the time, Porete was accused of heresy and forced to watch the burning of her book, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. Commanded never to circulate the text again, Porete disobeyed and was convicted as a relapsed heretic after a lengthy trial. Refusing to recant her views, she was burned at the stake in 1310. Her conviction identified her as a former member of the community of Christ who had turned her back on the true faith and had become a dangerous deviant. In fact, the Inquisitor called her a “pseudo-mulier” (a fake woman) to emphasize this deviance from truth. As a heretic, she was perceived as attempting to corrupt the faithful through her writings; thus she was considered dangerous and deserving of permanent expulsion in order to protect the community from her influence. Ironically, after her death her work was translated into several languages and circulated anonymously, becoming widely popular in many countries including England.

then the function of the accusations may be to promote factional rivalry and splits or to redefine the hierarchy within the community itself.¹²⁷

Keith Thomas provides insights into the rise in English witchcraft accusations during the Reformation, suggesting that they correspond with the loss of certain Catholic practices which had previously helped people to deal with their personal problems and insecurities: confession, penance, absolution, exorcism and protective blessings.¹²⁸ The Catholic Church had provided specific methods for the faithful to protect themselves and their property from the suspected influence of malevolent forces, but when Protestantism in England declared these methods to be mere superstition and condemned them, believers were left with fewer options. They could practice previous methods of protection clandestinely, or they could resort to the law courts. Indeed, surviving records do show an upsurge in charges of witchcraft during this period.¹²⁹ In a like manner, traditional Catholic teachings on mysticism were now also labeled as superstitious and condemned as promoting “enthusiasm” and allowing for demonic deception of believers. Although they were not witches, mystics were, unfortunately, sometimes equated with witches and accused of practicing the black arts. In light of the previous discussion, the function of these accusations within sixteenth and seventeenth century English communities may have been based primarily on the religious and political insecurities inherent in that society and which stemmed from the rivalry between Protestant and Catholic factions. Leaders felt challenged to promote an image of the new Protestant government as being the sole source of legitimate authority and as

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Keith Thomas, “The Relevance of Social Anthropology to the Historical Study of English Witchcraft.” *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*. Ed. Mary Douglas. (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970.), 47-79.

¹²⁹ For a detailed statistical account of the number and types of witchcraft cases in Essex during the forty years after the institution of the Witchcraft Statue of 1563, see Macfarlane, “Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart Essex,” 81-99.

the center of all authorized forms of worship. Suspicions of rival influences could then result in accusations of treachery, heresy, and malevolent occult practices aimed at undermining rightful authority and harming believers in the true faith.

Historical theologian Bernard McGinn identifies the seventeenth century as “a watershed” era in which disputes over the nature and legitimacy of mysticism reached a crisis both internally and externally:

The role of the inner experience in accounts of mysticism finally seemed to implode as the concentration on the investigation of inner states, especially of rapture and union, became so dominant that it ruptured the connection between the mystical element and the broad context of Christian life. Mystics seemed to some observers, both then and now, to be creating a separate sphere of religion....

The internal crisis was exacerbated externally by the Enlightenment criticism of traditional forms of Christian belief and practice, something which helped undercut the world view that had nourished mysticism over the centuries.¹³⁰

Weakened by these blows, mysticism lost ground as an institutionally recognized and respected approach to worship even within Catholic Christianity. The Counter-Reformation of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries sought to stamp out heresies, especially those which seemed to promote rebellion against papal authority. As mystics claimed a relationship with the Divine through union and through numinous experiences, they were suspected of trying to bypass priestly intermediaries and of claiming authority for themselves via their direct communication with God. Especially under suspicion was any claim of prophetic or visionary experience. Mystics had to be careful in their writings to stress that these experiences were gifts of God, received by contemplatives at His discretion. They were never to be sought out, nor were they to be entirely trusted. No mystical experience was ever to be used as a reason to break away from

¹³⁰ Bernard McGinn, “Mysticism,” *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 24.

the Church or its teachings. Thus, mystics hoped to placate Inquisitors and allay any suspicion of heresy or rebellion.

However, the reputation of mysticism as a legitimate form of Christian worship was to receive a devastating blow at the end of the seventeenth century. In 1686, the popular Spanish mystic and Quietist, Miguel de Molinos was convicted of heresy after a lengthy and well-publicized trial surrounding his teachings concerning meditation,¹³¹ contemplation,¹³² and quietism.¹³³ The controversy centered on methods of prayer. Jesuit rivals accused Molinos of teaching against the benefits of meditation, which served a central role in their own *Spiritual Exercises* as taught by Ignatius of Loyola. They took offence at his teachings, accusing Molinos of denigrating meditation as a technique more suited for beginners while at the same time recommending contemplation as a more advanced method of prayer. They argued that he had led many to abandon meditations which had sustained them in the faith.¹³⁴ Molinos denied the

¹³¹ Meditation utilizes a variety of visual and imaginary images as aids to prayer. It also emphasizes the humanity of Christ, especially in his suffering and death.

¹³² Contemplation is an inwardly focused method of prayer. Instead of vocalizing memorized prayers such as those of the rosary, contemplatives actively listen for the still, quiet voice of God as He communicates directly with their spirits. Contemplatives often seek silence and solitude to avoid distractions during their prayer times.

¹³³ The term “Quietism” was coined by its opponents. It references the “prayer of silence,” a term used by St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and others, and denotes a prayer trend which taught interiorization, the need for the soul to be completely passive to God, an insistence on absolute purity of intention and practice, and a desire for the destruction of the self-will. Although this approach to spirituality had early roots in Christianity, it was condemned as a heresy by the Catholic Church in the seventeenth century for its teaching that sin was to be resisted but not actively fought. Opponents accused Quietists of advocating an internal religion liberated from external practices and suspected Quietists of giving in to all manner of temptations, many of them sexual. For a fuller discussion of Quietism see Bernard McGinn, “Miguel de Molinos and the Spiritual Guide: A Theological Reappraisal,” *Miguel de Molinos: The Spiritual Guide* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 21-39.

¹³⁴ Henry Charles Lea states that “it was found that in many nunneries in Rome, whose confessors had adopted his views, the inmates had cast was observed that at mass the mystic devotees did not raise their eyes at the elevation of the Host or gaze on the holy images, but pursued uninterruptedly their mental prayer.” Henry Charles Lea, “Molinos and the Italian Mystics,” *American Historical Review*, 11.2 (1906), 251.

allegations, stressing that while he did consider contemplation a more advanced method of prayer, he did not discourage the use of meditations among those to whom it was suited.

Supporters of Molino believed jealousy to be the root cause of the Jesuits' hostility.¹³⁵ How much of the animosity directed at Molinos was motivated by political rivalry has yet to be determined. Was he caught in power struggles beyond his control, struggles involving the place of mysticism within the Counter-Reformation? Henry Charles Lea described Molino's conviction and the condemnation of the Quietists as "the church's definitive break with mysticism *in toto*."¹³⁶ "Much that had been taught and practiced by the mystic saints" came under suspicion and "there was no saving clause to differentiate lawful and unlawful converse of the soul with the Creator."¹³⁷ While Lea may have been exaggerating a little, he is correct in that the Catholic Church's suppression of Quietism did bring into question many of the traditional mystical practices which had been taught for hundreds of years. The Counter-Reformation suspected any view that was not overtly subservient to papal authority as being Reformist, regardless of its history within the Catholic Church. In this climate of suspicion, even mystics such as St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross had to beware the way they presented mysticism in their writings and were subject to suspicion and investigation by the Inquisition. St. John of the Cross

¹³⁴ Robert P. Baird, "Miguel de Molinos: Life and Controversy," *Miguel de Molinos: The Spiritual Guide* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 13.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³⁴ Lea, "Molinos and the Italian Mystics," 260. They put "aside their rosaries and chaplets and depended wholly on contemplation. It was observed that at mass the mystic devotees did not raise their eyes at the elevation of the Host or gaze on the holy images, but pursued uninterruptedly their mental prayer" (*Ibid.*, 251).

¹³⁵ Baird, "Miguel de Molinos: Life and Controversy," 13.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³⁷ Lea, "Molinos and the Italian Mystics," 260.

spent many years in prison due to political rivalries before he managed to escape and flee to a place of refuge. Concerns about mysticism prompted the Counter-Reformation development of a “mystical science’ or a “science of contemplation” which systematically examined all of its teachings and tenets.¹³⁸

Molinos pleaded guilty to sixty-eight charges of heresy and admitted to committing improprieties with some of his penitents. However, his guilt almost immediately came into question because of the possibility that his admission may have been coerced via torture or the threat of torture.¹³⁹ He was condemned on the basis of his private teachings, not on the ideas expressed within his *Spiritual Guide*; nevertheless, his writings were banned by the Catholic Church. Ironically this ban and Molino’s reputation as the arch-heretic of mystical error caused his book to be widely disseminated amongst Protestants, especially those influenced by the Free Church movement.¹⁴⁰

This movement promoted the separation of church and state; supporters believed the State should not be allowed to determine church policy, nor should the Church be allowed to define State policy. Some Calvinists were sympathetic to this movement and to the Levellers who strove for religious tolerance, but not all. The English Reformation overall was a time when various Protestant groups formed, each advocating its own approach to worship, and each desiring the ability to practice its religious beliefs in its own way without persecution. Some pushed for reforms from the inside of the established church; others believed that reforms were hopeless and strove instead to set up new churches; all challenged the structure of church authority and thereby of state authority as well. Puritans in particular were not satisfied with the

¹³⁸ McGinn, “Miguel de Molinos and the Spiritual Guide: A Theological Reappraisal,” 26.

¹³⁹ Pacho, “Molinos (Michel de),” (1508) cited in Baird, “Miguel de Molinos: Life and Controversy,” 19.

¹⁴⁰ McGinn, “Miguel de Molinos and the Spiritual Guide: A Theological Reappraisal,” 22.

Reformation of the Church of England and pushed for further reforms, yet they could not agree on how much more reform was needed, nor could they agree on a uniform theory of church polity. Therefore, the number of different Protestant groups which formed during this period should come as no surprise, each pushing the boundaries of church structure and authority.

Under the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I, these splinter groups were contained by laws which severely restricted their practice of religion. Puritans were blocked from making any reforms within the established Church of England. Yet, they were gradually able to become a major political force through both parliamentary and commercial alliances. Calvinist Puritans under Cromwell became a driving force for political change during the English Civil War, questioning the divine right of kings and advocating the trial and execution of the English monarch, Charles I. For the next fifteen years, Puritan Calvinists became prominent in Parliament, yet their attempts at stricter religious and moral reform failed as did their attempts to forge a new national religion. The English who had backed Cromwell, hoping for strong reforms, were disappointed by the slow pace of change, and when Cromwell died in 1659, the pendulum of reform began to swing in the opposite direction. By 1662, the Restoration and the Uniformity Act had swept all Puritans out of government office and out of the Church of England.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the explosion of variety in Protestant approaches to Christianity, ideas like the separation of church and state and religious tolerance were spouted by many. Each group desired to be able to worship God according to its own religious views, but the tolerance it desired for itself did not always extend to others. One example is in the suppression of the Anabaptists by English Protestants during the reigns of both Elizabeth I and Edward VI because they were too radical and posed a threat to religious stability. Part of what made them dangerous was their belief in adult rather than infant baptism, another was the belief held by Inspirational Anabaptists that they had received direct revelation from the

Holy Spirit, a belief which state religions, such as the Church of England found dangerous, especially after the Anabaptist revolts in Zurich (1525), Munster (1534), and Amsterdam (1535). The leaders of these rebellions had claimed prophetic inspiration by visions from heaven. Although these self-proclaimed prophets were not mystics, the fact that they claimed having visions and revelations linked them with mystics in the popular imagination. If radical religious leaders claimed to be visionaries and prophets in order to provide a divine stamp of approval for their rebellions, then such manifestations of religious enthusiasm were dangerous and needed to be discouraged. Zealousness in any form was dangerous to the stability of the state established religion and needed to be quashed.

Lumped together with charismatic rebels, mystics who reported numinous experiences were once again under suspicion of rebelling against religious authority and of using visions and revelations as excuses to subvert established church doctrine and institutions. Of course, the legitimacy of their experiences was also called into question. Were they fraudulently presenting themselves as visionaries and prophets in order to promote their own agendas? Were they self-deceived? Were they eccentric personalities inspired by superstition? Jean Gerson had addressed these possibilities a century earlier in his treatise *On Distinguishing True from False Revelations*. Some people do indeed invent prophetic messages to serve their own ends. Others are self-deceived. Gerson presents a case in which one learned man was persuaded that he would be the pope, or if not the pope, then he would be the Antichrist's precursor. So distraught was he at the possibility that he might usher in such evil, the man tried to commit suicide. Thankfully, he did not succeed and was later healed of his delusions.¹⁴¹ Here, the connection between self-proclaimed prophetic knowledge and illegitimate forms of leadership is clear. Any vision or revelation which promises the recipient power and authority should be rejected until examined by

¹⁴¹ Gerson, *On Distinguishing True from False Revelations*, 336.

those with discernment. In this case, the source of the man's self-deception was not intentional fraud or conscious self-promotion but illness.

Those who proclaim fraudulent revelations or accept delusions as true and work to bring them to fruition, may attempt to convince others of their legitimacy. Gerson writes that some gullible people "ascribe to revelation even superstitious, vain, and illusory deeds and dreams of mad people, and they believe in the portents made up by those who are mentally ill or in depressed states of mind."¹⁴² Such blind faith and lack of discernment lead to deception. Those who believe self-promoting prophesies, particularly of charismatic individuals can indeed be swept into heresy or rebellion. Hence the danger is not in legitimate numinous experiences but in false ones, regardless of the source, promoted and believed without discrimination.

But how does one differentiate between the real and the ill? What methods are needed to discern when people were experiencing physical or mental illnesses rather than genuine mystical encounters with the divine? Gerson advises that all mystical claims need to be examined closely, for they could be the result of a brain injury or a melancholic temperament rather than true numinous experiences.¹⁴³ The safest course of action is always to initially reject any vision or revelation until it is examined by someone in authority with discernment, and the recipient "should think of such matters as resulting from an injury done to the imagination and should worry about being ill in the way that insane, maniac, or depressive people are."¹⁴⁴ Only after the experience has been verified as truly divine in origin should the person then accept it as anything other than suspect:

¹⁴² Ibid., 338.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 347.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 339.

It happens then through mania or rage or other melancholy passions that phantasms become so deeply rooted and buried in the brain that they are thought to be true objects that appear outside the mind. A person believes that he or she can see or touch that which the external senses in no way perceive. This passion becomes stronger until sometimes in this insanity a person will judge himself to be something else than he or she is. Such a person has been found who believed he was a purple fish; another thought he was a cock; another an ass; yet another thought he was dead. Some doctors think that Nebuchadnezzar was struck by this illness, so that he thought he was a wild animal who had failed to put on an animal's body (cf. Dn 4:1-34). Medical books are full of such monstrous apparitions and disturbances in the power of judgment resulting from injury to the interior powers. Concerning such people, Jerome says that they are more in need of the remedies of Hippocrates than the counsel of others.¹⁴⁵

Hippocrates established that disease is a natural process and is not caused by supernatural factors as was believed by previous physicians. He reasoned that since the pathology of disease is natural, then symptoms would logically be the body's reaction to the illness.¹⁴⁶ According to Hippocrates when black bile is out of proportion with the other three humors, the result is pain and disease (*dyscrasia*).¹⁴⁷ Physiologically, melancholia had many avenues through which to influence the human body: the constellations in the sky, the planets, the hours of the day, the seasons of the year, the direction of the winds, the location of a town and its water source, the complexion of the body, and even the food and drink that a person consumes. In his *Regimen in Health*, Hippocrates taught that foods were governed by the humors and eating too much of any food governed by black bile could cause an imbalance leading to *dyscrasia*, especially if that person already has a melancholic temperament.¹⁴⁸ Treatments might include phlebotomy to drain

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 345-346.

¹⁴⁶ Castiglione Arturo, *A History of Medicine*, Tr. and Ed. E. B. Krumbhaar, 1941 (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1946), 151.

¹⁴⁷ Hippocrates, *Nature of Man, Hippocrates*, Tr. W. H. S. Jones, Vol. 4. 1931 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 11-13.

¹⁴⁸ Hippocrates, *Regimen in Health, Hippocrates*, Tr. W. H. S. Jones, Vol. 4. 1931, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 196.), 47-49; Erwin H. Ackernecht, *A Short History of Medicine* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1955, Revised Printing, 1968), 64.

away the excess black bile, dietary restrictions to weaken the cold and dry humor while increasing the strength of the hot and moist, or purgatives (emetics and laxatives) to help rid the body of superfluity of melancholia.¹⁴⁹

Physicians attributed this humor with causing a great number of diseases ranging from fevers to epilepsy to cancer.¹⁵⁰ Physicians placed so much emphasis on black bile in determining the pathology and treatment of disease that it very early became the first of the four humors to become associated with psychological characteristics.¹⁵¹ Melancholia, still considered by physicians in terms of disease, came to occupy a dual position. Klibansky describes this situation:

Unlike the others, the illness called “melancholia” was one mainly characterized by symptoms of mental change, ranging from fear, misanthropy and depression, to madness in its most frightful forms. Later, melancholia could equally well be defined as a bodily illness with mental repercussions or as a “*permixto rationis*” of physical origin; a peculiarity which must have considerably facilitated the process of separating the merely melancholic temperament from melancholic illness.¹⁵²

Black bile was a sinister substance causing “clouding of consciousness, depression, fear and delusions, and finally the dread lycanthropy which drove its victims through the night as howling, ravening wolves.”¹⁵³ Although Hippocrates believed that the cold, dry complexion produced the

¹⁴⁹ Guido Majno, *The Healing Hand: Man and Wound in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975, 1982), 179.

¹⁵⁰ E. D. Phillips, *Aspects of Greek Medicine* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1973), 177-178; Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Saxl Fritz, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 18.

¹⁵¹ Klibansky, *Saturn and Melancholy*, 14.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 15.

highest intelligence and best memory, an imbalance could cause the soul to be too quick.¹⁵⁴ He describes people of this type [as] inevitably suffer[ing] from dreams. They are called ‘half-mad’; their condition, in fact, is next door to madness, as even a slight untold inflammation results in madness.”¹⁵⁵ Gerson refers to people like these in his treatise *On Distinguishing True from False Revelations*. They believe that they are receiving visions and revelations from God, but in reality they are suffering from delusions brought on by a superfluity of black bile. The extremes of fasting practiced by some contemplatives were believed to be just as likely as drunken overeating to produce “incurable illness from brain damage and mental disorder.”¹⁵⁶ These practices disturbed both the senses and the mind, resulting in a madness betrayed by a terrible trembling in the face and eyes.¹⁵⁷

Pathology could produce pseudo-mystical experiences, yet mystical experiences were not necessarily always linked to pathology. It was the differentiation between the two which concerned Roman Catholic authorities such as Gerson. Madness joined a long list of suspicions connected with mystics both within the Catholic Church and within Protestant denominations. These concerns find popular expression in the transforming perceptions of mysticism in Early Modern England. Whereas authentic traditions were being ignored or suppressed, a plethora of false mystics became the subject of popular literature and drama. Contemporary poetry, such as Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, presents evil sorcerers masquerading as holy contemplatives, casting

¹⁵⁴ Hippocrates, *Regimen, Hippocrates*, Tr. W. H. S. Jones, Vol. 4. 1931 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), I. xxxv. 281-283.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 291.

¹⁵⁶ Gerson, *On Distinguishing True from False Revelations*, 345.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 345-6.

spells and calling up demons. Drama gives us mystics as either demon-possessed frauds and heretics or as grief-stricken lunatics, mad with guilt and shame.

Conclusion

Even when recognized as a long established part of Christianity and not as a religious sect unto itself, mysticism, as the “direct intuitive experience of God” still carries the stigmas attached to it via suspected connections with mental illness, heretical doctrines, and counterfeit approaches to Christian spirituality.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, authentic Christian mystics of both today and of the past share certain characteristics. They are drawn to seek God and are not satisfied merely with knowledge about God. Thus they are intrinsically motivated, spiritually committed individuals even though they may not be committed to a particular religious institution. Hence, they can be seen as stepping outside of the boundaries of established religious authority, a position which is often interpreted negatively. In addition, mystics usually have the ability to see themselves objectively and to acknowledge the darker side of their natures, yet they desire to shed these negative aspects of themselves and are receptive to encounters with the Divine. These moments of Divine union are believed to be initiated by God and are usually brief and life-changing, instilling an impulse toward virtue and an increase in compassion, joy, and other fruit of the Spirit. Even though Divine union is a gift of God, some researchers believe that the inclination toward mystical approaches to spirituality may be part of the temperament with which an individual was born and which has been influenced by several levels of socialization: familial, communal, and national. Pressures from these various levels of influence can either encourage

¹⁵⁸ Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystics of the Church* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 9.

these mystical inclinations to grow, or they can stifle them, at least until they are brought to the surface through some traumatic event, such as illness or a brush with death.

Although contemplation is the traditionally accepted vehicle of preparation for Divine union, Protestants may experience mystical and numinous phenomena without the benefit of any such preparation. Sometimes alarmed by their experiences and unsure of how to interpret them, mystics might not be willing to discuss the details of their personal encounters with God, yet their experiences may compel them towards study in an attempt to more fully understand them and learn whether or not to accept the validity of the numinous phenomena which may have accompanied them. To these ends, Christian mystics may be drawn to the scriptures, especially to the Psalms and to the Song of Songs. They may also be drawn to the writings of spiritual authorities and of other mystics. Sometimes, as will be seen in the following chapters, mystics will be compelled to write, exploring their experiences in a variety of ways: poetry, spiritual allegory, scriptural exegesis, and mystagogical treatises among others. Their writings, as well as their claims of direct experiences of God's presence and of various numinous phenomena which may be associated with these experiences, have been at the center of controversies regarding mysticism and the validity of its approaches to spirituality. Mystics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in particular were often charged with attempting to subvert "natural" and institutional hierarchies between men and women, between clergy and laity, between a Christian and the Divine. They have been accused of "enthusiasm" and of fomenting rebellions against established authority, of heretical doctrine, of vanity and of self-promotion, of superstition and of occult practices, of religious melancholia and of madness. Nevertheless, mystics and mysticism did not die out under these pressures during the Early Modern period, rather they transformed. Protestant mystics, especially those who were either unwilling or unable to access traditional Catholic mystical texts, adapted mysticism within the context of their own denominations and

approaches to spirituality. These adaptations are often flavored by the individual mystic's special interests and talents. The following chapters will examine some of these Protestant mystics and the ways in which they transformed mysticism.

CHAPTER III
APPROACHING THE DIVINE: THE MYSTAGOGICAL MANUALS OF
BENET OF CANFIELD AND AUGUSTINE BAKER

We must not be too strict in our identification of the grades of education [of mysticism] with the stages of growth. This education, rightly understood, is one coherent process: it consists in a steady and voluntary surrender of the awakened consciousness, its feeling, thought, and will, to the play of those transcendental influences, that flowing vitality, which it conceives of as divine.

—Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (310)

Immediate, Post-Reformation piety of the Church of England is expressed in the *Book of Common Prayer* (1549), which attempts to unify the officially sanctioned religion in the midst of pressures exerted on it from opposing forces including not just Catholics but Protestants as well. Those like the Laudians, who maintained a deep commitment to the liturgy and to the sacraments, believed The Middle Way went too far in its reforms. Puritans, on the other hand, did not believe it went far enough to remove the perceived superstitions and idolatries of the Roman Catholic Church.

The prevailing temperament of the time demanded a clear, theological rationale and intuitive forms of devotion were already coming under suspicion. Approaches to spirituality and forms of prayer which had been considered orthodox in the past, were now coming under scrutiny on both sides of the religious divide, and any approach to worship which appeared to encourage bypassing or undermining established religious authority came under suspicion. The Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church both grew increasingly wary of intuitive forms of devotion. The Middle Way encouraged a rational Christianity and discouraged forms of religious

enthusiasm as well as claims of divine inspiration. Likewise, the Counter-Reformation became increasingly wary of the prayer of contemplation and internal prayer.¹ Both sides began discouraging claims of prophesies, visions, and revelatory dreams. As these numinous experiences are part of the initial stages of higher contemplation, the inevitable result was that traditional forms of mysticism which sought either intuitive or direct experience of the Divine became suspected of promoting “enthusiasm” and allowing for the deception of believers.

The Protestant Reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) was the first to use the term “enthusiast” (*schwärmer*) to describe believers who elevated their own personal religious experiences over the literal words of Scripture.² He meant the term as a derogatory label for radical religious reformers like Thomas Muntzer (c. 1489-1525), the Zwickau prophets (1522), and Andreas Karlstadt (c. 1480-1541) who had all used claims of divine visions and revelations as justification in their rebellions.³ Later critics of enthusiasm would regard the Great Rebellion

¹ The Counter-Reformation (1545-1648) was the Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation and instigated a period of renewal and reform within the Roman Catholic Church. These revitalization efforts took the form of spiritual movements which encouraged a devotional life and a personal relationship with Christ. They also emphasized the reformation of religious orders, encouraging their return to spiritual foundations. One of the aims of the Counter-Reformation was the reconversion of Protestants, another was the cleansing of the Roman Church itself of any heretical or schismatic elements, a task which was assigned to the Roman Inquisition. The Counter-Reformation also gave birth to Baroque Art. For more information on the Counter-Reformation, see Martin D. W. Jones, *The Counter-Reformation: Religion and Society in early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

² Luther used the term “schwärmer” which translates as “someone who is enthusiastic”; the word carries connotations of fanaticism. On Luther’s attitude toward radical reformers such as Thomas Muntzer, the Zwickau prophets, and Andreas Carlstadt see Karl Holl, “Luther und die Schärmer,” *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1927), 1, 420-67; Wilhelm Mauer, “Luther und die Schärmer,” *Schriften des Theologischen Konvents Augsburger Bekenntnisses*, VI (1952), 7-27; Steck, Karl Gerhard, *Luther und die Schärmer* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1955).

³ Peter Harrison, “Enthusiasm,” *Europe, 1450-1789: Encyclopedia of the Early Modern World*. 2004. *Encyclopedia.com* (Accessed 4 Oct. 2015).

(English Civil Wars 1642-1651) as another series of events which exemplified the dangers of unchecked religious zeal.⁴

Most responses to the perceived problem of enthusiasm stressed the need for private religious experience to be moderated by reason or constrained by the authorities of tradition or Scripture. Of these, reason was the major beneficiary of the fear of enthusiastic excess. Champions of reason claimed that a reasonable religion suffered from neither the corruptions to which tradition was susceptible nor the difficulties associated with the interpretation of Scripture. For its promoters, moreover, the religion of reason also promoted religious concord, for in its simplest form, it contained only fundamental doctrines on which all, at least in principle, could agree. The seventeenth-century tendency toward rational religion can be regarded, at least in part, as a reaction against the putative dangers of enthusiasm.⁵

“Enthusiasm” was feared to foment rebellion, claiming divine sanction against established hierarchical authority. Leaders of both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church wanted to stem further rebellion, perceiving the prophesies, visions, and revelations of “enthusiasts” to have their source in political ambition or demonic deception rather than in divine inspiration. Thus, anyone who claimed either a direct or intuitive encounter with the divine was open to accusations of counterfeit spirituality, deception, and heresy. As such charges assume deviance from accepted forms of religious worship, it is but a small step from heresy and demonic deception to charges of malevolent occult practices aimed at undermining rightful authority and harming believers.⁶ Although traditional Christian mysticism in no way involves the black arts, mystics during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries found themselves

⁴ Ibid. For an examination of the reactions against enthusiasm and how they provide important background for the Enlightenment see Michael Heyd, *“Be Sober and Reasonable”*: *The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995).

⁵ Harrison, “Enthusiasm.” The classic study of religious enthusiasm in Early Modern England is that of Ronald Knox’s *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion with Special Reference to the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950). For more information on the changes in meaning of “enthusiasm” see Susie I. Tucker, *Enthusiasm: A Study in Semantic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

⁶ Douglas, *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, xxvii.

more and more in danger of accusations of witchcraft. Outward piety became suspected of disguising inward rebellion, and those who seemed religious were sometimes accused of being witches in disguise.

During the Early Modern period there was a dramatic upsurge in accusations of witchcraft. Often it was the most educated members of a community, such as religious leaders, who were the instigators of such accusations, motivated by the perceived dangers presented by insidious challenges to the authority of the established hierarchy.⁷ When either a society or an institution feels challenged to defend its authority and when that authority demands the control of its members through specific, official channels, submission to that authority and conformity to its demands are valued. Any deviation can be seen as dangerous and thus met with resistance.

When a society or an institution controls religious worship, any approach to spirituality which appears to bypass normal channels can come under close scrutiny. Leaders feel challenged to promote an image of their church as being the sole source of legitimate authority and as the center of all authorized forms of worship. Accusations of witchcraft are aimed at controlling deviants who threaten that proper order. Protection and support can be legitimately withdrawn from such individuals, either forcing them to conform or leading to their eventual elimination from the community. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this could mean exile or execution. Thus accusations of witchcraft can function to redefine a mystic's relationship with a community, even to the point of threatening life itself.

To avoid such threats, mystics had to be careful to articulate clearly that they believed that any numinous experience which undermined the established hierarchical authority was not to be trusted, nor should any experience be used as a reason to break away from the officially

⁷ Hugh Trevor-Roper, "Chapter 3," *Religion, Reformation, and Social Change, and Other Essays*. (London: Melbourne Macmillan, 1967).

sanctioned church or its teachings. If they did not, they could find themselves accused of heresy and occult practices. Even when they did, they were not safe from investigation.

Writers of mysticism, in particular mystagogical manuals, could find themselves accused of deceiving their readers with heretical doctrines and encouraging enthusiasm. One such writer, Benet of Canfield (1562-1610), chose to become Catholic after a numinous encounter with the Divine. Driven to understand his experience, in this case a prophetic vision, he turned toward a faith which had in the past accepted and explained such numinous encounters as a living and vibrant part of Christianity. Joining the Capuchin Order, Benet had access to traditional manuals written by mystical authors whom he studied in order better to understand the meaning and significance of his experience. He would later write his own manual, *The Scale of Perfection*, using the Ramist dialectical methods in which he had been trained as a lawyer in London. These methods of organizing and presenting information breathed fresh life into these traditional teachings making them easier for a contemporary audience, both lay and religious, to study and apply. As a result, his *Rule of Perfection* became very popular among both Catholics and Protestants, both in England and on the continent, going through many editions and translations.

This cross-confessional popularity among both Catholics and Protestants caused some leaders within the Capuchin order to take a second look at Benet's teachings, especially since he advocated passive contemplation. Within the pages of his manual, Benet suggests that the active and contemplative lives need not be divided as sharply as most traditional mystical writers teach. Perhaps based on his own experiences, he describes the unitive way as containing two paths leading to divine union, one active and one passive. The first is the accepted contemplative approach involving years of study, prayer, and meditation. The second is more controversial, allowing for both lay persons and religious living active lives to be drawn to God and receive

Divine union. It was this particular teaching, although entirely orthodox, which some officials feared could lead to demonic deception among the unwary, both religious and laymen.

During his life, Benet and his writings were exonerated; however, decades after his death, spiritual directors at a convent in Louviers, France were accused of using Benet's teachings to deceive the nuns and introduce diabolical doctrines. Several of the sisters were accused of witchcraft and of participating in satanic rituals; others were believed to be possessed by demons because of dabbling in intuitive forms of devotion. Whether or not the accusations were true, the resulting scandals changed contemporary perceptions of mysticism for both Catholics and Protestants alike.

Another recusant mystagogical writer, Augustine Baker, faced similar scrutiny. After his life was saved by what he believed to be a miraculous encounter with the Divine, Baker reconsidered his lackluster spiritual life and converted to Catholicism. He, like Benet of Canfield, studied Catholic mystagogical manuals in an attempt to understand his experience, and he too eventually felt led to write his own texts. In doing so, Baker drew upon his previous learning at the Inns of Court in London where he, again like Benet, had trained to be a lawyer. Using his expertise, he clarified and consolidated material from a variety of authors, both English and continental. The result was a collection of treatises which drew the suspicions of some of his fellow Benedictines, for according to David Lunn, he "advocated a style of prayer that could be lived in any walk of life but refused to be confined to any closed system. This prayer is anarchic; it places its persevering practitioners in direct relationship to God, without benefit of clergy."⁸ The problem was that Baker was advocating an approach to spiritual direction which was

⁸ David Lunn, *The English Benedictines, 1540-1688: From Reformation to Revolution*, (London: Burns and Oates, 1980), 217.

noninterventionist and a spiritual method which was liberating at a time when the Counter-Reformation Church recommended greater clerical regulation.⁹

Baker's original works had been written at the request of the nuns at a convent in Cambrai to aid them as they practiced contemplation and internal prayer. Yet, leaders within the Benedictine Order began to scrutinize his teachings. The nuns at Cambrai were never accused of witchcraft or demonic possession, but certain members of that convent, including the abbess, were accused of failing to submit to proper authority when they refused to hand over Baker's original manuscripts as ordered. They knew that the texts would be censored and the offending passages on internal prayer removed; thus they refused to cooperate.

Like Benet of Canfield, both Baker and his writings were exonerated in his lifetime, only to have the charges be brought up again after his death. This time, they were aimed at Baker's posthumous collaborator, Serenus Cressy. Cressy was a fellow recusant who, as an Anglican minister, had been drawn to the mystic way through Baker's writings. Compiling forty of these treatises into a single volume, Cressy arranged and reformatted Baker's materials, creating a manual which was both clear and accessible. Because of the new format, he was first accused of introducing new doctrine, then of providing open access to dangerous (if orthodox) teachings. The fear was that Baker's writings on internal prayer would confuse the unlearned and aid enthusiasts who would use such knowledge to claim divine sanction for their reforms and schisms.

Both Baker and Cressy were also attacked by Anglicans who accused them of enthusiasm and who saw mysticism, especially internal prayer and Divine union, as irrational and superstitious. The new emphasis on reasoning and empirical thought found offensive the idea of a

⁹ Claire Walker, "The English Benedictine Nuns and the Baker Manuscript." *Women, Property, and the Letters of the Law in Early Modern England*. Ed. Nancy E. Wright, Margaret w. Ferguson, and A. R. Buck. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 240.

God who was beyond human comprehension. Science was becoming the fashionable trend and natural theology, which was speculative and ratiocinating, found mysticism to be arcane and unreasonable. Nevertheless, despite the attacks from both sides of the religious divide, mysticism survived, especially among those who thirsted for a deep, meaningful, affective relationship with the Divine. Baker's writings and the approach to spirituality which he fostered addressed those needs, encouraging individuals to seek a devotional path suited to their temperament, and adapted to their personal abilities. His noninterventionist approach taught practitioners how to seek a deeper relationship with God for themselves, without the need of external control. In doing so, he pushed against contemporary pressures to conform to set forms of prayer and empirical methods of thinking. Thus, while his teachings drew upon traditional mysticism, he adapted it to the needs of contemporary believers.

Examining the reaction of both Benet's and Baker's contemporaries and the accusations made against both the writers and their texts reveals the tensions which existed between mysticism, an intuitive approach to devotion, and the more ratiocinating and speculative forms of worship which were becoming predominant during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It also reveals the insecurities held of some officials within both the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England, insecurities concerning the undermining or bypassing of what they regarded to be the proper order of authority within their respective religious institutions. These insecurities would lead to attempts at more and more stringent control, and the consequences both for mystics and for others who were drawn to more intuitive forms of worship could be severe.

Benet Canfield (1562/3-1611)

Benet Canfield was born William Fitch, the third son of William Fitch in Little Canfield, Essex. He was brought up Puritan, and matriculated at age seventeen from Cambridge,

which the Puritans favored over Oxford. In 1580, he entered the Middle Temple in London in order to study common law and resided there for the next six years. It was at the Inns of Court that he had his first numinous experience. It started with a trip to the countryside. William loved to hunt, and he loved to read, so he always kept a book with him in his pocket. On one hunting trip with friends, he had selected to bring a Protestant version of the Jesuit Robert Person's *First Book of Christian Exercise*.¹⁰ What he read caused him to resolve to change his life; it also caused him to reconsider whether he should remain Protestant or convert to Catholicism. During his struggle of conscience, he received a vision in which he found himself strolling through the fields one evening. In the field, he saw a troop of horses which were replaced by two successive companies of poor men. The first were clad in brown, the second in habits of whitish grey. William tried to join the second company, but as he advanced toward them, they would withdraw from him. Finally, one lingered and beckoned to William to follow him into a secluded area of the field.¹¹ The meaning of this vision was later revealed to William: the field of horses represents the concupiscence of the world. The two companies of men are two orders of Franciscans: The Capuchins (who wear brown habits) and the Cordeliers, now known as Observants, who wear grey. It was a Cordelier who beckoned him and who guided him toward an eremitical Order of Capuchins.¹²

¹⁰ Person's originally Catholic text had been converted by Edmund Bunny and titled, *A Book of Christian Exercise appertaining to Resolution, by R.P Perused and accompanied now with a treatise tending to Pacification* (London, 1584).

¹¹ Brousse, Jacque. *La Vie, conversion, et conversation miraculeuse de reverend père Benoist de Canfield Anglois* (Paris, 1621), 103-5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 123-4.

Guided by this vision, William travelled the next day, 1 August 1585, to Newgate where he found a priest named Robert Darbyshire who was imprisoned there.¹³ It was at Newgate with the help of the priest that William converted to Catholicism, and shortly thereafter he fled to France, so he could practice his new faith openly. In March 1587, he became a Capuchin friar at the convent of St. Honoré in Paris and received the name Benet, which means “blessed.”¹⁴ Since he was from Little Canfield, he became known simply as Benet of Canfield.

The Capuchins are a reformed order of the Franciscans founded in the early part of the sixteenth century, so in Benet’s time they were still fairly new. They desired to reform the clergy and wanted to return their order to the original teachings of their founder, St. Francis of Assisi, who was himself a mystic and a stigmatic.¹⁵ Like St. Francis, the Capuchin monks practice extremes of poverty and asceticism, two traditional elements of the first stage of the unitive way. Benet progressed rapidly through this stage, spending most of his novitiate experiencing the numinous manifestations usually associated with the second stage of Illumination. As it was quite unusual for novices to experience repeated semi-ecstatic states, both his superiors and his fellow brethren were suspicious. According to the accepted traditions of contemplation, mystical manifestations are reserved for those who are more advanced, but here was a novice who seemed to be experiencing what even mature members of their Order had not. Concerned that he might be

¹³ Kent Emory, Jr., *Renaissance Dialectic and Renaissance Piety Benet of Canfield’s Rule of Perfection: A Translation and Study* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1987), 16.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*; Benet is a variant form of Benedict. For the meaning of the name see Kathy Ishizuka’s *10,000 Names for Your Baby*. (New York: Dell, 1997), 24.

¹⁵ George Sitwell, “Benet Canfield.” *Pre-Reformation English Spirituality*. Ed. James Walsh (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 1965), 243.

suffering from melancholy, they subjected him to medical treatments such as laying freshly killed and split pigeons on the top of his head.¹⁶

Benet himself strove earnestly to understand what was happening to him; as a result, he progressed rapidly, shedding the initial physical manifestations of ecstasy and advancing to a condition of perfect spiritual balance and maturity. It was one of the ecstatic visions which he had during his time as a novice from which he later derived his *Rule of Perfection*, a simplified guide through the stages of the unitive way which anyone, lay or clergy, could study.¹⁷

To construct this simplified guide, Benet used Ramist dialectical methods which he learned while he was studying at the Inns of Court in London.¹⁸ According to Louis Knafka, “the crucial period in the use of dialect at the Inns is...the 1560’s-1580’s. However, this does not show up in the printed literature until the early seventeenth century, and then from men who were educated in the Elizabethan period.”¹⁹ Benet of Canfield is no exception, as he studied at the Inns

¹⁶ Ibid. In Donne’s *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, this same avian remedy is applied to his feet. In Medieval and Early Modern humoral medicine, the dove is a medicinal bird which, according to Bartholomaeus causes “heate of bloud and ripen(s) postumate humoures” (Bartholomaeus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, 181). The bird was often used to treat melancholia: “The flesh splitted hot, and layd to anye part of the bodye, draweth the humour, where the Phisition will” (Ibid.). For more information, see Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *Batman vppon Bartholome his booke De proprietatibus rerum, newly corrected, enlarged and amended: with such additions as are requisite, vnto euery seuerall booke: taken forth of the most approued authors, the like heretofore not translated in English. Profitable for all estates, as well for the benefit of the mind as the bodie*, Trans. John Trevisa, Ed. Stephen Batman (London: Imprinted by Thomas East, dwelling by Paules Wharfe, 1582), 179-181, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, *Early English Books Online*. Retrieved 9 March 2016
<http://eebo.chadwyck.com/libproxy.uncg.edu/search/full_rec?SOURCE=config.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=99842337>.

¹⁷ Emory, *Renaissance Dialectic and Renaissance Piety*, 15.

¹⁸ Ramistic dialectical methods are based on the teachings of Pierre de la Rameé, known by his students as Petrus Ramus (1515-1572). For more information on his ideas and his contributions to rhetoric, see Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, eds., “Peter Ramus (1515-1572),” *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 557-583.

¹⁹ Quoted from a personal letter to Kent Emory, Jr., April 1981 and printed in *Renaissance Dialectic and Renaissance Piety: Benet of Canfield’s Rule of Perfection: A Translation and Study* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1987), 44.

of Court in the 1580's but did not publish the authorized version of his *Rule of Perfection* until 1609-1610. Ramist principles of invention, such as the use of topics, were regularly applied to the study of law at the Inns of Court when Benet studied there, and the Ramist practice of dividing the whole into parts to better analyze and understand it was a practice used by the law students to expound their Readings.²⁰ In addition, Ramus' principles reinforced the use of a plain style, unadorned simplicity, which produces writing of perspicuity and brevity. Protestants, and Puritans in particular, wholeheartedly embraced this plain style since it eschewed rhetorical embellishments which could interfere with the communication of Truth from the Word and the mind of God through the scriptures and the corporeal words on their pages, to the mind of the individual.

Benet uses Ramist methods in his *Rule of Perfection*. In the subtitle of his work, he states that it contains "a brief but perspicuous abridgement of the whole spiritual life, reduced to the single point of the will of God."²¹ He uses the Ramist rule of opposition in order to juxtapose God and humanity to show the nature of each more clearly. Kent Emory, Jr. observes that the "logic of opposites...governs the discourse.... In the mystical life, God is known through the pair of most extreme opposition, all and nothing, which is perceived either experientially (passive annihilation), reasonably (active annihilation), or imaginatively (contemplation of the Passion)."²² Benet's use of Ramist methods favored by Protestants to organize traditional, Catholic mystical

²⁰ Petrus Ramus, *Dialectique* (1555). Ed. Michel Dassonville. (Genève: LibrairieDroz, 1964.), 89-93. For more information about rhetoric and dialectic at the Inns at Court see Richard J. Schoeck, "Lawyers and Rhetoric in Sixteenth-Century England." *Renaissance Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Renaissance Rhetoric*. Ed. James J. Murphy. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 274-291; Richard J. Schoeck, "Rhetoric and Law in Sixteenth-Century England." *Studies in Philology* 50 (1953): 110-27.

²¹ Emory, *Renaissance Dialectic and Renaissance Piety*, 89.

²² *Ibid.*, 42.

theology is unusual. However, having learned dialectic and the use of topics at the Inns of Court, he successfully applies that knowledge in his attempt to create a simple, brief manual which envisions the will of God as the central point of mysticism and divides that will into three parts, not because he believed that the will of God could be divided, but because such a division makes understanding of the unitive way more accessible to both laypersons and religious.

Benet may have even seen in Ramus' theories a kinship with mysticism for "through invention dialectic discovers, and through judgment it exposes the hidden, real order of the 'works of the sempiternal and divine wisdom.' God's wisdom thus revealed creates wonder (*admiratio*) in [humans], and causes [them] to praise God and to be violently attracted to religion" just as Benet himself had experienced.²³ Not only that, but "the art of dialectic elevates [the human] spirit from the shadows (*umbrae*) of sensible things to their intelligible, abstract 'images,' which are 'rays of the divine light' and images of the 'divine mind' itself."²⁴ The similarity to mystical imagery of the unitive way is fairly obvious, and suggests the applicability of Ramist dialectic to Benet's goal, simplifying mystical theology and making it accessible in plain language to all people from all walks of life, both active and contemplative.

For his content, Benet drew upon the mystical texts which were taught to novices at St. Honoré. As Bonaventure was the authoritative Franciscan theologian, his collected works would have been among these texts. Also included would have been the *Mystica theologica*²⁵ and *De septem itineribus aeternitatis* which distilled the contemplative doctrines of Church Fathers and

²³ Ibid., 39. Emory quotes from Petrus Ramus. *Dialecticae institutiones*. (Paris, 1543). Reprint. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann, 1964), ff. 35r-v.

²⁴ Ibid., 39. Emory quotes from Petrus Ramus. *Dialecticae institutiones*. (Paris, 1543). Reprint. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann, 1964), ff. 35v-36v.

²⁵ This thirteenth century text was written by Hugh of Balma and falsely attributed to Bonaventure and collected with his other works.

mystics such as Origen, Augustine, Thomas Gallus, Hugh and Richard of St. Victor, and Grosette²⁶ as well as the writings of other continental mystics such as Jan van Ruusbroec, Henry Harp (Harpius), Catherine of Genoa, and the anonymous author of *Breve compendio di perfezione cristiana*.²⁷ In addition, Benet became very much aware of the mystical tradition of England. Among his few possessions was a personal copy of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and there are hints in his *Rule* that he was familiar with the *Showings* of Julian of Norwich and of Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*.²⁸

He wrote his own *Rule of Perfection* in the 1590s, and the first manuscripts began circulating in France in 1593, a year or two after he became an ordained priest. In 1599, Benet travelled back to England as a missionary but was arrested immediately upon arrival. He and his travelling companion, a fellow priest named John Chrysostom Campbell, spent the next few years in prison. During this time, Benet translated the first two sections of his *Rule of Perfection* into English.²⁹ These sections deal with learning to conform perfectly to the will of God as it is externally manifested through lawful authority and internally manifested through various inspirations and illuminations.³⁰ However, he did not translate the third part because he “thought an English audience, even an exiled monastic one, incapable of the teachings...for they are hardly typical of English spirituality of the Counter-Reformation.”³¹ These teachings draw upon

²⁶ Although attributed to Bonaventure, this text is actually the fourteenth century work of Rudolph of Biberach (ca. 1360).

²⁷ This list of works studied by Benet is derived from one compiled by Kent Emory, Jr. in his *Renaissance Dialectic and Renaissance Piety*, 16.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 21.

³⁰ Sitwell, “Benet Canfield,” 244-247.

³¹ Emory, *Renaissance Dialectic and Renaissance Piety*, 17.

traditional approaches to Divine union; however, unlike most previous writers, Benet does not reserve Divine union only for those who can dedicate themselves fully to contemplation. Instead he maintains that one can be in a state of Divine union while engaged in active life. Walter Hilton had written about the possibility of living a mixed life, and numerous mystics, such as Catherine of Sienna and Hildegard of Bingen, exemplified this possibility; however, most writings about mysticism sharply divide the active life in the world and the contemplative life of prayer. Benet, in contrast, stresses that contemplation can still achieve union while engaged in active life and condemns those who would use contemplation as an excuse for avoiding going out into the world and helping people by doing good works.³²

Because of his concerns that contemporary English readers, both lay and monastic, might misunderstand and misapply the third part of his *Rule of Perfection*,³³ Benet did not publish a complete version of all three parts of his work until 1609 when he did so at the request of his superiors. The authorized version was to correct various incomplete and erroneous texts which were already then circulating. However, in 1608, an unauthorized version of the third section was published by itself, and in 1609 the Capuchin authorities in Paris called Benet to explain the meaning of certain difficult passages pertaining to passive contemplation and infusion, spiritual nudity, and annihilation.

At this time passive contemplation was under scrutiny. Capuchins and Carmelites were concerned by the difference between acquired and infused contemplation. The first was gradual. A contemplative advanced by degrees through a combination of personal effort through prayer and Godly grace. Because it was gradual, the Carmelites saw active contemplation as safer and more reliable as a path toward union. Infused union was different. The soul was quickly stripped

³² Sitwell, "Benet Canfield," 250.

³³ Emory, *Renaissance Dialectic and Renaissance Piety*, 17.

bare of Self (spiritual nudity) leaving it open for God to fill it. The concern was in how to know who was initiating the annihilation; was it always God or could it be demonic? Likewise, when the soul is bare of itself and open to be filled, could it be deceived into union with evil?³⁴ As a Capuchin, Benet addresses these concerns in his complete *Rule of Perfection*, stating that acquired contemplation is a preparatory stage for infused contemplation and divine union (infusion). Prayer, meditations, and spiritual exercises can prepare a soul for infusion, but human effort alone can never perfect the soul. The last stages of contemplation and divine union have to be gift of divine grace, not a reward for hard work.

Also at issue was the implication that “unity through annihilation and rejection of all created things included a rejection of God’s humanity” as well.³⁵ Christocentric mystics argued that only the Incarnation of the Divine Word enabled union with God; others took a more neo-Platonic approach and argued that only the complete negation of all created things could lead to annihilation of the self and infusion. In some of the most radical interpretations, this meant negation of the Incarnation as well.³⁶ Benet’s order, the Capuchins, rejected this idea and made sure that all authorized editions of *The Rule of Perfection* contained his section on the Passion and its role in contemplation, a section which had been missing from the unauthorized publication of Part III in 1608.³⁷ To minimize the harm which they feared this unauthorized publication could

³⁴ For more information on these concerns see Chapter 4 of Moshe Sluhovsky’s *Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism, and Discernment in the Early Modern Period*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 97- 136.

³⁵ Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit*, 125.

³⁶ Negation of the role of Christ in the higher levels of contemplation was one of the accusations leveled at Miguel de Molinos for which he was condemned in 1687.

³⁷ Moshe Sluhovsky believes Benet was constrained to add the sections on Christ’s Passion by the Capuchin authorities who wanted to distance his text from Illuminist and Pre-Quietist controversies of the time. For more information on these concerns see Chapter 4 of Moshe Sluhovsky’s *Believe Not Every Spirit*, 97- 136. However, Benet’s teaching on the Passion appears to be integrated into the meaning of the text as a whole. He taught that consideration of Christ’s Passion should not be given up during any stage of

do, these Capuchin officials ordered Benet to produce a corrected version of his *Rule of Perfection* containing all three parts in their entirety. This he did, preparing French, English, and Latin versions in 1609-1610.³⁸

The book was immensely popular as shown by the numerous editions which were published in the seventeenth century. Like other mystagogical treatises, it focuses on conforming to the will of God through the three-fold path of contemplation in order to achieve divine union. In doing so, *The Rule of Perfection* proposes that the human will is in total antagonism to the divine will which Benet breaks into three parts: the external will, the internal will, and the essential will. The first is represented by all of creation and corresponds to the active life of a Christian who must learn to conform perfectly to the will of God as manifested by all lawful authority. The second corresponds to the purification of the soul through purity of intention, prayer, and mortification of the passions. This stripping away of selfish motives and desires brings tranquility to the soul and engenders in it passivity to the will of God, which in turn bring with them a profound, internal silence. God speaks to the soul in that silence, revealing His will through inspiration, illumination, and other numinous experiences. The soul has the free choice to follow this revealed will or not, independent of all natural instincts or selfish desires.

The third part advances the human soul into contemplation and eventual union with God. The essential will is God Himself, and His will absorbs the human will, annihilating it, so the two

the unitive way, that both the humanity and divinity of Christ should be considered together. The dilemma is the belief had by some that humanity can only be considered through images since physical existence is part of being human. Likewise, Divinity should be considered without images since God is a spirit. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a mystical text Benet knew well, teaches that this dilemma itself is unnecessary as the soul during advanced contemplation transcends images of Christ's humanity but is able to contemplate them at other times. Benet himself, in suggesting that one could experience divine union while living an active life, implies that humanity and divinity need not be so sharply divided.

³⁸ Nigel Smith, "The Translations of John Everard and Giles Randall: *Theologia Germanica*, Sebastian Franck, Nicholas of Cusa, and Benet of Canfield." *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 107-143. The English translation of *The Rule of Perfection* was banned in England. Nevertheless, a pirated edition of the text translated from the French.

can become one: “Yea, in the perfection of this annihilation in this divine will the soule is so abstracted and fixed in God, and so high lifted above herself, that shee feeleth not her owne operation though most vehement, but only the interior operation of God” (1:2:7).³⁹ The soul is in perfect conformity to the divine will (1:2:11; cf. 3:6), rejecting the material world and all created things (3:1, 3:8). In this state of union, the human will, which is antagonistic to the divine will, is annihilated; the will of God then absorbs the soul, and it becomes deified in that it is transformed by God into his likeness, not in that it becomes a separate god unto itself. The soul in union is stripped completely bare of itself (3:6, 3:10) and stands in spiritual nudity and simplicity before the Divine (3:7). This total, passive annihilation of self will is not possible through meditation or ascetic practices. These techniques of active annihilation can prepare a soul to receive passive annihilation and union, but human efforts and human will alone are not sufficient to initiate deification; instead, it must be initiated by God.

Although the content of Benet’s *Rule of Perfection* comes straight out of traditional Catholic mysticism, the new, Ramist dialectical form in which he simplifies and organizes these ideas makes mystical theology accessible to a broad audience of both laypersons and religious. In other words, Benet’s legal education and training in dialectal methods preferred by contemporary Protestants in England directly influences his approach to writing, helping him to produce a text on a complicated subject which is clear, brief, and accessible. In doing so, Benet pulls aside the veil, revealing Divine union to be not just reserved for contemplatives with religious vocations, but possible even for normal people living and working in the secular world, people like he was when he received his first vision while studying at the Inns of Court.

³⁹ For this and all references to *The Rule of Perfection*, I am using Jean Orcibal, ed. *Benoît de Canfield.: La Règle de Perfection*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982) and Emory, *Renaissance Dialectic and Renaissance Piety*, 1987).

The Rule of Perfection became a very popular text on the continent, but its popularity may have been its undoing. Church authorities saw the popularization of mysticism as a threat, subverting the hierarchy of the Church and its power to control access to God through the sacraments. Lay piety in particular was a concern. While the hagiographies of saints commonly reported both mystical and numinous encounters with the Divine, the Church considered these people especially holy; thus their experiences were manifestations of a special grace. *The Rule of Perfection* suggested that this special grace was not set aside just for saints but was available to everyday Christians as well. Attempts by both the laity and the members of religious Orders to discern and obey the will of God without the direct mediation of the professional clergy raised alarms. These fears manifested in accusations of heresy and Illuminism (a pejorative term for “false claims or delusions of spiritual enlightenment”)⁴⁰ accompanied by charges of occult activity and demon possession.

Decades after Benet’s death, his *Rule of Perfection*, in particular his teachings concerning passivity, spiritual nudity, and infused contemplation came under severe scrutiny. Three spiritual directors were accused of using his text to lead astray a group of nuns at the Hospitaler convent of Saint-Louis et Sainte-Elizabeth in Louviers, Normandy during a five-year span (1642-1647). According to the testimony of the nuns, their spiritual director Father Pierre David had introduced them to the mystical writings of Benet of Canfield when the convent was founded in 1616, and they continued to practice his spiritual exercises. Father David died in 1628. Although he was a secular priest, he was buried in the robe of a Capuchin in Louviers.⁴¹ He was succeeded by

⁴⁰ Sarah Ferber, “Fighting Fire with Fire?: Exorcism against Ecstasy, Louviers, 1642-54.” *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France*. (London: Routledge, 2004), 92.

⁴¹ *Recit veritable de ce qui s'est fait & passé à Louviers touchant les Religieuses possédées Extraict d'une Lettre écrite de Louviers à un Evesque* (Paris: François Beauplet, 1643), microfiche, 2.

Mathurin Picard, who served as the nuns' spiritual director until he died in 1642. He was entombed in the chantry of the convent's chapel.

Within a few months of his death, the nuns at the convent began to report disturbances. Some claimed to be seeing "visions of witches at night" while others found themselves unable to take Communion.⁴² They blamed the presence of Picard's body in the chapel, and the Bishop of Évreux, François Périchard, ordered the body exhumed. Though six months had passed since it had been buried, decomposition had not yet begun. However, instead of seeing this as a sign of sanctity, the Bishop found it suspicious. He accused Picard posthumously of witchcraft and had his body thrown into a ditch.⁴³ The incident might have ended there if children had not found the body while playing and reported the corpse to the local authorities.⁴⁴

This chance discovery erupted into a firestorm of inquiries and accusations of witchcraft and demonic possession. A special commission investigated these allegations and accused eighteen of the fifty-two nuns at the convent of being either possessed or obsessed with demons.⁴⁵ Whether they actually were or not, the alleged mass possession became a high profile case. Thousands of spectators attended public exorcisms and the ensuing witchcraft trials, providing a large audience for anti-illuminist polemics.

⁴² Ibid., 5.

⁴³ *Sentences et arrests servans a la justification de la calomnieuse accusation faite contre Soeur Françoise de la Croix cy-devant superieure des religieuses & convent des Hospitalieres de la Charité Nostre-Dame, proche la Place Royale* (Paris: Veuve J. Guillemot, 1654), microfiche, 6-9.

⁴⁴ Ferber, "Fighting Fire with Fire?" 96.

⁴⁵ *Recit veritable de ce qui s'est fait & passé à Louviers touchant les Religieuses possédées Extraict d'une Lettre écrite de Louviers à un Evesque* (Paris: François Beauplet, 1643), microfiche, 7-8; *Attestation de Messieurs les Commissaires envoyez par sa Majesté pour prendre connoissance, avec Monseigneur l'Evesque, de l'estat des Religieuses qui paroissent agitées au Monastere de Saint Louys & Sainte Elizabeth de Louviers*. (N.p. No printer, 1643), 2, 4. Sarah Ferber summarizes the findings of this commission in "Fighting Fire with Fire?" 97.

As early as 1643, an anonymous pamphlet entitled *Recit veritable de ce qui s'est fait & passé à Louviers touchant les Religieuses possédées Extraict d'une Lettre escrite de Louviers à un Evesque* connected the supposed occult activities at the convent to Father Pierre David's misguided decision to teach affective spirituality to the nuns. The author makes a direct connection between mysticism and witchcraft, accusing the priest of diabolical intentions.⁴⁶

Once the accusations began, they became more and more outrageous. The nuns began to make sensational accusations not only against Pierre David, but also against Mathurn Picard and his successor Thomas Boullé, as well as an older sister named Madeleine Bavent, and their founder and former Mother Superior, Françoise de La Croix.⁴⁷

Interrogated at least twenty-three times between June 1644 and September 1645, Bavent eventually confessed to the charges against her.⁴⁸ According to her, she had been a nun at the convent since 1622, and was a firsthand witness to the early corruption of the convent with Illuminism and witchcraft. She accused Father David of deliberately encouraging the nuns to strip naked and dance around the chapel and garden.⁴⁹ He also purportedly encouraged the nuns to touch each other in impure ways and to perform sexual impurities with each other.⁵⁰ To a modern reader, these accusations make Father David appear to be a lecher who enjoys taking advantage

⁴⁶ *Recit veritable de ce qui s'est fait & passé à Louviers touchant les Religieuses possédées Extraict d'une Lettre escrite de Louviers à un Evesque* (Paris: François Beauplet, 1643), microfiche, 1-2.

⁴⁷ Ferber, "Fighting Fire with Fire?" 100.

⁴⁸ *Sentences et arrests servans a la justification de la calomnieuse accusation faite contre Soeur Françoise de la Croix cy-devant superieure des religieuses & convent des Hospitalieres de la Charité Nostre-Dame, proche la Place Royale* (Paris: Veuve J. Guillemot, 1654), microfiche, 11.

⁴⁹ Charles Desmarte, and Madeleine Bavent. *Histoire de Magdelaine Bavent, Religieuse de Monastere de Saint Louïs de Louviers...Ensemble l'Interrogatoire de Magdelaine Bavent. De plus l'Arrest donné contre Mathurin Picard, Thomas Boullé & ladite Bavent, tous convaincus du Crime de magie, l'un brulé vif & l'autre mort.* (Paris: Jacques Le Gentil, 1652), microfiche, 8.

⁵⁰ Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit*, 151.

of the nuns sexually, encouraging them to expose themselves and perform lesbian acts in the name of deeper spirituality. Benet of Canfield's teachings on spiritual nudity before God become literalized as complete nudity (spiritual and physical), and this in turn is transformed into an opportunity for exhibitionism and carnal lust.

To contemporary investigators, Father David appeared to be a heretic and an Adamite. The latter were essentially nudists who rationalized their exhibitionism by claiming to have achieved Adam's original state of innocence in the Garden of Eden. Aside from holy nudism (stripping themselves completely bare during worship), Adamites also eschewed marriage and laws of morality as not having existed before sin.⁵¹ One can see how Bavent's accusations against Father David made him appear guilty of this ancient heresy.

Sister Bavent continued by saying that as Father David lay dying in 1628, he gave Mathurin Picard instructions to continue directing the nuns in the manner he had initiated.⁵² Under his watchful eye, they were purportedly taught to disregard humility and the close examination of the interior self for the purpose of the purgation of sin. Instead they were to practice passivity, and they were taught that when one attains divine union, one no longer has to worry about sin. If the soul is pure, anything is permissible with the body.⁵³ He too supposedly exploited the nuns sexually. Sister Bavent accused him of seducing her and introducing her to satanic worship; they both would attend Sabbaths at least twice a week for the next four years.⁵⁴ During these Sabbaths, she reports that they "performed sacrilegious acts on the Eucharist, killed newborn babies, cannibalized human flesh, and used human body parts to create charms, which

⁵¹ Francis Patrick Havey, "Adamites," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1913), *New Advent*. 2012. Web. 26 Mar. 2015.

⁵² Desmarte, *Histoire de Magdelaine Bavent*, 11.

⁵³ Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit*, 153.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

they then used to create havoc in the convent.”⁵⁵ Like his predecessor, Picard was accused of witchcraft and of using his disguise as a spiritual advisor to corrupt the sisters of the convent. Just before he died in 1642, he reportedly passed his magical powers to the next spiritual director, Thomas Boullé, who was still alive when the reports of misconduct at the convent began to be investigated. Tragically, this young priest was accused of witchcraft, found guilty, and burned along with the bones of Picard in 1647.

Of course, Bavent’s confession and the accusations made by the other nuns must be read with a skeptical eye. Bavent herself had only confessed after repeated interrogations, and the truth of any confession made under duress must always be suspect. In addition, she was an older nun from a lower class than the younger nuns who accused her; thus she had fewer social guarantees against prosecution, making the motive for the accusations appear to be mean-spirited attempts to persecute this particular sister. If that is the case, then the attempts backfired. By naming Bavent a witch, these young nuns gave her the power to name others in the convent who participated in occult activities, turning the witch hunt into an opportunity for revenge. Similar instances of witchcraft allegations and inflated stories of possession should serve to caution readers against full acceptance of such testimonies. Another cautionary factor is the anti-mystical anxiety of the time. Father David had helped to establish the convent. He had moved to Louviers from Paris where he had studied mysticism and the new forms of passivity and spiritual annihilation under Benet of Canfield himself. The question then must be asked, was Father David falsely accused to discredit this form of mysticism or did he purposefully misinterpret Benet’s terminology and teachings in order to manipulate the nuns for his own ends? I lean towards the former explanation, for I find it very hard to believe that the nuns were that gullible.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Regardless, this scandal caused Benet's *Rule of Perfection* to come under close scrutiny. Esprit du Bosroger, one of the investigators, accused the English mystic of having introduced, not a new form of spirituality, but a disguised path to Satanism.⁵⁶ Here is a clear example of how misunderstanding or misinterpretation of mystical texts combined with fears concerning the undermining of authority can lead to allegations of heresy and of occult activities. Benet cannot be blamed for how others interpreted his writings nor for the ways in which they misused them. Nevertheless, one can see how these abuses led to anxieties which reshaped the spiritual climate of the seventeenth century.

Augustine Baker (1575-1641)

Augustine Baker, baptized David Baker, was born to Protestant parents on December 9, 1575, in Abergavenny, Wales.⁵⁷ His father, William Baker, was the steward of Lord Abergavenny, and he had hopes that his son would pursue a religious vocation.⁵⁸ Thus, when David turned eleven, his father sent him to school at Christ's Hospital in London; then in the beginning of 1590, he arranged for him to enter Broadgate's Hall (now Pembroke College) in Oxford. However, during his time there, David gave up all practice of religion. So after two years, his father brought him home. His eldest son, Richard was a counselor of law, and David, rather unenthusiastically, came under his tutelage. Four years later, he moved once more to

⁵⁶ Esprit du Bosroger, *La piété affligée; ou, Discours historique et théologique de la possession des religieuses dittes de Sainte-Elisabeth de Louviers* (Rouen, 1652). See also Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit*, 154-156.

⁵⁷ James Norbert Sweeney, *Life and Spirit of Augustine Baker: Monk and Priest of the English Benedictine Congregation*. (London: Catholic Publishing and Bookselling Company Limited, 1861), *Google Books*. Retrieved 23 July 2015. p.1.

⁵⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all further biographical information on Baker will be drawn from the following source: Jean Mary Stone. "David Augustine Baker." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 2 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907). *New Advent*. 2012. Web. Retrieved 13 July 2015.

London and became first a member of Clifford's Inn, then of the Middle Temple in the pursuit of his new career.

After his brother's death in 1598, Baker returned home where he drew upon his law training while serving as Recorder of Abergavenny.⁵⁹ This job required travel to different places to keep his courts or determine suits, and it was after such a journey, when he was riding home absent-mindedly that he suddenly realized he was in danger. Rather than taking his horse across the ford of the River Monrow, he found himself half-way over a narrowing, wooden footbridge which was rather high above the river.⁶⁰ "It was impossible for him to go forwards or to turn back; and to leap into the river, which being narrow there, was both extremely deep and violent in its course (besides the greatness of the precipice), was to him, that could not swim, all the same as to leap into his grave."⁶¹ Baker resolved this: "If ever I escape this danger I will believe there is a God who hath more care of my life and safety than I have had of His love and worship."⁶² Suddenly, and without explanation that he could discern, Baker found his horse turned, and the danger averted. "He never had any doubt but that his deliverance was supernatural."⁶³ Thus began for him a serious study of religion and of the controversy between the Protestants and Catholics. The result was his conversion, and at his first communion, "there sprang up a desire of spiritual perfection to be purchased with the loss of all sensual pleasures and abandoning all secular

⁵⁹ Sweeney, *Life and Spirit of Augustine Baker*, 5-6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Edward Ingram Watkins, *Poets and Mystics*. Essay Index Reprint Series. (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Series, 1968), 190.

⁶³ Sweeney, *Life and Spirit of Augustine Baker*, 7.

designs.”⁶⁴ Baker took the cloth as a novice on 27 May 1605, selecting the name Augustine. Just three years later, he experienced religious ecstasy while practicing internal prayer.⁶⁵ Though brief (less than a quarter of an hour),⁶⁶ it wrought an increased purity to his prayers, produced “an interior illumination whereby he understood the meaning of spiritual books,” and destroyed his tendency to sensuality.⁶⁷

Baker did not have a skilled spiritual director who could guide him through this experience, nor had he yet studied any of the mystical theologians, so he had not yet encountered the teaching that after passive union ensues what is called the great desolation in which one feels both isolated from God and deprived of all consolation.⁶⁸ Perplexed at what was happening to him, he abandoned internal prayer for the next twelve years.⁶⁹ In 1619, at the age of forty-five, Baker found a treatise called *Speculum Perfectionis* by Hermerus which explains passive union and contains instructions on how to persevere during the following “aridities” or dry spells. Finally understanding what had happened to him and how he should have responded, Baker returned to internal prayer and quickly advanced to a high degree of what he terms “active

⁶⁴ Watkins, *Poets and Mystics*, 190.

⁶⁵ Sweeney, *Life and Spirit of Augustine Baker*, 28; Justin McCann, ed. *The Confessions of Venerable Father Augustine Baker, O.S.B., Extracted from a Manuscript Treatise Preserved in the Library of Ampleforth Abbey, and Edited by Dom Justin McCann, Monk of Ampleforth*. (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1922). 67-69. *Archive.org*. Retrieved 23 July 2015.

⁶⁶ McCann, *The Confessions of Venerable Father Augustine Baker*, 67.

⁶⁷ Watkins, *Poets and Mystics*, 191. See also Sweeney, *Life and Spirit of Augustine Baker*, 29-30.

⁶⁸ Sweeney, *Life and Spirit of Augustine Baker*, 30-31.

⁶⁹ Justin McCann, ed. *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Treatises by an English Mystic of the Fourteenth Century with a Commentary on the Cloud by Father Augustine Baker O.S.B.* (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1924. Revised 1952), 151-218; McCann, *The Confessions of Venerable Father Augustine Baker*, 75-88.

contemplation.”⁷⁰ He read more mystagogical materials and shared his knowledge with others who were interested in the mystic way. He particularly favored his fellow Englishmen Walter Hilton (*The Scale of Perfection*) and the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*.⁷¹

His growing devotion and expertise did not go unnoticed. In July 1624, Father Rudesind Barlow, President of the English Congregation, sent him to Cambrai to serve as spiritual director to the sisters of the new Convent of Our Lady of Consolation which had been established there.⁷² After several years, at their request, he began writing treatises for them explaining various aspects of the mystic way.⁷³ One of the last of these treatises is the *Secretum* (also known as *Mysticum* 1629),⁷⁴ a commentary on *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which he composed in two parts. The first explains the subject matter of the text, active mystic contemplation. The second is a chapter by chapter commentary. Included in the first part is a lengthy account of his own mystical experience, presented as that of a scholar whom he had once directed.⁷⁵ That scholar, he claims, received a special enablement through which he penned forty treatises on various aspects of mysticism within the span of two years and nine months whereas before he was loathe to put pen to paper.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ McCann, *Confessions*, 33-36.

⁷¹ McCann, *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Treatises*.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 43-68; Baker served as spiritual director from 1624-1633.

⁷³ According to a timetable which he gives in Chapter 7 of his *Secretum*, he composed these treatises between the years 1627-1629. For more information, see McCann, *The Confessions of Venerable Father Augustine Baker*, 116-124.

⁷⁴ This treatise was composed in 1629.

⁷⁵ McCann, *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Treatises*, 151-218; McCann, *The Confessions of Venerable Father Augustine Baker*, ix.

⁷⁶ McCann, *The Confessions of Venerable Father Augustine Baker*, 116-124.

During this intensive period of composition, he drew upon what he had learned both from English and continental mystical writers, applying it to his own experiences and producing an approach to prayer and mysticism which is simple and discreet. Baker does not advocate harsh ascetic practices as some continental mystics did.⁷⁷ Nor does he deny the possibility of ecstatic union to those living active lives as others did. Baker came to recognize that the precedent for divine inspirations was set in the Scriptures as a method by which God conveyed truth to his people in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Catholic Church had long acknowledged the legitimacy of direct divine guidance obtained through prayer. However, during the Counter-Reformation, to teach the necessity of seeking and obeying guidance from God Himself must have made some Catholics uncomfortable, especially with the appearance of eccentric religious enthusiasts inciting rebellion and the birth of various sects who claimed direct inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Because of this growing atmosphere of suspicion, Baker wrote an *Apologie* in 1629, in which he expounds why he composed his mystical texts. Their purpose, he claims, was to help the sisters at Cambrai to understand the benefits of internal prayer and to make spiritual progress.⁷⁸ In order to clarify his approach to the doctrine of divine inspiration, Baker states explicitly that supernatural illuminations should not be sought, and those which are received should never counter religious authority. If they do, they are to be suspected of being false. Nevertheless, despite his explanations, Baker anticipates objections:

...some scholasticks in these dayes...are so rigid in censuringe the writings of misticks, that hardly dare any of those mistick[s] sette out any-thinge. And yet those carpers

⁷⁷ *Holy Wisdom* is a compilation of more than forty of Baker's shorter treatises published by his friend, Father Serenus Cressy in 1657, sixteen years after Baker's death.

⁷⁸ Augustine Baker, *Apologie. The Anchor of the Spirit: The Apology: Summarie of Perfection*. Ed. John Clark. *Analecta Cartusiana*. 119:30 (Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität, 2008), 62.

themselves are farre enough from settinge out any such misticke matters, as whom it suffiseth they can censure the said doeings of others, & dispose themselves no further. If one of those mistiks doe trippe in a terme that perhaps little or nothings importeth, they crie out as if the whole world were like to be corrupted & vndone by it.⁷⁹

He was right. In the later part of 1632, Baker's writings aroused the suspicions of Father Francis Hull who then served as the chaplain and confessor to the sisters at Cambrai. He urged the General Chapter of the Benedictine English Congregation to launch an enquiry to examine the orthodoxy of Baker's writings.⁸⁰ On 6 September 1632, two highly respected members of the convent, Abbess Catherine Gascoigne and Dame Gertrude More (great-great granddaughter of Saint Thomas More), signed a statement in defense of his teaching and practice.⁸¹ Baker himself composed *Protestations*, in the time leading up to the meeting of the General Chapter in August 1633.⁸² Ultimately, the Chapter endorsed Baker, but I cannot help but note the irony in an ex-protestant writing a book which defends orthodox Catholic teachings against critics of the Counter-Reformation.

Yet, like Benet of Canfield, whom he admired, Baker found his writings accused by his colleagues, examined by his superiors, and approved during his lifetime, only to come under

⁷⁹ Ibid., 59-60.

⁸⁰ Elizabeth Dutton and Victoria Van Hyning. "Augustine Baker and the Mystical Canon." *Analecta Cartusiana: Proceedings from the Douai Abbey Augustine Baker Conference, September 2009*. Ed. Geoffrey Scott. (Salzburg: FB Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 2012), 106.

⁸¹ John P. H. Clark, "Towards a Chronology of Father Augustine Baker's Writings." *Analecta Cartusiana: Proceedings from the Douai Abbey Augustine Baker Conference, September 2009*. Ed. Geoffrey Scott (Salzburg: FB Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 2012), 127. This statement can be found in *Vindication*. See Peter Salvin and Serenus Cressy. *The Life of Augustine Baker, O.S.B. (1575-1641)*. Ed. McCann, Justin (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd., 1933), 199, xxvi-xxvii.

⁸² Clark, "Towards a Chronology of Father Augustine Baker's Writings," 127; Augustine Baker, *The Life and Death of Dame Gertrude More: Edited from All Known Manuscripts*, Ed. Ben Wekking, *Analecta Cartusiana*, 119:19 (Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 2002), 347-350; and Augustine Baker, *Vox Clamantis in Deserto Animae, Analecta Cartusiana*, Ed. John Clark, 119:22 (Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 2004), 201.

attack again after his death. The second controversy began in 1655 when a new President of the English Benedictine Congregation, Claude White, claimed Baker's writings contained "poisonous, pernicious and diabolical doctrine" which encouraged "absolute disobedience."⁸³ White demanded that Baker's original manuscripts be given to him in order to expunge the offending teachings. Abbess Catherine Gascoigne refused. To White, her failure to comply with his demands justified his concerns that the treatises subverted ecclesiastical authority. In stark contrast to the Abbess' reputation for her intense piety, he accused her of "in a damnable way running to perdition" and tried to force her to hand over the manuscripts by threatening her with dire consequences if she refused to submit.⁸⁴ Heated though they were, White's threats and his opposition to Baker's teachings were brief, quieting with his death a few months later with apparently no lasting consequences for the Abbess.

However, controversies concerning the treatises surfaced again in 1657, when Father Serenus Cressy finished compiling them into a "brief" abstract of nearly 700 pages entitled, *Sancta Sofia* (hereafter referred to as *Holy Wisdom*). Cressy, following the command of Father Laurence Reyner, who was then President General of the English Benedictine Congregation, began preparing the work sometime after he joined the Community of St. Gregory at Douai in 1649.⁸⁵ Cressy was another recusant. Baptized as Hugh Paulin (Wakefield, Yorkshire 1605), he had received orders in the Church of England and was appointed to serve as chaplain to several

⁸³ Rawlinson MS A.36, f. 45 quoted in Claire Walker, "The English Benedictine Nuns and the Baker Manuscript." *Women, Property, and the Letters of the Law in Early Modern England*. Ed. Nancy E. Wright, Margaret W. Ferguson, and A. R. Buck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 242.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Augustine Baker, *Holy Wisdom or Directions for the Prayer of Contemplation, Extracted out of more than Forty Treatises by the Ven. Father F. Augustin Baker, Methodically Digested by R. F. Serenus Cressy, D.D.* Ed. J. Norbert Sweeney. (London: Burns and Oates, 1911), xiv-xv; see also Cressy's letter to Father Laurence Reyner published in the front matter, xxi-xxii.

lords before becoming canon of Windsor then Dean of Leighlin, in Ireland.⁸⁶ It was while travelling as tutor to a young English nobleman in 1646 that he became Catholic, attributing his conversion to Augustine Baker's treatises: "I found myself pressed to hasten my reconcilment to the Church, because I thirsted to become capable of practicing those heavenly instructions."⁸⁷ Thus, when Father Reyner called him to begin the compilation, he was pleased to do so.

Because of the enormous amount of work which Cressy invested into editing and compiling the forty treatises, he functions as a posthumous collaborator with Baker.⁸⁸ The content is Baker's, but the final form and arrangement are Cressy's. The result is a mystagogical manual which faithfully presents Baker's teachings but does so in a systematic manner.⁸⁹ In fact, Baker's most faithful supporter, Abbess Catherine Gascoigne, while acknowledging Cressy's hard work, noted how faithful *Holy Wisdom* was to the originals: "Not any who hath read your booke, and is versed in the authours (sic.) works; have found any objections to make, either of anything wanting or differing from him: but all acknowledge that you have most faithfully, clearly and substantially delivered his doctrine."⁹⁰ The text is remarkably clear and straightforward considering the mystical nature of its subject matter, the prayer of contemplation. In the year it

⁸⁶ J. Norbert Sweeney, Preface, *Holy Wisdom or Directions for the Prayer of Contemplation, Extracted out of More than Forty Treatises by the Ven. Father F. Augustin Baker, Methodically Digested by R. F. Serenus Cressy, D.D.*, Ed. J. Norbert Sweeney (London: Burns and Oates, 1911), xv.

⁸⁷ Cressy, Serenus, *Exologies or a Faithful Narration of the Occasion and Motives of the Conversion unto Catholique Unity*, (Paris: 1653), 445-446, Quoted in Geoffrey Scott, "Baker's Critics," *Analecta Cartusiana, Proceedings from the Douai Abbey Augustine Baker Conference, September 2009*, Ed. Geoffrey Scott (Salzburg, Austria: FB Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 2012), 182.

⁸⁸ McCann, *The Confessions of Venerable Father Augustine Baker*, ix.

⁸⁹ Edmund Power, "The Spirituality of Sancta Sophia," *Analecta Cartusiana. Proceedings from the Douai Abbey Augustine Baker Conference, September 2009*, Ed. Geoffrey Scott (Salzburg, Austria: FB Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 2012), 3.

⁹⁰ Augustine Baker, *Sancta Sophia*. Ed. Serenus Cressy. (Douai: 1657), vol. 1, p. 12. Quoted in Power, "The Spirituality of Sancta Sophia," 3.

was published, Brother Angelus Francis, the Lector Jubilante and Episcopal Censurer of Books at Douai, in the Convent of the English Recollects applauded its clarity:

Many grave authors have written of this subject, but in my opinion none more clearly (and with such brevity) than the R. Father Augustine Baker.... who in his several treatises abridged in this book, entitled *Sancta Sophia*, probably out of his own experience hath methodically, solidly, clearly, and piously set forth such efficacious instructions for the attaining of true perfection....⁹¹

This clarity, at least in part, stems from both men's ability to divide the subject matter into specific parts which they then methodically analyze and explain in the vernacular. The result is a mystagogical manual accessible to all English readers, both clergy and laypersons alike.

In order to help these readers navigate the sometimes confusing proliferation of terms and terminology, Baker draws upon a large number of mystical writers both ancient and contemporary, attempting to consolidate them and find the commonalities even in seemingly disparate authors.⁹² He shows how mystics end up using different terms for the same concepts because they are attempting to explain them by referencing their own experiences.⁹³ Baker's objective is to clarify the unitive way, making it more accessible to the sisters at Cambrai and to others who are drawn to contemplation and internal prayer. To accomplish this goal, he tries to explain very precisely the prayer of contemplation leading to divine union. For him, "continual union in spirit [is] the end [goal] of man's creation" and "all Christians are obliged to aspire to

⁹¹ Baker, *Holy Wisdom*, 4.

⁹² A brief, and very incomplete list includes Isaiah, King David, St. Dionysius the Areopagite (who was thought to be the author of various works of mystical theology, the author now known by the name, Pseudo-Dionysius), St. Augustine, St. Gregory, St. Bernard, Walter Hilton, the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, Harphius, Thaulerus, Constantine Barbanson, St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, Baltazar Alvarez, Benet of Canfield, etc.

⁹³ Baker, *Holy Wisdom*, III.ii.1.p.395-96.

perfection in divine love by the ways of prayer.”⁹⁴ Cressy compiles Baker’s explanations from the various treatises creating a straightforward manual which clearly and methodically explains the prayer of contemplation leading to divine union.

However, this clarity and accessibility made the content seem new, and therefore “improper,” to some objectors. Cressy explains this misunderstanding in his preface, emphasizing that though the method of delivery may be new, the content is not:

Yet scarce hath any one since the ancient fathers’ times (especially St. Augustine) so purposely, largely, and earnestly recommended it [prayer of contemplation] to practice. And therefore, no great wonder it is, if such a way of delivering it hath seemed a novelty, even to those that speculatively and in theory acknowledge it to be the established doctrine of the Church; and whilst they willingly, and with applause, hear it asserted daily in the schools, yet meeting with it thus popularly spread, they are offended with it: I mean with the communicating it to the use and practice of the unlearned.⁹⁵

Cressy is very careful to point out that Baker is not attempting to introduce any new doctrine:

“For the doctrine in substance is as old as Christianity itself, and cannot seem strange or new but only to such as whom in these days antiquity seemeth the greatest novelty.”⁹⁶ Counter-Reformation fears of all that seemed new or novel stemmed from suspicions of heresy, especially those which seemed to promote rebellion against established religious authority.

As the prayer of contemplation requires practitioners to listen for and respond to what they perceive to be internal promptings and inspirations received from God, proponents of internal prayer were suspected of trying to bypass priestly intermediaries, including spiritual directors, and of claiming authority for themselves, via their direct communication with God. According to Cressy, it was these fears which were the primary objections to Baker’s teachings

⁹⁴ Ibid., I.i.1. p.29.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 8-9.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 22.

during the author's lifetime.⁹⁷ This "jealousy," as Cressy terms it, stems from passages which discuss the "secret operations of God's Holy Spirit in the hearts" of people practicing internal prayer:⁹⁸

The humble, devout scholar is obliged to prepare and dispose himself for prayer, abstraction of life, &c.; in solitude hearkening to His voice and call, and learning how to distinguish it clearly from the voice and solicitations of human reason or corrupt nature; till that by long familiarity and conversation with God, divine love alone will so clear his spiritual sight, that he will see at last no other light, nor receive motion from any other sufferings, though in themselves of the smallest importance.⁹⁹

To Baker, the Divine Spirit is the only secure guide and master of the secret paths, yet he always recommends obedience to superiors (regardless of their knowledge or ability). Any misdirection on their part is ultimately laid to their charge, not to the one who follows them because religious are sworn to obedience. To placate Inquisitors and diffuse any accusations of possible rebellion, Baker is careful to stress that obedience to external, religious authority takes precedence:

All laws, therefore, all constitutions, precepts, and commands of superiors, and all external or internal duties of obligation by virtue of our state of life as Christians, or moreover as religious or ecclesiastical persons, &c., are, indeed, and so to be esteemed by us, true divine calls, necessarily to be attended to, known, and performed by us.¹⁰⁰

In other words, as divine authority was believed to have been given to the Church, its representatives were invested with that authority and were, therefore, to be obeyed. Anything which seemed to suggest rebellion against that authority was to be rejected:

⁹⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., I.ii.9. p.128.

Whatsoever internal suggestions, motions, or impulses we may find that be contrary or prejudicial to such external calls to obedience and regularity, we are to be so far from hearkening to them or esteeming them for divine, that we ought to despise and reject them judging them to be no better than diabolical illusions.¹⁰¹

By such statements Baker attempts to allay Counter-Reformation suspicions that internal prayer, contained within it the threat of undermining hierarchical structures of ecclesiastical authority. When he made it clear that he in no way promoted disobedience, leaders within the Benedictine order, according to Cressy, agreed unanimously “that the sum of the Author’s spiritual doctrine should, for the good of souls aspiring to contemplation, be published.”¹⁰²

Yet, when *Holy Wisdom* was printed, not only were the same objections renewed, but others were added by those who feared reactions to the publication, this time by unlearned Catholics who might see the doctrine as exempting practitioners of internal prayer from normal structures of authority, and by non-Catholics who might attempt to use it to justify their frenzies. Examining these objections and Cressy’s responses provides windows into the growing Counter-Reformation fears of mysticism in the mid-seventeenth century, particularly fears that Protestant reformers and schismatics would use Catholic mystagogical materials to support their own causes against Papal authority.

The first objection renewed older fears of the undermining of hierarchical structures within the Church. This time, however, as the publication of Baker’s writings made information about internal prayer clear and accessible to both religious and laypeople, the accusation was aimed at the latter. It was feared that through open access to a manual teaching about divine inspirations and of the Christian’s duty to attend to them, laypeople, even those who were sober Catholics, would see practitioners of such prayer as exempt “from the ordinary jurisdiction of

¹⁰¹ Ibid., I.ii.9. p.129.

¹⁰² Ibid., 9.

prelates and magistrates, pretending to extraordinary illuminations and commissions, and to walking *in mirabilibus super se, &c.*, by which a prejudice and contempt may be cast upon the common orders and rules concerning faith and good manners established in the Church.”¹⁰³ Such an accusation reveals the assumption that practitioners of internal prayer, whether lay or religious, would brag about their numinous encounters with the Divine and claim to be invested with special authority via those numinous encounters. These assumptions also reveal suspicions concerning the truth underlying reports of mystical encounters and the perceived difficulty in discerning between true and false reports.

In fact, the opposite is most often the case. Contemplatives and mystics, seldom care to discuss their prayer life publically, deeming their encounters with the Divine to be too deeply personal.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, legitimate practitioners of internal prayer are not likely to publicize their encounters, much less use them to usurp authority. Instead, those who through internal prayer have begun to annihilate Self-love, care little for advancing their own reputations or demanding special recognition.¹⁰⁵ Instead, they grow in humility, painfully realizing the inadequacies of humanity in contrast to the capabilities of God. Their humility and obedience does not encourage contempt for the established hierarchy nor does it promote the idea that mystics are above the law.

In his response, Cressy focuses on the accusation of “pretending to extraordinary illumination and commissions” and tries to allay Counter-Reformation fears of fraudulent claims

¹⁰³ Ibid., 11. The Latin translates as “in marvels beyond his power.”

¹⁰⁴ Several studies through the years have focused on the communication patterns of people who have had mystical experiences. For more information, see Hood, *The Psychology of Religion*, 347.

¹⁰⁵ Baker, *Holy Wisdom*, I. iv. 45; II. xiii. 309-320; Jean Gerson, *On Distinguishing True from False Revelations*, 334-364.

of Divine revelations which introduce and spread heresies.¹⁰⁶ He stresses that legitimate internal prayer reinforces accepted doctrines and does not try to introduce new ones:

Due obedience to all kind of superiors is so far from being prejudiced by this doctrine, that it is only by this doctrine that it is perfectly established, and all possible suspicions, all imaginary cases to the contrary solved: hereto it is answered that, where as it is said that by a pretending to divine illumination, &c., a contempt may be cast upon the common doctrines and rules of faith and a good life, there is not the least ground for such an apprehension. For never did any spiritual mystic writer pretend to receive any new or formerly unknown lights or revelations in matters of faith, beyond what have been known and universally received in the Church. The lights which such persons by God's gracious visits receive being only a clearer sight of ordinary mysteries, the which produces in them, an abhorring of all novelties of doctrines, and a most fervent zeal to the unity and peace of the Church, and to the redusing (sic.) of all unbelievers, misbelievers, and schismatics, into its bosom and communion.¹⁰⁷

Cressy claims that authentic internal prayer and numinous encounters are not the cause of schisms; instead, they reaffirm the faith. Therefore, the publication of a mystagogical manual which clearly and accessibly explains what internal prayer is and how to discern true from false illuminations, would bolster the Church's reputation and strengthen its claims against those who would pretend to divine illuminations and thereby bring contempt "upon the common doctrine and rules of the faith."¹⁰⁸

Yet, objectors still feared the "popular spread" of such teachings to the "unlearned," especially to people outside of monastic control lest they "make an ill use and perverse advantage from them."¹⁰⁹ The perceived danger came

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 11

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 4.

principally from strangers and enemies to the Church, especially the.... fanatic sectaries which now swarm in England more than ever, [and who] will be ready to take advantage from thence to justify all their frenzies and disorders: all which they impute with all confidence to divine inspirations, illuminations, and impulses. For can we forbid them to practice what we ourselves teach to be a Christian duty? And yet it is apparent what fearful; and execrable effects the practice of this pretended duty doth produce among them. It was by inspiration, say they, that their progenitors did break out of the Church; and by inspiration they do still introduce endlessly new fancies and practices. It is by inspiration that they endanger the ruin of Christianity itself by infinite schisms and pestilent reformations. It is by inspiration that they employ the Gospel to destroy the Gospel: from thence preaching heresies in churches and chambers, sedition in states, rebellions against princes and prelates; so destroying all order, unity, and peace everywhere.” These things considered, what can be more reasonable than that we should take heed how we furnish them thus with arms to maintain themselves, and to fight against God and His Church?¹¹⁰

By seeking to stop publication of *Holy Wisdom*, objectors were seeking to control access to knowledge which they perceived as potentially dangerous in the “wrong hands.” This also meant seeking to control access to doctrines which the Catholic Church acknowledged to be true. Fear that dissenters and enthusiasts would use this truth to justify their reforms and frenzies led some to advocate a reactionary stance, one which aimed to maintain Church authority by carefully guarding access to the mysteries of the faith. The belief was that only those within the Catholic Church, who were properly trained and deemed ready by their superiors should be allowed access to information concerning methods of internal prayer. The “unlearned,” both Catholic and non-Catholic, who might “misinterpret” such information, were to be denied access. Thus, the publication of a manual of internal prayer, available to everyone, making such information more easily accessible, drew objections.

Cressy’s response is to press past the strong rhetoric and reveal the weak grounds upon which such an objection is based. He begins by reiterating that divine inspirations are essential in a deep, living Christianity, setting it apart from a merely mechanical compliance with rules and

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 9, 14-15.

rituals.¹¹¹ He argues that since they are one of the means by which God communicates through His Holy Spirit to believers, they are not dangerous, but critical and the obligation of attending to them is equally critical: “For, from no other root, but the neglect of this obligation, doth or can proceed all our mischiefs.”¹¹² However, because of the danger of confusing true divine inspirations and false suggestions, Christians need reliable means by which to discern them. Attempting to avoid the possibility of deception by ignoring divine inspirations is hypocritical: “Shall we say, though there be inspirations, yet they are never to be marked, never obeyed nor complied with?”¹¹³ Likewise, focusing solely on external guidance is inadequate:

Neither will it suffice to say, that we do sufficiently perform God’s will when we perform the commands of God expressed in Scripture, likewise the precepts of the Church, and of all our lawful superiors. For neither will the doing of these things without an interior influx of grace avail us, since the devil can be content, yea will suggest the exercise of the greatest virtues to hearts which he knows will intend only the satisfaction of natural pride, or the interests of self-love, in them. And besides, neither can any of these external rules extend to all our actions, so as to regulate them in order to contemplation and perfection.¹¹⁴

Not only does such an anti-mystical course of action ignore the importance of Divine inspirations in the life of a Christian, but it is doomed to degenerate into legalism.

Paradoxically, according to Cressy, the only sure way to discern truth from deception is by learning about divine inspiration through contemplative prayer:

Since it is necessary to be enabled to distinguish the true inspirations of God from the false suggestions of our enemy; the only means imaginable that can be proper, natural, and efficacious to obtain such a supernatural light to discern God’s will in all things is

¹¹¹ Ibid., 16-18.

¹¹² Ibid., 16.

¹¹³ Ibid., 18.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 16-17.

pure spiritual prayer exercised by a soul living an abstracted, internal, recollected life, spent in a continual attendance on God.¹¹⁵

Only by listening and becoming familiar with the still, quiet voice of the Divine, is one able eventually to learn to discern the true from the false. Therefore, suppressing the teaching of divine inspirations by controlling access to mystagogical manuals such as *Holy Wisdom*, does not help to solve the problem of possible deception but exacerbates it: “Therefore, instead of a human fruitless policy of hiding such divine fundamental practical truths as these, let us sincerely, faithfully, and plentifully teach them.”¹¹⁶

However, Catholics were not the only ones concerned about religious “enthusiasm.” In his book, *The Enthusiasm of the Church of Rome Demonstrated*, Henry Wharton (1664-1695) argues that “the extraordinary Illuminations” of Catholic saints testify to the “irrationalism and fanaticism of the Roman church, as opposed to the ‘rational piety’ of Anglicanism.”¹¹⁷ His emphasis on the irrationalism of enthusiasm contrasts sharply with Cressy’s concerns with the source of inspiration, thus shifting the focus from the supernatural to the natural and from divine inspiration to human reasoning. Wharton’s Anglican apologetic text, *Historia Sacra*, uses contemporary rationalist and scientific arguments to “demonstrate the reasonableness of Anglicanism over against the obscurantism and foolish superstitions of the Church of Rome.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 17.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 19.

¹¹⁷ Henry Wharton, *The Enthusiasm of the Church of Rome Demonstrated*. (London: 1688); Geoffrey Scott, “Baker’s Critics,” *Analecta Cartusiana, Proceedings from the Douai Abbey Augustine Baker Conference, September 2009*, Ed. Geoffrey Scott (Salzburg, Austria: FB Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 2012), 181.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 180-181.

Wharton does not mention Baker by name; however, his attacks on Catholicism by contrasting mysticism with science and rationalism suggest a growing trend in the later seventeenth century.

Another Anglican, Edward Stillingfleet (1635-1699), specifically criticizes Baker's mystical teachings as published in *Holy Wisdom*, mounting a scornful attack on what he calls Romish and monastic "enthusiasms and raptures."¹¹⁹ Using rationalism, Stillingfleet systematically attacks both Baker and Cressy in his *Discourse on Idolatry* (1671), to which Cressy responds with *Fanaticism Fanatically Imputed* (1672).¹²⁰ In his volley of words, Stillingfleet accuses Cressy of having the character of a "Popish Fanatick" before going on to accuse the Roman Catholic Church of controlling access to the truth (by opposing vernacular translations of scripture) and of having substituted superstition and enthusiasm:

For the former, they are abundantly provided by a tedious and ceremonious way of external devotion as dull and as cold as the earth itself; to the other they commend *abstractedness of life, mental prayer, passive unions, a Deiform fund of the soul, a state of introversion, divine inspirations, which must either end in Enthusiasm or madness.*¹²¹

Stillingfleet goes on to scoff at the idea of union with God and at the obscurity of the *via negativa*, as well as of self-annihilation, claiming that such ideas were "unintelligible" and "intolerable nonsense."¹²²

The plain effect of such Enthusiastick fooleries is to make religion laughed at by some, despised by others, and neglected by all, who take no other measures of it, than from such

¹¹⁹ Edward Stillingfleet, *A discourse concerning the idolatry practiced in the Church of Rome and the danger of salvation in the communion of it in an answer to some papers of a revolted Protestant: wherein a particular account is given of the fanaticism and divisions of that church* (London: 1671).

¹²⁰ Serenus Cressy, *Fanaticism fanatically imputed to the Catholick church by Doctour Stillingfleet and the imputation refuted and retorted by S.C. a Catholick.* (1672).

¹²¹ Stillingfleet, *A discourse concerning the idolatry practiced in the Church of Rome.*

¹²² Ibid.

confounded Writers. If once an unintelligible way of practical Religion, become the standard of devotion, no men of sense and reason will ever set themselves about it, but leave it to be understood by mad-men and practiced by Fools.¹²³

Kataphatic mysticism viewed reason and the human intellect alone as insufficient to understand God. This was a point of growing contention in an age placing ever more emphasis on rationalism. Natural theology and science were becoming the new, fashionable trends, and theologians were becoming enthusiasts of another sort, aiming to use the new sciences to support their faith.¹²⁴ Stillingfleet's polemics reveal a growing hostility towards mysticism and its claim to sublime encounters with an ineffable God, claims which to some rational Anglicans began to seem more and more arcane.

Thus, *Holy Wisdom* found itself attacked from both sides of the religious divide. Catholic objectors feared that the style of prayer advocated by Augustine Baker undermined religious authority by placing its adherents in a direct relationship with the Divine, bypassing the need for spiritual directors. They also feared that Cressy's clear and accessible compilation of Baker's teachings could be used by Protestant reformers and schismatics to support their own causes against Papal authority. On the other hand, Anglican apologeticists accused both Baker and Cressy of being Enthusiasts themselves and condemned mysticism, with its teachings on ecstasies and raptures, as being irrational.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Geoffrey Scott, "Baker's Critics." *Analecta Cartusiana. Proceedings from the Douai Abbey Augustine Baker Conference, September 2009*. Ed. Geoffrey Scott (Salzburg, Austria: FB Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 2012), 188.

Conclusion

The similarities between Benet of Canfield and Augustine Baker are striking. They both came from Protestant families, both were trained as lawyers in London, both claimed to have had a numinous experience which propelled them to seek God. Their individual quests to understand the meaning and significance of their experiences drew both to study the writings of traditional mystical authors of the Catholic Church. In the process both converted to Catholicism, joined a monastic order, and began writing their own mystagogical texts in the vernacular. By composing these works for the benefit of others, these two authors were able to come to a fuller understanding of their own personal encounters with the Divine, even using their experiences to help them explain mysticism to their readers.

Both drew upon their training in the Inns of Court to help them clarify concepts and organize their materials, allowing for easier access to information about mysticism by both clergy and laypersons. In addition, both encouraged readers to seek a deep, rich relationship with the Divine via internal prayer. For Benet of Canfield this meant learning to hear and obey the will of God rather than slavishly following the demands of the self-will. For Baker it meant stressing the necessity of hearing and heeding the still quiet voice of God as manifested through Divine inspirations. It was these teachings in passive (infused) contemplation which sounded the alarm bells for certain religious authorities.

Through an ironic twist of fate, these two Englishmen who had renounced their Protestantism and joined the Catholic Church in a quest to understand mystical union would be forced to “protest” against the protests raised against their ex-protestant mysticism.¹²⁵ Even though they drew upon completely orthodox Catholic precepts, both Benet and Baker had to defend their writings and themselves against charges of teaching unorthodox and heretical

¹²⁵ Christopher Hodgkins, Personal communication, 1 Oct. 2015.

doctrines which threatened to undermine established church authority. In the case of Benet, the suspicions of church officials would eventually mushroom into charges against those who followed his teachings. Priests and nuns alike found themselves accused of demonic deception and occult practices. In the case of Baker, the suspicions of both his fellow Benedictines and of Anglican Church officials led to charges that his teachings would encourage enthusiasm, undermining church authority and providing dissenters with justifications for their reforms and frenzies.

Thus, in a further irony, the Protestant movement, which had begun by insisting on the primacy of the individual's direct contact with God through scripture and prayer, comes to denounce "enthusiasm" (which means in the Greek to be inspired literally by "the God within").¹²⁶ Thus, on both sides of the religious divide, contemporary reactions to the writings of these men and the accusations which were made against them highlight the insecurities of some religious officials concerned with controlling and consolidating power within their institutions via controlling access to God. Mysticism, which sought an intuitive or direct experience of the Divine, appeared to them to undermine this authority. Thus they suspected intuitive forms of worship of encouraging the pretense of numinous encounters by which recipients could claim to be invested with special authority, bypassing that of church officials. These suspicions and insecurities led to attempts at more stringent control. Mystics and those who practiced internal prayer leading to passive contemplation found themselves under scrutiny. Some fell prey to character assassination through public accusations of disobedience, mental illness, counterfeit spirituality, heresy, demonic deception, and occult practices. Others suffered physical punishments including imprisonment, interrogation, exorcism, and execution by burning at the stake. Even death was not sufficient reason to escape punishment. Mathurin Picard was exhumed,

¹²⁶ Ibid.

thrown into a ditch, and later immolated. Public forms of punishment became spectacles encouraging onlookers to conform and changing perceptions of mysticism in the process.

Dwindling was the respected place which mysticism had once held within the larger community of believers. In its place were growing suspicions and fears. Tensions were also growing cross-confessionally between intuitive approaches to devotion and those which were more ratiocinating and speculative. Among Catholics and Protestants alike, natural theology and science came to see mysticism as irrational and superstitious, and the numinous encounters, raptures and ecstasies of mysticism came to be suspected to be more signs of illness than of holiness.

Yet, despite the growing condemnation of mysticism in this period, protestant believers with a mystic temperament still thirsted for a deep, meaningful, affective spirituality which often led them away from the speculative and ratiocinating forms of worship which were becoming ever more popular in England. Mysticism may have seemed antithetical to changes which were occurring in politics, religion, epistemology, and science during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but it provided a much needed balance to the rational spirituality which was growing in popularity. It did not die out, it simply evolved, providing believers with what they most desired, a deep, abiding relationship with their God.

CHAPTER IV
HEARTS AFLAME: THE FIRE OF DIVINE LOVE IN THE WORKS OF
ROBERT SOUTHWELL AND RICHARD CRASHAW

O honeyed flame, sweeter than all sweet, delightful beyond all creation!
My God, my Love, surge over me, pierce me by your love,
wound me with your beauty...
You snatch your lovers away from all earthly things.
You lift them above every desire for worldly matters.
You make them capable of loving you—and love you they do indeed.
So they offer you their praise in spiritual song
which bursts out from that inner fire;
they know in truth the sweetness of the dart of love.
Ah eternal and most lovable of all joys,
you raise us from the very depths,
and entrance us with the sight of divine majesty so often!
Come into me, Beloved!

—Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love* (52-53)

In the popular imagination, mysticism and divine ecstasy are nearly synonymous. The two are in fact, very different. While a mystic may desire a deep, affective relationship with the Divine, that relationship does not always involve ecstatic union. These trancelike states cannot be achieved through active contemplation. Instead, they are received, initiated by the Divine, not the mystic. During such a union, the recipient becomes completely unresponsive to external stimuli, aware only of the presence of God and His activity within the spirit. Although the experience usually lasts only briefly, it is life-changing. The mystic's understanding of God may be illumined in some way or the mystery of God may be emphasized. Sometimes vices are purged, or charisms (spiritual gifts) are bestowed. These gifts may include increased faith, words of wisdom or knowledge, or the discernment of spirits. More extraordinary gifts may involve

prophesies, miracles, or healings. Some mystics who receive ecstatic union also experience physical manifestations such as stigmata or transverberation.¹ These spiritual wounds may pierce the body, replicating the wounds of Christ; they may also pierce the heart, transfixing it like a lance or dart, often simultaneously enflaming it with the fire of divine love. The experience can be excruciatingly painful, yet the intense suffering is mixed with a divine sweetness which leaves the mystic afire with the love of God.

Saint Teresa of Avila describes the pain and bliss of her transverberation in 1560. In her ecstatic trance, an angel with a fiery countenance, like one of the cherubim approaches her:

I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to be thrusting it at times into my heart; and to pierce my very entrails; when he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also, and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great, that it made me moan; yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I could not wish to be rid of it. The soul is satisfied now with nothing less than God.²

St. Teresa's encounter became the subject of much speculation in her own lifetime. Initially, some suspected the source of her ecstasy to be more diabolical than divine. Others believed her to be suffering from melancholy or hysteria. She was denounced to the Inquisition who, after a thorough investigation, exonerated her, her writings, and her visions of reform for the monastic life. Only forty years after her death, she was canonized as a saint, not because of her transverberation but because of her life of sanctity and her spiritual maturity. As further

¹ Transverberation is a spiritual wounding of the heart. This wounding usually takes place during a spiritual ecstasy or mystical vision and may involve the piercing of the heart by a dart or a flame of love. The most famous accounts of transverberation are those of St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. More recent accounts of transverberation include those of St. Teresa of Lisieux, Blessed Mariam Theresa, and Padre Pio.

² Teresa of Avila. *The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus, of the Order of Our Lady of Carmel*. Chapter 29. Trans. David Lewis. 3rd ed. (London: Thomas Baker, 1904), 257. *The Christian Ethereal Library*. 1 June 2005. Web. (accessed 29 Aug. 2015).

affirmation, she was declared a Doctor of the Church on 27 September 1970, one of only four women to receive this honor.³

Saint Teresa wrote during the latter half of the sixteenth century and went through the process of canonization during the first half of the seventeenth century. Her fame and popularity grew during this time period. Her ecstasy and the fiery love which pierced her heart during her transverberation inspired artists and poets cross-confessionally. One of the most famous of the artworks she inspired is Bernini's life-size sculpture, *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*. Completed in 1652, it depicts the moment of her rapture, an angel stands by her side, armed with a dart, ready to strike her heart. Golden shafts of light encompass them both from above. Commissioned by Cardinal Carnaro for his chapel, Bernini's marble and gold sculpture is considered by many to be one of the masterpieces of High Roman Baroque art.

Richard Crashaw (c. 1613-1649) never saw this statue, yet he depicts the same scene in his famous Teresan poems, combining the ecstasy of St. Teresa with the fire of divine love and English verse forms. Raised a staunch protestant, Crashaw became a recusant.⁴ Although he never discloses in his writing any personal numinous encounters, he does explicitly state his intense desire to experience the ecstatic joy and transformative power of mystical union with the Divine. Drawing upon his training at Cambridge, Crashaw's unique contribution to mystical poetry is his experimentation with devotional verses, combining the forms of both epigrams and longer poems with the visual imagery of emblems and the vivid sensuousness of Baroque sensibilities. The result encourages Salesian meditations on the multiple spiritual meanings embedded in the

³ The others are St Catherine of Siena, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, and St. Hildegard of Bingen.

⁴ Crashaw is thought to have officially joined the Roman Catholic Church at the beginning of his exile on the continent in 1644 after his expulsion from his fellowship at Cambridge.

images.⁵ This style of meditation, in turn encourages contemplation on the love of God and His transforming presence in the life of a believer. Crashaw's epigrams serve as didactic aids, startling readers out of stock responses to scripture and creating liminal spaces in which spiritual transformation becomes possible.

Victor Turner defines liminality as a state of transition in which one, in essence, stands on the threshold between a former sense of identity and a new one.⁶ Liminal spaces are in-between moments which can dramatically reshape a person's self-perception, dissolving it to a certain extent, thereby creating both disorientation and new possibilities. Although Turner examines liminal spaces in the context of ritual, when an initiate is temporarily outside of the normal social hierarchy, Agnes Horvath argues that the concept of a "threshold experience" can be applied in a broader capacity to understand specific events historically and sociologically.⁷ And while Turner attributes liminal experiences with being predominately positive, Horvath argues that they can also be periods of uncertainty, anguish, and existential loss.

Timothy L. Carson suggests that liminal spaces can also be associated with sacred spaces, both physical and temporal, during which individuals either feel the presence of the Divine or receive revelatory knowledge.⁸ Indeed, most mystical experiences do appear to share common elements of the liminal: they are brief, intense, transforming, and outside normal social hierarchies. However, most liminal experiences are not mystical. They are moments purposefully

⁵ Salesian meditation is based on the teachings of St. Frances de Sales (1567-1622) as recorded in his treatise, the *Introduction to the Devout Life* which he wrote in 1609. For more information, see Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Trans. Henry Benedict Mackey (London: Burnes and Oates, 1884), *Christian Ethereal Library*, Retrieved 8 March 2016 <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/desales/love.i.iii.html>>.

⁶ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 131-132.

⁷ Horvath, *Modernism and Charism*.

⁸ Carson, "Betwixt and Between," 61.

created to encourage spiritual growth and renewal. Through his epigrams, Crashaw attempts to create such liminal spaces where spiritual transformation becomes possible. They are brief and intense, designed to shake readers out of their complacency and reinvigorate their spirituality. They also serve as one step towards his later synthesis of liminality and mysticism in his poetry.

Crashaw's longer poetry continues to explore the Divine mysteries but also examines the spiritual passion of mystical saints such as Teresa of Avila. In his Teresan poems, Crashaw draws upon Baroque sensibilities, combining them with the traditional contemplative metaphors of sexual union to depict the threshold experiences of annihilation, mystical union, and spiritual ecstasy. He also incorporates the *conchetto* of fire and visual imagery of contemporary Protestant emblems of love: flaming hearts, cupidic arrows, and seraphic wings. Fire becomes both a symbol of Divine love and an agent of change, transmuting Teresa even as it consumes her. Crashaw's own stated desire to join Teresa in her ecstatic flights implies a mystical temperament as a driving force behind his poetry. Although he is not the first mystical poet, his unique approach to such poetry, combining both Protestant and Catholic elements, is an important contribution to the genre.

Poet, priest, and martyr, Robert Southwell is another English mystical poet of the Early Modern period. Although he does not compose hymns to Saint Teresa, he does write of the fire of divine love as encountered through a mystical vision. His imagery is not sensual, like that of Crashaw, but it is vivid, even at times startling. Southwell was never a protestant, yet his verses were popular cross-confessionally in the years following his execution. Among Catholics this surge in popularity sprang, at least in part, from his martyrdom and his popular recognition as a contemporary saint. In this context, his poems became relics of the man himself. Among Protestants, Southwell had become a compelling figure, capturing the sympathies of many despite his official condemnation as a traitor. London printers released the first compilations of his poetry

just months after his death, perhaps in hopes of capitalizing as much on the morbid curiosity of the crowd as on the appreciation of Southwell's poetic talents.

The poems in these volumes were sometimes altered by their editors who changed words or rearranged verses to remove overt references to Catholic doctrine. Through these revisions they attempted to convert Southwell's poetry to suit Protestant devotional needs. Although they may have been purged of their Catholic context, their mystical themes often remained, appealing to those who had a deep, spiritual love of the Divine. Southwell had striven to appropriate Elizabethan love poetry, turning its focus from secular human love to the divine love of God. In doing so, he drew upon the traditions of spiritual espousal and the fire of divine love. The intense spiritual yearning of his poetry inspired a new generation of devotional writers, among whom were metaphysical poets such as George Herbert and Henry Vaughan, who is also considered a natural mystic.

Robert Southwell and Richard Crashaw were caught between the political and religious tensions of their time. For one, those tensions led to the red martyrdom of execution, for the other, the white martyrdom of monastic exile. Despite external pressures to conform to authorized approaches to worship in the England of their time, these two men chose, at the peril of their own lives, to seek a different path. They infused their search into their poetry, and their poetry in turn encourages a deep, affective spirituality which calls others to experience the love of God. Their writing reveals that mysticism remained alive and vibrant during this era of radical changes. Examining how each author is set within his historical context and he reacted to the political and religious pressures exerted on him helps to reveal aspects of his individual approach to spirituality, aspects which are then integrated into his poetry. Both men write of the fire of divine love, but whereas Crashaw is fascinated with that fire in terms of spiritual ecstasy, Southwell is more interested in the flame in terms of spiritual renewal. Nevertheless, for both men, to

experience the mystical fire of God is to enter a liminal space where spiritual transformation becomes possible.

Robert Southwell (1561-1595)

Robert Southwell, named after his father, was born the third son of a gentleman of Harsham St. Faith's in Norfolk.⁹ The Southwell family had prospered after the dissolution of the monasteries during the reign of Henry VIII, yet their sympathies remained Catholic. Robert Southwell, Esquire, had married Bridget Copley, the daughter of Sir Roger Copley of Roughway, Sussex. Bridget had been a Lady of the Court, and served as Queen Elizabeth's Latin instructor. These courtly connections encouraged her husband to keep his Catholic sympathies quiet, yet young Robert was raised in the Roman faith.

When he turned fifteen, his father sent him to Douai, where he boarded at the English College while studying at the Jesuit College of Anchin under the direction of Leonard Lessius, a theologian and mystic. However, his stay there was interrupted. Because of French and Spanish troop movements, he was evacuated temporarily to Paris where he studied at the College de Clermont, under the tutelage of Father Thomas Darbyshire, a Jesuit who was one of the first English recusants to join the Society of Jesus. During this time, Southwell ardently desired to become Jesuit, but he was too young. Less than a year later, he was moved back to Douai from which he began a journey to Rome in 1578. On 17 October of that year, at the age of seventeen, he was received there into the Society of Jesus. After completing his novitiate in Tournay, Belgium, Southwell returned to Rome where he began his studies in theology and philosophy.

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, biographical information comes from "Memoir of the Rev. Robert Southwell, S.J." *The Complete Works of R. Southwell, S.J.* (London: D. Stewart, Warwick Chambers, Paternoster Row, E.C., 1876), vii-xxiv.

Even as a student he seems to have been drawn towards mysticism. Familiar with the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, he composed a collection of seventy-three meditative exercises of his own.¹⁰ He also translated an important mystical treatise by Diego de Estella entitled *Meditaciones Devotissimos del Amor de Dios* which he re-titled, *A Hundred Meditations of the Love of God*, and he is reputed to have written a similar collection of meditations which is now lost, *Meditationes Roberti Sotvelli Martyris de Attributis Divinis ad amorem Dei excitantes—Exercita et Devotiones ejusdem*.¹¹

Southwell was ordained priest in 1584, at the age of twenty-three and greatly desired to be sent on the English Mission. He and a company of others, including Henry Garnet who would also later be martyred, were sent to England on 8 May 1586, reaching their destination on 7 July. Within a month of their arrival, Mary, Queen of Scots was implicated in the Babington Plot and persecutions of the Catholic communities in England increased. On 20 September 1586, John Ballard, an English Jesuit and the instigator of the plot, was executed. All Jesuits were under suspicion; seventy priests had already been banished from England's shores, and several more had been martyred because they refused to leave.

It was during these dangerous times that Southwell began his missionary work. He was first received into the house of William, the third Lord Vaux of Harrowden in Hackney. Soon afterwards he became the domestic chaplain and confessor to the Countess of Arundel. Her husband, Philip, the Earl of Arundel had been imprisoned in the Tower since 1585, convicted of treason. For his comfort, Southwell wrote a "Consolation for Catholics," and most of his other compositions were written during the six years he resided at the home of the Countess. One of

¹⁰ Joseph B. Collins, *Christian Mysticism in the Elizabethan Age: With Its Background in Mystical Methodology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1940), 171.

¹¹ J. M. De Buck, *Spiritual Exercises and Devotions* (London, 1931), 11, 15.

those works, *Mary Magdalene's Funerall Teares* is the first mystical treatment of John 20: 1-8 in Early Modern England.¹² Beginning in a meditative form, it gradually progresses through the stages of prayer, reaching ecstatic union when Christ appears to Mary at the tomb.¹³ The companion piece to this work, *St. Peter's Complaynt* presents a Peter who has denied Christ; through tears of repentance, he seeks forgiveness, moving from sin and folly, through repentance and conversion and experiences the life changing love and forgiveness of God. This poem, more than any other, was appropriated by Protestant readers and went through seven print editions between 1595 and 1602.¹⁴

The reciprocal love of God and humanity is the theme of many of Southwell's smaller poems. "Life's Death, Love's Life," "See I Dye Alive," and "Content and Ritche" express a deep love for God and a desire to be with him, even to the point of disregarding the present life. In "Lewd Love Is Lost," Southwell presents the Platonic idea that this world of seeming reality is but a shadow of the ideal world of the spirit. Only imperfect copies of true love and beauty exist here; thus the spirit longs for the perfect love and beauty which exist with God; compared with his love, all other loves are base ("At Home in Heaven" v. 30). This longing is reciprocal, for the spiritual beauty of the soul stirs the mercy of God and causes him to want to unite with it in love:

Thy ghostly beauty offer'd force to God;
It chained Him in links of tender love;
It won His will with man to make abode;
It stay'd his sword, and did His wrath remove:
It made the vigour of His justice yield,
And crowned Mercy empress of the field. ("At Home in Heaven" v. 7-12)

¹² Collins, *Christian Mysticism in Elizabethan England*, 171.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 171-2.

¹⁴ These editions, bound with *Myrtae*, a collection of his shorter poems, were printed in London. Two editions were released in 1595, the year of Southwell's execution. Three other editions were printed in 1596, 1597, and 1599. In 1602, they were printed both in London and in Edinburgh.

In the mystical tradition of spiritual espousal, God is “ravish’d” with the soul and enamored with her beauty (v. 28-29).¹⁵ His love is so intense, that He himself is willing to die for His beloved, consumed in the fire of His own love (“The Burning Babe”).

By comparing the intensity of Divine Union with passionate human love, Southwell is drawing on a biblically rooted tradition reaching as far back as the *Song of Songs*, a tradition nurtured by such Church Fathers as Augustine, Gregory the Great, and Bernard of Clairvaux. In doing so, he is reclaiming contemporary, secular love poetry and redirecting its focus from erotic, human love to pure divine love whose source and end are found in God. Southwell explicitly states this intent in the preface to his poems which he addresses to his cousin, William

Shakespeare:

Poets, by abusing their talents, and making the follies and feigning of love the customary subject of their base endeavors, have so discredited this facility, that a poet, a lover, and a liar, are by many reckoned but three words of one signification. But the vanity of men cannot counterpoise the authority of God, who delivered many parts of Scripture in verse, and, by his apostle willing us to exercise our devotion in hymns and spiritual songs, warranteth the art to be good and the use allowable.... But the devil, as he affecteth deity and seeketh to have all the compliments of divine honour applied to his service, so hath he among the rest possessed also most Poets with his idle fancies. For in lieu of solemn and devout matters, to which in duty they owe their abilities, they now busy themselves in expressing such passions as serve only for testimonies to what unworthy affections they have wedded their wills. And, because the best course to let them see the error of their works is to weave a new web in their own loom, I have here laid a few course threads together to invite some skilfuller wits to go forward in the same, or to begin some finer piece, wherein it may be seen how well verse and virtue suit together.¹⁶

Shakespeare’s response to Southwell’s challenge is not recorded. However, there is a story that on the night of Southwell’s death “a copy of his verses were brought to Queen Elizabeth, who

¹⁵ In Christian tradition the soul is always referenced in the feminine regardless of the gender by which the person identifies.

¹⁶ “Memoir of the Rev. Robert Southwell, S.J.” *The Complete Works of R. Southwell, S.J.* (London: D. Stewart, Warwick Chambers, Paternoster Row, E.C., 1876). 1-2.

upon reading in his dedicatory poem the priest's impassioned appeal for poets to reform their talents to the service of God, silently shed tears of her own."¹⁷

Southwell was betrayed in 1592. He had been in the habit of visiting other local Catholics to administer the Sacraments. One of those families was that of Richard Bellamy, who was already under suspicion through his former connections with Jerome Bellamy, a conspirator in the Babington Plot. Richard's daughter, Ann was arrested by the Queen's chief Priest-hunter, Richard Topcliffe, who brutally interrogated her and learned of Southwell's movements. The priest was promptly arrested. Over the next two months, Southwell would be tortured ten times. So severe were these sessions that he later said that death would have been preferable to any one of them.¹⁸ Thrown into a dungeon, he was left filthy, starved, and covered with maggots until his father intervened.¹⁹ Petitioning the Queen on his son's behalf, Robert Southwell, Esquire humbly asked that if his son had indeed done anything which the law deemed worthy of death, that he should be killed rather than left confined in such a filthy hole. In response, the Queen allowed him to be transferred to a better cell in the Tower under Topcliffe's supervision. She also gave his father permission to supply him with clothes, necessities, and books, although he was denied ink and paper. Asking only for the Bible and for a copy of the works of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Southwell spent the next three years in the Tower, allowed only occasional visits by his sister, Mary.

¹⁷ Gary M. Bouchard, "The Roman Steps to the Temple: An Examination of the Influence of Robert Southwell, SJ, upon George Herbert." *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*. 10.3 (Summer 2007): 131-150. *Project Muse*. (retrieved 24 July 2015).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xvii.

¹⁹ Although the documentary evidence of his letter has disappeared, early biographers report that his father wrote a letter to the Queen petitioning on his behalf. For one such reference see, "Memoir of the Rev. Robert Southwell, S.J." *The Complete Works of R. Southwell, S.J.* (London: D. Stewart, Warwick Chambers, Paternoster Row, E.C., 1876), 18.

On February 18, 1595, Southwell was transferred to Newgate and thrown into a dungeon called Limbo to await his trial. Three days later, he was brought to the bar in Westminster where he pleaded not-guilty to charges of treason but admitted he was a priest and that he had returned to England to administer the Sacraments to those who requested them and to perform the ordinary duties of the clergy. Under statutes prohibiting the presence of a Catholic priest within the kingdom, Southwell was found guilty of treason.

At dawn on 22 February, his jailor informed him that he was to be executed later that day. Southwell purportedly embraced the man, resolved that he would die a martyr's death for his faith. Dragged to Tyburn on a hurdle, he was made to stand on a cart under a gibbet while a noose was placed around his neck. Allowed to address the crowd very briefly before his execution by being hanged, drawn, and quartered, Southwell prayed for his Queen, his country, and his soul, then he informed the bystanders that he was to die because he was a priest. Although a few hecklers interrupted him, most of the gathered crowd stood silent and solemn. The order was given and the cart removed. Southwell made the sign of the cross over himself as he suffocated, and when the executioner made to cut him down alive in order to begin disemboweling him, members of the crowd stepped forward to prevent him, chief among them being, Charles Blount, the eighth Baron Mountjoy, who pulled on Southwell's legs until he was dead. Martyred at age 33, Southwell's heart was burned at Tyburn, his body quartered, and his head displayed on a pike on London Bridge.

Within a month of his execution, the first printed editions of Southwell's poetry were published.²⁰ Initially, they may have been printed in an attempt to capitalize on the popularity of a

²⁰ Bouchard, "The Roman Steps to the Temple," 134. See also Robert Southwell. *The Poems of Robert Southwell*. Ed. James H. McDonald and Nancy Pollard Brown. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), lv.

compelling figure who had captured the sympathies of the London crowd.²¹ Amongst Catholics, this popularity sprang from his martyrdom; his poetry represented the relics of a modern saint, relics which they could own through the written word.²² Yet these printed editions sometimes varied substantially from Southwell's original versions which he had previously circulated in manuscript form. The 1588 Royal Proclamation, "Ordering Martial Law against Possessors of Papal Bulls, Books, and Pamphlets" officially denied Catholics access to printing presses; therefore, the distribution of Catholic texts relied on handwritten copies and clandestine printing.²³ These manuscripts created "a counter-narrative to the official government tale of Jesuit sedition and perfidy" and helped to create and sustain Catholic identity both public and private.²⁴ Southwell's poetry, as found in these manuscripts, affirms Catholic doctrine and tradition, and it is these original versions of his work which would have been seen as authentic relics of a modern martyred saint.

Yet, Southwell's popularity was cross-confessional.²⁵ To Protestants he was a sensational figure. They bought copies of his poetry, spurred perhaps at first by curiosity as much as by admiration of his poetic talents. Based on the number of editions which were printed, he was one

²¹ Robert S. Miola, "Publishing the Word," *Review of English Studies*. 64.265 (2013): 424. OxfordJournals.org. (Retrieved 28 July 2015).

²² For more information on the perception of Southwell's poetry as a saintly relic see Arthur Marotti. *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy: Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism Discourses in Early Modern England*. Ed. Cedric Brown and Arthur Marotti. (Basinstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1997).

²³ Miola, "Publishing the Word," 412.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Diana Marie Shaw, "'Such Fire is Love': The Bernadine Poetry of St. Robert Southwell, S.J.," *Christianity and Literature*. 62.3 (Spring 2013): 333. ATLA religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed July 24, 2015).

of the top five most popular Elizabethan writers.²⁶ Yet because of his status as an executed traitor, many Protestants may not have publically admitted to owning or reading his works.

Ben Jonson is a notable exception. Notorious for being a harsh critic of his contemporary poets, he, nevertheless, praised Southwell's work. In a conversation with William Drummond, Jonson declared that even though "Southwell was hanged; yet so he [Jonson] had written that piece of his, 'The Burning Babe', he would have been content to destroy many of his [own poems]."²⁷ Others who admired Southwell's poetry were less public in their praise. Various compilers of miscellanies included whole poems or selected verses from Southwell's writings, yet failed to acknowledge their author. Like his corpse, the corpus of his work was separated into smaller pieces and distributed for viewing by the masses. These excerpts appeared in a variety of manuscripts and publications, including numerous miscellanies and song books.²⁸ "According to Peter Beal, line 25 of 'Marie Magdalens complaint at Christs death', 'With my love my life was nestled' ['nested', and 'rested', sometimes] achieved surprising popularity."²⁹ "In 1600 Thomas Morley set the line to music and his setting appeared twice in a virginal book compiled by 'R. Cr.' (c. 1638)."³⁰ Nevertheless, Southwell himself was rarely acknowledged as the author of such popular snippets of his work.³¹ Separating the man from his writing was one way of attempting to

²⁶ Bouchard, "The Roman Steps to the Temple," 135.

²⁷ Ben Jonson, *Conversations with William Drummond*. 170. *The Complete Poems*. Ed. George Parfitt. (London: Penguin, 1975), 465. Although he was raised a protestant, Jonson was a sometime Catholic convert, though his conversations with William Drummond probably took place after his re-conversion to the Church of England. None of this detracts from his no doubt sincere admiration of Southwell.

²⁸ Miola, "Publishing the Word," 419.

²⁹ Ibid. Qtd. From Beal, Peter. "Robert Southwell." *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*. Vol1, Part 2. Ed. J. P. Croft, et al. (London, 1980), 495-522.

³⁰ Ibid., 419.

³¹ Ibid., 421.

relieve the tension created by the memory of his public execution as a traitor and the public appreciation of his skill as a poet.

Gary Bouchard has observed that since the execution of Southwell coincided with the publication of his works “we need to recognize that the influence that he exercised upon readers involved a complex entanglement of his words and his life, or rather, his death.”³² Even in anthologies of his work, editors sometimes included an apology which encouraged readers to weigh the works and not the author. John Trussel, in the dedicatory poem to his 1595 edition of Southwell’s poetry, urges readers not to be like “our late sprung sectaries, / Or for a fashion Bible-bearing hypocrites’, who ‘for the Authors sake the worke despise”.³³ In this case, separating the man from the work also meant separating the work from its Catholic context.

In order to affect this separation, Southwell’s verses are sometimes substantially rewritten by editors, who reconceptualize and reconstitute them as Protestant, sometimes including them with explicitly anti-Catholic material.³⁴ Robert S. Miola shows how such appropriated verses refashioned Southwell into a Protestant poet by sanitizing his writings of all references to contested Catholic doctrines.³⁵

Not only do these editions disjoin the priest from the poet but they refashion the poet into a Protestant by inventing texts for him. The inserted lines refuting transubstantiation in the Eucharist poem, the replacement of God for Mary in ‘Saint Peter’s Complaynt’, along

³² Bouchard, “The Roman Steps to the Temple,” 135.

³³ John Trussel, ed. *Triumphs over Death. Or, A Consolatory Epistle, for Afflicted Minds, in the Affects of Dying Friends. First Written for the Consolation of One: but Now Published for the General Good of all, by R. S. The Author of S. Peters Complaint, and Mænoniæ His Other Hymes.* (London: Printed by V. S. for John Busbie [etc.], 1595). *English Poetry Database*. Chadwyck-Healey. 1992. OCLC 671259695 or 456938168.

³⁴ Miola, “Publishing the Word,” 422.

³⁵ See Robert S. Miola, “Publishing the Word,” *Review of English Studies*. 64.265 (2013): 424. OxfordJournals.org. (Retrieved 28 July 2015).

with the many changes that deny the penitential agency of Peter's tears—all contradict the poet's original intent and transform him into an orthodox Church of England preacher. Censored and sanitized, Southwell no longer defiantly celebrates Catholic sacrament and Christian sacrifice, the drama of the cross being presently re-enacted in the poet's own life and in those of his recusant readers.³⁶

The consistent suppression of the Catholicity of Southwell's life and work and the removal of all references to the sacraments and the liturgy, resulted in making the poet seem Protestant, "a very valuable and popular commodity to the London book trade."³⁷ As Alison Shell has observed, Southwell's poems (both the appropriated versions and the clandestinely printed originals) "continued to sell well up to the Civil Wars. They inspired imitations and appealed to a wide readership, socially and religiously heterogeneous; and with a publishing record that rivals many popular prose works of religious devotion, they succeeded in pleasing both Catholics and Protestants for just under half a century."³⁸

All overt reference to Catholic doctrine and the liturgy may have been removed from Southwell's printed writings; nevertheless, mystical themes remained. Southwell had attempted to appropriate contemporary, secular love poetry and redirect its focus from erotic, human love to pure, divine love whose source and end are found in God. One of his more successful poems, "The Burning Babe" depicts this *agape* love in a mystical vision of the infant Christ as received by a lonely traveler on Christmas Eve. Southwell first circulated the poem in manuscript; however, quickly following his execution in 1595, it appeared in the first print editions of his collected poems, followed by eight other editions before 1636.³⁹ The poem shocks at least partly

³⁶ Ibid., 411.

³⁷ Ibid., 424.

³⁸ Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy, and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660*. (Cambridge, 1999), 61.

³⁹ Kenney, "The Christ Child of Fire," 416.

through its imagery of infant immolation. On a cold, winter's night, a lone man stands shivering in the snow when suddenly he feels the heat of a fire which warms his heart. He and looks up to see a vision of the Christ Child engulfed in flames.

The figure of a lonely traveler on the road is very common in mystical literature. Sometimes the traveler is depicted as both literally and spiritually lost, wandering blindly in the wilderness and facing sudden life-threatening danger. Were it not for divine intervention, the outcome would be certain death. At other times the traveler is depicted as being on a long journey or quest, moving purposefully towards a specific goal and facing various obstacles and tests along the way. Usually, the image represents the life-journey of an individual, and the destination is the afterlife, be that heaven or hell. At some point in the journey, the solitary pilgrim may experience a divine vision which results in a permanent change of heart and a deeper understanding of God. The speaker of "The Burning Babe" is on such a spiritual journey and does indeed encounter a vision which warms his cold heart and alters his understanding of the Incarnation of Christ. The speaker feels the presence of the burning Christ Child even before he sees Him with his eyes. His Divine Love manifests as flames, the heat of which cause even the traveler's "heart to glow" (v. 2).

Catherine of Siena, whose writings were popular with Jesuits in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries,⁴⁰ expounds upon the connection between Christ's love for humanity and God's divine fire in the conclusion of her *Dialogue*:

You are a fire always burning but never consuming; you are a fire consuming in your heat all the soul's selfish love; you are a fire lifting all chill and giving light. In your light you have made me know your truth: You are that light beyond all light who gives the mind's eye supernatural light in such fullness and perfection that you bring clarity even to

⁴⁰ Kenney, "The Christ Child on Fire," 425; Kenney notes that an English translation of her *vita* was published in Douai in 1609.

the light of faith. In that faith I see that my soul has life, and in that light receives you who are Light.

In the light of faith I gain wisdom in the wisdom of the Word your Son; in the light of faith I am strong, constant, persevering; in the light of faith I have hope: It does not let me faint along the way. This light teaches me the way, and without this light I would be walking in the dark.⁴¹

Echoes of a journey through cold and darkness resound in this passage. The fire of God's love lifts the chill and provides the light by which she perceives her path more clearly. It is the fire of God's love which burns away selfish vice, yet like the burning bush, it is itself never consumed.

Bernard of Clairvaux, whose writings Southwell requested when imprisoned in the Tower,⁴² describes the love of God as a purging fire. In his *Sermon 57 on The Song of Songs*, Bernard writes: "God does not just kindle the fire of love: He is the very fire. 'The fire that is God does indeed devour but it does not debase'; "it burns pleasantly, devastates felicitously. It is a coal of desolating fire, but a fire that rages against vices only to produce a healing unction in the soul."⁴³ Synthesized within this image are the two biblical similes of God as a consuming fire and as a refiner, purging away dross.⁴⁴ All that is consumed are sins and vices, leaving the soul unstained and pure. Bernard then identifies this divine fire with God Himself and combines it with the mystical concept of the fire of love. Southwell pushes this imagery a step further. Not only is God Himself a consuming fire, now he has also become the furnace in which souls are not

⁴¹ Catherine of Siena. Ch. 127. *The Dialogue*. Trans. Suzanne Noffke. (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 364-365.

⁴² Gregory Schweers has identified thematic and stylistic similarities between Southwell's writing and that of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. See Schweers, Gregory, "Bernard of Clairvaux's Influence on English Recusant Letters: The Case of Robert Southwell, S. J." *American Benedictine Review* 41.2 (June 1990): 157-166. In his Epistle of Comfort, Southwell cites the saint seventeen times (Ibid., 160).

⁴³ Shaw, "'Such Fire Is Love,'" 344; Bernard 57.7.

⁴⁴ Biblical references to God as a consuming fire, see Exodus 24:17; Deuteronomy 4:24, 9:3; 2 Samuel 22:9; Psalm 97:3; Hebrews 10:27, 12:9; God's refining fire, see Psalm 66:10; Proverbs 17:3; Isaiah 1:25; Jeremiah 9:7; Daniel 11:35; Zechariah 13:9; Malachi 3:3.

only purified but wrought into shape (v. 9, 12-13). The flames of that furnace are His love (v.10), quenched by His blood, tempering the newly worked soul.

To increase the impact of this image, Southwell startles his audience with the vision of a “pretty babe,” which “newly born in fiery heats did fry” (vv. 4, 7). The babe is the Christ child, suffering a Proleptic Passion. The time between birth and death has been compressed, and the strongly sacrificial tones of the poem emphasize the purpose of Christ’s birth for the redemption of humanity. Southwell’s Protestant audience would have been very much familiar with symbolic representations of the love of God as presented in emblem books which were popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These cryptographic collections of images and poems depicted Christian beliefs symbolically and encouraged readers to reflect on moral lessons generally gleaned from Christian doctrine. Such a symbolic reading of the “The Burning Babe” would have encouraged readers to reflect on the love of God and the redemptive reason behind the Incarnation. However, Southwell is doing more than just stirring their intellectual curiosity with a clever conceit. He is evoking a strong visceral reaction. Like other mystics, he finds in the visible world metaphors of the spiritual, and he pours intense emotion into his comparisons of the two, startling readers with the vividness of the imagery and depicting the spiritual life as a personal encounter with Love made flesh.⁴⁵

According to Helen White, “The thought that infinite Love should yet seek the love of its creature has awed some of the profoundest of Christian minds.”⁴⁶ Robert Southwell himself described his soul’s relationship to God in terms of the relationship between a bride and bridegroom: “*Crucifixo desponsata est anima tua, unde et eam cum corpora crucifixam esse*

⁴⁵ Shaw, “Such Fire Is Love,” 343.

⁴⁶ Helen C. White, “The Contemplative Element in Robert Southwell.” *The Catholic Historical Review*. 48.1 (April 1962): 9.

oportet. (Thy soul is espoused to the Crucified One and therefore thou must be crucified both in soul and body).⁴⁷ Such love is a sacrificial love, a love which is willing to give itself for the sake of the other. This is the type of love which Southwell understood to be the mission of the religious poet to depict. His poems both stir and feed the deep spiritual hunger of his audience, especially those with a temperament which draws them to strive ardently to know the Divine.

Southwell's call to redirect poetry from secular love sonnets to the service of God coincides with a shift towards devotional poetry in England. Nevertheless, Southwell is rarely if ever recognized by his contemporaries as a leader in this movement. Alison Shell suggests this lack of recognition is a direct result of his martyrdom:

Simply from reading what Elizabethan poets have to say about their mentors, one would assume that the turn towards religious poetry at this date [1595-6] was spearheaded almost entirely by Edmund Spenser, Guillaume Salluste de Bartas and the spirit of Philip Sidney. It is not that Southwell is never mentioned at all since a number of contemporaries praise his style; but it is as if a martyred Catholic could not escape an ideological miasma of a kind which did not prevent his being read or imitated by non-Catholics, but which may well have impeded their overt acknowledgement of him as an example.⁴⁸

The popularity of Southwell's poetry is evident in the number of editions which were printed. For political and ideological reasons, his contemporaries may have been hesitant to acknowledge admiring the work of a condemned and executed traitor. Likewise, admitting to hearing his call and imitating his style may have seemed unwise at the time. Nevertheless, Southwell did serve as

⁴⁷ Miola, "Publishing the Word," 416. Quoting. From J. M. de Buck, S.J., ed. *Spiritual Exercises and Devotions of Blessed Robert Southwell*, S.J. Trans. P. E. Hallet (London, 1931), 141, 59-60).

⁴⁸ Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 59.

an “invisible influence” on a new generation of devotional poets, among whom was George Herbert.⁴⁹

When he was nearly seventeen years old, George Herbert sent his mother two sonnets as a New Year’s gift from Cambridge where he was just beginning his first year of study. The first of these two poems questions why contemporary poets choose to write about secular love when the divine love of God is a much more fitting subject. In doing so, it contains several echoes of mystical elements found in Southwell’s work:

My God, where is that ancient heat towards thee,
Wherewith whole showls of *Martyrs* once did burn,
Besides their other flames? Doth Poetry
Wear *Venus* Livry? only serve her turn?
Why are not *Sonnets* made for thee? And layes
Upon thine Altar burnt? Cannot thy love
Heighten a spirit to sound out thy praise
As well as any she? Cannot thy *Dove*
Out-strip their *Cupid* easily in flight?
Or, since thy ways are deep, and still the same,
Will not a verse run smooth that bears thy name?
Why doth that fire, which by thy power and might
Each breast does feel, no braver fuel choose
Than that, which one day Worms may chance refuse?⁵⁰

The call to write poetry on sacred themes, the reference to the “ancient heat” of love for God, which burned within the martyrs (both red and white), and the connection between this love and divine inspiration all lead the speaker to adduce that poetry inspired by the love of God is better than verse influenced by secular love. Compared with Divine love, Cupid, Venus, and Erato all are inferior muses.

F. E. Hutchinson has pointed out the similarity between Herbert’s sonnet and Southwell’s “Rurus ad Eundem,” the prefatory lines to *St. Peter’s Complaint*:⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ F.E. Hutchinson, ed., *The Works of George Herbert* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), 206.

This makes my mourning muse dissolve in tears,
 This theme my heavy pen,--too plain in prose;
 Christ's thorn is sharp, no head his garland wears;
 Still finest wits are 'stilling Venus' rose:
 In paynim toys the sweetest veins are spent;
 To Christian works few have their talents lent.
 License my single pen to seek a phere;
 You heavenly sparks of wit shew native light,
 Cloud not with misty loves your orient clear,
 Sweet flight you shoot, learn once to level right.
 Favour my wish, well-wishing works no ill;
 I move the suit, the grant rests in your will. (vv. 13-24)⁵²

The temptation is to read the fourth line as referring to Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*. After all, Southwell did address the preface of his collection of poetry to his cousin. However, the dates are difficult to reconcile. Southwell wrote most of his poetry between 1586 and 1591. However, Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* was probably composed in 1592, the year Southwell was arrested. It was not entered in the Stationer's Register until April 18, 1593, when Southwell had already been imprisoned in the Tower for a year without access to pen or paper.⁵³ Therefore, it is unlikely that Southwell is referring to his cousin's poem in the prefatory lines of *St. Peter's Complaint*. What is more likely is that, through the reference to Venus, Southwell is referring to secular love poetry in general, not just to one particular poem. Regardless, his point is clear, the "finest wits" of his age spend their time composing verses to the goddess of love and lust rather than to Christ, the Incarnation of Divine love. His aim is to call for divine inspiration to appropriate popular love poetry and use it extol the love of God made flesh.

⁵¹ Ibid., 549.

⁵² Robert Southwell, "Rursus ad Eundem," *Saint Peter's Complaint, Mary Magdalen's Tears, with Other Works of the Author R. S.* (London: Printed by J. Haviland, and Sold by Robert Alcott, 1634), Reprinted in *The Complete Works of R. Southwell, S.J. with Life and Death* (London: D. Stewart, Warwick Chambers, Paternoster Row, E.C., 1876), 5-6.

⁵³ William Shakespeare, *Venus and Adonis, The Riverside Shakespeare*, Ed. G. Blakemore Evans, et al (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 1703.

Gary Bouchard examines other similarities and the important differences between Robert Southwell and George Herbert, most dealing with style and thematic content. In “Jordan II” he even sees a veiled reference to Southwell himself:

As [Southwell] describes the “quaint words... curling with metaphors,” with which he first attempted to write poetry, he describes his rejection of what seem to be the fineries of Elizabethan verse, and he offers what may be the subtlest of allusions to Southwell, first in a possibly condensed form of the poet’s name: “My thoughts began to burnish, sprout and *swell*” (“Jordan II,” 4; italics [Bouchard’s])....then uses Southwell’s most famous metaphor of “weaving a new webbe in others’ loom” to describe his own faltering creative process: “So did I weave myself into the sense” (14).⁵⁴

Bouchard argues that considering the context in which Southwell died, Herbert would never have been so imprudent as to refer to the man explicitly; nevertheless, the borrowing of his famous metaphor and the possible allusion to his name, imply the influence which Southwell had on the young Herbert. The poet had heard and heeded Southwell’s call to turn English poetry to the use of God.

George Herbert’s writings are usually acknowledged to be more metaphysical than mystical, meaning that they rely on highly ingenious conceits as controlling images.⁵⁵ His devotional poetry is intellectual, analytical, and psychological, expressing the poet’s sense of the complexities and contradictions of the spiritual life of an individual. Mystical poetry, on the other hand, while it may utilize metaphor and conceit, attempts to transcend the intellect and ordinary human perceptions. Anthony Low proposes that the two chief marks of a mystical poet are those of mystical prayer: “passivity and experience of direct communication with God.”⁵⁶ By passivity,

⁵⁴ Bouchard, “The Roman Steps to the Temple,” 147.

⁵⁵ C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon. *A Handbook to Literature*. 5th ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986), 299-300.

⁵⁶ Anthony Low, *Love’s Architecture: Devotional Modes in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry* (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 199.

Low is referring to passive contemplation. Mystics cannot actively instigate a numinous experience, nor can they control the time or the place in which they receive one. Such experiences are considered to be gifts from God, given at his discretion and directly communicated from Him to the mystic. Mystical poetry grapples with the ineffableness of such experiences, combining a sense of holiness with that of transcendence. They are often paradoxical and sometimes disturbing, especially to non-mystics.

Whether or not George Herbert himself can be considered a mystic, he is one of the greatest religious poets of his age, and his *Temple* influenced mystical writers such as Richard Crashaw (*Steps to the Temple*) and Henry Vaughan (*Silex Scintillans*). Therefore, Herbert's work serves to connect Southwell to these later poets, transferring and transforming elements of mysticism in the process. Both Crashaw and Vaughan also will heed Southwell's call to devote their poetic talents to sacred verse and both will draw upon themes of divine love. The fire of love which ignites the heart of the "Burning Babe" also burns within the "Flaming Heart" of Crashaw's Spanish saint. The desire to express a deep longing for the divine, which finds expression in Southwell's verse, will also inspire the poetry of Vaughan.

Thus, as Southwell appropriated Elizabethan romantic poetry to create his "sacred parody," so Protestant and recusant poets appropriated elements of his own work to create devotional poetry suited to their own religious needs. The Protestantization of Southwell's poetry may have divorced it from its original Catholic context; nevertheless, the mystical elements that remained served to inspire devotional poets for generations to come.

Richard Crashaw (1612/13-1649)

Richard Crashaw was born in London; his father, William Crashaw was an Anglican minister with strong Puritan sympathies who distinguished himself through his zealously anti-

Catholic writings. When Richard was about two years old, his family moved to Agnes Burton, a small Yorkshire parish where William hoped to have enough quiet leisure to compose his polemics.⁵⁷ To aid him, he collected religious works by Catholic writers, works which had been seized by the authorities. In one extant letter dated 26 February 1611, and addressed to his patron the Earl of Salisbury, the Lord High Treasurer of England, William requests to be given certain “popish bookes” which the Earl had recently acquired and which William wanted to study in order to refute their teachings.⁵⁸ His young son, Richard had access to this library of Popish books; thus he had early access to Catholic ideas as well as Protestant ones. Whether he read any of these available texts or not is unfortunately not documented; however, Crashaw does appear to be consistently drawn towards affective approaches to spirituality and religious devotion, approaches more to be found in contemplation and mysticism than in the zealous Puritanism of his father.

Little is known about Richard Crashaw’s childhood. His mother, Helen died before he was six, and his father remarried in 1619. His new step-mother treated him kindly, but tragically, she died from complications in childbirth in 1620. Mario Praz suggests that the loss of both these mother figures so early in life is an important factor in Crashaw’s later devotion to the Virgin

⁵⁷ George Walton Williams, ed. *The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw*. Introduction (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), xv.

⁵⁸ *The Complete State Papers: Domestic 1547-1625. Part VIII: The State Papers Domestic for the Years 1609-1617 of James I’s Reign*. SP/61. No. 200. Feb. 26, 1611 (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press Microform Publications, 1979), Microfilm.

Mother and to nurturing female saints such as Teresa of Avila.⁵⁹ It probably also played a factor in his attraction to Mary Collet, whom he called his dearest “Mother.”⁶⁰

Mrs. Collet was the sister of Nicholas Ferrar, a retired London merchant who had withdrawn to the country to devote himself to the service of God after suffering losses due to the failure of the Virginia Company.⁶¹ Ferrar established a small, Protestant religious community at Little Gidding, which his mother had purchased in 1625. She, her grown children, and their families along with the household servants numbered about forty individuals. They modeled their lives on a strict religious house. Study, work, and art were combined with prayer. Little Gidding was famous for its spiritual devotions reminiscent of monastic exercises, such as its night watches during which two family members would spend the night in prayer and the reading of the psalms.

The residents of Little Gidding were Protestant, but their experiment in “devout humanism” brought Puritan charges of popery.⁶² These charges found expression in an anonymous collection of distortions about Little Gidding, in which a visitor describes what he calls “the late erected Monasticall Place, called the Arminian Nunnery.”⁶³ Early in the text this

⁵⁹ Mario Praz, *Secentismo e marinismo in Inghilterra: John Donne—Richard Crashaw*. (Firenze: “La Voce,” 1925), 152.

⁶⁰ Edward Ingram Watkins, *Poets and Mystics*. Essay Index Reprint Series. (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Series, 1968), 139; Helen C. White, *The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in Religious Experience* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1936), 203.

⁶¹ Thomas Thelluson Carter, and J. F. M. Carter. *Nicholas Ferrar: His Household and His Friends*. (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1892), 79, 80-105.

⁶² White, *The Metaphysical Poets*, 1936), 210. White is using a term coined by Abbé Henri Brémond. See his *Histories Littéraire du Sentiment Religieux en France*. (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1916); Hodgkins, Christopher, *Authority, Church, and Society in George Herbert: Return to the Middle Way* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 122, 156-58, 166, 191, 192, 207, 211; Christopher Hodgkins, *Reforming Empire: Protestant Colonialism and Conscience in British Literature* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 129, 138, 154-160.

⁶³ *The Arminian Nunnery or, A Brief Description and Relation of the Late Erected Monasticall Place, Called the Arminian Nunnery at Little Gidding in Huntington-Shire*. (London: Printed for Thomas

visitor reports a conversation which he supposedly had with Nicholas and his brother, John, both of whom he describes as being “priest-like”: “I told him what I had heard of the *Nunns at Gidding*; of two watching and praying all night; of their *Canoncall hours*; of their *Crosses* on the outside and inside of the *Chappell*; of an Altar richly decked with *Tapestry, Plate, and Tapers*; of their *Adorations, genuflections, and geniculations*, which I told them plainly might strongly savour of Superstition and Popery.”⁶⁴ According to this account, Nicholas Ferrar cuts him off, denying that he nor anyone else residing at Little Gidding was Catholic and that “he did as verily beleeve the Pope to be *Antichrist*, as any Article of his Faith, . . . He denied the place to be a *Nunnery*, and that none of his neeces were *nunnes*: but hee confessed that two of his *Nieces* had lived the one thirtie, and the other thirty and two years Virgins, and so resolved to continue (as he hoped they would) to give themselves to *Fasting and Prayers*, but had made no *Vowes*.”⁶⁵

Regardless of this rebuttal, the visitor sees Little Gidding as a “bridge to Popery.”⁶⁶ Its basis in communal life and religious devotion; its extra-biblical observances such as genuflections in the chapel and prayers six times daily; and its use of ornamentation and decoration in the form of flowers and candles in the chapel and on the altar led to accusations of monasticism, superstition, and idolatry by hostile Puritan visitors like the author of *The Arminian Nunnery*. Nevertheless, for all its apparent similarity to Catholic monasticism, Ferrar’s experiment at Little Gidding was still Protestant. It consisted of one extended family; the children of that family were expected to take their place in the world and begin families of their own; and both men and

Underhill, 1644). Electronic version. Ed. William S. Peterson. July 2000. *The Internet Archive*. (Retrieved 29 April 2015). 1. I have kept the original spelling and italics in all quotations from this text.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 6.

women were expected to lead secular lives. The two virgin sisters were an exception rather than a rule, and even though they chose never to marry, they did not withdraw from the community. The two sisters, like their married kin, participated in the education of neighborhood children, the care of the sick, and the bookbinding for which their family was well known. Thus, while Little Gidding can feasibly be seen as an experimental synthesis of Protestantism and the spiritual devotion characteristic of religious houses, the comparison of Little Gidding with a nunnery is an exaggeration and a distortion of the truth.

The devotional life lived by the members of Little Gidding and their high-church practices drew many visitors from the neighboring Cambridge colleges, visitors such as Richard Crashaw who tutored Ferrar Collet, the son of Mary Collet and the nephew of her brother, Nicholas Ferrar.⁶⁷ Although Crashaw may have been aware of the community earlier, he began to visit it frequently after meeting the young Collet in 1636. He and a small group of friends would spend time visiting Little Gidding, and Crashaw found that he had much in common with the Ferrars. At the time, he was already a graduate of Cambridge and had just received a Fellowship at Pembroke (1635).⁶⁸ Crashaw probably owed this appointment to John Cosin who was one of the leaders of the High Church party at Cambridge.

Cosin became the master of Peterhouse in 1634, and he used his influence to “intensify the already existent anti-Puritan and High Anglicanism of the college.”⁶⁹ Soon after his

⁶⁷ Williams, *The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw*, xvi.

⁶⁸ Richard Crashaw’s father died in 1626 when the boy was fourteen years old. Not much is known about Crashaw’s teenage years until he is accepted for admission to the Charterhouse in 1629 even though he was older than the usual age of admission. He graduated in 1631 and was elected to the Greek Scholarship at Pembroke 6 Oct. 1631. He matriculated in 1632 as a pensioner of that college. See Martin, Leonard Cyril. *The Poems English, Latin, and Greek of Richard Crashaw* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927. 2nd ed. 1957), xix-xx.

⁶⁹ White, *The Metaphysical Poets*, 210.

appointment he began making significant changes to Peterhouse's Chapel in order to bring it in line with Archbishop William Laud's idea of the "beauty of holiness."⁷⁰ Richard Crashaw assisted in appealing for help toward the Chapel's decoration and contributed funds himself to its ornamentation.⁷¹ The appearance of God's house much concerned Crashaw. In a 1635 version of *On a Treatise of Charity*, he laments the iconoclasm which had destroyed the beauty of God's houses in England and looks forward to the day when that beauty will be restored.⁷²

Both his association with Cosin at Cambridge and his frequent visits with Ferrar at Little Gidding encouraged Crashaw's love for Laudian approaches to worship. His time at Cambridge also intensified his interest in devotional poetry and contemplative literature.⁷³ In the 1634 publication of his first book, *Epigrammata Sacra* Crashaw includes a declaration of his resolution "to devote himself to sacred poetry, setting against the profane love which poets have celebrated so lavishly and so wantonly the sacred love of the Christian."⁷⁴ The epigrams themselves do not focus on the usual Protestant preoccupations with sin, Christ's ransom of sinners, or the appeasement of God's wrath, nor do they express anxiety over faith or salvation. Instead, they combine the function of Salesian meditations with that of the emblems which were so popular at the time, creating vivid verbal images of spiritual concepts designed to both delight and to

⁷⁰ Thomas Alfred Walker, *Peterhouse* (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, Ltd., 1935).

⁷¹ Martin, *The Poems English, Latin, and Greek of Richard Crashaw*, xxii-xxiii.

⁷² *On a Treatise of Charity* was originally published in Robert Shelford's *Five Pious and Learned Discourses* (Cambridge, 1635), under the title, *Upon the Ensuing Treatises [of Mr. Shelford]*. See Williams, *The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw*, 69-70.

⁷³ Ruth C. Wallerstein, *A Study in Style and Poetic Development* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962), 34.

⁷⁴ White, *The Metaphysical Poets*, 205; "Lectori," 11-14. Senior scholars in the Charterhouse where Crashaw studied were required to compose Latin and Greek epigrams on the Gospel and Epistle of the day. Undoubtedly these school exercises were the inspiration for this volume of work. See Austin Warren, "Crashaw's *Epigrammata Sacra*." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*. 33.2 (Apr. 1934), 233-35.

teach.⁷⁵ To create these vivid images, Crashaw begins to draw upon elements of the new Baroque style which was popular on the continent. One of its poets, Giambattista Marino (1569-1625) was much admired by him. Marino encouraged the use of extravagant conceits, continuous strings of metaphors, antithesis, word play, lavish descriptions, sensuousness, and musicality. All of which Crashaw incorporates into his own style.

During his time at Peterhouse, Crashaw's deeply devotional poetry becomes more and more contemplative. According to Austin Warren, he probably began reading Saint Teresa of Avila as early as 1638, when his friend, the mystically-minded Joseph Beaumont discovered the saint.⁷⁶ Deeply inspired by her, Beaumont composed a "special and rapturous encomium" for Teresa which he delivered during a Latin oration at Cambridge.⁷⁷ Crashaw began writing his own hymn in praise of the saint around this same time and would continue to write some of his best poems about this inspiring mystic. In his *A Hymn to Sainte Teresa*, Crashaw "unites two themes intensely dear to him—martyrdom and mysticism.... indeed, the two themes grow into one: to live the mystical life is to die, not in a moment, but throughout a life—to die at the hand not of an enemy but of a lover."⁷⁸ The passionate ardor which Crashaw expresses in this hymn brings to mind the religious "enthusiasm" which the Church of England feared and discredited. Yet, Crashaw is not claiming a personal mystical experience, nor is he claiming any new revelation advocating religious or political change; instead, he is praising a mystic who lived in

⁷⁵ For more information, see Marc F. Bertolasco's book, *Crashaw and the Baroque* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1971).

⁷⁶ Austin Warren, "Crashaw and Saint Teresa." *The Times Literary Supplement*. (25 August 1932): 593.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Austin Warren, *Richard Crashaw: A Study in Baroque Sensibility* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1939), 146; See also Anthony E. Farnham. "St. Teresa and the Coy Mistress." *Boston University Studies in English*. II. (1956), 226-39.

continuous martyrdom of the self-will and taught total obedience to the will of God. Through his praise of her mystical ecstasy, Crashaw expresses his own desire, not for prophetic insight or revelatory knowledge but for “that ecstasy of love—of love for Him whom he already loves but as yet without that love that realizes the fullness of Teresa’s.”⁷⁹

On 15 April 1642 the Fellows of Peterhouse elected Crashaw “Catechista & Curatus Ecclesiasticus,” and various documents show him catechizing in local village churches connected with Peterhouse.⁸⁰ Tradition connects him to the ministry at Little Saint Mary’s, a connection which is given credence by a letter written years later by Queen Henrietta Maria to the Pope. In it she recommends Crashaw, stating expressly that he had been a “minister” in England.⁸¹ However, by 1643, Crashaw had left Cambridge. By December of that year, Parliamentary Commissioners arrived at the university, charged with the iconoclastic mission of despoiling the Peterhouse chapel and bringing Cambridge into alignment with their Puritan ideals.⁸² Laudianism was under attack, and Archbishop William Laud himself would be executed by the headman’s axe in January 1645.

Crashaw travelled to Leiden. In February 1644, he posted a letter from that city to a friend in England stating that he had recently parted from his “mother,” Mary Collett.⁸³ Apparently, he had been denied her company by relatives who did not want him to see her, and this greatly distressed him. Little more is known about his life during the next two years. When

⁷⁹ White, *The Metaphysical Poets*, 239.

⁸⁰ Austin Warren, “Richard Crashaw, ‘Catechist and Curate,’” *Modern Philology*. 32.3 (Feb. 1935), 261-63.

⁸¹ Martin, *The Poems English, Latin, and Greek of Richard Crashaw*, xxxiii.

⁸² *Ibid.*, xxv.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, xxiii-ix.

he surfaced again in September of 1644, he has converted to Catholicism, but is ignored and destitute. In an attempt to gain patronage, he publishes in 1645 a collection of both sacred and secular poetry entitled *Steps to the Temple* and *Delights of the Muses*. However, he must wait another two years before he finally finds a position, entering the service of Cardinal Palotto in 1647. By the following year he has revised his collection of poetry and republished it with several additions. Yet Crashaw has trouble getting along with the Cardinal's other servants. In an attempt to keep the peace, Palotto finds him a minor post in the House of Loretto; however, he catches a fever on the way there and dies on 21 August 1649, only a few months after he arrives. He was only thirty-one.

Robert Crashaw's friend, Thomas Carr, published in 1652 the final collection of his poetry. In the volume's introduction, Carr described Crashaw's approach to life as a mixture of material detachment and indifference.⁸⁴ This "conscious asceticism...comes fundamentally out of no low opinion of the world, out of no distaste for ordinary living, but out of a very deep passion for the love he has glimpsed, and a belief that it is only by passing beyond the limits of ordinary experience that he may hope to come to that love."⁸⁵ In comparison to that quest, the distractions of the material world fall away as less important, forgotten rather than forbidden. Crashaw is focused on a God who could not bear to abandon humanity to its own willfulness, and his mature English poems concentrate on what were for him "the main expressions of the love which brought Christ to earth, expressions in which that love is offered to [humanity]."⁸⁶ His poems, which are fundamentally contemplative and affective, reveal the natural progression of a religious

⁸⁴ White, *The Metaphysical Poets*, 237.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 236.

temperament drawn towards Divine love; they express his desire with the fervor of a lover and the ardent sensuality of a Baroque poet.

Crashaw's early poems, his epigrams, provide the first glimpses of this progression. Focusing on verses from the scriptural narrative, they present brief images with a visual and tactile vividness that discourages preconditioned responses and engages both the emotions and the mind through deep meditation on their spiritual themes. In this regard, the epigrams function in much the same way as the spiritual exercises of St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622).⁸⁷ In contrast to the Ignatian method, Salesian meditation does not encourage composition of place. The imagination is not used to visualize in extensive detail the suffering and death of Christ in order to stir strong emotions and encourage devotion. Instead, de Sales recommends choosing a divine mystery on which to focus and allowing the mind to reflect and consider that mystery in order to move the will and the emotions in the direction of God. Unlike the formally structured Ignatian exercises, Salesian meditation does not insist on strict logical development; instead, the mind is allowed to roam freely over the subject, expanding the heart as much as possible and allowing the affections to have their free course.⁸⁸ Meditating on the divine mysteries without allowing them to change one's life is inefficacious, so de Sales encourages meditators to put into practice the virtues that have been contemplated.

Crashaw's epigrams function in much the same way. Each begins by proposing one subject for meditation. To discourage stock responses, the poet uses vivid, sometimes shockingly uncomfortable imagery, presenting very human aspects of the life of Christ, focusing with wonder on the Incarnation, and yearning for intimacy with God. Like contracted verbal emblems,

⁸⁷ Anthony F. Allison, "Crashaw and St. Francis de Sales." *Review of English Studies*. 24.96 (Oct. 1948), 295-302.

⁸⁸ Marc F. Bertolasco, *Crashaw and the Baroque*. (Alabama: University of Alabama, 1971), 82-85.

the images he creates invite meditation, enlisting the aid of the senses to grasp and explore a spiritual concept, invoking both the mind and the emotions in the process, expanding the heart and raising the affections up to God.⁸⁹ In his epigram, “Blessed is the Womb and the Paps” (Luke 11:27), Crashaw imagines Mary breastfeeding the baby Jesus; he then turns this very human moment around, juxtaposing the image of the nursing mother with that of the crucified Christ, His breast bare and bleeding:

And what if Jesus should indeed drink from your breast?
what does it do to your thirst because he drinks?
And soon He will lay bare his breast—alas, not milky!—
from her son then the *mother* will drink.⁹⁰

The image is vivid, startling. The nurturing role of Mary as mother becomes transposed with that of Jesus as savior; the one gives birth, the other offers the new birth. The breast of one provides life-sustaining milk; the breast of the other runs with life-giving blood. The image of Mary nursing at this crimson fountain is uncomfortable for many,⁹¹ yet the motherly function of Christ in the Trinity is traditional.⁹² Julian of Norwich is only one of many mystics who have focused on the maternal duties of Jesus: “our savior is our true Mother, in whom we are endlessly born and

⁸⁹ Ibid., 87-88.

⁹⁰ *Luc. 11:27. Beatus venter & ubera, &c.*

Et quid si biberet Jesus vela b ubere vesto?
Quid facit ad vestram, quòd bibit ille, sitim?
Ubera mox sua & Hic (ò quàm non lacteal!) pandet:
E nato *Mater* tum bibet ipsa suo.

Williams, *The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw*, 324-25.

⁹¹ Susannah B. Mintz, “The Crashavian Mother.” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*. Vol. 39, No.1. *The English Renaissance* (Winter 1999), 114-119.

⁹² For more information on this topic see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. (Berkeley: University of California press, 1982).

out of whom we shall never come.”⁹³ As the *Logos*, Jesus is the generative force in Creation, and as savior he is the source of the new birth. It is also Christ who nurtures Christians through the milk of the Word. The antithesis of pure, white milk, which brings life and growth, would seem to be bright, red blood, which flows from Christ’s wounds at death, yet through the Holy Communion, that blood becomes the life-giving drink which every Christian, Mary included, must imbibe. Crashaw presents this belief through vivid, even sensuous imagery, and invites the reader to meditate on his sophisticated conceit: Jesus is the mother of Mary, the mother of all Christians. Thus the image of the nursing mother invites meditation on the Incarnation and contemplation of Christ’s role in the life of the believer. At the same time, it hints at an intimacy with the Divine which is the goal of every mystic.

This role reversal suggested by Crashaw’s emblematic image and the discomfort resulting from this shifting of hierarchies creates a liminal space.⁹⁴ Even as readers are disoriented by the startling concept of a mother nursing at the breast of her son, they are encouraged to explore new perspectives on the meaning of that image. Some of these perspectives will generate uncertainty, revulsion, or existential fear, hence the many accusations of “grotesqueness” and

⁹³ Julian of Norwich. *Showings*. Ed. James Walsh. (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 292. Others include St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Bonaventure, and St. Catherine of Sienna.

⁹⁴ Eugene R. Cunnar suggests that Crashaw was displaced from his preferred ritual practices and felt marginalized because of his liminal state between Anglicanism and Catholicism. He thus “turned to Catholic ritual as a means of mediating his own religious crisis.” While the theory is tempting, I have a difficult time accepting the idea that Crashaw felt marginalized as he was composing his epigrams. He was at Cambridge at the height of its Laudian reforms and had a circle of High Anglican friends both at the university and at Little Gidding. However, I can agree that Crashaw’s later expulsion from his position as curate at Little Saint Mary’s, his exile to Holland, and even the general religious climate in England as a whole, including his zealously Anti-Catholic father, could and probably did have a marginalizing effect on the poet at other times before and after his time at Cambridge. This marginalization conceivably could have caused his spiritual crisis after his expulsion and led to his seeking refuge in the arms of a religion which had traditionally welcomed those with a mystical temperament, such as his beloved Saint Teresa. See Eugene R. Cunnar, “Opening the Religious Lyric: Crashaw’s Ritual, Liminal, and Visual Wounds.” *New Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century English Religious Lyric*. (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 237-267.

“perversion” which have been leveled at Crashaw by critics.⁹⁵ However, other perspectives may offer moments of transition and renewal as perceptions of Christ’s role in the Trinity and His relationship with believers are transformed. Such positive threshold experiences allow for spiritual growth and encourage greater intimacy in one’s relationship with the Divine. Contemplation of the nurturing, motherly role of Christ further stimulates trust and love.

Pure, humble love, “that life-feeding flame/ That keeps Religion warme” and enkindles the heart bursts into intense, rapturous love of God in Crashaw’s poems about Saint Teresa.⁹⁶ Baroque antithesis builds tension through the juxtaposition of oxymoronic oppositions in the mystic’s ecstasies: sweet pain, intolerable joy, and delicious wounds:

O how oft shalt thou complain
Of a sweet and subtle PAIN.
Of intolerable JOYES;
Of a DEATH, in which who dyes
Loves his death, and dyes again.
And would for ever so be slain.
And lives, and dyes; and knows not why
To live, But that he thus may never leave to DY. (v. 97-104)⁹⁷

To Robert Martin Adams this “unity of opposites, of pain with pleasure, life with death, fruition with denial, assertion with surrender” creates tension in the poem through the incongruity of physical sensation and spiritual aspiration, of “yearning for a physical union with...deity.”⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Two of these critics include Robert Martin Adams, “Taste and Bad Taste in Metaphysical Poetry: Richard Crashaw and Dylan Thomas.” *The Hudson Review*. 8.1 (Spring 1955), 61-77 and Alexander T. Wong, “Mystic Excess: Extravagance and Indecorum in Richard Crashaw.” *The Cambridge Quarterly*. 39.4 (2010): 350-369. *Article First*. 28 Apr. 2015.

⁹⁶ Richard Crashaw, *On a Treatise of Charity. The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw*. Ed. George Walton Williams. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), 69-70. Verses 51-52.

⁹⁷ Richard Crashaw, *A Hymn to Sainte Teresa. The Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw*. Ed. George Walton Williams. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), 52-58.

⁹⁸ Adams, “Taste and Bad Taste in Metaphysical Poetry,” 65-66.

However, the ecstasy of mystical union itself, produces simultaneously intense pain and joy through the annihilation of self and the presence of the Divine Other. The mystic experiences in ecstasy a brief moment when the limitations of the human flesh are stripped away and the desire of the spirit to be utterly embraced in the presence of God is realized. The result is exquisite joy and intense suffering. The absolute Holiness of the Divine produces pain in the frail and flawed human spirit, like fire which burns even as it purifies. The mystic desires the union, but cannot bear it for long.

How kindly will thy gentle HEART
Kisse the sweetly-killing DART!
And close in his embraces keep
Those delicious Wounds, that weep
Balsom to heal themselves with. Thus
When These thy DEATHES, so numerous,
Shall all at last dy into one,
And melt thy Soul's sweet mansion;
Like a soft lump of incense, hasted
By too hot a fire, and wasted
Into perfuming clouds, so fast
Shalt thou exhale to Heaven at last
In a resolving SIGH, (v.106-118)⁹⁹

The sensuousness of Crashaw's imagery is erotic. Saint Teresa kisses and embraces that which causes her to die, the "dart" which penetrates her again and again, eventually causing her to "melt" into an ecstasy. Yet the sexual imagery is not unexpected or even unconventional.

Drawing upon the precedent of the *Song of Songs*, mystics have long used sexuality as a means to describe the intimacy between the spirit and the Divine during mystical union. Georges Bataille classifies the erotic into three categories: physical, emotional, and religious.¹⁰⁰ "With all of them

⁹⁹ Crashaw, *A Hymn to Sainte Teresa*, 52-58.

¹⁰⁰ Georges Batailles, *L'Erotisme*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1957. Translated by Mary Dalwood as *Eroticism* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), 15.

the concern is to substitute for the individual isolated discontinuity a feeling of profound continuity....The whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives.”¹⁰¹ Alexander T. Wong identifies mystical ecstasy as “a form of continuity” which like eroticism involves “loss, risk, extinction of the discontinuous self.”¹⁰² Through the ecstasies sometimes associated with Divine union, Christian mystics such as Saint Teresa claim brief moments of transcendence when the soul is raptured out of itself and into God. The barriers separating the two are removed and the mystic feels the Divine touch penetrating and transforming the soul.

By uniting mysticism and erotic imagery in *A Hymn to Sainte Teresa*, Crashaw is both drawing upon traditional contemplative themes and experimenting with new, Baroque elements of sensuality in an attempt to express the ineffability of God through His love and through ecstatic union with Him. Apophatic mysticism, as taught by Pseudo-Dionysius, emphasizes the mystery of God who is beyond all human experience and understanding, so the use of physical imagery would at first appear to be out of place, yet the concrete images are meant to describe what God is by what He is not.¹⁰³ Pseudo-Dionysius explains this seeming paradox by pointing back to the Scriptures in which “The Word of God makes use of poetic imagery” when describing heavenly things, “not for the sake of art, but as a concession to the nature of our own mind.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰² Alexander T. Wong, “Mystic Excess: Extravagance and Indecorum in Richard Crashaw.” *The Cambridge Quarterly*. 39.4 (2010): 350-369. *Article First*. 28 Apr. 2015.

¹⁰³ Crashaw was aware of Pseudo-Dionysius and the *via negativa*. He explicitly discusses both in his *Hymn to the Glorious Epiphany* which was published in *Steps to the Temple* in 1648.

¹⁰⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius. *The Celestial Hierarchy. Pseudo-Dionysius the Complete Works*. Trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 148.

Images of physicality, therefore, aid physical beings to understand that which is beyond physical existence, and the more incongruous the image is, the more effective it can be:

Incongruities are more suitable for lifting our minds up to the domain of the spiritual than similarities are.... Indeed the sheer crassness of the signs is a goad so that even the materially inclined cannot accept that it could be permitted or true that the celestial and divine sights could be conveyed by such shameful things.¹⁰⁵

Using the sexual imagery of the physical union of two lovers climaxing in orgasm to explain the spiritual union of the mystic with the Divine, a union which can culminate in mystical ecstasy, is, therefore, nothing new. However, Crashaw dares take this traditional theme and infuse it with the extreme sensuousness of the Baroque style which was becoming popular on the continent in the seventeenth-century.¹⁰⁶ The result is the creation of vivid, evocative imagery which draws upon the language of elation to encourage meditation on sacred themes.

Crashaw combines the Baroque *conchetto* of fire with contemporary emblems of love, hearts surrounded by arrows, flames, and wings,¹⁰⁷ to depict St. Teresa's transverberation with the flaming dart. "Fire as the energy, ardour, and motion of Divine Love, as the substantial-insubstantial element in nature, and in the poem, [becomes] the constant which defines Teresa as child, martyr, and saint."¹⁰⁸ Fire, as an aspect of nature, becomes symbolic of aspects of its

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 150.

¹⁰⁶ Marc F. Bertolaso, *Crashaw and the Baroque*. (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1971).

¹⁰⁷ In these emblems love is often depicted as an arrangement of arrows, flames, and wings surrounding a heart. George Wither's *Emblem Book* (1635) represents love as a flaming heart threatened by a death's head, but protected by the clasped hands of a man and woman. Wither, George. *A Collection of Emblemes Ancient and Moderne: Quickened with Metricall Illustrations; and, Disposed into Lotteries, Both Moral and Divine. The Second Booke* (London: Augustine Matthews, 1634. Reprinted. London: Henry Tauton, 1635), 99. *Internet Archive*. (Retrieved 17 May 2015).

¹⁰⁸ Robert T. Petersson, *The Art of Ecstasy: Teresa, Bernini, and Crashaw* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 151.

Creator. It transmutes base, earthly matter into light, heat, and flames, metaphors used in mysticism to denote truth, love, and living martyrdom. The smoke produced by these flames ascends like incense, swallowed by heaven.¹⁰⁹

Teresa's transmutation takes place in a liminal space. "Crashaw creates a transitional world.... The present Teresa is not exactly the Teresa who will be—*change* is exhibitable" as she becomes joined ever more deeply to God.¹¹⁰ Liminality is a state of transition, and for mystics those transitions occur in the presence of the Divine. Death, union, and ecstasy, all present moments of profound change. Teresa's "death" is the annihilation of self, the dying of the self-will which leads to the possibility of union with God. As a kataphatic mystic, she experiences full union as a fire burning within her heart and which transforms her even further, producing intense longing for God. As she enters a trancelike, ecstatic state she becomes completely unresponsive to external stimuli but completely aware of the presence and activity of God represented by the flaming dart wielded by the seraphim. Crashaw completes his depiction of her transformation by equating the final release of her breath with the release of her spirit and her immediate ascent into heaven like the smoke of incense to be ever in the presence of her beloved Lord.

In his final revision of *The Flaming Heart* (1652), Crashaw asks Teresa to lift him up with her in her ecstatic flights of love. "The poet wants to tear himself from his own life, and his yearning for ecstasy is so powerful and desperate that he almost seems to have reached it.... In the whole course of seventeenth-century literature there is no higher expression of that spiritualization of sense which is condensed here in a portentous, dizzy soaring of red-hot

¹⁰⁹ To make this comparison I have borrowed imagery from Seamus Heaney's description of Beowulf's funeral which states that heaven swallowed the smoke of the burning pyre. Seamus Heaney, *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (New York: Farrar, Staus and Giroux, 2000), 211.

¹¹⁰ Petersson, *The Art of Ecstasy*, 139.

images.”¹¹¹ It is always dangerous to assume a continuity between the speaker in a poem and the poet; however, it is difficult not to do so when reading Crashaw’s desperate pleas to the saint. The verses seem to show a self-abasement and a devotion of his whole self to God. There is a recognition of the stony coldness of the heart and a desire to wound that hardness and transmute it:

There is, I think, no mistaking the central aspiration of a passage like this, the great yearning, the basic passion, that gives volume and meaning to the ecstasy of the verse. That is the desire for the immediate, the ineffable experience of the presence of God. Teresa is one of the greatest mystics of the century preceding Crashaw’s, one of the most glowing, and most attractive Christian mystics of all time. Crashaw feels her power and feels it for the central, mystical reason. This woman has found her way to Divine Love. It is that fire that has kindled her great heart and lightened her pages. Her fire kindles Crashaw, and looking at her, Crashaw feels himself closer to her goal.¹¹²

Crashaw’s life does reveal a spiritual temperament which consistently draws him toward mysticism and its expression through Catholic mystics of the Counter-Reformation. It draws him from his father’s zealous Puritanism, to High-Church Laudianism, and eventually to his spiritual crisis and Catholic conversion. Nevertheless, his verses, whether Protestant or Catholic reveal a deep desire to expound the love of God and to encourage meditation on this love. In using vivid Baroque stylistic elements to create verbal emblems and icons, Crashaw encourages meditation on religious mysteries and creates liminal spaces in which lives can be profoundly transformed. Unfortunately, his fellow Englishmen did not always understand or appreciate his startling images or mystical themes. That notwithstanding, his unique experimentation, combining Baroque style with devotional meditations, transformed mystical poetry, infusing it with a

¹¹¹ Mario Praz, *Secentism e marinismo in Inghilterra: John Donne—Richard Crashaw* (Firenze: “La Voce,” 1925), 261-62. Helen C. White translates this passage in *The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in religious Experience* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1936).

¹¹² White, *The Metaphysical Poets*, 240.

beautifully vivid sensuousness which paradoxically helps to depict ineffable, Divine love. In their own way his poems are sighs of desire for the God whose love he desired so desperately.

Conclusion

Together, Southwell and Crashaw illustrate the progression of the love of God in the life of a believer who seeks a deep, affective, and intuitive relationship with the Divine. Mystical encounters such as the experience of the fire of divine love serve as for spiritual transformation. Although the experience may be accompanied by a physical manifestation of heat, that heat signifies the presence and activity of God within the spirit.

Such encounters are threshold experiences located between the spiritual state of the recipient before the encounter and after it. They open a liminal space where life-changing transformations can occur. For Southwell, the fire of divine love is a manifestation of the salvific function of Christ, the sacrificial giving of the self with the intent to save others. That intent reveals the depth of the love which God has for His people and the extent to which he is willing to go to protect them. To represent this love, Southwell constructs an anthropomorphic image which combines the fire of divine love with the incarnation. The result is at first horrific. The image of the Christ child engulfed in flames is calculated to startle the reader out of complacency. This reaction in turn invites contemplation on the reason for the incarnation and opens a threshold. The recipient of the vision can then choose whether or not to cross it.

Stepping into that liminal space requires accepting the proffered love. At that moment the fire becomes an agent of cleansing and transformation. Like a furnace it smelts away impurities and softens the metal, preparing it to be worked at the forge. Thus, Southwell's image combines the salvific aspects of the fire of divine love with its refining and reshaping properties. The result

of this mystical vision is that the recipient, the lone traveler, receives greater understanding of the meaning of the nativity and is changed by the encounter with the love of God made flesh.

Crashaw's approach picks up from there. His poetry presents a more mature, reciprocal love. To create this image, He draws upon the experience of spiritual ecstasy. In divine union the spirit perceives the presence of God and is aware of His activity within the soul, cleansing it of impurities and transforming it into His image. The mystic desires this transformation, for it involves the stripping away of all that is displeasing to God and the reshaping of the soul into His likeness. Such transformations are painful, for the mystic must face that darkness which lurks within the human soul, but they are also joyful, for the mystic feels an increased ability to love God. The paradoxical effect of such a transformation is the increased liberty of the soul as it is gradually freed from the bondage to selfish desires. Consequently, the transformed soul is able to display more compassion towards others and is less materialistic. All of the fruit of the spirit grow and become stronger.¹¹³

In Saint Teresa's original description of her transverberation, even as the fire of divine love burns within her, she sees that fire represented by a lance wielded by an angelic figure. As it enters her body, it enflames her heart with love; as it leaves, it pulls out what is unclean and impure, transforming her in the process. Crashaw presents the same moment of transverberation, but he changes the imagery, heightening the sexual overtones. The lance becomes a fiery dart which penetrates her repeatedly, each time heightening her ecstatic experience until she reaches a climax which melts her into bliss. Her breath, exhaled in a sigh (i.e. her spirit) leaves her body to join with her lord in heaven.

Crashaw's changes to Teresa's description of her experience draw heavily on the theme of spiritual espousal—emphasizing the unitive aspects of her ecstasy. This imagery presents, in

¹¹³ Paul lists the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against which there is not law."

the most intimate way possible, the mystic's desire to experience the love of God, to feel the presence of the Divine deep within the soul and to be drawn out of this world in order to be present with Him in eternity. Crashaw integrates this spiritual espousal imagery with sensual elements of the Baroque style. The result emphasizes the spiritual longing of the mystic who yearns for union with the divine and the intensity with which such an encounter can be experienced.

Both poets encourage the contemplation of the love of God and its transformative effect on the soul. The popularity and influence of their poems suggests that they spoke to a need within their contemporary audience. New ratiocinating and speculative approaches to worship were growing in dominance, not only within the Church of England but also within the Roman Catholic Church. These intellectual approaches encouraged a distrust of more intuitive forms of spirituality. However, they also left those who thirsted for a deep, affective relationship with the divine feeling dry and unfulfilled. The poetry of both Southwell and Crashaw spoke to those needs, offering a way to quench that spiritual thirst.

CHAPTER V
HEARING THE CALL: NONCONFORMISTS, SCHISMATICS,
AND VISIONARIES

One of the great fears of nationally institutionalized religion in England during the Early Modern period involved, ironically, demands for religious reform. These fears were based on the very real uprisings incited by the prophetic claims of Anabaptist leaders on the continent who rebelled against established religious authorities and attempted to reform religious institutions through violent coups. Although self-proclaimed prophets are not necessarily mystics, the fact that they claim having visions and revelations links them with mystics in the popular imagination. If radical religious leaders claimed to be visionaries and prophets in order to provide a divine stamp of approval for their rebellions, then the general belief was that such manifestations of religious enthusiasm were dangerous. For this reason, the Middle Way of the Church of England discouraged any type of zealousness and sought to discredit claims of divine inspiration through visions, dreams, and other forms of prophetic insight. In doing so, it also discredited traditional, intuitive approaches to worship which accepted such numinous experiences as legitimate. Lumped together with charismatic rebels, mystics fell under suspicion of attempting to subvert established church doctrine and institutions.

Another series of events which seemed to exemplify the dangers of unchecked religious zeal occurred during what later Establishment historians call the Great Rebellion of the English Civil Wars (1642-1651). The Middle Way had been an attempt at reconciliation between adherents to High Church and Low Church within the Church of England. Those who maintained

a deep commitment to the liturgy and to the sacraments believed the Middle Way went too far in its reforms while others did not believe that it went far enough to remove the perceived superstitions and idolatries of the Roman Catholic Church. These differences in approach to worship grew into hostilities, and the hostilities erupted into Civil War. Conformists and Nonconformists, Royalists and Parliamentarians each fought for what they thought was a divine cause. Puritan soldiers such as John Bunyan, under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell believed that they were soldiers of God fighting against the forces of Antichrist to enlarge the Kingdom of Heaven and prepare for the Second Coming of Christ. In their zeal they beheaded their own monarch, King Charles I in January 1649. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why later critics of the Great Rebellion would see it as yet another example of the schismatic dangers of religious zeal.

During the period of the English Civil Wars and the Commonwealth under Cromwell (1640s and 1650s), a number of new Protestant denominations and sects emerged including Independents and Congregationalists who advocated local and congregational control of religion. Nonconformists such as Puritans, Presbyterians, and Baptists, sought to reform the Church of England from the inside. Separatists such as the Quakers eventually broke away from it altogether. Founded by George Fox, in the mid-century, the Quakers found themselves persecuted by both Conformists and Nonconformists. They claimed an intuitive and experiential connection with God who gave them prophetic utterances to share. Inspired by such new revelations, they advocated religious and political change, but they did so non-violently, refusing to raise arms against those who disagreed with them—or to serve in the Commonwealth's army. Nevertheless, in the popular imagination, Quakers became yet another example of schism fueled by mysticism.

At the end of the Interregnum, when the monarchy was restored in 1660, the short period of relative religious tolerance in England was ended. King Charles II—having promised to abide

by Presbyterianism—instead restored the episcopacy of the Church of England and re-established strict orthodoxy. His Lord Chancellor, Edward Hyde the first earl of Clarendon, instituted a series of four acts which together become known as the Clarendon Code (1661-1665).¹ This code was designed to cripple the power of Nonconformists, re-establish the supremacy of the Church of England, and end toleration of dissenting approaches to Protestant Christianity in England. Religious intolerance and deeply polarized views were to persist long afterwards. The Toleration Act (1689) attempted to ease some of the restrictions imposed by Hyde, but the Clarendon Code itself was not repealed until the nineteenth century.

After the Toleration Act, various religious societies formed within the Church of England, rallying around shared ideologies. One such group of believers known as the Philadelphian Society attracted individuals who claimed a personal connection with the Divine, a connection through which they received prophesies, visions, and dreams. Their founder, Jane Ward Lead was an internationally recognized visionary and prophet. Like George Fox and the Quakers, her prophetic insights lead her away from some of the doctrines and approaches to spirituality authorized by the Church of England; however, Lead and her society did not advocate political change. Nevertheless, critics still saw their mysticism as a threat and accused Lead herself of mental illness.

Mystics like John Bunyan, George Fox, and Jane Ward Lead both confirm and counter the fears and suspicions linking mysticism with religious rebellion. They live during a period of

¹ The Corporation Act (1661) forbade municipal office to anyone who was not taking the sacrament of communion at an Anglican parish church. The Act of Uniformity (1662) excluded Nonconformists from church offices. It made the *Book of Common Prayer* compulsory in religious services. Over two thousand clergy refused to comply and consequently resigned their livings in what became known as the Great Ejection. This Act was not amended until 1872. The Conventicle Act (1662, revised in 1670) made meetings of Nonconformist worship illegal even in private homes where more than four outsiders were present. The Five-Mile Act (1665) forbade Nonconformist ministers to live or visit within five miles of an incorporated town or any place where they had ministered. They were also forbidden to teach in schools. This Act was not rescinded until 1812.

religious and political upheaval and change. John Bunyan fought in the Civil War as an enlisted soldier; however, contrary to popular beliefs about mysticism and its association with religious schism, Bunyan did not fight because of his personal encounters with the divine. George Fox encouraged direct and intuitive experience of the divine and founded a church of Friends who separated from the Church of England, but he never advocated violence. Jane Ward Lead established a society which sought numinous and mystical encounters, and while she did encourage religious renewal, she had no interest at all in promoting political change. A close examination of these mystics reveals how each one both reinforced and overturned popular views of mysticism at the time, transforming both approaches to and perceptions of intuitive forms for spirituality.

The non-conformist John Bunyan's spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666) describes incidents which strikingly resemble what St. John of the Cross defines as the dark night of the soul and of the senses. However, what distinguishes Bunyan's descriptions of this period of spiritual aridity is his interpretation of it within the context of his staunch Puritanism. The majority of his recorded communication with the Divine takes the form of scriptural illumination, legitimizing it through the Puritan emphasis on *sola scriptura*. Once these experiences have been confirmed as having their source in God, they in turn help to legitimize Bunyan's other numinous experiences such as dreams, visions, and miracles. These lay outside of the normal comfort zone for Puritans who believe that God no longer speaks directly to believers outside of the Scriptures. Bunyan is thus adapting mysticism within the context of his denomination and interpreting his encounters through this denominational lens.

Like Bunyan, George Fox also describes a period of spiritual aridity which very much resembles the dark night of the soul. He initially found the "inner voice," which he heard, to be a source of psychological torment and confusion as he tried to make sense of his numinous

experiences. Colleagues such as Nathaniel Stephens considered him mad. However, his desire to understand his faith better led him to trust this inner voice and allow it to guide him into a deeper understanding of the scriptures and of Christianity. This “opening,” as he called it, eventually led to his founding of the Religious Society of Friends, a Protestant group which challenged boundaries set by the nationally established church.

Like Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, Fox’s *Journal* records his first numinous experiences, hearing the voice of God within his soul, and how he chose to interpret their experiences. Bunyan believed himself to be called to lead a holier life and to begin his ministry as a Puritan preacher. He translates his experience with the numinous into an allegory of the Christian’s journey toward God, *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678). Although dream allegory was used extensively by medieval mystics, Bunyan adapts this genre to suit his Protestant beliefs. Fox, on the other hand, interprets his experiences of hearing the voice of the Divine as a call to found the Quakers, a denomination which is quite receptive to silent prayer and listening internally for the voice of God.

Anglican visionary Jane Ward Lead records her first encounters with the Divine in her spiritual autobiography, *A Fountain of Gardens* and in several of her published volumes of visions, including *The Wars of David* and *The Heavenly Cloud Now Breaking*. Just as both Bunyan and Fox initially heard what they believed to be the voice of God speaking to them clearly and specifically, calling them to a closer walk with Him, so did Lead hear such a voice calling her out of her ordinary life and into that of a prophet and visionary. However, as a woman she encounters not only opposition to her mysticism but to her gender as well. Her response to this opposition and her interpretation of the divine revelations which she receives challenges the gender boundaries of her time.

John Bunyan (1628-1688)

Non-conformist minister and literary genius of the early Puritan movement, John Bunyan authored one of the most popular books of Early Modern Christianity, *Pilgrim's Progress*. If only two books were owned by a Puritan household, they were often the Bible and this allegory of the Christian life. John Bunyan himself was born in November 1628 at Elstow near Bedford. He was the son of Thomas Bunyan, an itinerate tinker and began practicing his father's trade at an early age. His parents sent him to the local grammar school to learn to read and write, but he never had the opportunity to study at a university, a fact which his later critics would levy against both him and his writings.² According to his own autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, he had no interest in academics as a child: "To my shame I confess, I did soon lose that little I learned, and that even almost utterly, and that long before the Lord did work his gracious work of conversion upon my soul."³

Like many young men his age, Bunyan was more interested in sports and "childish vanities" than studies or religion.⁴ Nevertheless, he states that even at the early age of nine or ten, he was often tormented with thoughts of the day of judgment and with terrible dreams of the fires

² See Edward Fowler's, *Dirt Wip't Off: Or a Manifest Discovery of the Gross Ignorance, Erroneous and Most Unchristian and Wicked Spirit of One John Bunyan, Lay-preacher in Bedford, which He Hath Shewed in a Vile Pamphlet Publish't by Him, against the Design of Christianity. Written for the Disabusing of those poor Deluded People that are Followers of Him, and Such Like Teachers, and to Prevent Their Farther Deluding of Others, and Poisoning Them with Licentious and Destructive Principles* (London: Printed by R.N. for Richard Royston Book-seller to His Most Sacred Majesty, 1672).

³ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners: A Brief and Faithful Relation of the Exceeding Mercy of God in Christ to His Poor Servant, John Bunyan; Wherein Is Particularly Shewed the Manner of His Conversion, His Dreadful Temptations, Also How He Despaired of God's Mercy, and How the Lord at Length through Christ Did Deliver Him from all the Guilt and Terror that Lay upon Him* (London: George Larkin, 1666), 7-8.

⁴ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 8.

of hell.⁵ Caught between his desire to follow worldly pleasures and his fear of eternal punishment, Bunyan attempted to ease his conscience by turning away from religion altogether:

I could neither endure it myself, nor that any other should; so that, when I have seen some read in those books that concerned Christian piety, it would be as it were a prison to me. Then I said unto God, 'Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways' (Job 21:14). I was void of all good consideration, heaven and hell were both out of sight and mind; and as for saving and damning, they were the least of my thoughts.⁶

For Bunyan, in this passage, books and religion are linked. Puritan religion is based on the writings of Scripture and expressed through the writings of Christian piety. Puritan belief holds that the Bible is authored by God but was transcribed in the past by various people through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures are complete, meaning there is no need for further revelation. Therefore, God no longer interacts with His people outside of the Word and prayer. The Holy Book thus becomes integral to religion in Puritanism. The Bible contains the mind of God, but it must be read and interpreted through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, for to the Puritan, humanity is incapable of understanding the truth of God without such Divine discernment. Other books of Christian piety either serve to explicate the revealed truths of the Scriptures or to examine one's conscience and live a moral life, none of which interested the young Bunyan.

Although the adult Bunyan, looking back on his childhood as a Puritan minister, acknowledges his lack of religious zeal through his lack of interest in biblical study, he admits that his younger self was simultaneously fleeing from and drawn toward God, hinting that the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

source of this tension came from various numinous experiences.⁷ Since, in Puritan belief, God communicates with believers only through the Scripture and prayer, the Holy Spirit must limit Himself to Scriptural illumination and conviction as ways through which to influence believers. Both are accepted as appropriate and necessary parts of Christian spirituality; however, any other encounters are suspect. Nevertheless, in the first few pages of his autobiography, Bunyan hints at having various encounters with the Divine which fall outside of the expected norms.

The numinous dreams, which he had as a child, warning him of the dangers of hell, fall into this category, as do a series of miraculous rescues which he experienced as a young man. The older Bunyan interprets these events as evidence of God's judgment mixed with mercy:

For once I fell into a creek of the sea, and hardly escaped drowning. Another time I fell out of a boat into Bedford river, but mercy yet preserved me alive. Besides, another time, being in the field with one of my companions, it chanced that an adder passed over the highway; so I having a stick in my hand, struck her over the back; and having stunned her, I forced open her mouth with my stick, and plucked her sting out with my fingers; by which act, had not God been merciful to me, I might, by my desperateness, have brought myself to mine end.

This also have I taken notice of with thanksgiving; when I was a soldier, I, with others, were drawn out to go to such a place to besiege it; but when I was just ready to go, one of the company desired to go in my room; to which I had consented, he took my place; and coming to the siege, as he stood sentinel, he was shot into the head with a musket bullet and died.⁸

Bunyan clearly perceives these events as evidence of the intervention of God in his life, saving him from certain death. In another passage he quotes a message which he heard in his spirit, warning him of his sinful life:

⁷ M. G. Gupta has compared the mystical aspects of John Bunyan's life and writing with that of the Sufi mystics of India. See *Mystic Symbolism in Ramayana, Mahabharata, and the Pilgrim's Progress* (Agra, India: M. G. Publishers, 1993), 151-165. Aside from this one book, I am not aware of any other treatments on mysticism in John Bunyan's writing.

⁸ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 9.

A voice did suddenly dart from heaven into my soul, which said, Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell? At this point I was put to an exceeding maze; wherefore, . . . I looked up to heaven, and was, as if I had, with the eyes of my understanding, seen the Lord Jesus looking down upon me, as being very hotly displeased with me, and as if he did severely threaten me with some grievous punishment for these and other my ungodly practices.⁹

This unexpected, numinous encounter with the Divine prompts him to think about his spiritual life; however, rather than interpreting it as a call to repentance, the young Bunyan sees it as proof of his unforgiveable, damnable state and sinks into despair. Rationalizing his fate, he determines that if he is already damned, he might as well continue in his sins. Nevertheless, the message continues to needle his conscience until he eventually attempts an outward reformation of his ways.

For two years he continues in what traditional mystics would term purgation, which is the first stage of the unitive way. During purgation, believers typically attempt to reform both their outer and their inner lives, aligning themselves with the moral code of their congregation. Bunyan claims that during this time he turned from “cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the holy name of God” to a moral life through which “[he] thought [he] pleased God as well as any man in *England*.”¹⁰ However, like so many in the purgative stage, Bunyan gets caught up in his own righteousness: “I was proud of my godliness, and, indeed, I did all I did, either to be seen of, or to be well spoken of, by man.”¹¹ He continues in this trap until he overhears the conversation of a small group of women who have progressed further than he in their spiritual lives:

I heard, but I understood not; for they were far above, out of my reach; for their talk was about a new birth, the work of God on their hearts, also how they were convinced of their

⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰ Ibid., 8, 12.

¹¹ Ibid., 12.

miserable state by nature; they talked how God had visited their souls with his love in Lord Jesus, and with what words and promises they had been refreshed, comforted, and supported against the temptations of the devil.¹²

Their joy in the Lord sets them apart from anything Bunyan has experienced before: “they were to me, as if they had found a new world, as if they were a people that dwelt alone, and were not to be reckoned among their neighbors (Numbers 23:9).”¹³ This strange, new world he had glimpsed was the second stage of the unitive way, illumination. However, he would have to enter the dark night of his own soul before he would be able to pass into this joyful, new level of spirituality himself.

Bunyan begins to long for a deeper, richer spiritual life and is drawn not only to the company of others who are more spiritually advanced but also to the Word of God for which he thirsts continuously. These desires are common signs of a growing mystic temperament along with the “very great softness and tenderness of heart” which he now experiences within himself.¹⁴ He is undergoing spiritual transformation and the purgation of his former hardness of heart and loathing for the things of God. It is at this point which he begins his plunge into the dark night, for his studies cause him to question whether or not he truly has faith. In his anguish of spirit, he has a vision:

The state and happiness of [those spiritual women] at Bedford was thus, in a dream or vision, represented to me. I saw, as if they were set on the sunny side of some high mountain, there refreshing themselves with the pleasant beams of the sun, while I was shivering and shrinking in the cold, afflicted with frost, snow, and dark clouds. Methought, also, betwixt me and them, I saw a wall that did compass about this mountain; now, through this wall my soul did greatly desire to pass; concluding that if I

¹² Ibid., 13.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

could, I would go even into the very midst of them, and there also comfort myself with the heat of their sun.

About this wall I thought myself, to go again and again, still prying as I went, to see if I could find some way or passage, by which I might enter therein; but none could I find for some time. At the last, I saw, as it were, a narrow gap, like a little doorway in the wall, through which I attempted to pass; but the passage being very strait and narrow, I made many efforts to get in, but all in vain, even until I was well nigh quite beat out, by striving to get in; at last, with great striving, methought I at first did get in my head, and after that, by a sidling striving, my shoulders, and my whole body; then was I exceeding glad, and went and sat down in the midst of them, and so was comforted with the light and heat of their sun.¹⁵

Directly after receiving this vision, he also receives the interpretation which gives him some comfort that he will eventually be able to join those who bask in the light of God. However, he first has to set aside his sins, purging them in order to enter through the narrow way, “for there was only room for body and soul, but not for body and soul, and sin.”¹⁶ The vision and its interpretation stay with him, but he finds himself in a paradoxical place, simultaneously “provoked to vehement hunger” to be in the presence of God but doubting that he has faith in Christ.¹⁷ In anguish of spirit he becomes sad and forlorn, almost despairing of his election and salvation.

Bunyan’s description of his spiritual state coincides with the first of the two stages of purgation, sensory and spiritual. The first stage is common and occurs after believers have exercised themselves for a time in the way of virtue and have persevered in prayer, thereby gaining a little spiritual strength by which they are able to resist the temptations of the flesh.

Consequently, it is at the time they are going about their spiritual exercises with delight and satisfaction, when in their opinion the sun of divine favor is shining most brightly on

¹⁵ Ibid., 15-16.

¹⁶ Ibid., 16.

¹⁷ Ibid.

them, that God darkens all this light.... When God sees that they have grown a little, He weans them from the sweet breast so that they might be strengthened, lays aside their swaddling bands, and puts them down from His arms that they may grow accustomed to walking by themselves.¹⁸

Sensory purgation usually happens quite soon after entering the spiritual life. For Bunyan, it began after only two years, and he exhibits all three of the signs which usually accompany it: 1) a lack of satisfaction or consolation in either earthly or spiritual things, 2) a desire towards God accompanied by a fear that one is backsliding, and 3) dissatisfaction with the efficacy of one's prayer life.¹⁹ Bunyan also finds himself drawn to scriptures which reference sensory purgation such as Psalm 51.²⁰ The first of these signs, inability to take satisfaction in either daily or spiritual life, can be caused by depression, what the physicians of Bunyan's day would term a melancholic humor; therefore, the second sign was very important in determining whether the individual was suffering from a humoral imbalance or was indeed entering the dark night of the senses.

According to St John of the Cross in his *Dark Night* (1618), the difference between melancholia and sensory purgation is apparent in the end result of the process:

Those suffering from the purgative dryness are ordinarily solicitous, concerned, and pained about not serving God. Even though the dryness may be furthered by melancholia or some other humor—as it often is—it does not thereby fail to produce its purgative effect in the appetite, for the soul will be deprived of every satisfaction and concerned only about God. If this humor is the entire cause, everything ends in displeasure and does harm to one's nature, and there are none of these desires to serve God that accompany the purgative dryness. Even though in this purgative dryness the sensory part of the body is

¹⁸ Saint John of the Cross, *The Dark Night, John of the Cross: Selected Writings*, Ed. Kieran Kavanaugh (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 179-180.

¹⁹ St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night*, 180-181.

²⁰ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 16: "Have mercie vpon mee, O God, according to thy loving kindnesse: according vnto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash mee thoroughly from mine iniquitie, and clense me from my sinne. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sinne is euer before mee" (Psalm 51:1-2).

very cast down, slack and feeble in its actions because of the little satisfaction it finds, the spirit is ready and strong.²¹

For the melancholic, the desire to serve God weakens as do both body and spirit. However, for the believer entering the dark night of the senses, the desire to serve God grows stronger, and while the body may temporarily lose its appetite for what it normally desires most, the end result is always the strengthening of the individual spiritually.

Bunyan's experience, as recorded in his autobiography, does indeed result in the strengthening of his spirit, thereby satisfying St. John's criterion. Bunyan does not suffer from a humoral imbalance; instead, he experiences a purgation of his senses in preparation for entering the next stage of his spiritual progress. Bunyan himself gives no sign that he knows anything about St. John of the Cross or his text—and if he did, it would be unlikely for him to give credence to a Roman Catholic writer. He never even considers that a humoral imbalance could have played any part in the aridities which he experiences. Instead, he attributes all of his doubts and confusion to the devil. He uses the term “temptation” when referencing any thoughts which cause him to doubt his faith, his salvation, or the existence of God. Likewise, he uses the titles “tempter,” “devil,” and “Satan: when referencing the primary source of these temptations. However, he never uses those terms in describing the various numinous encounters which sustain him during these temptations.

He has visions, he is drawn to particular Bible passages which address his fears, and he hears in his spirit messages which boost his faith:²²

²¹ John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, 181.

²² Besides the one vision described earlier, Bunyan has at least two others. In one, he sees Christ emerging from the tomb; in another he sees Him sitting on the right hand of God the Father (26).

I went, with faintness in my mind; but one day, after I had been so many weeks oppressed and cast down therewith, as I was now quite giving up the ghost of all my hopes of ever attaining life, that sentence fell with weight upon my soul, “Look at the generations of old and see; did ever any trust in the Lord, and was confounded?”

At which I was greatly lightened and encouraged in my soul; for thus, at that very instant, it was expounded to me, Begin at the beginning of Genesis, and read to the end of the Revelation, and see if you can find that there was ever any that trusted in the Lord, and was confounded. So, coming home, I presently went to my Bible to see if I could find that saying, not doubting but to find it presently; for it was so fresh, and with such strength and comfort on my spirit, that I was as if it talked to me.²³

His phrase, “fell with weight” means that the experience was not merely one of remembering a scripture which he had previously read; instead, it refers to the experience receiving that message seemingly from an outside source, directly into the spirit, bypassing the senses. The recipient does not actively seek such a communication nor is necessarily expecting one. However, its reception is clear, immediate, and powerful, cutting through the recipient’s thoughts and imprinting itself indelibly on the memory. Bunyan has no doubt the message comes from God, nor is it the last time he receives such a divine inspiration. However, in keeping with Puritan beliefs that the Bible is the sole source of revelation, almost all of his recorded encounters involve a verse of scripture either from the English authorized version of the Bible or from an apocryphal book included in that version. This particular scripture which he receives from the apocryphal Ecclesiasticus 2:10, while others come from both the Old and New Testaments and either bring comfort and encouragement or explicate a particular doctrine with which Bunyan is struggling.²⁴ Bunyan receives these scriptural messages in a variety of circumstances: while he is sitting in a

²³ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 17.

²⁴ Romans 9:16; Luke 14: 22, 23; Mark 3:13; Joel 3:21; Isaiah 45:5; Hebrews 9:22; Acts 12:9; Romans 8:39; Luke 22:31; Isaiah 57: 20, 21; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 8: 31; Colossians 1:20; Hebrews 2:14, 15; Revelation 5:6; Isaiah 9:6; 1 Peter 1:19, 20; Hebrews 12: 16, 17; 1 John 1:7; Hebrews 12:25; Jeremiah 31:3; Psalm 130:3,4; 1 John 5:6; Hebrews 6:4-6, 10:26, 27, 12:16, 17; Matthew 15:28; Psalm 77:7-9; Hebrews 7:25; 2 Corinthians 12:9; James 2:13; John 6:37; Hebrews 13:5; Hebrews 13:8.

neighbor's house or by his own fire, pacing in a store, or traveling into the country, moping into a field, or walking under a hedge.²⁵ Sometimes he hears them so strongly in his spirit that he turns to see who is speaking to him.²⁶

However, on a few occasions, the divine inspiration he receives involves other phenomena such as an inner stillness, divine impulses, a "goodly touch," "sweetness," the gift of tears, the sound of a rushing wind, visions of Christ, and the fire of divine love.²⁷ These types of numinous and mystical encounters are usually associated with the illuminative stage which, according to St. John of the Cross, follows the dark night of the senses. The first few phenomena in the list are fairly common; however, visions and the fire of divine love are more closely associated with those who have made significant progress in their spiritual walks with God; thus they are more often associated with mystics who are entering the second stage of purgation, that of the senses and the spirit combined. This second dark night is much less common than the first. If the former purgation is the equivalent of weaning an infant and teaching it to walk, the second purgation is the passage from childhood into adulthood. According to St. John of the Cross, this second dark night is much more intense than the first:

God divests the faculties, affections, and senses, both spiritual and sensory, interior and exterior. He leaves the intellect in darkness, the will in aridity, the memory in emptiness, and the affections in supreme affliction, bitterness, and anguish, by depriving the soul of the feeling and satisfaction it previously obtained from spiritual blessings.²⁸

²⁵ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 24, 25, 34, 24, 29.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 21, 34.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 19, 29, 26, 38, 34, 26, 18.

²⁸ John of the Cross, *Dark Night*, 199.

The soul becomes a battlefield on which the opposing forces of human imperfection and divine perfection meet.

During this purgation, not only is the soul cleansed of further imperfections, but it is illumined and transformed. “God teaches the soul secretly” and prepares it for union with Him.²⁹ This illumination causes, what St. John terms, “spiritual darkness.”³⁰ According to the saint, when the pure light of God strikes the unclean soul, that soul recognizes its impurity and wretchedness. This recognition causes it to doubt that a perfect God could ever love such a flawed creature, and it begins to suspect that God will reject it. This thought, in turn, causes intense suffering and anguish. To these souls, “it seems God is against them and they are against God,”³¹ for they understand very clearly that they are not worthy of God and never can be through their own efforts.

This dark night is exactly the experience which Bunyan describes, starting with a prophetic warning of his spiritual battle to come:

I was much followed by the scripture, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you” (Luke 22:31). And sometimes it would sound so loud within me, yea, and as it were call so strongly after me, that once above all the rest, I turned my head over my shoulder, thinking verily that some man had, behind me, called to me; being at a great distance, methought he called so loud; it came, as I have thought since, to have stirred me up to prayer, and to watchfulness; it came to acquaint me that a cloud and a storm was coming down upon me, but I understood it not.³²

²⁹ Ibid., 201.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 202.

³² Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 21.

In the midst of this tempest, Bunyan states that scriptures tore at his soul, yet his heart seemed hardened, and he could shed no tears.³³ He feels that he is alone and has no desire to attend to the ordinances of God.³⁴ He feels afflicted and is distressed. If he hears the Scriptures, “then uncleanness, blasphemies, and despair” tempt him, and if he tries to read the Scriptures, he doubts and questions all he reads.³⁵ Yet, these times of aridity alternate with moments of “strong and heart-affecting apprehensions of God, and the reality and truth of his gospel.”³⁶ In those moments, Bunyan cries to the Lord for mercy then imagines God mocking him and his prayers.³⁷ He fears that because of his uncleanness and lack of faith, God will cast him away.³⁸ He wants to grasp the hope that Christ will not forsake him, but finds it difficult to trust in the promises (John 6:37; Hebrews 13:5) because of his own offences.³⁹

The similarities between Bunyan’s experience as recorded in his autobiography and the second dark night as described by St. John of the Cross are striking. While Bunyan knows the text of scripture, he doubts its applicability to himself. He experiences periods of intense spiritual dryness wherein he cannot take any pleasure in reading the Bible or find encouragement in its promises. When he does receive encouragement through the illumination of a scripture, it is not long before he once again falls into doubt and fear. His emotions are in turmoil. He is

³³ Ibid., 23.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 23, 39.

³⁶ Ibid., 24.

³⁷ Ibid., 24, 39.

³⁸ Ibid., 39.

³⁹ Ibid., 42.

excruciatingly aware of his own imperfections and his unworthiness, and because of these, he severely doubts that God could ever love a fallen creature such as himself.

This tempest, as he calls it, lasts for approximately two and a half years.⁴⁰ When it finally breaks, it is not long before Bunyan experiences what he himself calls “the mystery of union with the Son of God.”⁴¹ The prelude to this union is Bunyan’s serious contemplation of the Song of Solomon and its allegorical implications:

The words began thus to kindle in my spirit, “Thou art my love, thou art my love,” twenty times together; and still as they ran thus in my mind, they waxed stronger and warmer, and began to make me look up; but being as yet between hope and fear, I still replied in my heart, But is it true? At which, that sentence fell in upon me, He “wist not that it was true which was done by the angel” (Acts 12:9).

Then I began to give place to the word, which, with power, did over and over make this joyful sound within my soul, thou art my love, thou art my love; and nothing shall separate thee from my love; and with that (Rom 8:39) came into my mind: Now was my heart filled full of comfort and hope, and now I could believe that my sins would be forgiven me.⁴²

Bunyan tries to explain his numinous and mystical experiences within the context of Puritan beliefs, emphasizing the illumination of scripture and the duty of the Elect to search their own consciences for evidence of their salvation. He makes no reference to any mystical writings on spiritual betrothal or espousal and does not seem to be aware of the tradition of mystical marriage. Nevertheless, the similarities between his recorded experience and that of other mystics is striking. In another passage he writes:

I prayed, I cried, ‘and my soul cried’ to him in these words, with strong cries:—O Lord, I beseech thee, show me that thou hast loved me with everlasting love (Jer. 31:3). I had no

⁴⁰ Ibid., 39.

⁴¹ Ibid., 45.

⁴² Ibid., 21.

sooner said it but, with sweetness, this returned upon me, as an echo or sounding again, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” Now I went to bed at quiet; also, when I awaked the next morning, it was fresh upon my soul—‘and I believed it.’⁴³

Here Bunyan mentions the spiritual gift of tears and the divine “sweetness” which other mystics such as St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, Richard Rolle, and many others have also recorded in connection with the intense love which God has for the soul of the believer.

Bunyan describes his own experience of divine union as being joined with the Lord:

The Lord did also lead me into the mystery of union with the Son of God, that I was joined to him, that I was flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone, and now was that a sweet word to me in Ephesians 5:30. By this also was my faith in him, as my righteousness, the more confirmed to me; for if he and I were one, then his righteousness was mine, his merits mine, his victory also mine. Now I see myself in heaven and earth at once; in heaven by my Christ, by my head, by my righteousness and life, though on earth by my body or person.⁴⁴

Bunyan’s words echo those of Adam in Genesis when he is presented with his wife, Eve (2:23). They are also words which mirror the perfect spiritual union between Christ and his Bride, the Church. However, for Bunyan this union becomes very personal, he is part of the Church; he is part of the Bride. Through divine union he finally comes to understand the words of Saint Paul in his letter to the Ephesians: “For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leaue his father and mother, and shall be ioyned vnto his wife, and they two shalbe one flesh. This is the great mysterie: but I speake concerning Christ and the Church” (Ephesians 5:30-32).⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁵ Translation is from the 1611 version of the King James version of the Bible which Bunyan references in *Grace Abounding*.

Bunyan's encounters with God do not differ much in type or sequence from the kinds of experiences recorded by Early Modern Catholic mystics such as St. John of the Cross; however, they do differ in interpretation. As a Protestant, Bunyan is unfamiliar with, or at least untrained in, the traditional teachings of the Catholic Church in regards to mysticism. As a Puritan, he would have believed such teachings to be superstitious and dangerous. Therefore, unlike some of his fellow Early Modern mystics, such as Augustine Baker, Benet of Canfield, Richard Crashaw, and others, who became recusants in order to understand the source and meaning of their experiences, Bunyan struggles for meaning within the context of Puritanism, attempting to interpret his encounters within a limited range of accepted possibilities.

Therefore, his emphasis on Scriptural illumination, conviction, and temptation is not surprising. When recording these numinous encounters in his autobiography, he presents them rather matter-of-factly. They become evidence of his struggle with conviction and his temptation to doubt. The scriptural passages which are illumined for him take him step-by-step through the process of examining his own faith. The numinous aspects of these encounters becomes subsumed in language which diffuses them while acknowledging their source as being outside of himself. Bunyan states that "sentences fell upon [his] soul" as he is considering the scriptures, that they "bolted" and "darted in upon [him]," and "came rolling into [his] mind."⁴⁶ The verbs he chooses are forceful and energetic, emphasizing movement from the external to the interior. He claims that scripture itself did "did sweetly visit [his] soul," that it "came into [his] heart," giving him "hope," and enlightening his understanding.⁴⁷ He interprets these illuminations as "impulses from God" teaching His Word.⁴⁸ They are "goodly" and "sweet."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid., 29, 44, 40.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 42, 39, 42, 41.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 29, 26.

Not knowing or at least not using the traditional terminology of Catholic mysticism, Bunyan applies a Puritan vocabulary. By emphasizing the scriptural aspects of his encounters and couching them in biblical language, he is allaying suspicions and fears concerning their source. Establishing that the majority of his encounters occur within the context of scriptural illumination for the purposes of strengthening faith, Bunyan can interpret his other encounters within this same context. He couches his dreams and visions with Biblical language and scriptural texts, emphasizing their purpose in his spiritual progress.⁵⁰ The voices which he hears, call him to conviction and encourage him to lead a holy life. Even divine union is interpreted within the context of Puritan spirituality. Bunyan chooses to compare his divine encounter with the union described in Ephesians 5:30. However, instead of emphasizing the marriage imagery in that passage, Bunyan draws upon the doctrine of hypostatic union, an angle which again sets the encounter squarely within the framework of Puritan approaches to spirituality. His descriptions of his experiences are not calculated to give him authority amongst his peers as a seer or prophet, but to interpret them within the context of Puritanism and explain them within the boundaries accepted by that faith community.

As is the case with other mystics, Bunyan emerges from this period of aridity spiritually renewed and revitalized. He becomes a deacon and begins preaching without a license. The authorities of the Interregnum tolerate him, but in 1660, Charles II re-establishes the monarchy.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁰ In the preface to his little book entitled, *Visions*, John Bunyan applies a similar strategy in defending his choice of visions as a literary genre: “Nor let anyone be stumbled, that this is delivered under the similitude of a *Vision*; for so long as the truths herein conveyed are according to the true Analogy of Faith, the dress in which they are put may be very well dispensed with” (v). He describes dreams as a “pleasant physic” for presenting the way, or means, by which believers must find Heaven while visions are a vehicle for describing Heaven itself, the journey’s end (v). See John Bunyan, *The Visions of John Bunyan Being His Last Remains: Giving an Account of the Glories of Heaven, the Terrors of Hell, and of the World to Come* (Leeds: J. Binns, 1786), iii-vi. Of course, his *Pilgrim’s Progress* is the greatest of his excursions into this genre. Not surprisingly, the progress of the main character, Christian mirrors Bunyan’s own spiritual progress.

Religious authority is returned to the Crown, and Bunyan is arrested. He spends the next twelve years in jail. As a non-conformist, non-licensed preacher, Bunyan represents a double danger. First, he is not authorized to preach by the Church of England, for he has not been trained within its established system for educating ministers. Instead, he operates outside of its hierarchy, bypassing its system and undermining its authority in the process. Second, as a nonconformist, the approaches to spirituality which he advocates do not align with those promoted by the newly re-instituted Church of England which is re-establishing the *Book of Common Prayer*, the liturgy, and the ecumenical hierarchy which the Puritans had sought to eradicate. Nonconformist ministers, previously licensed or not, are banned from preaching. Those who refuse to comply, like Bunyan, are jailed.

It is during his long incarceration that Bunyan begins writing his best known works. He completes *Grace Abounding* in 1666. Although the main purpose of his spiritual autobiography is to examine his struggle with conversion, his anguish over sin and doubt, and the saving grace of God, the narrative also provides insights into how he, as a Puritan, understood and interpreted his numinous experiences. In the process, he shows how such mystical encounters can fit within an approach to Christianity which is deeply suspicious of any form of “inspiration” outside of the Scriptures. Thus, Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding* serves to broaden the parameters of what can be recognized as mysticism during the Early Modern Period.

George Fox (1624-1691)

In contrast to Bunyan, other Early Modern mystics found that their encounters with the divine led them away from the nonconformist sects which had originally developed within the Church of England. They joined others who had given up the hope of reforming the church from the inside and saw their only recourse in separating from the established ecclesiastical hierarchies

and starting afresh. These Separatists included many radical religious groups, one of which was the Quakers. Founded by George Fox, they advocated a different approach to Christianity, one which stressed the need for each believer to be taught by Christ himself through direct communion with Him in the Spirit. The emphasis is on immediate revelation:

Seeing “no man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son revealeth him;” and seeing the revelation of the Son is in and by the Spirit; therefore the testimony of the Spirit alone by which the true knowledge of God hath been, is, and can be only revealed; who...created man a living soul,...so by the revelation of the same Spirit he hath manifested himself all along unto the sons of men, both patriarchs, prophets, and apostles; which revelations of God by the Spirit, whether by outward voices and appearances, dreams or inward objective manifestations in the hearts, were of old the formal object of their faith, and remain yet so to be; since the object of the saints’ faith is the same in all ages, though set forth under diverse administrations. Moreover, these divine inward revelations, which we make absolutely necessary for the building up of true faith, neither do nor can ever contradict the outward testimony of the scriptures, or right and sound reason.⁵¹

Whereas the Puritans placed on emphasis on the Scriptures and were extremely suspicious of new personal “revelation,” the Quakers placed an emphasis on revelation and de-emphasized the importance of the Scriptures. For them, the Bible was a respected source by which to test divine inward revelations, however, it was not the only source of knowledge about God nor was it the primary source. In a very mystical sense, Quakers did not only want to know about God, they wanted to know God Himself and to have Him teach them through direct revelation.

This approach to revelation echoes George Fox’s own spiritual awakening. In contrast to Bunyan, Fox was from a rather well-to-do family, and from a young age he was of a serious and

⁵¹ Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity: Being an Explanation and Vindication of the Principles and Doctrines of the People Called Quakers (1675)*, in “The Second Proposition: Concerning Immediate Revelation,” *Theses Theologicae: The Fifteen Propositions from Robert Barclay’s Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Edited by George Amos, Jr. (1996), <http://www.qis.net/~daruma/barclay.html> Retrieved 24 December 2015.

spiritual mindset.⁵² Having a tender conscience, even as a teenager, Fox describes an incident when he is nineteen which causes him to enter into a spiritual crisis. A group of his friends, who claimed to be Christians, invited him to join them to drink a jug of beer. Being thirsty, he went with them gladly, but soon became dismayed when they began to drink to excess with the purpose of becoming drunk. Refusing to participate, he returned home, but could not go to bed that night or sleep.⁵³ Pacing up and down and praying, he called unto the Lord who, according to Fox, replied: “You see how young people go together into vanity, and old people go into the earth; you must forsake all, both young and old, and keep out of all, and be as a stranger to all.”⁵⁴

Fox claims that at the command of God he left home on July 7, 1643, and travelled through the country in spiritual crisis, seeing the disparity between the faith which people professed and that which they showed themselves to possess:

A strong temptation to despair came over me. Then I saw how Christ was tempted, and mighty troubles I was in; sometimes I kept myself retired in my chamber, and often walked solitary in the Chase there, to wait upon the Lord. I wondered why these things should come to me; and I looked upon myself and said “Was I ever so before?” Then I thought, because I had forsaken my relations I had done amiss against them; so I was brought to call to mind all my time that I had spent, and to consider whether I had wronged any. But temptations grew more and more, and I was tempted almost to despair; and when Satan could not effect his design upon me that way, he laid snares for me, and baits to draw me to commit some sin, whereby he could take advantage to bring me to despair. I was about twenty years of age when these exercises came upon me. I continued in that condition some years, in great trouble and fain would have put it from me. I went to many a priest to look for comfort, but found no comfort from them.⁵⁵

⁵² George Fox, *A Journal or Historical Account of the Life, Travels, Sufferings, Christian Experiences and Labour of Love in the Work of the Ministry, of that Ancient, Eminent and Faithful Servant of Jesus Christ, George Fox; Who Departed This Life in Great Peace with the Lord, the 13th of the 11th Month, 1690*, Vol. 1 (London: Printed for Thomas Nozthcott in George-yard, in Lombard-Street, 1694), 1-2.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

What Fox is describing, resembles the dark night described by St. John of the Cross and experienced by John Bunyan. Whereas Bunyan claims to have gone to the Bible for answers about his despair and temptations, Fox went to people, asking priests and ministers for help. However, all were ignorant of his condition, offering him no answers and showing themselves to be “angry,” “pettish,” and “hollow.”⁵⁶ Not knowing his spiritual condition, they recommended that he smoke tobacco, sing psalms, and let blood.⁵⁷ His response is very blunt: “I found them Miserable Comforters.”⁵⁸

Continuing in these aridities for about two years, Fox claims that at the beginning of 1646, he received his first “openings.” This is the term he uses to denote divine promptings, inspirations, or illuminations communicated directly to his soul. Whereas Bunyan claimed that a sentence would “fall” or “dart” upon him, Fox explains that “a consideration arose” and “the Lord opened” to him certain answers to his questions:

About the beginning of the year 1646, as I was going to Coventry and approaching towards the gate, a consideration arose in me, how it was said that “all Christians are believers, both protestants and papists”: and the Lord opened to me that, if all were believers, then they were all born of God, and passed from death to life, and that none were true believers but such; and though others said they were believers, yet they were not.

At another time, as I was walking in a field on a first-day morning, the Lord opened to me “that being bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ”; and I wondered at it, because it was the common belief of people. But I saw it clearly as the Lord opened it to me, and was satisfied.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid., 4-5.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 5. By being “bred,” Fox is referring to being “educated” at one or the other of these two universities.

The answers which satisfy Fox are those which he believes come from God Himself rather than through the fallible intermediary of a priest or minister. They are also not limited to Scripture, but are more conversational. They are direct answers to questions which have been weighing on his mind concerning those who professed Christ but did not seem to walk in his ways, people like the drunken teenagers and petulant priests which he had encountered over the last few years as he travelled and sought God. Like Bunyan, Fox sometimes receives these divine inspirations as he is walking alone in a field, and also like Bunyan, he likes to take a copy of the English Bible with him as he wanders alone into the orchards or fields.⁶⁰ However, unlike Bunyan, Fox is not Calvinistic. He does not worry about whether or not he is one of the Elect; instead, he is more concerned with avoiding hypocrisy in his Christian walk and begins to wonder at the necessity of being trained in order to minister to the people of God. His faith in the necessity of the priesthood shaken, his latter openings cause him to question the need for sanctified buildings:

Another time it was opened to me “That God, who made the world, did not dwell in temples made with hands”. This at first seemed a strange word, because both priests and people used to call their temples or churches dreadful places, holy ground, and the temples of God. But the Lord showed me clearly that he did not dwell in these temples which men had commanded and set up, but in people’s hearts.⁶¹

As a consequence of these openings, Fox begins to see no need for mediators between himself and God, no need for university training, no need for an ecclesiastical hierarchy, and no need for elaborate church buildings. At this point, his relations and the local priest begin to be concerned that he is “going after new lights” and that he is being deceived.⁶²

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 6.

⁶² Ibid.

When he claims that God is opening to him the meaning of the prophecies written in the book of Revelation, they warn him that it is a sealed book and advise him to stay out of it. His reply is that “Christ could open the seals.”⁶³ He insists that the prophecies of Revelation are “the nearest things to us: for the Epistles were written to the saints that lived in former ages but the Revelations were written of things to come.”⁶⁴ In this one statement, he undercuts the authority which many Protestants, such as the Puritans, had placed on the Scriptures, attempting to apply the words of Paul to their own contemporary lives. In its place, he elevates the importance of prophesy. Fox does not discard the epistles, but he does point out rather clearly that he sees at least some of them as directed towards the needs of specific people at specific times in the past rather than as generalized statements meant to apply to all people throughout all ages. For Fox, the more relevant Scriptures are the prophecies contained within the last book of the New Testament, which is entitled, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* in the 1611 edition of the King James Bible, but which is described in its opening lines as, “The Reuelation of Iesus Christ, which God gaue vnto him, to shewe vnto his seruants things which much shortly come to passe.”⁶⁵ Fox continues to emphasize the importance of prophesy throughout his ministry just as he also emphasizes the need for believers to be taught directly by Christ through direct revelation and divine openings.

Moving away from the government-sanctioned Church of England and its priesthood, Fox is drawn toward other Seekers, looking for those who could guide him through his “dark night”:

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Revelations 1:1.

After I had received that opening from the Lord, that *To be bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not sufficient to fit a man to be a minister of Christ*, I regarded the *Priests* less and looked more after the *Dissenting People*. And among them I saw, there was some Tenderness: And many of them came afterwards to be *Convinced*; for they have some *Openings*. But as I has forsaken all the *Priests*, so I left the *Separate Preachers* also, and those called the *Most Experienced-People*: for I saw there was none among them all, who could speak to my *Condition*. When all my hopes in them and in all Men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do; Then O! then I heard a Voice, which said, “*There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy Condition*”: And when I heard it, my Heart did leap for Joy. Then the *Lord* did let me see, why there was none upon the Earth, that could speak to my *Condition*? namely that I might give him all the glory.⁶⁶

This numinous experience is what Fox terms his great awakening after which his “Desires after the Lord grew stronger, and Zeal in the pure knowledge of God and of Christ alone—without the help of any *Man, Book or Writing*.”⁶⁷ This decision to break away from the officially sanctioned approaches to God through the Church of England, its licensed priesthood, and its *Book of Common Prayer* was exactly the type of reaction of which the authorities were suspicious, for they blamed zealous religious enthusiasts for rebellions and revolts which had occurred on the continent, particularly those led by self-proclaimed prophets. Fox was not only breaking away from the Church of England and the nonconformist sects within it, but he was also rejecting the other already established Separatist groups who had given up trying to reform the Church of England from the inside.

Fox is even rejecting the popular Protestant belief that the Scriptures are the sole source of revelation about Christ: “For though I read the *Scriptures*, that spake of Christ, and of God; yet I knew him not, but by *Revelation*, as he, who has the *Key*, did open, and as the *Father of Life* drew me to his *Son* by the Spirit.” For Fox, the knowledge of God which he receives through his openings affects and transforms his spirit in a much more immediate and intense way than that

⁶⁶ Fox, *Journal*, 8.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

which he receives by reading through the Scriptures alone. In this way he contrasts sharply with Bunyan, who believes deeply in the concept of *sola scriptura* and who therefore needs his numinous encounters to be dominated by scriptural illumination. Fox reads his Bible and has knowledge of what it says about Christ; however, he is guided by what he perceives to be direct revelations of Christ, given by Christ himself through divine openings: “And then the Lord did lead me gently along, and did let me see his *Love*, which was Endless and Eternal, and surpasseth all the *Knowledge*, that Men have in the natural State, or can get by *History*, or *Books*.”⁶⁸ It is the contrast between intellectual knowledge of Christ and experiential knowledge of Christ that prompts Fox to reject “*Man, Book, or Writing*,” and thus to de-emphasize the importance of the Scriptures in the spiritual life of a believer.⁶⁹ To Fox they are not the only source, nor even the best source of revelation about Christ. He gives that honor to Christ himself.

In his dark night experience, Fox pulls away from his previous reliance on all of the most common and approved Protestant approaches to God: churches and sanctuaries, scriptures and prayer books, priests and preachers. Of the three, he is leeriest of the latter:

I was afraid of all Company: For I saw them perfectly, where they were, through the *Love of God*, which let me see myself. And I had not Fellowship with any *People, Priests* nor *Professors*, nor any sort of *Separated People*; but with *Christ*, who hath the *Key*, and opened the Door of *Life* and *Light* unto me.⁷⁰

The “professors” which he mentions are any who “profess” Christ as their savior. They are his fellow believers, those who, like the companions of his youth, claimed to be Christians, yet did not seem to be interested in being sanctified and transformed into his image.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

In contrast to the light and life of Christ, Fox sees this focus on the world as carnal and corrupt: “And I was afraid of all *Carnal Talk* and *Talkers*; for I could see nothing but Corruptions, and the Life lay under the Burden of Corruptions.”⁷¹ In this passage, Fox is not pointing the finger at others so much as fleeing from what he perceives as endangering his own relationship with Christ. He is burdened by his own temptations and attempting to purge himself of all worldly distractions. Such attempts are common during the dark night of the senses and of the soul. Fox calls the experience, the Deep:

And when I my self was in the *Deep*, under all shut up, I could not believe, that I should *Overcome*; my *Troubles*, my *Sorrows* and my *Temptations* were so great, that I thought many times, I should have despaired, I was so tempted. But when Christ opened to me, how he was tempted by the same *Devil*, and had *Overcome* him, and bruised his Head; and that through him and his Power, Light, Grace and Spirit, I should *Overcome* also; I had confidence in him. So he it was, that opened to me, when I was shut up, and had not hope, not faith. Christ it was (who had enlightened me) that gave me his *Light* to believe in, and gave me Hope, which is himself, *Revealed* himself in me, and gave me his *Spirit*, and gave me his *Grace*, which I found sufficient in the *Deeps*, and in *Weakness*. Thus in the deepest *Miseries*, and in the greatest *Sorrows* and *Temptations*, that many times beset me, the *Lord* in his Mercy did keep me.⁷²

Fox’s great awakening, then, appears to be his emergence from a dark night experience into a transforming relationship with Christ. Afterwards he thirsts even more for God and begins to share his experience with others.⁷³ Like Bunyan, he wants to help others to find Christ; however, unlike Bunyan, he does not do so through the preaching and sermons favored by the Puritans. Instead, he promotes silent worship, waiting patiently in the presence of the Lord. Christ himself is the priest, the teacher, the pastor of His flock.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

What Fox offered appealed to many Seekers who were not satisfied with knowing about God, but who wanted to know God Himself. His mystical approach to Christianity drew them to his meetings, but it also drew the curious and the skeptical who scoffed at the Friends sitting together in silence:

There is a cry in the world among professor and papists and protestants against our silent meetings. For when Friends are met together waiting upon the Lord and Jesus Christ their teacher, some priests and professors have come and looked upon us in our meetings. The priests have said “Did you ever see the like in your lives? Look how they sit mumming and dumbing here, what edification is there among them?” “I never see the like in my life” cry the rest of the priests and professors—“Come let us go away, here is no edification, here is no words. See how they sit mumming and dumbing!”⁷⁴

Having come to expect worship to involve the saying of mass or the preaching of sermons, the “papists, priests, and professors” who visit these silent meetings are nonplussed by the lack of either. To them, Christianity is relayed through either the spoken or the written word, and the edification of believers must come the same way. Added to that is the growing suspicion of any revelation outside of Scripture. To these Christians, without relaying the word of God through the voice or pen, and without receiving it through the ears or eyes, there is no edification, for they do not believe God communicates directly to any believer as He once did as is recorded in the Bible.

Fox takes these scoffers to task:

When they are gone away, it may be some Friends have been moved of the Lord to say to them “Did you never see the like in your life, nor never in your days?” Say they to them “Prithee, look into your own steeple-houses, yes in all the steeple-houses among papists and protestants, and see—do not your people sit mumming and dumbing under you?” And have you not got a law that if anyone ask you a question when you are speaking or afterwards, do you not cry “Where are the churchwardens or constables? Is there not an

⁷⁴ George Fox, “Why Shall We Not Sit in Silence?” Manuscript 82E Aa, Bound with Annual Catalogue, Quaker Library at Friends House, London, printed in *George Fox: A Christian Mystic: Texts That reveal his Personality*, Edited by Hugh McGregor Ross (Cnoc Sceichín, Leac an Anfa, Cathair na Mart, Co. Mhaigh Eo, Éire: Evertime, 2008), 139.

officer here? Take him away, for he has disturbed me!” So do you not keep them in this manner, mumming and dumbing till they be three score years of age—all their life time?

There is not so much liberty to ask a question although your doctrine be never so false. So you may do what you will without questioning of it.

So look into your own parish. Did you never see the like in your life? You may see it all over Christendom—all people sit mumming and dumbing under you. Everyone has got a law; how many have you persecuted for questioning you? So you keep the people in the mumming and dumbing state.⁷⁵

Fox asks why it is that they expect people to sit quietly and listen to them teach and preach. Why it is they keep the people silent and refuse to allow them to ask questions if it is not more about control than edification. Fox condemns this type of official exploitation of religious authority, exploitation which silences believers and indoctrinates them with officially sanctioned messages, whether they are in line with the truth or not. Fox accuses such officials of persecuting those who do ask questions in order to silence them through fear and to keep them under the control of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. By implication, he also accuses them of purposefully discouraging believers from seeking a personal relationship with a living God and thereby bypassing any need for a mediator in the person of licensed priests and ministers.

It is this sort of accusation that made both him and the type of mysticism which he advocates dangerous in the eyes of the Establishment. Such radical ideas put them at odds with both church and government authorities. In light of the political unrest of the times, officials suspected the Friends of gathering together to plan insurrection; therefore, they scoffed at and discredited them, and they sometimes sent soldiers to break up their meetings. Instead of dangerous rebels on the brink of armed rebellion, what these soldiers found were peaceful groups of believers sitting together in silence, patiently waiting for Jesus. It was not their arms, but their ideas which officials found dangerous, ideas which undermined the very need for established

⁷⁵ Ibid., 139-140.

clerical authority; therefore, these officials were anxious to break up meetings and prevent the Friends from coming together. One such incident is recorded in Fox's *Journal*:

One first-day it was upon me to go to Devonshire House meeting in the afternoon; and because I had heard friends were kept out [of] there in the morning (as they were that day at most meetings about the city, I went somewhat the sooner, and got into the yard before the soldiers came to guard the passages; but the constables were got there before me, and stood in the door-way with their staves. I asked them to let me go in; they said "they could not, nor durst not; for they were commanded the contrary, and were sorry for it". I told them I would not press upon them; so I stood by, and then one gave me a stool to sit down on.

After a while the power of the Lord began to spring up among the Friends, and one began to speak. The constable soon forbade him, and said he should not speak; and he not stopping they began to be wroth. But I gently laid my hand on one of the constables, and wished him to let him alone; the constable did so, and was quiet; and the man did not speak for long.

After he had done, I was moved to stand and speak. In my declaration I said "They need not come against us with swords and staves, for we were a peaceable people; and had nothing in our hearts but goodwill to the king and magistrates, and to all people upon the earth. We did not meet, under pretense of religion, to plot and contrive against the government, or to raise insurrection; but to worship God in spirit and in truth. We had Christ to be our bishop, priest, and shepherd to feed us and oversee us, and he ruled in our hearts; so we could all sit in silence, enjoying the teacher. So to Christ, their bishop and shepherd I commended them all". (sic.)

I then sat down. After a while I was moved to pray, and the power of the Lord was over all; and the people, the constables, the soldiers put off their hats. When the meeting was done, and Friends began to pass away, the constable put off his hat, and desired the Lord to bless us; for the power of the Lord was over him and the people, and kept them under.⁷⁶

The incident described in this passage takes place in 1683. The Conventicle Act (1662) has already been in place for more than twenty years, making meetings for Nonconformist worship illegal, even in private houses, if attended by more than four people from outside the household.

⁷⁶ George Fox, *Journal*, "An Incident with the Constables," printed in *George Fox: A Christian Mystic: Texts That reveal his Personality*, Edited by Hugh McGregor Ross (Cnoc Sceichín, Leac an Anfa, Cathair na Mart, Co. Mhaigh Eo, Éire: Evertime, 2008), 141-143.

Thus, the constables have been sent to prevent a meeting of Friends by barring their entry into the Devonshire House.

The Friends, however, do not believe that God inhabits buildings. He instead dwells in the hearts of people, and where two or three Friends are gathered together, they believe that God is in their midst. The place did not matter; they could worship outside the building just as well as they could worship inside. According to Fox's account, they gather in the yard, and as long as they are not speaking, the constables do not make any moves against them; however, as soon as one of them stands to share what has been placed on his heart, they try to silence him.

This man is participating in a type of group-mysticism practiced by the Friends. Whereas numinous and mystical encounters are usually an individual experience, Fox and his followers also believe that there can be shared experiences amongst a group of believers, what they call a gathered meeting:

In the gathered meeting the sense is present that a new Life and Power has entered our midst. And we know not only that we stand erect in the Holy Presence but also that others sitting with us are experiencing the same exaltation and access to power. We may not know these our neighbors in any outwardly intimate sense, but we know them, as it were from within, and they know us in the same way, as souls now alive in the same areas and as blended into the body of Christ, which is His church.⁷⁷

In a gathered meeting, Friends report experiencing a shared perception that God Himself is present in the room and that He is communing with them and teaching them through His Spirit. According to Thomas Kelly, the gathered meeting is "the central fact of the overshadowing presence of the Eternal One. For it is God Himself who graciously reveals Himself in such holy times."⁷⁸ Sometimes during such a gathered meeting, God communicates to an individual a

⁷⁷ Thomas Kelly, *The Gathered Meeting* (London: Friends' Home Service Committee, 1944), The Tract Association. <http://www.tractassociation.org/tracts/the-gathered-meeting/> (Retrieved 26 Dec. 2015).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

message which is meant to be shared with the group. In such a case, that individual is to stand up, deliver the message, and sit back down.

That is exactly what Fox describes in the meeting at Devonshire House. The man feels the power of the Lord is present, he perceives he has a message, he then stands up to deliver it, at which time the constables try to stop him. The man ignores them and continues to speak what he believes the Lord has laid on his heart. The constables become angry because the man puts more authority into what he believes to be the command of God to deliver the message rather than the command of men to be silent.

Thomas Kelly asserts that gathered meetings, such as the one which Fox describes in the above passage, display all four of the characteristics which William James applies to mystic states: ineffability, insight, transience, and passivity.⁷⁹ They are ineffable because they are not fully describable in words: “We live through such hours of expanded vision yet never can we communicate to another all that wonder and power and life and re-creation which we knew when swept along in the immediacy of the Divine Presence.”⁸⁰ Though the experience may not be fully communicated through words, it does carry with it the sense of insight or knowledge:

We know Him as we have not known Him before. The secrets of this amazing world have been in some degree laid bare. We know life, and the world, and ourselves from within, anew. And lo, there we have seen God. We may not issue from a gathered meeting with a single crisp sentence or judgment of capsulated knowledge, yet we are infinitely more certain of the dynamic, living, working Life, for we have experienced a touch of that persuading Power that disquiets us until we find our home in Him.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Such experiences are brief, rarely lasting more than three-quarters of an hour or an hour, according to Kelly,⁸² but then individual mystical experiences often do not last more than a quarter to half hour. The transience of the experience is one of its defining characteristics as is the passive way in which it is received. Neither the individual mystic or the gathered meeting can initiate a mystical or numinous encounter with God. Instead they are passively received at the time and place of His choosing: “We seem to be acted upon by a More-than-ourselves, who stills our time-torn spirits and breathes into us, as on Creation’s day, the breath of life. When one rises to speak in such a meeting, one has a sense of being used, of being played upon, of being spoken through.”⁸³ The speaker is the instrument through which the message is relayed, not the author of the message itself and ideally should make no claim of special authority and take no pride in being used as a mouthpiece.

Thus, the gathered meeting is a unique transformation of the mystical experience within Early Modern Protestant England, one which encourages believers to see divine inspirations, illuminations, and promptings as a necessary and healthy part of a Christian’s spirituality. Nevertheless, as they are perceived as Divine openings, Friends rank such godly teachings above those inspired by human institutions alone. Therefore, Fox and his Friends represented a real threat to the authority of the established ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Church of England. Although they were pacifists who would not have raised arms against the king, the ideas which they espoused were radical and potentially schismatic because of their mystical nature. The Quakers, as they came to be called, did not claim special authority for themselves, nor did they use their prophetic insights to stir rebellions against the government; however, they did refuse to honor the special religious authority claimed by others through man-made institutions. This

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

threatened to undercut the established order; thus they were punished by imprisonment and by the seizure of their goods up until the time of the religious Toleration Act of 1689.

The approach to mysticism developed by George Fox and the Quakers stressed the belief that Christ Himself taught His people. This meant that every believer, male or female, could have a direct and vibrant relationship with the Divine. It also meant that the Quakers recognized women as being full members of the priesthood of all believers as mentioned in the Bible (1 Peter 2:5-9). Thus, contrary to most other contemporary Protestant faiths in England, the Quakers acknowledged the spiritual contributions of women. Fox himself wrote to Friends encouraging them to accept women as equals in the work of the church and to encourage women to play their part, even in prophecy.⁸⁴

For Fox prophecy includes both its foretelling and its forth-telling qualities. Therefore, a prophet may predict an event which is to happen at some future time, or a prophet may explicate the meaning of Scripture or provide a greater awareness of God's truth. This meant that Quaker women could serve in a capacity in their church usually reserved for men:

Christ is one in the male and the female, [and he] makes free from the law. And the Lord says "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions. Even upon your menservants and maid servants in those days I will pour out my spirit." ... Here all may see the spirit of the Lord not limited, ...and many thousands of servants and handmaids witness the spirit of the Lord poured out upon them, and the word of the Lord fulfilled.... Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them." Now mark.... Anna the prophetess...who served God with fasting and prayer night and day, came into the temple [and] spake of Christ to all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. Here was a large testimony borne of Jesus by Anna the prophetess—here you may see a daughter who gave testimony of Jesus.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Hugh McGregor Ross, *George Fox: A Christian Mystic: Texts That reveal his Personality*, (Cnoc Sceichin, Leac an Anfa, Cathair na Mart, Co. Mhaigh Eo, Éire: Evertype, 2008), 110.

⁸⁵ George Fox, "The Woman Learning in Silence" (1656) Smith's Catalogue. P. 651; *Doctrinals* p.77; *Works* 4/104; republished as "Concerning Sons and Daughters, and Prophetesses Speaking and Prophesying," Smith's Catalogue p. 666 in Ross, Hugh McGregor, *George Fox: A Christian Mystic: Texts*

Fox is referencing both the Old and New Testaments in this passage (Acts 2:17-18; Joel 2:28-29). The story of Anna the Prophetess is recorded in the Gospel of Luke (2:36-38). Fox goes on to tell of other New Testament women who served in significant roles in the early church: Priscilla, the wife of Aquila and one of the early deaconesses; Phoebe and Mary, who helped the apostle Paul; and Mary Magdalene, who was the first to see the risen Lord:

Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples she had seen the Lord.... Here all may see it was Mary Magdalene who was sent to declare his resurrection.... Now you who make a scoff and a wonder at a woman's declaring, you may see it was Mary who first declared Christ after he was risen. So be ashamed and confounded for ever, and let all your mouths be stopped for ever—who despise the spirit of prophesy in daughters.... The apostle says "Christ in the male and in the female," and if Christ be in the female as well as in the male, is not he the same? May not the spirit of Christ speak in the female as well as in the male? Is he there to be limited? Who is there who dare limit the holy one of Israel? ...Who is it that dares stop Christ's mouth? Christ is come to reign...who now reigns in his sons and daughters...that the glory is seen which the son had with his Father... which glory these males and females who receive Christ do see.... Now every one having a light from Christ Jesus, ...see him With the light [they] see Christ...and receive him.... With the light you will see the promise to them of life, ...and everyone receiving the light which comes from Christ shall receive the spirit of prophesy—whether they be male or female. The spirit of prophesy is the testimony of Jesus. If male and female have received the testimony of Jesus, they have received the spirit of prophesy.⁸⁶

By emphasizing the important roles which women such as Mary Magdalene, Anna, Priscilla, and Phoebe played in the early church, Fox builds his case against the contemporary Protestant emphasis on the Pauline interdict forbidding women from preaching or teaching. He uses scripture to contradict scripture, weighing the promises of God directly against the directions of Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians (14:35-36).⁸⁷ Fox interprets this letter of the apostle as

That Reveal His Personality (Cnoc Sceichín, Leac an Anfa, Cathair na Mart, Co. Mhaigh Eo, Éire: Evertype, 2008), 111-113.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 114-115.

⁸⁷ In Acts 2: 17-18, the crowds in Jerusalem have been mocking the charisms given to the believers in the upper room during the Pentecost. Peter reminds them of a prophesy of Joel which states that "it shall come to passe in the last dayes (saith God) I will power out my Spirit vpon all flesh: and your

directed specifically toward one group of people, addressing specific concerns which they had at a specific point in time. However, he believes the prophesies of God as revealed through Joel and Peter as applying to all believers living after the Pentecost. Fox deducts that since God promised to pour out His Spirit on both men and women, that he does so, and that His Spirit is no less potent regardless of the gender or age of the recipient. Therefore, according to Fox, women can not only be filled with the Holy Spirit, but they can also be gifted with the charism of prophesy. He believes such women should not be forced to remain silent but should be allowed to speak the words which have been given to them by the Lord.

This interpretation of scripture allows women an equality which had been denied them by most other contemporary Protestant sects, and empowers Quaker women to speak with authority within a religious context. As a result, over two hundred Quaker women are recorded as writing and prophesying during the Early Modern period.⁸⁸ Their texts provide rich ground for studies of feminine spirituality during the seventeenth century and much productive scholarship has already been done in this field, especially with those women whose prophesies are politically oriented and who have been interpreted by modern scholars to be proto-feminist.

These politically charged prophesies allowed women a voice in an arena which was traditionally denied them, and they provide a feminine perspective on the turbulent religious and political changes occurring during the seventeenth century. Although these women still relied on

sonnes and your daughters shall prophesie, and your yong men shall see visions, and your old men shall dreame dreames: And on my seruants, and on my handmaids, I will power out in those daies of my Spirit, and they shall prophesie.” (See Joel 2: 28-29.) The Pauline interdict is based on 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: “Let your women keepe silence in the Churches, for it is not permitted vnto them to speake; but *they* are *commanded* to bee vnder obedience: as also saith the Law. And if they will learen any thing, let them aske their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speake in the Church.”

⁸⁸ Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, 1992), 1, 409.

male sanction to give their voices authority, they were confident enough to speak, breaking the silence which had previously been forced upon them.⁸⁹

Of course, the idea of women speaking out in Church and prophesying was very contentious in the seventeenth century, and Fox and the Quakers were the target of much persecution. Fox strove to normalize Christian mysticism in an era which was wary of religious enthusiasm, equating it with political dissent, and politically charged prophetic utterances may have seemed to confirm these fears. Indeed, Fox's approach to spirituality did attempt to level manmade, religious hierarchies and institutions, providing all genders, ages, and social ranks equal access to a God who was not distant but living and active within the life of a believer.

Jane Ward Lead (1624-1704)

Not all of the female prophetic voices of the seventeenth century were politically charged. Jane Ward Lead was a visionary and prophetess who lead the Philadelphian Society for the Advancement of Piety and Divine Philosophy at the end of the seventeenth century. Although the group began meeting privately in Lead's home in 1694, within three years they had grown enough to need multiple venues.

Unlike other religious societies who were forming since the Religious Toleration Act of 1689, the purpose of the Philadelphians was not to affect political change; they did not wish to be confrontational or sectarian; likewise, they were not a church. They were instead a "Religious Society for the Reformation of Manners, for the Advancement of an Heroical Christian Piety, and

⁸⁹ These women prophets were sanctioned first by Fox who encouraged them to speak, then by other male Quakers who allowed them to continue, listening to their prophesies and heeding them. They also claimed male sanction through God himself who they believed gave them their prophetic utterances and by whose authority they spoke them in their meetings.

Universal Love towards All.”⁹⁰ They “sought to develop forms of spirituality on what must have been the Church’s outer limits,”⁹¹ for they were most interested in mysticism and universal salvation, beliefs which they held in common with the Quakers but which drew the censure of many other mainstream Protestants at the time.

In their approach to mysticism, the Philadelphians encouraged members to express themselves freely in the meetings. Like the Quakers, they believed that the spirit of prophecy could be poured out on either men or women and did not allow gender to hinder the free expression of prophetic utterance. According to their bylaws, in the tenth and twelfth constitutions, “the Manifestation of the Spirit, which is given to every one, whether Male or Female” should not be hindered:⁹² “If a Woman Pray or Prophecy let it be with all Sobriety and Modesty, to speak forth her own experience, Sensation, or Manifestation in the Divine Matters.”⁹³ Several women, in the Philadelphian Society, including Jane Ward Lead, were considered visionaries and prophets by the other members. However, Lead “always rejected the title of prophetess, when it was applied to her, and said that she had no pleasure in it, but that it was burdensome to her to be called so, because she did not deserve such a name or title.”⁹⁴ Nevertheless, she encouraged the Philadelphians to record in writing their numinous and mystical

⁹⁰ Francis Lee, *State of the Philadelphian Society* (London, 1697), 7.

⁹¹ Julie Hirst, *Jane Leade: Biography of a Seventeenth-Century Mystic* (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2005), 97.

⁹² “The Philadelphian Constitutions,” in *Theosophical Transactions of the Philadelphian Society* (5 Vols., London, 1699), vol. 4, 224.

⁹³ *Theosophical Transactions by the Philadelphia Society* (London, 1697), 221-23, and Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Rawl. D833, “Propositions Extracted from the Reasons and the Foundation and Promotion of the Philadelphia Society”, fol. 11, and in Julie Hirst, *Jane Leade: Biography of a Seventeenth-Century Mystic* (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2005), 4.

⁹⁴ Dr. Williams’ Library, London, MS Walton C.5.30, Francis Lee, “Last Hours of Jane Leade” in Hirst, *Jane Leade*, 101.

experiences and to share them amongst the other members. Lead herself wrote over twenty volumes recording her visions, dreams, and prophetic insights over the space of thirty years.

The Philadelphians emphasized an internal spirituality and believed in the possibility of a universal salvation, meaning that they took to heart the Biblical verse stating that “The Lord is...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”⁹⁵ To this end, the Philadelphians broke from Calvinistic predestination and refused to consign any Christians, whether Protestant or Catholic, to eternal damnation because of doctrinal differences. They rejected divisive approaches to spirituality and believed that the external paraphernalia and distinguishing habits of various religious groups encouraged schisms.⁹⁶ Lead’s step-son and editor, Francis Lee wrote that the Philadelphians “have no external Badge or Mark of distinction, but are above those little Affectations or Superstitions” and that “they were not so silly as to place Religion in Thouing and Theeing, in keeping on their Hats, or in a sad countenance.”⁹⁷ Thus, the Philadelphians did not try to separate themselves from other Christians; instead, they encouraged members to “embrace a more Spiritual Religion, overlooking the Outward Strength and Pomp of a Church State in Comparison with the Inward Life and Spirit of the Gospel.”⁹⁸ By not distinguishing, and thus separating, themselves from other Christians, they believed they could

⁹⁵ 2 Peter 3: 9.

⁹⁶ Within a few years, Lead is advocating a universal salvation as set out in *A Revelation of the Everlasting Gospel Message: Christ’s Eternal Judgment Shall Come for the Restitution of the Whole Lapsed Creation, Whether Human or Angelical* (1697). The title of course drew her much anticipated criticism. Universal salvation runs counter to doctrines taught by most contemporary Catholic and Protestant churches, and there is no biblical basis for the idea. Her defense is that her belief in universal salvation came from personal revelation.

⁹⁷ Lee, *State of the Philadelphian Society*, 13.

⁹⁸Ibid., 13.

more readily effect ‘an Universality, and generous noble Parity’ between all, whether Catholic or Protestant.⁹⁹

The Philadelphians were also millenarians. There was much millennial fervor in the seventeenth century. It fueled the faith of many Parliamentary soldiers during the Civil Wars. These men believed that they were quite literally fighting for God against the forces of Antichrist. They were post-millennialists in that they believed that Christ’s Second Coming would occur only after a golden age in which Christianity prospers and the church spreads the gospel in accordance with the Great Commission. In other words, the church would cleanse and prepare the way for Christ’s return, and that is exactly what many of the Parliamentary soldiers believed they were doing. They were God’s army cleansing the country of heresy and religious superstition, defeating the forces of Satan, and expanding the kingdom of God. However, after the Restoration, such millenarian ideas became associated with enthusiasm and revolution and were increasingly marginalized by the elite.¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, the turn of the eighteenth century brought with it a renewed, if subdued, interest in the prophesied eminent return of Christ and His millennial reign. In contrast to the post-millennialists of the mid-century, Lead and the Philadelphians, at the end of the seventeenth century, were pre-millennialists. They did not envision the reign of Christ as being ushered in by a revolutionary change in outward government; instead, they anticipated the Second Coming of Christ to usher in an inward change of those already in authority. Christ would transform the hearts of the people; thus the transition to the millennial reign would be peaceable. Lee warns against post-millennial enthusiasm in his preface to Lead’s spiritual diary, *A Fountain of Gardens*:

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Hirst, *Jane Leade*, 111.

This Word of Caution to the greedy Expectants and Waiters for some Outward visible Revolution in Church or State: *Let such be Sober in their Hopes, and take good heed to themselves of their Observations, or Calculations: and let them not lay too great a stress upon any external Deliverance how great soever, or upon the Rise or Fall of any Earthly Monarch, Potentate, or State: neither let them seek for the Kingdom of Christ in their own Will, nor according to certain preconceived Notions or Images, nor binding it down to any Sect or Party in the (So Called) Christian World....*¹⁰¹

In doing so, he is both diffusing any possible accusations of revolutionary intentions aimed at the Philadelphian Society, and he is reiterating their rejection of divisive approaches to spirituality. In the main text of her spiritual diary, Lead reassures “the Imperial Powers of the Earth, Kings, Queens, and all of that Progeny” that they would not be violently ousted at the beginning of the millennial reign of Christ, but that God would “establish not only your Thrones and Kingdoms here below, but also in the Heavenly places, which are permanent and durable, Crowns that cannot fall away...when every King shall become a King, Priest and Prophet unto God.”¹⁰² However, she did sound the alarm that “all Ranks, Orders, and Degrees of Persons, from the highest to the lowest” should prepare and be in readiness, “to entertain the Joyful tidings of the Reign and Dominion of Christ in Spirit.”¹⁰³ She also warns that “the Ecclesiastical Order, and all other Pastors and Teachers, under what Denomination soever” will be called upon to account for themselves and be transformed into true priests through the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁴

Despite the differences between these two ways of interpreting the Second Coming of Christ and His millennial reign, contemporaries such as Jonathan Swift were still suspicious. In

¹⁰¹ Lee, Francis (under the pseudonym of Timotheus) in Lead, Jane, *A Fountain of Gardens Watered by the Rivers of Divine Pleasure, And Springing Up in All the Variety of Spiritual Plants; Blown up by the Pure Breath into a Paradise* (N.p., 1697), xvi.

¹⁰² Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens*, vol. 3. Pt. 1 (London, 1700), sig. A3r.

¹⁰³ Ibid., sig. A2r.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., A4r.

his religious satire, *A Tale of a Tub*, which was composed during the time that the Philadelphian Society was growing (1694-1697), Swift associates millenarianism with mental illness. Some modern scholars make this connection as well. Paul Korshin accurately finds that Lead's "enthusiastic writings are filled with inspired readings of Scripture, personal revelations, and a certainty that the apocalypse was nigh"; however, he believes that these elements of her writing indicate a "slight touch of mental instability."¹⁰⁵ Thus, he associates both her millenarianism and her mysticism with mental illness.

Swift and Korshin both fall into the tempting trap of relegating to psychopathology those religious views which may be unpopular or uncomfortable. It is easier to marginalize and attempt to disempower the voices of those who hold such views than it is to face the unsettling possibilities presented by their messages. If Jane Ward Lead did indeed suffer from a mental illness, it was one with symptoms very similar to those described in the spiritual autobiographies of both John Bunyan and George Fox. Like both of them, Lead begins her spiritual journey with an unexpected visionary encounter followed by years of spiritual aridity which is finally broken by a mystical union with the Divine.

Her journey began in Norfolk where she was born and baptized in March 1624.¹⁰⁶ Not much is known about her mother, Mary Calthorpe (1582-1657), but her father, Hammond Ward (d. 1650) was a squire who served as the Justice of the Peace and sat on the Court of Quarter

¹⁰⁵ Paul Korshin, "Queuing and Waiting: The Apocalypse in England, 1660-1750," in C. A. Patrides and J. Wittreich (eds.) *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature, Patterns, Antecedents and Repercussions* (Manchester, 1984), 244-245. Korshin's use of the word "inspired" refers to Lead's claims that her understanding of the Scriptures was illuminated by God.

¹⁰⁶Hirst, *Jane Leade*, 13; Hirst documents the record as being in the Letheringsett Register Bills (Archdeacon's Transcripts); All of the following information about Jane Lead's life is taken from Hirst's biography of her unless otherwise noted. Jane Ward was born in Norfolk and baptized at St. Andrew's Church in Letheringsett on 9 March 1624.

Sessions.¹⁰⁷ He owned the original manor hall, Letheringsett Laviles¹⁰⁸ and was able to bring up his children “with dignity and good manners, according to his standing.”¹⁰⁹ Jane Ward was brought up in the Church of England, and while her family may have been sympathetic to the Parliament, they were probably not Puritans for they celebrated Christmas with singing and dancing as testified to by Francis Lee in the preface of *The Wars of David*.¹¹⁰

According to Lee, Ward’s first numinous experience occurred during her family’s Christmas celebration in 1640 when she was sixteen:

It was in a time of great Festivity, at the Celebration of the Nativity of CHRIST...with Musick and Dancing, in the House of her Father...when a sudden grievous Sorrow was darted as Fire into her Bowels, and she was made to consider that this was not the way to be Conform’d to CHRIST, or to remember his birth aright; And a soft Whisper entred into her, saying Cease from this, I have another Dance to lead thee in; for this is Vanity. Upon which she was as constrain’d to give over abruptly her Dancing, and so presently withdrew her self from the Company, retiring to consider of this Immediate Call.¹¹¹

According to Lee, the teenage Ward hears the divine voice suddenly and unexpectedly in the midst of the celebration. It is so clear as to be almost audible, and the young teenager does not know what to think of the warning. She pulls away from family and friends to consider what has just happened to her:

¹⁰⁷ J. Howell, “Norfolk Quarter Sessions Order Book,” *Norfolk Record Society*, 26 (1955), 3-19.

¹⁰⁸ B. Cozens-Hardy, “Some Norfolk Halls,” *Norfolk Archaeology*, 32 (1924), 192.

¹⁰⁹ Jane Leade, “Lebenslauff der Autorin,” in *Sechs Unschatzbare Mystische Tractlein* (Amsterdam, 1696), 413.

¹¹⁰ Jane Lead, *The Wars of David and the Peaceable Reign of Solomon Symbolizing the Times of Warfare and Refreshment of the Saints of the Most High God to Whom a Priestly Kingdom Is Shortly to Be Given after the Order of Melchisedeck* (London: J. Bradford in Little Britain, 1700), iii. This text was published when Jane Ward Lead was seventy-seven years old. It compares the reigns of David and Solomon to the times of spiritual warfare and peace experienced by Christians; thus it is a particularly place to discuss Lead’s first experience of spiritual aridity and the resulting period of spiritual renewal.

¹¹¹ Lead, *Wars of David*, iii-iv.

The Divine Spirit pursued so very hard, as after this she had no liberty to Converse, as formerly in the Family, or to mind any concern of it: but was so wholly taken up in the considerations of her Interiour State, and of the One Thing necessary, as to desert all things besides. Yet though her Relations and Acquaintance took great notice, and marveled much at what had happen'd, she diligently conceal'd the true Cause from them all.¹¹²

In this way her first encounter with the Divine is very similar to that of Bunyan and also of Fox.

Both Ward and Bunyan are stopped abruptly in the midst of activities which are fun and seemingly harmless; Bunyan is playing a game and Ward is dancing. The voice warns them of the vanity of the activity in which they are engaged and calls them to a higher purpose. Although Fox himself was not tempted to join his friends in their drinking game, he is troubled by the activity, and the voice he hears confirms the vanity of it. While Bunyan initially ignores the warning and continues playing ball with his friends, Ward immediately stops dancing. The call for her and for Fox is intense and unsettling. They both withdraw from others in order to work through the meaning of their experience and are very guarded in who they tell about their encounters.

Bunyan, Fox, and Ward initially reveal their encounters to churchmen who cannot speak to their experience or help them to understand it. Bunyan speaks to the minister in Bedford, Fox travels from congregation to congregation, and Ward confides in the Chaplain in the house who finds her reading in his study, apparently seeking answers in his religious texts.¹¹³ His advice to her is to “be of good Courage, and believe that God had some great Good to bring about, by all this Conflict of Soul she was in.”¹¹⁴ While his response is more encouraging than the initial clerical responses received by Bunyan and Fox, he still was not able to provide her with any of the answers that she sought.

¹¹² Ibid., iv.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Again, like Bunyan and Fox, when Ward seriously heeds the call, she is thrown into a period of terrible spiritual aridity filled with examination of her own sinfulness and terrible temptations to despair.

Which was so terrible indeed, as nothing was able to give her any Satisfaction or Rest, or to ease her Wounded Spirit, that was struck through and through, for having once persisted in a falsehood about a Trifle: The Sense of which continued upon her for the space of Three Years, with very great Anguish and Trouble; these Words being frequently brought before her, Whoever loveth and maketh a Lye cannot enter into the New Jerusalem. The Dreadfulness and Horror of Sin carried her down to the Gates of Hell: and every little Circumstance of its Evil, was continually presented to her Mind, with all the possible Aggravations (sic.) thereof.¹¹⁵

Again, like the other mystics, what Ward experiences in this period of withdrawal is an aridity which strongly resembles what St. John of the Cross describes as the dark night of the soul and the senses. She agonizes over the fact that she has lied to her parents by not telling them the truth about what has happened to her at the Christmas party, and she repeatedly has brought to mind Revelation 22:15 which warns that liars have no place in the New Jerusalem at Christ's Coming.¹¹⁶ Ward is experiencing a time of purging, which lasts for three years.

In 1643, while Ward is experiencing inner turmoil, the nation is caught in the grip of religious and political fervor. New forms of Protestantism are emerging in the 1640s and 1650s,¹¹⁷ and confrontations between Parliamentarians and Royalists is intensifying. London is not safe, yet Ward begs her parents for permission to visit her brother, Hammond who is a London merchant. They reluctantly agree, and Ward spends the next six months frequenting religious meetings, both public and private. She visits Tobias Crisp, an antinomian who rejects

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Revelation 22:15 states that outside the gates of the city are "dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie."

¹¹⁷ These new groups include the Quakers, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists.

predestination and believes in free will conversion by God's grace. Crisp teaches Ward that grace is offered freely to all and that it completely blots out sin. This doctrine reassures her and helps her to resolve her inner turmoil, preparing the way for her next mystical encounter.

At the age of nineteen, Ward has a vision through which she, like Bunyan and Fox, is brought out of the dark night and into a time of period of spiritual renewal:

Now it was in the Nineteenth Year of her Age, when the Light of the Divine Countenance, which had been hitherto hid, begun to shine upon her, and to bring her Soul out of this State of Obscurity and Darkness, and out of the Pains of Hell, that had taken hold upon her, feeling the Arrows of the Wrath of the Almighty: And she was Comforted with the sweet Message of the Free and Super-abounding Love and Grace of the most Tender and Merciful Father; and was so richly favoured by her dear and blessed Mediator, as to receive at that time the Seal of her Absolution and Assurance, in a manner very special, there being presented to her in a Vision, the form of a Pardon, with a Seal to it; signifying that her Transgressions were blotted out, and that she was Sealed by the Spirit, for the Promise of the Father; as a Witness whereof a mighty Gust and Power of Prayer was then given to her. And ever since she has been a trained Soldier, under the Discipline of the Blessed JESUS, and the leadings of his Spirit: which is a Spirit trying the Reigns and the Marrow, and that will not abide but with simplicity of Heart, and Truth in the inward Parts.¹¹⁸

The obscurity, darkness, and hellish torments of her dark night are dispersed by the "Light" of God, and Ward feels the Divine presence pulling her out of her separation and comforting her soul. She receives a vision in which she is presented with a sealed document confirming her pardon and is given spiritual gifts, charisms which she will need in the future. Francis Lee equates Ward's dark night experience with the intense training a soldier receives in preparation for service, breaking down the raw recruit, instilling obedience, and creating discipline. The result of this process was a strengthening of her spirit and a resolve to dedicate herself to Christ.

When Lead returns home from London in 1644, her parents present her with a potential marriage offer which she refuses on the grounds that her potential suitor was more interested in

¹¹⁸ Lead, *Wars of David*, v.

her outward appearance than her inner worth.¹¹⁹ After much negotiation and strife, she eventually accepts another suitor who shares her spiritual devotion. William Lead, was the son of John Lead, a King's Lynn merchant and sole heir to his father's business. He is Ward's distant cousin and is a pious and God-fearing man. By all accounts, their marriage is one of great love and unity.¹²⁰ Jane Ward Lead spends the next twenty-seven years in London, busied with the duties of household and family. She has four daughters, only one of whom lives to adulthood.

Lead claims to have received prophetic visions and revelations throughout her marriage; however, even though her husband is devout, he does not really understand these manifestations. Lead longs for the company of someone who does. She struggles with her visions until 1668, when she joins a religious group lead by John Pordage, a former Anglican priest.

The more I found myself in the service of this blessing and the prophesy and the revelation the more I lost hope of finding people who would understand of what had been revealed to me. Eventually, through my ceaseless looking out for such people I found such a community whose leading men were Dr. Pordage, Mr. T. Bromley, Mr. T. Sabberton. They were enlightened men who understood God's secrets.¹²¹

Pordage gathered around him a group of people interested in mysticism and piety and who shared an interest in affective forms of spirituality.¹²² These people included Thomas Bromley, the author of *The Way to the Sabbath of Rest* (1655) and Philip Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke. Pordage's wife, Mary, is a visionary like Lead, and the group appreciates the spiritual gifts of

¹¹⁹ Leade, "Lebenslauff," 418.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 420.

¹²² The group is particularly interested in the writings of Jacob Boehme who became a very influential mystic on the continent in the 1640s. Boehme drew on Hermeticism, spiritual alchemy, the Kabbala, Gnosticism, and sophiology. When Pordage and Philadelphian Society introduce Boehme's ideas to Jane Lead, she too is influenced by these ideas.

these two women. Jane Lead finally has someone who is interested in her visions and is willing to help her understand them.

Then tragedy strikes. First, Pordage's wife dies in 1668; then two years later, on 5 February 1670, William Lead dies. His wife is forty-six years old when she becomes a widow. His surviving daughter, Barbara tries to help her mother the best she can, but William Lead has died intestate and his business assets overseas are left in the hands of an overseas partner who refuses to relinquish anything and leaves the widowed Lead penniless and destitute. Instead of becoming bitter, she turns to God, trusting Him to provide for her needs:

So that when God did cast my lot to be a Widow, which was in the year 70, this change bringing me first into manifold trials, did drive me into a more Intimate Union with mine Eternal Spiritual Husband, upon whose Care I wholly cast myself. And then I resolved to make the choice of Anna, to wait in the Temple of the Lord day and night: and to be a Widow indeed, after I had been the wife of a Pious Husband about five and twenty years. For after his Dicease I ceased, as much as possible, from all Business and care, setting myself free by all means for the Heavenly Calling only.¹²³

Her change in social status has provoked a spiritual change as well. Lead's goal is mystical union with God, whom she sees as her new spiritual bridegroom, an eternal husband to take the place of the mortal one she has just lost. She searches inward rather than outward, to find the Presence of the Lord dwelling within her. She writes of the experience: "I introverted more into my Inward Deep, where I did meet with that I could not find elsewhere."¹²⁴

In April 1670, only two months after losing her husband, Lead enters into an intense visionary period highlighted by a series of visitations by God's Wisdom, symbolized by the Virgin Sophia. The first vision takes place as she is walking alone in the woods contemplating the

¹²³ Ibid., 419.

¹²⁴ Jane Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens Watered by the Rivers of Divine Pleasure, And Springing Up in All the Variety of Spiritual Plants; Blown up by the Pure Breath into a Paradise* (N.p., 1697), 6.

female image of Wisdom as described by Solomon in Proverbs (1:20-26, 7:4-9:18), and wondering whether or not she is a real being:

Which while in this debate within my Mind, there came upon me an overshadowing bright Cloud, and in the midst of it the Figure of a Woman, most richly adorned with transparent Gold, her Hair hanging down, and her Face as the terrible Crystal for brightness, but her Countenance was sweet and mild. At which sight I was somewhat amazed, but immediately this Voice came saying, Behold I am God's Eternal Virgin-Wisdom, whom thou hast been enquiring after; I am to unseal the Treasures of God's deep Wisdom unto thee.¹²⁵

Wisdom promises to act as a mother to Lead. Just as when she had her first numinous experience as a teenager, Lead is unable to speak of the vision to anyone. Instead, she turns inward, contemplating the meaning of what she has seen. "Now after three days, sitting under a Tree, the same Figure in greater Glory did appear, with a Crown upon her Head, full of Majesty."¹²⁶ Sophia announces that she has been sent to enter into a covenant with Lead to teach her divine wisdom. When Lead promises to be obedient to her teaching, the vision ends:—"So after six days the Vision appear'd again...saying, I shall now cease to appear in a Visible Figure unto thee, but I will not fail to transfigure myself in thy mind; and there open the Spring of Wisdom and Understanding, that so thou mayst come to know the only True God."¹²⁷

The temptation with visions is to interpret them literally when usually they are symbolic in meaning.¹²⁸ The value of wisdom is taught in many of the ancient Hebrew Scriptures and

¹²⁵ Ibid., 18.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 19.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 20-21.

¹²⁸ The interpretation of visions and dreams on a symbolic rather than literal level in Christian mysticism stems from the method of their interpretation within the Scriptures themselves, both in the Old and New Testaments.

Apocrypha included in the vernacular translation of the Bible authorized by King James.¹²⁹ Of those books, Proverbs, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) all personify the wisdom of God as female, describing her beauty, her golden garments, her role as a teacher, and the need for one to pledge obedience to her teachings. According to these Scriptures, Wisdom was with God in the beginning and played a role in the Creation.¹³⁰ The vision which Lead has is very much in keeping with these descriptions. Wisdom is as an attribute of God personified as desirable, compassionate, nurturing, and worthy to be obeyed.

In the New Testament, Wisdom is traditionally associated with Jesus. He is the Wisdom of God incarnate, the Logos which was with God in the beginning and played an integral role in the Creation.¹³¹ Nevertheless, the early Church still emphasized the feminine attributes of Christ's function in the Godhead: his work is both creative and procreative, providing the wisdom displayed in the created universe and the new birth offered to Christian believers. He sustains the children of God through the milk of the Word, teaching them and nurturing them as they grow in their faith. Although the idea may be shocking to modern Protestants, the image of Jesus as mother was neither startling nor uncommon until the Reformation.¹³²

¹²⁹ Proverbs 1-9, Job 28:36-37; Ecclesiastes 1:17-18; 7:11-25; 9:13-10:3; Wisdom of Solomon 1:4-8; 7:7-11:1; Sirach 1: 6-26; 4:11-25; 6:18-31; 14-15:8; 24, 39: 1-10; 51:17-22; (all are in the first edition of the King James Bible 1611).

¹³⁰ Proverbs 8:22-24: "The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water"; Prov. 8: 27: "When he prepared the heavens, I was there"; Prov. 4:7: "Wisdom is the principle thing."

¹³¹ 1 Cor. 1:24, 30; Barbour, R.S., "Creation, Wisdom and Christ," in Richard McKinney (ed.), *Creation, Christ and Culture* (Edinburgh, 1976), 42; John 1:1-18.

¹³² For more information, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, California: University of California, 1982).

Lead interprets God as containing within Himself attributes which He split into the male and the female at the Creation:

God creates MAN AT FIRST, to bear his own image and figure, who was to represent God himself, the High and Divine Masculine Male and Female; so that man had his Virgin in himself in imitation of his creator which in time, was brought forth in distinct figure.—and this was a Type of the Eternal Virgin Mother that lay hid in God, the centre and Heart of Flaming Love; from whence the production of a glorious female figure was brought forth, that was so commixed and comingled with Deity as she became God's Spouse and Bride, being spirit of his spirit.¹³³

His feminine attributes are represented by Sophia, the Eternal Virgin Mother. His male attributes are present in God the father. Wisdom, although emanating from God, is also an integral part of God; thus Lead describes Sophia as separate yet unified with Him as symbolized through the bond of marriage. Julie Hirst suggests Lead's interpretation of Sophia provides a counterbalance to the overwhelmingly patriarchal nature of Protestant ideology: "By emphasizing Sophia within the overwhelmingly male godhead, she can be seen to be challenging seventeen hundred years of patriarchal suppression of the feminine aspect of the wisdom of God."¹³⁴ Thus, through her mysticism, Lead is exploring new approaches to the understanding of the nature and attributes of God.

In 1674, Pordage takes Lead into his household and provides for her needs. However, her financial struggles following the death of her husband continue to haunt her and influence the way that she perceives her mystical encounters. For instance, in November 1674, she records a vision in which she is called away from her first marriage into a new marriage with Christ. Her first husband represents what is temporal and carnal, the second what is eternal and spiritual. The first pulls her down to earthly cares; the second lifts her up to heavenly bliss. In her vision she

¹³³ Lead, *The Wars of David*, 21.

¹³⁴ Hirst, *Jane Leade*, 9-10.

desponds of ever being discharged from the “Law of the first Husband” without which separation she can never enter into the second marriage. Her first marriage, therefore, comes to represent the fleeting nature of life and the dangers of relying on earthly riches. In contrast, the second marriage offers the possibility of eternal security and stability. As the “Lamb’s Wife” she would be

jointured into all the Lands and Possessions that he hath. The Eternal Revenues are belonging to her, whether Invisible or Visible: all Power in Heaven and Earth is committed to her, and all things are given to those that are his: whether it be Gifts of Prophecy, or of Revelation, or of Manifestation, or of Discerning of Spirits: or that high Tongue of the Learned, which only speaks from Wisdom’s Breath.¹³⁵

Lead’s imagery is more economic than erotic. She moves completely away from the traditional mystical love imagery drawn from the Song of Songs. There are no kisses, no sighs, no burning flames of love in her description of spiritual espousal. Instead, the marriage between her spirit and God is a financial transaction. What the first Adam lost in terms of lands and authority after the Fall, the second Adam, Jesus reclaimed at the resurrection. By divorcing herself from her marriage to the first Adam and binding herself to the second, she can regain what has been lost. As a woman of the Early Modern period, Lead is very much aware of the insecurities women faced in a world which severely limited their options. Therefore, she does not “offer opportunities for ‘real’ women to experience equality on this earth, or for them to be released from patriarchal restrictions through a demand for social reforms as the Quakers had done.”¹³⁶ Instead, she works within the system, providing a counter-offer of security, authority, and advancement in the heavenly places through a spiritual marriage to Christ.

¹³⁵ Lead, *Fountain of Gardens*, 69. The full vision is recorded on pages 67-69.

¹³⁶ Hirst, *Jane Leade*, 69.

As a spiritual partner, Pordage took care of Lead until his death in 1681. In that year she began publishing her spiritual writings. The first was *A Heavenly Cloud Now Breaking* (1681) which examines the subject of mystical death. Two years later, she published *The Revelation of Revelations* (1683), a commentary on the hidden mystery of God in the soul. Many others were to follow. In 1694, Behmenist Loth Fischer of Utrecht translated her first publication *A Heavenly Cloud* into German.¹³⁷ Baron Freiherr von Knyphausen, an administrator in the court of Frederick III Elector of Brandenburg, read the treatise and offered to fund the translation and publication of all of her other writings.¹³⁸ Lead became well-known on the continent, her writings influencing many people interested in mysticism and esoteric approaches to spirituality. In that same year, Lead began to hold meetings for a group which called itself the Philadelphian Society after one of the churches mentioned in Revelation (2: 7-13).

Her position as leader of the group runs counter to orthodox male-dominated leadership positions. However, neither the society which she founded nor the books which she wrote were overtly political. Nor did she direct angry polemics at those in authority, basing her accusations on scripture.¹³⁹ Under her leadership, the Philadelphian Society contributed largely to the spread of mystical piety at the end of the seventeenth century both in England and on the continent.¹⁴⁰ Her “important theosophical works were written by an intelligent, literate and dignified woman who felt encouraged by God to publish her mystical and introspective experiences as a guide to

¹³⁷ Christopher Walton, *Notes and Materials for an Adequate Biography of the Celebrated and Divine Theosopher William Law* (London, 1854), 509.

¹³⁸ Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians: A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Uppsala, 1948), 86.

¹³⁹ Hirst, *Jane Leade*, 105.

¹⁴⁰ John Blunt, *Dictionary of Sects, Heresies, Ecclesiastical Parties, and Schools of Religious Thought* (London, 1874), 425.

others.”¹⁴¹ Her approach to mysticism occupies a space on the margins of Early Modern Christianity at the turn of the century in England. She advocates millenarianism, a universal salvation, and a vision of God which acknowledges both the male and female attributes hidden within the Godhead. She is also very pragmatic in her approach to mystical union. Ecstatic trances do not interest her as much as the promise of eternal security which such a union offers.

Conclusion

Separated from the long Catholic tradition of mysticism both on the continent and in England, the Protestant mystics of the seventeenth century experienced many of the same kinds of numinous and mystical phenomena as their predecessors, but they understood and interpreted them in very different ways. Likewise, the mystics themselves were perceived differently than in the past. From the earliest days of the Church up through the beginning of the Reformation, mystics had been accepted, even respected, as a legitimate and necessary part of Christianity. Young mystics could look to the writings and teachings of those who had come before them to guide them through their experiences and to warn them of the dangers. Safeguards were in place to help them discern the source of their experiences and to help them to deal with them accordingly. Through such guidance, the Church reduced the chances that a mystic would introduce heretical teachings through new personal revelation or seek to undermine the authority of the Church itself through their personal interpretation of their encounters. That all changed with the Reformation. Breaking away from these old traditions which some began to see as superstitious, even heretical, Protestants began to look suspiciously at the mystics and mysticism. Because of the self-proclaimed prophets and visionaries which had recently led violent Protestant

¹⁴¹ Hirst, *Jane Leade*, 107.

rebellions on the continent in the name of further Church reform, mystics began to be equated with schism and rebellion in the popular imagination.

Young mystics in seventeenth-century England thus not only had the task of trying to understand their experiences without the benefit of the having a long mystical tradition to which to turn, but they also had to navigate the fears and suspicions of their fellow Protestants who had never had such an experience and who thus suspected both their source and motive.

Mystics such as John Bunyan struggle to find meaning within the context of Puritanism with its very limited range of acceptable possibilities. With its emphasis on *sola scriptura* and its belief that God only communicates to contemporary Christians through the written word, Puritanism presents a challenge to young mystics faced with interpreting numinous experiences outside of scriptural illumination. Bunyan has to adapt the religious vocabulary of his denomination to describe, define, interpret, and legitimize his experiences within the context of Puritanism. In doing so, he is able to allay the fears and suspicions of not only his fellow Puritans but also himself as to the source and reason for these spiritual manifestations. His mystical experiences strengthen him spiritually, propelling him into a career as a lay-preacher which in turn puts him in direct opposition to the official clerical hierarchy within the Church of England who sees him as a radical and as a threat undermining the authority and teachings of the officially recognized church.

Protestants such as George Fox take another path in their interpretation of their numinous encounters with God. While Bunyan tries to understand his experiences within the context of scripture and Puritanism, searching the Bible for answers to his questions, Fox searches for answers from the clergy and believers with which he comes into contact. As the Protestant churches he visits, both Conformist and Nonconformist, have no established teachings on mysticism, those men trained as priests and ministers within those churches cannot help him.

Suspecting the source of his experiences to be more medical than spiritual, they advise him to smoke a little tobacco for his health and go to a surgeon to drain some of the excess humors from his blood.¹⁴² Frustrated with their lack of understanding and their assumptions, Fox decides to seek his own answers, trusting more in the voices he hears in his spirit than those he hears in the community. He comes to reject the need for university-trained clergy, even for a clergy at all, and focuses instead on the biblical concept of the priesthood of all believers. He rejects the need for church buildings and focuses on the promise that Christ dwells in the hearts of all believers. He rejects the idea of any need for a mediator between humanity and God except for Christ, and he rejects the idea that God no longer communicates with the faithful in whom he is supposed to dwell. Based on his own experiences, he believes that Christ does speak to His people, teaching them and guiding them as they grow spiritually.

Fox's own interpretation of his mystical experiences provides the foundational teachings of the Society of Friends which he is to establish. It is also the source of his teachings on group mysticism during which several people experience the presence and/or the teaching of Christ together in what Fox calls a "gathered meeting." This concept, although a logical conclusion based on his interpretation of the source and reason of mystical phenomena, is rare within the context of traditional Catholic teachings on mysticism where mystical encounters are very personal and not shared experiences. Fox is thus introducing a new way of approaching mysticism, moving it from the individual to the group experience. He attempts to normalize mysticism within the context of Protestant Christianity.

¹⁴² During the seventeenth century, tobacco was touted to be a miracle cure-all. Bloodletting was practiced and was believed to allow excess humors such as black bile to drain from the blood. Black bile was the source of the melancholic humor which was associated with various symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions, disturbing dreams, and the like. The people to whom Fox talked thus gave him the best medical advice available at the time for healing an excess of black bile leading to religious melancholy. They thus reveal their suspicions about the true source of his experiences.

Another logical conclusion he draws from his interpretation of mystical phenomena is that if both men and women are indwelt by Christ who teaches and guides them from inside their own souls, then both men and women have equal access to prophetic insight and should therefore be allowed equal opportunity to express those prophetic insights with their fellow believers. Fox's mysticism, therefore, prompts him to encourage women's voices in an arena traditionally denied them. The result is the voicing of a feminine perspective on the turbulent religious and political changes of the seventeenth-century and a potential levelling of the strictly patriarchal hierarchy within the contemporary Protestant Christianity. Fox's interpretation of his mystical encounters leads a step closer to gender equality within the spiritual community of the Friends.

Although not a member of the Society of Friends, Jane Ward Lead did hold some beliefs in common with the Quakers. As the leader of Philadelphian Society, she faced the gender pressures of her time seeking to silence the voices of women in the church. Lead's visions and prophetic revelations thrust her to the forefront of this controversy, and her interpretation of the mystical phenomena she experienced provided a counterbalance to the patriarchal nature of Protestant ideology. Through her emphasis on Sophia, she explores the feminine qualities hidden within the divine attributes and interprets spiritual espousal in a much more pragmatic way than many of the mystics who had preceded her. Through the popularity of her writings she helped to spread mystical piety not only in England, but on the continent as well. Those influenced by her visions and prophetic insights reached America with the Moravians and the Swedenborgians, forms of Radical German Pietism which accepted the mystical and emphasized the need for a religion of the heart rather than just the head.

Therefore, mysticism, as an intuitive and affective approach to spirituality, provided a much-needed counterbalance to the increasingly intellectual and speculative nature of religion in the seventeenth century. Young Protestant mystics such as Bunyan, Fox, and Lead often struggled

within the context of their denominations to come to grips with the source, the meaning, and the reason for their numinous and mystical encounters. Without a tradition to guide them, their interpretations of their experiences were shaped by their own lives and characters as well as the communities within which they dwelt. No longer confined within the limits of the traditional teachings, mysticism was changed and adapted to the needs of individual mystics and to groups of believers who accepted it as a normal and necessary part of the Christian experience. Nevertheless, many non-mystics still equated mysticism with enthusiasm and thus with religious schism and rebellion. Therefore, even those mystics like Bunyan, Fox, and Lead, who had no intention of inciting violence, found themselves faced with the suspicions and denunciations of those who misunderstood and feared them. The almost inevitable result was either arrest and years of imprisonment or accusations of mental instability. Despite these hardships, Protestant mystics of seventeenth-century England transformed perceptions of mysticism and opened the door to the myriad of approaches and interpretations which exist today.

CHAPTER VI
WALKING WITH GOD:
NATURE MYSTICISM AND CONTEMPORARY
EPISTEMOLOGY AND SCIENCE

Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God tooke him.
—Genesis 5:24

There are two Books from whence I collect my Divinity; besides that written one of God, another of His servant Nature, that universal and publick Manuscript, that lies expans'd unto the Eyes of all: those that never saw him in the one, have discover'd Him in the other. This is the Scripture and Theology of the Heathens.... Surely the Heathens knew better how to joyn and read mystical Letters than we Christians, who cast a more careless Eye on these common Hieroglyphicks, and disdain to suck Divinity from the flowers of Nature.

—Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (17)

The tensions between various factions within the Church of England and the civil government erupted once again during the 1630s and 1640s. Parliamentary forces battled Royalists both from the podium and in the field while Laudians battled Puritans in the pulpit. The Middle Way which was supposed to reconcile opposing forces after the Reformation was instead pulling them apart. Laudians, who sided with the Royalists, strove to maintain the episcopacy and the sacerdotal system. They approved of the *Book of Common Prayer* and encouraged the beautification of churches. Doctrinally, they leaned toward Arminianism and emphasized the importance of free will in choosing to accept or reject salvation. In contrast, Puritans, who sided with the Parliament, fought to eliminate the episcopacy and the liturgy. They disapproved of the *Book of Common Prayer* and tended toward iconoclasm, distrusting any approach to worship

which seemed to lead back toward Roman Catholicism. Doctrinally, Puritans favored Calvinism and predestination, teaching that while the Elect had no real choice as to whether or not they were saved, they were under the obligation to search their consciences and confirm their election.

Both sides of this controversy waged a war of polemics against the other, publishing a wide range of texts from news-sheets, broadsides, and pamphlets to sermons, religious tracts, and devotional poetry. Through this flood of printed material, each accused the other of treason and heresy, the often violent and obsessive nature of the attacks promulgating a spirit of hostility and suspicion in their audience and encouraging contentious habits of reading. Even after the Civil Wars, during the uneasy years of the Commonwealth and the disillusionment that led to the Restoration, readers continued actively to search religious and devotional texts for any hint of suspicious or heretical doctrines. Mysticism ran the risk of falling into both categories.

As an intuitive form of devotion, mysticism ran counter to the prevailing temperament of the time, which demanded a clear, theological rationale. The growing emphasis on reasoning and empirical thought in secular life meant that speculative and ratiocinating forms of worship were also gaining favor in the Church of England. The divide between the intellect and the emotions was widening, the one promising to provide structure and control whereas the other seeming to defy both. The stability promised by the systemization of knowledge and the elevation of empirical thought supported the agenda of political and religious authorities who sought to consolidate their power and control through greater regulation.

Mysticism which claims direct or intuitive experience of God, not only de-stabilizes these hierarchies, but pushes against contemporary pressures to conform to primarily speculative rather than affective approaches to worship. Whereas rational Christianity seeks to know about God, mysticism seeks to know God Himself. This is not to say that mysticism is irrational or anti-intellectual, rather it embraces both intellectual and intuitive means of knowing God. Mystics

search both the scriptures and the heart. They crave both the Word of God and His presence, yearning to understand His ways and to feel His transforming touch at work in their lives. These numinous moments are often associated with intense emotions ranging from inner peace and tranquility to ecstatic love and joy, but may also include moments of deep spiritual anguish. Such emotive manifestations of the presence of God are beyond the mystic's control. For the mystic, such claims of outside influence serve to help legitimize the experience. However, for the skeptical outside observer, they are a source of suspicion because they seem to claim an authority outside of that embodied in the officially sanctioned hierarchies of leadership thus placing them outside of their control. In addition, they are sometimes associated with the reception by the mystic of visions, revelatory dreams, and raptures. For many Early Modern Protestants of the seventeenth century, the time of revelation was believed to be ended. They taught that the Scriptures were enough for the contemporary Christian to prove the truth of God and of His promises. Claims of receiving additional revelation rang alarm bells for many.

They saw mysticism as potentially dangerous, for it was not controllable, predictable, or verifiable by external, empirical means. It was thus de-stabilizing, drawing upon a source outside of officially sanctioned English hierarchies of authority and claiming to be a source of insight, illumination, and revelation beyond that which was provided by the authorized version of the Bible, making it seem more a source of superstition and deception than of enlightened Christianity. Charges of heresy, diabolical influence, and deliberate deception were interspersed with diagnoses of melancholia, hysteria, and madness. Decades earlier, in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), Robert Burton (1577-1640) had proposed that mystics suffered from a form of religious melancholia which manifested itself as an intense form of love-sickness for God.¹

¹ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Part 3, Section 4, Project Gutenberg, EBook #10800, 13 January 2004.

According to Burton, those afflicted with religious melancholia are “carried away headlong with the torrent of [their] affections” and actually believe they “have special revelation” and “perceive God’s secrets.”² However their visions, revelations, and prophecies are in actuality nothing more than hallucinations and delusions, products of “a furious disease of the soul”: “the brain, heart, will, understanding, soul itself, and all the faculties of it, *totum compisitum*, all is mad and dotes.”³

To counter these suspicions of illness and madness, some Early Modern mystics looked for ways to legitimize their experiences in the popular perception. One such approach was to draw upon contemporary popular epistemologies and sciences such as Christian humanism, alchemy, and Hermetic medicine. They provided mystics with a way to explain numinous and mystical encounters within popularly accepted knowledge systems while still acknowledging their source in God.

The Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther (1483-1546) himself praised alchemy:

The science of alchemy I like well, and, indeed, ‘tis the philosophy of the ancients. I like it not only for the profits it brings in melting metals, in decocting preparing, extracting, and distilling herbs, roots; I like it also for the sake of the allegory and secret signification, which is exceedingly fine, touching the resurrection of the dead at the last day. For, as in a furnace the fire extracts and separates from a substance the other portions and carries upward the spirit, the life, the sap, the strength, while the unclean matter, the dregs, remain at the bottom, like a dead and worthless carcass; even so God, at the day of judgment, will separate all things through fire, the righteous from the ungodly.⁴

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, Trans. William Hazlitt (London: G. Bell, 1092), 326), Section DCCLX, 326.

This “allegorical and secret signification” between the transforming processes within the alchemist’s alembic and the mysteries of God is what drew many religious to the study of alchemy and its sister science of Hermeticism.⁵

However, whereas the alchemist saw these significations in chemical processes, the Hermetist tended to see them in nature. For the Hermetist, there were two books which revealed the mysteries of God: The Bible and the book of Creation. Scripture itself encouraged this approach. Paul wrote of this second book in his letter to the Romans: “For the inuisible things of him from the Creation of the world, are clearely seene, being vnderstood by the things that are made, *euen* his eternall Power and Godhead’ (Romans 1:20). In the Hebrew Scriptures, the psalmist, King David wrote that “the heauens declare the glory of God: and the firmament sheweth his handy worke. Day vnto day vttereth speach, and night vnto night sheweth knowledge. *There is* no speech nor language, *where* their voyce is not heard” (Psalm 19:1-3). Early Modern, Christian Hermetists interpreted these verses to mean that the visible, physical world of creatures reflected the invisible, spiritual world of the divine. Thus by studying nature, one could gain spiritual insights. This type of correspondence was particularly relevant to nature mystics who readily saw such correlations between the natural and the spiritual realms. Believing nature to be an emanation from the Divine, they believed it also to be a lens through which to perceive aspects of the character of God. Nature mystics tend to experience His presence most

⁵ Hermeticism is a philosophical, religious, and esoteric tradition based on the writings of Hermes Trismegistus who was popularly believed by some Medieval and Early Modern Christians to be either a contemporary of Moses or one of a series of prophets through whom wisdom regarding the *prisca theologia* had been preserved from before the Fall in the Garden of Eden. This knowledge was believed to have been originally transmitted from the Divine to Adam and to be the single, true theology which threads through all other religions. Trismegistus means “Thrice Great” and refers to the legend that this prophet was the greatest philosopher, priest, and king. According to the legend, he foresaw the coming of Christ. The writings ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus include *The Emerald Tablet*, *The Asclapius*, and the *Corpus Hermeticum*. For more information, see Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 14–18, 433–434; see also Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), 360.

intensely through the natural world. Perhaps the most famous of these is Saint Francis of Assisi who saw nature as revealing the infinite love of God. By finding the presence of the Divine as revealed in creation, St. Francis also discovered his own interconnectedness with other living creatures.

Nature mysticism was not present in English mystical writings until the seventeenth century when it appears in the poetry of Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne. Henry Vaughan is a nature mystic, experiencing the presence of God in nature, and like so many other mystics, he feels compelled to write about the transforming power and love of God. In his poetry he grapples with the meaning and significance of his encounters with the Divine in nature and his soul's own ecstatic flights in union with God. By doing so, he presents an approach to spirituality which is potentially alarming to a contemporary audience leery of superstition and "enthusiasm." Aware of their potentially contentious reading habits, Vaughan constructs a simulacrum of himself through which he can explore the meaning and significance of these experiences.

Vaughan does not draw upon traditional teachings by mystical writers of the Catholic Church to find the answers which he seeks. Instead, he looks to the popular science of Hermetic medicine. Through its doctrines of correspondence, signatures, and sympathy, he finds an explanation of numinous and mystical phenomena which seems reasonable and rational. To a protestant seeking to avoid the "superstition" of the past and the "enthusiasm" of the present, a "scientific" explanation for nature mysticism would have helped him to avoid these dangerous extremes. To his audience, a "rational" explanation for mystical phenomena may have served to allay at least some of their fears. Thus, through his synthesis of Hermetic medicine and nature mysticism in his poetry, Vaughan makes a unique contribution to the transformation of the perceptions of mysticism in seventeenth century England.

Thomas Traherne draws upon nature mysticism in a way very different from that of Henry Vaughan. Traherne allows his spiritual joy to shine through in his writings where he embraces the redeemed potential of humanity and rejoices in the restored inheritance which encompasses all of Creation. He is an optimist, and he prefers to focus on the potential good of redeemed humanity, but he is not ignorant of evil.⁶ Nor does he turn a blind eye to the distractions of the world which draw one away from the Divine. Nevertheless, they are not his message. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he does not agonize over the total depravity of humanity or scrutinize his own faith. Instead, he accepts God's love with awestruck wonder and sees that love manifested in the natural world around him. Nature becomes a liminal place where he can encounter the presence of the Divine, yet Traherne also sees the divine potential within the human soul, and he combines his nature mysticism with elements of Platonism, humanism, and alchemical symbolism, creating a new and unique approach to mysticism. One of his most important contributions to English mystical poetry is his "vision splendid," a mysticism of childhood which synthesizes Scripture and Christian mysticism with alchemy and Hermeticism.

Henry Vaughan (1621-1695)

Henry and his twin brother Thomas were born to Thomas and Denise Vaughan of Newton-by-Usk, St. Bridget's Parish, Brecknockshire, Wales in 1621.⁷ As members of the landed gentry, their family was of considerable antiquity, yet of modest means, and they struggled

⁶ Thomas Traherne is well aware of the doctrine of Original Sin; however, he does not dwell on the idea of total depravity. For Traherne, the crucifixion of Christ provides redemption from the Curse and re-instatement as co-heirs to the kingdom through Christ. To thank God for his grace in providing such a gift glorifies Him. To see oneself as unworthy of that gift instills humility. However, to hyper-focus on one's unworthiness can prevent one from fully rejoicing in the implications of the redemption itself. That is Traherne's message.

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, biographical information is all taken from F. E. Hutchinson, *Henry Vaughan: A Life and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947).

financially. Denise Vaughan's father, David Morgan had bequeathed to her a small estate in Llansantffraed's Parish, Brecknockshire; however, her husband had to spend the first sixteen years of their marriage trying to secure that inheritance for his wife. It was on this estate that the twins grew up and on which Henry, as heir, would live throughout his life. He inherited the property, valued at five pounds sterling when his father died in 1658.

Although no records exist of Henry's college education, Thomas was admitted to Jesus College, Oxford on 4 May 1638, and matriculated from there on 14 December of the same year. He would continue to study in Oxford to earn an M.A. and take holy orders. If Henry had entered the university at the same time as his brother, he must have left after only a couple of years, for his father sent him to London to study municipal law at the Inns of Court. However, he was called back home at the outbreak of the Civil War in August 1642, and served as clerk to Sir Marmaduke Lloyd, the Chief Justice of the Great Sessions on the Brecon circuit. Sir Marmaduke was a Royalist and served in the army. He was captured at the siege of Hereford in December 1645, heavily fined, and discharged from his service as a judge. However, his loyalty to the Church and to the King would have made an impression on young Vaughan who, according to F. E. Hutchinson, "almost certainly...saw military service...in the autumn and early winter of 1645."⁸

Hints of such service can be found in his war poems in *Olor Iscanus*. "An Elegy on the Death of Mr. R. W." eulogizes his friend who fell on Rowton Heath, near Chester in September 1645, part of the Welsh bodyguard of cavalry-troopers who protected the king.⁹ Hutchinson suggests that Vaughan may have enlisted when King Charles I came to Brecon to recruit fresh

⁸ Hutchinson, *Henry Vaughan*, 60.

⁹ Helen White, *The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in Religious Experience* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), 263.

troops in July 1645, and may have served under Colonel Herbert Price, for both his name and the name of his brother appear in the list of the Brecon members of Sir Price's company.¹⁰ These cavalry troopers were with the King at Chester on 23 September 1645, so Vaughan may have fought in the same battle in which his friend R. W. was killed.

Beeston Castle was nine miles southeast of Chester and served as a garrison for Royalist forces. In his poem, "Upon a Cloke Lent Him by Mr. J. Ridsley" Vaughan humorously expresses his gratitude for the garment which served to protect him on that stormy winter's day, 16 November 1645 when the garrison of the castle was forced to surrender after having been besieged for two months. Just as Vaughan describes in his poem, the men marched from the "craggie Biston" and across the Dee on their way to Denbigh.¹¹ Nothing is certain about Vaughan's military service after this point, and he seems to have been home by the end of the first Civil War composing his poems and starting a family. Likewise, his brother, Thomas, seems to have ended his period of military service and become rector of St. Bridget's parish church in Llansantffraed; however, he was not to hold that position long.

On 3 January 1645, Parliament had declared the *Book of Common Prayer* illegal, and public use of it or observance of its calendars had been abolished. It had been replaced by the *Directory of Public Worship* which served more as a set of instructions than as a guide through prayer and observance. Members of the clergy refusing to give up use of the prayer book and the old episcopacy with it could be punished, and these punishments for non-compliance steadily grew more severe. In 1645 holding a church service based on the *Book of Common Prayer* could

¹⁰ See the "List of Officers Claiming to the Sixty Thousand Pounds Granted by His Sacred Majesty for the Relief of His Truly Loyal and Indigent Party," 4 February 1662/3, *State Papers Domestic*, Car. II, 1663, no. 19; cited in Hutchinson, *Henry Vaughan*, 64-65. Henry Vaughan is listed as a Lieutenant and Thomas Vaughan is listed as a Captain.

¹¹ *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, 2nd. Ed., Ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 52, Vv. 19-22.

result in a fine. By 15 Dec. 1655, anyone caught holding such a service could be imprisoned or exiled. Despite these dangers, some members of the clergy refused to give up their old ways of worship and come into alignment with the Puritan ideals which were gaining dominance. As a result, they were evicted from their positions within the church and lost their livelihoods. Thomas Vaughan was among them.

The ascendancy of Parliamentary forces and the new regulations which they imposed on worship meant that the Vaughan brothers were denied legal access to the forms of worship with which they had grown up and to which they were still loyal. One week after it abolished the *Book of Common Prayer*, Parliament declared Archbishop Laud (an Arminian and one of the strongest advocates of the old episcopacy) to be an evil advisor to the king and executed him on Tower Hill. Within four years they would also execute the king himself.

Puritan factions within the Parliament believed that the English Reformation had not gone far enough in removing Roman influences from the Church of England. They sought to cleanse the church of clerical authority, sacerdotalism, religious iconography, prayer books, and anything else which they thought heretical and potentially dangerous as a path leading back to the Roman Catholic Church. Among these were Arminian beliefs which contrasted sharply with Calvinistic predestination. The latter taught that each individual was selected by God either for salvation or damnation. Those who were to be saved did nothing to earn their salvation, but they were under the burden of determining within their own consciences whether or not they were one of the Elect. Arminians, in contrast, allowed for the free will of an individual to accept or reject salvation. King Charles I leaned towards Arminianism and strove to steer the Church of England toward more traditional and sacerdotal forms of worship. It was King Charles I who had

appointed William Laud as Archbishop of Canterbury. Laud also favored Arminianism as well as the old episcopacy and high church ceremony, which he termed the “beauty of holiness.”¹²

Henry Vaughan was a Royalist and a Laudian, which means he was probably also an Arminian.¹³ He was in his teens “during the 1630s, when Arminians were in the ascendancy in the Church of England,”¹⁴ and he was still a very young man when the Royalists lost the Civil Wars. Within a brief span of time, he lost his church, his king, his friends, and his cause. He also suffered the loss of his younger brother, William, who died in the same year as the king (1649), probably from injuries received during the Civil Wars. This combination of tragic losses together with the shifting religiopolitical tensions of his time may have been what prompted Vaughan eventually to turn from the conflicting institutions which claimed to represent God’s authority on earth and to seek a more stable anchor in God himself. Whatever the cause, between 1647 and 1650, something happened which prompted him to re-examine his life, turning from a secular to a more deliberately spiritual perspective.¹⁵

Signs of his “conversion” are evident in his writings. Whereas before he styled himself a cavalier poet and “one of the sons of Ben,” promoting the Royalist cause, drawing upon classical sources such as Ovid, and celebrating contemporary pleasures and virtues, afterward he rejects what he calls “those ingenious persons, which in the late notion are termed *Wits*” and who “cast

¹² “Archbishop William Laud, 1573-1645.” *British Civil Wars, Commonwealth and Protectorate, 1638-1660. BCW Project*. 24 Jan. 2010. Web. (accessed 6 Oct. 2015).

¹³ The final lines of Vaughan’s poem, “The World” can be read as Calvinistic: “This Ring the Bride-groome did for none provide / But for his bride” (vv.59-60). However, Calvinists are not the only Christians who acknowledge the provision of God. Arminians also acknowledge God’s provision for His people, they just believe that people have the free will to choose to accept and receive those provisions through accepting salvation.

¹⁴ Rudrum, “These Fragments I Hold against My Ruins,” 337.

¹⁵ See Claude J. Summers, and Ted-Larry Pebworth, “Vaughan’s Temple in Nature and the Context of ‘regeneration,’” *Essential Articles for the Study of Henry Vaughan*, Ed. Alan Rudrum (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1987), 213-225.

away their fair portion of time, in no better employments (sic.), then (sic.) a deliberate search, or excogitation of idle words, and a vain, insatiable desire to be reputed *Poets*.”¹⁶ The verses composed by such poets he identifies with “*Vipers* [that] survive their *Parents*, and for many ages after (like *Epidemic* diseases) infect whole Generations, corrupting always and unhallowing the best-gifted *Souls*, and the most capable *Vessels*; for whose sanctification and well-fare, the glorious Son of God laid down his *life*, and suffered the pretious (sic.) *blood* of his blessed and innocent *heart* to be poured out.”¹⁷ The poems which Vaughan himself had written in the style of the cavalier poets he condemned to obscurity¹⁸; however, they were collected by a friend and published under the title, *Olor Iscanus (The Swan of Usk)* in 1651. They show the sharp contrast between his poetry before and after his “conversion.”

As a cavalier poet he had sought to glorify the king, Charles I; now he sought to glorify God. He had reveled in secular pleasures;¹⁹ now he found joy in spiritual ones. He had memorialized his fallen comrades; now he esteemed the sacrifice of Christ. In the same year that his friend published *Olor Iscanus*, Vaughan himself published *The Mount of Olives* (1651), a private substitute for the now banned *Book of Common Prayer*. According to his preface, he wrote the collection of prayers and meditations to help his readers who were bewildered by the religious turmoil of the Civil War.²⁰ In the previous year he had published the first volume of *Silex Scintillans* (1650), a collection of his devotional poetry.

¹⁶ Vaughan, Preface, *Silex Scintillans* (1655), 388.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ “The Publisher to the Reader,” *Olor Iscanus*, 36.

¹⁹ Vaughan writes poems concerning the plays of John Fletcher and William Cartwright.

²⁰ Vaughan, Henry, Preface, *Silex Scintillans, The Works of Henry Vaughan*, Ed. L.C. Martin, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 390-2.

Whatever caused his conversion from a secular to a more deliberately spiritual life, he specifically attributes his conversion from writing secular to spiritual poetry to George Herbert. In the 1655 preface to the second volume of *Silex Scintillans*, he praises Herbert as “the blessed man... whose holy *life* and *verse* gained many pious *Converts*, (of whom I am the least).”²¹ He borrowed the subtitle of his collection, *Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*, from the subtitle of Herbert’s *Temple*, acknowledging his imitation of Herbert’s style while at the same time differentiating his own work. Richard Crashaw had done something similar when titling his own collection of devotional poetry, *Steps to the Temple* in 1646.

Vaughan’s Latin title, *Silex Scintillans* translates as “sparking flint.” In the preface of the first volume (1650), Vaughan includes an emblem which shows a heavenly hand striking a heart-shaped stone and producing simultaneously both flames and tears. In the Latin poem which he attached to the emblem, he explains the meaning of the image:

You break through the *Rocky* barrier of my heart, and it is made *Flesh* that was before a *Stone*. Behold me torn asunder! And at the last the *Fragments* burning toward your skies, and the cheeks streaming with tears out of the *Adamant*. Thus once upon a time you made the *Rocks* flow and the *Crags* gush, oh ever provident of your people! How marvelous toward me is your own hand! In *Dying*, I have been born again; and in the midst of my *shattered means* I am now *richer*.²²

The temptation is to read the adversity which tore him asunder as the tragic losses which he suffered during the Civil War. However, this correlation is difficult to determine for sure.

Whatever it may have been, Vaughan attributes it to the hand of God, striking a blow which softened his stony heart, inspiring both tears of contrition and sparks of divine love. Vaughan compares his transformation to the miracle recorded in Exodus 17 when God commands Moses to

²¹ Vaughan, Preface, *Silex Scintillans*, 391.

²² This English translation is provided by Louis L. Martz in *The Paradise Within: Studies in Vaughan, Traherne, and Milton* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 5-6.

strike the rock at Horeb to produce a fountain of water, so the people of Israel may drink in the desert.²³ Already Vaughan is mixing biblical allusion, with natural references and numinous phenomena, a combination which in his poetry earns him the reputation as a Christian nature mystic.

The first poem in his collection, “Regeneration” illustrates this approach. The speaker, wandering through a natural setting, seeks for God, and finds Jacob’s Bed. In the biblical story, Jacob is forced to rest in the wilderness of Haran when fleeing from his brother Esau. During the night he receives a revelatory dream in which he sees a ladder stretching between heaven and earth with angels ascending and descending upon it.²⁴ Yahweh stands at the top of the ladder and addresses Jacob, blessing him and his descendants. Jacob awakens changed by his vision. His numinous encounter in the wilderness serves as a threshold experience, awakening his spirituality and transforming his self-identity. Jacob, who is on the run in the wilderness, alone and exiled from his family, enters a liminal space where he encounters God²⁵ and receives His promise: “Behold I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go.”²⁶ When Jacob leaves that liminal

²³ Exodus 17: 5-7. It is possible to see in this reference a metaphor of Vaughan’s contemporary situation. He and his fellow Anglicans are traversing a spiritual wasteland, arid and barren. They thirst for God, but cannot find refreshment in the now forbidden forms of worship to which they were previously accustomed. The poems of *Silex Scintillans* are meant to provide some relief, and they were inspired, at least in some measure, by Vaughan’s own spiritual conversion and by the religious and political turmoil of his time. If this be the case, then Vaughan seems to see the hand of God behind the adversities which he and his fellow Anglicans faced, tribulation for the sake of spiritual renewal.

²⁴ Genesis 28:10-22.

²⁵ Christopher Hodgkins adds, “And of course there is Jacob’s marvelous phrase, ‘Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.’ Gen. 28:16. This is one of the most ‘metaphysical’ statements in the Bible, as it speaks of an imminent divine presence which the believer comes increasingly to perceive—highly relevant to ‘Regeneration’” (Email to Kathleen D. Fowler, 13 Feb. 2016).

²⁶ Genesis 28: 15. When Jacob awakens from his dream he states, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it” (Gen. 28:16). To the nature mystic, this passage speaks of the contrast between the presence of God in His Creation and the individual’s ability to perceive that presence. Jacob’s experience heightens that perceptivity which is directly relevant to the experience of the speaker in “The Regeneration.

space, he has stepped across the threshold into another life. He is not the same Jacob he was when he fell asleep.

Likewise, the speaker in “Regeneration” is in the process of transformation. Following a voice which calls him away, he finds Jacob’s Bed “where (since he slept there,) only go / Prophets, and friends of God.”²⁷ By implication, the speaker includes himself within this group. He has moved from the search for God into a relationship with God, but he reposes on Jacob’s Bed only for a short time before being drawn into a grove which is purposefully reminiscent of the garden in the *Song of Songs*.²⁸ Vaughan quotes the words of the Beloved: “Arise O North, and come thou South-wind, and blow upon my garden that the spices thereof may flow out.”²⁹ Mystics such as Bernard of Clairvaux interpret the garden in the *Song of Songs* as a space where Divine union takes place. The soul encounters God there and is transformed. Entering into this space, the speaker in the poem “found all was chang’d.”³⁰ He hears “A rushing wind / Which still increas’d, but whence it stirr’d” he cannot tell. This wind is an allusion both to the North and South winds which blow upon the garden and to the one which blows amongst the disciples on the day of Pentecost, filling them with the Holy Spirit.³¹

In the poem, the speaker searches for the source of this wind, hoping, as he says, to ease his mind.³² However, as mystics of the *via negativa* believe, the rational faculties cannot perceive

²⁷ Vaughan, “Regeneration,” vv. 31-2, p. 397.

²⁸ Song of Songs 4:12-5:1.

²⁹ Vaughan incorrectly cites *Canticles* 5:17; however, the verse which he quotes comes from 4:16.

³⁰ Vaughan, “Regeneration,” vv. 39, p. 398.

³¹ Acts 2:2.

³² Vaughan, “Regeneration,” vv. 71-79, p. 399.

or understand the ineffable God. He remains invisible, the wind a manifestation of his breath through which he whispers to the speaker, revealing that He moves where He pleases.³³ He can be sought, but He will be encountered only when and where He chooses. The speaker's final utterance in the poem is a prayer for divine union, an encounter with God Himself; "On me one breath, / And let me dye before my death."³⁴ To die before one's death is a reference to ecstasy, in this case spiritual ecstasy in which one is raptured outside of the self and taken into the presence of God. The external senses become inoperative, and the mystic is only aware of the presence of the Divine. The experience is brief, but the effect is permanent and life-changing.

Claude Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth prefer to place "Regeneration" within its religiopolitical context, arguing that "because the Anglican fabric has been destroyed" by the Civil Wars and by the new iconoclastic laws regulating worship under the Commonwealth "Vaughan is led to a new apprehension of a temple in nature, one expressed in terms of the architecture of Anglicanism."³⁵ They then proceed to show how each one of the elements of nature described in the poem can be interpreted as a representation of a component of the architecture within an Anglican church. This approach does align very well with Vaughan's own acknowledgement of his imitation of George Herbert's poetry. *The Temple* is structured as a metaphor of the church with various poems representing specific architectural features such as "The Altar" and "The Windows."

³³ Ibid., vv. 80, p. 399.

³⁴ Ibid., vv. 81-82, p. 399.

³⁵ Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth, "Vaughan's Temple in Nature and the Context of 'Regeneration,'" *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 74 (1975): 351-60; cited from *Essential Articles for the Study of Henry Vaughan*, Ed. Alan Rudrum (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1987), 217.

However, such an interpretation does not satisfactorily explain the numinous and mystical references in the poem. Rather than seeking public, communal forms of worship led by a priest or minister, the speaker goes into nature alone to draw inspiration and revelation from the natural world and to experience either intuitively or directly the presence of God in His creation. “This might be considered a good viewpoint for a mid-century Anglican whose accustomed liturgy had been abolished, and who lived in a part of the country where Anglican churches had either been closed or lodged puritan preachers planted there by hostile authority.”³⁶ However, it is also indicative of the doctrine of mystic correspondence and of nature mysticism.

Mystic correspondence is a philosophy which regards nature as a source of revelation, symbolically disclosing various aspects of the spirit or of the Divine.³⁷ Creation is seen as an emanation from God; therefore, it becomes a lens through which to contemplate Him, metaphorically revealing aspects of His character: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made.”³⁸ During the Romantic movement, this philosophy would be transformed into an appreciation of the sublime power of nature itself.

Whereas the doctrine of correspondence perceives a symbolic connection between God and his Creation, nature mysticism perceives God to be present in all of his creation. Christian nature mystics interpret Romans 1:20 to mean that God has purposefully designed creation to reveal aspects of His character. By seeking to understand these aspects of God as recorded in the Book of Creation, they are drawn to seek God Himself who is the Creator. Thus, nature mystics

³⁶ Rudrum, “These Fragments I Hold against My Ruins,” 328.

³⁷ James D. Simmonds, *Masques of God: Form and Theme in the Poetry of Henry Vaughan* (Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), 139, 143.

³⁸ Romans 1:20.

see in creation not just evidence of the handiwork of God, but the hand of God Himself active in the world. As they come to perceive this active presence, so are they drawn to connect with that presence.³⁹ Nature then becomes a liminal space where the mystic goes to experience the presence and the continuing activity of God in His creation.⁴⁰ In turn nature is used metaphorically to help explain these numinous encounters. The dividing line between Christian nature mysticism and pantheism is very important. In the former, nature is not seen as divine itself, but as created by the Divine and necessarily revealing aspects of its Creator's character. An omnipresent God must by the very definition of the word be present in all places at all times; thus He can be found in his Creation. Pantheism, on the other hand, identifies nature itself with divinity.

Vaughan is not a pantheist;⁴¹ however, he does incorporate nature mysticism into his poetry, and he does reveal a reflection of the Divine in nature. While it is possible that he merely draws upon nature mysticism and the doctrine of mystic correspondence to inform his work without being a mystic himself,

Most readers find his poems authentic: reflections of his experience and belief in what he wrote about. To be worthwhile, he writes in his Preface, religious poetry must flow from "true, practick piety." Although it cannot be proven, probably Vaughan had a mystical experience or experiences some time in the later 1640s or early 1650s. Since, as an Anglican, he inhabited a milieu hostile to mysticism, he very likely did not develop these

³⁹ Vaughan's poems, "The Regeneration," "The Dawning," "The Retreat," and "The Night," all suggest encounters with God which occur in nature.

⁴⁰ Scriptural precedence for nature mysticism can be found in Adam and Eve's friendly converse with God in the garden, Jacob's vision of Him in the wilderness of Haran, and Moses' encounters in the wilderness of Sinai, to name just a few from the Hebrew scriptures. In the New Testament Jesus himself spends much time praying either in the wilderness, on a mountaintop, or in a garden.

⁴¹ Vaughan does, however, play with neo-platonic ideas of pre-existence doctrine in "The Retreat."

experiences as fully as he might otherwise have done. Yet he is England's chief poet of traditional contemplative experience.⁴²

Because of the active discouragement of "enthusiasm" in Early Modern England by ruling authorities, whether they be Royalist or Parliamentarian, Anglican or Puritan, openly claiming to have experienced numinous or mystical phenomena could have been potentially dangerous. As Vaughan's spiritual temperament drew him to these aspects of the Christian tradition which raised the suspicions of his contemporaries, choosing poetry as the medium through which to grapple with the meaning of such experiences may have helped to allay, or at least deflect, some of the inevitable fear and suspicion. As an expression of imaginative awareness of experience, poetry, by its very nature, allows for a distancing between the subject matter and the author. Sound, rhythm, image, and meaning are all creatively selected to produce a desired effect. In the case of devotional poetry, these effects may include the deeper contemplation of a religious topic or the evocation of an emotional response such as contrition. Imaginative poetic devices such as symbolism and metaphor, serve to create a space allowing for the exploration of experiences and ideas which have the potential of making readers more uncomfortable if presented in other genres.

Because of the liberties granted by the genre itself, choosing poetry as the literary medium through which to approach potentially controversial aspects of spirituality suggests that Vaughan is conscious of the "arts of contentious reading."⁴³ Because of "a strong tradition of religious animadversion from the earliest years of the Reformation to the Restoration and beyond," literary works containing religious polemics were often read with an eye for objecting

⁴² Low, *Love's Architecture*, 199.

⁴³ Steven N Zwicker, "Habits of Reading and Early Modern Literary Culture," Chapter 6, *Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, Ed. David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 178-79.

and repudiating the doctrines contained within.⁴⁴ Tracts, pamphlets, and sermons are the obvious recipients of such as critical gaze, but other genres, could fall victim to these controverting habits. Steven Zwicker argues that during the turbulent decade of the 1640s and the disillusionment of the years that followed, there was an “increasingly hostile response [to] a broad field of texts,...indeed, at points [a] flood [of] suspicion and hostility [aimed at] an entire marketplace of texts from news-sheet to epic poem, from broadside and pamphlet (where we might well expect the mark of controversy) to song and strophic ode.”⁴⁵ The potential savagery of such readers, and the obsessive tenacity and often violent temper of their invective⁴⁶ would not have gone unnoticed by those, like Vaughan, who actively participated in the religiopolitical struggles of those times. “Nor should we be surprised to find that the consumption of religious polemic or, even, of devotional texts was animated by this spirit.”⁴⁷ Thus, although the poetic genre allows some license in exploring controversial ideas, Vaughan would still have been aware, even expected, the close scrutiny of his devotional writings by contemporary readers.

Therefore, by choosing to write in the first person, Vaughan creates a complex space in which the fictive speaker⁴⁸ in his poems is simultaneously distanced from himself and allowed to grapple with spiritual concepts which interested the poet. This fictional self experiences

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Such savagery is readily visible in the controversy surrounding the writings of Sir Thomas More. See G. R. Elton, *Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics: Papers and Reviews, 1946-1972*, 3 Vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), vol. 3.

⁴⁷ Zwicker, “Habits of Reading,” 179.

⁴⁸ Literary convention separates the speaker from the author. Vaughan purposefully relies on this convention to separate himself from his speaker in his poetry. Nevertheless, mystic poetry, by its very nature, draws upon personal experience, so although Vaughan uses the rhetorical device of the fictive speaker, that speaker is in turn exploring aspects of Vaughan’s own spirituality.

numinous and mystical phenomena, describes the encounters, and works through their meaning. Thus through this fictional self, Vaughan can explore approaches to spirituality which alarmed many of his contemporaries and attempt to disarm those fears. By doing so, he is purposefully entering into the religious debates of his time to suggest an alternative both to the officially sanctioned ratiocinating forms of worship and the dreaded “enthusiasms” believed by authorities to lead to heresy and rebellion.

In the preface to *The Mount of Olives*, Vaughan clarifies his position in relation to the claims of such “enthusiasts”: “I envie not their frequent Extasies, and raptures to the third heaven; I onely wish them real, and that their actions did not tell the world, they are rapt into some other place.”⁴⁹ As Antony Low points out, this is a polemic against false prophets, not a repudiation of mysticism.⁵⁰ Vaughan is distancing himself from “enthusiasts” claiming mystical encounters with God yet belying the truth of their own claims through their contentious actions. He is not labeling all mystical encounters as false. Instead, he is contrasting false encounters with real ones. The former stir up hatreds and rebellions, the latter do not.

In the 1655 preface to *Silex Scintillans*, Vaughan alludes to the “remote” content of some of his poems:

You will (peradventure) observe some *passages*, whose *history* or *reason* may seem something *remote*; but were they brought *nearer*, and plainly exposed to your view, (though that (perhaps) might quiet your *curiosity*) yet would it not conduce much to your greater *advantage*. And therefore I must desire you to accept of them in that *latitude*, which is already allowed (sic.) them.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Vaughan, Preface, *The Mount of Olives*, 140.

⁵⁰ Low, Anthony, *Love's Architecture*, 162.

⁵¹ Vaughan, Preface, *Silex Scintillans*, 392.

This “remoteness” of which he writes is a reference to the elements of nature mysticism which permeate his work. His choice of imaginative literature as his vehicle of expression, gives him, as he says, the “latitude” to explore various aspects of spirituality, some of which would have been less familiar to his readers. Though his contemporary audience would have been familiar with the concept of numinous encounters via dreams, visions, inspirations, and the like, not all of them would have experienced such phenomena, and of those who had, fewer still would have openly discussed such experiences considering the “anti-enthusiasm” milieu of the times. To those who have had experience with numinous or mystical encounters, the poems provide a means of grappling with the source and significance of those experiences. For those who have not, the references to them in the poems may seem quite remote and strange, piquing a curiosity which can be difficult to satisfy. By their nature, numinous and mystical encounters are difficult to articulate adequately even to those who have had experiences of their own; for those who have not their transcendent nature resists rational exposition.

For this reason, mystics have traditionally used metaphor in their attempt to describe the ineffable through the physical. The *Song of Songs* compares the soul to a bride, an image also used by mystics such as St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. John of the Cross. These same mystics describe the transformation of the soul as a marriage, as the enjoyment of a garden, as the crossing of a bridge, as a journey toward the interior of a castle, as an ascent up a ladder. Other mystics use different metaphors based on their own experiences and on the mystical traditions to which they have been exposed.

Although Vaughan uses metaphorical imagery common to mysticism: sun and light, clouds and shadows, there is very little evidence that he turned to other mystical writers for

guidance.⁵² He does mention “a deep, but dazzling darkness,”⁵³ such as is described by Pseudo-Dionysius, but such terminology has been used by mystics of the *via negativa* from ancient to contemporary times, so ascribing this reference to the direct influence of any one mystical author is impossible. Instead, Vaughan may have come into contact with this term indirectly through the Christian Hermeticism in which both he and his brother Thomas were interested.

After Thomas Vaughan was evicted from his position as rector of St. Bridget’s parish church, he returned to Oxford to continue his studies in contemporary sciences including Hermeticism and alchemy,⁵⁴ becoming an adept in Hermetic philosophy.⁵⁵ The ideas expressed in Thomas’ Hermetic writings and those expressed in Henry’s poetry are so similar that they suggest a connection.⁵⁶ Thomas may have even helped Henry with his translations of Hermetic texts such as Henry Nollius’ *Hermetical Physick*, which Vaughan attached to his 1655 volume of *Silex Scintillans*, and *The Chymist’s Key*, which he published separately in 1657.

Vaughan’s choice to bind his volume of devotional poems with a text of Hermetic medicine implies that he saw a connection between the works. In his dedication at the beginning of *Silex Scintillans*, Vaughan writes: “Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall

⁵² According to Hutchinson his reading list includes the church fathers, Platonic and Stoic writers in translation, and medical and Hermetical texts: Alanus de Insulis, Ambrose, Anselm, Don Antonio of Guevara, Chrysostom, Cyprian, Drexelius, Father Eucherius, Gregory the Great, Hermes Trismegistus, Jerome, Marcellus Empiricus, Maximus of Tyre, Johannes Eusebius Nierembergius, Nolles, Paracelsus, Petrarch, and Plutarch. Although Gregory the Great did write about mysticism, no other traditional, Catholic mystical writers or writings appear in the list. In addition, the works which Vaughan references are not among Gregory’s mystical texts.

⁵³ Vaughan, “the Night,” *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, 2nd ed., Ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 523, v. 50.

⁵⁴ White, *The Metaphysical Poets*, 265.

⁵⁵ Arthur Edward Waite, ed., *The Works of Thomas Vaughan, Mystic and Alchemist*, (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, Reprint of 1888 edition printed in London), LXIII, 241.

⁵⁶ White, *Metaphysical Poets*, 287.

be saved, for thou art my health, and my great deliverer.”⁵⁷ The quote comes from the biblical book of Jeremiah. The prophet cries out to God for physical and spiritual healing during a time of personal tribulation, resulting from the political and religious turmoil of his nation. Many had turned away from the faith of their fathers. The context of the biblical passage echoes Vaughan’s own circumstances: personal tragedy resulting from national and religious upheaval.⁵⁸ Like Jeremiah, he cries to God for healing, both physical and spiritual.

To Henry Nollus a correspondence exists between one’s spiritual health and one’s physical health, the one directly influencing the other. Poor spiritual health manifests itself in such social ills as “Perjury, Treachery, Tyranny,” and the like.⁵⁹ These spiritual diseases in turn cause physical diseases: “When we transgresse and violate [the] Law and will of our maker, then doth God send upon us condign punishments, amongst which *Diseases* are numbred in the very Booke of the Law.”⁶⁰ Here one can already see a thematic connection between Nollus’ text and the biblical passage which Vaughan chose in the dedication of his work. To a Royalist and a Laudian, the spiritual ills of his nation (the false promises of political and religious agitators, the treachery of rebellion, the tyranny of radical reformation) had manifested in the physical horrors of Civil War and regicide. The correlation suggests that Vaughan may have seen the turmoil of his time as due punishment for his nation’s straying from the Law and the will of God.

⁵⁷ Vaughan, *Silex Scintillans*, 393; Jeremiah 17:13-14.

⁵⁸ On the same page, Vaughan compiles quotations from Jeremiah (17:13-14), Isaiah (38:10-11, 16-20), Jonah (2:8-9), and David (Psalm 43:3-4). Each of these passages is a cry for deliverance uttered either by a prophet or by one temporarily given prophetic foresight. Each experienced personal loss and tragedy during a time of national turmoil, and each calls upon God for physical and spiritual healing during his time of tribulation.

⁵⁹ Vaughan, *Hermetical Physick*, 552.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 567.

In the preface to *Silex Scintillans* he equates idle words and “vicious verse” with vipers and epidemic diseases producing parricides and a “soul-killing issue” to obtain a “Laureate Crown.”⁶¹ Vaughan is alluding to the recent execution of the king, the father of his country, and the dismantling of the monarchy, the “crown” passing to the Parliament. He claims that “divers persons of eminent piety and learning (I meddle not with the seditious and *Schismatical*) have, long before my time taken notice of this *malady*.”⁶² Here he contrasts “piety and learning” specifically with sedition and schism, the one leading to spiritual health and the other to dysfunction.

Vaughan admits that he himself had participated in the recent schism, pledging his loyalty, his sword, and his verse to the king’s cause. That cause was lost, along with the king, but his cavalier verses still lived on:

I must remember, that I my self have for many years together, languished of this very *sickness*; and it is no long time since I have recovered. But (blessed be God for it!) I have by his saving assistance suppress my *greatest follies*, and those which escaped me [*Olor Iscanus*], are (I think) as innoxious, as most of that vein used to be; besides, they are interlined with many virtuous, and some pious mixtures.⁶³

In this passage he specifically equates the writing of these verses with suffering from an illness, a disease which infected his mind, spread among the body of the nation. If the cause of the “disease” is spiritual, then the cure for it must be spiritual as well, for in Hermetic medicine, like cures like.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Vaughan, *Silex Scintillans*, 388.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 389.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 390.

⁶⁴ Vaughan, *Hermetic Physick*, 581.

Silex Scintillans then becomes a guide for spiritual healing, its devotional poems meant to encourage the purging of vices and the strengthening of faith. The accompanying text of the *Hermetical Physick* complements this purpose, for Nollius teaches that the healing of both spirit and body is provided for by God: “For true and perfect medicines, and the knowledge of them, can nowhere be had, but from God,”⁶⁵ and “every Physician that desires to cure sick persons well and happily, must be a sound Christian, and truly religious and holy.”⁶⁶ According to Nollius, God will then reveal to the physician the cures for disease, and that revelation comes through nature. Physicians, therefore, must be “true philosophers” “who observe nature in her works, who imitate her, and use the same method that she doth, that out of nature, by the meditation of nature, and the assistance of their own judgements, they may produce and bring to light such rare effectual medicines, as will safely, speedily, and pleasantly cure, and utterly expel the most deplorable diseases.”⁶⁷ The “true physician” then seeks medicines from God through His creation.⁶⁸

The correlation between Hermetic medicine and nature mysticism becomes apparent in their emphasis that spiritual healing comes only from God and is received as revelation in the context of the natural world. Both the Hermetic physician and the nature mystic perceive physical and spiritual levels of meaning in natural processes. The microcosm of the individual (the lesser world) reveals aspects of the macrocosm (the greater world):

The greater and lesser worlds corresponded both in outline and in detail—in outline because each was threefold, the universe being intellectual or angelic, celestial or starry,

⁶⁵ Ibid., 579.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 550.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 583.

and terrestrial or elementary, and the man composed of an “elemented” body, an immortal soul, and a sidereal spirit which acted as medium between soul and body; in detail because all the parts and elements of the macrocosm were comprised (virtually, not materially) in man. This correspondence, with the “sympathy” it involves, is the secret of Hermetic medicine.⁶⁹

The Hermetic doctrine of correspondence between the macrocosm and the microcosm, between nature and humanity, between the physical and the spiritual is symbolic as it is in nature mysticism, but it is also sympathetic, suggesting a deeper connection between the two whereby like is able to cure like. This symbolic level of correspondence informs a number of Vaughan’s poems in *Silex Scintillans*.⁷⁰ In “Affliction” God displays physically “in the greater world” of the macrocosm what he will do spiritually “in the lesser” world of the microcosm (i.e. humanity).⁷¹

This correspondence is expounded in “The Tempest” where the speaker wishes for “man” to “hear/The world read to him,” for all Creation “Makes up but lectures for his eie, and ear.”⁷²

Sure, mighty love, foreseeing the discent
Of this poor Creature, by a gracious art
Hid in these low things snares to gain his heart,
And layd surprises in each Element.

All things here shew him heaven: *Waters* that fall
Chide, and fly up; *Mists* of corruptest fome
Quit their first beds & mount; trees, herbs, flowers, all
Strive upwards stil, and point him the way home.⁷³

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Holmes, *Henry Vaughan and Hermetic Philosophy*, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), 33.

⁷⁰ Metaphysical and devotional poets such as John Donne and George Herbert have used macrocosmic/microcosmic correspondences metaphorically in their writings. However, the use of such imagery does not make these poets into mystics. Instead, poets such as Henry Vaughan are or are not mystical based on other criteria explained in previous chapters. Nevertheless, as a mystical poet Henry Vaughan can use the doctrine of correspondences to explore the source and meaning of the mystical phenomena represented in his poetry.

⁷¹ Vaughan, “Affliction,” vv. 9-10.

⁷² Vaughan, “The Tempest,” vv. 17-20.

All of nature participates in this correspondence, each aspect of the natural world revealing an aspect of the spiritual world. Vaughan gives one specific example of such revelation in “The Showre.” He compares the moist vapors from a “drowsie Lake,” too heavy to rise, with the “lazier” prayers of the speaker which are unable to reach heaven; both condense and fall to the earth, the one as rain, the other as tears.⁷⁴ From these spiritual lessons drawn from nature, humanity is to find healing and “the way home.”⁷⁵

In the sympathetic level of correspondence, as well as in the related theories of magnetism and influence, Hermetists conceive of a three-fold cosmos: terrestrial, celestial, and intellectual. Each of these worlds or spheres is linked with the others so that the greater influences the lesser and the lesser attracts the greater (magnetism); thus a mutual sympathy exists among them. Just as each aspect of nature in the terrestrial realm is believed to be a type, a symbol, or an analogue of a higher reality, so each object or creature in the terrestrial world is believed to contain within itself the character of that to which it corresponds and to bear a “signature” of that correspondence in its outward form. That signature indicates that the one contains within itself the same “natures, vertues, and roots” as the other and can “produce the like operations upon other things.”⁷⁶

Vaughan’s “Cock-crowing” illustrates this sympathy between a terrestrial creature and a celestial object. The cock is governed by the sun so that even during the night, the cock can feel the influence of this celestial body, causing it to anticipate the sun’s rising even before the dawn. This influence or magnetism exists between the two because God, the “Father of lights” took a

⁷³ Ibid., vv. 21-28.

⁷⁴ Vaughan, “The Showre,” vv. 1, 5-6, 8, 13-14.

⁷⁵ Vaughan, “The Tempest,” v. 28; “Affliction,” v. 6.

⁷⁶ T. Vaughan, *Magia Adamica*, 96.

little grain or “seed” of the sun and placed it within the bird.⁷⁷ This “little grain.../So shines and sings, as if it knew /The path unto the house of light.”⁷⁸ Because of this grain of light, cocks are compelled to wake and greet the first rays of the rising sun, “their eyes watch for the morning hue.”⁷⁹

In Hermetic medicine this little grain is a spiritual tincture or essence of the sun itself. From this explanation of the nature of grains and tinctures, Vaughan draws a spiritual connection.

If such a tincture, such a touch,
So firm a longing can impowre [in the cock]
Shall thy own image think it much
To watch for thy appearing hour?
If a meer blast so fill the sail,
Shall not the breath of God prevail?⁸⁰

The cock bears a solar signature because of the “Sunnie seed” within it; likewise, humanity, according to Vaughan, bears a signature of Deity.⁸¹ Created in the image and likeness of God,⁸² Adam, the prototype human, received life through the breath of God. This breath, this “seed” which was placed inside humanity implies a sympathy and correspondence between the human and the Divine. Just as the cock awaits with expectation the rising of the celestial sun because of

⁷⁷ H. Vaughan, “Cock-crowing,” vv. 1-6.

⁷⁸ Ibid., vv. 7-12.

⁷⁹ Ibid., v.7.

⁸⁰ H. Vaughan, “Cock-crowing,” vv. 13-18.

⁸¹ Ibid., v. 1.

⁸² Genesis 1:26.

the seed within it, so the Christian longs for the heavenly Son. Each draws the other: “Seeing thy seed abides in me,/ Dwell thou in it, and I in thee.”⁸³

Hermetic medicine teaches that a spiritual tincture or essence is of a kindred nature to the quintessence which forms the boundary between matter and spirit, the link between body and soul: “the purest and most noble essence in which lie hid all mysteries in their inexhaustible fullness of marvelous virtue and efficacy.”⁸⁴ It is “that fine and pure and hidden essence which preserves each creature from corruption” and “a matter most subtly purged of all impurities and mortality.”⁸⁵ “It separateth and bringeth the pure from the impure: and... bringeth the life of all sorts of spirits, or all sorts of Essences, into its highest...degree... Yea, it is the cause of the shining, or the luster: it is the cause that all creatures see and live,”⁸⁶ yet it is not composed of any of the four elements, “but is a certain first thing, having its being above, and besides them.”⁸⁷ Quintessence then is the Hermetical explanation of what the traditional mystics refer to as *synderesis*, or the divine spark within. This divine spark serves as a bridge between God and humanity, and is the agent of spiritual transformation: “The divine nucleus, the point of contact between man’s life and the divine life in which it is immersed and sustained.”⁸⁸

⁸³ Ibid., vv. 23-24.

⁸⁴ *The Sophic Hydrolith* in A. E. Waite, *The Hermetic Museum* (Newburyport: Red Wheeler Weiser, 1999), I, 78.

⁸⁵ Holmes, *Henry Vaughan and Hermetic Philosophy*, 34; Paracelsus, in Waite, *The Hermetic Museum*, III, p.22.

⁸⁶ Jacob Boehme, *The Third Book of the Author, Being the High and Deep Searching Out of the Three-fold Life of Man, through The Three Principles English by J. Sparrow* (London: Printed and are to be Sould (Sic.) by Lodowick Lloyd, 1656), 105.

⁸⁷ Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy Written by Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim...; Translated out of the Latin into the English Tongue by J.F.* (London: Printed by R.W, for Gregory Moule, 1651), 33.

⁸⁸ Underhill, *Mysticism*, 54.

Traditional teachings on mysticism such as that of *synderesis* are absent in Vaughan's writings,⁸⁹ suggesting that he drew instead from contemporary, Hermetic philosophy and medicine to grapple with the meaning and significance of numinous encounters with the Divine in nature. Quintessence and sympathetic correspondence become the explanation for the attraction between the spirit and the Divine even within ecstatic union.

If joyes, and hopes, and earnest throws,
Are hearts, whose Pulse beats still for light
Are given to birds; who but thee, knows
A love-sick souls exalted flight?
Can souls be track'd by any eye
But his, who gave them wings to flie?⁹⁰

As the cock is compelled by the solar grain within it to yearn for the light of that celestial body and sing in hope and expectation of its return each dawn, so the soul, which contains the essence of the Divine, yearns for God and desires to be in His presence. The attraction of such a soul to the Divine can be so strong that their separation can cause it to suffer from love-sickness.

Vaughan suggests that in its desire for God, the soul is drawn away from the body in ecstatic flight. The Hermetic explanation for rapture is then based on the doctrine of correspondence and its corollary of magnetic influence.

⁸⁹ Synderesis involves the belief that each human soul contains a spark of the divine which confers the ability to discern right from wrong not from a practical standpoint, but from a moral one. In this way, synderesis is different from conscience which determines right and wrong based on practical reasons or attitudes. For more information, see "Synderesis," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*, Retrieved 8 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/synderes>>. See also Thomas Slater, "Synderesis," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 14 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), *New Advent*, Retrieved 8 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14384a.htm>>. For critical commentary on the debate concerning the difference between synderesis and conscience see Douglas Kries, "Origen, Plato, and Conscience (Synderesis) in Jerome's Ezekiel Commentary," *Traditio*, Vol. 57 (Fordham University: 2002), 67-83, *JSTOR*, Retrieved 8 March 2016. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/27832010>>.

⁹⁰ Vaughan, "Cock-crowing," vv. 31-36.

Vaughan suggests that it is the physical body which keeps the soul separated from the Divine:

Onely this Veyle which thou hast broke,
And must be broken yet in me,
This veyle, I say, is all the cloke
And cloud which shadows thee from me.
 This veyle thy full-ey'd love denies,
 And onely gleams and fractions spies.⁹¹

Alluding to the veil of the Temple in Jerusalem which was torn at the moment of Christ's death when his spirit left his body,⁹² Vaughan's speaker compares the physical body with that curtain or "cloke" of heavy cloth which separated worshippers from the presence of God in the Holy of Holies.⁹³ The tearing of the veil allows access that was previously denied. Likewise, the soul

⁹¹ Vaughan, "Cock-crowing," vv. 37-42.

⁹² Matthew 27:50-51 "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom...."

⁹³ The separation of the terrestrial from the intellectual is consistent with the Hermetic philosophy of the three-fold cosmos wherein the microcosm reflects the macrocosm but is separate from it. As with the Gnostics, the flesh becomes a barrier to the soul, holding it back and preventing it from achieving that which it desires, perfection and union with the divine. Gnostics believe the spirit to be good and the flesh to be evil; therefore, they doubt the validity of New Testament claims of the incarnation, for they cannot accept that a good God who is spirit would clothe himself in flesh which is evil. Christian mystics do not accept this Gnostic dichotomy. They recognize the fallen nature which influences the flesh but do not accept that the physicality of the body itself is evil. Therefore, the Christian mystic who believes Christ to have been born without sin (the fallen nature inherited from Adam), sees no reason why the spirit of God cannot incarnate itself within the neutral (unfallen) body of man. They do not believe the material world itself to be evil, for it was proclaimed "good" by God during the creation (Genesis 1: 31). Alchemists and Hermetists believe that all of nature fell with Adam and that it must be transformed back into its original perfect state. This process of transmutation is what the alchemist is trying to achieve within the lab, separating, distilling, and congealing the elements within crucibles to re-create the pure, perfect, unfallen state of that element, its essence. The outcome of these transmutations is affected by the spiritual state of the alchemist. The purer the heart, the better the results within the alchemical crucible; thus the alchemist needs to be humble, chaste, patient, temperate, and Godly. The same holds true for the medical Hermetist; the purer the life, the better the physician, for God will guide the virtuous philosopher who seeks Him, helping him to discover the ways to transmute illnesses of the body and soul to attain the health of both. For the medical Hermetist, the terrestrial and mortal nature of the body is inferior to the intellectual and immortal nature of the soul, but they are held together by the sidereal spirit which acts as the bridge between the two. At death the soul is freed from the body to fly to God to whom it is drawn. For more information on Hermetic philosophy see Holmes, Elizabeth, *Henry Vaughan and Hermetic Philosophy*; for

which longs to be continually in the presence of the Divine is prevented from achieving its desire by its connection to a physical body. Thus the love-sick soul can achieve only brief moments wherein it catches a glimpse of the Divine glory before it is pulled back. For Vaughan, it is the physical nature that is the “cloud which shadows” God from the love-sick soul.⁹⁴ The speaker longs for that cloud to be drawn away, so he can bathe in the light of God’s glory:

O take it off! Make no delay,
But brush me with thy light, that I
May shine unto a perfect day,
And warme me at thy glorious Eye!
O take it off! ⁹⁵

Here the soul, which is drawn towards God, shines with His light in sympathetic correspondence with Him.

Vaughan uses a similar image of veiled or shrouded light when he compares the spirit within the body with a star which has been locked within a tomb.⁹⁶ The immortal soul shines with the divine essence which has been breathed into it, but the full vision of its loveliness is obscured by the walls of mortal flesh which surround it. The tomb is a *momento mori*, yet death is not to be feared but desired, for only when the soul is released by the hand of the one who enclosed it in flesh, can it once more shine forth unimpeded.

Clouds, shadows, and light—Vaughan uses these images drawn from nature to symbolize the correspondence between the microcosm of humanity and the macrocosm of the world and its Creator. Clouds and shadows obscure and darken while light reveals and illuminates. Vaughan

more information on spiritual alchemy see Allison Coudert, “Chapter 4: The Elixir of the Soul,” *Alchemy: The Philosopher’s Stone* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1980), 80-107.

⁹⁴ Vaughan, “Cock-crowing,” v. 40.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, vv. 43-47.

⁹⁶ Vaughan, “They Are All Gone into the World of Light,” vv. 29-32.

equates the former with the mortal body and the latter with the immortal soul. Its light is but a reflection of the Divine light, that Divine essence which emanates from God and is breathed by Him into humanity. The body enshrouds the soul darkening its perception and obscuring its reflection of the light of God; nevertheless, the sympathetic correspondence between humanity and the Divine means that the soul is drawn toward God even as it is tied to the body.

Vaughan constructs the meanings of his imagery upon the foundation of Hermetic philosophy, using it to explain both the soul's ability to feel the presence of God in nature and its ecstatic flights in quest of union with the Divine. Hermetic philosophy thus provides Vaughan with a way of understanding both numinous and mystical encounters. In lieu of traditional teachings on the *via negativa*, explaining these spiritual phenomena from the perspective of Christian mystics of the Catholic Church, the Anglican Vaughan turns to the contemporary "science" of Hermeticism; thus the "remoteness," which he admits is present in his poetry, is increased by his attempts to use Hermetic philosophy to grapple with the source and significance of numinous and mystical phenomena experienced in nature.⁹⁷

The proliferation of Hermetic references in *Silex Scintillans* and their absence in *Olor Iscanus* suggests that his interest in Hermetic medicine, at least in terms of his poetry, began sometime during or shortly after his "conversion." Perhaps the philosophy provided him a way of coming to terms with the shifting religiopolitical tensions of his time and the tragic losses which he personally had suffered during the Civil Wars. Drawing upon Hermetic medicine allows Vaughan to interpret the war as a physical manifestation of social ills brought on by poor spiritual health; thus Hermetic medicine helps to provide some meaning for the chaos. It also provides a possible "scientific" explanation for the source and significance of numinous and mystical encounters like those which Vaughan describes in his poetry.

⁹⁷ Vaughan, *Silex Scintillans*, Preface, 392.

If he himself was indeed a nature mystic, and if his encounters with the Divine in nature began around the time of his conversion, then it is logical to suspect that at least part of his growing interest in Hermetic medicine may have stemmed from its ability to provide him with some answers as he grappled with understanding these phenomena. Hermetic medicine and nature mysticism agree that nature is an emanation from the Divine and that God is present in His creation, that spiritual healing comes only from God, that it is received in the context of the natural world, and that pursuing personal piety is necessary in order to receive such revelation and perceive these correspondences. Therefore, Hermetic medicine does seem to provide logical, “scientific” answers for the source and significance of numinous and mystical phenomena. For the Early Modern protestant concerned with avoiding the “superstitions” of the past and the “enthusiasms” of the present, such explanations may have seemed reasonable and rational. Therefore, Vaughan’s choice to use Hermetic medicine to explain nature mysticism informs his own understanding of these spiritual phenomena, bringing it in line with contemporary science. In turn, his presentation in his devotional poetry of this new, scientific understanding suggests to his audience a new way to perceive nature mysticism, transforming it from superstition to “science” in the process.

Thomas Traherne (1636/1637-1674)

Not much is known about Traherne’s life. His father, John Traherne may have been a shoemaker in Hereford, and he may have married Maria Adkins at St. John’s Parish of Hereford in 1628, but when or where Thomas was born is uncertain. The first real piece of evidence we have about him is that he was entered on 1 March 1652/3, as a commoner of Brasenose College, one of the most Puritan of the Oxford colleges. He received his B.A. in 1657. The group of men who verified his character and competence when he was appointed to his living at Credenhill,

Hereford were so staunchly Puritan that when the Church of the Commonwealth became the Church of the Restoration, four of them chose in 1662 to surrender their livings rather than submit to Anglican re-ordination and the use of the *Common Book of Prayer*.⁹⁸ Apparently, Traherne was not quite so staunchly Puritan, for he was later ordained by an Anglican bishop.

From 1657 to 1667, Traherne served the parish of Credenhill; however, he spent much of his time studying at Oxford, earning a Master's degree in 1661 and a Doctor of Divinity in 1669.⁹⁹ One of his school notebooks is now in the British Library, and it shows him studying the philosophy of Plato and Socrates as well as the alchemy of Hermes Trismegistus.¹⁰⁰ His published works also show a familiarity with the humanistic and Hermetic writings of Pico della Mirandola as well as the works of Aristotle, Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysius, and various Church fathers such as Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux.¹⁰¹ This list suggests that his spiritual temperament was already drawn toward esoteric writings and Christian mysticism.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ These four men were William Voyle, George Primrose, Samuel Smith, and William Lowe. For more information, see K.W. Salter, *Thomas Traherne: Mystic and Poet*. (New York: Barnes and Nobles, 1964), 13. See also White, Helen C. *The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in Religious Experience*. (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 353.

⁹⁹ According to Anthony à Wood, he began his ministry at Credenhill in 1661, but a manuscript in the Lambeth Library (MS.998) states that he was admitted to the rectory of Credenhill in 1657. Anabella, the Dowager Countess of Kent was his patron. See Bertram Dobell, ed. *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne*. Introduction. (London: Bertram Dobell, 1906), xxxviii-xxxix.

¹⁰⁰ This notebook was identified by Gladys Irene Wade. See Gladys I. Wade, *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne*. (London: P.J. and A.E. Dobell, 1932).

¹⁰¹ Helen C. White, *The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in religious Experience*. (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 319; A.L. Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1969), 13; Keith W. Salter, *Thomas Traherne: Mystic and Poet*. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964).

¹⁰² Arthur L. Clements has identified five areas in which he sees an influence on Traherne by Christian mystics such as Meister Eckhart and Jacob Boehme: "the theme of childhood; the distinction between *psyche* and *pneuma*; the 'meaning' of the Godhead; the negative and positive ways; and ...the doctrine of the Golden Mean." A.L. Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1969), 15.

One of his contributions to English mystical poetry is his account of the “vision splendid” which he describes in a number of poems: *The Salutation, Wonder, Eden, Innocence, The Rapture, The Approach*, and others.¹⁰³ This mysticism of childhood hints at the Platonic idea of the pre-existence of the soul and pre-figures Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. In addition, Traherne, perhaps drawing upon Scripture, suggests the possibility that the embryo can receive Divine impressions in the womb and remember those impressions at birth.¹⁰⁴ He describes his own first numinous intuitions when he still is a very young child. His infant self, “Unbodied and devoid of care” is as yet unaware of its physical needs: “I then no thirst nor hunger did perceive,/ No dull necessity,/ No want was known to me.”¹⁰⁵ He is all spirit, all mind, receptive of “Divine impressions”: “Without Disturbance then I Did receiv/ The fair Ideas of all Things,” and these “Divine Impressions when they came,/ Did quickly enter and my Soul inflame.”¹⁰⁶ Describing his first intimations of the presence of God, Traherne, as an adult, perceives his infant self as “an inward Sphere of Light,/ Or an interminable Orb of Sight,/ An endless and a living day,/ A vital Sun that round about did ray.”¹⁰⁷ In a state of ecstatic bliss, the

¹⁰³ Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, *Mysticism in English Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), 78-79.

¹⁰⁴ Passages in both Jeremiah and in the Gospels hint at this possibility: “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew you, before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). “And it came to pass, that, when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost. And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy” (Luke 1: 41-44).

¹⁰⁵ All poems shall be quoted from Bertram Dobell’s edition which does not contain the “corrections” to form and wording made by Traherne’s brother, Philip. See Bertram Dobell, ed. *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne*. Introduction. (London: Bertram Dobell, 1906), “The Preparative.” IV.37; III.21-23. p. 16.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, VI.55-56. p. 17.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, II.15-18. p. 15-16. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola equates the rational soul with “light” as an “eye” which can see into the spiritual realm. See Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*. Trans.

spirit of Traherne, unimpeded by the demands of the flesh, is able to perfectly receive and to reflect the Divine impressions which enflame it.

According to Traherne, this original awareness of God's presence was the best: "Those pure and virgin apprehensions I had from the womb, that divine light wherewith I was born are the best unto this day, wherein I can see the Universe. By the Gift of God, they attended me into the world, and by His special favour I remember them till now."¹⁰⁸ These "first Impressions are Immortal all," meaning that they may be temporarily forgotten as the cares of the world overshadow them, but they are never erased.¹⁰⁹ They can be recovered either through conscious meditation or through unconscious and spontaneous remembrance.

A. L. Clements proposes that Traherne uses infant imagery to symbolize the innocent state of both the original, unfallen Adam and of the redeemed Christian, as receptive to the wisdom of God as a little child, supposedly devoid of the ego and self-consciousness that inhibit the adult.¹¹⁰ The child consciousness has a highly limited sensory or intellectual apprehension; its awareness of itself and of its surroundings is rudimentary, and its response to stimuli such as hunger, wetness, and fatigue is unpremeditated. The infant does not lie in its crib contemplating the meaning of life. Yet, the "mindlessness" of the child is full of symbolic meaning. Lack of self-consciousness, the annihilation of the ego is one of the fundamental aims of Christian mysticism, for the willful self stands in opposition to union with the Divine by demanding its own

Douglas Carmichael. *The Library of Liberal Arts*. (Indianapolis: Boobs-Merrill, 1965), IV.i.118-119; V.i.128-130.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations*. Ed. Bertram Dobell. (London: P. J. & A. E. Dobell, 1908.), III.1. p. 151.

¹⁰⁹ "Dumbness." v. 85. p. 37.

¹¹⁰ A. L. Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969). 61-95.

way and rebelling against the will of God. Annihilating this willful self, becoming less self-absorbed is compared to becoming like a little child. The infant's nonintellectual mode of apprehension and lack of self-awareness represents the path by which the mystic must approach God, the *via negativa*. Since God is ineffable, one cannot attempt to understand Him with the intellect. Rational thought only gets in the way of understanding. Nor can one understand Him through the senses, for He is spirit.

Pseudo-Dionysius, one of the great explicators of the *via negativa*, explains that “the most divine knowledge of God, that which comes through unknowing, is achieved in a union far beyond mind, when mind turns away from all things, even from itself, and when it is made one with the dazzling rays, being then and there enlightened by the inscrutable depth of Wisdom.”¹¹¹ Here is the mind of no-mind by which one approaches knowledge of God, the unknowing which cannot be achieved by the senses or the rational intellect. Instead it comes directly from the “dazzling rays” of God Himself; so bright is the light of His glory that it appears as incomprehensible darkness to the limited human mind. An analogy would be stepping from a darkened room into the full brightness of an intense summer sun and being momentarily blinded. The “mindlessness” and selflessness of the infant is then a benefit in receiving these Divine impressions. For Traherne, the child symbolizes the way to approach knowledge of God through the *via negativa*, and his incorporation of light imagery into these passages draws deeply from traditional Christian mysticism.

In addition to Pseudo-Dionysius, Traherne also draws upon the traditional, Augustinian four-fold progression of the soul from initial Edenic innocence, through the misery of the Fall, to

¹¹¹ Pseudo-Dionysius. *The Divine Names*. Ch. 7. 872B. In *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. Trans. Colm Luibheid. (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 109.

the grace of redemption, and eventual glory of heaven.¹¹² The progress of a soul through these stages is known as Regaining Paradise, for the ultimate goal is to restore the soul's ability to commune with God as Adam did before the Fall, walking and talking with Him in the Garden.¹¹³ Regaining Paradise occurs through restoring the Divine image which is hidden deep within.¹¹⁴ This image is the likeness of God, formed purposefully during the Creation in order to make communion possible between the soul and the Divine. It is a spark of the Divine nature transferred to humanity and hidden deep within the soul. Regaining Paradise thus means re-establishing the spiritual unity between the two, rejoining the spark with its source.

Drawing deeply from these traditional ways of approaching Christian mysticism, Traherne infuses them with concepts taken from Christian alchemy which was one of the popular sciences of the Early Modern era.¹¹⁵ Christian alchemists were especially interested in "the sacred implications of the art by devising or reaffirming intricate systems of correspondence that existed (or were thought to exist) between chemical processes and interactions occurring within their

¹¹² Augustine. *Enchiridion: On Faith Hope, and Love*. Translated by Albert C. Outler. (1955). Chapter 31. Section 118. Tertullian. Org. 2 June 2015.

¹¹³ Genesis 2-3.

¹¹⁴ A. L. Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969), 17.

¹¹⁵ In his *Table Talk*, DCCLX, Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer writes about the spiritual signification of alchemy and its possible synchronization with Christian doctrine:

The science of alchemy I like very well.... I like it for the sake of the allegory and secret signification, which is exceedingly fine, touching the resurrection of the dead at the last day. For, as in a furnace the fire extracts and separates from a substance the other portions, and carries upward the spirit, the life, the sap, the strength, while the unclean matter, the dregs, remain at the bottom, like a dead and worthless carcass; even so God, at the day of judgment, will separate all things through fire, the righteous from the ungodly.

See *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*. Trans. William Hazlitt (London: G. Bell, 1902), Section DCCLX, 326.

alembics and spiritual transformations taking place within their own hearts and souls.”¹¹⁶ Both aimed at purification and perfection, be it the creation of gold from baser metals or the regeneration of the believer. Christ himself came to be equated with the philosopher’s stone: “the agent of healing, deliverer from sin and baseness, rewarder of merit, author of grace and salvation, and creator of new heavens and a new earth ‘in that great and generall refining day.’”¹¹⁷ Christian alchemists thus blended orthodoxy and heterodoxy, overlapping religion and “science.”¹¹⁸ In this way, Christianity and Hermeticism informed each other, and Hermetic texts such as those Traherene studied at Cambridge influenced the way in which he presents his childhood, numinous experiences.¹¹⁹

In his twelve theses, Hermes Trismegistus writes that “as all things were by contemplation of one, so all things arose from this one thing by a single act of adaptation.”¹²⁰ Christians interpreted this passage to mean that as all things in creation come originally from God, the presence of a primordial *prisca sapientia* (Sacred Wisdom) which God communicates

¹¹⁶ Stanton J. Linden, ed. *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 22.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Stanton is quoting from the Epistle Dedicatory to Thomas Tymme’s translation of Joseph Duchesne [Quersitanus], *The Practice of Chymicall and Hermeticall Physicke* (London, 1605).

¹¹⁸ For more information on spiritual alchemy see Carl G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. 2nd ed. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1953), 345-431; Coudert, Allison. *Alchemy: The Philosopher’s Stone*. (London: Wildwood House, 1980).

¹¹⁹ For more information, see Robert Barclay, *The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876); and Gilbert Waterhouse, Chapter 8. “The Theologians,” *The Literary Relations of England and Germany in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914); White, Helen C. *The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in religious Experience*. (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 341.

¹²⁰ Stanton J. Linden, ed. *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 28. See also Roob, Alexander. *The Hermetic Museum: Alchemy and Mysticism*. (London: Taschen, 2014), 9. I shall refrain from speculating on who Hermes Trismegistus may have been or when and where his texts were actually compiled.

was theorized by alchemical philosophy.¹²¹ This sacred wisdom was believed to have been handed down to Adam and Moses and other elites. Understanding such esoteric wisdom was believed to be accomplished more easily without speech, relying on the individual's "insight into the essential connections, not...[on] his discursive ability, which is largely held to be a destructive force."¹²² Literal language was believed to be corrupt, its expressive abilities more prone to darken the understanding than to enlighten it, the incident at the tower of Babel fettering the Holy Spirit in "grammatical bonds."¹²³ Visionary insight replaces logic and discourse as the primal language of paradise. Traherne's infant receives this *prisca sapientia* through his mind and spirit. There is no literal language to be spoken, nor do the physical ears receive it. The purpose of such wisdom is inner purification, the spiritual gold of both Christian alchemists and theologians alike.¹²⁴

According to the Gnostics, from whose tenets alchemy drew some of its ideas: The first and most fundamental form of knowledge is good news and concerns the divine nature of one's own essence: the soul appears as a divine spark of light.¹²⁵ Traherne describes his infant self as just such as divine spark, a little sun, "an Inward Sphere of Light,/ Or an Interminable Orb of Sight,/ An Endless and a Living Day,/ A Vital Sun that round about did ray."¹²⁶ The Early Modern alchemist, Paracelsus equates this "inner star" with the imagination which is creative and

¹²¹ See Pico della Mirandola. *On Being and the One*. Trans. Paul J.W. Miller. The Library of Liberal Arts. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 35-62.

¹²² Alexander Roob, *The Hermetic Museum: Alchemy and Mysticism*. (London: Taschen, 2014), 11-12.

¹²³ Ibid., 12.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 14.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 18.

¹²⁶ "The Preparative." II.15-18. p. 15-16.

is associated with the generative force of the sun and of the world of ideal forms in contrast to fantasy which is delusional and associated with the moon and with the shadowy likenesses of the physical world.¹²⁷ This spark, or “inward sphere of light” is able to understand and to receive “Divine impressions.”¹²⁸ It exists in a paradisaal state illuminated by the Divine and reflecting His sacred wisdom, and it reflects the “ideas of the higher, transcendental sphere of the divine intellect.”¹²⁹ However, this blissful state cannot last. As Traherne’s infant matures, he gradually loses his access to the *prisca sapientia*. His inward eye, that “Interminable Orb of Sight” has been turned outward, and he sees only his own poverty and loneliness.¹³⁰ His sense of oneness with the Divine has been temporarily severed.

However, this separation is not permanent, and it leads to one of Traherne’s most unique contributions to English mysticism of the seventeenth-century. While many were tempted to lose faith in human potential and to concentrate on its failings, Traherne rejoiced in the redemption and its implications for fallen humanity. At the age of four, a numinous encounter occurs when he is alone inside his father’s house, and it begins with a heightened awareness of himself and of his impoverished state:

As in the House I sate
Alone and desolate,
No Creature but the Fire and I,
The Chimney and the Stool, I lift mine Ey
Up to the Wall,
And in the silent Hall
Saw nothing mine....

¹²⁷ Roob, *The Hermetic Museum: Alchemy and Mysticism*, 20.

¹²⁸The word *impression* implies reception via a means other than through language.

¹²⁹ Roob, *The Hermetic Museum: Alchemy and Mysticism*, 19.

¹³⁰ “The Preparative.” II.16. p. 15.

I wond'd much to see
That all my Wealth should be
Confin'd in such a little Room,
Yet hope for more I scarcely durst presume.
It griev'd me sore
That such a scanty Store
Should be my All.¹³¹

He is “alone and desolate”; his solitary grief occurs in a brief space of time in which he is standing on the threshold between his current sense of identity as the impoverished son of his earthly father and the revelation of himself as the wealthy heir of his heavenly father. This in-between moment, or liminal state, has a dramatic influence on the shaping of his identity, dissolving this first awareness of himself and replacing it with a new perspective which he describes as a moment of spiritual clarity in which all of Creation and his place in it come into perspective:

No more shall Walls, no more shall Walls confine
That glorious Soul which in my Flesh doth shine:
No more shall Walls of Clay or Mud
Nor Ceilings made of Wood,
Nor Crystal Windows, bound my Sight,
But rather shall admit Delight.
The Skies that seem to bound
My Joys and Treasures,
Of more endearing Pleasures
Themselves becom a Ground:
While from the Center to the Utmost Sphere
My Goods are multiplied evry where.

The Deity, the Deity to me
Doth All things giv, and make me clearly see
The Moon and Stars, the Air and Sun
Into my Chamber com:
The Seas and Rivers hither flow,
Yea, here the Trees of *Eden* grow,
The Fowls and Fishes stand,

¹³¹ Thomas Traherne, “Poverty.” *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne*. Ed. Gladys I. Wade. (London: P.J. & A.E. Dobell, 1932), 1-7, 15-21. p.126-27. This poem is not in the Dobell manuscript, but comes from Burney MS. 392 (B.M.)

Kings and their Thrones,
As 'twere, at my Command;
God's wealth, His Holy Ones,
The Ages too, and Angels all conspire:
While I, that I the Center am, admire....

For Me the World created was by Lov;
For Me the Skies, the Seas, the Sun, do mov;
The Earth for Me doth stable stand;
For Me each fruitful Land
For Me the very Angels God made *His*
And *my* Companions in Bliss:
His Laws command all Men
That they lov Me,
Under a Penalty
Severe, in case they miss:
His Laws require His Creatures all to prais
His Name, and when they do't be most my Joys.¹³²

In this liminal moment, Traherne senses the presence of Deity and receives revelatory knowledge which completely reverses his earlier perceptions of himself. The amount of money in his pocket has not changed, but his understanding of wealth has been radically altered. Instead of equating it with land and property which would bind him to a very specific set of material goods, Traherne realizes that the entire world and all that is in it was created for him; thus he is wealthy beyond measure and freed from the confining definition of wealth which has trapped so many others. The sun, the moon, the stars, the very air he breathes, the water he drinks, and the earth upon which he stands were made for him to enjoy; they are his treasures given to him out of love. The baubles which he valued before become dross next to the splendor of Nature. On the surface, this revelation may seem solipsistic, yet it is not. It contains none of the greed of possession or of the competitive arrogance of a man comparing his financial status with others. Instead it is a simple

¹³² Thomas Traherne, "Hosanna." *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne*. Ed. Gladys I. Wade. (London: P.J. and A.E. Dobell, 1932), 1-24, 61-72. p.204-206. This poem is not in the Dobell manuscript, but comes from Burney MS. 392 (B.M.).

and candid realization of his status as a child of God, a status that he finds affirmed in Scripture.¹³³

Instead of being merely the poor, desolate child of a shoemaker, Traherne is also a child of God and a co-heir with Christ.¹³⁴ When Christ redeemed him, He glorified him as well, and restored to him his inheritance. Thus Traherne has a right to enjoy the wondrous beauty of Nature. However, of all the wondrous things which God created, he sees himself as the most wonderful because they were all created for him and restored to him.¹³⁵ This revelatory knowledge changes his understanding of himself and of his relationship both with the Divine and with all of Creation. It sounds vain. It is most certainly in sharp contrast to contemporary Protestant perspectives which focus on the sinful nature of the flesh and the total depravity of mankind. The center of seventeenth-century Protestant Christianity is Christ's sufferings and sacrifice for the redemption of humanity, yet Traherne reverses the traditional attitude of self-loathing and abasement to one of awestruck wonder. The amazement is in the willing suffering of his Creator in order to redeem and glorify humanity:

Is not he an object of infinite Love for whom our Saviour died? Shall not all things in Heaven and Earth serve him in splendour and glory, for whom the Son of God came down to minister in agonies and sufferings? O here contemplate the glory of man, and his high exaltation in the Throne of God. Here consider how you are beloved, and be transported with excess of joy at this wonderful mystery. Leave the trash and vanities of the world, to live here in communion with the blessed Trinity.¹³⁶

¹³³ Romans 8:17.

¹³⁴ Romans 8:17.

¹³⁵ Genesis 1:26-31.

¹³⁶ Thomas Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations*. Ed. Bertram Dobell. (London: P. J. & A. E. Dobell, 1908.), II.34. p.103.

This is no catalog of the virtues of mankind. In it we hear only surface echoes of Hamlet's famous speech glorifying humanity's potential: "What [a] piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world; the paragon of animals."¹³⁷ Renaissance humanism exalted humanity and its unlimited potential, Traherne, however, is exalting God's love which restored to humanity its lost potential and its demoted status.¹³⁸ His joy is not in any innate virtue, but in the glory which has been given to him and to all humanity through the self-sacrificing love of God. Recognition of this love and of the new, undeserved, yet exalted status of mankind fills him with joy and is one of his distinguishing characteristics, as well as one of his contributions to English mystical poetry.

When Traherne speaks of being the heir of Heaven and Earth, he is not speaking just of himself but of all redeemed humanity. All creation is humanity's as long as they do not begin to regard it as exclusively theirs:

He giveth all the world to me, He giveth it to everyone in giving it to all, and giveth it wholly to me in giving it to everyone for every one's sake.... Here is love! Here is a kingdom! Where all are knit in infinite unity. All are happy in each other. All are like Deities. Every one the end of all things, every one supreme, every one a treasure, and the joy of all, and every one most infinitely delighted in being so.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet. The Riverside Shakespeare*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), II.ii.303-307. Shakespeare ends Hamlet's speech with a sarcastic rebuttal of this philosophy, focusing on man as the "quintessence of dust" (Adam was formed of the duct of the ground in Genesis) as opposed to housing the quintessence of the Divine (the divine breath which God breathed into Adam at the Creation).

¹³⁸ See *Pico della Mirandola*. Trans. Paul J. Miller. The Library of Liberal Arts. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1940. Reprinted 1965).

¹³⁹ Thomas Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations*. Ed. Bertram Dobell. (London: P. J. & A. E. Dobell, 1908), I.74. p.53.

Traherne's insight is profoundly mystical: true wealth and joy are increased, not diminished, by sharing.¹⁴⁰ We become most truly ourselves when we are able to step outside of our individualized existence and see creation unified through Divine love. "It is when we have renounced our finite love, our preoccupation with 'I', 'me' and 'mine', that we can truly possess our inheritance. We are the heirs of the world. We must enjoy the world as in God and for God."¹⁴¹ Yet, Traherne acknowledges that before one can love others, one must first be able to love oneself.

Keith W. Salter notes a similarity between Traherne's teachings on love and those of St. Bernard of Clairvaux.¹⁴² In his *De Diligendo Deo*, Bernard identifies God as the source of all love.¹⁴³ He is worthy of all love in return, yet one's love of God must start with love of oneself.¹⁴⁴ *Amor carnalis*, natural affection, is the necessary and natural starting point of all other types of love, for in order to love God, one must preserve life and tend to one's basic needs; therefore, self-love is not necessarily evil.¹⁴⁵ Modern psychology confirms that love of self must be satisfied before love of others is possible and that love of others cannot be based on hatred of oneself. For Traherne, once the demands of self-love are satisfied, one can then begin to look beyond the self to others and to God: "but when we do love ourselves, and self-love is satisfied infinitely in all its

¹⁴⁰ Helen C. White, *The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in religious Experience*. (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 358.

¹⁴¹ Keith W. Salter, *Thomas Traherne: Mystic and Poet*. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964), 108.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 92-110, 122-129.

¹⁴³ St. Bernard. *De Diligendo Deo, Opera Omnia (Patrologiae Latinae)*, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris, 1862), Tome CLXXXII), vol. I, Chap. 1, para. I, col. 974.

¹⁴⁴ St. Bernard, *De Diligendo Deo. Opera Omnia (Patrologiae Latinae)*, ed. J. P. Migne, Paris, 1862), Tome CLXXXII), vol. I, chap. XV, para. 39, col. 998.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, chap. VIII, para.23, col. 988.

desires and possible demands, then it is easily led to regard the Benefactor more than itself, and for His sake overflows abundantly to all others. So that God by satisfying my self-love, hath enabled and engaged me to love others.”¹⁴⁶

Traherne is in agreement with Cistercian mysticism which teaches that we approach our full humanity through love, and as that love increases so do we resemble more fully the likeness of our Creator. The more we realize our true nature, the greater our Felicity (Traherne’s term for the joy of Divine union which he borrows from Pico della Mirandola):¹⁴⁷ “The more you love men, the more delightful you will be to God, and the more delight you will take in God, and the more you will enjoy Him. So that the more like you are to Him in goodness, the more abundantly you will enjoy his goodness. By loving others, you live in others to receive it.”¹⁴⁸ However, Salter accuses Traherne of mixing Cistercian mysticism with Christian humanism, thereby distorting Bernard’s teachings on the need to focus one’s love on God and eschew the things of the world. While I would agree that Traherne does seem to praise human potential, I would argue that he is adapting the Christian humanist perspective, deemphasizing the innate potentialities of humanity and emphasizing the gift of such potentialities through the underserved redemption of mankind through God’s self-sacrificing love. Awestruck acceptance of this exalted status and enjoyment of the creation as one’s inheritance does not distort love of God through love of the world; rather it enhances it:

From His love all the things in Heaven and Earth flow unto you; but if you love neither Him nor them, you bereave yourself of all, and make them infinitely evil and hurtful to

¹⁴⁶ Thomas Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations*. Ed. Bertram Dobell. (London: P. J. & A. E. Dobell, 1908), IV.55. p. 266.

¹⁴⁷ Pico della Mirandola defines “felicity” as “the return of each thing to its beginning” which he reasons is God. See Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni. *Heptaplus*. Trans. Douglas Carmichael. The Library of Liberal Arts. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), VII.147-169.

¹⁴⁸ Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations*, IV.57. p.267.

you, and yourself abominable. So that upon your love naturally depends your own excellency and the enjoyment of His. It is by your love that you enjoy all His delights, and are delightful to Him.¹⁴⁹

For Traherne, to dwell on the total depravity of humanity and to condemn the wonders of God's creation is to fail to accept fully the benefits of the redemption. Self-loathing interferes with one's capacity to accept God's love and manifest it to others. Instead it is through love that we come to accept ourselves, develop unity with others, and find felicity with God.

Traherne, not long after this profound vision, found himself alone in a field where he was suddenly overwhelmed with a sense of how small he was in contrast to the vastness of the world, and thus how vulnerable he was in contrast to its dangers. Just when the fear of this realization grips his heart, he has the sudden revelation that the God who made him and redeemed him made all of creation both to delight him and to serve as a place to hold communion with him, for God is present in His Creation, not just in man-made temples, and that in His watchful presence, Traherne was safe:

Another time in a lowering and sad evening, being alone in the field, when all things were dead and quiet, a certain want and horror fell upon me, beyond my imagination. The unprofitableness and silence of the place dissatisfied me; its wideness terrified me; from the utmost ends of the earth fears surrounded me. How did I know but dangers might suddenly arise from the East, and invade me from the unknown regions beyond the seas? I was a weak and little child, and had forgotten there was a man alive in the earth. Yet something also of hope and expectation comforted me from every border. This taught me that I was concerned in all the world: and that in the remotest borders the causes of peace delight me, and the beauties of the earth when seen were made to entertain me: that I was made to hold a communion with the secrets of Divine Providence in all the world: that a remembrance of all the joys I had from my birth ought always to be with me: that the presence of Cities, Temples, and Kingdoms ought to sustain me, and that to be alone in the world was to be desolate and miserable. The comfort of houses and friends, the clear assurance of treasures everywhere, God's care and love, His goodness, wisdom, and power, His presence and watchfulness in all the ends of the earth, were my strength and assurance for ever: and that these things being absent to my eye, were joys and

¹⁴⁹ Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations*, IV.48. p.260-61.

consolations, as present to my understanding as the wideness and emptiness of the Universe which I saw before me.¹⁵⁰

This intuitive experience of Divine presence is interpreted by Traherne as an active benevolence and is understood through the filter of his Christian training. God created Nature and maintains it through his Divine Providence. Thus, Traherne interprets the numinous presence which he senses as God. His blending of numinous, mystical experience with orthodox Christian teaching is important in understanding his approach to nature mysticism.

For Traherne, nature itself is not divine. He is no pantheist as some nature mystics are.¹⁵¹ Instead, he believes that God's presence can be felt in the natural world; therefore, nature can serve as a means to bring one closer to God. Nature mystics may seek the wilderness as a place to pray and contemplate the divine. In this context, nature becomes a liminal space in which one can feel the presence of God and receive sacred or revelatory knowledge. Thus, nature mystics are deeply sensitive to the providence and beauty of the natural world. Traherne rejoices in these, allowing them to draw him into the presence of the divine:

You never enjoy the world aright, till the Sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars: . . . Till you can sing and rejoice and delight in God, as misers do in gold, and Kings in scepters, you never enjoy the world.

Till your spirit filleth the whole world, and the stars are your jewels; . . . till you love men so as to desire their happiness, with a thirst equal to the zeal of your own; till you delight in God for being good to all: you never enjoy the world. . . . The world is a mirror of infinite beauty, yet no man sees it. It is a Temple of Majesty, yet no man regards it. It is a

¹⁵⁰ Helen C. White, *The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in religious Experience*. (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 330-31.

¹⁵¹ Traherne may, however, be drawing upon Christianized alchemy which taught that as the universe was created by God, it is permeated by His spirit; therefore, everything has a sentience and a life of its own. For more information, see Stanton J. Linden, ed. *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

region of Light and Peace, did not men disquiet it. It is the Paradise of God.... It is the place of Angels and the Gate of Heaven.¹⁵²

The natural world is a reflection of the infinite and the sacred; by enjoying it as the creation of the Divine, one participates in a circle of continuity.¹⁵³ If all good emanates from God and if beauty and providence are good, then enjoying their presence in God's creation means receiving that good and manifesting it back to God. The same holds true for love. If God is love, His love is manifested in His creation of the world, by enjoying that Creation as a manifestation of love one rejoices not only in the Creation but also in the Creator. "He [God] must be loved in all with an unlimited love, even in all His doings, in all His friends, in all His creatures."¹⁵⁴ As one begins to "love the world aright" one is transformed. The self-love of the psyche which focuses on its own happiness becomes the *agape* love of God which delights in the happiness of others.

Communicating these spiritual transformations to those who have never experienced such numinous encounters is extremely difficult. To help them to convey their meaning, nature mystics tend to rely on metaphors and to see nature as symbolic of the divine. Christ Himself uses natural metaphors in his parables to explain spiritual concepts. The lilies of the field, the little sparrow, and the grain of mustard seed all take on spiritual significance, symbolizing aspects of God and of the life of the believer.¹⁵⁵ Jesus exhibits other characteristics of the nature mystic as well. He goes

¹⁵² Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations*, I.27-31.19-20.

¹⁵³ Here again, Traherne may have been drawing upon Christianized alchemical concepts. In the first line of his *Emerald Tablet*, Hermes Trismegistus writes "that which is above is like to that which is below, and that which is below is like to that which is above." See Stanton J. Linden, ed. *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 28.

¹⁵⁴ Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, *Mysticism in English Literature*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), 77.

¹⁵⁵ Matthew 6: 28; Matthew 10: 31, Luke 12: 7; Matthew 4: 31, 10:31, 17:20, Luke 13: 19, 17:6.

out into the wilderness to pray, entering a liminal space where he is tested by Satan.¹⁵⁶ Passing the test, he is then ministered to by angels. Later, Peter, James, and John, see him transformed on a mountaintop while he is praying and speaking of spiritual matters with the prophets Moses and Elijah.¹⁵⁷ Yet again, the night before his crucifixion, he prays in a garden, sweating blood and performing miracles.¹⁵⁸ These are but a few of the many examples present in the gospels. Therefore, nature mysticism is not foreign to Christianity. And mystics from St Francis of Assisi to Meister Eckhart and Jacob Boehme have taught forms of nature mysticism.

However, it is not prominent in England. None of the fourteenth-century English mystical writers advocate it. While they may draw upon natural metaphors in their writings, there is no hint of nature as a liminal space in which to seek the Divine, nor is there any joy and awestruck wonder associated with the Divine presence in the natural world. It is not until the seventeenth-century that nature mysticism appears in English mystical writings, primarily through the works of Traherne and of his contemporary Henry Vaughan. Like Vaughan, Traherne experiences an overwhelming consciousness of the presence of God in his Creation, the unmistakable trait of a nature mystic.¹⁵⁹ Yet, as we have already seen, he contributes his own individualized approach to natural mysticism, identifying it as a liminal space in which to seek the presence and the love of God, and expressing awestruck wonder at its beauty in light of his redemption and his inheritance of Creation. For Traherne, to love nature is to love the God who created nature.

Receptiveness to divine truth as perceived through hidden channels is the essence of mysticism. For Thomas Traherne, those channels involve both the natural world and the world of

¹⁵⁶ Luke 4: 1-13.

¹⁵⁷ Matthew 17: 1-5, Mark 9: 1-7, Luke 9: 28-35.

¹⁵⁸ Matthew 26: 36-56, Mark 14: 32-50, John 18:1-11.

¹⁵⁹ Helen C. White, *The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in religious Experience*. (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 357.

childhood. They are thresholds where intuitive and/or experiential encounters with the Divine become possible. These numinous encounters result in a highly personal and individualized relationship with God which allows the mystic to perceive Divine truth outside of the scriptures and church institutions. Traherne saw in the natural world metaphors of the Divine, and he was not afraid to draw upon Platonic, humanistic, and alchemical symbolism to relay his understanding of these Divine truths. Hints of the Pre-existence of the soul, joy in humanity's restored potential, and union through the divine spark of the spirit, these are ways in which Traherne blended the popular philosophies and sciences of his day with his mysticism and his orthodox training as an Anglican clergyman. The result is a unique and uplifting adaptation of traditional Christian mysticism and a transformation of perception concerning acceptable approaches to God.

Unlike English mystics such as Julian of Norwich, Walter Hilton, and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Traherne does not mention the slow, painful progress by which medieval mystics achieved self-annihilation and union. Instead Traherne achieves Felicity by rejoicing in the love of God which has redeemed him and restored him as an heir of all creation. Love has been the means of this redemption and because of it there is no reason why humanity's Edenic innocence cannot be regained. "The burden of choice is put on man. If he so wishes, if he will see again with the eyes of the child, then the experience of the world as Paradise can be enjoyed as man's inheritance here and now."¹⁶⁰ In this way Traherne's mystic vision is similar to that of William Blake in his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Yet he is no Romantic, he is a seventeenth century Protestant clergyman with a mystic temperament.

¹⁶⁰ Keith W. Salter, *Thomas Traherne: Mystic and Poet*. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964), 108.

Conclusion

In an era of Civil War, regicide, and radical reformation, Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne at first appear to have very little in common. As a Royalist and a Laudian, Vaughan lost his king, his cause, his church, his friends, and his brother in the Civil Wars. In contrast to him, Thomas Traherne was born just before the outbreak of hostilities and was a child during most of the fighting. He was only twelve when Cromwell beheaded King Charles I.

Vaughan knew very well the aggressive polemics and propaganda by which both sides viciously and tenaciously attacked each other. He was also familiar with the aggressive reading habits of his contemporaries who were continually on the lookout for hints of heresy and political dissent. Thus, when his “conversion” occurred sometimes between 1647 and 1650, and he switched from composing cavalier to devotional poetry, Vaughan knew that he would have to distance himself from suspicions of superstition and “enthusiasm” by creating a simulacrum of himself through which to explore the meaning and significance of the numinous and mystical encounters which fill his poetry. This simulacrum describes feeling the presence of God in nature and perceives mystic correspondences between natural phenomena and spiritual truths. In keeping with his need to distance himself from any hint of superstition, Vaughan does not draw upon traditional mystical teachings to explain the reasoning behind these phenomena; instead, he looks to the contemporary popular science of Hermetic medicine for answers. By doing so, he works to legitimize mysticism. It is his synthesis of Hermetical medicine and nature mysticism which is his unique contribution to the changing perceptions of this intuitive and affective approach to spirituality.

Whereas Vaughan sees the social ills of his time as a manifestation of spiritual disease and presents mysticism as a means by which to heal the deep social and spiritual wounds of his

people, Traherne rejoices in the redemption and its implications for humanity. Coming of age during the Commonwealth, Thomas Traherne does not leave a record of tragic losses like Vaughan. Whereas the converted cavalier seeks spiritual regeneration for himself and others, Traherne focuses on spiritual joy. Like Vaughan, he is a poet of nature mysticism, and he draws upon contemporary popular epistemologies and sciences to explore the meaning and significance of his encounters. However, Traherne goes beyond just Hermetic medicine, blending traditional Christian mysticism with Platonism, humanism, and alchemical symbolism, overlapping religion and “science,” orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

Rejecting the idea of total depravity which dominated the theology of so many of his contemporaries, Traherne, instead, embraces the redeemed potentialities of humanity and rejoices in their restored inheritance which encompasses all of Creation. He is awestruck by the wonder of God’s love and teaches that by learning to love and accept themselves, people can develop unity with others and find Felicity with God, his term for Divine union. His optimistic mysticism presents a “vision splendid” which is one of his contributions to English mystical poetry and a foreshadowing of the mysticism of childhood in the poetry of William Blake.

While both Vaughan and Traherne synthesize nature mysticism with Early Modern “science,” they do so in very different ways. Each presents an individuated and alternative approach to spirituality in an age which was increasingly becoming more reliant on systematized and regulated approaches to knowledge and religion. Thus, they provide counters to the speculative and ratiocinating forms of worship which were becoming ever more dominant during this period.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Are mystics dangerous as Robert Burton suggested in 1621, when he published his *Anatomy of Melancholy*? Why invest so much time and effort into creating a voluminous polemic against them if they were not perceived as a very real threat? To whom would they be dangerous and why? The literary evidence, when viewed within its historical context, repeatedly suggests that mystics and mysticism were perceived as dangerous by anyone who had an interest in the control of access to God. Indeed, they would by their very nature be inimical to this objective.

Mystics are people who have experienced phenomena which they genuinely believe to be either direct or intuitive encounters with the Divine. Regardless of the century into which they are born, they seem to share certain traits in common. First and foremost, Christian mystics are drawn to seek God and are not satisfied merely with knowledge about God. Because of this yearning for contact with the Divine, they are intrinsically motivated, spiritually committed individuals. However, they may not be committed to any particular religious institution. Some, like John Bunyan, strive diligently to understand their experiences within the context of the teachings of their churches and denominations. Others, like George Fox cannot find a way to reconcile the two. Thus mystics can be seen as challenging the boundaries of established religious authority, a perception which could and did arouse fear and suspicion in an era of ever stricter religious control and regulation.

In addition, mystics in general report being spiritually transformed by their experience of the Divine. They become intensely aware of the darker sides of their own natures and of their inability to shed those negative aspects of themselves. Thus, they come to welcome the intervention of the Divine whom, they believe, is able and willing to do what they themselves cannot. Such moments of intervention are brief but life-changing, creating an impulse toward virtue and increasing the strength of those traits such as compassion and joy which are known as the fruit of the Spirit. Mystics who have experienced this kind of transformation may then feel compelled to help others to seek such an experience for themselves. For instance, Robert Southwell and Richard Crashaw use ecstatic imagery to create liminal spaces in their poetry, inviting readers to enter and seek spiritual renewal, while Augustine Baker and Benet of Canfield write mystagogical manuals for the purpose of guiding people as they progress along this path. Jane Ward Lead even goes so far as to found a religious society aimed at encouraging individuals to seek such spiritual transformation and grow in compassion for others.

However, while their stated intentions may have been benevolent, the reactions from their contemporaries varied widely from acceptance to total rejection. Both Baker and Benet were forced to defend their mystagogical manuals against accusations of teaching unorthodox and heretical doctrines and of seeking to undermine established church authority. In the years following Benet's death, practitioners of his teachings on internal prayer were even brought up on charges of witchcraft. As for Jane Ward Lead, while her visionary writings were highly respected by Boehmists in England and on the continent, she faced accusations of mental instability from others who believed the source of her visions to be more humoral than holy.

Mysticism still carries the stigmas attached to it via such accusations of mental illness, heretical doctrines, and counterfeit approaches to Christianity. In addition, the common perception is that individuals who experience mystical phenomena are relatively rare, yet recent

studies in religious psychology suggest that as much as one third of the population of first-world, English-speaking nations such as England and the United States have had experiences which the researchers classify as either numinous and/or mystical. If these studies of modern populations can be applied to the past, then these types of phenomena may not have been as rare as previously thought.

In fact, within the Roman Catholic Church there is a longstanding mystical tradition designed to help recipients of such phenomena to understand them better, interpreting their source and meaning and providing guidance for spiritual progress—as well as stern sanctions for heresy. However, English Protestants of the Early Modern period were generally very suspicious of Catholic traditions, fearing them to be merely superstitious and heretical themselves. Therefore, Protestants during this period who experienced numinous and mystical phenomena were often very startled and completely unprepared for them. Alarmed and unsure how to interpret the experience, such Protestants may at first have been hesitant to discuss with others the details of their encounters, fearing the response; nevertheless, they were compelled to understand them. Baker, Benet, Bunyan, Fox, and Lead all recorded their first numinous encounters and how they reacted to them. All eventually broke the silence and sought for answers, each in a slightly different place. Some turned to the Roman Catholic Church and its mystical tradition, some searched the scriptures on their own, others asked the advice of church elders. All of them felt compelled to write, exploring the meaning of their encounters through a variety of genres: mystagogical treatises, conversion narratives, spiritual autobiographies, allegories, devotional diaries, and poetry. Their writings, as well as the experiences which prompted them have stirred controversies through the years regarding mysticism and the validity of intuitive approaches to spirituality.

Once again the problem is the control of access to God, and the accusations during the Early Modern Period came from four different directions: religious, political, epistemological, and scientific. Religious authorities suspected mystics of claiming direct access to God in order to bypass priestly intermediaries and undermine clerical authority. They also suspected mystics of manufacturing visions and prophetic revelations in order to promote their own agendas while claiming Divine sanction. They associated mysticism with enthusiasm and blamed it for promoting religious schisms. Augustine Baker and Benet of Canfield both found themselves drawn into such controversy. The two men had individually converted to Catholicism, joined monastic orders and studied the mystical traditions of the Church to help them understand personal experiences which they believed to have been initiated by the Divine. Both then drew upon their Protestant training as lawyers to organize these mystagogical materials, clarify their concepts, and translate them into the vernacular. The result was the composition of manuals designed to allow ease of access to information which had been carefully controlled in the past. Their books proved to be very popular, and pirated copies of Benet's work were published in England, speaking to the thirst for such materials among members of the population.

However, Catholic Church officials were concerned about the dangers of allowing laypersons access to this information. They feared that people would misunderstand it and misuse it without the proper training and that they would interpret mystical teachings as a way of approaching the Divine directly without the benefit of clergy. Thus, they saw ease of access to mystical materials as leading to the undermining of church authority and providing dissenters with justifications for their reforms and frenzies. As controlling such information now seemed to some to be in the Church's best interest, both Benet and Baker had to defend themselves and their texts against charges of heresy and unorthodox teaching. Those who followed their teachings found themselves accused of demonic deception and occult practices. Such charges also brought

with them suspicions of sexual misbehavior as witchcraft was associated with illicit sexual acts and perversions. These accusations highlight the insecurities of some religious officials concerned with controlling and consolidating power within their institutions via controlling access to God. These suspicions and insecurities, in turn, led to attempts at more stringent control.

The Roman Catholic Church was not the only one to attempt to control who could approach the Divine and how. The Church of England also had a stake in such matters. Struggles between High Church and Low Church centered on appropriate methods of approaching God in worship. Disputes about the episcopacy, the vestments, the sacraments, the decoration of the church, the *Book of Common Prayer*, are but a few that would inspire vitriolic polemics. High Church adherents believed that members of the Low Church wanted to go too far in their reforms while the Low Church believed the High Church did not go far enough. Numerous nonconformist factions developed in an attempt to reform the Church from the inside and some dissatisfied with the slow pace of such reforms attempted to break away entirely. In an attempt to control the chaos, the Church of England employed ever stricter controls, mandating the acceptable ways in which Anglicans were to approach to worship and imposing ever harsher penalties for those who refused to comply. The controls were inevitably met with resistance, resulting in struggle and conflict between Conformists and Nonconformists, Laudians and Puritans, Royalists and Parliamentarians.

The irony was, that while Protestantism, in general, claimed to encourage believers to seek a close, personal relationship with the Divine, the various approaches to Protestantism limited the acceptable ways through which that relationship could be approached. For instance, some taught that the time of prophecy was ended. The Scriptures were complete, so God had no further need to communicate with His people outside of the Bible and prayer. This emphasis on *sola scriptura* meant that in developing a personal relationship with the Divine, the believer could

read about God and pray to God, but should not expect any response back from God except a pang of conscience, an illumination of Scripture, or an answer to prayer which did not involve direct communication. As numinous and mystical encounters fell outside of these accepted approaches, young Protestants who experienced them were completely unprepared. Their initial reactions, as described in their writings, involved surprise, confusion, doubt, and fear. They were not expecting such phenomena, they did not understand the source or meaning, they doubted themselves, and feared the response of their families and communities.

Mystics such as John Bunyan, who refuse to look for answers outside of the teachings of their own faith communities face a difficult challenge. Bunyan has to adapt the religious vocabulary of Puritanism to describe, define, interpret, and legitimize his experiences. In doing so, he is able to allay the fears and suspicions of not only his fellow Puritans but also himself as to the source and reason for these spiritual manifestations. The spiritual transformation within Bunyan himself, which is spurred by his encounters with the Divine, strengthens his resolve to preach even though he is not licensed. This puts him in open conflict with religious authorities in the Church of England. So, even though Bunyan is able to find a workable synthesis of his mystical experiences and Puritan faith, he is not able to do so within the context of the tensions between Conformists and Nonconformists within the larger Church of England. He is eventually arrested and jailed by those with a vested interest in limiting through licensure those who may approach God through the ministry. In another ironic twist, in attempting to stop Bunyan's unauthorized teaching and preaching, they give him the opportunity to pen *Grace Abounding* and *Pilgrim's Progress*, both of which have had a major impact on Protestant Christianity.

Other mystics such as Fox, who are willing to seek answers outside of the teachings of their own faith communities, may find themselves moving from church to church and denomination to denomination in their search. Fox visits both Conformists and Nonconformists;

however, none of them has any established teachings on mysticism; therefore, none of the priests or ministers he consults can help him. With no mystical tradition to consult, these men of God suspect his experiences to arise from medical rather than mystical causes; thus they advise him to seek contemporary medical treatments for his symptoms. Their lack of understanding and their assumptions both function to limit what they perceive as accepted ways of approaching God. Numinous and mystical phenomena are relegated to symptoms of disease rather than legitimate, intuitive approaches to spirituality.

When Fox decides to trust that God is indeed communicating directly with Him through these phenomena, his friends and family are concerned because that kind of approach to spirituality lies outside of the safe boundaries of the teachings of *sola scriptura*. Once he is able to cross that line, Fox is then able to reject many other limitations imposed on English protestants as a means of regulating their spirituality and controlling their access to God through what the religious authorities consider to be legitimate means of worship. Fox levels a good number of these: He rejects the need for university-trained clergy. He rejects the need for any man-made religious hierarchy and promotes the biblical concept of the priesthood of all believers. He rejects the need for church buildings and teaches that the temple where Christ dwells is the heart of the believer. He rejects the idea of any need for a mediator between humanity and God except for Christ, and he rejects the idea that God no longer communicates with the faithful in whom he is supposed to dwell. Based on his own numinous and mystical experiences, Fox believes that Christ does speak to His people, teaching them and guiding them as they grow spiritually. The strength of this belief allows him to reject much of what contemporary, institutional Christianity holds to be necessarily and divinely sanctioned. It also allows him to convince others to follow him in this rejection.

Another logical conclusion Fox draws from his interpretation of mystical phenomena is that if both men and women are indwelt by Christ who teaches and guides them from inside their own souls, then both men and women have equal access to prophetic insight and should therefore be allowed equal opportunity to express those prophetic insights with their fellow believers. Fox's mysticism, therefore, prompts him to encourage women's voices in an arena traditionally denied them. The result is the voicing of a feminine perspective on the turbulent religious and political changes of the seventeenth-century and a potential for equalizing the previously strictly patriarchal hierarchy within contemporary Protestant Christianity. Fox's interpretation of his mystical encounters opens a possibility for greater gender equality within the spiritual community of the Friends if not England at large.

As the leader of Philadelphian Society, Lead faced the gender pressures of her time seeking to silence the voices of women in the church. Lead's visions and prophetic revelations thrust her to the forefront of this controversy, and her interpretation of the mystical phenomena she experienced provided a counterbalance to the patriarchal nature of Protestant ideology. Through her emphasis on Sophia, she explores the feminine qualities hidden within the divine attributes and interprets spiritual espousal in a much more pragmatic way than many of the mystics who had preceded her.

Like Fox she is dismissed by some as suffering from an illness which causes her to see hallucination or have delusions which she interprets as visions and prophetic insights. By assigning the source of her mysticism to mental instability, these people attempt to silence her voice and undermine her authority, limiting acceptable approaches to God to those which do not involve mystical phenomena and do not use a woman as a mouth-piece for revealing prophetic insights.

Although Lead did not have any interest in causing religious schism or political upheaval, she found herself accused of such by those who objected to her millennialism and belief in universal salvation. Because religion and politics were so intricately intertwined in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the two are difficult to separate. The one informs the other. Millennialism had fueled much of the conflict during the English Civil Wars. Parliamentary forces believed that they were soldiers of God, battling the armies of the Anti-Christ and striving to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth and prepare for the Second Coming of Christ. Lead's visions led her to reject this type of post-millennialism in favor of a pre-millennialism which promoted the idea of a much less violent conversion to the millennial kingdom. Instead of teaching that the Kingdom of God had to be brought about by an exterior change in political authority, Lead taught that the necessary change was to occur within the hearts of those already in authority. The monarchs and nobles did not need to fear losing their power at the advent of the millennial kingdom.

The overthrow of the monarchy and the beheading of the king, which had occurred during the Civil Wars and which had been approved by the post-millennial fervor of many Parliamentarians, had made the Restoration government wary of religious zeal and millennial teachings. However, Lead sought to ease their suspicions. She interpreted her visions as meaning that the kingdoms of those whose authority was divinely sanctioned by God would continue into the millennial kingdom and that the monarchs in power at that time would remain in power. God would change their hearts, not their government. In this way, Lead countered the prevailing idea associating mysticism with enthusiasm and hence with religious schism and rebellion. She did not promote violent religious or political change; instead, she encouraged universal love which she again based on an interpretation of her visions believing God showed compassion on all, believers and non-believers, Protestants and Catholics, Conformists and Non-conformists.

The reasons behind political attacks on mysticism at the end of the seventeenth century were essentially the same as those which had prompted such attacks during fifteen and sixteenth centuries as well. During the Reformation, Protestant countries had broken away from the control of the Roman Catholic Church. During this time of religious and political upheaval, some self-proclaimed prophets and visionaries led violent rebellions on the continent in the name of further Church reform. Because they claimed their visions and revelations gave them divine sanction for their actions, such numinous experiences became associated in the popular imagination with religious zealots and enthusiasm. Since mystics also claimed to experience such phenomena, they also were suspected instigating schism and rebellion. By discouraging religious zeal and enthusiasm, and limiting the accepted ways of approaching God to those authorized by the church under the monarch, the English government attempted to prevent schisms and rebellions such as had occurred on the continent.

It was the religious zeal of the poet-priest Robert Southwell which directly led to his arrest and execution during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. As a young adult Southwell had been educated on the continent by Jesuits with strong connections to mysticism, and his own mystical leanings were apparent in his poetry. Joining the Jesuit order, he longed to return to England as a missionary. Just before his arrival, another Jesuit, John Ballard, was arrested for his part in the Babington Plot to assassinate the Queen and replace her with the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots. Ballard was hanged, drawn, and quartered, and all other Jesuit priests were ordered to leave England or face the same consequences as traitors to the Crown. In his zeal, Southwell refused to go. There is little evidence that he ever actively participated in any plot against the Queen; however, when he was caught, he was judged guilty of treason simply by being a Jesuit priest on English soil, and he faced the full consequences of that sentence.

Southwell's spirituality had led him to try to help his fellow Catholics in the land of his birth. His poetry expresses his deep love of God and his desire to reform English poetry to the service of the divine. After his execution, his poems were stripped by Protestant editors of all of their references to Catholicism; however, the references to mysticism were allowed to remain. The ecstatic vision of "The Burning Babe" presented a mystical experience as a liminal space, inviting readers to enter and be spiritually transformed. It invited people to seek a direct, personal approach to spirituality and to experience the intense love of God for His people. Southwell's impassioned plea for English poets to devote themselves to the service of this love, influenced the next generation of devotional poets. So, although Southwell himself was not Protestant, through the mystical elements in his poetry he helped to transform the trajectory of English Protestant poetry in the decades following his death.

This complicated mix of religion and politics affected Richard Crashaw as well. Although he was raised Puritan, with its plain and simple approach to worship, Crashaw gravitated toward the more contemplative approach to spirituality practiced at Little Gidding and the sensory-rich beauty of the Laudian church he attended at Cambridge. He was particularly fascinated with the ecstatic experiences of St. Teresa of Avila who had recently been canonized. His own poetry shows the influence of Teresian mysticism as well as of Ignatian methods of contemplation, both presented with the rich sensuousness of the Baroque style which was popular on the continent at the time. Like Southwell, Crashaw incorporates elements of mysticism in his poetry purposefully creating liminal spaces for his readers to enter and be spiritually transformed. His Teresian poems attempt to re-create the experience of transverberation and religious ecstasy as experienced by the saint, inviting the reader to share the intense love of God which Teresa feels and to be carried with her into the experience of Divine union.

When the political and religious struggles between the Puritans and Archbishop William Laud resulted in Laud's arrest and execution for high treason, a Puritan commission was sent to Cambridge to eliminate all Laudian influences throughout the University. Because Crashaw was attracted to High Church practices and Catholic contemplation, his religious sympathies implicated him in the political struggle which was taking place around him. Fearing for his life in this new political climate, Crashaw fled, first seeking refuge with the king at Oxford, then travelling to the continent where he eventually converted to Roman Catholicism. Like Southwell, Crashaw was not actively involved in subversive political plots; however, he was endangered by the political climate of his time which censured Catholicism and any approach to Protestantism which seemed to be sympathetic with Catholicism. In other words, his love of Catholic forms of contemplation and mysticism make him an enemy of the State whether or not he was personally involved with politics. The attacks drove him from his home and from his nation, but not from his love of intuitive approaches to spirituality.

In an era of Civil War, regicide, and radical reformation, Henry Vaughan and John Bunyan at first appear to have very little in common. Vaughan was a Royalist and a Laudian, fighting for his king, Charles I. In contrast, John Bunyan was a Parliamentarian and a Puritan, fighting for the Commonwealth. However, both experience a "conversion" through which they are drawn to seek lives which are more deliberately spiritual. They are also both prompted to write about their experiences. Vaughan does so through his poetry while Bunyan does so through his spiritual autobiography. As they are composing their works, both men are very well aware of the aggressive polemics and propaganda by which both Royalists and Parliamentarians viciously and tenaciously attack each other. Each side reads the publications of the other aggressively looking for any hints of heresy and political dissent.

In response, when Vaughan switches from composing cavalier to devotional poetry, he distances himself from suspicions of “enthusiasm” by creating a simulacrum through which to explore the meaning and significance of the numinous and mystical phenomena which fill his poetry. Vaughan sees the Civil Wars and the social ills of his time as manifestations of spiritual disease and presents mysticism as a means by which to heal the deep social and spiritual wounds of his people.

Bunyan also distances himself from suspicions of enthusiasm; however, he does so by interpreting the mystical elements of his conversion through the lens of Puritanism, legitimizing them through his emphasis on Scriptural illumination. Bunyan also creates a type of simulacrum in the form of the allegorical figure Christian, who must face much of what Bunyan himself faces in his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding*. Like Vaughan, Bunyan writes for the edification of his fellow Christians; however, he is less hesitant to enter into the polemical debates of his time. He is unapologetically Puritan even during the Restoration. Bunyan’s mystical experiences strengthen him spiritually, propelling him into a career as a lay-preacher which in turn puts him in direct opposition to the Clarendon Code as passed by the Restoration government under King Charles II. The purpose of the code is to deny nonconformists access to forms of power by promising that power only to those who conform to officially sanctioned methods of worship. The result is Bunyan’s long-term incarceration.

Although Bunyan was not afraid to stand against what he believed to be heresy in the Church of England, he had no intention of inciting another violent overthrow of the government. Nevertheless, the recent political and religious upheavals in England had only served to reinforce the associations between mysticism, enthusiasm, and schism in the popular imagination. Mystics like Bunyan, Vaughan, Crashaw, and Southwell found themselves faced with the suspicions and denunciations of those with political reasons for regulating which approaches to worship were

and were not acceptable. The inevitable result of such control was the persecution of those who did not conform.

Just as religion and politics were intimately bound together at this time, so were epistemology and science. Since the advent of the Renaissance, the ways of defining knowledge and of justifying belief had been changing. With the rediscovery of the Greek philosophers came the development of a humanism which exalted in man's capabilities and achievements, among these being his ability to think and reason. Humanist scholars studied the ancient classics in their original languages and appraised them through reasoning and empirical evidence rather than focusing on resolving contradictions as the medieval scholastics had done. Humanists emphasized observation and inductive reasoning and were willing to question previously held beliefs. They began to re-examine the New Testament and the relationship between God and man. In doing so, some came to suspect long-established traditions of being based more on heresy and superstition than the truth. Such a willingness to question the foundations of belief set the stage for the Reformation and its rejection of what the reformers considered to be the false doctrines and questionable practices of the Roman Catholic clergy. One of the areas of faith that was called into question was mysticism.

As an intuitive approach to spirituality, mysticism defies not only religious authority but also empirical perception and inductive reasoning. The presence of God, which is felt intensely by the mystic, cannot be witnessed or measured by outside observers except through the physical and emotional responses of the mystics. Nor can the claims of the resulting spiritual transformations be immediately weighed and measured. In addition, since mystics cannot initiate the numinous phenomena associated with mysticism, these phenomena cannot be easily investigated through methodical, inductive experimentation. Therefore, what the mystic claims to experience is difficult to validate through Cartesian or Baconian methods.

Moreover, mysticism seems to reject humanism's exaltation of man. Rather than elevating the human reason, it recognizes the inability of a limited, mortal mind to comprehend an omniscient and eternal one. It also rejects the carnal will with all its desires for knowledge, fame, power, and material wealth. When man and his desires become the measure of all things, he becomes limited and bound by those desires; his will becomes a gilded cage. The paradox of mysticism is that it advocates annihilating the self-will and its desires in order to be free of its chains and attain true liberty of the spirit.

As a mystic, Thomas Traherne embraces the redeemed potentialities of humanity and rejoices in its restored inheritance which encompasses all of Creation. His mystical humanism rejects the idea of total depravity which dominated Calvinistic theology. Instead he is awestruck by the wonder of God's love and teaches that by learning to love and accept themselves, people can develop unity with others and find Felicity with God, his term for Divine union. His optimistic mysticism presents a "vision splendid" which is one of his contributions to English mystical poetry.

Traherne synthesizes this approach to humanism with Platonism, alchemical symbolism, and Hermetic medicine, overlapping religion and "science," orthodoxy and heterodoxy. In doing so, he attempts to validate his intuitive approach to spirituality by drawing upon contemporary popular sciences which were more favorable to mysticism than Baconian methodology. Hermeticism and alchemy rely heavily on observation and experimentation but also emphasize the necessity of divine inspiration and illumination in the process of discovery and the understanding of creation. Nature mysticism is a particularly good fit because of its awareness of the presence of God in the natural world and its perception of correspondences between natural phenomena and spiritual truths.

Thomas Traherne is just such a nature mystic as is Henry Vaughan. Both men use these more esoteric sciences to explore the meaning and significance of their mystical encounters. However unlike Traherne, Vaughan does not synthesize Hermeticism with traditional mystical teachings. Instead, he relies completely on “science” to provide his answers. In this way, he works to legitimize mysticism in a climate which was increasingly more reliant on systematized and regulated approaches to knowledge.

Tensions continued to grow between intuitive approaches to devotion and those which were more speculative and ratiocinating. Natural theology and empirical, inductive science came to see mysticism as irrational and superstitious, and encouraged a distrust of this approach to spirituality. Nevertheless, the popularity and influence of mystical writers suggests that they spoke to a need within their contemporary audience. Even as speculative approaches to worship grew in dominance, a portion of the people still thirsted for a deep, affective relationship with the divine and purely ratiocinating forms of worship left them feeling dry and unfulfilled. Mystical writers offered a way to quench that spiritual thirst.

Protestant mystics have been accused of “enthusiasm” and of fomenting rebellions against established authority, of heretical doctrine, of vanity and of self-promotion, of superstition and of occult practices, of religious melancholia and of madness. Nevertheless, mystics and mysticism did not die out under these pressures during the Early Modern period. On the contrary they continued to thrive and grow, adapting to a variety of needs and circumstances. Those who experienced what they genuinely believed to be either direct or intuitive encounters with God not only had the task of trying to understand the source and meaning of their experiences but also of navigating the fears and suspicions of their fellow Protestants. Some turned to the mystical teachings of the Catholic Church for answers. Others, who were either unwilling or unable to access these traditions, adapted mysticism within the context of their own denominations and

approaches to spirituality. Their individuated responses to their experience of mystical phenomena inevitably led to a variety of interpretations, all influenced by Protestantism. Their writings reveal these influences and the ways in which these author-mystics, in turn, influenced their contemporaries. Examining these mystical writings within the context of the authors' lives and of the decades in which they were written helps to illuminate the various contributions made by mystics to religion, literature, and social reform in Early Modern England.

Examining these contributions opens a neglected area of research in literary studies and provides insights into the various ways in which Early Modern Protestant mystics came to terms with their experiences by interpreting them within the context of their lives and the various familial, communal, and national pressures to which they were subject. Their responses, recorded in their writings, provide a window into a period of time during which mysticism began to grow into the myriad forms in which it appears today.

The *Anatomy of Joy* provides a broad overview of the many different ways in which Protestantism influenced mysticism and vice versa. However, much work remains to be done. For example, because of time and space requirements, only a handful of the many author-mystics of the period could be examined in this work. Many remain, including a large number of women mystics. A great deal of work already has been done on the Quakers and on those women who attempt to combine mysticism and politics or who have connections with proto-feminism. However, the contributions of other Protestant female mystics have yet to be examined. Neither have the contributions of male mystics who were actively involved in politics such as the Cambridge Platonists, John Smith and Peter Sterry. In addition, an in-depth look at the mystical manual of Francis Rous, the Provost of Eton and one of Cromwell's councilors of state, would help to shed light on the interesting interplay between Puritanism and mysticism during the Interregnum. Such projects and others would open avenues by which the literary, religious,

political, and social contributions of mystics during the Early Modern period can be examined in the context of their times, increasing understanding of the complex interplay between mysticism and the forces which sought to control it.

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