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DURHAM UNIVERSITY

SOUL RECREATION:
SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE AND RAVISHMENT IN THE CONTEMPLATIVE-
MYSTICAL PIETY OF ISAAC AMBROSE

TOM SCHWANDA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN TOTAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS
OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR PHILOSOPHY
DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGION

NOVEMBER 2009

ABSTRACT

Tom Schwanda

Soul Recreation: Spiritual Marriage and Ravishment in the Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Isaac Ambrose

This thesis examines the theology and piety of Isaac Ambrose (1604-1664), a moderate Lancashire Puritan minister. More specifically it raises the question about the nature of his spiritual practices and whether they reflect what Bernard McGinn calls the “mystical element” of Christianity? This research is distinctive since Ambrose has never been the primary focus of research. There are six chapters to this thesis.

Chapter 1 examines the definition of three key terms: “mysticism”, “Puritanism”, and “Puritan mysticism” and then substitutes “contemplative-mystical piety” for McGinn’s mystical element since this language is more familiar to the Reformed community. A review of the literature reveals the prevalence of contemplative-mystical piety within mainstream Puritanism. Chapter 2 explores the biblical and theological foundations of union with Christ, which the Puritans often called spiritual marriage. Contrary to common perception, the Puritans encouraged intimacy and sexual enjoyment in their godly marriage that they often perceived as a reciprocal relationship with their spiritual marriage. The third chapter creates a contemplative biography of Ambrose through his diary entries and examines his relationship with God and his neighbor through his annual retreats, the struggles of his soul, serving as a physician of the soul, times of public fasting and worship, and the significance of specific places or environment to his piety. Chapter 4 narrows the focus to Ambrose’s teaching on meditation and contemplation. The influence of Bernard of Clairvaux is clearly evident as Ambrose contemplatively looks at Jesus throughout all the manifestations of Jesus’ life. The fifth chapter considers Ambrose’s use of ravishment and examines the nature, dynamics and benefits of this ambiguous term of delight and enjoyment. The final chapter moves from the seventeenth-century to the present and inquires whether Ambrose’s contemplative-mystical piety can guide contemporary Reformed Christians. That requires an examination into the resistance of Karl Barth as well as the more receptive possibility of retrieval through Herman Bavinck. This work concludes with seven principles from Ambrose to encourage those who are members of the Reformed tradition.

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DECLARATION

“No part of this thesis has previously been submitted by me for a degree in this or in any other University. Material from the work of others has been acknowledged and quotations and paraphrases suitably indicated.”

“The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published in any format, including electronic and the Internet, without the author’s prior written consent. All information derived from this thesis must be acknowledged appropriately”.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Schwanda". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Tom Schwanda

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The creation of a thesis requires a journey that involves many people. While it is impossible to recognize every individual that has contributed to this research there are a number of significant people that I would like to acknowledge. First, I am most grateful for my wife, Grace Schwanda, who faithfully supported and consistently encouraged me during the years of this research that often reduced our time together. I also thank my family and friends who encouraged me during this process. Second, I acknowledge Philip Sheldrake who has wisely guided this research. Professor Sheldrake has always provided a depth of knowledge and insight and valuable questions and feedback that have expanded my understanding and greatly improved the quality of this work. However, any errors that remain are my responsibility. Gary Sattler, my teaching partner in the Fuller Theological Seminary Doctor of Ministry Cohort in Christian Spirituality, has also been a constant source of academic insight, encouragement, and support.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CD</i>	Karl Barth, <i>Church Dogmatics</i>
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>SCC</i>	Bernard of Clairvaux, <i>Sermo super cantica canticorum</i> (Sermons on the Song of Songs)

INTRODUCTION

The questions that prompted this research originally arose out of Christian ministry. At that time the author was a pastor and recognized how some people, whether fellow clergy or laity, who became interested in the spiritual life often felt frustrated by the lack of resources, especially within the Reformed and Evangelical tradition. Rather than examine the historical roots of their heritage they tended to explore and embrace the richness of writings and methods of prayer of the Roman Catholic tradition. On the one hand, this is both wise and necessary as will be clearly demonstrated in this present study. Further, if any one is interested in ecumenical dialogue it is essential that he or she have a significant background in other expressions of Christianity. However, on the other hand, if a person does not consider his or her own spiritual roots it is likely to create an impoverished spirituality since that person is unaware of the resources that first enriched and guided that tradition. A conviction that has long inspired my research in the study of the history of Christian spirituality is that if you examine any tradition in detail you will discover the full spectrum of both the strengths and weaknesses of the broader history of the Church. Therefore, the historical question of what can the Reformed tradition contribute to the study of Christian spirituality became the basis for this research.

Since those early days I have become a professor and now have the opportunity of training students for Christian ministry. This combines the importance of discovering the context and wisdom of the past as well as seeking to enable contemporary pilgrims to learn from the Communion of Saints. While the majority of this research is historical and theological it concludes in the final chapter by asking

the pastoral question of how the forgotten or neglected treasures of Puritan piety can speak to the contemporary Church, and in particular those of the Reformed tradition. Additionally, it is important to establish a few style and format issues that will guide the reading of this thesis.

Isaac Ambrose (1604-1664), a Lancashire Puritan minister, known for his practical and devotional writings is the subject of this study. In some cases Ambrose produced various editions of the same work. *Prima* and *Ultima* were published in numerous versions with some minor expansion as well as contraction, whereas *Media*, was released in three different editions that varied significantly. Since these three works appeared in numerous editions or versions a specific date will always be given in all references. *Looking Unto Jesus* first issued in 1658 was later combined with the *War with Devils* and *Communion with Angels* without any alteration of text. Whilst the 1658 version of *Looking Unto Jesus* was the standard edition it will be treated as *War with Devils*, *Communion with Angels*, and *Redeeming the Time* which were issued only once during Ambrose's life and therefore do not require a date.

This thesis employs many documents from the seventeenth-century. Spelling had not yet been standardized and it was often common to italicize various phrases or entire sentences. All spellings in this thesis reflect those of the original documents and all italicized words of both primary and secondary sources appear in the originals.

Unless otherwise indicated all quotations from the Bible are from the *Authorized Version* (1611).

Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. has established the style and format of this thesis. In particular, the “Short Form for Notes” (16.4.1) has been used. One of the primary reasons for employing this shortened form was due to the numerous and lengthy footnotes that guide the reader through this research. The shortened form reduces some of the possible bulkiness of references without sacrificing accuracy in identifying sources. Every effort was made to select the most descriptive title for shortened references. Further, the bibliography provides the standard detailed description for every reference in this thesis.

No dissertation can accomplish everything and along the way a number of interesting topics arose that simply could not be examined in any great depth. There are at least two future ideas for additional research that builds on and extends from this thesis. First, it would be fascinating to make a detailed study and comparison between Isaac Ambrose and Francis Rous (1579-1659), Member of Parliament and devotional writer. How similar and dissimilar were they in their contemplative-mystical piety? Second, the importance of heavenly meditation as an expression of contemplation was mentioned in chapter 4. Further research across a broader cross section of Puritans would be valuable to determine if there were variations or different expressions within this critical aspect of Puritan piety.



J. Miller. Pinx. sculp.

Rev. Isaac Ambrose.

Chapter 1

Introduction to Puritan Mysticism

Isaac Ambrose was “[o]f a retiring disposition, his mind of the contemplative order, he was in true sense a religious mystic.”¹

Was Isaac Ambrose a Puritan mystic and can the contemporary Church retrieve any wisdom from his writings? These two questions will shape the substance and structure of this thesis. Ambrose was a moderate seventeenth-century Lancashire Puritan minister whom Benjamin Nightingale, in the words at the top of this page, called a “religious mystic.” Therefore, the primary question of this thesis is whether it is in fact legitimate to call Isaac Ambrose a Puritan mystic. This will require a study of the nature of Puritan mysticism examining both the theological foundation as well as historical antecedents for it. Many readers may find the juxtaposition of the terms Puritanism and mysticism not only paradoxical but also improbable. All too often the perception of many regarding the Puritans is that they were hardheaded and cold hearted. They are seen as spiritually cold, legalistic, eschewing all forms of fun, sexually pinched, and devoid of passion. While much scholarship has sought to defend this position more recently some writers have begun to correct what I believe to be a distorted perception. Jean Williams’ recent research has been most significant in debunking the myth of Puritan mysticism. This chapter will examine her research in greater detail, but for now it is important to summarize her findings. Unlike some previous researchers who acknowledged the possibility of mysticism on the fringes or as an oddity within mainstream Puritanism, Williams

¹ Nightingale, *Isaac Ambrose, Religious Mystic*, 20.

argues persuasively “that mystics and mystically-inclined individuals naturally grew out of the soil of moderate Puritanism: they were not hybrid off-shoots, but expected outgrowths of mainstream Puritan theology and devotion which itself had many mystical elements.”²

The secondary question of this thesis is the practical issue of retrieval that lies behind the historical-theological question. Does Isaac Ambrose have any wisdom to teach the contemporary Reformed Church about piety and growing in deeper union and communion with God? In that sense, this thesis is an exercise in practical theology as much as it is in historical theology. The term “Reformed” is used in its broader theological context to describe the descendants of John Calvin rather than limiting it to a cluster of specific denominations. Therefore, it may occasionally be linked with the term “evangelical” to signify those from outside Reformed Churches who practice a Reformed theology and spiritual life. In recent years numerous Reformed Christians who were formed by a strong cognitive emphasis have been leaving their Churches and searching for deeper and more experiential relationships of faith. The reality is that some Reformed Christians are weaker and less effective in their ministries because of ignorance or resistance to contemplative spirituality. Further, the Reformed tradition has much to learn from her earlier Catholic roots. In the following chapters it will become evident that many Reformed writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries were willing to embrace and even strongly endorse medieval sources from the Western Catholic Church, not limited to but especially those of Bernard of Clairvaux. Chapter 4 will explore the continuities between the Western Catholic and Reformed uses of contemplation while the

² Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 9.

complex matter of sorting out the reasons for this decline in continuity will be examined in chapter 6 when the important question of contemporary retrieval will be raised.

It is appropriate to say a few words about the selection of Isaac Ambrose as the subject of this thesis. First, and most importantly from a research perspective no one has examined his life or theology in a sustained way or devoted a dissertation to him. Therefore, his writings provide a very fertile ground for examination. Further, he is representative of the moderate stream of Puritanism and displays a balanced and integrative dynamic of both the intellect and affect. This critical combination seems lacking today in many Reformed and Evangelical Churches. A third compelling factor is that while many of the writings of prominent Puritans of the seventeenth-century have been forgotten or are no longer being republished, Ambrose's writings are.³ The fact that he has stood the test of time warrants a closer examination of his theology and piety. For all of these reasons he is a wise selection for research.

This chapter will continue by examining three critical words that will shape this thesis. First is the nature and meaning of "mysticism." This term has challenged and frustrated many writers and readers over the past centuries and a summary of the key issues will be explored. The research of Bernard McGinn will be added to this debate providing greater clarity for the purposes of this study. Next a similar examination will be made of the term "Puritan" and "Puritanism". Originally this was a label of scorn foisted upon the Puritans by their enemies. Thirdly, a more detailed evaluation will be made regarding the possibility of "Puritan mysticism." Both the

³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*. Sprinkle Publications, 1986 and *The Christian Warrior* (contemporary title for *War with Devils*). Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1997.

academic detractors as well as defenders of this commonly perceived oxymoron will be considered. McGinn's insights from the earlier definition of mysticism will be applied to the study of Puritanism and examine what if any "mystical element" existed within Puritan piety. This triad of definitions will be followed by a review of the most salient writings on Puritan mysticism and Isaac Ambrose. The uniqueness of this thesis is that while Ambrose has appeared in both journals and dissertations he has never been the primary focus. Before examining the critical topic of hermeneutics a review of the sources of Ambrose's writings will be included. While the historiography of Puritanism rarely explores the methodology of interpreting these early texts this particular thesis is framed by the modern academic discipline of Christian spirituality in which considerable scholarship has been devoted to the reading of ancient texts. After establishing the hermeneutical methodology and methods that will guide this thesis the chapter will conclude with a detailed summary of the themes of the remaining five chapters.

Defining Mysticism

The problematic nature of mysticism has occupied scholars for generations yielding little clarity and consensus.⁴ Further, embarking upon this pilgrimage it must be asserted that Isaac Ambrose and his fellow Puritans of the seventeenth-century would not have employed this term nor had the ability to understand the nature of it. However, that would be no different for Western and Roman Catholic mystics who would more readily warrant this label. McGinn remarks "[n]o mystics (at least before the present century) believed in or practiced mysticism. They believed in and

⁴ For a helpful introduction to mysticism see Wiseman, "Mysticism." s.v.; McGinn, "Mysticism." s.v.; Turner, "Mysticism." s.v.; Perrin, "Mysticism." *Blackwell Companion*; and Tamburello, *Ordinary Mysticism*.

practiced Christianity.”⁵ According to Michel de Certeau, “mysticism” as a noun first appeared in early seventeenth-century France.⁶ The word mysticism did not enter the English language until the eighteenth-century.⁷ A review of four popular seventeenth-century dictionaries confirms this; however, the word “mystery” and “mystical” were already in common usage.⁸ Indeed the language of “mystical” and “mystically” was introduced by Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-ca. 215) already in the early third-century.⁹

William Inge concludes his study of mysticism with a sample of twenty-six definitions of “mysticism” and “mystical theology” and acknowledges that the list could have been greatly expanded.¹⁰ The difficulty of defining the nature of mysticism can be further illustrated by the assessment of the spiritual life of St. Thérèse of Lisieux by two prominent Roman Catholic theologians of the last century. On the one hand Louis Bouyer asserts that she was a mystic while Hans Urs von Balthasar maintains that she was not because she possessed no acquaintance with or desired the typical experiences associated with mysticism.¹¹ Therefore, Heiko Oberman’s reminder about the necessity for clarity is appropriate as he warns that an

⁵ McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 266-7. For a helpful summary of the development of the term “mysticism” see Bouyer, “Mysticism: Essay of the Word.” For a succinct summary of the history of spirituality that is strongly focused on mysticism see Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 40-64.

⁶ de Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 107, cf. 94-112. cf. Harmless, *Mystics*, 261-2.

⁷ The first entry for mysticism appears in 1736. *OED*, 10:176. However, the term mystical appeared as early as 1500 and mystic in 1382. *OED*, 10:175. Further the term mystery appeared in 1315. *OED*, 10:173. Of these terms, mystery was the only term that would have been used in Scripture (e.g. Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 15:51; Eph 5:32; Col 1:26; 1 Tm 3:16).

⁸ See Cawdrey, *Table Alphabetical*; Wilson, *Christian Dictionary*; Cockeram, *English Dictionarie*; Phillips, *New World of English Words*.

⁹ McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 102.

¹⁰ Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, 335-48.

¹¹ Wiseman, “Mysticism.” s.v., 682.

inaccurate understanding tends to “block access to mysticism.” This is especially true of Protestants whose distorted categories have produced an “understanding of mysticism [that] has also been prejudiced.”¹² Perhaps the most common misconception people associate with mysticism is that voiced by Dennis Tamburello, “[t]he problem in these discussions is that mysticism is assumed to mean a pantheistic absorption into God or merging of identities between the believer and God.”¹³ Unfortunately, this perception of mysticism is difficult to shed and many writers who address this from within Protestantism raise this as a primary concern. Friedrich Heiler, a convert from Roman Catholicism, is one person responsible for creating this distortion of a union of absorption.¹⁴ Significantly for the purposes of this thesis McGinn reminds his readers that if a “union of absorption” is used to define mysticism, then there “are actually so few mystics in the history of Christianity that one wonders why Christians used the qualifier “mystical” so often.”¹⁵ Further, Oberman articulates another common Protestant concern that mysticism is too closely associated with Roman Catholicism and marginalizes the usage of Scripture.¹⁶ However, Oberman clearly reveals his own position in concluding, “without Christian mysticism, there is no faithful and living Church to withstand the Hell of the Last Days.”¹⁷

¹² Oberman, “Meaning of Mysticism,” 80.

¹³ Tamburello, “John Calvin’s Mysticism,” 504. cf. Tamburello, *Union with Christ*, 21-2, 103.

¹⁴ Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, 89.

¹⁵ McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, xvi, cf. 83. McGinn clarifies the difference between the “union of identity” or “union of indistinction” that is partaking of the actual essence of God found in Meister Eckhart and some of the Beguines and the older teaching of the “loving union of wills” (1 Cor 6:17) found in Bernard. “Mysticism.” s.v., 3:119.

¹⁶ Oberman, “Meaning of Mysticism,” 80. cf. Nuttall, “Puritans and Quaker Mysticism,” 522 for additional Protestant suspicions of mysticism.

¹⁷ Oberman, “Meaning of Mysticism,” 90.

The combination of distorted perceptions among Protestants and Roman Catholics alike and the inability to find a consensus definition among scholars has raised the question of the validity of this term. Alister McGrath argues, “[t]he difficulty in using the term ‘mysticism’ to refer to what is now more widely known as ‘spirituality’ is that the term has so many unhelpful associations and misleading overtones that its continued use is problematic.”¹⁸ While McGrath is correct to recognize the problematic nature of the word mysticism, his solution of collapsing the term into spirituality continues to advance a similar misconception by implying that all expressions of spirituality are synonymous with mysticism. What McGrath fails to recognize is that typically mysticism is a more distinctive and carefully defined component of the more general term spirituality. Many expressions of spirituality do not reflect the depth of intimacy suggested by mysticism. Thus there has been an attempt to retrieve the term and its validity for use in speaking of one’s experience of God. Denys Turner also raises questions about the usage of mysticism; however, he affirms the positive value for “historical reconstruction” of the term.¹⁹ Accepting this premise, this thesis seeks to explore the validity of a “historical reconstruction” of mysticism within seventeenth-century Puritan piety.

Further, some scholars differentiate between two broad traditions of Christian mysticism. As with all generalizations there is a danger in pressing these distinctions too far, however, history has revealed a christocentric affective love mysticism that gives prominence to the *via positiva* which has its biblical foundation in St. Paul. This kataphatic approach is in stark contrast to the *via negativa* or apophatic way that

¹⁸ McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 6.

¹⁹ Turner “Mysticism.” s.v., 460-1.

tends to focus on the intellect and has its biblical origin in St. John.²⁰ However, the history of mysticism is far too complex and fluid to neatly fit into these tidy categories and it is important to remember the elasticity of these approaches to mysticism. John of the Cross, though strongly apophatic, had a deep appreciation for the more kataphatic Bernard of Clairvaux and his sermons on the Song of Songs. Further, while Pseudo-Dionysius is frequently mentioned as the founder of the apophatic school he also emphasized the kataphatic.²¹ Harvey Egan reminds readers that, “any genuine Christian mysticism must contain apophatic as well as kataphatic elements.”²² Therefore, while the Puritans displayed a strong affinity for Bernard that does not negate the reality of apophatic expressions of mysticism as Jean Williams’ research has demonstrated.²³

Among the most recent efforts towards a revised understanding of mysticism is the research of Bernard McGinn. While his magisterial study has not yet reached the seventeenth-century he provides an extremely valuable heuristic model for the study of Puritan mysticism.²⁴ Indeed McGinn offers great encouragement to Protestants and no doubt many others, as he summarizes two forms of mysticism. The first involves “some form of union of identity with God through purely contemplative practice, especially one that bypasses the mediatorial role of Christ and the place of scripture and the community.” McGinn quickly critiques this aberrant

²⁰ Turner, “Mysticism.” s.v., 460-461. cf. Oberman, “Meaning of Mysticism,” 81-5. Steven Ozment makes the same distinction but acknowledges it is a “gross contrast.” *Age of Reform*, 115-6.

²¹ McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 159.

²² Harvey Egan, “Christian Apophatic and Kataphatic Mysticism,” 405.

²³ Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 267-70, 393.

²⁴ McGinn is preparing a six volume series entitled *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*. To date the first four volumes, reaching the mid fifteenth-century, have been released.

form and asserts that this type of mysticism rarely existed in Christianity. The second form of “mysticism is [the] broader and more flexible sense argued for in this volume” that reflects “the existence of a mystical element.”²⁵ Therefore, rather than attempting to delineate a concise definition McGinn prefers to speak in broader terms. He draws upon Baron von Hügel’s research that recognized three dimensions to religion, the institutional, intellectual, and mystical.²⁶ Significantly von Hügel stressed the importance that these three elements must be kept in balance.²⁷ McGinn maintains, “the mystical element in Christianity is that part of its belief and practices that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God.”²⁸ Michael Downey agrees, “[t]he governing category for viewing the tradition of mysticism need not be solely that of union with God as is often assumed... Indeed, there is much to suggest that ‘presence’ rather than ‘union’ is the more appropriate category in interpreting the traditions of Christian spirituality.”²⁹ McGinn’s broad definition includes three main areas of concern, the mystical element of Christianity, the mystical process or way of life, and the mystical experience.³⁰ In his third volume he restates his understanding of mysticism, “[t]he mystical element within Christianity, as I have argued throughout this history, centers on a form of immediate encounter with God whose essential purpose is to convey a loving knowledge (even a negative one) that transforms the mystic’s mind and whole way of life.”³¹ McGinn’s understanding of mysticism is obviously more expansive than this and includes a nuanced perspective on the role of

²⁵ McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 65-6.

²⁶ von Hügel, *Mystical Element of Religion*, 1:9, 60-1.

²⁷ von Hügel, *Mystical Element of Religion*, 2:68-9, 387-92.

²⁸ McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, xvii.

²⁹ Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, 67.

³⁰ McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, xvi-xvii.

³¹ McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism*, 26.

experience that has been frequently seen by scholars in the past as a central feature of mysticism. That treatment which fits more directly with the contemplative biography of Isaac Ambrose will be examined in chapter 3. McGinn has provided a great service to the academy and the Church in expanding the horizons for both Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars thereby creating the framework for discovering the broader richness of the “mystical element” within Christianity. Therefore, by adapting McGinn’s schema the goal of this thesis is not to prove whether or not mysticism existed in Puritanism since that would be anachronistic but rather whether there was a “mystical element” in Puritanism. Further, by employing other categories of McGinn’s treatment of mysticism did the Puritans in general, and Isaac Ambrose in particular, employ a mystical language or vocabulary, mystical theology, write mystical texts, and record mystical experiences?

Defining Puritanism

Puritanism, like mysticism, is another challenging term to define.³² John Coffey provides a succinct and excellent summary of the nature of this long running debate including the significant scholars and issues surrounding the word “Puritan.”³³ Patrick Collinson accurately reminds readers that the word “[p]uritan was never a term of ecclesiological or confessional precision.”³⁴ More accurately it was a pejorative word of slander or rebuke and the Puritans themselves often preferred the

³² The literature surrounding this debate is massive. The best writings for tracing this are: Coffey, “Puritanism, Evangelicalism and Protestant Tradition,” 255-61; Coffey and Lim, *Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, 1-7; Kapic and Gleason, *Devoted Life*, 16-8; Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 3-8; Durston and Eales, *Culture of English Puritanism*, 1-31; Collinson, “Puritans” s.v., 3:364-70; Lake, “Defining Puritanism---again?”; David Hall, “Narrating Puritanism”; and Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 1-32. Older but still valuable is Finlayson, “Puritanism and Puritans,” 201-23.

³³ Coffey, “Puritanism, Evangelicalism and Protestant Tradition,” 255-61.

³⁴ Collinson, “Puritans.” s.v., 3:364.

term “the godly.”³⁵ John Coffey and Paul Lim introduce their study of Puritanism by using five themes to describe and frame a clearer perspective of this term. They maintain that Puritans were descendants of the Reformation, with Calvinistic roots, who originated within the Church of England, who eventually proved to be divisive and that their influence quickly overflowed into the European context.³⁶ While scholars continue to wrestle and wrangle over definitions and boundaries and wonder who might or might not have been Puritans John Spurr helpfully comments “that the puritans [themselves] could recognize each other as brethren.”³⁷ Therefore, it may be valuable to listen to how John Geree, a self-described Puritan, who spoke of himself and others associated with this term, saying:

The Old English Puritane was such an one that honoured God above all, and under God gave every one his due. His first care was to serve God, and therein he did not what was good in his own, but in God’s sight, making the word of God the rule of his worship. He highly esteemed order in the House of God: but would not under colour of that submit to superstitious rites ... He was much in prayer; with it he began and closed the day. In it he was exercised in his closet, family and publike assembly. He esteemed that manner of praier best, where by the gift of God, expressions were varied according to present wants and occasions; Yet he did not account set-forms unlawful. Therefore in that circumstance of the Church he did not wholly reject the liturgy but the corruption of it. He esteemed reading of the word an ordinance of God both in private and publike; but he did not account reading to be preaching ... The Lord’s day he esteemed a divine ordinance, and rest on it necessary so far as it conduced to holinesse. He was very conscientious in the observance of that day as the Mart day of the Soul... The Lords Supper he accounted part of his soul’s food: to which he laboured to keep an appetite. He esteemed it an ordinance of nearest communion with Christ, and so requiring most exact preparation... His family he endeavoured to make a Church, both in regard of persons and exercises, admitting none into it but such as feared God; and labouring that those that were born in it, might be born again to God...He was a man of a tender heart, not only in regard of his own sin, but others misery, not counting mercy arbitrary, but a necessary

³⁵ Collinson, *Godly People*, 1-17; Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy*, esp. 3, 4, 95-121; and Ann Hughes, “Frustrations of Godly.”

³⁶ Coffey and Lim, *Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, 2-7. The final point of expansion will be evident in later discussions involving the Dutch *Nadere Reformatie*.

³⁷ Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 8.

duty... His whole life he accounted a warfare, wherein Christ was his Captain, his arms, prayers and tears.³⁸

Central to Geree's description of a Puritan is the strong emphasis on piety.

Significantly, this echoes Lake's assertion, "I would wish to see Puritanism as a distinctive style of piety and divinity."³⁹ Other scholars have advanced the premise that at the heart of it "Puritanism was a devotional movement, rooted in religious experience."⁴⁰ Further, the Puritans were concerned about reforming the devotional life of the Church and encouraging a more passionate experimental relationship with the Triune God. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis Puritanism in the seventeenth-century refers to those who were nonconformists as well as some conformists who worked towards a continuing reformation of piety and were known as the godly demonstrating a penchant for affectionate practical divinity.

Further, some scholars have sought to classify Puritans more specifically into different categories. According to Jerald Brauer Puritans can be divided into four different streams of piety: legalist (that Brauer names nomism), evangelical, rationalist, and mystical.⁴¹ Brauer maintains this approach of classification is helpful because "[t]ypology is a heuristic tool that enables a historian to account for obvious differences and to distinguish between figures in the same movement."⁴² Less rigidly Janice Knight has simplified the field by reducing it to two categories: "Intellectual Fathers" who were represented by Thomas Hooker, Thomas Shepard, and William

³⁸ Geree, *Character of English Puritan*, 1-6.

³⁹ Lake, "Defining Puritanism---again?" 6, cf. 4. See also Collinson, "Puritans." s.v., 3:368.

⁴⁰ Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, vii, cf. 23, 38, 53, 113. cf. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 28; Dewey Wallace, *Spirituality of Later Puritans*, xi; and Haller, *Rise of Puritanism*, 9.

⁴¹ Brauer, "Types of Puritan Piety," 42, 44-58.

⁴² Brauer, "Types of Puritan Piety," 42.

Perkins, and William Ames and the “Spiritual Brethren” who included Richard Sibbes, John Preston, and John Cotton.⁴³ While she acknowledges the danger of “oversimplif[ying] the complex ideas in question” she continues this approach.⁴⁴ Norman Pettit criticizes Knight for this very reason of attempting to force Puritans into overly rigid categories.⁴⁵ Further, as with many typologies, a person might equally fit in more than one category. This is clearly revealed by Brauer’s placement of Samuel Rutherford in the nomist group whereas Jean Williams believes he “was also a mystic.”⁴⁶ Additionally Brauer positions Sibbes in the evangelical stream in part because of his numerous sermons on the Song of Songs yet this very placement reveals the strong mystical flavor in his writings.⁴⁷ Philip Sheldrake helpfully comments on the benefits of “types of spirituality.” However, he also raises cautions asserting, “[t]here is a danger that, if applied too rigidly or exclusively, these distinctions will force historical personalities into preconceived models which do damage to their complexity.”⁴⁸ Further, Sheldrake is speaking more broadly across the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions or within the major schools in the Roman Catholic Church rather than in the more narrowly defined theological movements. This raises another challenge of classification: how will the categories be determined? Frequently, in seventeenth-century England ecclesiology was used to distinguish between various types of Puritans. However, while Sibbes, Baxter, and Owen are at different ends of the ecclesial spectrum than bishops Bayly, Hall, and Reynolds they all share a fairly common theology and piety. One possible solution

⁴³ Knight, *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts*, 2-3.

⁴⁴ Knight, *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts*, 131.

⁴⁵ Pettit, review of *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts*, 145-50.

⁴⁶ Compare Brauer, “Types of Puritan Piety,” 46n19 with Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 9n37.

⁴⁷ Brauer, “Types of Puritan Piety,” 48.

⁴⁸ Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 209, cf. 196, 217-8 for the benefits of using typologies.

that still allows for the unique distinctions within Puritanism is Finlayson's suggestion that envisions Puritans living along a "spectrum" or continuum rather than being forced into rigid categories of demarcation.⁴⁹ Therefore, narrow categories of differentiation are as likely to conceal insights, as they are to reveal them, consequently this study will not attempt to parse the various streams of Puritanism. More specifically this danger of creating distinctive boundaries will be shortly illustrated in Simon Chan's categories that ultimately distort his reading of Ambrose. However, there is still value in drawing broader categories such as between moderate and radical Puritans when seeking to illustrate the more diverse theological perspectives that framed Puritan mysticism.

Defining Puritan Mysticism

The combination of the two previous key terms of mysticism and Puritanism are now joined to ask if mysticism existed within Puritanism?⁵⁰ For many the idea of Puritan mysticism is odd and incongruous. However, numerous expressions of

⁴⁹ Finlayson, "Puritanism and Puritans," 208, 211, 223.

⁵⁰ The best-published sources for tracing Puritan mysticism are Winthrop Hudson, "Mystical Religion in Puritan Commonwealth"; Brauer, "Puritan Mysticism and Liberalism"; Brauer, "Types of Puritan Piety"; Maclear, "Heart of New England Rent"; Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, esp. 101-8; Wakefield "Mysticism and its Puritan Types"; Nuttall, "Puritan and Quaker Mysticism"; Nuttall, *Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith*; Stoeffler, *Rise of Evangelical Pietism*; Rupp, "Rapture of Devotion in English Puritans"; Lovelace, *American Pietism of Cotton Mather*; Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, Hambrick-Stowe, *Early New England Meditative Poetry*; B. R. White, "Echoes of Medieval Christendom"; Dewey Wallace, *Spirituality of Later Puritans*; King, "Affective Spirituality of John Owen"; Williams, "Puritanism: Piety of Joy"; van den Berg, "English Puritan Francis Rous"; Belden Lane, "Two Schools of Desire"; Dever, *Richard Sibbes*; Schwanda, "Gazing at God"; and de Reuver, *Sweet Communion*. Dissertations focusing on Puritan mysticism include: Brauer, "Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic"; Chan, "Puritan Meditative Tradition" and Williams, "Puritan Enjoyment of God." Ronald Frost devotes one chapter to mystical marriage within the writings of Richard Sibbes, "Richard Sibbes' Theology of Grace." Additionally the following dissertations explore the possibility of Puritan mysticism: Won, "Communion with Christ" and Yeoman, *Heart-Work*."

scholarship have emerged since Geoffrey Nuttall declared over sixty years ago, “Puritan mysticism is a field still almost entirely unexplored.”⁵¹ Broadly speaking, I envision Puritan mysticism as the grateful and loving beholding of God through God’s mighty acts and Scripture, in which one experiences union and deepening communion with Jesus Christ through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. While there has been no critical study on Puritan mysticism, a handful of articles and dissertations have begun the much-needed examination of this significant topic. However, some skeptics might raise the question why should such a scorned and misunderstood topic as Puritan mysticism be explored when it is fraught with such little clarity. Further, why perpetuate the confusion by asking whether there could be a legitimate expression of Puritan mysticism? However, there are at least three valid reasons for examining the question of Puritan mysticism. First, a careful examination into the theological foundation of Puritan spiritual practices and the resulting spiritual texts and experiences will assist in revealing a more accurate picture of a frequently denigrated and grossly misconstrued tradition. This rehabilitation would provide a more accurate and balanced understanding of a significant movement of the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries. Second, to include Puritanism within the conversation with other Christian traditions regarding mysticism elevates the validity and authenticity of Puritan piety. There are those within the Reformed tradition who are apologetic or even embarrassed when discussing the topic of spirituality. Due to historical amnesia many contemporary Reformed Christians are unaware of the richness of their spiritual roots. The greater the attention of scholars to Puritan piety the more these forgotten but valued principles can be reclaimed. Third, an awareness of the distinctions of Puritan mysticism can expand the conversation within the larger

⁵¹ Nuttall, *Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith*, 146.

study of Christian mysticism. What were the roots, challenges, unique spiritual practices, and writings of Puritan piety and how can their distinctive emphases contribute to the study of Christian mysticism?

Jerald Brauer was the first to heed Nuttall's invitation and in 1948 wrote a dissertation on Francis Rous, the British Member of Parliament and devotional writer.⁵² Brauer defines a "Christian mystic, then, [as] a person who has had an extremely intimate experience of being personally united with God and who follows the threefold mystic path that he might repeat such an experience and exhibit the results of the union in his daily life."⁵³ Rous' writings, especially on *The Mystical Marriage*, frequently employ the union with Christ or spiritual marriage metaphor. However, according to Brauer, the presence of a "mystical element" does not make one a mystic.⁵⁴ One must also have "mystical experience" and employ "mystical theology."⁵⁵ He further cautions readers not to be too hasty in using the term mystic with the Puritans, "[t]he fact of a heavy mystical emphasis does not mean that any of these Puritans became mystics or practiced the mystical life."⁵⁶ Nonetheless, Brauer maintains that there were numerous themes within Puritanism that prepared them for mysticism including a strong doctrine of the Holy Spirit, immediacy of faith, and a disciplined moral life that emphasized asceticism that relates to the principle of spiritual marriage.⁵⁷

⁵² Brauer, "Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic."

⁵³ Brauer, "Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic," 13.

⁵⁴ Brauer, "Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic," 14.

⁵⁵ Brauer, "Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic," 127, cf. 147.

⁵⁶ Brauer, "Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic," 49, cf. 14.

⁵⁷ Brauer, "Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic," 33-41, cf. 323.

Brauer offers a number of significant conclusions that must be briefly mentioned. His claim that Puritan mysticism developed from within Puritanism itself as they read “Augustine, Gregory and Bernard” rather than any direct “contemporary Continental” influence appears accurate.⁵⁸ However, his contention that Rous was the first Puritan mystic⁵⁹ is inconsistent with the Puritan themes and tendencies just mentioned. Further, his narrow definition of mysticism prevents him from noticing the mystical element in writers such as Sibbes, whom he specifically denies was a mystic.⁶⁰ This restriction in defining Puritan mysticism leads to Brauer’s surprising claim that there were only six to eight Puritan mystics.⁶¹ His list of Puritan “mystics in the fullest sense of the term” includes John Everard, Giles Randall, Peter Sterry, and perhaps Morgan Llwyd and Walter Cradock.”⁶² These individuals typically represent the radical stream of Puritanism. Clearly this small number reflects his definition that relies upon the Dionysian mysticism of the threefold way. While Brauer concedes that Rous never used the *triplex via* in his writings he still insists that they can reflect those insights.⁶³ The most questionable conclusion reached by Brauer asserts that those Puritans who were mystics eventually moved away from Puritanism.⁶⁴ While this reveals some degree of accuracy related to the Quakers and other Spirit enthusiasts these individuals are usually not representative of a healthy Christian mysticism. Further, Rous himself never left Puritanism and Brauer ultimately tempers those remarks regarding him, who “emerged directly from his

⁵⁸ Brauer, “Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic,” 33, cf. 279, 323, 329.

⁵⁹ Brauer, “Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic,” 44, 184, 231, 287, 329.

⁶⁰ Brauer, “Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic,” 291.

⁶¹ Brauer, “Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic,” 293.

⁶² Brauer, “Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic,” 289.

⁶³ Brauer, “Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic,” 131.

⁶⁴ Brauer, “Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic,” 289.

Puritanism and remained closely related to it.”⁶⁵ Brauer published a number of articles since his thesis, the most recently in 1987. However, nothing significant changed in his position and Rous is still the only moderate Puritan listed among his candidates for Puritan mysticism.⁶⁶ Further, Brauer misreads Wakefield in asserting he denied the possibility of mysticism within Puritanism.⁶⁷

More helpful for the broader study of Puritan mysticism is the pioneering research of Geoffrey Nuttall. While his earlier and still seminal work on *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* tended to privilege the more radical stream of Quaker mysticism his recent article has focused more exclusively on the prospect of mysticism within moderate Puritanism.⁶⁸ A significant difference between Brauer and Nuttall is the latter’s broader definition that eschews the traditional three-fold manner of defining mysticism. Nuttall helpfully illustrates the reality of mystical writings in Puritans using John Preston, Rous, Rowland Stedman, and Edward Polhill. Further, all four writers employ the allegorical reading of the Song of Songs.⁶⁹

Obviously Brauer and Nuttall believe that there is some expression of mysticism within the Puritans, or least one stream of it. They are certainly not alone in this assessment. Moreover the seventeenth-century was a fertile period for the development of renewed spirituality and “affective devotion” in both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches.⁷⁰ The Protestant expressions included the Puritans as well as Pietism on the Continent while within Roman Catholicism this was manifested in

⁶⁵ Brauer, “Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic,” 329.

⁶⁶ Brauer, “Types of Puritan Piety,” 53-8.

⁶⁷ Brauer, “Types of Puritan Piety,” 40n6.

⁶⁸ Nuttall, “Puritan and Quaker Mysticism.”

⁶⁹ Nuttall, “Puritan and Quaker Mysticism,” 521.

⁷⁰ Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 23.

Jansenism, Quietism, and devotion to the sacred heart of Jesus.⁷¹ However, there are some scholars who appear to be overly generous in their assessment. Richard Lovelace declares, “that the Puritans implicitly assumed that every Christian was to be a mystic.”⁷² Additionally, some scholars in their enthusiasm to affirm Puritan mysticism fail to adequately define their use of language. Lovelace mentions the “Puritan mysticism” of Jonathan Edwards without any indication of the nature or meaning of this word.⁷³ Unfortunately, this lack of precision can be harmful increasing the fear of more cautious scholars that leads them to quickly reject the concept of “mysticism” due to its more dubious history. Conversely, some writers dilute the definition of “mysticism” to such an extent that it no longer has any value since virtually anyone can qualify.⁷⁴

Not surprisingly, there are others who object to the prospect of Puritan mysticism. Mark Dever is reticent in describing Sibbes’ spirituality in terms of mysticism and prefers the more conducive word “affectionate.”⁷⁵ John Coffey registers a similar concern in applying the term “mystic” to Samuel Rutherford. He concedes that “[p]erhaps we would be wise to follow Mark Dever’s suggestion that instead of describing Puritans as ‘mystics’ (which implies a rather vague and undogmatic spirituality), we would do better to follow their own terms and call them ‘affectionate theologians’.”⁷⁶ Paul Cook draws the distinction more forcefully with Thomas Goodwin asserting that mysticism is incompatible with biblical

⁷¹ Campbell, *Religion of the Heart*, 2.

⁷² Lovelace, *American Pietism of Cotton Mather*, 105-6.

⁷³ Lovelace, “Afterword, Puritans and Spiritual Renewal,” 308.

⁷⁴ Coffey, *Theology and British Revolutions*, 83n5.

⁷⁵ Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 137.

⁷⁶ Coffey, *Theology and British Revolutions*, 95.

Christianity.⁷⁷ Further, Cook maintains, “[t]he true mystic is unconcerned with doctrine. He worships in a richly symbolic atmosphere, whereas the Puritan rejected such symbolism as dishonouring to God.”⁷⁸

However, it is essential to inquire about the reasons for this resistance and why some scholars find mysticism incompatible with Puritanism. The primary motivation for this rejection is fear based upon a distorted perception of mysticism. Arie de Reuver, describing the sixteenth-century, provides a helpful commentary that was still accurate in the next century for the Puritans. He insists, “the rejection of mysticism by the reformers involved only a certain form of it.” The type of mysticism rejected can be summarized as one that sought a union of absorption or indistinction, “practices as a meritorious pre-condition for salvation that ignored grace”, restricted to the monastery, and “upset the balance between faith and love at the expense of faith.”⁷⁹ Additional concerns of some contemporary Puritan scholars regarding mysticism include the perceived rejection of Christ’s mediatorial role and undervaluing of Scripture.⁸⁰ Gordon Mursell’s qualifications of Puritan mysticism provides a valuable summary on this topic. He writes,

This kind of spirituality may be termed ‘mysticism’ if by that is implied a direct and unmediated experience of God that is vouchsafed to the individual Christian, provided we remember three things: first, that this experience happens within the context of a personal intimacy, for which marriage is the natural analogy ...; secondly, that ...there is no suggestion of an ontological union, a mutual absorption of the soul into the Godhead; and, thirdly, that the natural context for the development of this intimacy is not ... in the monastic life, but precisely in the midst of the Christian community, and supremely in its worship.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Cook, “Thomas Goodwin-Mystic?” 46.

⁷⁸ Cook, “Thomas Goodwin-Mystic?” 48.

⁷⁹ de Reuver, *Sweet Communion*, 22. cf. Hambrick-Stowe, *Early New England Meditative Poetry*, 10; and Hartley Hall, “Shape of Reformed Piety,” 213.

⁸⁰ Andrew Davies, “Holy Spirit in Puritan Experience,” 29.

⁸¹ Mursell, *English Spirituality: From Earliest Times*, 369.

Readers will recognize the strong similarity between Mursell’s summary and McGinn’s previous description of two forms of mysticism.⁸² Further, Roman Catholics did not welcome all types of mysticism indiscriminately acknowledging that there could be unhealthy expressions of it and experienced similar fears regarding it at various stages of their history.⁸³ Due to this ongoing lack of clarity regarding the term, some scholars today are hesitant to use the word mysticism in connection with Puritan piety. They are rightfully concerned since “mysticism” has had an uneven history over the centuries and has both collected many excesses and pushed the boundaries of theological orthodoxy beyond the acceptable limits for some in the church.⁸⁴ Significantly, some authors who initially were reticent to speak of mysticism within Puritanism are able to embrace this possibility when it is understood in a biblical or historically balanced manner.⁸⁵ Wakefield concludes his later study of Puritanism asserting, “we are not wrong to speak of Mysticism” in the Puritans and further “that the Mysticism of the English Puritans is in need of extended research.”⁸⁶

Clearly McGinn’s revised framework of the mystical element rather than mysticism helps to respond to these legitimate criticisms of Puritan scholars as well as encouraging the greatly needed research in this largely unexamined reservoir of Puritan literature. Many of those who initially resisted the label of mysticism when

⁸² See page 6 above.

⁸³ See for example McGinn, “Mysticism” s.v., 3:120; Mursell, *Story of Christian Spirituality*, 212, 234-5; and von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 117-8, 121-2.

⁸⁴ For example Pope John XXII pronounced Meister Eckhart’s teaching as heretical due to his emphasis upon the union of absorption or indistinction. McGinn, “Mysticism” s.v., 3:119. However, Tamburello reminds readers of Eckhart’s contemporary rehabilitation. *Ordinary Mysticism*, 115-118.

⁸⁵ Coffey, *Theology and British Revolutions*, 95.

⁸⁶ Wakefield, “Mysticism and Its Puritan Types,” 44. cf. *Puritan Devotion*, 108.

applied to Puritanism are willing to acknowledge a mystical element in them.⁸⁷ However, there were Puritan scholars prior to McGinn's broader definition who employed the language of "mystical element"⁸⁸ or "mystical piety"⁸⁹ or "deeply mystical tone"⁹⁰ or "mystical material" and "mystical tendencies"⁹¹ that today reflect McGinn's scholarship. Nevertheless, no one has intentionally employed McGinn's broader understanding of "mysticism" in a consistent and sustained manner in studying the Puritans. Therefore, by employing McGinn's description it can now be asked whether there was a "mystical element" or what this thesis will call the "contemplative-mystical piety" within Puritanism?

There are a number of reasons for making this substitution. While the broader term mystical element is a helpful improvement over the confusion-riddled language of mysticism there are no doubt numerous vestiges of Reformed suspicion still lingering. Moreover this is a thesis about Isaac Ambrose and certainly he would be alarmed to be called a mystic while he frequently spoke of contemplation. The term contemplation has had a better history within many parts of the Reformed tradition and therefore serves as a gentler introduction to the mystical element. Wakefield suggests that the word contemplation is "a more satisfactory term to apply" than mystical⁹² and de Certeau notes that contemplation was the word of choice for most of

⁸⁷ Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 158; Cook, "Thomas Goodwin-Mystic?" 47, 48; Andrew Davies, "Holy Spirit in Puritan Experience," 29; and Coffey above, 22n85.

⁸⁸ Brauer, "Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic," 14, 281, 288, 299; Stoeffler, *Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 131; Dewey Wallace, *Spirituality of Later Puritans*, xvii; and Williams, "Puritan Enjoyment of God," 2.

⁸⁹ McGiffert, *God's Plot*, 29, cf. 26-7.

⁹⁰ Stoeffler, *Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 84.

⁹¹ Nuttall, "Puritan and Quaker Mysticism," 527.

⁹² Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, 90.

the history of Christian spirituality.⁹³ More specifically contemplative denotes the attitude and awareness in which a person approaches life. It is based on the grammar of gazing on the Triune God. Additionally, it communicates a devotional intensity that reflects the deep desire to live in conscious union and communion with God. The word mystical used in combination with contemplative seeks to express the outcome or the subjective experience of being in union with Christ. These experiences are always a gift of God and not the result of a person's efforts but those efforts often prepare the person for God's presence. Piety is used instead of the more common contemporary term spirituality for two reasons. Spirituality has become so broadly-based today that it has lost much of its meaning without some descriptive adjective placed before it such as Reformed spirituality or Cistercian spirituality. Second, piety was the preferred word for Reformed believers of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century and included a broader arena in which the spiritual life was lived unlike the contemporary usage that frequently privileges the individual.

Jean Williams has produced the most comprehensive research on the topic of Puritan mysticism. Her vast and far-ranging study focuses upon both clergy and laity, including the often-neglected study of women and thereby addresses one of the most under researched areas in Puritan studies. She reverses the commonly held opinion that if anything resembling mysticism existed within Puritanism that it was abnormal rather than a common experience.⁹⁴ Not only is she comfortable in recognizing and affirming the reality of Puritan mystics but her primary thesis is that mysticism is not only present in the radical Puritans but firmly established among the moderate

⁹³ de Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 94-5. cf. Harmless, *Mystics*, 261.

⁹⁴ Williams, "Puritan Enjoyment of God," 8-9. Williams briefly summarizes her primary conclusions in "Puritanism: Piety of Joy," 4-14.

Puritans including Sibbes and Owen.⁹⁵ This is all the more convincing since Williams began her research with the strong bias “that Puritanism is not supposed to be characterized by mysticism.”⁹⁶ Further, and central to her conclusion is that Puritan mysticism while conscious of the medieval roots is not directly derived from Roman Catholic mysticism but rather is an indigenous expression fashioned within the uniqueness of Puritan theology and instead of being a rare occurrence was common throughout Puritanism.⁹⁷ This also corrects Brauer’s perception that Rous was the first Puritan mystic.

On the one hand, Williams is aware of McGinn’s broader definition of mysticism⁹⁸ and her thesis is divided into the four categories of theology, vocabulary, devotion, and enactment or records of spiritual experience. Nonetheless, she continues to employ the terminology of Puritan mysticism rather than McGinn’s broader language of the mystical element of Puritanism.⁹⁹ She does not indicate her reason for this choice, though perhaps her motivation is dependent upon her desire to recover the legitimacy of Puritan mysticism. It still appears problematic, however, due to the confusion of many regarding the nature and heritage of Christian mysticism. In fact, Williams herself, rejects the similarity of Puritan mysticism with “classic Christian mysticism” since many associate the latter with the absorption of humanity into the Godhead.¹⁰⁰ Another significant feature of her research is that while she recognizes the necessity for the specific theological character of

⁹⁵ Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 11, 21.

⁹⁶ Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” ix.

⁹⁷ Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 15, 102n267, 226, 392.

⁹⁸ Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 17n62, 18n64.

⁹⁹ Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 25-26, 140, 394-9, etc. These references are merely illustrative of her almost universal practice throughout her thesis.

¹⁰⁰ Compare Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” ix with Williams, “Puritanism: Piety of Joy,” 8.

Puritanism¹⁰¹ she employs the language of union with God, which is more typically Roman Catholic, than the Puritan preference of union with Christ. For the Puritans this created a stronger parallel between union with Christ and Jesus as the divine Bridegroom in spiritual marriage.¹⁰² Further, in light of this it is noteworthy to trace her criticism of Charles Hambrick-Stowe whom she insists employs a Roman Catholic understanding of union as the culmination rather than the origin of the spiritual life.¹⁰³ However, upon closer examination the specific references she cites reveals her misreading of Hambrick-Stowe. Clearly he recognizes as chapter 2 of this thesis will argue that the Puritans understood union with Christ as the beginning of spiritual marriage and “that they [i.e. the Puritans] would not attain full salvation until the soul was perfectly united with Christ after death.”¹⁰⁴ One limitation of this otherwise outstanding study of Puritan mysticism is that Williams did not dialogue with any dissertations including Brauer and the soon to be examined research of Simon Chan.

There are two themes that remain underdeveloped in Williams. First, she acknowledges that time and space prevented her from exploring more fully the patristic and medieval roots of Puritan mysticism.¹⁰⁵ This is simply an acknowledgment that no thesis can cover everything and must have boundaries and limitations. Second, while Williams addresses the nature and practice of contemplation within Puritan piety she devotes much of her energy to the examination of the apophatic nature of it. This is extremely valuable since this dimension is

¹⁰¹ Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 11-12.

¹⁰² This will be developed in chapter 2.

¹⁰³ Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 11-12, 66.

¹⁰⁴ Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 19, 197, cf. 60, 79, 286 Williams misses Hambrick-Stowe’s emphasis upon “full” union.

¹⁰⁵ Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” x, cf. 16, 302n346.

frequently ignored or even denied in Puritan studies. However, what is missing is an equal sensitivity to the recognition of and appreciation for the importance of heavenly meditation as an expression of Puritan contemplation. Closely related to this is the minimal treatment of the *visio Dei* and the significance of gazing on or beholding God. Additionally, while recognizing the prevalence of ravishment as an expression of Puritan enjoyment of God, Williams does not engage in any great depth with the theology of this critical term. All of these missing or underdeveloped themes will figure more prominently in this thesis.

Evidence of the Contemplative-Mystical Piety within Puritanism

In Brauer's pioneering research he distinguished between two forms of Puritan mysticism that he named "classical Christian mystics" and "Christian Spirit mystics."¹⁰⁶ Francis Rous illustrated the first category while John Saltmarsh, William Dell, William Erbery, Thomas Collier, Walter Craddock, and George Fox characterized the second.¹⁰⁷ Previously Brauer had asserted that John Everard, Giles Randall, Peter Sterry, and perhaps Morgan Llwyd "appear to be mystics in the fullest sense of the term."¹⁰⁸ What is striking about these names is that apart from Rous, the remainder of these individuals typically represents the radical stream of Puritanism. David Como's research in tracing this stream clarifies the reason for them being called radical, "in their own day, the ideas and practices in question were regarded by most contemporaries (both Puritan and non-Puritan) as excessive and disruptive of the right notions of orthodoxy or order."¹⁰⁹ Therefore, since this thesis concerns Isaac

¹⁰⁶ Brauer, "Types of Puritan Piety," 53. cf. "Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic," 23-9.

¹⁰⁷ Brauer, "Types of Puritan Piety," 53-6. Compare with 18n62. Brauer spells Crad[d]ock both ways.

¹⁰⁸ Brauer, "Francis Rouse, Puritan Mystic," 289.

¹⁰⁹ Como, "Radical Puritanism," 242.

Ambrose it will consider only the contemplative-mystical piety within the moderate stream of Puritanism unless directly impacted by its radical relatives.¹¹⁰ Further, this reflects the approach of Ambrose and other likeminded Puritans who were careful to distance themselves from the radical mystics who typically discounted the mediatorial role of Jesus Christ and elevated a person's subjective experience above that of Scripture to determine the validity of that experience. One additional reason for limiting this study to the contemplative-mystical piety of moderate Puritanism is that it parallels the wisdom of Ernest Stoeffler's study of Pietism, "[i]f Pietism is to be seen truly it, like other historical movements, must be seen with reference to its center, not its circumference."¹¹¹ Therefore, there is impressive evidence for the contemplative-mystical piety within moderate Puritanism including mystical language and vocabulary, mystical theology, and even mystical experience. Richard Sibbes, Francis Rous, Thomas Goodwin, Samuel Rutherford, Richard Baxter, John Owen, and Cotton Mather are most frequently mentioned as reflective of this contemplative-mystical piety.¹¹² While it would be easy to compile a lengthy list of other Puritans

¹¹⁰ For an examination of the radical or spirit mysticism within Puritanism see: Nuttall, *Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith*; George Johnson, "From Seeker to Finder"; Maclear, "Heart of New England Rent"; Welch, "Quakers, Ranters and Puritan Mystics"; Mack, *Visionary Women*; and Como, *Blown By the Spirit*, esp. 219-65.

¹¹¹ Stoeffler, *Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 12.

¹¹² The best sources for exploring the contemplative-mystical piety in moderate Puritanism are Nuttall, *Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith* and "Puritan and Quaker Mysticism"; Chan, "Puritan Meditative Tradition"; and Williams, "Puritan Enjoyment of God." More specifically for Sibbes see Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, esp. 135-60 and Frost, "Richard Sibbes' Theology of Grace," 97-121. For Francis Rous see Brauer, "Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic"; Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, 103-6; and van den Berg, "English Puritan Francis Rous." For Thomas Goodwin see Watkin, *Poets and Mystics*, 56-69 and Cook, "Thomas Goodwin-Mystic?" For Rutherford see Coffey, *Theology and British Revolutions*, esp. 82-113 and Coffey, "Letters by Samuel Rutherford." For Richard Baxter see Stoeffler, *Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 88-96; Nuttall, "Puritan and Quaker Mysticism," 525-7; and Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 99-100. For John Owen see Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, esp. 191-218; King, "Affective Spirituality of John Owen" and Kapic, *Communion with God*, esp. 147-205. For

some of the more familiar names that reflect the contemplative-mystical piety include Joseph Hall¹¹³, John Preston¹¹⁴, Robert Bolton¹¹⁵, Thomas Shepard¹¹⁶, and John Flavel.¹¹⁷

Literature Review Related to Isaac Ambrose

Isaac Ambrose has attracted only sporadic rather than systematic attention from scholars thereby making this thesis distinct. I will first examine published material specifically related to Ambrose and then dissertations. Robert Halley (1796-1876), a nonconformist divine, is perhaps best remembered today for his religious history of Lancashire.¹¹⁸ Halley was the first scholar to give any serious recognition to Ambrose and his broad sweeping treatment of Lancashire history provides a valuable context for understanding the religious setting of the seventeenth-century in which Ambrose lived. He summarizes the details of Ambrose's life and ministry, including a few selections from Ambrose's diary preserved in *Media* that explores the growth of the soul in sanctification through the use of spiritual practices. As a result of Ambrose's spiritual practices from his annual month-long May retreats in the woods, Halley asserts that Ambrose was the "most meditative Puritan of Lancashire."¹¹⁹ Additionally he includes his assessment that "Isaac Ambrose is better known as a practical writer than any other."¹²⁰ What is lacking in Halley is any

Cotton Mather see Lovelace, *American Pietism of Cotton Mather*, esp. 110-97 and Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, esp. 278-87.

¹¹³ Stoeffler, *Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 83-5 and Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 99-100.

¹¹⁴ Wakefield, "Mysticism and Puritan Type," 40 and Nuttall, "Puritan and Quaker Mysticism," 520.

¹¹⁵ Rupp, "Devotion of Rapture," 120-1.

¹¹⁶ McGiffert, *God's Plot*, esp. 26-9.

¹¹⁷ Yuille, *Inner Sanctum of Puritan Piety*, 85-94.

¹¹⁸ Halley, *Lancashire: Puritanism and Nonconformity*.

¹¹⁹ Halley, *Lancashire: Puritanism and Nonconformity*, 2:195.

¹²⁰ Halley, *Lancashire: Puritanism and Nonconformity*, 2:202, cf. 194.

theological reflection on Ambrose's writings or spiritual practices. Benjamin Nightingale (1854-1928), another nonconformist pastor who like Ambrose served in the town of Preston, displayed a special appreciation for Ambrose. Nightingale was strongly dependent upon Halley for much of his material but he did expand the historical details of both church politics and Ambrose's family background. His assessment regarding Ambrose's piety also parallels that of Halley, declaring that he was "[o]f a retiring disposition, his mind of the contemplative order, he was in true sense a religious mystic."¹²¹ Additionally Nightingale provides one example of the continued interest in Ambrose's writings in the latter portion of the seventeenth-century.¹²² But similar to Halley, Nightingale does not study the theology or the dynamics of the spiritual practices of Ambrose. Gordon Wakefield in his significant study *Puritan Devotion* was the first scholar to pay attention to Ambrose's style of meditation.¹²³ However, his treatment is very brief and focuses more on the background and structure of *Looking Unto Jesus* than it does to the experiential piety that might result from this approach. Wakefield reiterates the conclusion of both Halley and Nightingale describing Ambrose as a "Lancashire Nonconformist of contemplative disposition."¹²⁴

Milo Kaufmann introduces a significant transition, being the first literary critic to display an interest in Ambrose.¹²⁵ Kaufmann traces the development of Puritan meditation according to two streams, one more formal approach reflected by Bishop Joseph Hall and the second more imaginative focused on heavenly meditation of

¹²¹ Nightingale, *Isaac Ambrose, Religious Mystic*, 20.

¹²² Nightingale, *Isaac Ambrose, Religious Mystic*, 26-7.

¹²³ Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, 88, 96-8.

¹²⁴ Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, xiii.

¹²⁵ Kaufmann, *Pilgrim's Progress and Puritan Meditation*.

Richard Sibbes. Kaufmann places Ambrose in the meditative tradition of Hall yet oddly cites him as an example of heavenly meditation.¹²⁶ Indeed there are numerous places where Kaufmann appears to misread Ambrose, but since they are directly related to the development of Ambrose's understanding and practice of meditation and contemplation they will be discussed in chapter 4. However, Kaufmann does not appear to appreciate the fullness of Ambrose's method of meditation nor the importance of imagination for him in this process. Barbara Lewalski is another literary critic who includes Ambrose in her study, though to a much lesser extent than Kaufmann.¹²⁷ Her primary goal is to redress the strongly Roman Catholic focus of Louis Martz's study of meditation. Lewalski makes two significant contributions in relation to Kaufmann: a more balanced treatment of Puritan meditation and liberating Ambrose from the restrictive status of a lifeless clone of Hall. Erica Longfellow is the most recent literary critic to include Ambrose in her study.¹²⁸ Once again there is little interaction with Ambrose's piety. The primary focus of Kaufmann, Lewalski, and Longfellow has been on Ambrose's style of meditation. In reality their treatment reflects more of the mechanics of meditation. In every case, *Media* was the only source examined with little appreciation for the theological or experiential dimensions of Ambrose's piety. Therefore, while in varying degrees these sources engage the nature of Puritan meditation, Ambrose is not the primary figure of any of them. Additionally, none of these works have included Ambrose's magnum opus *Looking Unto Jesus* which provides a vivid christological kaleidoscope of Puritan meditation through a theological foundation of union with Christ. Therefore, no scholarship has focused exclusively on Ambrose or even examined all of his works.

¹²⁶ Kaufmann, *Pilgrim's Progress and Puritan Meditation*, 134.

¹²⁷ Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*.

¹²⁸ Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing*.

There are three dissertations that in varying degrees mention Ambrose. However, before exploring them there is one thesis that provides a helpful foundation for this present research. Jonathan Won explored the degree of continuity and discontinuity between Calvin and the seventeenth-century Puritans in their understanding of union and communion with Christ.¹²⁹ He concluded that there was both significant commonality as well as divergence between Calvin and the English Puritans. Interestingly in some categories the Puritans reflected greater affinity for Bernard of Clairvaux than Calvin. This was particularly true in the Puritan allegorical reading of Song of Songs and the more experiential nature derived from it.¹³⁰ Won also rightly concludes that the Puritans displayed a greater proclivity towards the “mystical tradition” than Calvin.¹³¹ Further, while I would agree with his assessment that Calvin emphasized union with Christ more than communion I take exception to the idea that the Puritans emphasized communion with Christ more than union.¹³² One must remember that Calvin is one person and the Puritans obviously provide a much broader cross section of writing where it is not uncommon to find a balanced emphasis upon both union and communion with Christ.

The first doctoral dissertation that mentions Ambrose was written by John Martone, who like his advisor Barbara Lewalski, is an English professor. Martone employs four brief references to Ambrose, all related to the practice of meditation or journal keeping.¹³³ More recently Joanne Jung has written on the subject of Puritan

¹²⁹ Won, “Communion with Christ.”

¹³⁰ Won, “Communion with Christ,” 294, 334, 340-1, 344, 356.

¹³¹ Won, “Communion with Christ,” 353.

¹³² Won, “Communion with Christ,” 351.

¹³³ Martone, “Map of Heaven,” 9, 93-5, 166.

conferences and draws upon Ambrose's teaching on this subject.¹³⁴ Both Martone and Jung were highly selective in their usage of Ambrose, reading only *Media*, his work on spiritual practices and sanctification. The third dissertation written by Simon Chan displays the broadest reading of Ambrose, examining four of his works; *Prima*, *Media*, *Looking Unto Jesus*, and *Communion with Angels*. *Media* and *Looking Unto Jesus* have already been introduced. *Prima* is Ambrose's work on the new birth and regeneration and *Communion with Angels* explores how a person might cultivate a greater awareness of angels and how they minister to a person during the various periods of life from birth to death. The great strength of Chan's thesis is his extensive reading among the primary sources on Puritan practices of meditation. He also recognizes the significance of heavenly meditation¹³⁵ for the Puritans, thus correcting the oversight of Williams' thesis. However, far less helpful is the manner in which Chan understands mysticism that is similar to Brauer though not as narrowly focused on the *triplex via*.¹³⁶ Chan believes the Puritan emphasis upon preparation can be "the puritan equivalent to the purgative way."¹³⁷ Another limitation that restricts Chan's ability to see greater evidence of mysticism within Puritanism is his use of the traditional principle of "infused contemplation" as a determinate for mysticism.¹³⁸ Therefore, not surprisingly, he concludes "it seems strange that, given the puritans' intellectual acceptance of mysticism as noted at the beginning of this chapter, the experience was not as extensively cultivated nor as actively encouraged as would be

¹³⁴ Jung, "Conference: Communal Tradition of Puritan Piety," 112, 123, 126, 128, 130.

¹³⁵ Chan, "Puritan Meditative Tradition," esp. 122-41.

¹³⁶ Chan, "Puritan Meditative Tradition," 118.

¹³⁷ Chan, "Puritan Meditative Tradition," 71-2, cf. 216. In fact, Chan arranges three of his chapters to follow the pattern of purgation, illumination, and union.

¹³⁸ Chan, "Puritan Meditative Tradition," 130.

expected.”¹³⁹ Since Chan wrote his thesis before McGinn’s usage of a broader definition for mysticism he can hardly be faulted for this. However, this does restrict his ability to discover a fuller expression of the mystical element or what I am calling the contemplative-mystical piety of Puritanism. One additional limitation that affects Chan’s potential for locating the contemplative-mystical piety within Puritanism is his neglect of some of the significant secondary literature that has explored this question. This leads him to assert that Gordon Wakefield denied the possibility of Puritan mysticism.¹⁴⁰ However, Wakefield later revised his assessment affirming, “we are not wrong to speak of Mysticism” in relation to the Puritans.¹⁴¹

Further, Chan locates two distinctive streams of Puritan piety, one that he calls the ascetic stream that includes Joseph Hall, Richard Baxter, Thomas Hooker, and Isaac Ambrose. These members are characterized by their intensity of spiritual practices “in which heavenly meditation”¹⁴² was the result and further they gave “scant attention [to the Holy Spirit] in their exposition of the devotional life.”¹⁴³ One significant discrepancy is that while Hall was not known for his use of imagination both Ambrose and Baxter were.¹⁴⁴ The other category of the enthusiast stream or Spirit mystics includes Richard Sibbes, John Cotton, Francis Rous, and John Owen. Chan delineates that the “meditative technique” for these Spirit mystics has “become a duty stripped of much of its ascetical precision.” Further, “the intense feeling and ecstatic language” so common among the ascetic stream is “conspicuously absent”¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ Chan, “Puritan Meditative Tradition,” 143, cf. 122.

¹⁴⁰ Chan, “Puritan Meditative Tradition,” 117-8.

¹⁴¹ Wakefield, “Mysticism and Its Puritan Types,” 44.

¹⁴² Chan, “Puritan Meditative Tradition,” 120.

¹⁴³ Chan, “Puritan Meditative Tradition,” 188, cf. 191.

¹⁴⁴ Chan, “Puritan Meditative Tradition,” compare 182 with 186.

¹⁴⁵ Chan, “Puritan Meditative Tradition,” 200.

while there is a strong dependency upon the direct operation or inner testimony of the Spirit.¹⁴⁶ One is struck by the relatively small number of members of the Spirit mystic stream but more surprising is that Chan employs the suspect term “enthusiasts” to describe this stream when he himself declares, “[p]art of the failure to deal adequately with the question may be due to the fact that attempts at understanding puritan mysticism have been based largely on the wrong sources—on those who should be called “enthusiasts” rather than “mystics.”¹⁴⁷

Sheldrake previously asserted the strengths and weaknesses of typologies and in Chan’s usage they appear mostly negative. There are at least three reasons for this. First, and most importantly Chan’s distinction places Ambrose in the ascetical stream that specifically implies that he and others of this category had a weak or insignificant understanding of the inner testimony of the Spirit. However, a more accurate reading of Ambrose reveals a very strong reliance upon the direct operation or inner witness of the Spirit’s work in meditation and contemplation. While it may be accurate to maintain the priority of the Spirit’s role in Sibbes it is nonetheless inaccurate to minimize or ignore it in Ambrose. Therefore, Chan’s structure and use of classification drives a wedge in Ambrose’s theology and leads him to underestimate the role of the Spirit in Ambrose’s piety. Second, the ascetical school anchored in Hall was not known for its imagination. This is hardly accurate for Ambrose or Baxter. Third, Chan’s usage of the terminology “enthusiastic” is unhelpful since Brauer among others use this language to describe the radical Puritans of the Quakers, Seekers, and Ranters.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Chan, “Puritan Meditative Tradition,” 191, 194, 196, 197, 210, 216.

¹⁴⁷ Chan, “Puritan Meditative Tradition,” 120.

¹⁴⁸ Brauer, “Types of Puritan Piety,” 56-8.

More specifically in Chan's examination of Isaac Ambrose he explores Bishop Joseph Hall's influence on the development of meditation in Ambrose. He devotes seven pages to analyzing Ambrose's pattern of piety in *Looking Unto Jesus*. Chan is mistaken in his interpretation of Ambrose's nine-fold way of looking at Jesus. Since this figures more prominently in Ambrose's development of meditation and contemplation this will be examined in chapter 4. Further, my reading of Ambrose's method of meditation finds less dependency upon Ignatius than Chan. Additionally Chan's comments that Ambrose is the first to meditate on the humanity of Christ, which clearly ignores the earlier example of Charles Herle will also be examined more appropriately in chapter 4. Therefore, while there have been three dissertations that have included Isaac Ambrose two have referred to him extremely briefly and only one has examined him significantly but even in that study Ambrose was not the central figure. Therefore, this present study is distinctive since there have not been any dissertations that have focused specifically upon Ambrose, his theology or piety.

Since there has been no sustained study of Isaac Ambrose some may conclude that this is reflective of his lack of importance in the seventeenth-century or for today. However, that would be a mistake. There are at least two possible reasons for the previous neglect of scholarly interest in Ambrose. First, he lived in Lancashire, which was far from the theological and political hub of London. R.C. Richardson's research of Puritanism in this region reveals that "[o]f the 160 divines in the diocese during this period, only twenty-four got into print." Ambrose was one of those twenty-four, however, "[o]nly four of the Puritan clergy of the diocese of Chester preached before the House of Commons in the 1640s"¹⁴⁹ and Ambrose was not one of

¹⁴⁹ Richardson, *Puritanism in North-West England*, 150.

them. One possible reason for this was because he was still relatively young and had not yet established himself since his first publication of *Prima* and *Ultima* appeared in 1640 and his more popular *Looking Unto Jesus* was not published until 1658. By that time the political prospects of the Puritan were quickly declining. Richardson provides a further elaboration on the disadvantage of being isolated from London, “[t]hrough effective and influential patronage came national notice for the puritan preacher. But most of those patrons whose activities have been described in an earlier chapter were able to exert little influence outside the diocese, since they were only minor figures themselves.”¹⁵⁰ A second significant reason that may account for Ambrose’s lack of attention could have been his irenic spirit that shunned controversy. Puritan writers who engaged in more polemical writing would have attracted greater awareness and visibility by virtue of the controversy that their writings would have generated. However, that was not consistent with Ambrose’s personality or style.

Further, there is one additional reason that might explain the lack of interest in Ambrose in the English-speaking world today. A review of recent dissertations written over the past few decades reveals that they generally fall into two different categories. The first group is comprised of comparative studies of two or more Puritans often focusing on preaching, theology of the Holy Spirit, poetry or other broader topics. The second category typically relates to studies of specific aspects of theology of the best-known Puritans especially favoring Richard Sibbes, John Owen, and Richard Baxter. Moreover, the research interests of many scholars have tended to avoid the subject of practical divinity or piety of the Puritans. However, the study of

¹⁵⁰ Richardson, *Puritanism in North-West England*, 183.

Isaac Ambrose's theology and piety appears to be highly relevant for the contemporary church. Further, David Tracy asserts that a "classic text" warrants retrieval and Ambrose's works readily fit that description. Ambrose's consistent message of the benefits of consciously living in union and communion with God and the closely related themes of heavenly meditation and contemplation and enjoyment of God can address the deep spiritual hunger of today. Therefore, this thesis is unique as it breaks new ground in examining more fully the theological foundation as well as constitutive components of Ambrose's contemplative-mystical piety. It will specifically connect contemplation with the earlier spiritual practice of heavenly meditation that can create a more balanced perspective for living.

It is now possible to summarize the state of research on the contemplative-mystical piety in Puritanism. Perhaps what is most striking is the lack of a common voice on this topic. Scholarship is still in its infancy and rarely has any writer interacted with another writer except for a brief comment. The most extensive and recent work remains Williams' "The Puritan Quest for Enjoyment of God." Therefore, three strands of research have emerged. The oldest school defines mysticism narrowly according to the traditional *triplex via* and except for Rous locates mysticism in the radical groups of the Quakers and Ranters.¹⁵¹ A second stream typically comprised of more confessional Reformed theologians is fearful of the narrow definition for mysticism. However, when a broader definition resembling McGinn's mystical element is used most of these scholars are willing to concede that

¹⁵¹ See 14n50, 27n110, 27n112 for Brauer, Maclear, and Watkin.

a contemplative-mystical piety does indeed exist within Puritanism.¹⁵² The third school of thought is the emerging collection of scholars who believe that contemplative-mystical piety is fully present across the mainstream of Puritanism.¹⁵³ The present author would place himself in this third school. Once again it must be reiterated that there has been minimal conversation between any of the above writers on this topic.

Writings of Isaac Ambrose

Ambrose was a fairly productive writer for his day though he can hardly compare with the prolific pens of Richard Baxter and John Owen. Both *Prima* and *Ultima* were published in 1640. *Prima* had the sub-title, *The First Things or Regeneration Sermons*¹⁵⁴ and *Ultima*, *The Last Things or Meditation Sermons* which as its title implies is devoted to death, judgment, the terrors of hell, and preparing for heaven.¹⁵⁵ While these two works were issued only in a first edition, there were minor changes that appeared in subsequent printings. These variations will be noted though out this thesis when they are relevant to the discussion. *Media*, which was first issued in 1650, was subtitled, *The Means, Duties, Ordinances, both Secret, Private and Publike, for Continuance and Increase of a Godly Life, (once begun,) Till*

¹⁵² See 20n80, 27n110, 27n112 for Andrew Davies, Welch, Coffey, and Cook. Dever also reflects this position but it is difficult to assess if he would accept the principles of a contemplative-mystical piety.

¹⁵³ See 14n50 above for Nuttall, Stoeffler, Dewey Wallace, Belden Lane, and de Reuver. Though Williams misreads Wakefield, he would fit in this category as well as Williams herself. Though Chan insists on employing the narrow definition of mysticism his research validates the reality of contemplative-mystic piety in moderate Puritanism.

¹⁵⁴ Ambrose, *Prima* (1640), t.p. The 1650 printing revised the title to *The Doctrine of Regeneration, the New Birth, the Very Beginning of a Godly Life*.

¹⁵⁵ Ambrose, *Ultima* (1640), t.p. The 1650 printing expanded the title to *Certain Meditations on Life, Death, Judgment, Hell, Right Purgatory, and Heaven*.

We Come to Heaven.¹⁵⁶ This was Ambrose's only work that was designated by specific editions and the second revised edition was released in 1652 followed by the third revision in 1657. Two major changes from the first to the second editions involved the addition of another spiritual practice that Ambrose called "the saints' suffering" and replacing assorted retreat experiences from numerous years with a series of entries from a single year. There were additional minor variations between the second and third editions. Further, *Prima, Media, & Ultima* were issued in a single volume in 1650, 1654, and 1659. *Looking Unto Jesus* and *Redeeming the Time* were both published in 1658. *Looking Unto Jesus*, Ambrose's largest and most popular work was sub-titled, *A View of the Everlasting Gospel, or, the Souls Eying or Jesus, as Carrying on the Great Work of Mans Salvation from First to Last*.¹⁵⁷ *Redeeming the Time* was the funeral sermon for Lady Margaret Houghton, Ambrose's primary patron while in Preston. *Looking Unto Jesus* was later combined without any alteration of the text with *War with Devils* and *Ministration of, and Communion with Angels* as *The Three Great Ordinances of Jesus Christ* in 1662.¹⁵⁸ *War with Devils*, Ambrose's work on spiritual battle, traces both Satan's assaults and the duties a Christian should employ to resist these attacks and *Ministration of, and Communion with Angels* explores the ways in which a Christian can receive the guidance of angels through out the various stages of a person's life. The first edition of *The Compleat Works of Isaac Ambrose* was published in 1674, ten years after his death. The specific references through out this thesis will vary depending upon the particular need or theme to illustrate. However, since the standard edition of *Looking Unto Jesus* is 1658 and *Redeeming the Time*, *War with Devils* and *Communion with Angels*

¹⁵⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), t.p.

¹⁵⁷ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, t.p.

¹⁵⁸ Ambrose, *Three Great Ordinances of Jesus Christ*, t.p. There were no subtitles for any of these books in this edition.

were printed in only one edition no dates will be given in footnote references for these sources. Ambrose also wrote two dedications for Henry Newcome's works.¹⁵⁹ Additionally there are a few surviving manuscripts of letters of Isaac Ambrose that have been printed in various histories of Lancashire. I have had access to all of these documents for this study.¹⁶⁰

The Hermeneutical Process

As previously indicated most early modern or Puritan historians give little attention to the subject of hermeneutics. Two exceptions to this both point to Quentin Skinner.¹⁶¹ However, his primary focus is political thought and this thesis will draw upon the more appropriate field of hermeneutical theory that is consistent with the discipline of Christian spirituality.¹⁶² Since this is a historical-theological study of seventeenth-century Puritanism, history is of the utmost importance. Philip Sheldrake reminds readers of the critical importance of how we think about the past and the broader issue of historical consciousness.¹⁶³ Therefore, one must approach this subject carefully, aware of the potential dangers of oversimplifying the complexity of any person or movement of spirituality, sensitive to the continuity and discontinuity between sources of different traditions and time periods, and presentism.¹⁶⁴ Further, Sheldrake asserts that the study of history requires that certain choices must be made,

¹⁵⁹ Newcome, *Sinners Hope and Usurpation Defeated*.

¹⁶⁰ The writings of Isaac Ambrose and other early modern authors consulted for this thesis were accessed at the British Library and Dr Williams's Library and also through the Early English Books Online (EEBO) database.

¹⁶¹ Coffey, *Theology and British Revolutions*, 25-6 and Trueman, "Puritan Theology as Historical Event," esp. 257-60.

¹⁶² See for example Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, esp. 91-112, 171-95; Sheldrake, "Interpretation." in *Blackwell Companion*; Sheldrake, "Spirituality and Its Critical Methodology"; and Dreyer and Burrows, *Minding the Spirit*.

¹⁶³ Sheldrake, "Spirituality and Its Critical Methodology," 17.

¹⁶⁴ Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, esp. 17-39, 65-90.

in particular those pertaining to specific time period, geographical boundaries, and what themes will be examined.¹⁶⁵ For this study Isaac Ambrose, a seventeenth-century Lancashire Puritan, and his sources, frames the time period and geography. Since this is a study on the contemplative-mystical piety of the Puritans those themes as well as the theological foundations of that piety will be the primary focus. Closely related is the importance of context and culture. Reading Ambrose within his context requires sensitivity to the political tensions of nonconformity and recognizing the heavy concentration of Roman Catholics in Lancashire. Additionally, the theological dynamics exert a great influence as will shortly be illustrated in the motivation behind Ambrose's work *Media*. Further, it has become appropriate to stress the role of contemplation not only methodologically but also more fully as a hermeneutical method in the study of Christian spirituality.¹⁶⁶ Significantly this reinforces and validates the focus of this present study.

While many writers have contributed to the development of hermeneutics this thesis will follow David Tracy¹⁶⁷ who created his method by interacting with the Gadamer and Ricoeur. Tracy's approach is grounded in interpreting the "classic" text that possesses at least three assumptions:

first, there exists a qualitative difference between a classic and a period piece; second, there exists an assumption that a classic, by definition, will always be in need of further interpretation in view of its need for renewed application to a particular situation: third, a classic, again by definition, is assumed to be any text that always has the power to transform the horizon of the interpreter and thereby disclose new meaning and experiential possibilities.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 101-5.

¹⁶⁶ Sheldrake, "Spirituality and Its Critical Methodology," 26-9.

¹⁶⁷ Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 99-153.

¹⁶⁸ Tracy, *On Naming the Present*, 115.

Further, Tracy contends that the Scripture of the Old and New Testament “serve for the Christian as the classic judging and transforming all other classics.”¹⁶⁹ This is particularly important for this research since the Bible was the primary focus of Ambrose’s writings. Tracy emphasizes another significant aspect of a classic text in quoting Hans-Georg Gadamer’s famous assertion that there is an “excess of meaning” in these texts.¹⁷⁰ A positive outcome of following Tracy’s emphasis upon the classic text challenges readers to engage the primary texts and not blindly accept the typical uneven perceptions of some secondary sources. There are four steps to Tracy’s hermeneutical process: preunderstanding, provocation, dialogical conversation, and the community of readers.¹⁷¹ While these steps have a logical order they are not necessarily sequential but dynamically reflect the hermeneutical circle.

The first step of preunderstanding recognizes that no one approaches a classic text completely objectively. The accumulated history of effects surrounds the reader with expectations, fears, and questions for the text. Many readers who have approached the Puritans have not received them well. This negative perception makes it difficult to be receptive to them in general and even more suspect to any idea of contemplative piety. In reality this may be due to a selective reading of the primary sources. These fears may also revolve around the themes of sexuality and marriage and are related to the term ravishment that is often perceived by some as an indicator of sexual repression or violence. Therefore, it is essential that readers listen carefully to the text in context and not become sidetracked by critics.

¹⁶⁹ Tracy, *On Naming the Present*, 117.

¹⁷⁰ Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 102. Tracy’s reference is to Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 253-8. However, those pages relate to the nature of a “classic text.” For Gadamer on “excess of meaning” see *Truth and Method*, esp. 263-4, cf. 70.

¹⁷¹ Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 118-21, cf. 130-1.

Provocation is the second step of the interpretive process. Classic texts have the ability to provoke, vex, challenge, unsettle, and transform readers. Clearly the reader is not in full control of the experience since the reading of the text demands a response. Therefore, it is vital that the reader remain open to the text. This openness will likely provoke and reveal the reader's initial preunderstanding. For example, some readers are surprised to discover the Puritan usage of spiritual marriage as a metaphor for union with Christ. Others might be more shocked to recognize the Puritan perception of Jesus as divine Bridegroom. This could be especially unsettling for some males. Perhaps others might react even more strongly to the Puritan usage of ravishment as an expression of delight and enjoyment of God. These examples vividly illuminate a "hermeneutic of suspicion" that require readers to wrestle more deeply with the issues provoked within them by the text. In other words the horizon of the text unsettles the horizon of the reader. Further, it is likely that some of these examples could vex the very legitimate feminist concerns and concerns about feminism. As they arise, it is important to listen carefully but not necessarily take them so far that the reader is unable to listen to and learn from the Puritans. This demonstrates that multiple forms of provocation may occur. Closely related is Elizabeth Dreyer's warning of the danger of anachronistic and other forms of misusing and abusing medieval mystical texts. Her guidelines of not imposing the contemporary context on the original context or discounting the original setting are equally valuable for reading the seventeenth-century Puritans.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Dreyer, "Whose Story Is It?" 151-72.

Third, Tracy emphasizes the need for dialogical conversation with the text.¹⁷³ Originally Gadamer and Tracy conceptualized this as a “back-and-forth movement” between the horizon of the text and the horizon of the reader.¹⁷⁴ However, in recent years the imagery of an interactive game has been replaced by the more engaging imagery of performing a musical composition.¹⁷⁵ This is suggestive of the performative nature of the dynamic conversation that can be created between reader and text. It requires sensitivity to the text that is able to both welcome and respond to the themes that are elicited. Charles Cohen reminds readers that the best approach for studying the Puritans is to allow them to speak for themselves.¹⁷⁶ This requires awareness to the clues embedded within the text. Therefore, in following Ambrose’s embedded guidance, he reveals the motivation for writing *Media* was to address the decreased interest in spiritual duties due to the antinomian backlash. Further, *Looking Unto Jesus* was penned out of gratitude to Jesus for his recovery from a severe illness. Both of these themes will figure prominently in chapter 3 and 4. Further, Sheldrake comments upon the importance of a text’s structure as a guide to the dynamic at work within a text.¹⁷⁷ In *Media* Ambrose quotes Bernard of Clairvaux’s teaching that contemplation is of two kinds, the intellect and affect. Significantly, this two-fold structure becomes the foundation upon which *Looking Unto Jesus* is built. These examples illustrate that inherent within a classic text are questions that the reader needs to notice and negotiate. Mary Frohlich recognizes the importance of questions in Bernard Lonergan and comments that the “proper question” stimulates insight and “Lonergan’s almost childlike yet incredibly productive question was, ‘what are we

¹⁷³ For an expansion on the dynamic nature of conversation in Tracy see *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 18-27.

¹⁷⁴ Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 120. cf. Tracy, “Theological Method,” 41.

¹⁷⁵ See for example Lash, *Theology on Way to Emmaus*, 40-46.

¹⁷⁶ Cohen, *God’s Caress*, 20.

¹⁷⁷ Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 178.

doing when we are knowing?”¹⁷⁸ McGinn was deeply influenced by Lonergan, and McGinn’s questions of what is the mystical element; mystical vocabulary, mystical theology, mystical consciousness, mystical path, and how we read and interpret the mystical texts will exert a strong influence in this thesis. A significant challenge during this third step is to negotiate the conversation between the two horizons of the reader and text. Further, Sheldrake stresses the value of a contemplative approach to this reading.¹⁷⁹ This reinforces Frohlich’s comments about the childlike nature of Lonergan’s questions since children’s questions model a desire to understand and enjoy, not to analyze and control.

The importance of the community of readers is Tracy’s fourth step. Reading is not done in isolation and the insights of others either resonate and confirm understanding encouraging a hermeneutic of consent or further provoke and challenge the person to examine more deeply his or her own awareness and whether or not it was a possible interpretation of the text. McGinn’s consistent usage of a broader definition of mysticism is ultimately a confirmation of the more isolated previous usages of the mystical element or its variations on that theme. While the resistance of many scholars to find evidence of Puritan mysticism causes numerous readers to be skittish about this possibility, the research of Jean Williams and Simon Chan assert the reality of the contemplative-mystical piety within moderate Puritanism, not as a rarity but as a common feature of a healthy Reformed piety. I too join that community in engaging this study. Chapter 6 will revisit the hermeneutical matter of

¹⁷⁸ Frohlich, “Spiritual Discipline, Discipline of Spirituality,” 66. cf. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 261.

¹⁷⁹ Sheldrake, “Spirituality and Its Critical Methodology,” 25-9.

how Reformed theologians can handle the contemporary retrieval of Isaac Ambrose and his sources.

Conclusion

This thesis has raised two important questions. Was Isaac Ambrose a Puritan mystic and can contemporary Reformed Christians retrieve any wisdom from Ambrose's writings to guide their piety? This first chapter acknowledged the difficulty of defining mysticism. Over its long history within the Christian Church clearly there have been vivid illustrations of the strengths and potential dangers of mysticism. Rather than ignoring or rejecting mysticism Bernard McGinn offers a broader definition that reduces the distorted perceptions of many and expands the possibility of recognizing the presence and importance of the mystical element more widely in the Roman Catholic and even the Protestant Church. This chapter substituted the language of contemplative-mystical piety for McGinn's mystical element since the former is more amenable and consistent with the Reformed tradition. Further, Jean Williams has demonstrated through her extensive research that mysticism and Puritanism are not mutually exclusive. While historians have been quite willing to acknowledge the presence of mystics along the radical perimeter of the Puritans, Williams guides readers in recognizing a similar reality in the moderate Puritans. Additionally, this chapter introduced Isaac Ambrose as the primary focus of this research. There has been no significant inquiry into Ambrose's theology or piety and therefore this study is unique. However, before it is possible to confirm the nature and depth of Ambrose's contemplative-mystical piety or whether his writings can offer wisdom for the contemporary Church a thorough investigation of his theology and piety must be made.

Chapter 2 will explore the critical theme of examining the biblical-theological foundation of union with Christ, often called spiritual marriage. A historical survey will indicate that spiritual marriage played a significant role in Bernard of Clairvaux, John Calvin, and the Puritans. Unlike Calvin who eschewed the allegorical reading of the Song of Songs, the Puritans more closely resembled Bernard in their reading of this exceptional text of biblical mysticism. Just as the Puritans spoke freely of the intimacy and joys of spiritual marriage with Jesus as the divine Bridegroom they equally believed in celebrating the intimacy and joys of godly or earthly marriage. This background enables a careful consideration of Isaac Ambrose's usage of spiritual marriage. Additionally, this chapter will examine the points of continuity and discontinuity between Bernard, Calvin, and the Puritans on spiritual marriage. Central to Ambrose's understanding of spiritual marriage is both the person's relationship to Jesus in *unio mystica* as well as the potential for deepening that relationship in communion with Christ. In the third chapter a contemplative biography of Isaac Ambrose will be created through the Spiritual Movement Matrix, a tool derived from the social sciences that assists one in reflecting on the presence and movement of God within a person's life. Ambrose follows the common perception of contemplation as gazing at God in love out of gratitude. While much of Ambrose's diary is not extant, the available evidence of these texts produces a vivid description of his contemplative attitude, personal and communal spiritual practices, and experiences that emerge from his spiritual marriage with Jesus. The most unique feature about Ambrose was his annual month-long retreats in May in which he retired into the woods to more intentionally cultivate his relationship with God. This is all the more surprising since Ambrose was married and had three children. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that Ambrose was a recluse since he also

demonstrated similar contemplative practices and experiences during his daily activities of ministry the other eleven months. While chapter 3 reveals the uniqueness of Ambrose's annual retreats chapter 4 examines more closely first the broader Christian understanding of meditation and contemplation and then the specific manner in which Ambrose taught and practiced these disciplines that he himself used during his retreats. The degree of continuity and discontinuity between the earlier Western Catholic writings and that of the Puritans will be examined, with a specific interest in discovering the primary sources that might have influenced Ambrose. This will then prepare readers for a detailed examination of Ambrose's use of contemplation in his writings. Finally, the benefits and effects of contemplation according to Ambrose will be examined. Chapter 5 will present the most distinctive aspect of this thesis on Ambrose. While numerous scholars have explored various dimensions of the contemplative-mystical piety of the Puritans no one has devoted sustained research to the Puritan usage of the erotic language of Song of Songs expressed in ravishment. However, ravishment was a primary term for the Puritans in general and Ambrose in particular to express their delight and enjoyment of God in spiritual marriage. This chapter will also notice the role of desire or motivation for longing after God as well as a complete examination of the various ways in which Ambrose employed this term in his writings. Similar to chapter 4, Ambrose's teaching on the benefits and effects on the ravished soul will be considered. Chapter 6 marks a critical transition as this thesis moves from the historical-theological focus of the contemplative-mystical piety of Isaac Ambrose to the practical matter of retrieval. However, before the issue of retrieving Ambrose's piety for contemporary Reformed Christians can be raised it must be asked what happened to this contemplative tradition within Puritanism. That will necessitate an inquiry into the

areas of resistance to or suspicion of mysticism by Reformed theologians. Karl Barth will be employed as one of the more prominent Reformed voices that have expressed serious misgivings about contemplative experience. However, Barth is not representative of the entire Reformed tradition and Herman Bavinck will offer a contrasting position that is more receptive to contemplative piety. The critical issue of retrieval will once again be examined to determine how one can recover both Ambrose's piety and his sources. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a number of specific themes and principles from Ambrose's contemplative-mystical piety for the contemporary Reformed Church.

Chapter 2

Biblical and Theological Foundations of Spiritual Marriage

Is it thus, O my soul? hath the Lord Christ indeed discovered his will, to thee for his Spouse? What, he that is so holy, to marry such an impure wretch as thou art? O how should this but melt-thee into a flame of *love*? ... O my soul, henceforth cling to thy Savior, go out of thy self, and creep to him, and affect not onely union, but very unity with him; bathe thy self hereafter again and again, many and many a time in those delicious intimacies of thy Spiritual marriage.¹

Christian spirituality records the long history of believers hungering for God. The previous chapter introduced Isaac Ambrose as a seventeenth-century moderate Puritan divine. While his life and writings have been under-researched those few scholars who have studied him have noticed a strong contemplative dimension to his works. Ambrose was situated within the larger stream of Christian spirituality by exploring the meaning of mysticism, Puritanism, and Puritan mysticism. McGinn's broader definition of the mystical element of Christian spirituality was modified to reflect a more Reformed understanding, and therefore called contemplative-mystical piety. After a review of various sources pertaining to both Puritan piety and Isaac Ambrose the critical theme of hermeneutics was examined.

This chapter studies the central role of the biblical and theological foundation of mystical union or spiritual marriage. However, McGinn suggests that the language of mystical union be replaced with the broader term of "the immediate or direct presence of God." He asserts that this revised approach enlarges the potential for recognizing the mystical element in Christianity since mystical union is only one of

¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 235 (incorrectly numbered 237)-236.

many possible images used to express the mystical themes within spirituality.² While that is true, for the Reformed and Puritan tradition mystical union is the broader term and parallels the more expansive nature of the immediate presence of God in Roman Catholic spirituality.³ Therefore, this chapter will focus primarily on the notion of union with Christ.

While Isaac Ambrose is the primary focus of this thesis this chapter is more broadly based to establish the critical foundation for examining him. Therefore, the significant themes of spiritual marriage will be studied, thus preparing the way for the latter section of this chapter in which Ambrose moves to center stage and assumes the prominent role for the remainder of this study. Union with Christ has held a cherished place in the writings of Christians since the New Testament. This language was common to the patristic, monastic, and medieval periods as well as to Ambrose and other Puritans and continues into the present age.⁴ Alongside the development of mystical union in the Western Church theosis or deification in the Eastern Church must also be recognized. While this topic has become increasingly more important in studies of mystical union space prevents an examination of it.⁵ Therefore, this chapter begins by exploring the biblical foundation for spiritual marriage and then reviews the

² McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, xvii.

³ Jean Williams maintains that union with Christ rather than pilgrimage was the most common metaphor for the Puritans. "Puritan Enjoyment of God," 160. For the importance of pilgrimage in Puritan writings see Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 54 and Hinson, "Puritan Spirituality," 168. cf. 74n114-6 for other images.

⁴ For a general orientation to spiritual marriage see McGinn, "Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam." s.v. and Marcoulesco "Mystical Union." s.v. For a broader theological perspective see Smedes, *Union with Christ*.

⁵ One can detect echoes of deification in many of the writings of the Western Church; however, they are rarely as dominant as in Orthodox spirituality. For deification in Francis Rous see Brauer, "Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic," 178-82, 187. For a Reformed consideration see Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift*. More broadly see Christensen and Wittung, *Partakers of the Divine Nature* and Kärkkäinen, *One with God*.

historical roots of this metaphor in Bernard of Clairvaux and John Calvin, two individuals who influenced Ambrose. The Puritan exegesis of Scripture, especially as it relates to the spiritual reading of Song of Songs, will then be investigated. After an examination of the Puritan celebration of marriage and sex the primacy of spiritual marriage within Puritan writings will be explored. An extensive survey of Ambrose's biblical and theological understanding of spiritual marriage will then be developed, followed by a summary of the continuities and discontinuities between Bernard and Calvin in relationship to Ambrose.

Biblical Foundations of Spiritual Marriage

Bernard McGinn stresses the foundational role of Scripture and maintains it was used as a "sacred text" in the early history of Christian mysticism.⁶ Further, McGinn asserts exegesis was inseparable from mysticism at least through the twelfth-century. According to A.A. Bialas the most frequently used Scriptures for spiritual marriage in the early church through the Roman Catholic Reformation were Hosea 2:19; Matthew 9:15; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 21:2.⁷ Additionally John 17:21; 1 Corinthians 6:17; 13; 1 John 4:1-19 would inspire mystical responses.⁸ In the seventeenth-century Puritan preachers were turning to many of the same texts in their sermons on spiritual marriage. Among the more frequently cited Old Testament passages were Psalm 45; Isaiah 62:4-5; Hosea 2:19 and Malachi 3:1.⁹ Prominent

⁶ McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 3, cf. 4, 345n1.

⁷ Bialas, "Mystical Marriage." s.v., 105.

⁸ McGinn, "Love, Knowledge and Unio Mystica," 60-62, 65.

⁹ For Ps 45:10-11 see Vincent, *Christ the Best Husband*; for Is 62:4-5 see Edwards, *Church's Marriage to Her Son*; for Hosea see King, *Marriage of the Lambe* on Hos 2:20 and Baillie, *Spiritual Marriage* on Hos 2:19; for Malachi see Hooker, *Soules Implantation*, 81-153.

New Testament Scriptures included Matthew 25; John 17; 1 Corinthians 6:17; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:32; 1 John 1:3 and Revelation 3:20.¹⁰

Western Catholics and Protestants alike turned to the Song of Songs as a favorite text for spiritual marriage.¹¹ This has been true at least since Origen in the third century. While this would surprise no one reading the monastic or medieval writers it may seem totally out of character among the Puritans. Nonetheless, Puritan preachers including John Collinges, John Cotton, Richard Sibbes, Thomas Brightman, John Robotham, and James Durham produced numerous commentaries and lengthy sermon series on the Song of Songs. Others, such as Edward Taylor would later employ the Song of Songs for his Saturday evening communion preparatory meditations.¹² Further, many writers drew heavily upon this text to illustrate or comment on spiritual marriage. This was true of Isaac Ambrose. It places him in the good company of John Owen, whose *Communion with God* and Samuel Rutherford whose *Letters* are all highly dependent upon the bridal imagery of the Song of Songs. Perhaps not unsurprisingly some critics have reacted strongly to the intensely erotic

¹⁰ For Mt 25 see Shepard, *Parable of Ten Virgins*; for John 17 see Burgess, *CXLV Expository Sermons* and Flavel, *Method of Grace*, 33-49 on Jn 17:23; for 1 Cor 6:17 see Hooker, *Soules Exaltation*, 1-53 and Lye, *True Believers Union*; for 2 Cor 11:2 see Pearse, *Best Match*; for Eph 5:32 see Preston, *Churchs Marriage*; for 1 Jn 1:3 see Owen, *Communion with God*; and for Rev 3:20 see Flavel, *England's Duty*, 4:4-268.

¹¹ Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, 123; Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 28-9; and Coffey, "Letters by Samuel Rutherford," 104.

¹² The literature on Taylor's usage of the Song of Songs is vast. See for example Hambrick-Stowe, *Early New England Meditative Poetry*, 38-62, 129-264 and Hessel-Robinson, "Edward Taylor's Preparatory Meditations."

nature of Rutherford's *Letters*.¹³ Unfortunately, there is no Protestant counterpart to Ann Matter's study of the medieval usage of the Song of Songs for the Puritans.¹⁴

While Protestants and Western Catholics shared a dependence upon the same Scripture that should not imply that they always derived an identical meaning. George Scheper distinguishes between the monastic and Puritan usage that while similar in exegetical approach yielded a different metaphor.¹⁵ Susan Hardman Moore suggests that a significant distinction between the monastic and Puritan use of Song of Songs focuses on the increased practice of marriage in the Puritans.¹⁶ While the monastic and Medieval Church leaders were required to practice celibacy and extol virginity, many Puritan leaders were married. This would lead to a differing awareness around gender and the soul. Indeed Puritans encouraged young couples to think in terms of "double marriage", looking not only at the prospect of earthly marriage but also considering the greater joy of heavenly marriage with Jesus.¹⁷ This theme will be explored in greater depth later in this chapter.

Historical Roots of Spiritual Marriage

McGinn reminds readers that until the twelfth-century the language of union with God was not particularly common. This change was related to a number of interacting features including the Dionysian emphasis upon ascent and reaching the

¹³ Coffey, *Theology and the British Revolutions*, 108-9. Rutherford also used Sg 2:14-17 for his sermon, *Christ and the Doves*.

¹⁴ Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*. Another standard work on the medieval period is Astell, *Song of Songs in Middle Ages*. Clarke, *Rewriting the Bride*, is the best remedy for this vacuum. cf. Scheper, "Reformation and Song of Songs" and Williams, "Puritan Enjoyment of God," 177-211.

¹⁵ Scheper, "Reformation and Song of Songs," 557-8.

¹⁶ Hardman Moore, "Sexing the Soul," 179.

¹⁷ See Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 74.

completion of the journey.¹⁸ Further, this period has often been called the “Twelfth-Century Renaissance” that among other things emphasized, “divine and human love [that] was expressed in subjective mysticism and in courtly love.” Additionally a new awareness of the individual and interpersonal relationships, a growing appreciation of humanness, including the humanity of Christ, and new spiritual forms emerged.¹⁹ Undoubtedly the most significant person towering over the twelfth-century was Bernard of Clairvaux.

Isaac Ambrose as well as many other Puritans exhibited a great fondness for Bernard of Clairvaux.²⁰ Bernard’s eighty-six sermons from the Song of Songs are far ranging and only a few illustrations can be offered. In one particularly significant reference Bernard writes:

‘Arise my love, my bride, and come.’ The bridegroom draws attention to the greatness of his love by repeating words of love.... Never yet, as far as I recall, has he mentioned the bride openly in this whole work, except when she goes to the vineyards and draws near the wine of love. When she will have attained to it and become perfect she will celebrate a spiritual marriage; and they shall become two, not in one flesh but in one spirit, as the apostle says: ‘He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.’²¹

Bernard alerts his readers to a number of key principles. God, the divine Bridegroom, takes the initiative in calling individuals into spiritual marriage. This is a reminder that grace was important for Bernard. Further, it is clear that this is a process; union is something that needs to be attained. This passage also employs 1 Corinthians 6:17

¹⁸ McGinn, “Love, Knowledge and Unio Mystica,” 61-2.

¹⁹ Sheldrake, *Brief History of Spirituality*, 77. cf. McGinn, “Western Christianity,” 323-9.

²⁰ The literature on Bernard is immense. Two general introductions are McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 158-224 and Tamburello, *Bernard of Clairvaux, Essential Writings*. On Bernard’s understanding of *unio mystica* see Tamburello, *Union with Christ*; Gilson, *Mystical Theology of Bernard*; Casey, *Athirst for God*, esp. 191-208 and de Reuver, *Sweet Communion*, 27-60.

²¹ Bernard, *SCC* 61:1.

which was Bernard's favorite Scripture to express union with God.²² And, "[f]urthermore, 'he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him,' his whole being somehow changed into a movement of divine love.... But God is love, and the deeper one's union with God, the more full one is of love."²³ Therefore, "[s]uch love, as I have said, is marriage, for a soul cannot love like this and not be beloved; complete and perfect marriage consists in the exchange of love."²⁴ These two reminders are representative of the essential nature of love for Bernard in spiritual marriage.

Mystical union was also significant in John Calvin's theology. In recent years there has been considerable debate whether Calvin had a 'central dogma.' While the older perception focused upon predestination, more recently the pendulum has swung to the centrality of union with Christ.²⁵ However, the best of contemporary research, while not seeking to minimize the importance of *unio mystica*, asserts that Calvin was too complex to have a single 'central dogma.'²⁶ Although Calvin's writings are replete with numerous references to union with Christ there are a few that focus specifically on spiritual marriage. Calvin asserts,

God very commonly takes on the character of a husband to us. Indeed, the union by which he binds us to himself when he receives us into the bosom of the church is like sacred wedlock, which must rest upon mutual faithfulness [Eph. 5:29-32]. As he performs all the duties of a true and faithful husband, of us in return he demands love and conjugal chastity. That is we are not to yield our souls to Satan, to lust, and to the filthy desires of the flesh, to be defiled by them.²⁷

²² McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 213, 215.

²³ Bernard, *SCC* 26:5.

²⁴ Bernard, *SCC* 83.6.

²⁵ Partee, "Calvin's Central Dogma Again," 191-199 and Hageman, "Reformed Spirituality," 60-61. For an opposing view see Wenger "New Perspective on Calvin."

²⁶ Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift*, 19.

²⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.18. Calvin also draws upon Is 62:4-5 and Hos 2:19-20 in this section to reinforce the importance of faithfulness to God. Engrafting is Calvin's

Calvin uses the same imagery later when he declares:

This union alone ensures that, as far as we are concerned, he has not unprofitably come with the name of Savior. The same purpose is served by that sacred wedlock through which we are made flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone [Eph. 5:30], and thus one with him. But he unites himself to us by the Spirit alone. By the grace and power of the same Spirit we are made his members, to keep us under himself and in turn to possess him.²⁸

It is significant, contra Bernard that spiritual marriage for Calvin is more ecclesial and related to Ephesians 5. Additionally Calvin stresses the critical role of the Holy Spirit who serves as the initiator and bond of this mystical union.²⁹ Bernard's relational emphasis of love appears to be altered in Calvin to focus more on salvation and faith.

There are a number of significant continuities and discontinuities between Bernard and Calvin. The commonalities include the importance of grace in the union with Christ, and that the union is of the will and not of essence, and the centrality of Christ's humanity. Conversely, Bernard typically spoke of union with God rather than Christ, and this union focused more on love, and emphasized the Song of Songs. Calvin spoke most frequently of union with Christ and focused on faith and emphasized the foundational role of the sacraments. Both reformers placed some restrictions on it. Bernard taught that the monastery was the primary place to experience it. Calvin's view was more inclusive of clergy and laity; however, it could be argued that he limited it to those who were among God's elect. Bernard's favorite text was 1 Corinthians 6:17 and Ephesians 5:30-32 was the corresponding counterpart

favorite image when speaking of being joined with Christ. Tamburello, *Union with Christ*, 111

²⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.3, cf. 2.12.7; 4.19.35. Calvin also uses the metaphor of "holy marriage" in *Commentary on Hosea*, 2:21-22 and "spiritual marriage" in *Commentary on Matthew* 22:2.

²⁹ According to Tamburello, the Holy Spirit also serves an important function in Bernard of Clairvaux. *Union with Christ*, 44-5.

for Calvin.³⁰ However, the most significant distinction, especially as it relates to this chapter, is that while Song of Songs was foundational and contemplation was highly desirable for Bernard's understanding neither held the same significance for Calvin.³¹ While it has become customary to summarize the distinctions between Bernard and Calvin in this manner, upon closer examination some of these distinctions appear to decrease and in reality Bernard does seem to appreciate the importance of faith and likewise Calvin's understanding was not devoid of love.³² More importantly, what appears lacking in this discussion is the absence of the dynamic nature of faith in Calvin's theology. While faith originates in the mind for Calvin it is sealed in the heart. Therefore, faith has a strong affective dimension and when combined with the Holy Spirit creates a robust sense of enjoyment of Christ. Calvin maintains,

We also, in turn, are said to be "engrafted into him" [Rom. 11:17], and to "put on Christ" [Gal. 3:27]; for, as I have said, all that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him. It is true that we obtain this by faith. Yet since we see that not all indiscriminately embrace that communion with Christ which is offered through the gospel, reason itself teaches us to climb higher and to examine into the secret energy of the Spirit, by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits.³³

Additionally it is vital to recognize that for Calvin spiritual marriage was intimately connected with the celebration of the Lord's Supper and contained a strong relational

³⁰ Tamburello, *Union with Christ*, 90. For the significance of Eph 5:30-32 see Hardman Moore, "Sexing the Soul," 179n11.

³¹ Much of this is summarized from Tamburello, *Union with Christ*, 105-7. cf. Chin, "*Unio Mystica and Imitatio Christi*," 306.

³² De Reuver, *Sweet Communion*, 58. For the emphasis of love being predominant in Bernard and faith in Calvin see Tamburello, *Union with Christ*, 85, 91, 103, 107. For a critique of Tamburello's method see Chin, "*Unio Mystica and Imitatio Christi*," 44-51. McGinn also appears to minimize the affective dimension of faith in Calvin. "Mysticism." s.v., 3:122. Tamburello concedes that faith was also important for Bernard and that love played a significant role for Calvin. *Union with Christ*, 144n47, 40, 105.

³³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.1, cf. 3.2.7; 3.2.14; 3.2.36. Calvin connects faith to the "double grace" of justification and sanctification. *Institutes*, 3.11.1. Won also stresses the experiential nature of union with Christ for Calvin. "Communion with Christ," 33.

theme. Ronald Wallace accurately summarizes this crucial aspect of Calvin's theology, "[w]hen we have such communion with him by the Holy Spirit, Calvin explained, he is not only brought down to us on this earth, but our souls are also raised up to him so that we can participate here and now in his ascended life and glory."³⁴ This uncovers another critical distinction between Bernard and Calvin that is not typically recognized. Bernard spoke of union with God while Calvin spoke of both union and communion with Christ.³⁵ The theological background for this can be traced to the differing perceptions regarding justification and sanctification. Indeed Bernard, as other medieval writers did not distinguish as clearly as Calvin and the Protestant Reformers did on these two graces of God.³⁶ When the Puritan understanding of spiritual marriage is examined it will be clear how significant both communion and the strong relational theme is for them.

Puritan Reading and Exegesis of Scripture

Previously it was mentioned that the Song of Songs was a favorite Puritan text for spiritual marriage, but how did they read this Scripture? Isaac Ambrose provides an illuminating insight in summarizing the purpose of Psalm 45, which was often used as a compact version of the Song of Songs.³⁷ Ambrose declares "*the spiritual marriage and love between Christ and his Church, whereof Solomons marriage with Pharaohs daughter, was a figure and type and likewise to shew the perfect love that*

³⁴ Ronald Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation*, 198. cf. Ronald Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word*, 206-7.

³⁵ Tamburello speaks of the "twofold communion with Christ" and is one scholar who recognizes this major distinction. *Union with Christ*, 86.

³⁶ Tamburello, *Union with Christ*, 107, cf. 41-63. cf. McGrath, "Justification." s.v. and Gründler, "Justification and Sanctification in Calvin and Bernard."

³⁷ Bainton, "Bible in Reformation," 8 and Williams, "Puritan Enjoyment of God," 177n108.

ought to be between the husband and the wife.”³⁸ “Figure and type” clearly reveal a more dynamic engagement with the text and indicate that Ambrose was not limited to a literal reading of Scripture. At one level it was not uncommon to conflate these terms and many seventeenth-century dictionaries defined “type” as a “figure, example, shadow of anything.”³⁹ Yet at another level a distinction could be drawn between them. William Perkins, who authored one of the primary preaching manuals in the early seventeenth-century, demonstrates awareness to figures of speech when he includes metaphors, metonymies, and synecdoche in his work.⁴⁰ He also recognized the difference between “Analogical & plaine, or Crypticall and dark” passages.⁴¹ Perkins cites 1 Corinthians 11:24 “[t]his is my body, which is broken for you.” as an example and explains why this passage could not be taken literally.⁴² Additionally James Durham offers a helpful distinction between typology and allegory, “[t]ypes suppose still the verity of some history, as Jonah’s casting in the sea, and being in the fish’s belly three days and three nights, when it is applied to Christ in the New Testament, it supposeth such a thing once to have been: allegories again, have no such necessary supposition, but are as parables, proponed for some

³⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 499-500.

³⁹ Cawdry, *Table Alphabetical*, n.p. cf. Phillips, *New World*, n.p.; Cockeram, *English Dictionarie*, 2nd pt., n.p.; and Blount, *Glossographia*, n.p. cf. Lowance, *Language of Canaan*, 19, 66.

⁴⁰ Perkins, *Arte of Prophecyng*, 54-57.

⁴¹ Perkins, *Arte of Prophecyng*, 45, 46. Thomas Lea notes, “[t]his recognition moderated their emphasis on literalism so that they did not practice a wooden literalism that could lead to serious errors in interpretation.” “Hermeneutics of the Puritans,” 281.

⁴² Perkins, *Arte of Prophecyng*, 47-49. For the use of figural language in the Puritans see Lowance, *Language of Canaan* and Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, esp. 31-146.

mystical end.”⁴³ However, in practice, even the distinctions between typologies and allegories could blur.⁴⁴

Further, the Puritans recognized that some passages were allegorical in nature, such as the Song of Songs. Durham distinguished between an “allegoric exposition of scripture, and an exposition of allegoric scripture: the first is that which many fathers and schoolmen fail in, that is, when they allegorize plain scriptures and histories, seeking to draw out some secret meaning, other than appeareth in the words; and so will fasten many senses upon one scripture.”⁴⁵ Therefore, Durham maintains that the Song of Songs is to be read allegorically.⁴⁶ Most Puritans readily agreed with this assessment⁴⁷, though they also understood that Solomon was a “type” of Christ.⁴⁸

This Puritan sensitivity to allegories, figures of speech, and typology unsettles the assumption that the Protestant Reformation fully embraced the literal sense of Scripture. Brevard Childs corrects this distorted thinking, “[i]n the post-Reformation period ... both the orthodox Lutherans and Calvinists had almost immediate difficulty in maintaining the unity of the literal sense which increasingly was fragmented in different levels of meaning.”⁴⁹ In reality the literal reading of Scripture had been emphasized by Hugh of St. Victor (1096-1141) long before Luther’s resistance to

⁴³ Durham, *Song of Solomon*, 30. Benjamin Keach authored one of the primary works of typology. *Tropologia: Key to Metaphors*. For an overview to typology see Lowance, *Language of Canaan*, esp. 16-27.

⁴⁴ Schneiders, “Scripture and Spirituality,” 17. cf. Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 182n117.

⁴⁵ Durham, *Song of Solomon*, 43.

⁴⁶ Durham, *Song of Solomon*, 30.

⁴⁷ Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 183 and Knott, *Sword of Spirit*, 53.

⁴⁸ Lowance, *Language of Canaan*, 46-7 and Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 181n114.

⁴⁹ Childs, “Sensus Literalis of Scripture,” 87.

allegorical reading.⁵⁰ Previously Augustine had advanced a double literal reading of Scripture based on 2 Corinthians 3:6, “[t]he letter kills but the spirit makes alive” that sought both the literal and spiritual sense of a passage.⁵¹ However, due to the often excessive interpretations that developed around allegorical reading the Reformers rejected the *quadriga* or four-fold pattern of reading Scripture according to the literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical meaning and resorted to the literal practice.⁵² Lisa Gordis is correct that polemics was primarily the motivation behind the intense resistance to the *quadriga*.⁵³ Perkins continued the same trajectory opposing the *quadriga* stating, “[t]here is one onelie sense, and the same is the literall.”⁵⁴ However, this condemnation quickly evolves into an affirmation, “[a]n allegorie is onely a certaine manner of uttering the same sense. The Anagoge and Tropologie are waies, whereby the sense may be applied.”⁵⁵ Further, in his preaching manual Perkins provides specific directions on how to expound allegory and reminds his readers that the apostle Paul frequently employed them in his epistles.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Childs, “Sensus Literalis of Scripture,” 83. cf. Schneiders, “Scripture and Spirituality,” 15-16.

⁵¹ Steinmetz, “Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,” 28-9.

⁵² Gordis, *Opening Scripture*, 20, cf. 238n22. The seminal study on the *quadriga* is de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: Four Senses of Scripture*. Other helpful resources include Schneiders, “Scripture and Spirituality,” 9-19; Muller, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 254-55; and Wilson, *God Sense*. Muller asserts that the *quadriga* continued to exist following the Protestant Reformation. “Biblical Interpretation in the Reformation,” 3-16 and *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 469-82.

⁵³ Gordis, *Opening Scripture*, 20, 238n22. cf. Scheper, “Reformation and Song of Songs”, 552.

⁵⁴ Perkins, *Arte of Prophecyng*, 31.

⁵⁵ Perkins, *Arte of Prophecyng*, 31. One of Perkins’ examples of doctrine strongly resembles the four-fold method of reading. *Arte of Prophecyng*, 126. Durham claims that the apostle Paul used the *quadriga* in Galatians 4. *Song of Solomon*, 30. Muller asserts that the *quadriga* continued in some form in Calvin. “Biblical Interpretation in the Reformation,” 11-12.

⁵⁶ Perkins, *Arte of Prophecyng*, 75, 97. Durham provides five rules for expounding allegories. *Song of Solomon*, 46-8.

Consequently this leads some contemporary scholars to contend that the Puritan allegorizing of the Song of Songs was due to their squeamishness regarding sex and attempt to minimize it.⁵⁷ However, others maintain the opposite and Williams declares:

[f]or the vast majority of Puritan writers interpreted Canticles as an allegory of the love between Christ and the individual believer. This hermeneutic was not chosen chiefly to de-eroticise the Song, but to increase its spiritual value, for it was the very sensuality of its language which made it such an apt descriptive tool for ecstatic enjoyment of God. Puritan mysticism was communicated using a profoundly sensual and even erotic love-language.⁵⁸

McGinn recognizes the same principle within the broader context and asserts that, “erotic imagery of kisses and breasts, was one of the central scriptural foundations in the history of Christian mysticism.”⁵⁹ Therefore, it is illuminating that the Puritans turned to Proverbs 31 as their favorite text for wedding sermons not the Song of Songs.⁶⁰ Perhaps in their mind the Song of Songs had been elevated for more exclusive use in speaking of their relationship with Jesus in spiritual marriage rather than their earthly marriage.

Puritan Celebration of Godly Marriage and Sex

The Puritans often spoke of their earthly marriage as godly marriage.⁶¹

Richard Godbeer asserts that the Puritans drew inspiration for their godly marriage

⁵⁷ Scheper, “Reformation and Song of Songs,” 558.

⁵⁸ Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 194-5, cf. 184, 196.

⁵⁹ McGinn, “Mysticism and Sexuality,” 46. cf. McGinn, “Language of Love,” 205.

⁶⁰ See for example the four volumes of wedding sermons published as *Conjugal Duty: Delightful Wedding-Sermons* in the Dr Williams’s Library.

⁶¹ The primary sources will be introduced throughout this section. The secondary literature on godly marriage is extensive. Some useful sources include: Haller and Haller, “Puritan Art of Love”; Frye, “Puritanism on Conjugal Love”; Leites, “Duty to Desire”; Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 39-55; Todd, “Spiritualized Household”; Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 259-73; Doriani, “Puritans, Sex, and Pleasure”; Fletcher, “Protestant Idea of Marriage”; Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 159-173; and Peters, *Patterns of Piety*.

from the model of their experience with Christ in spiritual marriage.⁶² Amanda Porterfield observes that earthly marriage mirrored the heavenly marriage in hierarchy.⁶³ Susan Hardman Moore advances the opposing view that human marriage was the model for spiritual marriage.⁶⁴ In reality it is difficult to ascertain which came first, and some scholars recognize the reciprocal nature in the Puritan usage of the marriage metaphor.⁶⁵ Isaac Ambrose maintains that Christ and his spouse serve as an example for the husband and wife in godly marriage because the quality of Christ's love is far superior to that of human love.⁶⁶ Samuel Rutherford's *Letters*, which are full of vivid and erotic nuptial imagery, agrees with Ambrose's assessment declaring, "[l]et her give Christ the love of her virginity and espousals, and choose Him first as her Husband, and that match shall bless the other."⁶⁷ Somewhat surprisingly, Longfellow contends, "[w]ith the exception of William Gouge, who attempts to literalise the mystical marriage metaphor, in most Puritan writers the mystery of mystical marriage has very little connection to human marriage."⁶⁸

Readers who have not been exposed to a careful examination of the primary texts are prone to caricature individuals or movements from history. Perhaps no group has been more consistently criticized for their teaching on marriage and sex than the Puritans. In fact many writers employ the term puritanical as a repressive

⁶² Godbeer, "Performing Patriarchy," 301; Godbeer, "Love Raptures," 53, 63-65, 70; and *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 72.

⁶³ Porterfield, *Feminine Spirituality in America*, 39.

⁶⁴ Hardman Moore, "Sexing the Soul," 176n5, 180, 182.

⁶⁵ Godbeer, "Love Raptures," 54, 62 and *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 72. cf. Williams, "Puritan Enjoyment of God," 176.

⁶⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 323, 325.

⁶⁷ Rutherford, *Letters*, 483.

⁶⁸ Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writings*, 23.

and pejorative label.⁶⁹ However, once a person reads the Puritan marriage manuals he or she is almost certain to develop a different perception. These emphases can be summarized as: the softening of the hierarchical understanding of marriage within a patriarchal society, the recognition of the benefit of marriage beyond procreation, and a greater celebration of intimacy and sex within marriage.

No one denies that the seventeenth-century landscape was highly patriarchal. This was not a new development but a continuation of a practice that had existed for centuries. However, within Puritanism there was a softening of the rigidity and control that had marked previous generations. Robert Cleaver writing in 1592 declares:

A wise husband, and one that seeketh to live in quiet with his wife, must observe these three rules. Often to admonish; Seldome to reprove; and never to smite her. . . . The husband is also to understand, that as God created the woman, not of the head, & so equall in authoritie with her husband; so also hee created her not of *Adams* foote, that she should be troden downe and despised, but he tooke her out of the ribbe, that shee might walke joyntly with him, under the conduct and government of her head.⁷⁰

Thomas Gataker in a sermon preached almost forty years after Cleaver continues the same imagery and expands it, “[s]he was made for man, & given to man, not to be a *play-fellow*, or a *bed-fellow*, or a *table-mate*, onely with him (and yet to be all these too) but to bee a *yoke-fellow*, a *work-fellow*, a *fellow-labourer* with him, to be *an assistant* and *an helper* unto him, in the managing of such *domesticall*

⁶⁹ Doriani, “Puritans, Sex, and Pleasure,” 125. cf. Verduin, “Our Cursed Natures,” 223.

⁷⁰ Cleaver, *Godly Form of Householde Government*, 201. William Gouge follows the same principle and forbids the husband from beating his wife. *Domesticall Duties*, 394, 396. However, Whately maintains that under certain circumstances it may be necessary. *Brides-Bush* (1623), see esp. 107, 123, 125.

and household affaires.”⁷¹ Earlier Gataker reminds both husband and wife to recognize that their respective partner is a gift from God.⁷² William Whately argues that a husband and wife “are indebted each to other in reciprocall debt.”⁷³ However, the husband’s higher position of authority also included greater responsibility and he was expected to provide a good example for his wife.⁷⁴ Puritan pastors were typically very perceptive of human nature and Richard Steele in his sermon on Ephesians 5:33 declares that the apostle Paul was observing the most frequent failings of couples, that “husbands too commonly being defective in their love, and wives most defective in their reverence and subjection.”⁷⁵

William Gouge provides a striking illustration of the dynamics of hierarchy. The publication of his *Of Domesticall Duties* created an outcry among many of the women in his London congregation. By the third edition he acknowledged that they felt he was overbearing and excessive in his teaching. Significantly these women felt the freedom to voice their concerns and equally that Gouge acknowledged this in print.⁷⁶ It is also noteworthy that his teaching on sex within marriage was very reciprocal and he was the most progressive Puritan on this subject. The recent research of Christine Peters further clarifies both the dynamics within Gouge’s

⁷¹ Gataker, *Certaine Sermons*, 128. The likely original source of this imagery is Chrysostom’s homily on Ephesians. Steele, “Duties of Husbands and Wives?” 290. cf. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 262 and Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing*, 120 for other variations. For John Donne’s opposing view of Genesis 2 imagery see Todd, “Spiritualized Household,” 113n72.

⁷² Gataker, *Good Wife Gods Gift*, 22-3.

⁷³ Whately, *Bride-Bush* (1617), 1.

⁷⁴ Whately, *Bride-Bush* (1617), 19.

⁷⁵ Steele, “Duties of Husbands and Wives,” 274.

⁷⁶ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 4. This does not appear in the 1627 second edition. All citations from Gouge in this thesis are from the 1634 third edition.

congregation and the broader perspective of Puritan family hierarchy.⁷⁷ Therefore, while no one would deny that patriarchy was firmly ensconced within Puritan culture there was greater flexibility and freedom for women than commonly assumed.⁷⁸ In fact, Willen concludes that, “godliness [among Puritan wives] tempered patriarchy” and that normal gender roles were more conditioned by specific structure or order in a given situation than by the gender of a person.⁷⁹ Further, Peters citing Gouge asserts that men could actually forfeit their authority as the head of the family due to drunkenness, card playing, or illicit sex.⁸⁰

Isaac Ambrose follows a similar pattern in his teaching on godly marriage in his exploration of the roles of husband and wife in *Media*. He begins with a general summary of mutual responsibilities. Husbands and wives should offer “[a] sweet, loving, and tender-hearted pouring out of their hearts, with much affectionate dearness into each others bosoms. This mutual-melting-heartedness, being preserved fresh and fruitful, will infinitely sweeten and beautifie the marriage state.” Further, he encourages couples to “resemble and imitate...the compassionate and melting compellations which Christ and his Spouse exchange in the *Canticles*.”⁸¹

Significantly spiritual marriage is able to guide godly marriage. Next he addresses

⁷⁷ Peters, *Patterns of Piety*, 314-6. cf. Fletcher, “Protestant Idea of Marriage,” 167-169.

⁷⁸ Limitations of space prevent a more detailed treatment of this expanding study of patriarchy. For further exploration see Richardson, *Puritanism in North-West England*, 107-9; Lake, “Feminine Piety and Personal Potency”; Porterfield, “Women’s Attraction to Puritanism”; Porterfield, *Feminine Spirituality in America*, esp. 3-39; Willen, “Godly Women in Early Modern England”; Willen, “Construction of the Feminine”; Godbeer, “Performing Patriarchy”; and Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing*, esp. 1-41.

⁷⁹ Willen, “Godly Women in Early Modern England,” 580 and Godbeer, “Performing Patriarchy,” 293.

⁸⁰ Peters, *Patterns of Piety*, 317.

⁸¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 323.

the specific duties of husbands and wives. The husband is charged to “dearly love his Wife” and “wisely maintain and manage his authority over her.” Husbands are warned that love based on “beauty, riches, lust, or any other slight grounds, is but a blaze, and soon vanisheth, but if grounded on these considerations, and especially on this union of marriage, it is lasting and true.”⁸² The wife in turn is to “be in submission to her husband” and “be an helper to him all her days.”⁸³ Further, Ambrose affirms that the wife is to submit to her husband only if those things reflect Christ. In response to the question “[w]hat if her husband command things contrary to Christ? Must she therein be subject? No.”⁸⁴

Second, the Puritans reversed the order for the purpose of marriage. To appreciate the radical shift there is need for some awareness of the medieval context that the Protestant Reformation inherited. Marriage was prohibited for the clergy in the West and while the laity were permitted and even encouraged to marry, virginity had held an elevated status for over a millennium.⁸⁵ In most sections of the church the general perception was holiness was most likely to be attained through a life of virginity. Reflective of this strong mindset, the Protestant Reformers continued to speak of virginity and chasteness, but now redefined it according to the exclusiveness to one person as husband or wife.⁸⁶ Further, Article Thirty Two of the Church of England’s *Thirty Nine Articles* explicitly approved of clergy marriage, though not

⁸² Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 324.

⁸³ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 327.

⁸⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 328.

⁸⁵ McGinn, “Mysticism and Sexuality,” 48-51 and McGinn, “Tropics of Desire,” 134-5. For a summary of the status and restrictions of marriage within the Western Catholic Church at this time see Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 40-2; Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 260-1; and Doriani, “Puritans, Sex, and Pleasure,” 142.

⁸⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.12.28.

making it obligatory.⁸⁷ Indeed most clergy of the Church of England were married though there were a few rare exceptions as witnessed by the words of George Herbert, “[t]he Country Parson considering that virginity is a higher state than Matrimony, and that the Ministry requires the best and highest things, is rather unmarried, than married.”⁸⁸

Far more significant was the reversal of the order of the purposes of marriage. Throughout the history of the Church the primary reason for marriage was procreation. This order still existed in the *Book of Common Prayer* (1549): 1. procreation of children, 2. remedy against sin and to avoid fornication, and 3. mutual society, help, and comfort.⁸⁹ While a cross section of the early Puritan sources reveal a variation in the order by the time of the *Westminster Confession* in 1647 they are standardized that “[m]arriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the Church with an holy seed, and for preventing of uncleanness.”⁹⁰ Fletcher observes, “[f]ollowing St Paul’s precepts in 1 Corinthians, there is a notable lack of reference to intercourse being solely or primarily for the purpose of procreation.”⁹¹ With the clear reversal between the first and third reasons, mutual companionship became primary. Additionally the Puritans used the term “due benevolence” to capture this deepening sense of mutuality within marriage. Gouge asserted, “[d]ue benevolence is one of the most

⁸⁷ Young, “Origin of Newman’s Celibacy,” 16, cf. 18.

⁸⁸ Herbert, *Country Parson*, ch. 9, 66. Herbert wrote this work in 1632. cf. Taylor, *Holy Living*, 82.

⁸⁹ James Johnson, “Puritan Thought on Marriage,” 429. cf. Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 47-8.

⁹⁰ *Westminster Confession*, XXIV:ii. cf. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 261-2.

⁹¹ Fletcher, “Protestant Idea of Marriage,” 179. Gouge confirms this principle, “[f]or though procreation of children be one end of marriage, yet it is not the onely end.” *Domesticall Duties*, 183.

proper and essential acts or ends of marriage- it preserves chastity, it increases the legitimate brood in the world, and & it provides a means for the affection of the married couple.” Further, due benevolence “must bee performed with good will and delight, willingly, readily, and cheerfully.”⁹² Perkins adds this description to due benevolence, “by an holy kind of rejoicing and solacing themselves each with other, in a mutuall declaration of the signes and tokens of love and kindness.”⁹³ Perkins employs both Proverbs 5:18-19 and Genesis 26:8 that figured prominently in the Puritan marriage manuals reflecting their understanding of the enjoyment of sex.

Third, the Puritan teaching on marriage celebrates intimacy and the enjoyment of sex. Packer speaks of the “erotic agape of romantic marriage”⁹⁴ and asserts that the Puritans frequently made use of Proverbs 5:18-19 in their preaching on the joys of marriage “[m]ay you rejoyce in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer--may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.”⁹⁵ Thomas Gataker exegetes this text and declares that one of the duties of a husband was take pleasure in his wife:

*‘Joy and delight in her. Drink,’ saith the wise man, ‘the water of thine own cistern: Let thy fountain be blessed: ... and rejoyce in the wife of thy youth: let her bee unto thee as the loving Hind, and the pleasant Roe: Let her breasts or her bosome content thee at all times: & delight continually, or as the word there is, even doate on the love of her.’ As if the holy Ghost did allow some such private dalliance and behaviour to married persons betweene themselves as to others might seem dotage: such as may be Isaacke sporting with Rebecka.*⁹⁶

⁹² Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 224.

⁹³ Perkins, *Christian Oeconomie*, 122.

⁹⁴ Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 263.

⁹⁵ Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 265-6.

⁹⁶ Gataker, *Certaine Sermons*, 2:206. The reference to Isaac sporting Rebekah is Gn 26:8. cf. Cleaver, *Godly Form of Household Government*, 175 and Smith, *Sermons*, 12 for sanctioning love play using Gn 26:8 and Frye, “Puritanism on Conjugal Love,” 153 for the usage of Prv 5:18-19.

Employing the robust nature of the same verse Gouge reminds couples of the delight within marriage, “[a]s the man must be satisfied at all times in his wife, and even ravisht with her love; so must the woman be satisfied at all times in her husband, and even ravisht with his love.”⁹⁷ Later he again returns to this same verse and instructs husbands to let their affection delight completely in their wives. He then amplifies the power of this lovemaking and reminds his readers that the hart and roe buck “are most enamored of their mate and even mad againe in their heat and desire after them.”⁹⁸ He continues, “[a]n husbands affection to his wife cannot be too great, if it be kept within the bonds of honesty, sobriety and comelinesse.”⁹⁹ Richard Baxter counsels couples to “[k]eep up your conjugal love in a constant heat and vigour.”¹⁰⁰ Gouge also employs Genesis 26:8 articulating that God does not expect husbands and wives to be like the Stoics without affection, rather husbands should delight in their wives. Additionally he instructs couples to “[r]ead the Song of Songs, and in it you shall observe such affection manifested by Christ to his Spouse.... A good patterne and precedent for Husbands.”¹⁰¹ While it is difficult to know the actual marital practices of the Puritans, one brief glimpse is available in the study of three seventeenth-century Puritan couples. What surfaces, surely as no surprise, is that no two marriages or relationships are identical.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 219.

⁹⁸ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 365. Previously Cleaver counsels couples to take mutual delight in each other since Prv 5:18-19 asserts, “so the wife should bee a delight unto her husband and so in like manner, shee ought to take delight in him.” *Godly Forme of Household Government*, 176.

⁹⁹ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 366, cf. 365 Gouge also declares as long as the husband’s desire does “exceed not the bonds of Christian modesty and decency, are very fit, and pertinent to the purpose.”

¹⁰⁰ Baxter, *Christian Directory*, 522.

¹⁰¹ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 366.

¹⁰² Stevie Davies examines the lives of Ralph and Jane Josselin, Nehemiah and Grace Wallington, and Lucy and John Hutchinson. Stevie Davies, *Unbridled Spirits*.

Because the Puritans took marriage very seriously they also recognized the great importance of guarding it from temptations that could destroy or weaken it. First, they placed a strong emphasis upon the appropriateness of behavior within a given context. Intimacy and sexual expressions were not for the public eye. Gouge once again draws upon Genesis 26:8 and comments that Isaac and Rebecca had enjoyed themselves in private and then adds, “[m]uch greater liberty is granted to man and wife when they are lone, then in company.”¹⁰³ This relates to his warning about the danger of excessive sex.¹⁰⁴ Similarly Perkins warns couples that, “excesse in lusts is no better than plaine adulterie before God.”¹⁰⁵ Finally, there was a constant warning against adultery and importance of commitment to your partner. Gouge, who again reveals the most progressive Puritan stance in addressing these matters, may once again be surprising. He argues that while the Western Catholic Church placed the primary responsibility on the woman for avoiding adultery he believes that biblically both couples are equally responsible, but then he adds, that man should be punished more than the woman since he is required to set a higher example.¹⁰⁶ Gouge understood that one of the best ways to prevent adultery is “that husband and wife mutually delight each in other, and maintaine a pure and fervent love betwixt themselves, yielding that due benevolence one to another which is warranted and sanctified by Gods Word, and ordained of God for this particular end.”¹⁰⁷ As a result, some critics upbraid the Puritans for their strict boundaries regarding sexuality. However, Belden Lane’s perceptive comments resonate more accurately with the integrity of the Puritan understanding of marriage and sex. He writes, “[t]his is why

¹⁰³ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 393, cf. 280.

¹⁰⁴ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 224-5.

¹⁰⁵ Perkins, *Christian Oeconomie*, 113. cf. Frye, “Puritanism on Conjugal Love,” 150-152.

¹⁰⁶ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 221. cf. Whately, *Bride-Bush* (1623), 30.

¹⁰⁷ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, 224.

the Puritans were necessarily so concerned about propriety and purity — not because they were innately prudish, but because their very piety lent itself to an excess of ardor.”¹⁰⁸ Therefore, it is no surprise that the Puritans struggled with the temptations of pre-marital sex. Godbeer states, “roughly one-fifth of English brides in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were already pregnant by the time they were formally married.”¹⁰⁹

Notwithstanding these claims it would be inaccurate to assume that the Puritans had completely severed themselves from the medieval perception that sin was transmitted through sex.¹¹⁰ Nonetheless, there was considerable freedom and advancement from previous generations. In fact, denying sex to your partner was a cause for public discipline in New England and at times could even constitute grounds for divorce.¹¹¹ That certainly does not reflect the squeamish or typical impression of “Puritanical love” as advanced by many contemporary voices. The Puritans mostly embraced a robust understanding of healthy sex within marriage. The joys and intimacy that they were able to share in their godly marriages mirrored and encouraged a similar intimacy with Jesus Christ in spiritual marriage. However, as will soon be clear, the Puritans were always careful not to elevate their love for their partner above their love for Jesus.

¹⁰⁸ Belden Lane, “Covenant and Desire in Puritan Spirituality,” 77.

¹⁰⁹ Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 3, cf. 29, 345n25. cf. Masson, “Typology of the Female,” 309.

¹¹⁰ Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 61-62 and Doriani, “Puritans, Sex, and Pleasure,” 138.

¹¹¹ Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 59-60.

Spiritual Marriage in the Writings of the Puritans ¹¹²

The Puritans followed the theological foundation of Calvin and understood union with Christ began at a person's conversion. In fact, many Puritans referred to their conversion as their wedding or marriage day. Flavel declares, "[t]hat when Christ comes into the soul he will not come empty-handed. It is Christ's *marriage-day*, and he will make it a good day, a festival day."¹¹³ While numerous images were used to describe this new relationship with Christ they all conveyed the sense of unity with Christ.¹¹⁴ Thomas Hooker used both the older language of Calvin's ingrafting as well as his own style of being "knit" together.¹¹⁵ Other Puritan divines used the imagery of a "marriage knot" or "love-knot."¹¹⁶ Depending upon the specific writer, spiritual marriage was either between Jesus Christ and the church or the individual believer. John Preston declared, "[t]here is a match between Christ and the church: and consequently, between Christ and every particular man that is a member of the true body of Christ."¹¹⁷ Benjamin King described this union as, "that neere and intimate conjunction, that is betwixt Christ and every beleeving soule, which is so great and intimate, that Christ and a beleever are sayd to bee one: Ephes. 5.32."¹¹⁸ Some authors tended to oscillate between both of these uses while others focused more on one than the other. To summarize, the Puritan understanding of union with

¹¹² All of the sources used for this chapter were written by men. See Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writings*, esp. 3-17 for female sources.

¹¹³ Flavel, *England's Duty*, 214.

¹¹⁴ Flavel is representative of the Puritans when he speaks of the "four elegant and lively metaphors" that describes the union between Christ and the believer, "two pieces united by glue", "graff and stock", "conjugal union", and the "head and members." *Method of Grace*, 34-5.

¹¹⁵ Hooker, *Soules Exaltation*, 1-2, 4. Within Hooker's larger work of *Soules Implantation* he had a smaller work entitled, *Soules Ingrafting*. For knitting imagery see Hooker, *Soules Exaltation*, 16, 18, 20, 24-5, 40.

¹¹⁶ See Shepard, *Parable of Ten Virgins*, 325; Flavel, *England's Duty*, 207; Vincent, *Christ the Best Husband*, 3; Pearse, *Best Match*, 41, 60, 61, 163, 227, 240, 275.

¹¹⁷ Preston, *Churches Marriage*, 1.

¹¹⁸ King, *Marriage of the Lambe*, 7.

Christ broadly resembled both Bernard and Calvin. They would all be in agreement that it was spiritual, mystical, deep, real, and indissoluble.¹¹⁹

However, there is some variation regarding the origin and dynamics of growth in union with Christ/God. In the last chapter both Brauer and Chan sought to trace their respective Puritans through the *triplex via* while Williams adamantly asserted Hambrick-Stowe sought to overlay a Roman Catholic understanding of union as the conclusion rather than the origin of the Puritans' spiritual journey. However, this is a messy conundrum and it is wiser to recognize that contemporary Roman Catholic scholarship perceives this topic in a more nuanced manner. Sheldrake asserts, “[a]n over-emphasis on separate, successive stages, with universal application, conflicts with a sense of the uniqueness of each person’s spiritual journey as well as with the freedom of God and unpredictability of grace.” And further, “by focusing exclusively on union with God as the final stage, we may miss the point that union with God is not so much a stage above and beyond all others as the precondition of all spiritual growth.”¹²⁰

The Holy Spirit was central to the Puritan development and experience of spiritual marriage. Preston declares, “Christ sends his Spirit into the heart; therefore thou must consider, whether thou have the Spirit of thy Husband dwelling in thee or

¹¹⁹ Lye, *True Believer’s Union*, 285-88. Flavel apparently knew Lye’s work and enlarged this summary by adding this union was also immediate, efficacious, comfortable, and fruitful. *Method of Grace*, 38-42.

¹²⁰ Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 181. cf. Rahner, “Gradual Ascent to Perfection.” McGinn observes that in Bonaventure the stages “are not successive but simultaneous and mutually interactive.” *Flowering of Mysticism*, 102-3. Dupré and Wiseman asserts that both Catherine of Genoa and Hadewych “describe their own experiences as starting with what would appear to be a state of union which is then followed by stages of purgation and illumination.” *Light from Light*, 17.

no, for except thou have the holy Ghost to dwell in thy heart, it is impossible that there should be any match.”¹²¹ He continues by stating the Spirit’s presence is critical because when we have the same Spirit of Christ we will have the same will, desires, love and hate the same things.¹²² Sibbes remarks that the “Spirit of God in the hearts of his children is effectual in stirring up holy desires.”¹²³ Goodwin reinforces the same reality when he reminds his readers that the Spirit is in our hearts, preaching and persuading us of Christ’s love.¹²⁴ Therefore, the Holy Spirit is not only necessary for taking God’s gracious initiative in the formation of spiritual marriage, but also responsible for deepening the experiential nature of it. John Owen devotes a major portion of his Trinitarian work on spiritual marriage to the Holy Spirit.¹²⁵ According to Owen the Spirit is actively involved by being the sanctifier and comforter and bringing to remembrance what Jesus spoke. Owen recognized that spiritual marriage included the important soteriological emphasis that was so prominent in Calvin; however, both of them realized that this did not exhaust the understanding of this. Owen writes, “[a]s a means of retaining communion with God, whereby we sweetly ease our hearts in the bosom of the Father, and receive in refreshing tastes his love. The soul is never more raised with the love of God than when by the Spirit taken into intimate communion with him in the discharge of this duty.”¹²⁶

Significantly, while the Puritans continued to employ the language of union with Christ they expanded Calvin’s understanding of communion with Christ. Union was the necessary foundation for communion and Preston reminds us that this

¹²¹ Preston, *Churches Marriage*, 17, cf. 11-2.

¹²² Preston, *Churches Marriage*, 17.

¹²³ Sibbes, *Breathing After God*, 219.

¹²⁴ Goodwin, *Christ Set Forth*, 107.

¹²⁵ Owen, *Communion with God*, 222-74.

¹²⁶ Owen, *Communion with God*, 249.

required “mutuall consent” among both parties.¹²⁷ Union was the initial connection while communion was the ongoing relational experience and enjoyment of that union.¹²⁸ Owen asserts the distinction, “[o]ur communion, then, with God consisteth in *his communication of himself unto us, with our returnal unto him* of that which he requireth and accepteth, flowing from that *union* which is Jesus Christ we have with him.”¹²⁹ Clearly for Owen spiritual marriage includes both the rich gifts of salvation and also the experience of love, “[h]ow few saints are experimentally acquainted with this privilege of holding immediate communion with the Father in love!”¹³⁰ A further reminder of the reciprocal nature of this communion is, “Christ having given himself to the soul, loves the soul; and the soul having given itself unto Christ, loveth him also.”¹³¹ One recognizes the important reciprocal nature of godly marriage, that it finds an echo in spiritual marriage.

King deepens the awareness of spiritual marriage with Christ as he unfolds four consequences that include mutual delight between Christ and the spouse, cohabitation that is necessary to preserve the friendship, mutual bearing of one another’s burdens, and mutual adhering and cleaving to one another.¹³² In his final point he refers to one of Bernard’s sermons on the Song of Songs.¹³³ King introduces a very significant theme in the first consequence of mutual delight. He observes that the satisfied soul delights in Christ by contemplation of his person and beauty as

¹²⁷ Preston, *Churches Marriage*, 8-9. cf. Owen, *Communion with God*, 8.

¹²⁸ On the nature and dynamics of communion with God see Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 201-18 and Kapic, *Communion with the Triune God*, 20-46.

¹²⁹ Owen, *Communion with God*, 8. cf. Flavel, *Method of Grace*, 151

¹³⁰ Owen, *Communion with God*, 32.

¹³¹ Owen, *Communion with God*, 118.

¹³² King, *Marriage of the Lambe*, 17-26.

¹³³ King, *Marriage of the Lambe*, 26. The reference is to SCC 31.

expressed in Song of Songs 5:10.¹³⁴ King is not the only Puritan that connects contemplation with spiritual marriage. Owen comments, “this is a little glimpse of some of that communion which we enjoy with Christ.... In the contemplation of the excellencies, desirableness, love, and grace of our dear Lord Jesus.”¹³⁵ Likewise Rous captures the importance of how contemplation deepens the enjoyment of Christ in spiritual marriage:

The highest and happiest, and sweetest harmony is, when the soule is in an unizon with her Saviour and husband: every touch and sound of the soule thus tuned to Christ Jesus, resoundeth in him, toucheth and moveth him. And as with the sound of outward musicke the spirit of God came upon the Prophet; so with the sound of this inward musicke (be it in contemplations, ardenancies, desires, invocations, resolutions) the spirit of Christ Jesus commeth more powerfully and plentifully into the soule.¹³⁶

Edward Pearse also recognizes how contemplation encourages and enriches spiritual marriage, “[t]hus Christ is every way acceptable, and infinitely acceptable, and as ever, Soul, thou wouldst be indeed espoused to him, dwell much in study and contemplation of his acceptableness. Labour to be possest with a deep and daily renewed sense of it, which will sweetly draw and allure thy Soul to him.”¹³⁷ Both delight and enjoyment were significant experiences of being in union and communion with Jesus. Rous confesses, “[f]or the soule having tasted Christ in an heavenly communion, so loves him, that to please him is a pleasure and delight to her selfe.”¹³⁸ Furthermore, Rous declares the richness that the believer can expect from this spiritual marriage, “that an heavenly joy is to the soule a restaurative medicine: and that when she enjoyth her Saviour in the contemplations and tastes of his love, then is

¹³⁴ King, *Marriage of the Lambe*, 18. Sibbes also employs Ps 27:4 to proclaim Christ’s beauty in relation to contemplation. *Breathing After God*, 237.

¹³⁵ Owen, *Communion with God*, 154.

¹³⁶ Rous, *Mysticall Marriage*, 306-7, cf. 88, 268, and 282 for other benefits and fruit of spiritual marriage.

¹³⁷ Pearse, *Best Match*, 226, cf. 215 where a similar declaration is made following a reference to Bernard.

¹³⁸ Rous, *Mysticall Marriage*, 73.

she filled with marrow and fatnesse.”¹³⁹ King asserts Peter’s experience at the Transfiguration captures the depth of this love that soars even higher, a “doting love that carries the soule to a spiritual distraction.” Peter “was so transported, so ravished with the love of Christ, that like a man spiritually distracted he knew not what hee sayd.”¹⁴⁰ Owen recognizes the reciprocal nature of “conjugal affection, in communion between Christ and believers:--*he delights in them, and they delight in him.*”¹⁴¹ Similarly Pearse rejoices as he speaks of the benefit of spiritual marriage, “[t]here is sweetness and delight in Christ.” He continues by making reference to Bernard and declares, “[h]ow sweet is his presence, entercourse, and communion with Him.” On the very next page Bernard is again quoted, this time from *On Loving God*, that individuals share “the joy of Communion with him.”¹⁴² Clearly the intimate joys and mutual delight of spiritual marriage echo the intimacy and enjoyment of godly marriage.

Obviously this depth of joy that arises from a growing spiritual marriage does not happen automatically. Therefore, Thomas Watson declares, “[m]inisters are paranymphe, friends of the bridegroom. This day I come a wooing for your love. Love him who is so lovely.”¹⁴³ Puritan preaching sought to woo and prepare the way for the Holy Spirit to work in their listeners’ souls.¹⁴⁴ Further, they frequently

¹³⁹ Rous, *Mysticall Marriage*, 268-9.

¹⁴⁰ King, *Marriage of the Lambe*, 34-5.

¹⁴¹ Owen, *Communion with God*, 132.

¹⁴² Pearse, *Best Match*, 222, 223, 224, cf. esp. 17, 18, 19, 25, and 262 for additional usage of Bernard to capture the delights of being in communion with Jesus.

¹⁴³ Watson, *Christ’s Loveliness*, 319.

¹⁴⁴ The language of wooing is abundant. See for example Vincent, *Christ the Best Husband*, 5; Rutherford, *Christ and the Doves*, 9, 10, 14; and Pearse, *Best Match*, 2.

employed maternal metaphors for themselves¹⁴⁵ as John Cotton illustrates, “[b]rests are parts and vessels that give milk to babes of the Church, which resemble the Ministers of this Church of the Jews.”¹⁴⁶ Readers must remember the biblical source of this Puritan imagery, recognizing that Jesus himself spoke of being a mother hen (Mt 23:37). The Old Testament includes other examples of God as a mother of the faithful (e.g. Is 42:14, 49:15-16, 66:13). Therefore, when a Puritan minister spoke of feeding his congregation through his breasts he was not acting in a sexually aberrant manner but rather mirroring Jesus Christ and God the Father. Of course, these examples of gender inversion of Jesus as Mother are not unique to the Puritans but common among medieval males, such as Bernard, and to a lesser extent to females such as Gertrude of Helfta and Mechtild of Hackeborn.¹⁴⁷ This obviously raises questions regarding contemporary gender issues, however, since they were not germane to the seventeenth-century they cannot be examined here.

Contrary to Longfellow who is misled by Scheper’s limited reading of the sources on spiritual marriages I have found that many Puritans used erotic imagery to stimulate their experience of spiritual marriages.¹⁴⁸ More broadly many scholars find a deep interaction between sexual love and spiritual love in the Puritan writings on

¹⁴⁵ See for example Dillon, “Nursing Fathers and Brides of Christ.” cf. Leverenz, *Language of Puritan Feeling*, esp. 143-5 and Webster, “Gender Inversion and Canticles,” 150-1.

¹⁴⁶ Cotton, *Brief Exposition on Canticles*, 198.

¹⁴⁷ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 110-69, 189-90, 131n72, 211-2n132. cf. McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism*, 169.

¹⁴⁸ Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing*, 29. See Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 183n123, 192n155, 195 for a critique of Scheper. On the pervasiveness of erotic language in Puritanism see Jones, “Union with Christ,” 201-2; Porterfield, *Female Piety in New England*, esp. 26-9, 36-9, 44, 72; Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 195-9, 202-3.

spiritual marriage.¹⁴⁹ Richard Godbeer advances the premise that “[p]erhaps the most remarkable aspect of Puritan sexuality was not its spiritualization of the erotic but its eroticization of the spiritual.”¹⁵⁰ Further, McGinn maintains, “the study of Christian mysticism shows that we should be scandalized not so much by the presence of such erotic elements as by their absence.”¹⁵¹ Thomas Hooker employs erotic language rather daringly when he refers to Proverbs 5:18-19:

If a husband hath a loose heart, and will not content himselfe with the wife of his youth, but hath his back doores, and his goings out; this makes a breach in matrimoniall affection; but when he is satisfied with her brests, he is ravished with her love: so hope hath an expectation of mercy, and is satisfied therewith; desire longs for mercy, and is satisfied therewith; the will closeth Christ, and it is fully satisfied with him.¹⁵²

Rous employs Genesis 26:8, the other favorite Puritan text for encouraging love-play within godly marriage, and counsels his readers, “*Isaac sported with Rebekah*, ... So doth the mysticall wife also, she thinkes sometimes how she may please her husband by service, and not onely how she may take pleasure in him and of him.”¹⁵³ Rous also encourages his readers to lust after Jesus, “[a]nd if hee come not yet into thee, stirre up thy spirituall concupiscence, and therewith let the soule lust mightily for him, and let her lusts and desires ascend up to him in strong cryes and invocations, & then by his spirit he will descend unto thee.”¹⁵⁴ Rutherford also employs erotic language and imagery of the Song of Songs to stimulate and encourage spiritual marriage. Often he

¹⁴⁹ See for example Westerkamp, “Engendering Puritan Religious Culture,” 113, 115; Porterfield, *Female Piety in New England*, esp. 72-4; Achinstein, “Romance of the Spirit,” 415; Godbeer, “Love Raptures,” esp. 53, 58, 62 and *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, esp. 57-8, 72-4, 356n68-69.

¹⁵⁰ Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 55.

¹⁵¹ McGinn, “Language of Love in Mysticism,” 205, cf. 225.

¹⁵² Hooker, *Soules Exaltation*, 5-6. The topic of *eros* and desire will be examined in chapter 5.

¹⁵³ Rous, *Mysticall Marriage*, 64-6.

¹⁵⁴ Rous, *Mysticall Marriage*, 288-9.

utilizes the image of the kisses of his mouth from Song of Songs 1:2.¹⁵⁵ In a letter to John Gordon he wrote, “and now many a sweet, sweet, soft kiss, many perfumed, well-smelled kisses, and embracements have I received of my royal Master. He and I have had much love together.”¹⁵⁶ Sibbes devoted a full sermon to this text.¹⁵⁷ Thomas Shepard employs yet another dimension of the Puritan use of sexual imagery in sermons, “but now when laid in the bosom of Christ, when sucking the breasts of the grace of Christ, when you can go no farther, though thou wert in heaven, for there is no other happiness there, now sit still contented.”¹⁵⁸ By the end of the seventeenth-century some scholars detect a growing trend to distance one’s self from the lush and erotic language of Song of Songs and spiritual marriage.¹⁵⁹ Winship comments that clergy “tended to focus more on the reasonableness of their version of Christianity than upon its mysteries.”¹⁶⁰ However, Godbeer asserts that Winship is mistaken in his reading of the sources and that from approximately the midpoint of the seventeenth-century into the first quarter of the eighteenth-century the actual usage of erotic language increased and became more personal, intimate, and loving.¹⁶¹ William Sherlock’s verbal attacks on John Owen and other Puritans who emphasized the experiential centrality of union with Christ is another reflection of this. Sherlock’s critique was against the subjective intimacy and emotional nature of a believers’ relationship with Christ through spiritual marriage. He maintained the metaphor of

¹⁵⁵ The language is prominent in Isaac Ambrose’s writing on experience and will be examined in chapter 3.

¹⁵⁶ Rutherford, *Letters*, 346. This language is abundant in Rutherford, see *Letters*, 87, 164, 186, 226, 251, 336, 342, 443, 512, 572, 632, etc.

¹⁵⁷ Sibbes, *Spouse, Her Earnest Desire*, 197-208. The use of kissing imagery saturates Puritan writings.

¹⁵⁸ Shepard, *Parable of Ten Virgins*, 592, cf. 66.

¹⁵⁹ Achinstein, “Romance of the Spirit”, 414 in reference to Isaac Watts.

¹⁶⁰ Winship, “Behold the Bridegroom Cometh!” 178.

¹⁶¹ Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 56, 74, 76-7, 355n58.

spiritual marriage marginalized the importance of reason and elevated the emotions in relationship to faith.¹⁶²

But the Puritans were careful not to elevate their earthly marriage above the spiritual marriage and cautioned their readers not to enjoy sexual love more than their love for Jesus.¹⁶³ Rutherford adamantly declares, “I will not have Two Husbands”.¹⁶⁴ Godbeer maintains the Puritans understood the importance of keeping the two marriages in their proper relationship. He acknowledges that within the Puritan emphasis of spiritual marriage there was a potential to under-value human marriage.¹⁶⁵ Rous is more forceful asserting that the primary marriage for the Christian is in heaven, “[t]here is a law in heaven, that the heavenly Bride may at one time have but one Husband.”¹⁶⁶ Further, an almost universal warning in most works on spiritual marriage was the potential for spiritual adultery or unfaithfulness to Jesus. Sibbes states the issue squarely, “Christ will allow of no bigamy or double marriage.”¹⁶⁷ Burgess counsels, “[i]f we desire not all things in reference to him, we are guilty of spirituall Idolatry.”¹⁶⁸ This theme runs through out Hooker’s writing as he warns his readers, “the end of our creation and redemption was, that we might

¹⁶² Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing*, 186. cf. Dewey Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 170-73 and Kopic, *Communion with God*, 153-56.

¹⁶³ Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 168, 176; Hardman Moore, “Sexing the Soul,” 186; Porterfield, *Feminine Spirituality in America*, 31.

¹⁶⁴ Rutherford, *Christ and the Doves*, 26.

¹⁶⁵ Godbeer, “Love Raptures,” 52, 63-65 and *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 52, 62.

¹⁶⁶ Rous, *Mysticall Marriage*, 18.

¹⁶⁷ Sibbes, *Bowels Opened*, 187. cf. King, *Marriage of the Lambe*, 105, 108.

¹⁶⁸ Burgess, *CXLV Expository Sermons*, 34. King also connects spiritual adultery to idolatry. *Marriage of the Lambe*, 105, cf. p. 108.

have communion with God; but all of us have played the adulteresses, we have had our wicked lovers.”¹⁶⁹

Yet another highly significant component of spiritual marriage was the recognition that if Jesus Christ was the divine Bridegroom then his followers were his brides. Obviously it would not be difficult for Puritan women to conceptualize themselves as brides of Christ since they were females. However, the same metaphor was also applied to men. Porterfield is correct when she states that “a metaphoric change of gender was required” for males to perceive themselves as brides of Christ.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, some scholars maintain that gender flexibility or inversion¹⁷¹ created anguished tension and gender gymnastics for Puritan males.¹⁷² Others allow too much of the twenty first-century sexual questions to be read into the seventeenth-century and speak of “homosexual panic” among Puritan males or seek to apply queer theory to the Song of Songs.¹⁷³ Still others read the Puritans as if Freud lived in the seventeenth-century.¹⁷⁴ Additionally, Longfellow warns that some well-intentioned

¹⁶⁹ Hooker, *Soules Implantation*, 31, cf. 151, 230, 247-48, 257, 261, etc. cf. Hooker, *Soules Preparation for Christ*, 41, 66, 86. Similar warnings can be found in other writings of Hooker.

¹⁷⁰ Porterfield, *Feminine Spirituality in America*, 27.

¹⁷¹ Spirituality and gender flexibility has become a very significant topic. Some of the more helpful writings related to this chapter include Dahill, “Genre of Gender”; Coffey, *Theology and the British Revolutions*, 104-110; Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism*, 140-70; Hardman Moore, “Sexing the Soul”; Webster, “Gender Inversion and Canticles”; Belden Lane, “Two Schools of Desire,” 393-97. cf. fn 79 and fn 145 above.

¹⁷² Westerkamp, “Engendering Puritan Religious Culture,” 115. Webster acknowledges while it was a major change it did not create anxiety for Puritan males, “Gender Inversion and Canticles,” 151. Helpfully Hardman Moore adds that this gender change was not an escape for men. “Sexing the Soul,” 184.

¹⁷³ Walter Hughes, “Meat Out of the Eater,” 107-19; Leverenz, *Language of Puritan Feeling*, 129, 132; Rambuss, *Closet Devotions*; and Fessenden, Radel and Zaborowska, eds. *Puritan Origins of American Sex*.

¹⁷⁴ Leverenz, *Language of Puritan Feeling*, esp. 4, 10-1, 14-15, 20-2, 107. Porterfield often veers towards a strong twentieth-century psychological reading of the Puritans.

feminist scholars may actually create more harm than good in their efforts to cast early modern women writers as feminists.¹⁷⁵ Perhaps it would be wiser to heed the sagacious voice of Susan Juster, “[w]as early modern faith so powerful because it effectively harnessed the enormous emotional and physical satisfactions of sex for spiritual purposes, or did human relationships benefit from an infusion of the erotics of spiritual communion into the intimate lives of men and women?”¹⁷⁶

Puritans of the seventeenth-century lived with a greater gender fluidity than the next century.¹⁷⁷ It is dangerous to read the contemporary uncertainty regarding gender back into the Puritan culture and wise to recognize that the Puritans were conscious of the mystery within the metaphoric language of spiritual marriage. Godbeer asserts that, “Puritan men who understood their theology had no reason to believe that their masculinity would be threatened by their union as brides to Christ: the son of God was to marry not men and women but the souls of men and women. That distinction was important since souls did not adopt the sex of the bodies they inhabited.”¹⁷⁸ He continues by insisting; “[t]he use of marital and romantic imagery in a spiritual context did not pose a problem for male New Englanders since notions

Female Piety in New England. Similar claims were made in the monastic period, see Burrows, “Foundations for Erotic Christology,” 478-9.

¹⁷⁵ Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing*, 214-6, cf. esp 123 for her warning of the danger of “over reading” by feminist critics.

¹⁷⁶ Juster, “Eros and Desire in Early Modern Sexuality,” 205. Dillon asserts, “What is striking about the persistent use of the eroticized Bride of Christ tropology is the extent to which this language does not seem to induce anxiety or homosexual panic, but rather serves as a dominant, culturally accepted account of masculinity among Puritans.” “Nursing Fathers and Brides of Christ,” 134.

¹⁷⁷ Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 55, 79-83, 357n74; “Performing Patriarchy,” 291, 293, 301, 303, 306, 323; Hardman Moore, “Sexing the Soul,” 183-4; Tom Webster, “Gender Inversion and Canticles,” 149, 151, 159-61; and Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writings*, 83.

¹⁷⁸ Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 79. cf. “Performing Patriarchy,” 302. For an opposing view see Tom Webster, “Gender Inversion and Canticles,” 157-8.

of gender were in some respects remarkably fluid.”¹⁷⁹ Additionally, it must be recalled that the Puritans followed the lead of previous generations in understanding the feminine nature of the soul.¹⁸⁰ Hence Puritan males did not need to be threatened by any gender gymnastics since Christ was marrying their female soul. Further, the Puritans typically understood the soul more expansively than is common today. John Robotham writes, “[t]he soule is put for all the faculties of nature, and for the uniting of all affections, whereby they goe forth most strongly.... The soule is here by a Synechdoche put for all the Affections of the soule.”¹⁸¹

None of this discussion discounts Porterfield’s earlier comment regarding the “metaphoric change of gender was required” for men to become brides of Christ. Spiritually the Puritan male was required to act and behave as if he were a female, taking on the humility and submission that was more commonly associated with females than males in marriage. Godbeer demonstrates that males needed to learn the feminine qualities of submission and obedience, not only in their spiritual lives, but also within the political arena of life.¹⁸² Webster’s conclusion seems valid; “subordination and humility were seen as spiritually valuable and, in these eyes, they were assets more readily available to women, properly trained, than men.”¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 82.

¹⁸⁰ Hardman Moore, “Sexing the Soul,” 175. cf. Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 173-74. Occasionally the Puritans saw the soul as genderless.

¹⁸¹ Robotham, *Exposition of Solomons Song*, 126. The faculties of the soul will be explored in chapter 4.

¹⁸² Godbeer, “Performing Patriarchy,” 292-3, 296. cf. Mack, *Visionary Women*, 49-50 and Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing*, 118.

¹⁸³ Tom Webster, “Gender Inversion and Canticles,” 159.

Spiritual Marriage in Isaac Ambrose

Isaac Ambrose employed many of the same biblical texts that inspired his fellow Puritan preachers when speaking on spiritual marriage. However, unlike the works previously explored in this chapter that were devoted exclusively to spiritual marriage Ambrose did not produce any specific work on this topic. Rather he examined the importance of spiritual marriage as it intersected various themes of Puritan theology. Therefore, *Prima* that addressed the new birth illustrates that spiritual marriage begins with a person's conversion. *Media*, his work on sanctification, demonstrates how spiritual practices guide a person to grow more fully in Christ. Most significantly *Looking Unto Jesus* illustrates how contemplative delight and enjoyment of God emerges from spiritual marriage. One of his popular texts related to spiritual marriage was Hosea 2:19, "[a]nd I will betroth thee unto me for ever, yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies."¹⁸⁴ As previously noted Psalm 45 was another common text and also employed by Ambrose.¹⁸⁵ Ambrose frequently employed Isaiah 62:5, "[f]or as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as a bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee."¹⁸⁶ Other passages that formed significant biblical references for spiritual marriage in Ambrose's writings include Isaiah 54:8, 10; John 17:21-23; 1 Corinthians 6:17; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25, 27; and Revelations 19:7, 21:9. Surveying his selection of Scripture reveals a consistency with both the more popular medieval texts and other Puritans. Further, he used numerous references to the Song of Songs, but

¹⁸⁴ Ambrose, *Prima* in *Prima, Media, & Ultima* (1654), 24; *Media* (1657), 293; and *Looking Unto Jesus*, 11, 1038. Additionally he used Hos 2:18. *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1117.

¹⁸⁵ Ambrose used both v. 10 in *Looking Unto Jesus*, 11 and v. 13 in *Ultima* in *Prima, Media, & Ultima* (1654), 68 and *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1039.

¹⁸⁶ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 98, 1117.

again did not use this book as the primary text for any of his writings. While Ambrose's specific references to Bernard on spiritual marriage are relatively few, chapter 4 will trace his significant dependency on Bernard for his development of contemplation.

Additionally, Ambrose made full use of the biblical bridal imagery that paralleled both Bernard and his Puritan colleagues. In examining the importance of a solitary place for engaging in meditation he writes, “[t]he Bridegroom, of our Soul, The Lord Jesus Christ, is bashful (said Bernard) and never comes to his meditating Bride in the presence of a multitude.”¹⁸⁷ Ambrose also suggests how he and his congregation might envision being the bride of Christ. In *Prima* he declares, “he is not only to be thy Saviour, but thy husband; thou must love him, and serve him, and honor him, and obey him.”¹⁸⁸ Ambrose duplicates this theme in *Ultima*, “if we are but once truly incorporated into Christ, we must take him as our Husband and Lord; we must love, honour, and serve him.”¹⁸⁹ These words echo the wedding vows of human marriage and confirm the seriousness of this relationship between Jesus Christ and the individual believer. In this same work Ambrose draws upon the imagery of Song of Songs to speak of the believer as spouse, “[o] ravishing voice! *I charge you O daughters of Jerusalem, if you finde my well-beloved, that you tell him I am sick of love.* What else? You that are Gods servants are no lesse his spouse, your soul is the bride, and when the day is come (this day of doom) *God give you joy, the joy of*

¹⁸⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 218.

¹⁸⁸ Ambrose, *Prima* in *Prima, Media, & Ultima* (1654), 67.

¹⁸⁹ Ambrose, *Ultima* in *Prima, Media, & Ultima* (1654), 194. cf. Jones, “Union with Christ,” 197 for the “marriage covenant” language of Thomas Doolittle.

heaven for ever and ever.”¹⁹⁰ Ambrose reiterates that the marriage takes place between Jesus Christ and the soul, “[t]he Lord Christ marries himself to the souls of his Saints.”¹⁹¹ At times Ambrose recognizes that this marriage involves both the individual believer and the Church.

Significantly for Ambrose, spiritual marriage was not a secondary issue but rather the foundation from which all spiritual life originated. The initial page of *Media* declares, “[t]he first Privilege which immediately follows our *Union with Christ is Justification*.”¹⁹² Likewise in *Looking Unto Jesus*, Ambrose asserts the primacy and all inclusive priority of this relationship, “[t]he Lord Christ marries himself to the souls of his Saints... and for this cause the soul must forsake all, and cleave unto Christ, as married wives use to do, we must leave all for our husband the Lord Jesus.”¹⁹³ Ambrose advances this same priority from God’s perspective, “Gods purposes are without any alteration, the love of Christ after thousands of yeares is still as the love of a Bridegroom upon the wedding day.”¹⁹⁴ Clearly according to Ambrose, God’s central purpose is to be in a marital relationship with God’s people. The quote that introduced this chapter is a robust description of Ambrose’s understanding. Since God has taken the initiative toward humanity, humanity must respond appropriately, “[o] my soul, henceforth cling to thy Saviour, go out of thy self, and creep to him, and affect not onely union, but very unity with him; bathe thy

¹⁹⁰ Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, & Ultima* (1654), 117, cf. 196 for a variation of this referring to Bernard in relation to the penitent thief on the cross.

¹⁹¹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 11.

¹⁹² Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 1.

¹⁹³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 11.

¹⁹⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 98.

self hereafter again and again, many and many a time in those delicious intimacies of thy Spiritual marriage.”¹⁹⁵

Ambrose is consistent with other Puritan writers in distinguishing between union and communion with Christ, “[u]nion is the ground of our communion with Christ; and the nearer our union, and the greater our communion.”¹⁹⁶ This relationship begins at conversion and often was referred to as the “first espousal.”¹⁹⁷ Conversely, it was not fully realized until the person died, “[w]hen first a soul believes, it is contracted to Christ, when the soul is sentenced to glory, then is the solemnitie, and consummation of the marriage.”¹⁹⁸ This significant foundation created a highly relational and affective understanding of what it meant to be in communion with Jesus Christ. Ambrose asks the question, “[w]hat is this communion with Christ, but very heaven aforehand.” Ambrose then cites Canticles 2:4, “we are *brought into Christs banqueting-house*” and then continues to expand on what it means to be in communion with Christ, “[o]h it’s an happy thing to have Christ dwell in our hearts, and for us to lodge in Christs bosome! Oh its an happy thing to maintaine a reciprocal communication of affairs betwixt Christ and our souls!”¹⁹⁹ This reflects the mutual and dialogical nature of the covenant fellowship between Jesus Christ and the church or individual believer. Ambrose parallels all those previously explored in this chapter by ascribing the feminine nature to the soul, “[o] *my soul, my soul!* what can we say of such a creature? to summe up all; she is in

¹⁹⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 236.

¹⁹⁶ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 913. Ambrose includes a detailed summary of John Owen’s *Communion with God* in his funeral sermon for Lady Margaret Houghton, *Redeeming the Time*, 11-12

¹⁹⁷ Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, & Ultima* (1654), 74, cf. 62 where the same language is used with a reference to Bernard.

¹⁹⁸ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1077.

¹⁹⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 40.

nature *a substance, created by God.*”²⁰⁰ Furthermore, Ambrose follows the lead of earlier Puritans in recognizing the challenge to continually be committed to Jesus Christ as the divine Bridegroom. He warns all believers of the dangers of spiritual adultery and declares, “far be it from us to love thee like a harlot, and not like a wife.”²⁰¹

Central to Ambrose’s theology of spiritual marriage is the role of the Holy Spirit who was active in both forming and maintaining union and communion. The Spirit is the “principal bond of our union betwixt Christ and us.”²⁰² Ambrose shares a common feature with John Owen in asserting that our communion is not only with the Father and the Son, but also with the Holy Spirit.²⁰³ God graciously sends the Holy Spirit to dwell within believers because apart from the Spirit’s presence and power no one is able to be in Christ or follow Christ.²⁰⁴ This indwelling presence of the Spirit illuminates the understanding to recognize Christ and his benefits more fully and consequently one of the major activities of the Spirit is to assist believers in following Jesus. Therefore, it is essential for individuals to seek to be in communion with the Holy Spirit.²⁰⁵ Further, Ambrose challenges his readers to be alert and observe the workings of the Holy Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit “lifts up our souls towards heaven” it is crucial “that Christians would be much in observation of, and in lissening to the movings, workings, hints, and intimations of that Spirit that comes from heaven.”²⁰⁶

²⁰⁰ Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, & Ultima* (1654), 69.

²⁰¹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 9, 447 and *Media* (1657), 465.

²⁰² Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 884, cf. 858, 860.

²⁰³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 861. cf. Owen, *Communion with God*, 222-74.

²⁰⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 857, 876. Ambrose also maintains that the Spirit continues to assist in “*growing the soul with Christ.*” *Prima* (Appendix) in *Prima, Media, & Ultima* (1654), 66-7.

²⁰⁵ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 444, 450, 1128, 1140.

²⁰⁶ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 846, cf. 815 (incorrectly numbered as 905), 1140.

Indeed, one of the challenges for followers of Jesus is to “feel the Spirit in his stirrings” so that they might “co-operate with the Spirit.”²⁰⁷ The benefit of such careful attentiveness to the Spirit may create “a spirit even swallowed up in communion with God.”²⁰⁸

Equally important to Ambrose’s theology of spiritual marriage is the role of faith. Once again this necessitates the involvement of the Holy Spirit since faith comes from the Spirit.²⁰⁹ Further, within Ambrose’s teaching on prayer he contends, “there is no grace but from Christ, and no communion with Christ but by faith.”²¹⁰ He follows Calvin in emphasizing a strong affective quality of faith. However, Ambrose’s perception of faith as relational and affective expands beyond that of Calvin and is consistent with other Puritans of the seventeenth-century. In relation to the Lord’s Supper, Ambrose maintains:

So if thus it be, that Christ in the Sacrament offers himself to come to us, let our faith busily bestir itself in widening the passage, and opening our hearts to make Christ way, let us strive with might and main to stretch open our hearts to such a breadth and largeness, as a fit way may be made for the King of glory to come in, let us hasten, open, clasp, imbrace, welcome, and receive Christ offered to us.²¹¹

Clearly Ambrose understood that faith had two natures and while it was essential for salvation it also possessed a vibrant relational and experimental dimension. When he spoke of contending against the devil in a person’s “riper years” he wrote, “[f]aith hath his change of rayments for gracious souls; sometimes it acts the soul in joy and rejoicing, sometimes only in adherence and waiting.”²¹² Closely related is Ambrose’s

²⁰⁷ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1140.

²⁰⁸ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 815 (incorrectly numbered as 905).

²⁰⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 788-9.

²¹⁰ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 469.

²¹¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 418, cf. 89.

²¹² Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 101.

teaching that spiritual love arises from faith and the reciprocal relationship that the experience of love refreshes a person's faith.²¹³ But even more, for Ambrose, faith not only has an affective quality but also a contemplative dimension for "by contemplative faith, [we] behold Christ."²¹⁴

Contemplation is one of the significant aspects of piety in which Ambrose distinguished himself. His largest work, *Looking Unto Jesus* is essentially a contemplative journey that experientially considers the christological spectrum of how beholding Christ can transform a person to be more like him. This can be experienced only as a person is in union and communion with Jesus. Since this is a major dimension of Ambrose's theology and spiritual experiences chapter 4 will examine this in detail. However, one brief example that illustrates this is the soul's challenge to conform herself to Christ in relation to the final judgment, "[o]h then let us call upon our souls! ... he would have us to be still arising, ascending, and mounting up in divine contemplation to his Majesty.... Oh that every morning, and every evening, at least, our hearts would arise, ascend and go to Christ in the heavens."²¹⁵

Ambrose places a high priority upon the enjoyment and delight of God in spiritual marriage and he can soar with the best of medieval writers in seeking to express the ineffable experience of mystical union with Christ. The following rhapsodic example reflects his present desire of spiritual marriage and yearns for a deepening of this union and communion of love:

²¹³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 230 and *Media* (1657), esp. 224, cf. 172, 285.

²¹⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 23.

²¹⁵ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1152.

Set us on fire, burn us, make us new and transform us, that nothing besides thee may live in us. O wound very deeply our hearts with the dart of thy love.... O that we were sick of love.... and by an heavenly excess may be transported into an heavenly love, that we may imbrace Christ, who is the Lord from heaven, with a love like himself. ----- Nor do we desire onely the pleasures of love, and the joyes of thy union, but that we may become generative and fruitful, far be it from us to love thee like a harlot, and not like a wife: O let us desire union with thee, and to bring forth fruit unto thee.²¹⁶

Clearly this validates the importance of conjugal love, desire, and joy for Ambrose and occupies a significant component of his teaching and experience of spiritual marriage that will be examined in detail in chapter 5. However, for now its exuberance is descriptive of the deep and burning desire to be filled only with the fire of divine love and for any impurities to be purged so as to increase both the experience of this divine love and to bear fruit that is faithful and glorifying to this spiritual marriage.

It is often difficult to grasp the depth and richness of a person's spiritual teaching and experience when it is atomized. Since Ambrose's instruction on spiritual marriage is so dynamic it is helpful to examine it in a more integrated manner. In describing the nature of the soul's love to Christ Ambrose proclaims "it is the souls rest or reposal of it selfe in the bosome of Christ, with content unspeakable and glorious, being perswaded of her interest in that Song of the Spouse, I am my welbeloveds, and my wel-beloveds is mine. This, O my soul, is the nature of thy love to Christ."²¹⁷ As this meditation turns to Psalm 1:6-7 he declares, "[w]e return unto our rest, because the Lord hath dealt bountifully with us, when sweetly we repose our selves in the lap of our Saviour with content unspeakable, and full of glory."²¹⁸ This

²¹⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 465.

²¹⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 224.

²¹⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 224, cf. 208 for another example within his meditation on heaven.

is not the only time that Ambrose employs this type of language. Previously in describing his understanding of communion with Christ he declared, “[o]h it’s an happy thing to have Christ dwell in our hearts, and for us to lodge in Christs bosome! Oh its an happy thing to maintaine a reciprocal communication of affairs betwixt Christ and our souls!”²¹⁹ For those Puritans encountered in this study this language of reposing in Christ’s bosom appears unusual.²²⁰ This imagery has a medieval sound to it and parallels Bernard of Clairvaux in speaking of Jesus, “he lets the soul which contemplates repose on his breast.”²²¹ Apparently the Bible is the primary inspiration for Ambrose’s usage of this language. In the first example Ambrose cites Canticles 6:3 and in the *Looking Unto Jesus* illustration mentioned earlier he draws upon Canticles 2:4 and also Peter’s Transfiguration experience. Reposing in Christ’s bosom suggests a relationship of deep intimacy and contentment of resting in Christ’s presence. Often relationships between two people reach their greatest depth when their voices are silent and they are united by the delight and enjoyment of each other. Ambrose reflects this pattern in his reposing with Jesus.

The above references clearly indicate the joy and delight that a person could experience in spiritual marriage. Williams asserts that the phrase “joy unspeakable and full of glory” which is from 1 Peter 1:8, was a common referent “used to describe ecstasy, which virtually became code-words for intense delight.”²²² Chapter 1 introduced Simon Chan’s assessment that those Puritans who practiced greater

²¹⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 40, cf. 1004.

²²⁰ Rutherford speaks of “sleeping in the bosom of the Almighty.” *Letters*, 34, cf. 251, 560. Baxter invites readers to lay their hearts “to rest, as in the bosom of Christ.” *Saints Everlasting Rest*, 330. cf. 85n158 above. None of these examples reach the depth of intimacy of Ambrose.

²²¹ Bernard, *SCC* 51.10, cf. 51.5.

²²² Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 116.

asceticism typically experienced greater contemplation and Ambrose's understanding of the role of spiritual practices in guiding a person into communion with God certainly confirms this. He declares, "[i]n right performance of *Duties*, we come to have fuller Union with Christ, and by this coming to him, we come to, and see the Father by him."²²³ Earlier in the same work he reminds his readers, "[b]ecause in *Duties* they have converses, and communion with God....The Saints look upon *Duties* (the Word, Sacraments, Prayers, & c.) as Bridges to give them a passage to God, as Boats carry them into the bosom of Christ, as means to bring them into more intimate communion with their heavenly Father, and therefore are they so much taken with them."²²⁴ Further, these spiritual duties that were dependent upon a person's union with Christ could also be practiced in a contemplative manner. Clearly Ambrose's intent was for his listeners to deepen and enrich their communion with Christ through them. Therefore, contemplative awareness cultivated by spiritual duties created a deepening experience and enjoyment of spiritual marriage between the person and Jesus. It is now possible to summarize and assess the continuities and discontinuities between Isaac Ambrose and Bernard, Calvin, and other Puritans.

Continuities and Discontinuities in the Study of Spiritual Marriage

One of the critical issues regarding spiritual marriage in this chapter is how this metaphor functioned in Ambrose as well as other Puritans. For Bernard union with God was primarily a relational experience that emphasized love. Calvin, the Puritans, and Isaac Ambrose, all shared the same theology of spiritual marriage and maintained there were two unique components. Spiritual marriage began when a person was united with Christ that was associated with the new birth of salvation

²²³ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 74.

²²⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 33. This significant topic will be explored in chapter 4.

through faith. However, there is more. All of the Protestant writers that have been examined in this chapter would recognize that by virtue of a person's union with Christ they would also share in all of the benefits of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension. This leads to the second aspect of spiritual marriage within the Protestant understanding that is limited in Bernard that of communion. While this was certainly present and essential in Calvin, it became more significant in the Puritans and, especially, Ambrose who clearly elevated the importance of communion with Christ. Further, this must not be conceptualized as two stages to spiritual marriage. Reformed theologians would insist that while union is the beginning a person never loses that important connection of being engrafted into Christ. However, what does vary is the person's experiential sense of God's love and enjoyment of God. Therefore, the mutual and reciprocal nature of the Reformed perspective of communion creates an experience that resembles Bernard's stronger love-based experiential focus.

Further, Bernard and the Puritans share a common bond in their use of the Song of Songs. While it is often very difficult to trace influences, Ambrose was deeply shaped by his knowledge of this premier biblical book that described a person's intimacy with Jesus the divine Bridegroom and also encouraged further through his awareness of Bernard. While Ambrose never employed any of the Canticles as his primary texts he frequently included numerous passages from them to illustrate his writings. Significantly Calvin stands alone at this point. Instead of relying upon the Song of Songs his major theological fulcrum was the Lord's Supper. While Calvin would appreciate the experiential dimension of piety held by Bernard and the Puritans, his desire was to frame that more corporately in public worship, thus

guarding against the perceived excesses he found in late medieval individualized piety. Significantly in the Lord's Supper the dynamic importance of experience and enjoyment can be seen in Calvin. He confesses, "[n]ow, if anyone should ask me how this takes place [i.e. Christ's true presence in the Supper], I shall not be ashamed to confess that it is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare. And, to speak more plainly, I rather experience than understand it."²²⁵

Bishop Edward Reynolds is representative of some Puritans who combined their teaching of spiritual marriage with the Lord's Supper.²²⁶ The necessity of grace as the means for salvation and spiritual marriage is another common conviction of both Bernard and Calvin. Further, embedded in the above discussion, all of these writers would agree that betrothal to spiritual marriage occurs on earth and its consummation must wait until heaven.

The previous examination of the importance of faith and love discovered that the gap between Bernard and Calvin was not as wide as some might initially assume. The Puritans and other Reformed descendants continued to develop a more affective understanding of faith as well as the more intimate dance between faith and love. The *Nadere Reformatie* of the late sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries were direct descendents of Calvin as were the Puritans of England and New England. Arie de Reuver in his excellent study on Dutch Pietism concludes, "[t]heir mysticism is one with that which is drenched in the scriptural word that by means of the secret operation of the Holy Spirit brings about a gracious and highly real faith-encounter and a loving fellowship with God in Christ--both marked by hope."²²⁷

²²⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.32.

²²⁶ Reynolds, *Meditations on the Lords Last Supper*.

²²⁷ de Reuver, *Sweet Communion*, 284.

Another feature that must be highlighted is that some of the Puritans included in this chapter followed Bernard's example in using erotic metaphors for motivating others in their spiritual marriage. Neither Calvin nor Ambrose followed this approach. This prompts the question why, at least for Ambrose, he did not follow the pattern of many of his fellow Puritans in employing the metaphors of sexual stimulation? Perhaps Ambrose was so transfixed by the glorious love of beholding Jesus, his divine Bridegroom that he did not need to rely upon this imagery? Another contributing factor could have been his struggle with poor health. *Looking Unto Jesus* was written after recovering from a major illness. Possibly his soul was so overflowing with gratitude that this was a sufficient motivation for him. This was also a significant motivation for contemplation that will be examined in chapter 4.

Even though Calvin and the Puritans were familiar with Bernard of Clairvaux he does not appear to be the dominant influence of their understanding, practice, and experience of spiritual marriage. Rather the biblical foundation of mystical union processed through their own experiences of the intimacy and enjoyment of conjugal love in their godly marriages provided greater encouragement and inspiration. Further, both Calvin and the Puritans greatly extended the inclusiveness of this spiritual experience by removing it from the cloisters and bringing it into the streets. However, this should not imply that Bernard was unimportant, as chapter 4 will clearly demonstrate. Not only did Ambrose know and draw upon Bernard but he also indicates some awareness of Gerson and Bonaventure; nonetheless his primary formative influence was Scripture.²²⁸ This parallels Coffey's conclusion in relation to

²²⁸ For Gerson see *War with Devils*, 173. For Bonaventure see *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1000.

Rutherford, that it is difficult “to understand the ideas of Puritan writers without reference to their principal intellectual source, the Bible itself.”²²⁹

This chapter has reviewed the biblical and theological foundations of spiritual marriage as the foundation for understanding Ambrose’s “contemplative-mystical piety.” The usage of spiritual marriage in Bernard and Calvin was examined to better understand the sources inherited by the Puritans. Scripture played a central role in the Puritans even as it did for Bernard and Calvin. However, the Puritans revealed a departure from Calvin both in their greater interest in and more allegorical reading of the Song of Songs. Since the Puritans perceived their godly marriage in relationship to their spiritual marriage with Jesus their understanding of intimacy and enjoyment of sex within marriage was explored. This vibrant intimacy and enjoyment of their earthly partner was echoed more deeply in their spiritual marriage with Jesus, their divine Bridegroom. The chapter concluded with a detailed survey of the use of spiritual marriage in the writings of Isaac Ambrose. It is now time to examine Ambrose’s spiritual experiences and further explore the evidence of a contemplative-mystical piety.

²²⁹ Coffey, *Theology and the British Revolutions*, 81.

Chapter 3

Contemplative Biography

For the things wherein they excelled (Ambrose and his brother Machin), I have not known the like. Mr. Ambrose for his habitual course of contemplation and rare improvement of secret opportunities.¹

The previous chapter examined the biblical and theological foundations for spiritual marriage. For the Puritans this consisted of both union and communion with Christ. The allegorical reading of the Song of Songs provided the Puritans with the biblical warrant and example for cultivating a relationship of intimacy and enjoyment with Jesus, their divine Bridegroom. This in turn inspired a similar sensitivity to the importance of intimacy and enjoyment of sex in their godly marriages. Chapter 2 also demonstrated that Isaac Ambrose is reflective of the Puritan biblical and theological understanding of spiritual marriage. Significantly, this chapter marks a key transition. While chapter 1 provided the general introduction to the possibility of a contemplative-mystical piety within Puritanism in general, and Isaac Ambrose in particular, and chapter 2 examined the broad background for the nature and themes of spiritual marriage, again including the importance of Ambrose, this chapter and the remainder of this thesis now turns its primary focus to Ambrose.

The importance of the Holy Spirit in Ambrose's theology of spiritual marriage made in chapter 2 needs to be revisited. Ambrose declares that the "*growing of the soul with Christ*" requires both "an union of the soul with Christ" and "a conveyance of the sap or sweetnesse (all the treasures of grace and happinesse) that is in Christ to

¹ Newcome, *Autobiography of Newcome*, 143.

the soul.”² None of this happens without the active involvement of the Spirit of God. Clearly, Ambrose understood spiritual marriage as the means for growing in Christ and also enjoying all of Christ’s benefits. This chapter examines Ambrose’s experience of growing his “soul with Christ” through the use of the Spiritual Movement Matrix. This tool from contemporary spiritual direction traces the movement of a person’s experience of God through the various dimensions of life including the intrapersonal, interpersonal, structural, and environmental. A careful review of his writings will reveal an abundance of mystical texts, mystical vocabulary, and robust mystic experiences. Contemplation is the common thread that unites all of these varied experiences into a revealing biography of Isaac Ambrose’s piety.

During the seventeenth-century contemplation was defined as “the action of beholding, or looking at with attention and thought.”³ Similarly Ambrose declares, “[w]hat, shall he ascend, and shall not we in our contemplations follow after him? gaze, O my soul, on this wonderful object, thou needest not feare any check from God or Angel, so that thy contemplation be spiritual and divine.”⁴ In *Media* he combines the importance of contemplation with love and the experience of God’s presence and joyfully asserts; “[w]hat happinesse of a glorified Saint, but that he is alwayes under the line of love, ever in the contemplation of, and converses with God, and shall that be thought our burthen here, which is our glory hereafter?”⁵ Later he raises some questions of practical divinity and asks, “[w]hat are the signes of a sincere love to

² Ambrose, *Prima* (Appendix) in *Prima, Media & Ultima* (1654), 66-7.

³ *OED*, 17:811. Henry Cockeram defines it similarly, “a beholding in ones mind.” *English Dictionarie*, n.p.

⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 871-2.

⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 34.

Christ?” He replies “a contemplation of Christ’s love, and desires after further sense of it, *Eph.* 3.17, 18, 19.”⁶

While the meaning of contemplation⁷ has varied over the centuries, the general meaning, and the one used here follows that of Thomas Merton who writes of contemplation as a “constant loving attention to God” and as a “simple contemplative gaze.”⁸ Likewise Richard Foster writes; “[p]ut simply, the contemplative life is the steady gaze of the soul upon the God who loves us.”⁹ The integrative thread that unites these various definitions with Ambrose’s own use of the term is that contemplation is a loving and sustained gaze upon God’s presence in creation and God’s mighty acts. It is more about noticing and admiring God’s presence than it is about being able to dissect and explain the meaning of something about God. Further, contemplation is an attitude and a practice that may yield the gift of a contemplative experience. Contemplation also produces increased love and knowledge. However, the gift of contemplation is always dependent upon God’s grace as Bernard continually reminded his fellow monks.¹⁰ There is no formula or technique that guarantees that if a person prays in a certain way that it will produce a contemplative experience. Therefore, contemplation is both an attitude and activity of loving focused attention or gazing on God that provides a means for keeping company with and enjoying Jesus Christ.

⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 355-6.

⁷ For a helpful introduction to contemplation see Aumann, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 4:203-9.

⁸ Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 217, 219. cf. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 20, 104-11.

⁹ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 49. cf. Foster, *Prayer the Heart’s True Home*, 158.

¹⁰ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 211.

Nature and Structure of the Contemplative Biography

A contemplative biography offers a window into the soul of another person. It attempts to reveal the spiritual dynamics as that individual gazes at God through the various dimensions of life. More specifically it endeavors to trace the contours of the soul and observe the ways in which a person has experienced God. One of the challenges in developing a contemplative biography for Ambrose is the limited sources available. While he recognized the value of keeping a diary and is often cited as a model for engaging in this practice his own diary is not extant.¹¹ It was not uncommon for Puritans to destroy their diaries at death and this likely explains the absence of Ambrose's diary.¹² Fortunately he wove two lengthy sections of selected entries into *Media* to illustrate his practice of keeping a diary.¹³ These limited resources, which cover only ten years of Ambrose's life, prevent the possibility of a developmental study of his spirituality. Charles Cohen's correctly notes, "[a]ll historical inquiries proceed at the mercy of their methods, and psychological studies of vanished minds place a premium on methodological precision."¹⁴ Therefore, a thematic rather than sequential framework has been selected to examine Ambrose's

¹¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 87. cf. Sachse, *Diary of Roger Lowe*, 2 and Keeble, *Literary Culture Nonconformity*, 208. On the importance of diary keeping for the Puritans see Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, esp. 176, 186-93 and Tomalin, *Samuel Pepys*, 78-89.

¹² Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 188-9 and Brekus, "Writing as Protestant Practice," 33.

¹³ These entries vary over the three editions of *Media*. The first edition contains the largest amount of diary material. The second and third editions are identical. The most significant change is the substitution of his May 1651 retreat experiences in place of the much lengthier and varied experiences in the 1650 edition. Additionally he greatly reduced the number of examples provided in his section entitled "Experiences." Ambrose reports the reduction in the latter two editions was due to his assessment that not all of the material in the first edition was edifying for others. *Media* (1652), 171 and *Media* (1657), 189.

¹⁴ Cohen, *God's Caress*, 14.

life. The Spiritual Movement Matrix will be employed to guide this examination.¹⁵ Spiritual directors use the Matrix for observing how God is experienced and to notice the contemplative movements within a person's life. Forerunners to the Spiritual Movement Matrix include the "Grid Arenas" and "The Experience Circle."¹⁶ While all of the literature has been written on the Experience Circle the Spiritual Movement Matrix has been selected since it better illustrates the important movements in Ambrose's life. Elizabeth Liebert acknowledges the difficulty in capturing the fullness of experience graphically using the Experience Circle.¹⁷ Further, it appears to distort this more than the Spiritual Movement Matrix. Structurally the Circle implies that experiences work themselves from the outer edges into the center, named the mystery or God. It is also possible for some who seek to use the Circle to assume that one must pass through these levels progressively as steps. Liebert recognizes these potential limitations and asserts that these are not her intentions,¹⁸ however, that message is not communicated visually. Additionally, the Matrix seems to enlarge the presence of God by placing God around the entire range of experiences rather than localizing and limiting God at the center. This conveys that a person can move from any direction and through any level of experience to notice the presence of God.

¹⁵ The Spiritual Movement Matrix was developed by Andrew Dreitzer and Patricia Bulkley in 1997 for training spiritual directors at San Francisco Theological Seminary, San Anselmo, CA. See Appendix 1.

¹⁶ Shea, "Spiritual Direction and Social Consciousness"; Keegan, "Spiritual Direction for Justice"; Cleary, "Societal Context for Supervision"; and Liebert, "Supervision as Widening Horizons."

¹⁷ Liebert, "Supervision as Widening Horizons,"135.

¹⁸ Liebert, "Supervision as Widening Horizons,"135.

The Spiritual Movement Matrix consists of four arenas or dimensions:¹⁹ Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Structural, and Environmental. The first two categories are self-explanatory; the Intrapersonal dimension focuses upon the relationship with self. Further dividing it into two separate categories will expand the Intrapersonal category: Ambrose's experience of God through his annual retreats, and the struggles of his soul. The second dimension, the Interpersonal, relates to Ambrose's interaction with others. The next two dimensions require greater clarification. The third category is the Structural. This systemic category includes the whole constellation of larger relational groupings, including, families, churches, communities, and organizations. Normally the focus is upon specific roles a person engages with others within those structures. The final dimension is the Environmental, or as it will be named here the Geo-Environmental, and "it draws attention to the interdependence among all the creatures in the universe and to the reciprocal influence between the natural world and the individual person."²⁰ Therefore, the focus turns to the uniqueness of place and how specific environments shaped Ambrose's experience.

Before examining the experiences of Ambrose the strengths and limitations of the Spiritual Movement Matrix need to be considered. There are four strengths to this interpretation method. First, as previously indicated, the Matrix was developed to help spiritual directors and supervisors guide others in better understanding their experiences of God. Therefore, the Matrix offers a practical means for reviewing Ambrose's

¹⁹ While both the Matrix and Circle refers to these categories as "arenas" the term "dimension" seems more expansive and open-ended and will be employed here.

²⁰ Liebert, "Supervision as Widening Horizons," 132.

experiences and to notice where God is amid those experiences. Second, the Matrix is not rigid or restrictive in categorizing experiences. Rather the four dimensions are fluid and open-ended. The dashed lines between the four categories visually depict this and communicate the reality that one's experience of God in the Interpersonal dimension can easily overflow into the Structural and vice versa.²¹ Indeed depending upon the focus and the nature of reflection, Ambrose's experiences could be placed in virtually any of the four dimensions. Third, the Matrix reminds spiritual directors and supervisors of the importance of both the affective and interpretive levels of experience. Therefore, if a person typically speaks of experiences in an affective manner, that person should be encouraged to consider how those experiences can be deepened by also paying attention to the interpretive thread of the experience. The converse is also true; an individual who typically speaks of God at the interpretive level should be encouraged to deepen or expand those experiences by the affective component of those experiences. Later a specific occasion of Ambrose's participation in the Lord's Supper will demonstrate his failure to experience the expected affective level until he engaged in a further interpretive exercise that yielded the desired outcome. Fourth, this tool recognizes that God is present in every dimension of life, not just the obvious Intrapersonal or spiritual dimensions.²² John Bunyan is representative of the Puritans when he asks, "[h]ave you forgot the Close, the Milk-house, the Stable, the Barn, and the like, where God did visit your soul?"²³ This awareness encourages readers to attend to the subtler yet nonetheless important places in which Ambrose experienced God. Therefore, the goal for this meditative reading

²¹ Keegan, "Spiritual Direction for Justice," 8, 9, 18 and Liebert, "Supervision as Widening Horizons," 133.

²² Liebert comments, "[i]n our culture, what we think of as 'spiritual' language is typically language of the intrapersonal or interpersonal arenas." "Supervision as Widening Horizons," 133-4.

²³ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to Chief of Sinners*, preface [7].

and reflection upon Ambrose's life is to observe the dynamic contours of his heart and soul in relationship with God and those around him. Further, this reading of his life will help to recognize his experiences of God and to detect the degree to which they reflect a contemplative attitude and awareness.

There are also four potential limitations to recognize before employing the Spiritual Movement Matrix. First, and most obvious, this tool was designed to help spiritual directors guide individuals or groups in becoming more attentive to the presence of God. The assumption was that you were guiding persons who could respond to your questions and comments and thereby further explore and deepen their respective experiences. Applying this to Ambrose who is dead obviously limits its usage. Additionally, Karl Rahner remarks, "the transition from the experience itself to a recognition of it at the conceptual and reflexive level is more difficult for the actual subject undergoing the experience, so that this subject can actually prevent this transition from taking place."²⁴ In other words, a reader's perception of Ambrose's experience today may not have been the actual experience he had in the seventeenth-century. However, once that is acknowledged the Matrix is still a helpful instrument for exploring the experiences of Ambrose. A second potential caution is the manner in which Ambrose's experiences are placed within the various dimensions of the Matrix. It might be difficult to determine the placement for a specific event from his life. However, undue preoccupation with this may cause readers to miss the importance of simultaneity. This principle, first advanced by Rahner, maintains that there is a unity of experience of God and self.²⁵ Accordingly a person who does not experience God at any significant depth cannot experience him or herself significantly

²⁴ Rahner, "Experience of God Today," 150.

²⁵ Rahner, "Experience of Self and Experience of God," 122-32.

either. By this Rahner posits that there is an intimate connection between the experience of self or one's neighbor and experience of God. Liebert has refined his thinking and maintains, "the notion of simultaneity suggests that an experience of the Holy in one arena will 'overflow' or 'bleed into' all the other arenas of a single life."²⁶ Ambrose illustrates this by his annual retreat into the wilderness each May. This isolated location provided both an opportunity for prolonged meditation and communion with God as well as living with nature, hence a combination of both the Intrapersonal and Geo-Environmental dimensions. Third, and closely related, is the reminder not to attempt to squeeze Ambrose or his experiences too tightly into any dimension. Once these categories are conceptualized as neat and tidy boxes into which everything must fit the ability to observe Ambrose describe the ways in which he experienced life in the intrapersonal, interpersonal, structural and geo-environmental dimensions of life is lost. Fourth, both the Matrix and the Circle have solid lines around the outer edges. In the Matrix this seems to limit the ways in which a person might experience God and in the Circle it communicates a similar restrictive sense to the range of experiences a person might have in the interpretive level.

Intrapersonal Dimension: Retreats

It is now possible to demonstrate how reading Ambrose's diary experiences through the Spiritual Movement Matrix reveal his contemplative nature and practices. As previously mentioned the Intrapersonal dimension will be divided into two categories, Ambrose's experience with God through his retreat practices and the struggles of his soul. Before proceeding further, it is necessary to recognize McGinn's caution not to focus too hastily upon a person's experience since many

²⁶ Liebert, "Supervision as Widening Horizons," 134, cf. 128, 129, 132, 141, 143.

people gravitate only towards the more spectacular and intense visionary accounts.²⁷ He downplays this, stressing that some of the better-known mystics such as Origen, Meister Eckhart, and John of the Cross minimized the importance of experience especially of the more rapturous nature.²⁸ More recently McGinn asserts that neither mystics nor scholars before the nineteenth-century employed the term “mystical experience”.²⁹ In place of the language of experience, McGinn proposes the term “consciousness” which contains both the felt nature of the experience as well as the more reflective interpretation of this experience.³⁰ Sheldrake has also articulated the problematic nature of defining mysticism based on experience. He cites three reasons: it frequently separates mysticism from theology, it privatizes mysticism, and it elevates certain heightened experiences that create an exclusive elitism.³¹ These are critical warnings and must guide the reader of mystical texts. However, while recognizing the importance of McGinn’s and Sheldrake’s concerns regarding the usage of “experience” McGinn’s alternative of consciousness seems equally problematic conveying a strong psychological theme that may also complicate the reading of these texts. Further, the Puritans were known for their experiential or as they preferred to call it, experimental focus on faith, consequently, experience is more reflective of their language. J. I. Packer maintains, “Puritanism was essentially an experimental faith, a religion of ‘heart-work’, a sustained practice of seeking the face of God.” He continues, “[o]ur interest focuses on religious experience, as such, and on man’s quest for God, whereas the Puritans were concerned with the God of whom men have experience, and in the manner of his dealings with those whom he draws to

²⁷ McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, xiv, cf. xvii.

²⁸ McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, xviii. cf. *Flowering of Mysticism*, 18, 24 and Dupré and Wiseman, *Light from Light*, 4.

²⁹ McGinn, “Mystical Consciousness,” 45.

³⁰ McGinn, “Mystical Consciousness,” esp. 59. cf. *Foundations of Mysticism*, xiv.

³¹ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 119-20.

himself.”³² Therefore, with sensitivity to these concerns I will examine some of the personal experiences that Ambrose recorded.

The writings of Isaac Ambrose breathe with the inspired pulse of a person who has experienced the love and joy of God. He urges his readers, “[I]about so to know Christ, as to have a practical and experimental knowledge of Christ in his influences, and not merely a notional [one].” Puritans stressed this message repeatedly because they knew people could receive “some notional, speculative brain knowledge of Jesus Christ, but they are not changed, their hearts are not over-powered.”³³ Ambrose was interested in changed hearts, beginning with himself. He asserts in his opening words to *Media*, “I have writ nothing, but in some measure I have, by the Lords assistance, practiced the same, and felt the comfort of it in my own heart and soul.”³⁴ Illustrative of this Ambrose names the writers who nourished his own soul in the beginning of *Media*, “Angier, Ash, Ball, Baxter, Bolton, Burroughs, Burges, Byfield, Downham, Dyke, Goodwin, Gouge, Hooker, Leigh, Mason, Rogers, Shepherd, Torshel, White, & c.”³⁵

Ambrose, like Christians for hundreds of years before him, sought to prepare and cultivate his heart through the use of spiritual disciplines, or duties, as he preferred to call them. While some resisted these practices due to the influence of antinomianism he stresses their importance. Further, Ambrose recognizes from

³² Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 215, 216.

³³ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 87, 88.

³⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), To the Reader [8].

³⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), To the Reader [7]. A comparative review indicates that Burroughs was added in the second edition and Baxter in the third edition. This reveals Ambrose’s continual desire to be expanding his awareness of experimental writings.

studying his own heart that the intentional choices that he makes to engage them reaps rich dividends in his relationship with God. Spiritual duties are “[b]ridges to give them a passage to God, as Boats to carry them into the bosom of Christ.” Ambrose cautions his readers that there is nothing unique about these practices and great care must be exercised so as not to use them to bargain with God. He stresses that these duties are a source of delight and joy “because in *Duties* they come to see the face of God in Christ: Hence *Duties* are called *The face or presence of God*.”³⁶ Further, practicing them brings a portion of heaven to that person, “[h]ence they who meet with God in duty, usually finde their hearts sweetly refreshed, as if Heaven were in them.”³⁷ Puritans typically divided spiritual duties into the categories of secret, private, and public.³⁸ Secret duties described the individual’s personal spiritual practices. Private pertains to a small group of friends invited to your house and public described the larger gatherings in the church building for spiritual exercises. Since these duties contained such potential, the Puritans often engaged them with great intensity.³⁹

A major component of Ambrose’s spiritual duties and a primary means for his experience of God were his annual month-long retreats in May. Edmund Calamy comments upon Ambrose’s pattern, “[t]was his usual Custom once in a Year, for the space of a Month to retire into a little Hut in a Wood, and avoiding all Humane Converse to devote himself to Contemplation.”⁴⁰ This practice appears to have been

³⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 33.

³⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 34.

³⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), t.p., and 42. cf. *Westminster Directory for Family-Worship*, subtitle.

³⁹ The devotional intensity of the Puritans will be examined in chapter 4. See especially page 194.

⁴⁰ Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 9.

fairly unique to him.⁴¹ One wonders whether he first began this spiritual discipline by following the practice of his biblical namesake. Genesis 24:63 records, “and Isaac went out in the fields at night to meditate.”⁴² The first recorded experience of these retreats was May 1641. This coincided with the beginning of his diary.⁴³ The complete entry from May 20, 1646 provides both an example of the framework Ambrose followed during his retreat as well as some of the ways in which he experienced God:

I came to *Weddicre*, which I did upon mature resolution, every year about that pleasant Spring time (if the Lord pleased) to retire my self, and in some solitary and silent place to practice especially the secret Duties of a Christian: In this place are sweet silent Woods, and therein this moneth, and part of the next, the Lord by his Spirit wrought in me Evangelical Repentance for sin, gave me sweet comforts, and Spiritual refreshings in my commerce, and intercourse with him, by Prayer, and Meditation, and Self-Examination, & discovered to me the causes of my many troubles and discouragements in my Ministry: whereupon I prayed more fervently, pressed the Lord with his promises, set his Power, and Wisdom, and Mercy on work; and so waited and believed, till the Lord *answered every Petition*, and I could not but observe his hand in it. This was a comfortable time to my soul.⁴⁴

Through his vivid and highly descriptive language Ambrose provides a number of insights to this particular retreat experience. He was both conscious of and dependent upon the Spirit to lead him to a greater awareness of his sins and to experience the accompanying refreshment that brought him into a deeper personal communion with God. As he broadened his use of spiritual practices he again gained personal insight

⁴¹ Joseph Alleine also withdrew in solitude for retreats but they were shorter in duration than those of Ambrose. Theodosia Alleine, *Life and Death*, 43-4. Additionally, John Lightfoot of Ashley “built a study in his garden, in which he devoted all his spare time to researches in Hebrew.” *DNB*, 11:1108. Mary Rich spent much time in contemplation in her garden or “wilderness”. Fraser, “Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick,” 49. Thomas Shepard also used his garden for his meditations. McGiffert, *God’s Plot*, 122, 126.

⁴² Elsewhere Ambrose draws upon this text to indicate that evening might be the best time for some people to practice their spiritual duties. *Media* (1657), 217.

⁴³ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 87. I assume that the first retreat was in 1641; though it is possible it began earlier. I believe it was closely connected with Ambrose’s practice to keep a diary.

⁴⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 74.

and discovered the causes for his troubles and discouragement in ministry. His spiritual intensity reflects his devotion and love for God. This renewed awareness guided him to pray boldly, waiting until God responded with an answer to each of his petitions. This retreat experience also utilizes the language of banking depicting how he exchanged his sins for the “sweet comforts” of God’s presence. Clearly Ambrose recognized God’s intimate presence and movement in his life. Significantly, while Ambrose could not withdraw permanently to a monastery as contemplative Christians did in the Western Catholic tradition he adapted this practice through his annual retreats for prolonged periods of communion with God.

Ambrose described other experiences of how his spiritual duties cultivated sensitivity to perceiving and enjoying God. On May 17, 1648 he writes, “[a]t several times I ran through the Duties of *Watchfulness, Self-Examination, Experiences, Meditation, the Life of Faith*; and many a time I felt many sweet stirrings of Christ’s Spirit: the Lord Jesus appeared to my soul, gave me the kisses of his mouth, especially in my Prayers to, and praises of his Majesty. *Surely thou art my Lord, and I will praise thee: Thou art my God, and I will exalt thee. Hallelujah.*”⁴⁵ While the Puritans, including Ambrose, knew Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs, none make any reference to Bernard’s teaching on the three-fold kisses. The Puritan resistance to spiritual hierarchies or exclusiveness would certainly clash with Bernard’s third kiss.⁴⁶ A common theme uniting the previous retreat experiences is

⁴⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 79.

⁴⁶ Bernard introduces his teaching on the three-fold kiss in *SCC* 3. See McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 166. Sibbes did speak of “degrees of his kisses” but he understood them as an encouragement through periods of struggle and not increasing levels of spiritual intensity. *Spouse, Her Earnest Desire*, 206. See also Keach, *Tropologia Key to Scripture Metaphors*, 53, 567-570 and Won, “Communion with Christ,” 159, 169, 199, 340n91, 353n3.

the use of the word sweetness. Ambrose describes his location as the “sweet silent Woods”.⁴⁷ Further, he experiences God through sweet “comforts”, “communion”, and “stirrings”. Sweetness was a common term among the Puritans as well as earlier Christians.⁴⁸ These and other retreat entries specifically reveal that for Ambrose the practice of spiritual duties were both the motivation and means for experiencing and enjoying God. Further, the depth of intimacy and enjoyment of God are revealed by employing the bridal language of Song of Songs.⁴⁹

In the second and third editions of *Media* Ambrose included different examples from his retreat experience for 1651.⁵⁰ The great benefit of this variation is that readers are provided with an overview of a more complete experience from the month rather than the previous scattered entries of various years. Here he provides nine specific entries for the nineteen days of his retreat that reflects the same basic pattern as the 1646 account. It appears that virtually any of the spiritual duties that Ambrose engaged had the potential to lift his soul into deeper contemplative awareness and adoration of God. For example, on May 17, 1651 he describes what he experienced as he meditated on Christ’s love and looked ahead to heaven, “[t]his day in the morning, *I meditated on the love of Christ*, wherein Christ appeared, and melted my heart in many sweet passages. In the Evening *I meditated on Eternity*, of hell: and on eternity of Heaven, wherein the Lord both melted, and cheered, and warmed, and refreshed my soul. Surely the touches of Gods Spirit are as sensible as any

⁴⁷ The importance of place, especially as it relates to Ambrose’s retreat experiences, will be examined in the Geo-Environmental dimension.

⁴⁸ See Hesselink, “Calvin: Theologian of Sweetness.” cf. McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism, Flowering of Mysticism*, and *Harvest of Mysticism*, indexes.

⁴⁹ See chapter 2 and chapter 5 for more on this.

⁵⁰ Ambrose, *Media* (1652), 73-5 and *Media* (1657), 88-90.

outward touches. Allelujah.”⁵¹ Clearly God’s Spirit made deep impressions upon Ambrose’s soul. The comparison suggests that this was a strongly palpable experience that deeply touched and transformed his soul. The language of melting, cheering, and warming the heart has long been used by contemplative writers in their attempt to articulate their knowing and loving God. The remaining dates of this retreat produced a similar cycle of renewed awareness of sin and negligence followed by confession that in turn brought a renewed experience of God’s presence and promises. The concluding words of his last entry for this year’s retreat serve as a helpful summary of his experience, “[n]ow the Spirit left in my soul a sweet scent and favour behind it. Allelujah. *Amen, Amen.*”⁵²

There were other retreat experiences when Ambrose’s soul soared to the suburbs of heaven. May 20, 1641 captures this overwhelming experience, “[t]his day in the Evening the Lord in his mercy poured into my soul the ravishing joy of his blessed Spirit. O how sweet was the Lord unto me? I never felt such a lovely taste of Heaven before: I believed this was *the joyful sound, the Kisses of his mouth, the Sweetnesses of Christ, the Joy of his Spirit, the new wine of his kingdom*; it continued with me about two days.”⁵³ There are a number of significant themes from this two-day encounter. Ambrose specifically mentions he experienced each member of the Trinity. Joy is the dominant affection, mentioned three times. Sweetness is

⁵¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 88-9. Ambrose specifically mentions the following spiritual duties in which he experienced God: watchfulness, self-tryal (i.e. self-examination), experience, evidences, meditation, life of faith, prayer, reading the Word, self-denial, and saints suffering, 73-5. cf. *Media* (1650), 112 for Ambrose’s “consideration of Eternity.”

⁵² Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 90.

⁵³ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 71. This event was so significant that it was recorded again later in *Media* in a slightly different version. There Ambrose describes it as “Spiritual, heavenly ravishing love-trance” that was a “blessed foretaste of heaven.” *Media* (1650), 111, cf. 134 for a third reference to this experience.

mentioned twice. Ambrose comments that he has never had an experience of this depth before. In fact, he traces this experience to the time in which he “began to see Spiritual things ... upon which followed more desire and endeavors after grace.”⁵⁴ One can understand how this contemplative experience of the presence of God would inspire a person to continue to cultivate a relationship of gazing lovingly on God. There are two additional items that need to be noted. First, Ambrose is again reflective of the bridal desire and delight of the Song of Songs and very similar to his sample meditation on the soul’s love to Christ. There he writes, “[o] let me taste how gracious thou art, by some real experiments in my own heart, smile upon me from heaven, answer me with some alluring whispers of the Spirit of Adoption; *Kiss me with the kisses of thy mouth, for thy love is better than wine.* O let me bathe my soul in the delicious intimacies of a Spiritual communion with thee my God.”⁵⁵ This reflects the intimacy of spiritual marriage that has long been a theme within the contemplative-mystical tradition of Christian spirituality as noted in chapter 2. Second this description captures the rich devotional language of meditating on heaven. Heavenly-mindedness was a common theme in Christian mysticism and according to McGinn contemplation was “understood as burning desire for heaven.”⁵⁶ Some Puritans shared a similar desire for heavenly-mindedness.⁵⁷

It is unfortunate that the diary entries for the remaining days of Ambrose’s retreat have been lost. Nonetheless, the erotic language reminiscent of the Song of Songs is sufficient to indicate the warmth of Ambrose’s relationship with God. Contemplative experiences often defy description, however, there is ample evidence

⁵⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 214.

⁵⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 235 (incorrectly numbered 237).

⁵⁶ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 140.

⁵⁷ This will be explored in depth in chapter 4.

from the numerous illustrations cited to support the reality that he was deeply transformed by his contemplative visits with God.

Contemporary readers might question Ambrose's practice of an annual month-long retreat. This is all the more surprising since unlike Bernard and earlier monastic Christians who followed this pattern as a way of life Ambrose was married and had three children.⁵⁸ However, Ambrose asserts that he felt called and even compelled to make these annual retreats. He draws upon the experience of Jesus being driven into the wilderness as an important model for him to emulate. He contends,

In this respect, I know not but the wilderness might be an advantage to Christ's design: In this solitary place, he could not but breathe out more pure inspiration; heaven usually is more open, and God usually more familiar and frequent in his visits in such places. I know not what others' experiences may be; but if I have found anything of God, or of his grace, I may thank a wood, a wilderness, a desert, a solitary place, for its accommodation; and have I not a blessed pattern here before me?⁵⁹

Earlier in a May 16, 1648 diary entry he provides another motivation for this practice, "I came to *Weddicre*, to renew my engagements and loves with my Lord and my God this Spring also: My ground is that of *Cant.* 2.11,12. *Come my beloved, let us go forth into the fields, etc. there will I give thee my loves. The bridegroom of our souls (said Bernard) is bashful, and more frequently visits his bride in the solitary places.*"⁶⁰ Therefore, according to Ambrose Christ provides a double motivation;

both in his actual practice of retreating to the wilderness and the bridal reminder from

⁵⁸ Ambrose married his wife Judith probably in 1633. In 1641 when Ambrose began his annual retreats his oldest child, Rachel, would have been six and a half years old. In addition, he had two sons, Augustine and Richard. Smith, *Records of Preston Church*, 225.

⁵⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 235. Oliver Heywood, a fellow Lancashire Puritan, acknowledges the benefit of withdrawing when he counsels; "[a] man shal best enjoy himself alone: Solitary recesses are of singular advantage, both for getting and increasing grace." *Heart Treasure*, 93.

⁶⁰ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 78-9. Ambrose duplicates this entry as the justification for his annual retreat on May 13, 1651. *Media* (1657), 88.

Song of Songs where Jesus, the Bridegroom, offers a biblical warrant for this practice of solitude or removing one's self from the busyness of daily life. In a fascinating comment on Ambrose's teaching on meditation he stresses that the minister's time is not his own and he needs to use it for the benefit of his people. He continues by saying, "I hear them (i.e. the congregation) crying after me, To your closet, and there pray for us that we perish not; study for us, that we may learn of you how to walk in his paths: for if we perish, and you will not give warning, *then must our blood be required at your hands.*"⁶¹ That awareness and responsibility is a strong motivation for a minister to take annual retreats. But to comprehend the full reason for Ambrose's understanding regarding his annual retreats one additional insight needs to be grasped.

Ambrose was not naïve and recognized that inherent within his practice of an annual retreat was also the danger of greater temptation. He cites Jesus' wilderness experience facing the devil's temptation and continues by saying wilderness places

are no freer from temptations, than they that are more publike; Satan hath his temptations of another sort, and especially his most hideous and horrible injections in such places more then publike. And this more resolves me than all the arguments that ever I read, of the error of those Eremites and Votaries of old, who, to free themselves from Satans malice, and for more holiness, voluntarily forsook the societies of men, and lived by themselves in woods, and wildernesses; And yet is there no mean betwixt these two extremes? is not society good? and is not solitariness good in their times and season? I dare not for a world deny either, and I think he is no Christian that makes not use of both.⁶²

Those are strong words. Ambrose realizes the tension between being submerged in the busyness of daily activities as well as the freedom of solitude for prolonged meditation and prayer. While this tension exists he leaves no doubt that solitude

⁶¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 220, cf. 218 on the importance of solitary places.

⁶² Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 171-2.

offers a greater opportunity to “enjoy the benefits” of God.⁶³ Therefore, he believes his practice of taking a month-long annual retreat allows him to benefit from both of these necessities of the spiritual life. He continues his appeal by commenting on the proper use of solitude and discerning when it is best to avoid and when it is wise to enter it. He writes,

Hence I say, that in the very time of the assaults, or of Satans injections, it is good to avoid solitariness, as of choice; yet if God, by virtue of our calling, shall draw or lead us into solitary places at such a time, we need not fear, *Jesus Christ was led of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.* If we are led into a wilderness by Divine Providence, and in our calling, and that we run not our selves rashly into a temptation, we may confidently expect a comfortable issue out of it.⁶⁴

Additionally Ambrose cautions his readers to not yield “to roving, ranging thoughts” so that their time in solitude might be well spent.⁶⁵ Clearly for Ambrose his retreats were more than a spiritual luxury or a means toward escaping the pressures of life. Rather in identifying with Jesus he felt he was drawn into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to prepare and refine him to be the best minister for his congregation. Therefore, his experiences of God would serve as an important motivation and encouragement for others.

In reviewing Ambrose’s retreat experiences it is evident that he possessed a contemplative hunger and desire that was consciously aware of God. His experiences of God were renewed by delight and the sweet enjoyment of communion. This deep communion of “delicate intimacies” is strongly reflective of being in union with Christ or spiritual marriage. This was certainly one of the results of his annual

⁶³ Ambrose, *Communion with Angels*, 277.

⁶⁴ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 172. cf. Scudder, *Christians Daily Walke*, 184-7 for a discussion on the proper use of solitude. Nehemiah Wallington confesses that “solitariness” created a greater temptation towards suicide and lust for himself. Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 31, 126.

⁶⁵ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 172.

retreats, deepening his contemplative joy in communion with God. Unfortunately, Ambrose does not mention any of his personal “closet” times of devotion in his diary. However, his funeral sermon, *Redeeming the Time*, suggests that Ambrose would have engaged in a variety of forms of meditation and prayer in both the morning and evening that could no doubt produce similar experiences.⁶⁶ Ambrose’s retreats also increased his awareness of how his sins created a barrier between himself and God. Therefore he shared a commonality with other Christians who recognized one of the fruits of contemplative prayer was an increased awareness of sin. On May 22, 1646 he detected with great sadness that, “[t]he Lord by his spirit wrought in one a depth of humiliation for sin, and yet he was troubled that he was not more troubled for it.”⁶⁷ Growing in godliness or holiness was one of the major emphases of Puritan piety. They understood that this was not possible without a serious awareness of their own sins and a desire to work towards their sanctification as they lived more fully by God’s grace. The retreat experience of May 19, 1648 serves as both a summary of this retreat section and creates a bridge for the next dimension of the struggles of Ambrose’s soul. He writes, “[o]ne felt many strivings, and contrary workings in his spirit; sometimes in prayer ravished, and sometimes heavy; sometimes full of comfort, and sometimes exceedingly dejected; sometimes patient, and other whiles impatience. O the fickleness and uncertainty of the heart in the course of piety.”⁶⁸

Intrapersonal Dimension: Struggles of the Soul

Ambrose also experienced God through the struggles of his soul. Frank Luttmer captures the Puritans’ understanding of temptations, “the very experience of

⁶⁶ Ambrose, *Redeeming the Time*, 17-9.

⁶⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 112, cf. 107.

⁶⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 115.

spiritual struggle was a sign of God's saving grace; the torment of temptation, the affliction of conscience born of an awareness of one's sins, and the consciousness of being unworthy of salvation were all symptoms of a soul engaged in 'warfare' not wallowing in 'security', a cause for hope not despair."⁶⁹ Some scholars have drawn attention to the heightened sense of anxiety and despair that marked certain Puritans. While Paul Seaver admits that Nehemiah Wallington's case was more severe and extreme than most, he does indicate that Wallington was often suicidal.⁷⁰ Thomas Shepard's experience, while less intense, was still often consumed with spiritual anxiety regarding his assurance, and in "the final analysis, Shepard simply does not get off the treadmill."⁷¹ John Bunyan records a similar pilgrimage of doubt, despair, and fear that he had committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit in his autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Hambrick-Stowe offers a more balanced assessment and acknowledges "anxiety was a motivating force in the daily devotional practice of New Englanders throughout their lives" but that "Puritan anxiety was not spiritually crippling" and "led to an ever-deepening relationship with the God of salvation."⁷² While Ambrose recognizes that one of the tools employed by the devil is despair, he does not seem overly troubled by it in comparison with Shepard, Wallington, Bunyan, and others.⁷³ Nor does he seem to battle with melancholy as many Puritans did. Struggles often tend to be personalized and attack the individual at the place of greatest vulnerability. Ambrose understood this and counsels his readers, that the "evils that arise from *the Devil*, are temptations of

⁶⁹ Luttmer, "Persecutors, Tempters and the Devil," 67.

⁷⁰ Seaver, *Wallington's World*, 16, 21-25, 31, 76.

⁷¹ Tipson, "Routinized Piety of Shepard's Diary," 74-5. See also McGiffert, *God's Plot*, 19-26 for a helpful treatment of anxiety and assurance within the Puritans.

⁷² Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 20, 284, 89, cf. 286-7.

⁷³ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 178-86.

several sorts.”⁷⁴ That reality reveals the wide spectrum of struggles experienced by Puritans in the seventeenth-century. Henry Newcome, Ambrose’s close friend, often wrestled with the use of his time, bemoaning the large quantities he spent playing billiards and smoking rather than in meditation.⁷⁵ Conversely, Ralph Josselin the Essex Puritan minister, in his idiosyncratic diary often seems preoccupied with his health, especially his navel.⁷⁶ Ambrose referred to “our special sins, our *Dalilah* sins” as those most challenging for us to face.⁷⁷ While he does not specifically name his Dalilah sin, his diary reveals that he was more susceptible to the temptation of pride, which will be examined later.

Traditionally Christians have examined the struggles of the soul according to the three-fold temptations of the devil, the flesh, and the world.⁷⁸ Unlike some in the modern scientific world, the Puritans believed in the reality of Satan’s presence.⁷⁹ Due to the vicious, virulent, and persistent nature of the devil to deceive or destroy Christians Ambrose writes of the importance of entering into spiritual combat and wrestling with the Satan.⁸⁰ The Puritans were well aware of the long tradition of spiritual combat that can be traced back to the Bible.⁸¹ William Gurnall’s *The*

⁷⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 286.

⁷⁵ On playing billiards see Newcome, *Diary*, 67, 72, 75, 82, 158n. On smoking tobacco see 68, 70, 139, 166, 168, 182, 194, 196, 199, 218.

⁷⁶ Macfarlane, *Diary of Ralph Josselin*, 140n1, 141.

⁷⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 47, 65, 100, 454.

⁷⁸ There appears to be no consistency in the arrangement of these three headings among Puritan authors. Ambrose employs this pattern and it will be followed in examining his development of temptation. *Media* (1657), 286-7.

⁷⁹ Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 180.

⁸⁰ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 2, 3, 5, 15, 17, 19, 22, 26, 29, 163.

⁸¹ There is no adequate history that traces the Puritan awareness of this topic back to the NT. The best historiography on this subject is Russell, *Mephistopheles: Devil in the Modern World*. For Calvin’s understanding see Charles Hall, *With the Spirit’s Sword*. For Puritan sources see Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, 132-5; Bozeman, *Precisianist Strain*, esp. 110-3, 236-7; and Zacharias, *Embattled Christian*.

Christian in Complete Armour employed the Pauline battle imagery of Ephesians 6 and was one of the most popular Puritan works on this subject. Gurnall cites Tertullian, Augustine, and Jerome as well as later writers such as Bernard and Gerson. In reality the gulf between Roman Catholic and Puritan writings on this subject was not as wide as some might suspect.⁸² More importantly to this study is Ambrose's knowledge of some early sources on spiritual warfare. In *War with Devils* he writes, "Athanasius tells of an Hermite to whom God should reveal the state of the world."⁸³ This almost certainly refers to Antony, the early desert father whose experience of spiritual combat was recorded by Athanasius. Later in this same work, Ambrose makes a specific reference to the twenty-third scale that is pride in John Climacus's *Ladder of Divine Ascent*.⁸⁴

Ambrose asserts that the devil is a formidable foe "and enters into Spirits; his wrestling is so close, that neither understanding, will, affections, nor any thing within can escape his fangs."⁸⁵ This should not imply that the devil could control the individual believer in Jesus. Ambrose clarifies that the Devil "cannot compel or force you to Sin." Therefore, it is "not that Sathan imports any new thing into our minds, which he found not in our fancies before."⁸⁶ Further, as he expounds his thinking more fully Ambrose declares that Satan knows "our thoughts, as well as words and actions" but this is only true for the "outer rooms" of our life. Ambrose seeks to reassure his readers as he limits the power of the devil in the lives of Christians, "for the most inner room or privy chamber, wherein we place the understanding and will,

⁸² See for example Clark, "Protestant Demonology," 73, 79 and Bozeman, *Precisianist Strain*, 79

⁸³ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 56.

⁸⁴ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 170.

⁸⁵ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 15.

⁸⁶ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 10.

as Sathan cannot intuitively or immediately discern it, so neither can he imperiously or efficaciously work upon it.”⁸⁷

This can be demonstrated from Ambrose’s diary. While he occasionally experienced these torments being awake,⁸⁸ most temptations occurred during sleep. These nocturnal encounters with Satan powerfully illustrate how he experienced God amid these troubling attacks upon his soul. On March 6, 1647 Ambrose reports, “[t]his night in his sleep a troubled soul was by Satan tempted to sin, but the Lord stood by him, put prayers into him though asleep, whereby he overcame the temptation; then awaking, he deeply apprehended Satans approach and busie temptations: it struck him into fears, but praising God for his assistance, he received boldness, and then slept again.”⁸⁹ It is significant that Ambrose’s sensitivity to God that had been cultivated through his contemplative awareness was able to experience God even during his sleep.⁹⁰ Since dreams can originate from godly sources as well as the devil, Ambrose provides guidance in distinguishing those that come from God’s angels.⁹¹

Doubt was another temptation that Satan often used and twice Ambrose wrestles with it within a day of each other. The first struggle occurred on May 20, 1651, “[i]n the Morning I fell on *Reading the Word*, perused the directions, and then

⁸⁷ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 49. Luttmer affirms this assessment from his broad study of the topic, “According to Puritan divines, the devil could not directly read minds, but his powers as a spirit, his unparalleled knowledge, and his long experience enabled him to know the ‘very thoughts and intents of the heart’.” “Persecutors, Tempters and the Devil,” 64n104.

⁸⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 107.

⁸⁹ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 108, cf. 107.

⁹⁰ For another example of Ambrose’s spiritual awareness of God during sleep see 239.

⁹¹ Ambrose, *Communion with Angels*, 248.

searched into the *Common places and uses of my corruptions in nature and practice; of my comforts against the burthens of my daily infirmities; of establishing my heart against the fear of falling away; of directions in my calling; of comforts against outward crosses; of my priviledges in Christ above all the wicked in the world.*” He also describes the other occasion from the previous day, “[i]n the former part of this day I exercised the *life of Faith*, when the Lord strengthened me to act Faith on severall Promises, both temporal, spiritual, and eternal. I had then sweet, refreshing, and encouraging impressions on my soul against all the fearful, sinful, and doubting dreams I had the night or two before dreamed.”⁹² Ambrose provides no indication from his earlier entries of the cause for these “doubting dreams” but does affirm that God strengthened and removed his doubts. Additionally he confesses, mostly likely from his own experiences, that “the best cure and remedy of doubtings, is to perfect and strengthen our assurance.”⁹³ Unlike Shepard and Wallington who struggled for years to attain assurance Ambrose appears to have experienced it sooner.

It is often difficult to accurately ascertain the placement of these temptations since there is some overlap of categories. In one sense this is reflective of the principle of simultaneity already discussed. Ambrose realized the same challenge when he declared, that the devil “hath his aydes, these are led under the conduct of those two Captain-Generals, the World and the Flesh.”⁹⁴ Further, since the devil commonly works through the flesh this serves as a helpful bridge to the next category of struggle. Once again while on retreat, Ambrose experienced the torments of the tempter. On May 25, 1646 he recorded this battle, “[t]he Lord opened a poor creatures eye, to see in some measure the depths of Satan, and deceitfulness of his

⁹² Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 89.

⁹³ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 211.

⁹⁴ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 16.

own heart: he acted in things doubtful, against the reluctancy of his own conscience before; no question this is sin, because it is not faith.”⁹⁵ Ambrose declares his intended response by adding Romans 14:22 and Galatians 2:14 in the margin. Both of these passages reinforce the importance of walking according to the Gospel and living before God in a manner that is acceptable to God. In other words, when Satan tempts you, you must remember to look at God.

The second general category of temptations originates from the flesh. Ambrose declares that the flesh does not mean “the body and the flesh thereof, but that corruption of nature, which hath defiled the Body and Soul.”⁹⁶ Further, he states that the “evils that arise from *the flesh*, are lusts or temptations of Uncleanness.”⁹⁷ Based upon the available diary entries Ambrose reported as many experiences that related to the flesh as to the world and devil combined. Not surprising, later in *War with Devils* he observes, “[t]he Flesh is a worse enemy than the Devil himself; for never could the Devil hurt us, if this imbred enemy did not betray us: This is the root, the fountain, the origine of all other sin, *when lust have conceived, it bringeth forth sin.*”⁹⁸

More specifically Ambrose’s greatest struggles of the soul were related to the flesh. As previously indicated, his major challenge appears to have been pride.⁹⁹ The following sampling reflect both his honesty and struggle as well as the ways in which

⁹⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 106.

⁹⁶ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 52, cf. 16.

⁹⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 286.

⁹⁸ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 57.

⁹⁹ Pride was also a common temptation to both Henry Newcome and Thomas Shepard. See Newcome, *Diary*, 49, 201 and McGiffert, *God’s Plot*, 25, 85, 88, 103, 108, 128. cf. Haller, *Rise of Puritanism*, 153-4, 196.

he experienced God amid these battles. His primary conflict appears to have been his desire to create a better public image than was justified. On May 15, 1646, “[t]his day a poor soul upon strict examination of his heart, found that formerly he had judged many sinful actions lawful and good, and had excused many actions though in themselves sinful: he felt not such a powerful operation of his corruptions before, and so through Pride and Ignorance thought better of himself than he had cause.”¹⁰⁰ Further, on May 13, 1646, “[o]ne performed indeed a good action, but he exceedingly overprized it; which he found afterwards.”¹⁰¹ It is not surprising considering the great importance spiritual duties occupied in Ambrose’s life that his greatest strength could potentially also become his greatest weakness.¹⁰² In the 1652 edition of *Media* Ambrose added a new section entitled “Self-denial” that specifically addressed his struggle, “[t]here is nothing that a Christian is more apt to be proud of then spirituall things.”¹⁰³ This addition of the self-denial section reveals a significant place of transformation in Ambrose’s personal battle with pride.

Anger was another struggle that Ambrose mentions and on January 23, 1647 he records “[t]his evening one fell into exorbitancy of passion; it was so strong in him, that it cast him into *Palpitation of heart*.”¹⁰⁴ There is no indication of the reason for his strong response. However, he supplies some marginal references that convey the desired disposition from this event (Ps 37:8; Eph 4:31; Col 3:12, 13). Fortunately the very next day he was able to report, “[o]ne troubled in conscience for his rash

¹⁰⁰ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 115, cf. 114.

¹⁰¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 114.

¹⁰² Owen Watkins links the potential for pride with diary keeping and asserts “[t]he early nineteenth-century editor of Ebenezer Erskine’s diary thought the practice could be dangerous because it might supply fuel for spiritual pride.” *Puritan Experience*, 23.

¹⁰³ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 157.

¹⁰⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 106.

anger, reconciled himself to his adversary, and immediately God spake peace to his conscience.”¹⁰⁵ Apparently Ambrose took seriously the Pauline admonition of not letting the sun go down on your anger. In fact, this verse from Ephesians 4:31 was one of the marginal texts adjoined to this event.

The world constituted the third temptation and Ambrose recognized that this included “covetousness, cares, evil company.”¹⁰⁶ He later enlarged this to comprise on one the hand “pleasure, honours, riches” and on the other hand “[t]hreats, Miseries, afflictions, Poverty, Ignominy.”¹⁰⁷ Living in Lancashire during the seventeenth-century, in particular during the decade of the 1640s when the country was often ravaged by the Civil War, strained the already meager resources of many. Finances were typically inadequate for ministers. Ambrose bluntly confesses on March 27, 1647, “[a] poor soul being mightily insnared with the world, and finding by experience its vanity and vexation, he resolved against it.”¹⁰⁸ On the same date Ambrose conveys the severity of this struggle when he discloses he was “exceedingly troubled by the cares of this life.”¹⁰⁹ Later that same year on December 11, 1647 Ambrose records progress towards his goal, “[t]his day one observed GODS goodness, in supplying fully all his Temporal wants: This he construed as earnest both of Spiritual and Eternal favors and mercies in Christ.”¹¹⁰ Ambrose’s response reflects gratitude rather than greed. One of the qualities of gratitude is that it

¹⁰⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 108.

¹⁰⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 287.

¹⁰⁷ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 51, cf. 16 and Luttmer, “Persecutors, Tempters and the Devil,” 44-5

¹⁰⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 186. Earlier on February 27, 1645 Ambrose records that he had received an augmentation to his salary and prays “Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.” *Media* (1650), 73.

¹⁰⁹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 185.

¹¹⁰ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 105.

increases one's ability to notice life and detect the origin of blessings and hence have a more contemplative attitude towards life. Additionally it is likely that this awareness of the proper use of resources enabled a transformation within him to later write about the importance of looking off from the world so that you are able to look on to Jesus.¹¹¹ He declares, "[t]he eye cannot look upwards and downwards, at once in a direct line; we cannot seriously minde heaven and earth in one thought."¹¹²

Illness is another aspect of the temptations of the world. John Waite in his introduction to *Media* refers to Ambrose's weak health without any elaboration.¹¹³ Ambrose includes a number of examples of his health in his diary. While fevers and weakness were common ailments, on August 7, 1646 he records that he suffered from a stitch in his side that troubled him throughout his sermon. His sickness grew progressively worse and when the doctor was unable to ease his pain he wrote his will. However, later he was able to declare, "[t]he Lord restored one to his health, out of a dangerous disease, and he praised God for it in the public Assemblies."¹¹⁴ While his last extant diary entry was in 1651, he suffered from a "sore sickness" in 1653 that provided the inspiration for writing *Looking Unto Jesus*.¹¹⁵ Ambrose's experience surrounding his health confirms Hambrick-Stowe's observation that illness could intensify personal devotion.¹¹⁶ In a dream recorded on July 19, 1647 Ambrose connects his awareness that his end might be near with an increased desire for intimacy with Jesus:

¹¹¹ Ambrose *Looking Unto Jesus*, 6-20.

¹¹² Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 10.

¹¹³ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), To the Reader (John Waite), [1].

¹¹⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 105.

¹¹⁵ Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus*, To the Reader, [1].

¹¹⁶ Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 225. cf. Cohen, *God's Caress*, 214-15.

This night desiring God to sanctifie my sleep and dreams, that I sinned not in them: I dreamed, that after some troubles of life, my time limited was at an end, and that I heard the very voyce of God calling me by name into his glorious Kingdom; whither when I came, heavenly ornaments were put upon me by the hand of God, and of Christ: My soul was exceedingly ravished. *The Lord grant I may make some use of this, to be more heavenly-minded, and to breathe more after Christ.*¹¹⁷

This amazing experience transformed Ambrose's desire to focus more consistently upon Christ and expand his meditation on heaven. Additionally his method of processing this reveals the combination of an affective level experience of a dream that was further deepened through the interpretive level to determine the best use of this experience.

The Puritans realized that external events in life could often be a means to awakening them to an inner awareness of truth. This discipline of applying a theological truth in a practical way also illustrates the experimental piety of the Puritans. Ambrose vividly illustrates this practice from his March 17, 1645 entry with a fascinating parable on his sickness, “[a]fter some extreme torment, one voided a Stone; and suddenly the Spirit of Christ injected this motion into his heart, That the best cure for the stone in his heart, was to look on Christ, whose heart he pierced; and to consider that Christ looks on him in every action, and therefore that he should still carry as in his presence, that his heart should be stil on *Gods* eye.”¹¹⁸ Ambrose appropriately includes Ezekiel 11:19-20 which requests God to remove the prophet's heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh. Ambrose's personal response parallels the advice he gave to a fellow minister who visited him for counsel during sickness, and said, “sanctifie his sickness to his Spiritual advantage.”¹¹⁹ It does

¹¹⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 76.

¹¹⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 112.

¹¹⁹ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 76.

appear from the material preserved that Ambrose's heart was softened and changed and aided him in looking unto Jesus.

Struggles of the soul typically create a sense of anxiety and anxiety frequently raises the question of whether or not a person is living closely with God. Yet for Ambrose those skirmishes with desolation did not draw him away from God, at least not for lengthy periods as they did for other Puritans. Further, a number of significant points of transformations within his soul have been observed: wrestling with Satan drew him closer to God, periodic doubts renewed his faith and trust in God's promises, anger was transformed into reconciliation, financial fears were converted by God's provisions into gratitude rather than greed, illness created a deeper hunger for Christ and increased his heavenly-mindedness, and the persistence of pride created the discipline of self-denial. Consistent throughout instead of focusing upon his struggles Ambrose turned his gaze in a more contemplative way upon Jesus.

Lovelace makes the significant connection that was frequently neglected by the Puritans, "[i]t is remarkable that the Puritans could so easily overlook a third biblical path to assurance that Luther had uncovered: naked reliance on the work of Christ."¹²⁰ Ambrose connects this assurance that comes from recognizing God's love in Christ with the ability to overcome the world's temptations; "[i]s a man assured of God's love in Christ? Such a one fears not any troubles, he knows all comes through his Father's hands.... He gets a victory against the world by his *Faith*, and *Samson*-like, breaks all bands of temptations as straw."¹²¹ This solid christocentric foundation, that would later form the groundwork for *Looking Unto Jesus*, reduces anxiety,

¹²⁰ Lovelace, *American Pietism of Cotton Mather*, 101. Nehemiah Wallington finally discovered the same reality that assurance ultimately rests on trusting Jesus. Seaver, *Wallington's World*, 43.

¹²¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 209-10.

increases freedom and encourages Ambrose to lovingly gaze upon Jesus. Even his greatest interior struggle with pride seems to have brought renewed intimacy with Jesus.

Interpersonal Dimension

The third dimension elucidates the ways in which Ambrose experienced God through his one-on-one relationships with other individuals. His diary includes numerous examples of how he sought to lead others to experience God more deeply. This sensitivity and concern among Puritan ministers earned them the title physicians of the soul.¹²² Haller provides a helpful summary of this form of pastoral care, “[t]heir function was to probe the conscience of the down-hearted sinner, to name and cure the malady of his soul, and then to send him out strengthened and emboldened for the continuance of his lifelong battle with the world and the devil.”¹²³ While the soul physician’s primary concern was to assist the other person in experiencing God Ambrose’s diary reveals that God often challenged him through others as well. Once again it is clear that the Puritans did not exist in a vacuum. Their practice of caring for souls both recognized and interacted with the long history of spiritual direction.¹²⁴ Casuistry, or cases of conscience, was a cornerstone of the Puritan physician of the soul and developed through both resistance to and reform of the large reservoir of

¹²² See for example, Haller, *Rise of Puritanism*, 26-48.

¹²³ Haller, *Rise of Puritanism*, 27. For a detailed summary of the themes and methods used in this ministry of soul care see Lewis, *Genius of Puritanism*, 63-135.

¹²⁴ McNeill, *History of Cure of Souls*, 192-269. cf. Keller, “Puritan Resources for Biblical Counseling,” 11-44 and Bozeman, *Precisianist Strain*, esp. 72-3, 129-136, 140-143, 162-3. Bozeman tends to diminish the specific nature and function of Puritan soul care by making it synonymous with the term minister.

Roman Catholic literature.¹²⁵ Richard Greenham has been acknowledged as the founding father of Puritan casuistry. He is also representative of the Puritan awareness of patristic and medieval sources on this subject.¹²⁶

Being a physician of the soul requires the blending of contemplation and action. The contemplative attitude provides the sensitivity and the ability to observe God's presence within the life of another person. Contemplation requires patience in waiting and lingering in God's presence. Likewise, the soul physician needs to learn how to linger and wait as he or she spends time with those in need. Further this awareness must be expanded into the action of guiding the other person who will possess varying degrees of self-awareness of God. This critical marriage between contemplation and action has had a long and venerated history throughout Christian spirituality.¹²⁷ Bernard of Clairvaux, who influenced many Puritans, describes this interaction using Martha and Mary from Luke 10:38-42. Just as these two sisters lived under the same roof, action and contemplation need to be united not separated.¹²⁸ Thomas Hooker demonstrates a less balanced understanding between the two sisters revealing the typical Puritan animosity towards the Church of England

¹²⁵ See for example Bozeman, *Precisianist Strain*, 78-83. For a broader treatment of Puritan casuistry see McNeill, "Casuistry in the Puritan Age," 76-89 and Thomas, "Cases of Conscience," 29-56.

¹²⁶ On Greenham in general see Parker and Carlson, "Practical Divinity," esp. 97-119; Jebb, "Richard Greenham and Troubled Souls"; and Bozeman, *Precisianist Strain*, 129-136. On patristic and medieval knowledge of the Puritans see Bozeman, *Precisianist Strain*, 77-8, 130-1, 143, 215; McNeill, *History of Cure of Souls*, 227, 265; McNeill, "Casuistry in the Puritan Age," 79, 81-2; and Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy*, 81, 170.

¹²⁷ For examples of this in the first millennium plus of Christian spirituality see McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 225-26, 256-57; *Growth of Mysticism*, 31-32, 35-36, 74-79, 184-85, 218-23; and *Flowering of Mysticism*, 14-15,

¹²⁸ Bernard, *SCC* 51.2. cf. McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 222-23.

worship when he “identified the busy show of activity in the liturgy with Martha and the devotional life of “heart religion” with Mary.¹²⁹

Sensitive to the experimental emphasis upon heart religion Ambrose declares that personal experiences with God are not to be kept silent or restricted for personal growth. Rather they are to be freely shared to encourage others in their spiritual pilgrimage. In his introduction to spiritual conferences Ambrose declares this principle, “[t]he Christian that hath collected experiences, or found out methods, for the advancement of holiness, must not deny such knowledge to the body; Christians must drive an open and free trade, they must teach one another the mystery of godliness.”¹³⁰ Shortly later in the same work, Ambrose provides the motivation and encouragement for this spiritual sharing, “[w]ould Christians thus meet and exchange words and notions, they might build up one another, they might heat and inflame one another, they might strengthen and encourage one another, as the brethren did *Paul*: and have we not an express Command for this *Duty of Conference*?”¹³¹

Knappen asserts “[c]onferences with fellow Christians on spiritual matters were a very important part of the Puritan’s spiritual life.”¹³² While these meetings often included more than one person they could also refer to one-on-one spiritual counsel. Ambrose used the term specifically in this manner, as did other Puritans of his day.¹³³ The following reference could be directed to both individuals and groups,

¹²⁹ Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 43.

¹³⁰ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 339.

¹³¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 344. Tom Webster provides the best descriptive treatment of the nature and usage of conferences. *Godly Clergy*, 36-59.

¹³² Knappen, *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*, 8, cf. vii, 84.

¹³³ Ambrose, *Communion with Angels*, 133. For a helpful overview to conferences see Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 150-5 and Schwanda, “Growing in Christ,”

“[r]eading the holy Scriptures, which is nothing else but a kinde of holy conference with God, wherein we enquire after, and he reveals unto us himself and his will.”¹³⁴ Ambrose devotes a large section to this in *Media*¹³⁵ and the variety of topics of practical divinity covered include: cases of conscience of humanity after the fall, signs of sincere humility, signs of a hard heart, evidence of a true and evangelical repentance, signs of a sincere love to Christ, causes why Christ might withdraw himself from us, signs of true grace, handling doubt, means towards seeking unity among Christians, observing the Lord’s Day, etc. Ambrose never uses the term conference specifically for spiritual guidance. However, since the numerous examples of his soul care to other individuals follows the specific themes and format that he develops in his section on conferences it is obvious that he would have understood that this was indeed what he was doing. Nevertheless, twice he specifically mentions the communal usage of this practice and both references pertain to the importance of praying at the start of the winter conferences and again to express thanks for these gatherings later in the spring.¹³⁶

Coming alongside of another person to provide spiritual counsel is challenging and requires great perceptiveness. Ambrose demonstrates the delicate balance when he asserts; “[e]xcuse me that I speak thus much to encourage sinners to come to Christ, I would be sometimes a *Boanerges*, and sometimes a *Barnabas*; a son of thunder to rouse hard hearts, and a son of consolation to cherre up drooping spirits.”¹³⁷

28-30. cf. Ash, Nalton, and Church, *Heavenly Conference Between Christ and Mary*; Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 40, 97, 148; and Flavel, *Conference Between a Minister and Doubting Christian*, 6:460-9.

¹³⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 477.

¹³⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 338-77.

¹³⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 83.

¹³⁷ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 746.

This language was not unique to him. Simon Chan comments that among Puritan pastors “a few possessed that rare balance of “[a] Boanerges: A Son of Thunder in preaching the Law” and a “Barnabas, a Son of Sweet Consolation” in preaching “the exceeding Riches of Divine Grace in the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹³⁸ The best approach for tracing this in Ambrose is through reviewing his practice of spiritual guidance. Parishioners and ministers alike struggled with various “cases of conscience” or concerns of the heart that could cover practically any aspect of life. Ambrose includes a rich and varied collection illustrative of his spiritual counsel that sought to build upon and reflect Jesus’ own ministry in the gospels. He provided such spiritual guidance to individuals who experienced doubt in their spiritual condition, spiritual desertion, troubled conscience, sickness, and approaching death. On certain occasions he spoke the needed words of conviction while more frequently he sought to woo broken people back to the love of God.

These themes broaden in the experience recorded from March 3, 1647. Ambrose reports, “Mr. B. a godly Minister in the North, being troubled in Conscience, came to me, and desired some Spiritual advice: After acknowledgement of my unfitness and weakness, I directed, as the Lord enabled.” Five days later these two men gathered with others for a private day of humiliation. Ambrose continues, “the terror of Conscience had so worn out his Spirit, and wasted his body, that he was not able (as he said) to perform: yet desiring him to depend on God, and to cast himself on him for ability; he prayed with such fervency, humility and brokenness of

¹³⁸ Chan, “Puritan Meditative Tradition,” 151. Samuel Clarke described his father as “a Boanerges to the wicked but a Barnabas to the humble and broken in spirit.” Haller, *Rise of Puritanism*, 102, cf. 110. cf. Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, 112; Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 9; Heywood, *Narrative of John Angier*, 35; and Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy*, 6, 101.

¹³⁸ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 746.

heart, that he opened the fountains of all eyes about him, and caused a flood of tears in my Chamber, I never saw the like day. *All the glory to God.*”¹³⁹ A number of significant points emerge from this event. First, Ambrose recognized his own inadequacy and utter weakness in assisting a struggling person. However, he was also cognizant of his need to depend upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit to direct his efforts. Second, wisely he understood that his responsibility was to help the person depend upon God, not himself. Towards that end, the physician of the soul may need to urge the person to engage in behavior that might be very painful in the short run. Finally, Ambrose realized that he is only the conduit or the means. All praise and credit is directed towards God, the source of this gracious gift of restoration. Three and a half weeks later on March 29, Ambrose received a letter from this same minister expressing his gratitude and progress from his time with the Lancashire divine. In response, Ambrose declares, “[o]ur Father, hallowed be thy Name in this and all things.”¹⁴⁰

Additionally *Prima* and *Ultima* were instrumental in the conversion of another minister. Ambrose reports the joyous news, “[t]his day I was told by a godly Minister Mr. C. that Mr. B. residing in *Glasco*, and lighting by Providence on my Book of the *First and Last things*, it was a means (as he acknowledged) of his Conversion; at this time he was ordained Minister by the *L. Classis*, and reported to be a holy and able man. *Glory and praise to thee, O my Lord and my God.*”¹⁴¹ Not only was Ambrose able to guide others through his physical presence but also through his writings.

¹³⁹ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 75.

¹⁴⁰ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 75.

¹⁴¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 77.

While the previous examples exhibit Ambrose's spiritual guidance to other ministers, the following incident pertains to a woman from his congregation. On March 1, 1647 he writes, "[t]his day Mistris C. sent for me, expressing that my sermons of *Eternity* had struck her with fear and trembling, and that she was troubled in Conscience, and desired to be informed in Gods ways: I advised her, and prayed with her; many a tear came from her: *The Lord by his Spirit work in her a thorough and saving Conversion.*"¹⁴² Once again the importance of the Holy Spirit is evident. Further, this occasion as well as numerous others from his diary confirms Ambrose's words regarding the importance of being a Barnabas to those who were in distress, "Christians should not triumph over them that are on the ground, and thrown down by a temptation, but rather they should sit by them on the same flat, and mourn with them and for them, and feel some of their weight."¹⁴³ Ambrose gives witness to this contemplative practice of sitting with a person at the time of great need, watching and waiting with them for God to work within their lives, "R. M. sent for me again, and drawing to his end, he proclaimed *God's goodness, and sweetness, and mercy*, which were his last words; and after, in the midst of our Prayers, he gave up the ghost."¹⁴⁴ This practice illustrates the critical skill of patience to perceive the presence of God, whether directly or through another person.

All of the above examples reflect more of the Barnabas' attitude. However, there is one additional experience from Ambrose's diary that resembles the Boeneger's approach. This situation incarnates Charles Cohen's understanding of the

¹⁴² Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 74-5.

¹⁴³ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 341.

¹⁴⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 76, cf. The initial reference of Ambrose's visit to R.M. on June 26, 1647. *Media* (1650), 76. See also the July 1, 1648 visit with a woman trapped in desertion. *Media* (1657), 188.

Puritan preacher's role in conversion, "[p]reachers meant to unsettle their audiences by driving home the enormity of sin."¹⁴⁵ Ambrose perceptively recognized that a troubled conscience was receptive for conversion. On November 29, 1647 he reports,

This night I was told that Mistris *E.D.* was upon my Prayer the last Fast troubled in Conscience; and that since she had much talked of me, and desired to see me, but her Companion concealing it, she now apprehended the time was past, and utterly despaired: I sent for her, and at her first entrance into my Chamber, she cryed, *O that face! I dare not look on it! Shall such a lost creature as I look upon thee?-- Had I seen thee yesternight, I might have been saved; but now I am lost[,] time is past; -- O terrors of the Lord are upon me, &c.* yet after she was pleased to hear me pray: And then I advised her, *to search out her sin-- To submit to the Lord, to wonder at Gods mercy, that yet she lived, and was on this side Hell.*¹⁴⁶

The uniqueness of this account compared with the previous examples is that this is the only occasion in which Ambrose requested that the person meet him in his study.

Perhaps being a Barnabas prompted the soul physician to visit the person in his or her own familiar setting, while the more challenging practice of being a Boenerges was conducted in the minister's chamber where he had more authority and advantage.

The final outcome of this visit is unknown, but Ambrose offers these additional details, "[s]he spake sensibly, acknowledging God to be righteous, That she deserved the state she was in: yet promised to yield, and to be quiet under Gods hand, and to search out her sins: so for that time we parted." Unfortunately, that was the last time Ambrose saw her. He later learned that this woman suffered a "deep melancholy" and was taken by her friend to Ireland.¹⁴⁷ This is a reminder that a soul physician is not the only person who might influence the outcome of a conflicted relationship.

Due to the lack of further details it is difficult to determine how Ambrose experienced

¹⁴⁵ Cohen, *God's Caress*, 169, cf. 170 The purpose of spiritual terror was to activate sinners.

¹⁴⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 77.

¹⁴⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 77-78.

God through this situation. However, it does illustrate that sometimes we meet God through others and sometimes we might miss God through the same relationships.

Whether Ambrose was offering spiritual counsel to a troubled or anxious conscience, or coming alongside one who was struggling to receive assurance of conversion, or providing the comfort of grace and peace through his prayers he was a gifted soul physician. Clearly his effectiveness was not dependent upon his own abilities but rather his reliance upon the Holy Spirit, his blending of contemplation and action and being a Barnabas and a Boenerges, that enabled him to guide others into experiencing God's transforming presence. Further, he wisely acknowledged, "[t]here lies many times a great deal of spiritual wealth, in some obscure and neglected Christians, which many supercilious and conceited professors do pass by and neglect."¹⁴⁸ This discovery comes only through consistent contemplative listening that is attentive to the unexpected and recognizes that God may speak through any one anywhere and when God does, to give praise and thanks to God alone.

Structural Dimension

While his annual retreats occupied a cornerstone in his spiritual life, Ambrose also recognized the value and importance of communal spiritual duties. Cohen accurately notes that, "Puritan saints found their faith as much through social communication as through introspective wrangling."¹⁴⁹ The frequent diary entries of public and private fasts with both ministers and laity reveal the great importance of

¹⁴⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 337.

¹⁴⁹ Cohen, *God's Caress*, 151. Socialibility in Puritan piety is a central theme in Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy*.

this discipline for Ambrose.¹⁵⁰ Historically Horton Davies is correct when he asserts that fast days were not a Puritan innovation but already stipulated in 1563 in the *Elizabethan Book of Homilies*.¹⁵¹ However, the Protestant origin of this practice can be traced earlier. The form of prayer that Grindal developed in 1563 was an adaptation of the Genevan liturgy that in turn was derived from Leviticus 23:27-32.¹⁵² Further, according to the Puritans there were a few significant differences between themselves and the Roman Catholic observance of fasting. While the Roman Catholic practice focused on external actions the Puritans also emphasized the internal movement of the soul. Additionally, the Puritan practice was voluntary. Finally, almsgiving for the poor and needy soon became a standard practice within Puritanism.¹⁵³

Henry Scudder describes the purpose of these fasts as “*sanctifying a day to the Lord by a willing abstinence from meats and drinke, and from delights & worldly labours, that the whole man may be more thorowly humbled before God, and more*

¹⁵⁰ See Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 72, 73, 74, 75, 77, 79, 80, 83, 84, 101, 104, 105, 110. The literature on fasting and fast days within Puritanism is considerable. See for example Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy*, 60-74; Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, 142-7, 164-6; Durston, “Better Humiliation of People”; Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, 214-9, 437-440; Collinson, *Religion of Protestants*, 167-8, 260-3; and the index in Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*. For fasting in Protestant Scotland see Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 19, 28, 32-3, 55, 77-8, 121, 239n10 and Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism*, 29, 115, 275-6.

¹⁵¹ Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, 2: 238.

¹⁵² Winthrop Hudson, “Fast Days and Civil Religion,” 12; Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, 215; and Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, 143.

¹⁵³ On the distinction between Roman Catholic and Puritan fasting see Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy*, 61, 64, 72 and Durston, “Better Humiliation of People,” 129. On the voluntary nature see Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy*, 63, 69, 71. On almsgiving and fasting see Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy*, 61; Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, 143, 145; and Collinson, *Religion of the Protestants*, 261-2. On the Roman Catholic practice of fasting see Bossy, *English Catholic Community*, 110-6.

fervent in prayer.”¹⁵⁴ According to Ambrose, there were four important components to a fast day: fasting from sin, combining scripture and prayer, following up with expressions of mercy, and renewing the covenant with God.¹⁵⁵ He resolves the question of whether a private or public fast day is more important by wisely stating it all depends upon the person and their situation.¹⁵⁶ Preaching was also a part of fast days.¹⁵⁷ Additionally, fasting was frequently connected with humiliation.¹⁵⁸ Perhaps most illuminating and suggestive of his own experiences, Ambrose declares that “[f]asting days are soul-feeding days, and soul-curing days; some diseases, some lusts will go out no other ways.”¹⁵⁹

One example of a “soul-feeding” day occurred in Ambrose’s own house on January 6, 1642, “[t]his day a private Fast being observed, the Lord gave some, that exercised, the very spirit & power of Prayer, to the ravishment of hearers; surely it was the Spirit spake in them.”¹⁶⁰ This incident, reminiscent of Ambrose’s retreat experiences, enabled him to taste the ravishing presence of God. Obviously it was a significant event since he mentioned it earlier in a slightly different form, “[t]his day I observed a private Fast in my house; where by the Spirit of Prayer in some Christians, all hearts were warmed, affections moved, and Christ manifested his presence in the

¹⁵⁴ Scudder, *Christians Daily Walke*, 69-70.

¹⁵⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 569-71. This treatment follows rather closely the format provided by Lewis Bayly, *Practice of Piety*, 491-520. See also Scudder, *Christians Daily Walke*, 69-147 for a more in depth treatment of fasting.

¹⁵⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 359-60.

¹⁵⁷ Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, 283-87; Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 135, 247-9; and Old, *Reading and Preaching Scriptures*, 4:296-9.

¹⁵⁸ Durston, “Better Humiliation of People,” 133-5, 140, 145 and Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 100, 102-3.

¹⁵⁹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 343. According to Catherine Nunn, Henry Newcome experienced similar benefits; “[h]e considered that the quiet contemplation which they encouraged was a conduit by which God could work on the soul of the individual.” Henry Newcome and his Circle,” 14.

¹⁶⁰ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 184

midst of us.”¹⁶¹ Another “soul feeding” day was August 16, 1648, just one day before the Battle of Preston that would end the second Civil War. Ambrose reports,

A Fast was upon the occasion observed in *Manchester*. In my preparation unto it (reading the Bible) I light upon *Isa.* 49.17.---51.12, 13. After the duty begun, the Lord kept my heart up as in a flame: The day was sweetly observed, but the Conclusion of it (when Mr. *Angier* prayed) was exceedingly sweet; his Prayer was so working, that I believe it melted all hearts: and for my own, it pleased the Lord so to soften it, and break it, that (so far as I can remember) it was never in such a melting frame in any publike Ordinance before.¹⁶²

This same event is mentioned in John Angier’s diary.¹⁶³

However, of all of the many references that Ambrose makes to fasting, the one that reflects the greatest experiential nature and “soul curing” power upon his faith occurred on October 4, 1647, “[t]his day I was called by some discontented Brethren to a private Fast: I construed this as good news from Heaven, was obedient unto it, and joyned with them. Some sparkles of former love still remained in every one of us: notwithstanding former breaches, *I trust God will by degrees unite our hearts more and more.*”¹⁶⁴ Assessing these experiences, fast days were occasions for Ambrose’s heart to be converted, melted, and ravished, for his affections to be moved, to experience the presence of Christ, and to be motivated to seek reconciliation in broken relationships.

Family worship was another significant communal discipline. On May 3, 1648 Ambrose writes, “[w]e had sudden news of some Cavaliers driven out of *Scotland*, and drawing towards us: At morning, in order of our Family-duty, we read

¹⁶¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 71.

¹⁶² Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 80.

¹⁶³ Heywood, *Narrative of John Angier*, 42-3.

¹⁶⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 77.

Psal. 124. and at night *1 Pet. 5.7.* both which places refreshed and cheered my soul.”¹⁶⁵ Later that same year on August 1, Ambrose wrote, “[i]n the morning, a little while before day, I dreamed fearfully of Satans being busie with me about my bed, and in terror I awaked; the night was rough: Hereupon I meditated on Gods Judgements now abroad on the earth. After in my Family-duty was read *Psal. 103.* and from *ver. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13.* whence I drew some Spiritual comfort.”¹⁶⁶ A number of themes converge with this second incident. First, it reflects the principle of simultaneity. While this event began in his dreams and could readily be placed in the Intrapersonal Struggles of the Soul dimension, he found resolution and peace from God as he read Scripture to his family. Second, this dream was just two weeks before the Battle of Preston. Third, the means towards granting Ambrose comfort in both of these troubling situations was the public reading and meditating on Scripture with his family.

The Lord’s Supper was a significant aspect of Puritan public worship.¹⁶⁷ The evidence from Ambrose’s diary confirms this truth for him. On May 2, 1646 he records “[t]his day (after three years want) we administered and received the Sacrament of the Lords Supper; it was the most heavenly heart-breaking day (especially at the time of the Ordinance) that of a long time we enjoyed: Many souls were raised, many hearts melted. *Blessed be God.*”¹⁶⁸ Obviously both Ambrose and his congregation were deeply moved by this experience. The infrequency of

¹⁶⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 78.

¹⁶⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 79.

¹⁶⁷ For an overview to the Puritan understanding of the Lord’s Supper see Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, 42-54; Horton Davies, *Worship of English Puritans*, esp. 22, 119, 150, 204-16; Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 32-3, 123-6, 206-18; and Holifield, *Covenant Sealed*, esp. 109-38.

¹⁶⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 76.

celebration in relation to its overpowering nature appears confusing unless we are aware of the historical context.¹⁶⁹ While the Church of England stipulated receiving the Lord's Supper three times a year, few congregants received it more than once a year on Easter.¹⁷⁰ Puritans took St. Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 11:28 very seriously and recognized the importance of proper preparation and self-examination. In his teaching on the sacrament, Ambrose states, "Christ makes offer to come into our hearts, and therefore we must open the gates."¹⁷¹ "Open the gates" refers to the critical role that self-examination plays in preparation.¹⁷² Two years later on May 7 Ambrose records his own experience while fencing the Table, "I administrated the Sacrament of the Lords Supper; wherein I found much sweetness, and blessed impressions of the Spirit of Christ, and Spiritual enlargements above my self, and a return of Prayers, in that the Lord hedged his Sacrament, that some such came not in, whom I desired to keep out. *Hallelujah. Blessed be God.*"¹⁷³ Most Puritans, at least those of the moderate position of Ambrose, did not believe in the converting potential of the Lord's Supper.¹⁷⁴ But this was a meal of great power. Ambrose believed that

¹⁶⁹ See for example Arnold Hunt, "Lord's Supper Early Modern England," 41-5, 51-57, 60-1, 74, 76, 82; Collinson, "English Conventicle," 255-8; Green, *Print and Protestantism*, 289; and Spufford, *World of Rural Dissenters*, 88-91.

¹⁷⁰ Arnold Hunt, "Lord's Supper Early Modern England," 41, 45. For the specific practices of the Lord's Supper among nonconformist ministers and laity in Lancashire see Richardson, *Puritanism in North-West England*, 30-3, 48-9, 76-9.

¹⁷¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 418.

¹⁷² The importance of self-examination produced numerous devotional manuals to guide Puritans in preparing for the Lord's Supper. See Green, *Print and Protestantism*, 290-1 and Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 206-18.

¹⁷³ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 78. For a broader description of "excluding ungodly parishioners" from the Lord's Supper see Richardson, *Puritanism in North-West England*, 48-9.

¹⁷⁴ For a historical summary on the debate of whether or not the Lord's Supper was a "converting ordinance" see Holifield, *Covenant Sealed*, esp. 110-25.

through the promises of Christ that “the Bread conveys whole Christ, and the wine conveys whole Christ.”¹⁷⁵

In relationship to this, Ambrose’s understanding of the sacraments might seem contradictory. However, Reformed Christians from the seventeenth-century recognized that the sacraments were only for believers and therefore is not inconsistent. Ambrose declares, “[*t*he Lords Supper is the Sacrament of our continuance in Christ, of our confirmation in spiritual life, and the power of Grace already planted within us.”¹⁷⁶ However, as he knew from his own experience, they “do not always work for the present, but the efficacy may come afterwards.”¹⁷⁷ On April 21, 1644 he writes, “[t]his day one received the Sacrament of the Lords Supper, but found not in it the comfortable presence of Christ as at other times; it troubled his soul, and then falling to examination and prayer, the Lord was pleased at last to give him a sweet visit, and spiritual refreshing.”¹⁷⁸ Later on May 7, 1648 he combines sermon and sacrament and observes, “[t]his day one felt many sweet impressions of Gods Spirit in his heart, sometimes melting, and sometimes chearing his soul, in the publick Ordinances of the Word and Sacraments.”¹⁷⁹ These last two experiences contain a number of important insights. Ambrose’s initial entry reminds readers that God’s presence can be missed even through the means of grace that God has provided. Further this illustrates how the affective and interpretive components of the Spiritual Movement Matrix interact to guide a person in experiencing God more fully. Ambrose originally missed God affectively. Since he noticed this absence he

¹⁷⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 175.

¹⁷⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 393-4.

¹⁷⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 426.

¹⁷⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 111.

¹⁷⁹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 187.

engaged in interpretive reflection and self-examination until he received the desired affective experience of God.

Another insight from Ambrose's participation in sermon and sacrament is how they change his inner life. On some occasions his heart is melted and at other times his soul is cheered and renewed.¹⁸⁰ The following words are a fitting summary to his understanding and experience of God's presence through communion, "*Lord, I believe that through this golden pipe of the Lords Supper, I shall receive the golden oyl of Grace from Christ, now be it to me according to my faith: Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief: O come down into my soul, and fill it full of the Lord Christ, of the body and blood of Christ.*"¹⁸¹

The last testimony from Ambrose's diary combined the Lord's Supper with preaching. Preaching was one of the major roles of the Puritan minister.¹⁸² Ambrose was appointed as one of the four King's Preachers in Lancashire in 1631.¹⁸³ Unfortunately he did not leave any records reflecting this involvement. However, a number of entries do capture his experience in the pulpit. On one occasion Ambrose required and received divine strength and encouragement to preach amid the growing conflict. The 1640s were difficult for all people within England, but perhaps especially for those ministers of the Church of England who became nonconformists and Presbyterians. On November 15, 1642 he observes the beginning of this tension, "I was taken prisoner... Now began the troublesome times; and this year the Lord

¹⁸⁰ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 84-5.

¹⁸¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 422.

¹⁸² For a general introduction see Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, 2:133-77; Horton Davies, *Worship of English Puritans*, 182-203; and Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 116-23.

¹⁸³ Axon, "King's Preachers in Lancashire," 87.

many a time assisted me in the Preaching of his Word boldly to the Enemy, both above ordinary, and far above my self.”¹⁸⁴ Earlier that same year on May 15 he provides the context for this growing problem, “I first Preached against all Superstitious vanities, and particularly against the Cross in Baptism: This was the first occasion of the peoples general discontent, ever since when some of them have been irreconcilable: Now begun the divisions of Church and State. Reformation proves an hard work. I received strong consolation afterwards out of Psal. 37. v. 32, 33,34. and out of Psal. 57. throughout.”¹⁸⁵ With such an intentional change of focus in his preaching it is not surprising that Ambrose frequently cites the importance of Scripture as a means for his encouragement and experience of God.

However, in light of the above experiences readers need to recognize that Ambrose understood the destructive nature of conflict and sought to avoid controversy. His irenic spirit desired unity and sought to look for the best, even in those with whom he disagreed.¹⁸⁶ He cautions readers to avoid engaging in controversial points because they serve to “discompose our spirits, waste our zeale, our love, our delight in *Jesus*” and also work as an “interruption and diversion of our contemplations.”¹⁸⁷ Later in *War with Devils* he provides these additional reasons for avoiding conflict, “[t]ake heed of spending, or rather mis-spending your precious time and thoughts in needless Controversies, in doubtfull disputations.... None are more

¹⁸⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 72.

¹⁸⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 71-2.

¹⁸⁶ Ambrose, *Communion with Angels*, Prolegomena [8-9], 199, 289. Additionally Ambrose provided a list of twenty-eight practices to encourage “Unity and Amity amongst Christians.” *Media* (1657), 367-8. Dewey Wallace maintains one of the key qualities of a Puritan saint was an irenic spirit. “Image of Saintliness Puritan Hagiography,” 36.

¹⁸⁷ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 64, 75 (incorrectly numbered as 65), 702, 707, 1096, etc. on avoiding controversy.

apt to fall into errors, than they that busie themselves most with unnecessary, curious, circumstantial points.”¹⁸⁸ Brauer maintains that tolerance is a fruit of mysticism and that Francis Rous was tolerant towards those who opposed him.¹⁸⁹ It is difficult to gauge if Ambrose’s resistance to controversy was due to his personality or his contemplative-mystical piety or a combination of both.

That did not mean that Ambrose compromised his values or equivocated on his theology. He preserved a number of entries that capture the tension and turmoil related to the Civil War.¹⁹⁰ On October 15, 1647 he states, “[a] Letter full of Invectives, without any Name subscribed, was in the night cast into my house: I guess the man, but desire to look up to God, to search my own heart, and to binde the Reproofs as a Crown unto my head; be the Author who he will, I much matter not, Psal. 27, 11, 12, 13, 14.”¹⁹¹ This statement amplified by the words of David speaks of waiting for the Lord rather than taking matters into your own hand. The next year, on January 24, 1648, Ambrose wrote, “I was troubled in minde to hear, and consider of the many oppositions I found in my Ministry; at night I read a feeling passage in Rogers on Judges 13. thus:--*I have often thought it Gods mercy, to keep the knowledge of such discouragements from them that are to enter into the Ministry, lest they should be deterred wholly from it, till by experience they be armed against it.*”¹⁹² It is significant to recognize his focus on God and the role of Scripture in providing comfort and strength amidst persecution.

¹⁸⁸ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 157.

¹⁸⁹ Brauer, “Francis Rous, Puritan Mystic,” 209, 233-6.

¹⁹⁰ The literature on the Civil Wars is vast. The sources most directly related to Lancashire include Ormerod, *Military Proceedings in Lancashire*; Broxap, *Great Civil War in Lancashire*; and Woolrych, *Battles of English Civil War*, esp. 153-84.

¹⁹¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 77.

¹⁹² Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 78.

Other diary entries record Ambrose's reflections upon the Civil Wars. During 1643 the town of Preston changed hands twice. In both examples Ambrose views this through the lens of God's providence.¹⁹³ Once more Preston occupied a prominent place where the decisive battle that concluded the second Civil War was fought. On August 22, 1648, days after the battle ended, Ambrose reports,

I returned to *Preston*, and saw the wonderful works of God, and heard of many miracles of Mercies... That no place (whither the Enemy came) escaped Plundering, except *Preston*, which was prevented by the Armies coming in the very nick of time... Upon meditation of the whole business, I believed that the Lord heard *my prayers*: 1. In that my heart sympathized: 2. In that my heart was filled with joy in accomplishment: 3. In that the Mercy concerned me, in respect of my person, Family, Congregation, as much as any other.¹⁹⁴

It is noteworthy that Ambrose offers thanksgiving to God for answered prayer only six weeks after he lamented during a public fast, “[o] *when will the Lord return answers!*”¹⁹⁵ Again he recognizes the presence of God through God's providence.

The second edition of *Media* included a new spiritual duty called the suffering of saints. Most likely Ambrose's struggles during the Civil Wars as a nonconformist contributed to this addition. This provides another illustration of simultaneity. The suffering that Ambrose experienced through the Civil War overlaps with the previous dimension of Intrapersonal Struggles of the Soul. Further, it will soon be clear that this also relates to the Geo-Environmental dimension since it originates in Preston. John Spurr summarizes this Puritan practice of ‘sanctifying the suffering’ with the “assumption that *every* event contains a divine message, and the conviction that it is

¹⁹³ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 72.

¹⁹⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 80, cf. 101.

¹⁹⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 79.

the saint's duty to root this out and learn from it."¹⁹⁶ Ambrose was among the two thousand nonconformist Puritan ministers who were ejected from their pulpits on St. Bartholomew's Day, August 24, 1662. Already in 1651 Ambrose had experienced great turmoil. During his annual retreat on May 31, he records, "I practised (as the Lord inabled) the Duty of *Saints Sufferings*; Into which condition as I was cast, so the Lord gave me to see my sin wherefore, and to bewaile it, and to pray for the contrary grace and Gods favour. The Lord was sweet to me in the preparations to, but especially in the improving of *Sufferings*. Now the Spirit left in my soul a sweet scent and favour behind it. Allelujah. *Amen, Amen.*"¹⁹⁷ There were abundant tensions within Preston and Lancashire to cause a sensitive, contemplative spirit to be pained. It is evident that Ambrose understood, even amid the struggles and tensions, that God's providence was present and at work in his life.

This diverse Structural dimension clearly reveals the nature and desires of Ambrose's heart. He acknowledged the difficulty of seeking to bring about a reformation of the people's behavior both through his preaching and restricting those who could receive the Lord's Supper. The result were attacks and persecution, yet amid these troubling times Ambrose found renewed strength through Scripture and God's providence, "[o]n this day [Jun 24, 1643] understood... that some snares were laid for him, and by a special Providence at the same time he opened the Bible, and cast his eye on *Psa. 37.v. 32, 33, 34* to his great incouragement and comfort."¹⁹⁸ God used both the heart melting humiliations of fasting and the afflictions that came

¹⁹⁶ Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 183. cf. Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*.

¹⁹⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 89-90.

¹⁹⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 110, cf. 102 for a similar event and how Ambrose received strength from Scripture.

through his enemies during the Civil Wars to strip his soul and first break and then elevate his heart to heaven. Rather than becoming bitter and attacking those who opposed him Ambrose was cheered by the sweetness of God and lifted his heart in contemplative gratitude towards God. Significantly through all of these experiences he discovered an inner freedom that encouraged him to continue his ministry.

Geo-Environmental Dimension

Ambrose also experienced the presence of God through the Geo-Environmental dimension of life. This category is frequently ignored because many people are not conscious of how spiritual reality can be manifested in nature or through the uniqueness of place. However, Sheldrake contends “it is appropriate to think of places as texts, layered with meaning.”¹⁹⁹ Therefore, for Ambrose as well as for many others this is a dimension that must be considered. Gordon Rupp was an early advocate to detect a connection between environment and prayer when he asserted, “[o]ne fine day, somebody will write about the relation between spirituality and geography. There seems to be places in the world with an affinity for contemplative men, like the deserts of Libya or Goreme, or the northeastern corner of Scotland which in the seventeenth century produced Samuel Rutherford, Henry Scougal, Patrick Forbes.”²⁰⁰ While Rupp largely focuses upon the Puritans he does not make any further connections between geography and piety. Belden Lane has explored the specific connections between the landscape of the New England Puritans

¹⁹⁹ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 17. cf. Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, 165-95.

²⁰⁰ Rupp, “Devotion of Rapture,” 115.

and their piety but no comparable study exists on their English counterparts.²⁰¹

Watkins comes closest in his brief treatment of five levels of how a person's inner experience may be associated with environment.²⁰²

Clearly every person is a product of his or her environment and Ambrose was no exception. He was born in the Lancashire town of Ormskirk, where his father, Richard was vicar. As a young man he went to Oxford. While Cambridge was the predominant center for educating ministers who were sympathetic to Puritan theology a strong connection existed between Lancashire and Brasenose College where Ambrose studied.²⁰³ Lancashire had a strong affinity for Roman Catholicism, especially in the northwest, and in particular Garstang where Ambrose spent a large part of his ministry.²⁰⁴ In addition to entrenched recusancy other challenges that confronted a nonconformist minister included "folk-lore and superstitions [that] were so deeply ingrained that their overthrow was almost impossible; witchcraft was a feature of everyday life."²⁰⁵ Furthermore, this region had strong Royalist ties and George Fox and the Quakers had their beginning in Lancashire. Further, the Sabbath habits of Lancashire prompted the infamous *Book of Sports*, written by Bishop Thomas Morton, who ordained Ambrose.²⁰⁶ All of these divergent factors coalesced

²⁰¹ Belden Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred*, 131-52. cf. Mark Peterson, "Practice of Piety in Contexts."

²⁰² Watkins, *Puritan Experience*, 63-7.

²⁰³ Richardson, *Puritanism in North-West England*, 61-3.

²⁰⁴ Richardson, *Puritanism in North-West England*, 153, 161-2.

²⁰⁵ Richardson, *Puritanism in North-West England*, 164; Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*, 181n2, 182n2, 187-188, 188n1, 206, 214, 233, 266, 305, 451; and Paxman, "Lancashire Spiritual Culture and Magic," 223-243.

²⁰⁶ Richardson, "Puritanism and Ecclesiastical Authorities," 15; Tait, "Declaration of Sports for Lancashire," 561-8; and Love, *Fast and Thanksgiving Days*, 18-21.

to create the unfriendly and challenging context in which Ambrose lived and served as a minister.²⁰⁷

Using place as the locus for experiencing God opens a new horizon for observing how Ambrose experienced God. The most intimate place of any person is his or her home. Previously the ways that Ambrose experienced God in family worship were examined. However, there were other dangerous domestic ways in which he also noticed God. On February 5, 1642 he records, “[t]he Lord wonderfully this day (as once before) delivered one from the danger of fire, which had begun in his house, but was discovered by the smoke.”²⁰⁸ Ambrose’s marginalia of Isaiah 24:15 further amplifies his experience, “[w]herefore glorifie ye the Lord in the fires.”

By moving out in expanding concentric circles from Ambrose’s house to the woods for his annual retreats reveals the porous nature of the various dimensions of Ambrose’s life and how his retreats connect the Intrapersonal and Geo-Environmental experiences of his life. One of his favourite places was Weddicre Woods, near Garstang. Presumably Ambrose first discovered this welcoming place when he served in Garstang as one of the Kings’ Preachers. Clearly Weddicre Woods was unique for Ambrose. Belden Lane employs Yi-Fu Tuan’s term *topophilia*, which describes those places that are attached with great meaning.²⁰⁹ Similar to symbols, geographical places collect meaning and store memory over time. Shelldrake asserts that “[p]lace is space that has the capacity to be remembered and to evoke our

²⁰⁷ Fishwick, *History of Garstang*, 166.

²⁰⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 104. Seaver addresses the reasons for frequent fires in homes. *Wallington’s World*, 54-5. cf. Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, 117-27, 137-8.

²⁰⁹ Belden Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred*, 6.

attention and care.”²¹⁰ Ambrose’s diary reveals the *topophilia* of these annual retreat places, “[t]his day [May 19, 1647] I went to *Weddicre*, that in those sweet silent Woods (where I have found God many a time) I might fall upon the practice of some secret Duties, and enjoy sweet communion with my Lord and my God.”²¹¹

There are at least two different ways in which to appropriate and appreciate nature. The first more elementary level provides a divergent setting that offers a contrast from the normal activities of a person’s daily life.²¹² Ambrose definitely understood *Weddicre* this way. He followed the practice of Jesus entering the wilderness as a motivation and approval for his own practice. Wilderness is a term that is full of meaning in the study of Christian spirituality.²¹³ Ambrose recognized the inherent ambiguity that his retreats provided both a prolonged time to focus on God as well as increased pressures of Satan’s temptation. Withdrawal is a necessity for entering a wilderness setting and “one of the fundamental features of Christian monasticism is that it demands withdrawal.”²¹⁴ Both the previous reference as well as the May 20, 1646 entry illustrates that awareness, “I came to *Weddicre*, which I did upon mature resolution, every year about that pleasant Spring time (if the Lord pleased) to retire my self, and in some solitary and silent place to practice especially the secret Duties of a Christian.”²¹⁵ The terms retire, solitary, and silent places all reveal that there was something very unique about these woods. It provided an

²¹⁰ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 154.

²¹¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 76. Ambrose’s retreat experiences are an example of Watkins’ third level. *Puritan Experience*, 64.

²¹² This reflects Watkins’ second level. *Puritan Experience*, 64.

²¹³ Louth, *Wilderness of God*, cf. 131 where Louth asserts a dense forest served the same purpose as the desert for early Christians. For a Puritan discussion on the wilderness see Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 243-77.

²¹⁴ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 91.

²¹⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 74.

unhurried atmosphere in which Ambrose could devote himself more fully to cultivating his experience with the Triune God.

Second, Weddicre was more than just a relaxing landscape for Ambrose. On May 17, 1648 he speaks of the specific influence that nature had on his experience of God, “I went into the solitary Woods, to practice the secret Duties of a Christian: No sooner stepped in, but the green Trees and Herbs, and the sweet singing of Birds, stirred up my soul to praise God.”²¹⁶ This nicely reinforces Sheldrake’s principle of the spiritual nature of place, “landscapes frequently have a capacity to carry us beyond ourselves and beyond the immediate. They are often our first intimations of the sacred.”²¹⁷ Apparently not only the specific spiritual duties but also the unique location provided a space in which to experience God. Later in *War with Devils* Ambrose would reinforce this reality:

Much of my time I have spent in eminently famous and publike places, but at last weary of those hurries, jars, envies, pride, discord, and policies of men in streets and towns, I resolved to spend the remainder of my time, for the most part, in the silent gardens, fields and woods; there sometimes I was taken with the various tunes of melodious birds, and occasionally they have lifted up my heart in spiritual songs, and Psalms, and Hymns.²¹⁸

Significantly, Ambrose recognizes that nature provided far more than just a setting for his retreat, it also served to actually encourage and inspire his experience of God. Not surprisingly, Halley comments that for Ambrose the woods were “his best school of theology.”²¹⁹ Further, Ambrose also spent time at Hoghton Towers as a guest of Lady Margaret Hoghton, one of his benefactors. While there are no diary entries that record his retreats at Hoghton Towers he does mention his visits there during his

²¹⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 79. This reflects Watkins’ third level. *Puritan Experience*, 64.

²¹⁷ Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, 168.

²¹⁸ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 171.

²¹⁹ Halley, *Lancashire: Puritanism and Nonconformity*, 2:200.

funeral sermon for Lady Margaret.²²⁰ Hoghton Towers also became a meeting place for nonconformist ministers both before and after the Ejection of 1662.²²¹

While Weddicre Woods and presumably the Darwen River at Hoghton Towers held a special place in Ambrose's life there were other significant places as well. William Bagshaw records the conversation he had with Ambrose in Manchester regarding his departure from his first church at Casteleton, "[a]t that time his love to *Castleton* (upon mention of it) revived, Tears shot into his Eyes, and from his Mouth fell this ingenuous Acknowledgement: It was my Sin (and is my Sorrow) that I left that place when the Lord was blessing my Ministry in it."²²² Ambrose mourned the loss of his first congregation. It appears his premature departure caused him to limit or at least minimize his experience of God. Bagshaw then adds, "[m]ay this be a fair warning to others, that they be not hasty in removing from their People."²²³ This reveals the possibility of a vital relationship that can exist between a minister and the church he serves.

Expanding with a greater concentric circle from Ambrose's house yet still within Lancashire is the development of Presbyterianism in 1646. Next to London, Lancashire had the best-developed expression of Presbyterianism.²²⁴ Ambrose became part of the Presbyterian movement, though he was already active in serving on a committee to distribute relief due to pestilence and poverty. He also served as

²²⁰ Ambrose, *Redeeming the Time*, 27.

²²¹ Miller, *Hoghton Tower*, 123, 180.

²²² Bagshaw, *De Spiritualabus Pecci*, 23. It is likely that this meeting took place on July 16, 1658 when Bagshaw preached before the Presbyterian ministers in Manchester. Brentnall, *Apostle of the Peak*, 31.

²²³ Bagshaw, *De Spiritualabus Pecci*, 23.

²²⁴ For Presbyterianism in Lancashire see Smithen, *Lancashire Presbyterianism* and Shaw, *Minutes Manchester Presbyterian Classis*.

moderator of many of the Presbyterian provincial assemblies that were held in Preston.²²⁵ There are no extant comments from Ambrose regarding these experiences, but they do reinforce the earlier impression that he was a contemplative in action.

London provides the most distant region away from Lancashire. This is reflected both through the actions of Parliament and from specific experiences that occurred there. Ambrose was summoned to London in May 1649 because he signed the document against the Agreement of the People. He records his final diary entry on May 28, 1649, “[u]pon serious consideration of the manifold miscarriages both in church and state, which I observed since my coming to *London*, I had some resolutions to spend the remainder of my uncertain days in a more retired and private way.”²²⁶ The far ranging importance of this event includes his introduction to Lady Mary Vere. Lady Mary and her husband, Horace, were well known for their support of the Puritan cause. While apparently this was the only occasion that they met, Lady Mary provided for the financial needs of Ambrose and he in turn dedicated all three editions of *Media* to her.²²⁷ Undoubtedly the most significant outcome from his London visit was his decision to withdraw and seek greater solitude from the clamor and commotion of the turbulence of Preston. This single transformative event eventually led to his move to Garstang. There were a number of factors motivating Ambrose: on the one hand was the deep desire and conviction that he felt drawn to a place of greater solitude and silence so that he might spend more time with God in contemplation and less time embroiled in conflict and controversies. But on the other hand, Ambrose realizes that this move includes a high price and will create a greater

²²⁵ Nightingale, *Isaac Ambrose, Religious Mystic*, 17-8 and Shaw, *Minutes Manchester Presbyterian Classis*, 24:406.

²²⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 85.

²²⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1650, 1652, 1657), Epistle Dedication.

geographical distance between himself and his friends and therefore he declares, “I desire therefore to retire, and to go back again from a publick to a more private place, even from *Preston* to *Garstange*. And now my dear Brethren farewell.”²²⁸

The petition from Garstang requesting Ambrose is quite revealing of their love and admiration for him, “having long desired Mr. Ambrose to be our Minister, diuers both of them and us being able to call him our spiritual father, of whose godly life and orthodox doctrine our whole Countie hath a singular and eminent esteeme, a truth (we believe) not unknown to many of your selves.”²²⁹ As Ambrose was preparing to leave Preston he discovered that they were deeply saddened to lose him as their minister. In response to their affection Ambrose declares; “[c]ould you have wept more if you had brought me to my grave? Such chaines were these tears and prayers that (notwithstanding my resolutions), [you have expressed for me].”²³⁰

It is likely that there were other factors that weighed in Ambrose’s decision to move to Garstang. Previously he had maintained that “there is work enough for foure or five priests who have their constant residence in that parish (*Preston*), what work may you imagine for one Gospel Minister.”²³¹ His request for an assistant to help in the pastoral responsibilities was declined apparently creating a greater sense of exhaustion. Ambrose candidly confesses, “I shall walk the silent fields and woods and hear more frequently the various tunes of melodious birds and keep consort with them, who without jarres are ever in their kind praising God.”²³² This provides a

²²⁸ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 256.

²²⁹ Fishwick, *History of Garstang*, 168.

²³⁰ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 52.

²³¹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1012-3.

²³² Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 256.

fascinating admission that Ambrose longs to join the birds in their continual praise of God. In light of this it is interesting to speculate why he returned to Preston once he was ejected in 1662. Perhaps the attraction was Hoghton Tower, and the opportunity to renew old friendships and perhaps receive a continuation of support from the Hoghtons.

Geopiety is a term that “covers a broad range of emotional bonds between man and his terrestrial home.”²³³ Ambrose developed a deep affinity for those places he withdrew to for his annual retreats. His records indicate that not only did he meditate “in” nature but also “on” it, finding the birds to be his faithful companions in praising God. Clearly his growing hunger for contemplative experiences sought a different place without all of the distractions and turmoil of his stressful context in Preston. Ambrose had tasted enough of the presence of God in Weddicre Woods and the Darwen River behind Hoghton Tower to recognize that these “thin places” were essential for his parched soul. While his horizons were restricted by “hurries and discord” Ambrose still exercised his ministry with compassion to those in need and dedication to the Presbyterian cause. His enforced visit to London in 1649 was liberating in clarifying his need for greater solitude and silence. This decision to seek a more tranquil place is a powerful confirmation of the depth of his contemplative hunger for God.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to uncover the contemplative life of Isaac Ambrose as drawn from his diary and other related materials. The Spiritual Movement Matrix, an

²³³ Tuan, “Geopiety: Attachment to Place,” 12.

instrument used in training spiritual directors, was used to examine the intrapersonal, interpersonal, structural, and geo-environmental dimensions of his life. Across each dimension numerous expressions of his hunger and longing for the mystical presence of God was evident. The uniqueness of Ambrose's spiritual practices was demonstrated by his annual retreats, yet he was as likely to taste the ravishing joy of God when he gathered with others in private fasts. He practiced spiritual duties with an intensity that both convicted and comforted him with the taste of heaven. On the night of May 20, 1651 Ambrose attempts to put in words his experience of God:

In the Evening I proceeded in the *Common places and uses of sweet passages that melted my heart; of sensible comforts, and of places hard to be understood*: In the first my heart was sweetly melted, in the second cheered, in the conclusion the Lord struck me with a reverence of his Majesty and presence, filled my soul with spiritual refreshings, enlarged my heart with praises of him, and desires to live unto him, who hath given me in this time of love so many sweet visits, *and kisses of his mouth*. Allelujah.²³⁴

Unlike some of his fellow Puritans Ambrose did not suffer from anxiety, wondering if he had received God's assurance. Instead his many "sweet visits" confirmed to him God's love. However, that did not eliminate all the struggles of his soul. Through the Holy Spirit he discovered increased freedom in dealing with doubt, anger, and financial fears though pride continued to be his greatest challenge. The combination of his retreats and struggles of his soul created attentiveness to God as well as a sensitive heart for others. This prepared him as a physician of the soul to guide those in need and thereby assist others who were struggling to experience God more freely and fully in their lives. Throughout his experiences the importance of Scripture was evident, whether Ambrose was meditating by himself, using it to encourage others or preaching to his congregation. Closely connected with Scripture was his awareness of and comfort drawn from God's providence amid the uncertainties, battles, and

²³⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1652), 74. cf. *Media* (1657), 89.

bloodshed of seventeenth century Lancashire. Regardless of these varied and diverse situations Ambrose experienced the transforming presence of God and those initial tastes of “delicious intimacies of spiritual communion” motivated him to turn his mind and heart frequently toward heaven.

This prepares the way for the fourth chapter that will examine more fully the devotional practices of meditation and contemplation that Isaac Ambrose engaged in during his annual retreats. The historical context of both meditation and contemplation will be studied, being particular sensitive to the influence of Bernard upon Ambrose’s understanding of contemplation. This will be followed by a detailed study of contemplation in the writings of Ambrose as well as the benefits and effects of contemplation upon the soul.

Chapter 4

Isaac Ambrose's Spiritual Practices and Contemplative Experiences

It is the Lords pleasure that we should dayly come to him... he would have us to be still arising, ascending, and mounting up in divine contemplations to his Majesty. And is it not our duty, and the Saints disposition to be thus?... if Christ be in heaven, where should we be but in heaven with him? *for where your treasure is, there will be your heart also.* Oh that every morning, and every evening, at least, our hearts would arise, ascend, and go to Christ in the heavens.¹

The previous chapter examined Isaac Ambrose's experience of God through the various dimensions of his personal and public life. His devotional practices including his annual month-long retreats, spiritual battles and temptations, spiritual companionship with those in need, engagement in the structures of public and national life, and the contextual influence of his environment shaped his experiences of God. Further, his ability to overcome the fears and anxieties that were so prevalent for nonconformists in seventeenth-century England sensitized and strengthened him to be an effective physician of the soul. The resulting spiritual hunger and the delight and enjoyment he experienced with God was evident in the strong contemplative-mystical flavor in his writings.

Chapter 3 also revealed that Ambrose's understanding of contemplation was consistent with that of his day as a loving and sustained gaze upon God's presence and mighty acts. This chapter will examine more fully Ambrose's understanding of the nature and experience of contemplation. First, this topic will be situated within a brief discussion of the distinction between meditation and contemplation and then

¹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1152.

explore Ambrose's teaching on meditation including his definition and types of meditation. This will be followed by an investigation of the origin and roots of Ambrose's meditative practice that in turn leads to the historical sources of contemplation. Next, the faculties of the soul, and in particular, the use of imagination will be considered. The largest section of this chapter will appropriately study Ambrose's use of contemplation in his writings and will conclude with a review of the benefits and effects of contemplation, as he understood them.

Distinction Between Meditation and Contemplation

Meditation was one of the primary spiritual practices of seventeenth-century Puritans.² However, some were more specific and drew a distinction between meditation and contemplation. John Downname declares "in nature there is a small difference between Meditation and Contemplation, yet as the Schooles define it, there is some in degree; Meditation being an exercise of a lower and meaner nature, within the reach of all Christians which will put out their hand unto it; Contemplation more highly and heavenly, fit only for such as by long exercise have attained to much perfection."³ Downname's reference to the Schooles reflects the traditional medieval understanding and not that of Protestantism. However, it should be recognized that many Protestants did not automatically discount this wisdom. In reality, one of the reasons for the Protestant resistance to contemplation was its exclusive or elitist nature. Thomas White's contrast written over thirty years later is more helpful. White maintained "[c]ontemplation is more like the beatificall Vision which they

² Horton Davies has produced the most expansive study on this topic. *Worship and Theology in England*. cf. Beeke, "Puritan Practice of Meditation"; Kaufmann, *Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation*; Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 161-8; Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, 147-68; Green, *Print and Protestantism*, 277-88; and Chan, "Puritan Meditative Tradition."

³ Downname, *Guide to Godlynesse*, 534.

have of God in Heaven, like the Angels beholding of the face of God; Meditation is like the kindling of fire, and Contemplation more like the flaming of it when fully kindled: The one is like the Spouses seeking of Christ, and the other like the Spouses enjoying of Christ.”⁴ Significantly both Downname and White appear among the list of experimental writers that Ambrose endorses.⁵ This suggests that Ambrose was likely familiar with the distinctions between these two practices.

While some were careful to distinguish between meditation and contemplation there was also a blurring of linguistic lines in both the Roman Catholic and Puritan writings. Richard Baxter illustrates this from the Puritan perspective asserting, “[t]he general title that I give this duty is meditation; not as it is precisely distinguished from thought, consideration, and contemplation; but as it is taken in the larger and usual sense for thinking on things spiritual, and so comprehending consideration and contemplation.”⁶ Ignatius of Loyola is representative of the Roman Catholic conflation of these terms.⁷ Bernard could also use these terms in a confusing manner. Since these words are occasionally interchanged and further since meditation is often the means towards which a person experiences God in a contemplative manner it is necessary to first explore Ambrose’s understanding and practice of meditation.

⁴ White, *Method of Divine Meditation*, 4-5. Thomas Manton makes a similar distinction declaring, “[c]ontemplation is the fruit and perfection of meditation.... In short, contemplation is a ravishing sight without discourse, the work of reason not discoursing, but raised and ecstasied into the highest way of apprehension.” *Sermons Upon Genesis 24:63*, 293.

⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), To the Reader, [7].

⁶ Baxter, *Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 296.

⁷ Ganss, *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises*, 136, 402; Martz, *Poetry of Meditation* 16-20; Keith Egan “Contemplation.” s.v., 211-2. cf. 432; Shannon, “Contemplation, Contemplative Prayer.” s.v., 209; and McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 386.

Isaac Ambrose's Teaching on Meditation

Ambrose begins his teaching on meditation with this definition, “[m]editation is a stedfast bending of the mind to some spiritual matter, discoursing of it with our selves, till we bring the same to some profitable issue.”⁸ This definition closely parallels the description of Bishop Joseph Hall in his classic, *The Arte of Divine Meditation*, “[m]editation is nothing else but a bending of the mind upon some spirituall object, through divers formes of discourse, untill our thoughts come to an issue.”⁹ Bishop Hall’s influence upon Ambrose and other Puritans will be examined shortly. Both of these definitions of meditation emphasize the mind, but that was hardly the full picture. Ambrose elsewhere defines “[m]editation is as the bellows of the soul, that doth kindle and inflame holy affections.”¹⁰ Downname reiterates this intensity of meditation asserting, “[i]t inflameth our love towards God and all spirituall and heavenly things.”¹¹ More expansively, for meditation to accomplish its maximum good Edmund Calamy taught that it must enter through three doors; the “*door of the understanding*”... the “*door of thy heart and of thy affections*”... and the “*door of thy conversations*” for proper Christian living.¹² Interestingly Ambrose employs the same analogy of eating that was common among medieval monks proclaiming a person should “ruminate, and chew the cud.”¹³ Calamy expands the same language, declaring, “*a meditating Christian is one that chews the cud*” and that

⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 216.

⁹ Joseph Hall, *Arte of Divine Meditation*, 7.

¹⁰ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 392.

¹¹ Downname, *Guide to Godlynesse*, 544. Thomas Hooker likewise declares, “[s]o meditation is like fire, the heart is like a vessell, the heart is made for God, and it may be made a vessell of grace here, and of glory hereafter.” *Soules Preparation for Christ*, 113.

¹² Calamy, *Art of Divine Meditation*, 28.

¹³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 469.

meditation “is a *digesting* of all the things of God.”¹⁴ While this nicely parallels the imagery of Guigo II who in the twelfth-century asserted, “meditation chews it [the food] and breaks it up” Calamy cites specifically Leviticus 11:3 on clean and unclean beasts as the inspiration for his statement.¹⁵

Ambrose continues his treatment following the traditional teaching that differentiates between the two forms of meditation: “[*s*]udden, Occasional, or Extemporal” or “[*d*]eliberate, set, or solemn.”¹⁶ Sudden meditations are those that a person would engage during the course of a day as God brings various events, people, or things before the senses. For example, a person walking home might notice the beauty of a sunset and extemporaneously express wonder and gratitude to God. Deliberate meditations are intentional periods in which the person selects a topic, place, and method to explore and ponder something. Ambrose observes a distinction between two types of deliberate meditations, “for it is either conversant about matters of knowledge, for the finding out of some hidden truth, or about matters of affections, *for the enkindling of our love unto God, or if you will, for the acting of all the powers of our soul on spiritual object.* The former of these two we leave to the Schooles and Prophets, the latter we shall search after.”¹⁷ Similar to many of his fellow Puritans, Ambrose draws upon Isaac’s practice from Genesis 24:63 of withdrawing to the fields in the evening to meditate as the guide for the best time, place, and attitude to practice meditation.¹⁸

¹⁴ Calamy, *Art of Divine Meditation*, 24, 114. cf. Downname, *Guide to Godlynesse*, 546.

¹⁵ Guigo II, *Ladder of Monks*, 69, cf. 80 and Calamy, *Art of Divine Meditation*, 24.

¹⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 216.

¹⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 216-7.

¹⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 217-9. Thomas Manton preached ten sermons on meditation based on this text. *Sermons Genesis xxiv.63*,” 263-348. cf. Joseph Hall,

Next, Ambrose examines the two types of meditation in greater detail.

Following the normal Puritan pattern occasional or sudden meditations are taken up first and always dealt with more succinctly. Ambrose reminds his reader that since the subject matter for this type of meditation comes from daily life and a person's awareness of God's providence the possibilities are endless. To illustrate he mentions a person first awaking at a new day, the sight of the morning sky, noticing the grass, flowers, or garden, and any or all events of the day. This is followed by a brief summary of how the various occupations of magistrate, minister, tradesman, farmer, and soldier can practice occasional meditation during their daily work.¹⁹ This is a very significant reminder of the Puritan understanding that meditation was the work of all God's people and not reserved for ministers alone. Hall pointedly criticizes monks who hide in their cloisters and are confined to their cells, and while they practice contemplation they eschew the active life.²⁰ Likewise Calamy asserts that meditation is required of young men, kings and nobles, soldiers, learned men, and women.²¹ An important component of sudden meditation is ejaculatory or arrow prayers. In *Redeeming the Time*, Ambrose contends that while God sometimes calls a person "extraordinarily to such spiritual duties all day long" individuals are not to neglect their "particular calling, with which I may either mingle some actings of grace, or ejaculatory duties, as suddenly to look up to heaven, and to behold the face

Arte of Divine Meditation, 49, 57, 62; Downname, *Guide to Godlynesse*, 541; White, *Method of Divine Meditation*, 18; Calamy, *Art of Divine Meditation*, 1, 76; and Ranew, *Solitude Improved*, 343.

¹⁹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 219-21. cf. Ambrose, *Redeeming the Time*, 17-9.

²⁰ Joseph Hall, *Arte of Divine Meditation*, 4. White also stresses that meditation is not just for ministers. *Method of Divine Meditation*, 11.

²¹ Calamy, *Art of Divine Meditation*, 4-5.

of God, to whom I am to approve my self in my particular calling.”²² This is a vital testimony of the Puritan practice to always balance contemplation and action.

Ambrose then turns his attention to deliberate meditations. Once again his dependence upon Bishop Hall is evident. Every meditation is comprised of three parts; the entrance which serves to prepare the person’s heart, the proceedings which are the major portion to guide the person in processing the subject matter, and the conclusion that contains a thanksgiving and suggested singing a psalm so that the “soul close up it self with much sweetness and Spiritual contentment.”²³

Significantly, Ambrose quotes Bernard as he introduces the proceedings section, “[c]ontemplationis accessus duo sunt, unus in intellectu, alter in affectu, unus in lumine, alter in fevore.” Meaning “holy contemplation has two forms of ecstasy, one in the intellect, the other in the will; one of enlightenment, the other of fervor.”

Ambrose summarizes this insight in declaring “[t]he proceedings of our Meditation are in this Method. 1. To begin in the understanding, 2. To end in the affections.”²⁴

Following this entrance to meditation, the understanding section of proceeding includes seven steps of description, distribution, causes, effects, opposites, comparatives, and testimonies.²⁵ The second portion on the affections moves a person through six steps of relish, complaint, wish, confession, petition, and confidence to

²² Ambrose, *Redeeming the Time*, 19. cf. *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 40. For a summary of Cotton Mather’s practice of ejaculatory prayer see Mather, *Diary of Cotton Mather*, 1:81-4. On the practice and cautions for using ejaculatory meditation see Ranew, *Solitude Improved*, 204-9, 344-7.

²³ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 222-3. This reference appears only in the 1657 edition.

²⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 222. The Bernard citation is *SCC* 49.4.

²⁵ While Ambrose lists nine steps in his initial instructions, all three samples provided have only seven steps. Compare Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 222 with 223-8. Huntley appropriately notes, “even Hall in his own practice rarely followed the ‘steps’ he set down in *Art of Divine Meditation*.” *Bishop Joseph Hall*, 7.

stir up the proper response.²⁶ He then provides three very detailed examples of meditations, the first of the soul's love to Christ, the second of the eternity of hell, and the third of the eternity of heaven.²⁷

The purpose of these meditations is to deepen the understanding and stir up the affections so a person might experience Jesus more fully. A major component of this process is the soliloquy which Baxter defines as “a preaching to one's self.”²⁸ Throughout both the understanding and the affection sections Ambrose and other Puritans liberally sprinkle the phrase “[o] my soul” as a way of directing and personalizing these meditations. Significantly his three sample meditations are replete with the abundant use of Scripture, repetitive reminders of God's assurance and mercy regardless of the theme, including even that of hell, but little indication of the content or style of Ignatian sensory imagination, though the passages are richly described.²⁹ Further, each one reflects a contemplative attitude of approaching the subject with a loving and grateful stance towards God. More specifically the meditation on the eternity of hell reminded listeners that hell was a place of loss of everything and that humanity has been created for God and must recognize the seriousness of sin so that this awareness creates a “pang of love” to Jesus Christ.³⁰ Again he mentions Bernard, “*let us go down to hell whiles we are alive, that we may not go down to hell when we are dead.*”³¹ Ambrose concludes this meditation with grateful delight affirming, “[m]ethinks after all my tremblings in this meditation of

²⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 223.

²⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 223-72.

²⁸ Baxter, *Saints Everlasting Rest*, 316. cf. Sibbes, *Soul's Conflict*, 199 and Knott, *Sword of the Spirit*, 58, 71-2.

²⁹ For a more detailed comparison of the Ignatian and Puritan use of imagination see pages 177-8 and 187-8 below.

³⁰ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 249.

³¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 251. cf. Calamy, *Art of Divine Meditation*, 126.

the eternity of hell, I can now with an holy comfort, and humble triumph think upon death, judgment, hell, and those endless torments, and why? If I am but in Christ, and am guided by the Spirit of grace, and sanctification; there is no condemnation can seize on me.”³² Clearly the reason for this confident peace is that he is in Christ, another reminder of the importance of mystical union with Christ.

As might be expected, the meditations on the love to Christ and eternity of heaven overflow with abundance of bridal language and mystical themes. Terms such as ravishment, spiritual fire, inflamed and transported by love, and contemplation of God are common. In the first meditation Ambrose’s language soars as he first confesses his deep desire for Jesus, “[o] my bleeding heart and broken spirit doth languish in a thirsty *love*, panting and gasping after thee” and then he pleads more intensely “[*k*]iss me with the kisses of thy mouth, for thy love is better than wine. O let me bathe my soul in the delicious intimacies of a spiritual communion with thee my God.” His final desire is that this longing will be translated into an ineffable resting “*love of complacency*” with his “dearest Husband.”³³ In the meditation on heaven Ambrose reminds us “the Saints now dwell upon the contemplation of him [God], they have time enough to take a full view of him, even *Eternity it self*.” Central to this contemplation is the richness of joy, for the saints “enjoy God, so they enjoy themselves in God.”³⁴ Therefore, Ambrose seeks a “spiritual eye” so that he might perceive “the visions of God, and the fruitions of God” so that this might culminate in a “stronger union betwixt God and my soul ... yea let me enjoy God in

³² Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 253.

³³ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 235.

³⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 260.

my self, and my self in God.”³⁵ He confesses the difficulty of restraining his desire requesting, “[n]ow begin that *Hallelujah* on earth.”³⁶ Strikingly these last two examples reveal how meditation within the context of spiritual marriage can lead to contemplative experiences of love, intimacy, and ravishing enjoyment of God.

Historical Roots of Ambrose’s Understanding of Meditation

After reading a few Puritan manuals on meditation one soon discovers a certain commonality to them. It has been previously indicated that Ambrose was greatly indebted to Bishop Hall’s *Arte of Divine Meditation*. However, he was hardly the only one. Edward Reynolds declares no one has written on meditation in his day except our “*Christian Seneca, the learned and Reverend Bishop Hall*.”³⁷ Ambrose employs the same appellation calling Hall “our Divine *Seneca*.”³⁸ According to Knott, Hall influenced Baxter, Downname, Rogers, Ambrose, and Calamy.³⁹ However, none of these writers borrowed from Hall without making their own revisions and adaptations. Ambrose simplified Hall’s approach by reducing his ten steps to seven in the understanding section and combining two steps into six for stirring up the affections. Calamy simplified Hall’s complex method even further.⁴⁰ However, it must be recognized that most of these writers, including Ambrose, understood that they were offering flexible guidelines and not rigid rules to be followed.⁴¹ Further,

³⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 268-9.

³⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 272.

³⁷ Watson, *Saints Delight*, To the Reader, [6].

³⁸ Ambrose, *Communion with Angels*, 320. cf. Downname, *Guide to Godlynesse*, 637, who refers to him as the “*divine English Seneca*.”

³⁹ Knott, *Sword of the Spirit*, 68-70. cf. Kaufmann, *Pilgrim’s Progress in Puritan Meditation*, 121. Thomas White also borrowed from Joseph Hall but Nathaneal Ranew appears to have been one of the few who did not.

⁴⁰ Kaufmann, *Pilgrim’s Progress in Puritan Meditation*, 132.

⁴¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), To the Reader, [8, 6-7]; Joseph Hall, *Arte of Divine Meditation*, 90, 116; and Calamy, *Art of Divine Meditation*, 177.

Kaufmann's research distilled "two divergent traditions in Puritan meditation."⁴² The first originated with Hall and his major disciples Ambrose and Calamy. Kaufmann characterized this stream as strongly logical in approach eschewing the use of imagination and the senses.⁴³ The second was the heavenly meditation stream best represented by Sibbes and Baxter and recovered the use of imagination ignored by Hall.⁴⁴ This distinction appears overly simplistic and I agree with the critique of Knott, Beeke, and Lewalski.⁴⁵ As will soon be seen Ambrose had a strong sense of imagination and meditation on heaven. Additionally, Baxter was often considered to be a strong proponent of reason.⁴⁶ Further, one scholar cites both Hall and Baxter as examples of heavenly meditation.⁴⁷ Baxter's name is also closely associated with the groundbreaking research of Louis Martz who declared *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* was "the first Puritan treatise on the art of methodical meditation to appear in England."⁴⁸ The content of this paragraph clearly challenges the accuracy of Martz's assessment.⁴⁹ The ensuing debate has involved many participants and is quite sterile. Martz brought a predominant Medieval and Roman Catholic reading to the devotional literature of seventeenth-century England and while he was helpful in recognizing this influence the reality is that both Roman Catholic and Protestant contributions existed side-by-side within English Puritanism.

⁴² Kaufmann, *Pilgrim's Progress in Puritan Meditation*, 118-50.

⁴³ Kaufmann, *Pilgrim's Progress in Puritan Meditation*, 124.

⁴⁴ Kaufmann, *Pilgrim's Progress in Puritan Meditation*, 135-6.

⁴⁵ Knott, *Sword of the Spirit*, 68; Beeke, "Puritan Practice of Meditation," 77; and Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, 150.

⁴⁶ Baxter, *Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 306. cf. Knott, *Sword of the Spirit*, 76-7

⁴⁷ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 99.

⁴⁸ Martz, *Poetry of Meditation*, 154.

⁴⁹ For a critique of Martz see Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, 5, 87; Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, viii-ix, 38; and Knott, *Sword of the Spirit*, 64-5.

However, this prompts the larger question of who influenced Hall in developing his popular approach. He indicates his inspiration was drawn from an unknown monk who wrote 112 years before him.⁵⁰ Scholars have identified him as John Mombaer, author of the *Rosetum exercitiorum spiritualium et sacrarum meditationum* who in turn was influenced by Johan Wessel Gansfort. Hall is not shy about his distaste for Jesuit spirituality and therefore, attempts to find Ignatian influence are not likely to yield any results.⁵¹ However, the irony of history is that both Gansfort and Mombaer, members of the Brethren of the Common Life, not only inspired Hall but through Garcia de Cisneros provided significant inspiration for Ignatius as well.⁵² Therefore, both Hall and the Puritan method of meditation, and Ignatius and the Roman Catholic method, share a common root. In addition, Hall made trips to Belgium, France, and the Netherlands and would have been exposed to other Continental mystical writers. One person in particular that he cites frequently in *The Arte of Divine Meditation* is Jean Gerson⁵³ who was influential in the development of *devotio moderna*.⁵⁴ This awareness has led a recent biographer of Hall to assert that he “served to introduce continental contemplative methods to an English protestant readership.”⁵⁵ Therefore, Lovelace’s assessment of the Puritans is incorrect, “[o]f mystical writers (save for Bernard and Augustine) there is no mention.”⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Joseph Hall, *Arte of Divine Meditation*, Epistle Dedication, [4].

⁵¹ Booty, “Joseph Hall, *Arte Divine Meditation*,” 203.

⁵² Melloni, *Exercises of St. Ignatius*, esp. 1-2, 22; McGuire, *Companion to Jean Gerson*, 375-82; and Martz, *Poetry of Meditation*, 5, 331. On Cisneros see Pourrat, *Christian Spirituality*, 3:18-22.

⁵³ Joseph Hall, *Arte of Divine Meditation*, 25-6, 46, 62, 85. cf. Stoeffler, *Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 84. Gerson is also a favorite of Baxter, *Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 263, 280, 282, 287, 296, 302, 304, 311.

⁵⁴ McGuire, *Companion to Jean Gerson*, 371-5.

⁵⁵ McCabe, “Joseph Hall.” *ODNB*, 24:635.

⁵⁶ Lovelace, “Anatomy Puritan Piety,” 296.

Closely related is the question of continuities and discontinuities between the Roman Catholic and Puritan approaches to meditation.⁵⁷ This is a significant question, as it will guide my reading of Ambrose more accurately. A certain amount of overlap would be expected since at least initially Puritans were dependent upon Roman Catholic sources.⁵⁸ One of the more vivid demonstrations of this is Edmund Bunny's bowdlerization of Jesuit Robert Parsons' *First Book of Christian Exercise* (1582). However, this example also illustrates that Puritan writers never borrowed Roman Catholic works wholesale.⁵⁹ There was always the necessity of theological fine-tuning to remove offensive papist passages to Protestant theology. In fact, Bunny's changes while somewhat restrained demonstrated his ignorance of Parson's more nuanced Roman Catholic theology.⁶⁰ This incensed Parsons to such a degree that he devoted twenty-four pages in a later volume refuting them.⁶¹ Further, while both groups might employ the same components they often approach them from very different angles. Therefore, the respective approaches to meditation can be summarized around nine significant areas.⁶² Generalizations are always prone to

⁵⁷ While Puritans and Anglicans shared a common distaste for Roman Catholics there were numerous discontinuities between these two branches of Protestants in their practice of meditation. See McGee, "Conversion and Imitation of Christ."

⁵⁸ For an opposing view minimizing the Roman Catholic influence on Puritan piety see Campbell, *Religion of the Heart*, 42-4, cf. 68 for greater receptivity to this.

⁵⁹ Bozeman, *Precisianist Strain*, 76. See de Reuver, *Sweet Communion*, for Willem Teellinck's revision of a' Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* to fit Reformed sensibilities. 116n40.

⁶⁰ Houlston, "Edmund Bunny's Theft of *Book of Resolution*," compare 169 with 163-4, 173.

⁶¹ Parsons, *Christian Directory*, Preface [4-27]. Parsons previously declared that Bunny "greatly perverted and corrupted" his work. *Christian Directory*, To the Reader [7], cf. Preface [2]. For a good overview of the scholarship related to Bunny's pirating of Parsons' work see Houlston, "Edmund Bunny's Theft of *Book of Resolution*."

⁶² This summary comparison is a composite from the following sources plus my reading of the primary sources: Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, 2:68-132; Knott, *Sword of the Spirit*, 79-81; Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, 148-67; Kaufmann, *Pilgrim's Progress in Puritan Meditation*, 125-8, 206-7, 215; Lovelace,

distortion and there was always some blurring of boundaries both within and between these two methods. Nonetheless, first the role of Scripture was essential in shaping Puritan meditation though less influential for Roman Catholics. However, the influence of *devotio moderna* certainly inspired the Roman Catholic recovery of Scripture. Second, Roman Catholics usually placed a greater overall emphasis upon the suffering and passion of Jesus lingering on his crucifixion. However, Puritan writings on sacramental meditation tended to recover more of this from a Protestant perspective, but not to the degree of those from Rome. Next, both groups were conscious of Ignatian imagination but within the native soil of Roman Catholicism there tended to be a greater desire to stimulate the imagination through the senses to recreate vivid details of the Gospel events. Puritans did not stir up the senses to the same degree as Ignatius but their meditation on heaven strongly encouraged the use of imagination.⁶³ Fourth, Roman Catholics focused on the Christian year through the observances of feasts and fasts while the Puritans measured time according to the Lord's Day or Sunday. Fifth, regarding topics the Puritans emphasized meditation on creation, hell, and heaven. In particular, hell was meditated upon to deepen the person's love for God and not intimidation. Neither creation nor heaven occupied the same prominence for Roman Catholics as they did for Puritans, but the focus on hell was directly related to the need for penance. Closely related is the sixth theme of assurance. While Puritan manuals exuded optimism and reassurance the message of Roman Catholic manuals warned of the need for continual spiritual struggle and of eternal damnation with little hope of assurance. Seventh, regarding the nature of experience Roman Catholics were encouraged to recreate the actual experience, in

American Pietism of Cotton Mather, 114-23; Roston, "Donne and Meditative Tradition"; and Williams, "Puritan Enjoyment of God," 303-4, 313-4.

⁶³ See Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed*, 530 and Cornick, *Letting God Be God*, 106.

true Ignatian form, and to savor and enjoy it. Conversely, Puritans were usually taught to explore and apply the insights to their own lives and to discover the value of that experience. Eighth, given Puritans' later origin and focus on the priesthood of all believers all people were expected to participate in spiritual disciplines. In practice, it was not until the seventeenth-century that the majority of lay people in Roman Catholicism gained regular access to the same means to enter into these disciplines. Finally, in Puritanism the structure and method of the sermon was the foundation for meditation.⁶⁴ That served to both democratize meditation and to model it weekly in the sermons of public worship. This was normally absent in Roman Catholicism due to the irregularity of preaching and the lack of making this connection between sermon and meditation. However, Granada is an exception asserting, "there is no difference between a Sermon and Consideration."⁶⁵ Therefore, the Puritan approach to meditation is both derivative and yet distinctive in certain ways. While this summary sketches the larger background and comparison regarding meditation methods and guides in reading Ambrose the emphasis must now focus more narrowly on him.

Historical Roots of Contemplation in the Writings of Isaac Ambrose

Ambrose's frequent practice of quoting patristic, medieval, and contemporary sources has been evident throughout this thesis. This raises the question of the sources that may have inspired him. Gilson, writing from within the context of Bernardine research, declares the challenging nature of this task; "*[t]he influence of one work on another is not to be proved from the fact that they contain formulas that*

⁶⁴ Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, 152-5, cf. 157 for Ambrose's reflection of this.

⁶⁵ Granada, *Treatise of Consideration and Prayer*, 6.

are literally similar, but of different meaning.”⁶⁶ Anthony Lane’s meticulous research on Calvin’s use of the church fathers provides additional cautions.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, it is apparent that Ambrose willingly draws upon Western Catholic sources. Perhaps his more conciliatory attitude that shunned controversy also created a greater receptivity to medieval writings. Two glimpses of this are evident in comparing the first and second editions of *Ultima*. In 1640 Ambrose writes, “as a Pope hath told us” and in the margin reveals his identity as Gregory.⁶⁸ However, in the next edition he is simply referred to as Gregory.⁶⁹ Similarly in his first work he names Luis de Granada and his *Meditations*.⁷⁰ But in the 1654 edition while his name is removed the same two quotations remain and he is merely identified as “saith one devoutly.”⁷¹ This reflects the nature of seventeenth-century polemics, but it also reveals that at least some Puritans, while anxious to criticize and distance themselves publicly from Western Catholics, were still quite willing to borrow from their writings. However, this practice pertained only to devotional works of piety and not doctrinal writings. Granada, author of the popular *Of Prayer and Meditation*, was one of the most widely read continental mystics in seventeenth-century England.⁷² Ambrose also includes two references to Ignatius, though neither one is positive. In describing Jesus’ crucifixion he writes, “[I]et Jesuites and Friers in meditating of Christs sufferings, cry

⁶⁶ Gilson, *Mystical Theology of Bernard*, 187, cf. 186.

⁶⁷ Anthony Lane, *John Calvin: Student of Church Fathers*, esp. 1-13.

⁶⁸ Ambrose, *Ultima* in *Prima, Media, Ultima* (1640), 245.

⁶⁹ Ambrose, *Ultima* in *Prima, Media Ultima* (1654), 109. Ambrose also links Gregory and Calvin in their common interpretation of the fires of hell. *Ultima* in *Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 146.

⁷⁰ Ambrose, *Ultima* (1640), 242, 388.

⁷¹ Ambrose, *Ultima* in *Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 106, 212. I have not been able to determine the specific source of these quotations.

⁷² Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, 2:69. On Granada see Pourrat, *Christian Spirituality*, 3:95-101. Terence Cave asserts that Erasmus also influenced Granada. *Devotional Poetry in France*, 5.

out against the Jewes; in this bloody sweat of Christ I see another use.”⁷³ The other reference is to the repentant thief on the cross who was “*of the Society of Jesus*.... (though no Jesuite neither).”⁷⁴

Ambrose makes more direct references to Bernard’s usage of contemplation than any other patristic or medieval person. Bernard’s teaching on contemplation is rich and extensive. However, space limits this synopsis to only his most salient points.⁷⁵ Casey summarizes Bernard’s understanding of “contemplation [as] a penetrating moment of perception which conveys something of the beauty and attractiveness of God which has the result of distracting the mind and the heart from absolutely everything else.”⁷⁶ Even though Bernard stressed the necessity of clearly differentiating between meditation and contemplation, there were occasions when the distinction faded and terms overlapped.⁷⁷ While there was not the same emphasis upon personal experience in the twelfth as the seventeenth-century Bernard speaks with passionate autobiographical detail and delight.⁷⁸ Further, these experiences are always a gift, the result of God’s grace.⁷⁹ Though he presents his own experiences he cautions his readers that times of contemplation are rare and fleeting.⁸⁰

⁷³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 560.

⁷⁴ Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 208.

⁷⁵ Much of the following section is summarized from John Sommerfeldt’s *Spiritual Teachings of Bernard*, 215-50. Other studies that specifically focus on Bernard’s understanding of contemplation are Butler, *Western Mysticism*, 95-110; Casey, *Athirst for God*, 289-96; and McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 211-3, 221-3.

⁷⁶ Casey, *Athirst for God*, 295. For the semantic range of terms used by Bernard to express contemplation see McGinn, *Growth in Mysticism*, 212.

⁷⁷ Sommerfeldt, *Spiritual Teachings of Bernard*, 223-4, 228n36.

⁷⁸ Bernard, *SCC* 74.5-7. cf. McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 496n152.

⁷⁹ Sommerfeldt, *Spiritual Teachings of Bernard*, 234, 238-41.

⁸⁰ Bernard, *SCC* 23.15, cf. *SCC* 85.13.

Love is the driving force within the contemplative experience.⁸¹ This is hardly a surprise since it is related to spiritual marriage. In fact, as one grows into deeper intimacy in spiritual marriage with Jesus as the divine Bridegroom one will experience the joys of contemplative love and life.⁸² Bernard follows the earlier historical pattern of invoking Mary, the sister of Martha (Luke 10:39) as one of the primary models of contemplation.⁸³ However, Bernard realizes the wisdom of the Christian life is best lived in balance and not in dichotomy. Therefore, the healthy spiritual life combines contemplation and action. Or more accurately, the contemplative life overflows in action.⁸⁴ This signals the benefits of the contemplative experience of love and knowledge.⁸⁵ Finally, the last and perhaps the greatest benefit for many is that contemplation provides a foretaste of heaven. This glimpse of the beatific vision introduces in miniature what will be the saints' fullness of joy when they repose in Jesus' presence in heaven.⁸⁶ Ambrose's deep affection for Bernard is clear in his approbation of "devout Bernard"⁸⁷ and since the references to Bernard are more substantive they will appear in the specific text of Ambrose's writings for greater clarity and connection.

Ambrose in particular, and the Puritans in general, were often indebted to Bernard for their understanding of contemplation; however, Calvin did not provide the same formative influence. Nonetheless, it would be a serious error to conclude that contemplation was not present in his writings. One significant distinction

⁸¹ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 190.

⁸² Sommerfeldt, *Spiritual Teachings of Bernard*, 244 and Bernard, *SSC* 1.11-12, 52.6, 83, 85.12-13.

⁸³ Casey, *Athirst for God*, 296.

⁸⁴ Casey, *Athirst for God*, 265. cf. McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 221-3.

⁸⁵ Sommerfeldt, *Spiritual Teachings of Bernard*, 241-2, 244-5.

⁸⁶ Sommerfeldt, *Spiritual Teachings of Bernard*, 226-7.

⁸⁷ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 182.

between Bernard and Calvin is that for Bernard contemplation was primarily relational, while for Calvin it was essentially doxological. Bernard frequently focuses upon Jesus, the Word, while Calvin's attention to contemplation is typically directed to God the Father and the works of creation and providence.⁸⁸ Unfortunately, no detailed study of contemplation in Calvin presently exists.⁸⁹ However, there is an important link between Calvin and Ambrose and other Puritans that relates to meditation on heaven. Calvin declares, "[s]ince, therefore, believers ascribe to God's grace the fact that, illumined by his Spirit, they enjoy through faith the contemplation of heavenly life."⁹⁰ In his commentary on Colossians, he asserts this more fully, "[l]et us therefore bear in mind that *that* is the true and holy *thinking* as to Christ, which forthwith bears us up into heaven, that we may there adore him, and that our minds may dwell with Him."⁹¹ Ronald Wallace nicely connects "[t]he 'mystical union' with Christ which played such an important part in Calvin's theology, is union with the ascended Christ" with meditation on heaven.⁹² The Ascension also figured prominently in Bernard's preaching occupying more sermons than any other topic, including Jesus' passion.⁹³

The Puritans, including Ambrose, greatly expanded the connection between heavenly-mindedness and meditation on heaven with contemplation. Calvin was not

⁸⁸ On Calvin see, *Institutes*, 1.14.21; 1.17.9; 2.8.55; 3.20.4; 4.14.5; and *Comm* on Ps 19.

⁸⁹ Zachman, *Image and Word in John Calvin* occasionally flirts with the theme of contemplation but never defines or exegetes Calvin's theology of contemplation.

⁹⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.40.

⁹¹ Calvin, *Comm* on Col 3:1. For meditation on the heavenly life in Calvin see Ronald Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of Christian Life*, 87-93.

⁹² Ronald Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and Reformation*, 198. cf. Ronald Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of Christian Life*, 92. Similarly the Ascension was significant for the Puritans. Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, 158-9.

⁹³ Leclercq, *Love of Learning and Desire for God*, 56.

the first to engage in this as McGinn's summary indicates, the "fundamental aim of monastic spirituality was not so much to strive to enjoy what later ages would call mystical experience here below as to encourage *contemplatio* understood as burning desire for heaven."⁹⁴ However, while earlier Christians, including Bernard, desired heaven there does not appear to be the same degree of emphasis upon meditating on heaven as practiced by Calvin and the Puritans.⁹⁵ Dewey Wallace reports, "[h]eavenly mindedness was the spiritual person's foretaste of the joys of heaven through meditation."⁹⁶ Further, he maintains, "Puritan spirituality became most affectively mystical with regard to such topics as heavenly mindedness and union with Christ."⁹⁷ Likewise Lovelace maintains "Puritan 'heavenly-mindedness,' despite modern jests to the contrary, was a practical mysticism that sought communion with God among the common events of daily living."⁹⁸ Moreover, Peter Toon suggests that "meditation on heaven" was the most important theme in Puritan meditation. He suggests three reasons for the importance of meditating on heaven:

First, because Christ is there now and our salvation consists of union through the Holy Spirit with him.... Second, we are pilgrims and sojourners on earth, journeying in faith, hope, and love toward heaven in order to be with Christ there. Heaven is the goal of our pilgrimage. And third, because we can rightly live a Christian life in the present evil age only if we have the mind of Christ, that is, if we are genuinely heavenly minded, seeing our earth and this age in the perspective of heaven.⁹⁹

What is significant for this study on Isaac Ambrose is that Dewey Wallace regards heavenly-mindedness as a more prominent theme following the Act of Uniformity in

⁹⁴ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 140.

⁹⁵ For Bernard's desire for heaven see Casey, *Athirst for God*, 208-31. cf. Leclercq, *Love of Learning and Desire for God*, 56-70.

⁹⁶ Dewey Wallace, *Spirituality of Later Puritans*, xvii.

⁹⁷ Dewey Wallace, *Spirituality of Later Puritans*. xviii.

⁹⁸ Lovelace, *American Pietism of Cotton Mather*, 187.

⁹⁹ Toon, *From Mind to Heart*, 95-6.

1662 with “the dashing at the Restoration of so many Puritan hopes.”¹⁰⁰ Ambrose wrote all but his two final works before 1662. Further, Baxter’s popular *Saints Everlasting Rest* that was essentially a guide to heavenly meditation or contemplation was written in 1649. Interestingly both of these works were based on texts from the book of Hebrews.

Imagination in the Writings of Isaac Ambrose

Previously the comparison between Roman Catholic and Puritan approaches to meditation recognized that heavenly meditation inspired a greater usage of the imagination in the Puritans. Before examining this significant topic it must first be framed within the Puritan awareness of the faculties of the soul.¹⁰¹ Ambrose follows the typical Puritan and medieval practice that the faculties consisted of the understanding, will, and the affections.¹⁰² He also included the memory as a component of the faculties.¹⁰³ While according to Ambrose, a person could enjoy God through both their understanding and the will,¹⁰⁴ the primary purpose of meditation was to stir up the affections so that the person would respond appropriately.¹⁰⁵ However, since the affections could be directed either towards God or the world they required the proper guidance through the understanding so that “the

¹⁰⁰ Dewey Wallace, *Spirituality of Later Puritans*, xvii. See Rowe, *Heavenly-Mindedness* as a post-Restoration example of this.

¹⁰¹ The best Puritan treatment on the faculties of the soul is Reynolds, *Passions and Faculties of Soul*. cf. Fulcher, “Puritans and the Passions” and Kopic, *Communion with God*, 45n49.

¹⁰² Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 21; *Media* (1657), 140, 259, 465; and *Looking Unto Jesus*, 325.

¹⁰³ Ambrose, *Prima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 3 and *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 67.

¹⁰⁴ Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 212.

¹⁰⁵ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 319.

affections [would not become] disordered.”¹⁰⁶ The senses are also important in Ambrose’s anthropology serving as the “windows of our soul.”¹⁰⁷ Moreover Ambrose shared the common awareness held by Bernard and others before him that the faculties, marred by sin, required regeneration.¹⁰⁸ Ambrose recognized that contemplation and looking unto Jesus restored the faculties until they reached an excellency through glorification in heaven.¹⁰⁹

Further, the imagination functions in relationship with the faculties of the soul and is a significant theme in understanding Ambrose’s practice of meditation.¹¹⁰ Imagination has the potential to reconstruct passages of Scripture so that a person can relive that experience and deepen the understanding and affections of that event. Ambrose illustrates this in relationship to Jesus’ post Easter visitations to his disciples, “[m]ethinks I see *Thomas’s* finger on Christ’s boared hand, and *Thomas’s* hand in Christs pierced side. Here’s a strong argument to convince my soul that Christ is risen from the dead.”¹¹¹ The imagination has the potential to convince a person’s soul of some event or message. In *Ultima*, Ambrose often employs the

¹⁰⁶ Ambrose, *Ultima* in *Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 19. The best Puritan treatment on this subject is Fenner, *Treatise of Affections*. Fenner declares that when the affections are “inordinate” it makes a person the “worlds spouse and the devils spouse.” *Treatise of Affections*, 46.

¹⁰⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 50. cf. *War with Devils*, 57.

¹⁰⁸ Ambrose, *Prima* in *Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 8. cf. McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 201 and Sommerfledt, *Spiritual Teachings of Bernard*, 242-5.

¹⁰⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1094.

¹¹⁰ Little has been written on this important topic. For a helpful summary see Evans, “Puritan Use of Imagination,” 47-88 and La Shell, “Imagination and Idol,” 305-334. While Kaufmann addresses this topic frequently in *Pilgrim’s Progress in Puritan Meditation* his misreading of the Puritans mars his research. See Knott, *Sword of the Spirit*, 68; Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, 150; Beeke, “Puritan Practice Meditation,” 77; and Chan, “Puritan Meditative Tradition,” 91.

¹¹¹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 766. Ambrose frequently uses this formula of “methinks I see [or] imagine [or] hear”. *Looking Unto Jesus*, 949, 964, 1102, 1142, etc.

imagination to dramatize the seriousness of an event. After guiding his readers through a meditation on the horrors of hell he declares, “I have lead you through the dungeon, let this sight serve for a terrour that you never come nearer.”¹¹² Additionally he recognized that the “imagination [can] work a real change in nature.”¹¹³ At times he combines the power of imagination with looking at Christ and declares, “[a]nd no question but there is a kinde of spiritual imaginative of power in faith to be like to Christ by looking on Christ.”¹¹⁴

Puritan teaching is in agreement that the Fall severely damaged the imagination, making it unreliable. Ambrose warns his readers of the Devil’s ability and desire to work in a person’s imagination.¹¹⁵ Sibbes expands this reality, declaring, “[a]nd amongst all the faculties of the soul, most of the disquiet and unnecessary trouble of our lives arises from the vanity and ill government of that power of the soul which we call *imagination*.... This imagination of ours is become the seat of vanity, and thereupon of vexation to us, because it apprehends a greater happiness in outward good things than there is.”¹¹⁶ He continues by summarizing four major dangers of misguided imagination: making false representations, blocking reason and wise judgments, creating impressions that lack reality, and a tendency to create vanity and mischief.¹¹⁷ However, Sibbes was also fully aware of the potential benefit of harnessing the imagination for good. He asserted, “[a]s the soul receives much hurt from imagination, so it may have much good thereby... A sanctified fancy

¹¹² Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 137.

¹¹³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 526.

¹¹⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 668.

¹¹⁵ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 109, 116.

¹¹⁶ Sibbes, *Soul’s Conflict*, 178-9.

¹¹⁷ Sibbes, *Soul’s Conflict*, 180.

[i.e. imagination] will make every creature a ladder to heaven.”¹¹⁸ Because of the importance of imagination in Ambrose’s teaching on meditation and experience of God he questions his readers directly “is thy imagination strong?”¹¹⁹ This concern is amplified by his frequent invitation and encouragement to use one’s imagination by the repeated inclusion in his writings of “imagine then” as the person meditates on a passage of Scripture.¹²⁰ Not surprisingly, given the nature of his massive work on contemplation, Ambrose often personalizes Jesus in relation to the individual through imagination. In his consideration of Jesus’ work of salvation he writes, “[r]ealize Christ standing by thee.”¹²¹

This raises the question how did Ambrose’s use of imagination compare with Ignatius of Loyola? While Ambrose and the Puritans essentially continued the practice of using “composition of place” in their meditation¹²² there still appears to be a rather significant gap between Ignatius and Ambrose in style and especially content. However, Lovelace is too restrictive in his critique asserting “[t]he Ignatian type of mysticism, which stresses Christ in his human nature and the pictorial use of sensory imagination, is also alien to Puritan communion, which would insist on going to God by a route that it would consider more direct and more spiritual.”¹²³ More accurately it can be noted that Ignatius placed much greater emphasis upon all five senses for reconstructing and experiencing the biblical text. Conversely Ambrose, while able to create vivid images of the biblical stories is more restrained in his use of the senses,

¹¹⁸ Sibbes, *Soul’s Conflict*, 185.

¹¹⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 626.

¹²⁰ Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 53, 76, 115, 140, 174, 181; *Media* (1657), 398; *Looking Unto Jesus*, 519, 659, 1035; and *War with Devils*, 67; etc.

¹²¹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 476, cf. 1077.

¹²² Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 31-2, 38-9.

¹²³ Lovelace, “Anatomy Puritan Piety,” 3:318, cf. 296.

typically limiting himself to sight and sound. Toon's assessment of Baxter that "[w]hile he does not go as far as Ignatius Loyola, who invites people to use all their five senses (including taste and smell) to imagine the heavenly city, Baxter certainly is uninhibited in commending the use of imagination controlled by the images and pictures of Holy Scripture" is correct for Ambrose as well.¹²⁴ Additionally, Ambrose's negative impression of Ignatius mentioned earlier in this chapter must be recalled. Further, the more subdued principles of Granada appear far more influential on Ambrose than Ignatius. While Granada also encouraged the use of all five senses, his examples lack the striking vividness of Ignatius.¹²⁵ Further, Granada also recognizes the potential danger of imagination especially for novices and beginners and cautions his readers not to overuse imagination because it can "weary the head."¹²⁶

Therefore, while Ambrose made frequent use of imagination and pushed the boundaries perhaps much farther than most Puritans, there is still a gap between himself and Ignatius of Loyola.¹²⁷ This is perhaps more stark in Baxter who asserts, "I would not have thee, as the papists, draw them in pictures, nor use such ways to represent them. This, as it is a course forbidden by God, so it would but seduce and draw down thy heart; but get the liveliest picture of them in thy mind that possibly thou canst; meditate of them as if thou wert all the while beholding them ... till thou canst say, Methinks I see a glimpse of the glory."¹²⁸ The Second Commandment

¹²⁴ Toon, *From Mind to Heart*, 99. cf. Beeke, "Puritan Practice of Meditation," 77.

¹²⁵ Granada, *Prayer and Meditation*, 250.

¹²⁶ Granada, *Spiritual Doctrine*, 117.

¹²⁷ Ambrose's *Looking Unto Jesus* was seen as a strong witness to the Puritan use of the imagination during the eighteenth-century Scottish controversy regarding mental images. La Shell, "Imagination and Idol," 316.

¹²⁸ Baxter, *Saints' Everlasting Rest*, 320.

against making idols is at the root of Baxter's concern. While Ignatius also influenced Granada, the latter's style appears more muted and amenable to Ambrose.¹²⁹ In reality both Ignatius and Granada were influenced by the *devotio moderna* through Cisneros.¹³⁰ This again raises the critical question of influence and continuity and discontinuity. Simply because two persons appear to use roughly the same method does not guarantee that one borrowed from the other. Further, while both Ignatius and Granada drew upon *devotio moderna* in style and content the resulting outcomes are not identical. The roots of Ambrose's style are more reflective of Hall and Granada than Ignatius. One fascinating trajectory of Puritan imagination is that John Bunyan owned a marked copy of Ambrose's *Prima, Media, Ultima*.¹³¹ Kaufmann posits one specific example from *Pilgrim's Progress* that resembles Ambrose's approach.¹³² Therefore, one can only wonder how much influence Ambrose's writing had upon Bunyan and his own development and use of imagination.

Contemplation in the Writings of Isaac Ambrose

A chronological examination will now be made of Ambrose's corpus to determine if there was any noticeable development in his understanding of contemplation. Ambrose has little to say about contemplation in his first work, but uses the term both positively and negatively. In his sermon on the new birth he encourages his listeners, "may your contemplations (guided by the Gods Word) go

¹²⁹ Chan agrees that Granada's use of imagination would have been more acceptable to the Puritans than Ignatius. "Puritan Meditative Tradition," 2.

¹³⁰ Pourrat, *Christian Spirituality*, 26-9, 97; McGuire, *Companion to Jean Gerson*, 379-82; and Cave, *Devotional Poetry*, 5.

¹³¹ Harrison, "John Bunyan: Record of Recent Research," 53.

¹³² Kaufmann, *Pilgrim's Progress in Puritan Meditation*, 230.

into that Paradise above.”¹³³ This is not surprising given the Puritan strong dependency upon Scripture. It also echoes Bernard’s frequent refrain that the *Verbum* as Spouse is essential in contemplation.¹³⁴ Later in his teaching on the Ten Commandments he warns his auditors not to delight “in the inward contemplations of evil.”¹³⁵ This sort of language was fairly common among the Puritans. Later Calamy would speak of “contemplative wickedness” and “contemplative adultery.”¹³⁶ On the one hand this suggests that contemplation could be used in a more general way of thinking or considering. But it also implies the sense of delighting in something, delight being good or evil, depending on the object of contemplation and the source of delight. Contemplation is about gazing and the vision of God, therefore, one of the benefits of the new birth is that it provides the person with “a spirituall eye” so that they might see more clearly.¹³⁷ Earlier in this chapter it was mentioned that Ambrose used the “spirituall eye” in relationship with his meditation on heaven.

Ultima was also published the same year as *Prima*. These sermons address the four last things: death, judgment, hell, and heaven. One can detect an expansion of the connection between sight and gazing and contemplation, and Ambrose declares that in contemplation a person “behold[s] the face of your Saviour.”¹³⁸ The language of beholding figures prominently in *Looking Unto Jesus* as will soon be clear. This theme is further expanded in his discussion of the beatific vision. Ambrose introduces this theme with a reference to Granada’s *Meditations* that was examined

¹³³ Ambrose, *Prima* in *Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 7.

¹³⁴ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 190-3.

¹³⁵ Ambrose, *Prima* in *Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 59.

¹³⁶ Calamy, *Art Divine Meditation*, 3, 71. cf. Scudder, *Christians Daily Walke*, 185. Lockyer distinguishes between carnal and divine contemplation. *England Faithfully Watcht*, 88.

¹³⁷ Ambrose, *Prima* in *Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 43.

¹³⁸ Ambrose, *Ultima* in *Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 180.

earlier in this chapter. To the question “how can our souls enjoy this *Godhead*?” Ambrose replies, “[t]he *understanding* is filled by a clear glorious sight of God, called *Beatificall vision*.”¹³⁹ While he does not specifically connect the beatific vision with heavenly meditation Ambrose nonetheless recognizes the value of gazing on God. After quoting Bernard, Ambrose immediately declares, “[a]nd yet because God in his Word doth here give us as a taste of heaven, by comparing it with the most precious things that are on earth, let us follow him so far as he hath revealed it, and no further.”¹⁴⁰ Previously he declared, “[b]eloved, I know not how to expresse it, but let your soules in some meditation flie up from *Calvary* to Heaven.”¹⁴¹ This initial experience will only be complete when a person reaches heaven and can “fully contemplate the glory” of God.¹⁴²

Contemplation in *Media*

One of the primary themes of *Media* is that a person can cultivate a contemplative attitude or experience the joyful presence of God through ascetical practices. Ambrose reminds his auditors that spiritual duties are like “[b]ridges to give them a passage to God, as Boats to carry them into the bosom of Christ, as means to bring them into more intimate communion with their heavenly Father.” Amazingly, these spiritual activities enable a person “to see the face of God.” Further, those who meet God in spiritual duties “usually find their hearts sweetly refreshed, as if Heaven were in them.”¹⁴³ Ambrose acknowledges that spiritual duties were not popular in his day among the Puritans, hence his motivation for addressing

¹³⁹ Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 212, cf. 203, 215.

¹⁴⁰ Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 224. The reference is to *SCC* 38.

¹⁴¹ Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 206.

¹⁴² Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 227.

¹⁴³ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 33-4.

this critical topic.¹⁴⁴ Based on his immediate reference to Rutherford's *Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist* and comments including "Christ hath done all Duties for us" it is clear that he is referring to Antinomianism, which among other things was resistant to spiritual practices and was prevalent in Lancashire.¹⁴⁵ Ambrose also advises his readers that everything that he has written he has practiced himself. Further, as noted previously, while the steps may appear to be demanding as one reads through this massive work of spiritual practices he reminds them that these are guidelines and not rigid rules.¹⁴⁶ There are two additional principles to understanding Ambrose's teaching on spiritual practices, the first is the importance of the Holy Spirit guiding the person and the second is Jesus' ministry of perfecting what a person offers to God.¹⁴⁷

A dynamic spiritual component of *Media* is a series of retreat days that illustrate Ambrose's own personal use of these spiritual duties and how they prepared him for contemplative experiences of rapture and delight. Philip Sheldrake perceptively recognizes that same combination when he writes, "[a] somewhat ascetical spirituality was off-set in some people [the Puritans] with a more contemplative stance and even mystical raptures as in Isaac Ambrose."¹⁴⁸ Clearly the spiritual duties that Ambrose describes in *Media* are identical to the ones he practices during his retreats. He engaged them in the following order: watchfulness, self-examination, experiences, evidences, meditation, life of faith, prayer, reading the

¹⁴⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), To the Reader, [5], cf. 34.

¹⁴⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), To the Reader, [5-6] and Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 35 (resistance to spiritual duties) and esp. 315-21 (antinomianism in Lancashire).

¹⁴⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), To the Reader, [8, 6-7].

¹⁴⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), To the Reader, [8-9], 89, 90, 184 (on the role of the Spirit) and 17 (on Christ perfecting human offering).

¹⁴⁸ Sheldrake, *Brief History of Spirituality*, 120

Word, self-denial, and the saint's suffering. The only variation is that self-denial was practiced near the end rather than in its placement after self-examination in *Media*. However, Ambrose indicates without any explanation that self-denial was practiced "not in course."¹⁴⁹ The other distinction is that he would obviously not be able to engage in the corporate disciplines of family duties, Christian society, and the Lord's Supper. In comparing Ambrose's order with other popular devotional manuals there is obviously overlap of practices but also uniqueness and none seem to follow a standard order.¹⁵⁰

Chapter 3 revealed that Ambrose had a contemplative experience of rapture and ecstatic delight that lasted two days. While he does provide a number of different descriptions of this celebrated event he nowhere suggests what spiritual practices he had used on that day. He merely indicates that God bathed his soul with a mystical sense of love and the sweetness of heavenly joy. Elsewhere the most common disciplines that produced his contemplative experiences were: prayer, meditation, and self-examination.¹⁵¹ But on other occasions, spiritual practices that might appear to be less likely to create a contemplative response, such as meditation on hell, the saints suffering, and the "very hard lesson" of self-denial also refreshed his soul with the flames of God's love and a "sweet scent" from the Spirit.¹⁵² To summarize, while there are some spiritual practices that may more likely create a contemplative experience than others, there are also those that are surprising. This is a reminder that spiritual disciplines are only the means for cultivating a greater

¹⁴⁹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 89.

¹⁵⁰ Compare *Media* (1657) with Bayly, *Practice of Piety*, Downname, *Guide to Godlynesse*, and Scudder, *Christian's Daily Walke*.

¹⁵¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 76, 79 and *Media* (1657), 88.

¹⁵² Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 89-90.

attentiveness and responsiveness to God. Whether Ambrose, or any one else, experiences God in a contemplative way, is always determined by God's grace and not human effort. However, that does not minimize the importance of effort in forming the pattern of receptivity and responsiveness to God. Interestingly, Ambrose's practice appears to mirror Bernard, for whom according to Leclercq, "there can be no "mystical" experience without prior "ascetic" experience."¹⁵³

While Ambrose was the only person that I have discovered in the seventeenth-century to take month-long retreats there were others who cultivated a similar intensity for shorter periods. On the continent, Theodorus a' Brakel, one of the primary leaders of Dutch Pietism, was known for his intense spiritual practices that could incredibly occupy up to eight hours a day even though he was married with children.¹⁵⁴ It is little wonder that these examples, which were more the norm than the exception, inspired Packer to refer to Puritanism as "reformed monasticism."¹⁵⁵ Similarly Hambrick-Stowe asserts "[t]he contemplative [Puritan] is distinguished from the common practicing believer by the regularity, protractedness, and continuing intensity of the exercises." And further due to the intensity of Puritan devotional practices "perhaps most of the clergy---and women who might be described by the phrase "Puritan contemplative."¹⁵⁶ This should not imply that Lutherans and Roman Catholics, both ministers and laity alike, were not also disciplined in spiritual

¹⁵³ Leclercq, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 35. Chan's research suggests there are two major streams of Puritan meditation, the ascetical strain, in which he places Ambrose, and the Spirit enthusiastic strain. "Puritan Meditative Tradition," 164, 216.

¹⁵⁴ de Reuver, *Sweet Communion*, 167-8, cf. 107, 109 for the example of Willem Teellinck.

¹⁵⁵ Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 28, 331.

¹⁵⁶ Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 285, 287. cf. Bozeman, *Precisianist Strain*, 103, 174, 177; Lovelace, *American Pietism Cotton Mather*, 124-6; Hinson, "Puritan Spirituality," 172, 177; and Williams, "Puritan Enjoyment of God," 131-3 for examples of the monastic intensity of especially Puritan laity.

practices, but this sort of intensity may seem more unusual among the Reformed.¹⁵⁷ However, not every one was able to endure this intensity and the ascetical demands of Puritanism. Therefore, it is no surprise that a major backlash arose from these excessive devotional demands and expectations. Antinomianism that grew with increasing strength during the 1620s was particularly resistant to these demands since they believed Christ had already accomplished everything for them.¹⁵⁸ While this is an important development in the history of Puritanism time does not permit further examination of it.¹⁵⁹

A great deal can be learned about Ambrose's understanding of contemplative language and heavenly meditation by examining two passages. First, he affirms, "[w]hat is the happinesse of a glorified Saint, but that he is alwayes under the line of love, ever in the contemplation of, and converse with God."¹⁶⁰ Second, he seeks to stir up the importance of this attitude and practice when he declares, "[g]et we into our hearts an habit of more heavenly-mindednesse, by much exercise, and intercourse, and acquaintance with God, by often contemplation, and foretaste of the sweetnesse, glory, and eternity of those Mansions above."¹⁶¹ In parsing these two passages he highlights the relational nature of being with God in contemplation. God's love is the umbrella under which this occurs. But human love is also closely related and it creates "a certain close walking with God, [that has] been long exercised in a

¹⁵⁷ See Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed*, 430, 530.

¹⁵⁸ Bozeman, *Precisianist Strain*, 184, 193, 195, 200, 202, 208-9.

¹⁵⁹ On Antinomianism see Bozeman, *Precisianist Strain*; Como, *Blown by the Spirit*; Dewey Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 113-22; and Liu, *Towards an Evangelical Spirituality*, 43-68.

¹⁶⁰ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 34.

¹⁶¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 55.

Christian course, [and has] often entertained Christ Jesus at Supper in their hearts.”¹⁶²

Additionally Ambrose makes a direct connection between heavenly-mindedness and contemplation reflective of other Puritans. He asserts that contemplation provides a preview of heaven in offering a “foretaste of the sweetnesse, glory, and eternity of those Mansions above.” Elsewhere Ambrose more specifically soars with the language of love with echoes of Song of Songs that is reflective of Bernard as he pleads for Jesus to lift his soul to heaven with his rapturous love:

O sweet Jesu, touch our souls with thy spirit... give us the flagons of the new wine of the Kingdom, which may lift up our souls above our selves in our loves, ... and by an heavenly excess may be transported into an heavenly love, that we may imbrace Christ, ... O let us desire union with thee.... O burn and consume whatsoever would grow one with our souls besides thee; O let the fire of thy spirit so wholly turn our soules into a spiritual fire.¹⁶³

Significantly Ambrose also includes the importance of the Holy Spirit in this process of spiritual marriage.

These above references also emphasize the importance of repetition. One is most likely to experience the gift of contemplation through cultivating the regular “habit of more heavenly-mindednesse, by much exercise, and intercourse” with the Triune God.¹⁶⁴ In connection with this reminder of frequent converse with God Ambrose adds two related principles regarding time. First, he cautions his readers “[n]o time can be prescribed to all men; for neither is God bound to hours, neither doth the contrary disposition of men agree in one choice of opportunities.” Here he refers to Isaac’s practice recorded in Genesis 24:63. The most critical factor for determining the best time is “when we find our spirits most active and fit for

¹⁶² Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 225, cf. 402 the Lord’s Supper “makes the soul heavenly-minded.”

¹⁶³ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 465, cf. 356, 53 for the importance of love in contemplation.

¹⁶⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 55.

contemplation.”¹⁶⁵ Second, beyond the wisdom of paying attention to a person’s individual temperament Ambrose declares, “prosperity is the fittest season for heavenly contemplation, the less troubles lies upon our estate, the more liberty we have to think of heavenly things.”¹⁶⁶ While that may be true, Ambrose and his fellow nonconformists often found themselves at the opposite end of prosperity for pursuing their spiritual practices. Moreover, the broader context for this statement is the Life of Faith section and in the Saints Suffering section in which he asserts “[l]et us by faith realize the glorious things of heaven to us.”¹⁶⁷ This comment regarding prosperity sounds very elitist and suggests that a wealthy person has a distinct advantage over the poor laborer. However, elsewhere when Ambrose is speaking about the wisdom of relationships within the Christian community counsels that one should not neglect the insights of obscure people because “heavenly mindednesse may be now and then found out and discovered in plain people, that have plain carriage and plain speech.”¹⁶⁸ Finally, while the benefits of contemplation and heavenly-mindedness will be explored later in this chapter clearly the “foretaste of the sweetnesse, glory and eternity” of heaven is one of them.

Contemplation in *Looking Unto Jesus*

Ambrose confesses his motivation for writing *Looking Unto Jesus* was gratitude for recovering from a serious illness in 1653.¹⁶⁹ This serves as a good reminder that gratitude and love are strongly connected with contemplation. Structurally *Looking Unto Jesus* is based upon the life of Christ divided into nine

¹⁶⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 217.

¹⁶⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 285.

¹⁶⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 550, cf. 285.

¹⁶⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 337.

¹⁶⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, To the Reader, [1].

periods ranging from his heavenly existence before his birth to the second coming. Each of these nine categories begins with the biblical foundation, or laying down the doctrine for that aspect of Jesus' life, followed by nine movements of increasing intensity of looking at Jesus intended to stir up the affections. The nine ways of looking consist of knowing, considering, desiring, hoping, believing, loving, joying¹⁷⁰, calling, and conforming to that aspect of Jesus' life. This pattern is once again reflective of the structure of a Puritan sermon and meditation that follows Bernard's practice of beginning with the intellect and moving to the affections.¹⁷¹

Some scholars have asserted that the Puritans did not write about the humanity of Christ and more specifically his passion, as was common among Roman Catholic authors.¹⁷² Charles Herle's *Contemplations and Devotions on the Severall Passages of Our Blessed Saviours Death and Passion* is the exception, though he specifically asserts his motivation for publishing this was to counter the rather unusual criticism of Roman Catholics that Puritans "spend all [their] devotion on the Pulpit, and keeps none for the Closet."¹⁷³ Ambrose specifically references Herle's work in *Looking unto Jesus*.¹⁷⁴ Horton Davies observes that while Puritans typically eschewed meditation on Christ's humanity and passion those writers of mystical persuasion

¹⁷⁰ While "joying" is not a standard English word Ambrose employs it throughout *Looking Unto Jesus*.

¹⁷¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 222.

¹⁷² Martz, *Poetry of Meditation*, 163-4 and Kaufmann, *Pilgrim's Progress in Puritan Meditation*, 126.

¹⁷³ Herle, *Contemplations on Our Blessed Saviours*, Epistle Dedication, [6]. Green lists a number of other Puritan works that addressed Jesus as Saviour and Exemplar, including Perkins, Preston, Reynolds, Thomas Hooker, and Thomas Goodwin. *Print and Protestantism*, 322-5.

¹⁷⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 612. cf. *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 183 The name is unclear, but the titles match.

tended to conflate the distinction between Roman Catholic and Puritan meditation.¹⁷⁵ Further, Wakefield interestingly suggests there are some parallels between *Looking Unto Jesus* and Bishop Guevara's *Mount Calvary*, though Ambrose "meditates upon the whole work of Christ from Creation to the last day, and thus sets Calvary in its context of the universal purpose of God in Christ."¹⁷⁶ John Flavel indicates that Ambrose had addressed the subject of meditating on Jesus and "done worthily" and provided guidance for his own work.¹⁷⁷ While Flavel does not follow the structure of Ambrose, especially in his detailed sections on stirring up the affections, he does cover the same topics beginning with Christ's pre-existence and concluding with his final judgment.

Ambrose devotes slightly less than half of the work to the nine affective categories of looking, included knowing, considering, desiring, hoping, believing, loving, joying, calling, and conforming to Jesus' life. One wonders about the origin of these nine ways of gazing at Jesus. One pattern that reflects some similarity is Rutherford's *Christ Dying* which Ambrose quotes in his introduction declaring it is, "[a]n act of living in Christ, and on Christ, in the acts of seeing, enjoying, embracing, loving, resting on him, is that noone-day divinity, and theology of beatifical vision."¹⁷⁸ Thomas Hooker, writing nine years earlier, offers another pattern that reflects even greater similarity in his discussion of how the soul grows in union with Christ asserting, "the soule settles itselfe upon Christ, hoping, expecting, longing, desiring,

¹⁷⁵ Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, 2:88. Davies lists Rous, Thomas Goodwin, and Peter Sterry as Puritans possessing mystical tendencies.

¹⁷⁶ Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, 95-6.

¹⁷⁷ Flavel, *Fountain of Life*, 23, 272.

¹⁷⁸ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, To the Reader, [3]. The reference is Rutherford, *Christ Dying*, To the Reader, [11].

loving, embracing.”¹⁷⁹ While there is some overlap between both of these lists it is difficult to gauge their impact upon Ambrose’s schema. Meanwhile, Chan claims that knowing and considering relate to the intellect, desiring, hoping, believing, loving, and joying are affections, and calling and conforming pertain to the will.¹⁸⁰ While there is some truth to his assessment it is overly simplistic. For example, considering, which is “consideration” is really a combination of the intellect and affections.¹⁸¹ Further according to Ambrose believing also has a strong component of consideration to it.¹⁸²

The title for this thesis is taken from Ambrose’s definition of contemplation. Early in *Looking Unto Jesus* he declares, “contemplation is soul-recreation, & recreation is kept up by variety.”¹⁸³ However this wonderful image was not original to him but borrowed from Nicholas Lockyer’s commentary on Colossians 1:16.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, understanding the nature of recreation in the seventeenth-century can expand one’s awareness of this term as a definition for contemplation.¹⁸⁵ While many people think of the Puritans as rigid and joyless this was certainly not an accurate picture for all. Downname provides a detailed treatment of recreation in his massive treatise on godliness. The introductory heading provides a clear summary of his purpose “[r]ecreation, which are not onely lawfull, but also profitable and necessary, if wee bee exercised in them according to Gods Word.” He reminds his readers of Jesus’ example, and since he rested “to refresh himselfe and repaire his strength”

¹⁷⁹ Hooker, *Soules Exaltation*, 5.

¹⁸⁰ Chan, “Puritan Meditative Tradition,” 183.

¹⁸¹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 88, 319, etc.

¹⁸² Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 225-9, 329.

¹⁸³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 21.

¹⁸⁴ Lockyer *England Faithfully Watcht*, 87. cf. Ranew, *Solitude Improved*, 144.

¹⁸⁵ For a good summary of the understanding of recreation in early modern England see McKay, “For Refreshment and Preserving Health.”

others must also and that the purpose for resting is to refresh their bodies and souls so that they “may more cheerfully return to our labors.”¹⁸⁶ But his most interesting assertion is that the “exercise of contemplation... seemeth to have been one of *Solomons* recreations in his best times.”¹⁸⁷ Downname also provides detailed guidelines for the cautious use of recreation so as not to misuse or abuse it. He warns his readers “that wee use them [i.e. the recreations] so, as they may refresh the body, but not pamper the flesh.”¹⁸⁸ While it is difficult to understand the specific nuances that Ambrose had when he used Lockyer’s image it is certainly possible that he perceived it similarly to Downname, especially since he was one of the experimental writers Ambrose endorsed and encouraged others to read. Shortly it will be clear that Ambrose’s development of contemplation is a recreation that refreshes the soul.

Again Ambrose draws from Lockyer declaring “*an holy soul can not tyre it self in the contemplation of Jesus*” and continues in his own words, “how much lesse can it tyre it selfe in *looking unto Jesus*, which is far more comprehensive than contemplating of Jesus.”¹⁸⁹ This is a very important distinction for Ambrose, as he equates looking unto Jesus with the “[a]rt of Christ-contemplation.”¹⁹⁰ It is more comprehensive because there is “more content in contemplating Christ” than in the regular process of contemplating some aspect of Jesus.¹⁹¹ Therefore, in looking unto Jesus a person is actually expanding the potential for subject matter that can be

¹⁸⁶ Downname, *Guide to Godlynesse*, 262-3.

¹⁸⁷ Downname, *Guide to Godlynesse*, 266.

¹⁸⁸ Downname, *Guide to Godlynesse*, 269-79. Quotation at 271. Bolton’s attitude is more restrictive and focuses on the shortness of time and the costly nature of recreation. *Comfortable Walking with God*, 154-180.

¹⁸⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, To the Reader, [4], 318. cf. Lockyer, *England Faithfully Watcht*, 87.

¹⁹⁰ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 42.

¹⁹¹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 45.

contemplated since Ambrose takes readers through a complete cycle from the time before Jesus' birth until the final judgment. Ambrose's strong emphasis upon looking unto Jesus as a synonym for contemplation provides another very critical insight. For Ambrose and the Puritans, contemplation had a strong relational dimension that was directed toward a specific person, Jesus or God rather than some abstract truth. This is very significant for their understanding of spiritual marriage. People relate to Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God. Robert Webber, cognizant of that distinction, asserts that during the later medieval period "[s]pirituality, which was once a contemplation of God's saving acts, now contemplated the self and the interior life."¹⁹² Ambrose and his fellow Puritans decidedly altered this focus in their contemplation since the only appropriate response to God's love was to love God in return. However, before proceeding further it must be acknowledged that Ambrose, like many other spiritual writers, did not always use the term contemplation consistently. There are some occasions when his language suggests more of the sense to think or ponder than a mystical gazing or intense loving focus upon some aspect of God or God's creation.¹⁹³

Ambrose reflects Calvin's previously mentioned emphasis on Jesus' Ascension and heavenly-mindedness. Accordingly "what is heaven but to be with Christ" and "what is this communion with Christ, but very heaven aforehand."¹⁹⁴ Once a person's betrothal to Jesus in spiritual marriage was sealed that person would hunger and desire a deepening sense of being in a growing union and communion with Jesus and to taste the joys of heaven more fully until the fullness in heaven was

¹⁹² Webber, *Divine Embrace*, 51.

¹⁹³ See for example Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 506 (incorrectly numbered 514), 509 (incorrectly numbered 517).

¹⁹⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1161 (incorrectly numbered 1061), 40.

reached. Contemplation was a means of providing a glimpse of heaven. Ambrose asserts the obvious reason for hungering for heaven, “[t]hat we have our share in heaven with him; he went not up as a single person, but virtually, or mystically he carried up all the Elect with him into glory.”¹⁹⁵ He maintains, “[c]onsider of Christ’s ascension into heaven... what shall he ascend, and shall not we in our contemplations follow after him? gaze O my soul on this wonderful object.”¹⁹⁶ This experience awaits its consummation in heaven. Quoting Bernard, Ambrose declares, “[c]onsider that *looking unto Jesus* is the work of heaven; *it is begun in this life* (saith Bernard) *but it is perfected in that life to come*; not onely Angels, but the Saints in glory do ever behold the face of God and Christ.”¹⁹⁷ Significantly Ambrose directly connects contemplation with meditating on heaven. Earlier he bemoans that the inconsistency of this practice allows some to “get up into heaven to see their Jesus but it is not daily.”¹⁹⁸ Therefore, he encourages his readers to make this a daily practice and “habituate your selves to such contemplations as in the next [life] ... O tie your souls in heavenly galleries, have you eyes continually set on Christ.”¹⁹⁹ Even more dramatically he challenges his readers, Jesus “would have us to be still arising, ascending, and mounting up in divine contemplation to his Majesty.... If Christ be in heaven, where should we be but in heaven with him? ... Oh that every morning, and every evening, at least, our hearts would arise, ascend, and go to Christ in heaven.”²⁰⁰

Further, it is necessary to recognize the central role of the Holy Spirit in heavenly

¹⁹⁵ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 829 (incorrectly numbered 929)-30, cf. 951.

¹⁹⁶ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 871, cf. 819-924 for Ambrose’s treatment of Jesus’ Ascension.

¹⁹⁷ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 46.

¹⁹⁸ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 28. cf. 29.

¹⁹⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 30. Ambrose directly connects heavenly-mindedness and contemplation in the example of “holy Mr. *Ward*”. *Looking Unto Jesus*, 584. (incorrectly numbered 594). Ranew speaks of “habitual heavenly-mindedness.” *Solitude Improved*, 227-30.

²⁰⁰ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1152.

meditation. Previously the Holy Spirit's essential responsibility for creating the bond of spiritual marriage was noted. Now the Spirit's role is further reinforced as Ambrose declares "it is the Spirit of God" who "make[s] us heavenly minded" and "lifts up our souls towards heaven."²⁰¹

Returning to Jesus' Ascension it becomes clear that this event provided his early disciples with important lessons in the art of looking or beholding. This accounts for Ambrose's emphasis on the importance of "*looking off*" the world and its many distractions so that a person could be "*looking on*" Jesus.²⁰² It is essential to make this choice "[b]ecause we cannot look fixedly on Christ, and such things together, and at once; the eye cannot look upwards and downwards, at once in a direct line; we cannot seriously minde heaven and earth in one thought."²⁰³ Further, he instructs his auditors that there are two ways of looking, ocular or mental "or the inward eye" and further, mental looking can be "either notional and theoretical; or practical and experimental."²⁰⁴ The entire focus of *Looking Unto Jesus* is experimental as it "stirs up the affections."²⁰⁵ Ambrose bemoans the soul's meager interest in following Jesus' example when he writes "[c]onsider that Christ looked off heaven and heavenly things for you, how much more should you look off the earth and earthly things, the world and worldly things for him."²⁰⁶

Ambrose employs a triad of words to capture the depth of this *visio Dei*, looking, beholding, and gazing. Jesus is the object of focus in every situation.

²⁰¹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 846.

²⁰² Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 5.

²⁰³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 10.

²⁰⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 18-9.

²⁰⁵ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 22-3.

²⁰⁶ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 14.

Previously the importance of the object of contemplation was mentioned. Ambrose clarifies the reason for this discerning focus since a person becomes what he or she gazes upon, “[l]ooking to Jesus contains this, and is the cause of this; the sight of God will make us like to God; and the sight of Christ will make us like to Christ.”²⁰⁷ He does not tire repeating this essential principle and as he writes of Jesus’ death he again challenges his readers, “this very *look* may work on us to change us, and transforme us into the very image of Jesus Christ.”²⁰⁸ Further, he importantly connects spiritual marriage with contemplative looking, “and all we have is by marriage with Jesus Christ; Christ by his union hath all good things without measure... if by looking on Christ we come to this likeness, to be one with Jesus Christ, Oh what a privilege is this!”²⁰⁹ Drawing upon on 2 Corinthians 3:18 he declares, “[l]et us look on Christ till we are like Christ... come now let us behold this glory of Christ till we are changed in some high measure into the same glory with Christ.”²¹⁰ Ambrose describes glory as the very “essence of God” and that God’s nature is a “glorious essence which is most Majestical.”²¹¹ Further, God is full of “glory, beauty and excellency.”²¹² The visual nature of glory has both intensity and power and can vary so as not to overwhelm humanity as well as to transform those who look upon the radiant beauty of God. Jesus, as God’s Son, reflects the pure brilliance and radiance of God and those who look unto Jesus will participate in that same glory, for their “life begun in grace [will be] ending in eternal glory.”²¹³

²⁰⁷ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 349, cf. 352. 489.

²⁰⁸ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 679.

²⁰⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 355.

²¹⁰ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1157.

²¹¹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 92.

²¹² Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 242.

²¹³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 356, cf. 1089-1103 for Ambrose’s most sustained treatment of Jesus’ glory.

The next category of contemplative vision is beholding. 2 Corinthians 3:18 which was occasionally connected with the examples of looking at Jesus now becomes foundational for beholding. Both this text and the principle of beholding Christ were highly significant for Bernard as well, though Ambrose does not quote him directly in this regard.²¹⁴ Thomas White likewise defines contemplation as “beholding of the face of God.”²¹⁵ Ambrose also believes that “contemplative faith behold[s] Christ.”²¹⁶ He combines the themes of imitation and beholding when he asserts “we must fix our eyes on Jesus for our imitation ... *We are changed by beholding* ... how should this but stirre up my soule to be like Jesus Christ?”²¹⁷ Again the importance of the transforming sight of Jesus’ glory becomes evident as Ambrose refers to 2 Corinthians 3:18 and asserts, “[t]he very beholding of Christ hath a mighty conforming and assimilating vertue to leave the impressions of glory upon our spirits.”²¹⁸ Once again in one of the conforming sections Ambrose invites his readers to focus their “spiritual eyes” on Jesus so that they might be transformed into his image:

Let us look fixedly on Jesus Christ, let us keep our spiritual eyes still on the patterne, untill we feel our selves conforming to it.... Indeed the manner of this working may be secret, and insensible, yet if we follow on, we shall feele it in the issue; the beholding of Christ is a powerful beholding; there is a changing, transforming vertue goes of Christ... Sight works upon the imagination in bruit creatures... and imagination work[s] a real change in nature.²¹⁹

This reinforces the general principle that people are changed by beholding the object upon which they contemplate. Christ’s glory, the glory of heaven is so radiant and

²¹⁴ See for example Bernard, *SCC* 12.11; 24.5; 25.5; 36.6; 57.11; 62.5, 7; 67.8; 69.7.

²¹⁵ White, *Method of Divine Meditation*, 4.

²¹⁶ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 23.

²¹⁷ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 121. cf. McGee, “Conversion and Imitation of Christ,” 28-33 for the Puritan understanding of imitation of Christ.

²¹⁸ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 815-6.

²¹⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 526. Chan describes this specific passage as an example of “mystical” beholding. “Puritan Meditative Tradition,” 198-9.

overwhelming that it transforms a person more into the likeness of Jesus. Therefore, he assures his readers, “so God receives none to contemplate his face, but he transformes them into his own likeness by the irradiation of his light, and Christ hath none that dive into these depths of his glorious and blessed incarnation, but they carry along with them sweet impressions of an abiding and transforming nature.”²²⁰

Gazing is the final word used by Ambrose and receives little attention in comparison with looking and beholding. However, Ambrose reinforces the significance of the Ascension declaring, “what shall he ascend, and shall not we in our contemplations follow after him? gaze O my soul on this wonderful object, thou needest not feare any check from God.”²²¹ According to Ambrose the beatific vision was the “glorious sight of Christ as God.”²²² The Puritans and most spiritual writers before them recognized that contemplation could anticipate but never fully realize the beatific vision until a person reached heaven.²²³ Saint Paul was the exception briefly experiencing this during his rapture into heaven recorded in 2 Corinthians 12:2.²²⁴ Further this experience of seeing God face to face was sometimes referred to as “the very top of heaven.”²²⁵ In the following illustration Ambrose weaves the beatific vision and the themes of both beholding and gazing together to describe Christ’s holiness, “the Saints in glory now *see the face of Christ*; ... they do nothing else but stare, and gaze, and behold his face for ages, and yet they are never satisfied with

²²⁰ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 350, cf. 526, 917 for other examples of transformation that are not directly connected with 2 Cor 3:18.

²²¹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 871-2.

²²² Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1096, cf. 1092-103, 1111-3 and *Media* (1657), 259-60 for a sustained treatment on this topic.

²²³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 481 and Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 125, 265-6.

²²⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1093-4.

²²⁵ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1095.

beholding; suppose they could weare out their eyes at the eye-holes in beholding Christ, they should still desire to see more. O the lovelinesse of Christ ravishes the souls of the glorified.”²²⁶ Therefore, while contemplative gazing provides both a brief glimpse of God’s presence and a desire to see God more fully while a person is on earth that fullness is reserved for heaven.²²⁷

Contemplation in the Other Writings of Isaac Ambrose

There are three remaining works of Ambrose. *Redeeming the Time* and the twin 1662 works *War with Devils* and *Communion with Angels*. In *Redeeming the Time* Ambrose mentions that Lady Margaret had books for contemplation without identifying them. Further, he mentioned a primary way for redeeming the time was to exercise “ejaculatory Duties, as suddenly to look up to Heaven.”²²⁸ In *War with Devils* Ambrose addresses his epistolary dedication to Justice Orlando Bridgman. He praises Bridgman for his heavenly-mindedness and once again equates the “Duty of looking unto Jesus” with contemplation.²²⁹ Chapter 3 demonstrated that one of the greatest barriers to contemplation was the devil’s temptation. The best antidote to counter this was to “have your conversation in heaven, be much in meditation of those surpassing joys, so will you frustrate Satans hopes, and escape the worlds intanglements or snares.”²³⁰ Closely related to the devil’s temptations are worldly anxieties and cares. Therefore, Ambrose maintains that “heavenly-minded Christian[s]” should “pray also for heavenly-mindedness” to protect them from being

²²⁶ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 481.

²²⁷ Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 203, 214-7 and *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1096-9 for Ambrose on the beatific vision.

²²⁸ Ambrose, *Redeeming the Time*, 28, 19.

²²⁹ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, Epistle Dedication, [1, 3].

²³⁰ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 111-2.

“disquieted with worldly troubles.”²³¹ This introduces the benefits of contemplation that will shortly be examined. There are surprisingly few references to contemplation in *Communion with Angels* where one might expect to find a greater emphasis upon heavenly-mindedness. However, that is not Ambrose’s focus. Rather this is his most controversial work and examines the origin and nature of the angels’ ministry and especially how they might function across the person’s lifespan including declaring God’s mind and will, protecting a person from the devil’s temptations, restoring people back to health, encouraging souls, and finally welcoming the saints into heaven. One interesting use of the term comes in his description of Joseph Hall as “the contemplative Bishop.”²³²

Benefits and Effects of Contemplation

Early in *Looking Unto Jesus* Ambrose provides two lists of motives, one of wants, indicating what a person would lose by neglecting to look at Jesus and a second positive list based upon the benefits gained by looking unto Jesus.²³³ In the second category he states, “[h]ere is a Catalogue, an Inventory of a Christians riches; have Christ and have all; ... If Christ be yours ... God is yours, the Father is yours, the Son is yours, the Spirit is yours, all promises are yours, for in Christ they are all made, and for him they shall be performed.”²³⁴ Not all of these benefits are of equal weight but the primary effects of contemplation and heavenly-mindedness according to Ambrose are contemplative understanding and love, protection from temptation and danger, growing intimacy with Jesus in spiritual marriage, being transformed into

²³¹ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 146.

²³² Ambrose, *Communion with Angels*, 290. Earlier Ambrose referred to one of Joseph Hall’s writings as “a sweet contemplation of an holy Divine.” *Looking Unto Jesus*, 386.

²³³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 31-46.

²³⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 39.

Christ's likeness, and a deepening and expanding sense of enjoyment of God. First, contemplation provides a person with a new sense of understanding and love. The very structure of *Looking Unto Jesus* follows this pattern, first the intellect or understanding is emphasized and next the affections, in which love occupies a central role. Ambrose declares that by looking at Jesus "we gaine more, and more knowledge of Christ" and further that this helps us to "understand those great mysteries of grace." He further clarifies that this type of contemplative knowledge is "practical and experimental."²³⁵ Additionally as a person meditates upon Christ considering the relationship of the "bride in the bridegroom" they experience a "flaming, burning love to Christ."²³⁶ In return "Christ gives a sincere and inward love of himself unto their hearts."²³⁷ With even greater integration Ambrose connects these two benefits of contemplation in his stirring meditation of a soul's love to Christ, "when sweetly we repose our selves in the lap of our Saviour with content unspeakable, and full of glory, it proceeds from the last act of faith, wherby we are actually perswaded by those welcome whispers of the Spirit of adoption, that certainly Christ is our Saviour, and that our debts are cancelled to the very last mite."²³⁸

A second benefit of heavenly-mindedness is strength to combat suffering and protection from temptations. Ambrose alerts his readers that, "*looking on Jesus* will strengthen patience under the crosse of Christ."²³⁹ Further, he encourages others to "pray also for heavenly-mindedness, and thou wilt not be disquieted with worldly

²³⁵ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 33.

²³⁶ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 34.

²³⁷ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 37.

²³⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 224.

²³⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 42.

troubles.”²⁴⁰ Ambrose did not devote as much attention to this as some of the other effects of contemplation, but Baxter did declaring, “a heavenly mind is exceedingly fortified against temptations, because the affections are so thoroughly prepossessed with the high delights of another world.”²⁴¹ The remaining three benefits all figure more prominently in Ambrose’s understanding of contemplation and heavenly-mindedness.

Third, the person who intentionally meditates and contemplates on Jesus will deepen his or her intimacy of spiritual marriage with him. One of the more significant motives is that “this communion with Christ, [is] but very heaven aforehand.” And “it’s an happy thing to have Christ dwell in our hearts, and for us to lodge in Christs bosome! Oh its an happy thing to maintaine a reciprocal communication of affairs betwixt Christ and our souls!”²⁴² Ambrose uses the same intimate imagery of resting in Christ’s bosom in his meditation of the soul’s love to Christ. His desired goal for this meditation is for “the souls rest or reposal of it selfe in the bosome of Christ, with content unspeakable and glorious.”²⁴³ Further, since Christ “their Husband is in heaven” this motivates those who are in communion with Christ to continually seek to be in conversation with him.²⁴⁴ Ambrose elaborates on the description as well as the means of cultivating this heavenly conversation, “so in our conversings with Christ there is a communion, or mutual acting of the soul upon Christ, and of Christ upon the soul; we let out our hearts to Christ, and he lets out his

²⁴⁰ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 146, cf. 111-2.

²⁴¹ Baxter, *Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 269, cf. 268-70.

²⁴² Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 40, cf. 1004.

²⁴³ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 224, cf. 272.

²⁴⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 920.

heart to us.”²⁴⁵ He also provides a number of suggestions of how to maintain heavenly conversations including taking advantage of heavenly exercises which includes Scripture and prayer, being cautious to avoid performing spiritual practices by mere formality, and paying attention to the Holy Spirit.²⁴⁶ Since “it is the Spirit of God that must be as the chariot of *Elijah*” to guide individuals in heavenly-mindedness Ambrose challenges his readers to “observe the drawings, and movings, and mindings of the Spirit.”²⁴⁷

A fourth benefit of contemplation is being transformed into Christ’s likeness. Contemplation is a looking, beholding, and gazing upon an object in a sustained loving and grateful manner. When this is directed towards Jesus as the object a person is transformed more and more into Christ’s likeness. Earlier it was noticed how frequently Ambrose connects this with Saint Paul’s declaration in 2 Corinthians 3:18 and the formative nature of God’s glory. Of the nine ways of looking at Jesus, the conforming sections were most likely to be saturated with contemplative language or images. As Ambrose develops this in the conforming to Jesus in his incarnation section he significantly frames this within the context of spiritual marriage, “all we have is by marriage with Jesus Christ; ... if by looking on Christ, we come to this likeness, to be one with Jesus Christ.”²⁴⁸ Previously Ambrose’s frequent reliance upon the Holy Spirit was mentioned. In drawing a parallel between Mary, the mother of Jesus, and those who seek to look unto Jesus Ambrose declares, “look we to this conformity, that as Christ was conceived in *Mary* by the holy Ghost, so, that Christ be

²⁴⁵ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 918.

²⁴⁶ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 921-4.

²⁴⁷ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 924.

²⁴⁸ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 355, cf. 354, 356.

conceived in us, in a spiritual sense by the same holy Ghost.”²⁴⁹ Realizing that conception is only the beginning Ambrose asserts that “formation follows conception” and further that a “life begun in grace [will be] ending in eternal glory.”²⁵⁰ Therefore, the final outcome of looking to Jesus is that “the sight of God will make us like to God; and the sight of Christ will make us like to Christ.”²⁵¹ Further, the full benefit of the beatific vision is that a person reclaims his or her original image and likeness of Christ.

Fifth, heavenly-mindedness yields a growing sense of enjoyment and delight in God and Jesus. Once a person reaches heaven they experience a “complete enjoyment of God.”²⁵² While the fullness of fruition is reserved for heaven individuals are able to experience a proleptic prelude of that joy on earth. Every opportunity of contemplation affords the individual who has been married to Jesus as Bridegroom to taste again the heavenly joy that awaits that consummation of marriage with Christ in heaven. The Holy Spirit once again fulfills a significant ministry towards that end in providing “a drop of heavens joy” into the hearts of those who follow Jesus.²⁵³ Further, a person may already have “tasted of the joyes of heaven in prayer” in their spiritual practices.²⁵⁴ Closely connected with this sense of enjoyment of God is the resulting expression that contemplation is “to worship him in his ascension up into heaven; O admire and adore him!”²⁵⁵ Admiration and adoration is a proper response to experiencing the joyful presence of Jesus.

²⁴⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 351.

²⁵⁰ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 356.

²⁵¹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 349.

²⁵² Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1084, cf. 1085-8 and *Media* (1657), 260-3.

²⁵³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 876, cf. 914-5.

²⁵⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 480.

²⁵⁵ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 872.

While Ambrose does not employ the common medieval distinction between Mary and Martha and balancing the contemplative and active dimensions of life he and his fellow Puritans certainly understood the importance of this.²⁵⁶ In chapter 3 Ambrose spoke of the proper balance of solitude that always was connected with returning and engagement with the world. Previously Ambrose's funeral sermon for Lady Margaret Houghton was mentioned and the importance of balancing contemplative practices and active living within the world.²⁵⁷

Conclusion

In the previous chapter his friends and numerous scholars introduced Isaac Ambrose as a contemplative. Both of these chapters have confirmed beyond a doubt the contemplative nature of this Lancashire divine. His writings and experience reflect a deeply focused beholding of Jesus. His intentional looking off of the world so that he can look unto Jesus is motivated by love and gratitude. A careful review of his usage of contemplation and heavenly meditation reveals no apparent change or development in his understanding. His two largest works of *Media* and *Looking Unto Jesus* are mystical texts in the best sense of the word and came in the middle of his life. These two works reveal a much richer and more robust understanding than his earlier works of *Prima* and *Ultima*. Further, his last two works, *War with Devils* and *Communion with Angels*, completed just two years before his death, indicate a marked reduction of contemplative themes. However, that should not suggest that contemplation became less important for him. Rather it appears that the degree of contemplation was directly related to the topic and texture of his works. Therefore, the focus of *Media* on spiritual duties and *Looking Unto Jesus*, which was essentially

²⁵⁶ Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, xiii, 280. cf. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 24.

²⁵⁷ Ambrose, *Redeeming the Time*, 19.

a guide to contemplation, were more likely to invite contemplative practices and experiences than his other works. Ambrose's usage of imagination was another significant component in his teaching on contemplation and heavenly meditation. While some scholars have detected an Ignatian influence, the style of Granada appears far more significant. However, Ambrose's consistent employment of spiritual marriage and the bridal language of Song of Songs soar much higher in him than Granada. Further, Ambrose's deep appreciation for Bernard is evident. He quotes him accurately and never refers to him disapprovingly. Moreover, Ambrose followed the nascent importance of the Ascension and heavenly meditation of Calvin and expanded its use throughout his works.

Relative to other Puritans, Ambrose exhibits a rich expression of contemplative-mystical piety. While the sampling of Puritans read in this chapter is limited he is far more focused on heaven than Downname. Unlike Baxter who is frequently acknowledged because of the popularity of his *Saints' Everlasting Rest*, Ambrose devotes more attention to the actual process and enjoyment of contemplation than Baxter's preoccupation of focusing on the hindrances to heavenly meditation. Baxter appears to favor more of the intellect while Ambrose seems to emphasize more the affections. Further, while Ambrose drew heavily from Bishop Hall his writings were more sustained and deeper in contemplative awareness and experience than the Bishop. Significantly Ambrose was writing before the Restoration hence his contemplative nature was not a retreat from the increased persecution that nonconformists later faced. Simon Chan concludes his assessment of Ambrose by asserting he introduced two new features into Puritan meditation: "the sustained and detailed reflection on the life of Christ outside the sacramental context"

and “that these reflections are ... often [pursued] for their alleged ability to transform the soul as it engages imaginatively in the events of Christ’s life.”²⁵⁸ However, it was discovered that Charles Herle wrote on Christ’s life before Ambrose, so Chan’s first conclusion is in need of revision, though his second one is correct according to my reading. One additional theme that has appeared at various places throughout the last chapter is the great importance of the Holy Spirit in uniting believers with Jesus in spiritual marriage and the meditative practices that can prepare a person for contemplative experiences to deepen that spiritual marriage.

The next chapter will continue to examine contemplative experiences. However, the focus will be greatly sharpened to explore one aspect of the language of contemplation, which is rapture. Rapture is a significant expression and experience of the Puritan awareness of delight and enjoyment of God and while it may strike contemporary ears as being unusual it was definitely not to seventeenth-century Christians. The chapter will begin with a detailed study of Ambrose’s use of rapture that appeared ninety two times in his writings. His sources for his use of this term of delight as well as his understanding of desire, the causes and recipients of rapture as well as the dynamics of its operation on the soul will be examined. The chapter will conclude with a summary of Ambrose’s awareness of the benefits and effects of being ravished.

²⁵⁸ Chan, “Puritan Meditative Tradition,” 187.

Chapter 5

The Rhetoric of Ravishment: The Language of Delight and Enjoyment

This day the Lord cast one into a spiritual, heavenly, ravishing love trance; he tasted the goodness of God, the very sweetness of Christ, and was filled with the joys of the Spirit above measure. O it was a good day, a blessed fore-taste of Heaven, a love-token of Christ to the Soul, *a kisse of his mouth whose love is better then wine.*¹

The last chapter examined Isaac Ambrose's understanding of contemplation. It established that his awareness was consistent with those writers who had gone before him. Additionally, Ambrose was greatly indebted to the importance of Jesus' Ascension and recognized that heavenly meditation was synonymous with contemplation. Contemplation occupied a dominant place within his theology and experience and during his annual retreats in May he intentionally sought to cultivate a deepening awareness and sensitivity to the Trinity. These practices paralleled his development of spiritual duties that he presented to his readers in *Media*. Ambrose used the metaphor of "soul recreation" to describe contemplation in *Looking Unto Jesus*. He asserted that this looking at or beholding of Jesus had the ability to transform a person into Christ's likeness. Therefore, he encouraged his listeners to move contemplatively through a journey of nine movements of looking at Jesus that would guide them in experiencing the transforming presence of Jesus more fully and experientially. The importance of imagination in Ambrose as well as the benefits and effects of contemplation were also examined. Further, the contemplative life was situated within the framework of spiritual marriage. Contemplation or being heavenly-minded was a result of living in a vital union with Christ and its intentional

¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 183.

practice sought to deepen a person's experience of being in communion with Christ. This provides the connection with this present chapter. Spiritual marriage, which began on earth through betrothal, was only consummated in heaven. However, the believer received a foretaste of the joy and delight of that experience while still on earth.

Delight and enjoyment may appear to be unusual terms when speaking of the Puritans. However, as previously discovered, many of the commonly held perceptions regarding these seventeenth-century English reformers crumble when their writings are carefully read. Puritans were strong proponents of experimental piety. They were as interested in stirring their hearts as stretching their minds. In their yearning to experience God they drew upon the language of previous generations to express their desire and delight. Their vocabulary of enjoyment overflowed through the language of sweetness, various expressions of love, being swallowed up, and ravishment. Ravishment was a favorite term of Ambrose and appeared ninety two times in his writings and will shape the structure and content of this chapter. First, his definition and use of ravishment will be examined, that will lead to an exploration of the biblical and historical sources that guided his usage of this highly charged word. Next, his understanding of desire, the causes and recipients of ravishment including his own personal experiences of being ravished and the dynamics of its operation on the soul will be studied. The chapter will conclude with a summary of Ambrose's awareness of the benefits and effects of being ravished.

Definition and Use of Ravishment in the Writings of Isaac Ambrose

Ambrose provides his readers with a clear awareness of his usage of ravishment through two examples from *Looking unto Jesus*. Early in this work he articulates the power and necessity of ravishment to draw a person out from him or herself:

Therefore they were willed to come forth of their doores: even so, if we will behold the great King, Jesus Christ, in his most excellent glory (a sight able to satisfie the eye, and to ravish the heart) we must come out of our doors, we must come out of our selves, otherwise we cannot see his glory; we are in our selves shut up in a dark dungeon, and therefore we are called upon to come forth into the clear light of faith, and with the eyes of faith to behold in daily meditation the glory of Christ Jesus.²

Later as he is describing the practice of loving Jesus for his great work of salvation he writes, “[i]t pleased thee, my Lord, out of thy sweet ravishments of thy heavenly love, to say to thy poor Church, *turne away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me*; but oh let me say to thee, *turne thine eyes to me, that they may overcome me*; my Lord, *I would be thus ravished, I would be overcome; I would be thus out of my selfe, that I might be all in thee*.” Significantly this citation rightly recognizes that the bridegroom is the person who is being ravished by the bride in Canticles. However, Ambrose quickly reverses the relationship and begs the bridegroom to ravish him, as the bride. Immediately Ambrose adds this “is the language of true love to Christ.”³ Clearly for him ravishment is a term that expresses being overcome by God’s greater power that draws a person out from darkness and transforms that person’s sight so that he or she might perceive the glory of Jesus. There is also a reciprocal nature that lovingly responds to Christ for his great love and freedom first shared.

² Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 12.

³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 505 (incorrectly numbered 513).

Ambrose employed the negative use of ravish only once. In describing the struggles of Jacob in Genesis 34 he declares “after his first entry into his owne country, his wife Rachel dyes, his daughter Dinah is ravished, his sonne Reuben lyes with his concubine.”⁴ Obviously, ravish is used here in its destructive sense of rape or overpowering a person to harm or inflict pain upon her. This was the common definition found in seventeenth-century dictionaries. Thomas Blount’s entry is representative of this and declares that ravish, “signifies in our Law an unlawful taking away, either a woman or an heir in Ward: Sometime it is used also in one signification with Rape, (viz.) the violent deflouring a Woman.”⁵ However, in another seventeenth-century work, the spiritual meaning of ravish was conveyed through the term rapture and understood as, “a snatching away by violence; also an Ecstasie, or Transportment.”⁶ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the semantic range includes both the “mystical sense” to transport a soul and the destructive expression “to ravage, despoil, plunder.”⁷ Williams acknowledges the ambiguous nature and tension that while ravishment has “dangerous associations with rape or abduction” it also “expressed certain characteristics of ecstasy powerfully and effectively.”⁸ Thomas Vincent’s sermon on spiritual marriage reflects this same negative usage as he warns young virgins “when otherwise the Devil and Sin would ravish your Virgin affections.”⁹ However, it is critical to recognize that the devil and sin are violating the woman not God. Contemporary scholarship has made much of

⁴ Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 28.

⁵ Blount, *Glossographia*, n.p.; Cockeram, *English Dictionarie*, second part, n.p.; and Phillips, *New World of English Words*, n.p. also define ravish as rape. Cawdrey, *Table Alphabeticall*, renders ravish as “take away by force,” n.p. Wilson, *Christian Dictionarie* does not include ravish.

⁶ Phillips, *New World of English Words*, n.p. Phillips also has entries for transport and ecstasie.

⁷ *OED*, 13:235.

⁸ Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 201.

⁹ Vincent, *Christ the Best Husband*, 18.

the tension associated with this term. Accusations of God's violence as a rapist abound. John Donne's Holy Sonnet XIV "Batter my heart three-personed God" is often a lightning rod for much of this critique, and in particular his final line which reads, "[n]or ever chaste, except you ravish me."¹⁰ While unquestionably there is a degree of force exercised in ravishing or drawing the soul toward God, it does not resemble the destructive misuse of power and abusive control or violence that is inherent in rape. Moreover, this extravagant use of intense erotic imagery that was fairly typical among the Puritans¹¹ was a continuation of the practices of medieval saints and reflected the best of the contemplative-mystical tradition of historic Christian spirituality. Beyond this single example Ambrose understood ravishment as the experience of being overcome, carried away by joy, or transported into the presence of God. To be ravished is to be lifted up or out beyond oneself not by anything one does but as a gift from God. While there is a sense of being overpowered that requires surrender this should not occasion fear since it is motivated by God's love. Shortly this topic will be revisited in the consideration of the ambiguous nature of ravishment.

Biblical and Historical Sources of Ravishment in Isaac Ambrose

Ambrose employs both biblical as well as patristic and contemporary sources for his use of ravishment. Further, he utilizes the traditional vocabulary of desire and delight in his writings. This accounts for the absence of ravishment in Marius van

¹⁰ Barbara Lewalski is rather tame in her assertion that "Christ the Bridegroom of the soul is urged to become its ravisher or rapist." *Protestant Poetics*, 104. Much less restrained is Rambuss, *Closet Devotions*, 18, 50, 53-4, 68. Chapter 2 revealed his tendency to read homoerotic intentions into the language of ravishment. Barbara Newman, "Rereading Donne's Holy Sonnet 14" explores the linguistic and spiritual tension of Donne's usage of ravishment. cf. McCullough, "Ravished by Grace."

¹¹ Coffey, *Theology and British Revolutions*, 109.

Beek's detailed study of devotional literature in the Puritans. His focus was on new vocabulary, which among the Puritans included many variations on love language, rather than that which was already in common usage. Williams appears to miss van Beek's intent, which was to research only new terms originating within Puritanism.¹² The first source that Ambrose employed as any good Puritan would was Scripture and the Song of Songs which had long been the preeminent book for illustrating the spiritual life and imagery for growing in intimacy with Christ.¹³ While the *Geneva Bible* first published in 1560 continued to exert great influence throughout much of the first half and, in some situations, even later parts of the seventeenth-century, the *Authorized Version* or *King James Bible* became available in 1611.¹⁴ However, the Puritan usage of versions was extremely fluid and could often include a mixture of the Geneva and *Authorized Versions* and preachers trained in the original languages would occasionally translate their own passages. Another factor that contributed to this fluidity was the practice of some pastors to quote Scripture from memory.¹⁵ Ambrose used the *Authorized Version* as his translation of *leb* which is a *hapax logemena* in Song of Songs 4:9; "[t]hou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck." The annotations created by various ecclesiastical bodies further extend this definition. The *Dutch Annotations* based upon the original translation of the Synod of Dort renders this phrase from Canticles 4:9 as "[t]hou hast taken my heart from me" and

¹² Compare van Beek, *Inquiry into Puritan Vocabulary*, 5, 66, 71 with Williams, "Puritan Enjoyment of God," 209n213.

¹³ See McGinn, "With 'the Kisses of the Mouth'; Turner, *Eros and Allegory*; Coffey, "Letters by Samuel Rutherford," 104-5; and Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 28.

¹⁴ Danner reports that both Lancelot Andrewes and Joseph Hall used the *Geneva Bible* until at least 1624. "Later English Calvinists and Geneva Bible," 502. Betteridge asserts the same for John Bunyan who was writing forty years later. "Bitter Notes: Geneva Annotations," 59.

¹⁵ Gordis, *Opening Scripture*, 25-6.

then adds this note, “[o]r, *thou hast taken mine heart: or, hast ravished, or wounded mine heart.*”¹⁶ The *Westminster Annotations* based upon the *Authorized Version* declares that the word in the *LXX* conveys, “thou hast *excordiated*, or unhearted me; which is the language of great passion.”¹⁷

A further source of inspiration was Christian tradition. Ambrose quotes Jerome, “[h]e was fairer than the sons of men; his countenance carried in it an hidden veiled star---like brightness (saith Jerome) which being but a little revealed, it so ravished his Disciples hearts, that at the first sight thereof they left all, and followed him: and it so astonished his enemies, that they stumbled and fell to the ground.”¹⁸ Ambrose also mentions Gregory the Great. He does not quote directly any statement that uses the term ravishment from the “Doctor of Desire” but as Ambrose describes the benefits of Christ’s Ascension he declares, Christ’s “love was so great and vast, that for our sakes he moves up and down; this ravished the Spouse, *Behold he comes leaping upon the mountains, and skipping upon the hills*, Cant. 2:8. Gregory that measured his leaps, thus gives them; he first leaps from his Fathers mansion to his Mothers womb...”¹⁹

Chapters three and four revealed Ambrose’s deep appreciation for the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux.²⁰ In addressing the subject of spiritual duties Ambrose reminds his readers that it is easy to miss God’s presence if a person’s heart is “carnal

¹⁶ Haak, *Dutch Annotations*, n.p.

¹⁷ *Westminster Annotations*, 3:n.p. cf. Diodoti, *Geneva Annotations*, n.p.

¹⁸ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 273.

¹⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 905.

²⁰ For Bernard’s usage of ravishment see Petry, *Late Medieval Mysticism*, 51-4; Casey, *Athirst for God*, 227, 290-92; and Gilson, *Mystical Theology of Bernard*, 106-8.

and worldly.” Furthermore, even when a person does experience God these times are relatively brief. Here he quotes Bernard’s popular *rara hora brevis mora* (how rare the time and how brief the stay).²¹ Chapter 4 also indicated that Ambrose quotes Bernard when he speaks of contemplation. In describing deliberate meditation he cites another Latin reference from Bernard when he speaks of the two types of contemplations in relation to God, the mind and the affections.²² This reference will figure significantly later in the examination of the dynamics of ravishment in Ambrose.

Turning to Protestant sources Ambrose cites Caracciolus as an example of ravishment, “[o]h if men did not know what ravishing sweetness were in the ways of God, they could not but embrace them, *and esteem one dayes society with Jesus Christ* (as *Caracciolus* did) *better than all the gold in the world.*”²³ While Caracciolus was a convert to Calvinism, Ambrose does not quote any specific references to ravish from Calvin even though the word is not uncommon in him.²⁴ Another reference to ravishment was drawn from Patrick Forbes (1564-1635), bishop of Aberdeen. The specific citation is from his commentary on the Book of Revelation 14:3.²⁵ Ambrose declares that,

²¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 36. The reference is to Bernard, *SCC* 23.15 but with a slight variation, *rara hora et parva mora*. cf. *SCC* 85.13. John Owen attributes the identical phrase to Bernard. *Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 330 and *Glory of Christ*, 293. De Reuver reports that Bernard borrowed this phrase from John of Fécamp and that it was common among the Dutch Pietists. *Sweet Communion*, 53n147.

²² Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 222. The reference is to *SCC* 49.4.

²³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 481. This is likely Galeacius Caracciolus (1517-1586), an Italian nobleman.

²⁴ For Calvin’s use of ravishment see *Institutes*, 3.2.41; *Comm.* Ps 5:11; 19:1; 22:9-10; 89:6; 104:3; 119:97, 119; etc. For Luther’s use of ravishment see Oberman, *Dawn of the Reformation*, 126-54.

²⁵ Forbes of Corse, *Exquisite Commentarie upon Revelation*, 131-2.

Forbs tells us that the Word of God hath three degrees of operation in the hearts of his chosen, *first it falleth to mens ears as the sound of many waters, a mighty great, and confused sound, and which commonly brings neither terror nor joy, but yet a wondering and acknowledgement of a strange force, and more than humane power, this is that effect which many felt hearing Christ, when they were astonished at his doctrine, as teaching with authority; what manner of doctrine is this? never man spake like this man: the next effect is the voyce of thunder, which bringeth not only wonder, but feare also: not only filleth the eares with sound, and the heart with astonishment, but moreover shaketh and terrifieth the conscience: the third effect is the sound of harping, while the word not only ravisheth with admiration, and striketh the Conscience with terrour, but also lastly filleth it with sweet peace and joy.*²⁶

Interestingly, Ambrose duplicates this same reference earlier in *Prima*.²⁷ Moreover, this reinforces the great importance the Puritans placed upon the transforming power of Scripture. More specifically the Puritan commentaries on the Song of Songs further strengthen this understanding of ravishment. John Cotton exegetes Song of Songs 4:9 declaring, “ravishment is a force put upon a person loving, whereby he is more for the person beloved, then for himself. And when the heart is ravished, the person is willingly and heartily taken up with affection and attendance to another more than himself.”²⁸ James Durham’s *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon* was another very popular commentary. John Owen penned the dedication, confirming his appreciation for the devotional language of love in spiritual marriage in Canticles that he had previously employed in his *Communion with God*.²⁹ Durham declares that ravished describes “Christ’s unspeakable love, as it were, [and] coins new words to discover itself by, it is so unexpressible.” He continues to enlarge its meaning by asserting “[t]he word is borrowed from the passionateness of love, when it seizes deeply on a man, it leaves him not master of his heart, but the object loved hath it.”³⁰

²⁶ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 490.

²⁷ Ambrose, *Prima* in *Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 63.

²⁸ Cotton, *Brief Exposition of Canticles*, 97.

²⁹ See chapter 2.

³⁰ Durham, *Exposition of Song of Solomon*, 225.

A review of other Puritan Song of Songs commentaries further substantiates this understanding.³¹

Further, there is some debate whether the usage of ravishment declined in prominence in the later half of the seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century. On the one hand, Godbeer asserts the “references to Christ as husband and lover became more frequent and more vividly detailed in the late seventeenth century” and into the eighteenth-century.³² Conversely Winship maintains “this imagery grew far more restrained ... after the turn of the eighteenth century.”³³ While the usage appears to have greatly diminished in writings of those who remained faithful to the Church of England, this does not hold true for nonconformist sources as evidenced by the popular eighteenth-century commentaries of Matthew Henry and John Gill.³⁴ In summary, while the Puritans in general and Ambrose in particular were clearly indebted to Bernard and other medieval sources these writings were read through the lens of the Protestant Reformation.³⁵

Desire and Motivation

Ambrose understood the great importance of “befriending our desires”³⁶ and this topic occupies a major place in his contemplative-mystical writings. Moreover, his emphasis upon desire and yearning for God was a theme present in Bernard,

³¹ See for example Ainsworth, *Solomons Song of Songs*, n.p.

³² Godbeer *Sexual Revolution*, 56, 355n58. cf. Rambuss, *Closet Devotions*, 134-5.

³³ Winship, “Behold the Bridegroom Cometh”, 171. cf. Belden Lane, “Two Schools of Desire,” 401. While some of this debate is specifically focused on bridal imagery this was always closely connected with the use of ravishment.

³⁴ Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* and Gill, *Exposition of Song of Solomon* consisted of 122 sermons preached on this book.

³⁵ See Williams, “Puritanism: Piety of Joy,” 6n17. cf. Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 15.

³⁶ Sheldrake, *Befriending Our Desires*, 17, cf. 47.

Calvin, and other Puritans.³⁷ The previous chapter established that desire was one of the nine ways of looking at Jesus. Accordingly, Ambrose defines it as “*a passion looking after the attainment of some good which we enjoy not, and which we imagine to be fitting for us.*” Or later in the same work he declares, desire is “*a certain motion of the appetite, by which the soul darts it selfe towards the absent good, purposely to draw neare, and to unite it selfe thereunto.*”³⁸ Ambrose recognized the biblical foundation of desire³⁹ and frequently employs the apostle Paul’s statement in Philippians 1:21, “*I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ*” to illustrate the nature and goal of desire.⁴⁰

Central to any understanding of desire is the object of that desire. Ambrose is insistent that while Jesus “*is altogether desirable*” and that nothing can compare “*with the beauty of Christ*” because he is full of glory, nonetheless individuals must be careful to guard against the desires of the world that can lead them astray.⁴¹ Indeed the great challenge for humanity after the Fall is to ensure that the object of desire be worthy and not distorted through disordered attachments. Therefore, Ambrose urges his readers to “*rouze up, and set this blessed object [of Jesus] before thy face!*”⁴² The role of the Holy Spirit in Ambrose’s theology is essential “*as we desire the assistance*

³⁷ On Bernard see Casey, *Athirst for God* and McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 193-223. On Calvin see Belden Lane, “Spirituality as Performance of Desire.” On the Puritans see Belden Lane, “Two Schools of Desire” and “Rivers of Pleasure” and Rambuss, *Closet Devotions*, though Rambuss persistently over reads homoerotic themes into the Puritans.

³⁸ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 102, 320, cf. 769.

³⁹ See for example Pss 42:1-2, 63:1, 73:25, 84:1-2; 143:6; Is 26:9; Lk 6:21; Phil 3:13-14.

⁴⁰ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 321, cf. 1113 and *Media* (1657), 210. Additionally Ps 42:1-2 and Sg 2:5 figure prominently in Ambrose’s treatment of desire. *Looking Unto Jesus*, 104, 320.

⁴¹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 773, 485, 103.

⁴² Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 975.

of the Holy Spirit” to encourage this process.⁴³ According to him the “greatest gift we can expect in this world is the Spirit of Christ” and Christ’s indwelling Spirit will work in individuals to transform them into greater holiness so that they might experience “dear communion with God and Christ.”⁴⁴ Further, this desire serves as a connective tissue with the larger subject of spiritual marriage. Ambrose encourages his readers to “desire union with Christ” and “communion with God” and further to desire an “interest in Christs ascension into the Heaven ...[because] my Husband, my Lord [is] in heaven.”⁴⁵ Ambrose’s language soars higher as he looks ahead and desires the Second Coming of Christ. Amid the expectation of this joyful reunion the object of his desire is “Christs wedding-day” and the “Marriage-Supper of the Lamb” and hearing Jesus address God about his bride, “*Father, here behold my Bride, that I have married unto my self.*”⁴⁶ As he concludes this section on desiring Christ’s return he summarizes the richness of this longing, “[c]ome now, and run over these particulars [of all the goals of spiritual marriage]; surely every one is motive enough to desire this day; it is a day of refreshing.”⁴⁷ Significantly, all that Ambrose has written about desire finds its culmination in Jesus. This is not surprising since it echoes the title of his major work *Looking unto Jesus*.

Ambrose’s understanding of desire recognizes the intensity or vehemence of a deep longing for Jesus that is reflective of both his fellow Puritans and the medieval saints before him. A type of holy violence is required to reverse the tendency of human corruption as well as to overcome the violence of temptations that besiege the

⁴³ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 75.

⁴⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 881.

⁴⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 226, cf. 465 and *Looking Unto Jesus*, 213, 880, 977-8, 879.

⁴⁶ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1113-19, especially 1117-18.

⁴⁷ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1119.

soul.⁴⁸ For without “an holy kinde of *violence* [a person can not] *lay hold upon the Kingdome of heaven*, Mat. 11.12.”⁴⁹ Therefore, to counter the temptations and allurements of the devil, Ambrose urges stirring up “violent affections” and being responsive to “Gods merciful violence.”⁵⁰ Earlier Bernard employed vehement love and violence when he discussed desire.⁵¹ His usage asserted the “forceful, powerful, even violent” nature of love.⁵² Later in the same century Richard of St. Victor wrote a brief but significant treatise entitled *The Four Degrees of Violent Charity*.⁵³ Further, this language was not uncommon in the Eastern Orthodox tradition and appeared in John Climacus.⁵⁴ Thomas Watson writing during Ambrose’s time published the most sustained Puritan treatment of violence in *Heaven Taken By Storm*. Watson understood that violence could be either positive or negative since it is a zealous or fervent intentionality to act in a specific way. Therefore, he writes, “[w]ithout violent affections we shall never resist violent temptations.”⁵⁵ The Puritans took seriously the great entrenchment of sin and the entropy of the divided human heart. Indeed violence was often associated with conversion, or the beginning of spiritual marriage. Thomas Hooker declares “God doth by an holy kind of violence plucke the sinner

⁴⁸ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 369 and *Media* (1657), 224, 289.

⁴⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1007.

⁵⁰ Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 196 (incorrectly number 194) and *War with Devils*, 75.

⁵¹ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 198, 203-4, 504n271. cf. Casey, *Athirst for God*, 92-3 and Burrows, “Erotic Christology.”

⁵² McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 203.

⁵³ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 398-400, and esp. 413, 415-8.

⁵⁴ Chryssavgis, “Notion of ‘Divine Eros’,” 194.

⁵⁵ Watson, *Heaven Taken By Storm*, 86. cf. Rutherford, *Christ Dying*, esp. 228, 282-4, 308, 361-2. Sharon Achinstein devotes a chapter to violence and cites Watson’s *Heaven Taken By Storm* as well as other sources; however, she conflates Watson’s spiritual usage of violence with more physical expressions of destruction. *Literature and Dissent in Milton’s England*, 84-114.

from sin to himself.”⁵⁶ John Knott accurately summarizes the Puritan understanding of holy violence, “[t]he gulf between God and man was so wide and human sinfulness so persistent that some kind of extraordinary force seemed necessary to precipitate a response.”⁵⁷ But it must be recognized that God does not use this divine power indiscriminately or capriciously. Sibbes offers this valuable insight into the Puritan understanding of holy violence, “for first, he deals by gentle means always, and then after, if those will not prevail, he goes to severe means, and in severe means he takes degrees; first less, and then more violent, and then violent indeed. God would never descend to sharper courses, if milder would serve the turn.”⁵⁸ All of this is in agreement with Ambrose’s understanding of holy violence.

However, a careful reading of Song of Songs 4:9 reveals a significant insight regarding the origin of ravishment, that it is the bride who ravishes the bridegroom by flashing her eyes. Therefore, it is Jesus the divine Bridegroom, who is ravished by the spouse, the Church or individual believer, not the reverse. Moreover, there is no evidence of forceful abuse when the relationship is reversed and the Triune God ravishes those in spiritual marriage with delight and enjoyment. Both the language in Song of Songs and of God’s desire for creation is derived from the foundations of surrender and consent. Rutherford clarifies this asserting, “[m]y Well-beloved hath ravished me; but it is done with consent of both parties, and it is allowable enough.”⁵⁹ Since there is mutual consent one person is not taking advantage of the other.

Further, just as Puritan marriages recognized the importance of mutual ravishment

⁵⁶ Hooker, *Soules Implantation*, 1. Hooker frequently employs the language of violence to describe the divine operation on the soul. See Hooker, *Soules Implantation*, esp. 2, 68, 204, 254 and *Soules Vocation Effectual Calling*, 635.

⁵⁷ Knott, *Sword of the Spirit*, 11.

⁵⁸ Sibbes, *Exposition of 2 Corinthians*, 3.490.

⁵⁹ Rutherford, *Letters*, 556.

between husband and wife the same was experientially true for Jesus and his bride the Church or individual Christians. Once again this reminds readers what was discovered in chapter 2, that ravishment for the Puritans possessed both a physical and spiritual dimension. Therefore, I conclude that the Puritan usage of ravishment was not abusive or violent, as the term would be understood today.⁶⁰ Rather they fully understood the serious and pervasiveness of sin and rebellion and the deep allure the world had on those who lived on earth. They also recognized the necessary power of God's love that was required to attract a person to Christ and repulse the destructive nature of worldliness.

Ambrose's yearning for God also reveals a degree of *eros* reflective of earlier mystical writers. When writing about the connection between prayer and love to God he passionately pleads, "[o] burn and consume whatsoever would grow one with our souls beside thee; O let the fire of thy spirit so wholly turn our soules into a spiritual fire that the dross of the flesh and the world being wholly consumed" and "[s]et us on fire, burn us, make us anew and transform us, that nothing besides thee may live in us; O wound very deeply our hearts with the dart of thy love."⁶¹ My reading of Ambrose confirms Alvin Plantinga's assessment, "[e]ven (and perhaps especially) the Puritans, dour and emotionally pinched as they are often represented, are full of expressions of erotic love of God."⁶² Once again Ambrose demonstrates the critical role of the Spirit in his theology, as he urgently longs for God and begs for the flames

⁶⁰ Cohen comes to the same conclusion in *God's Caress*, 239-41.

⁶¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 465, cf. 491 on the benefit of wounding the soul. cf. 264 on the role of the Spirit and heavenly flames.

⁶² Plantinga, *Testimonial Model*, 313.

of God's melting love to burn off any sin and the barriers of the world that keep him from enjoying God.⁶³ Further, wounding the soul increases its desire for God.

According to Ambrose, grace serves an important function in his understanding of desire. Desire originates not in the soul of the seeker but rather is initiated by God, "*thou hast given me a kiss of thy mouth, and now I pant to be united to thee in a more consummate marriage; thou hast given me a tast, but my appetite and desire is not thereby diminished, but enlarged.*"⁶⁴ Obviously the desire to long "after Christ" should be guided by him "whose heart is ever panting and longing after us."⁶⁵ God's grace is revealed in the comments on Psalm 63:1, "violent affections [are those] that God puts into the hearts of those who seeke him in sincerity and truth."⁶⁶ Ambrose recognizes his need and inadequacy as he confessed, "[o] where be those holy fits, those pangs of *love*, those *love-trances*, those Seraphical flames of conjugal affection, which made the spouse cry out, *I am sick of love?*"⁶⁷ Aware of both his necessity for increased love and desire as well as the challenges and barriers that could diminish his yearning Ambrose cries out for God's assistance, "I desire, but help thou my faint desires; blow on my dying spark, it is but little; and if I know any thing of my heart, I would have it more; oh that my spark would flame! why Lord I desire that I might desire; oh breath it into me, and I will desire after thee."⁶⁸ Related to this deep yearning for Jesus Ambrose quotes Bernard, "he that thirsts let him thirsts

⁶³ The flame of God's love was a common image in medieval writers. See McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 59-61, 192, 298, 302, 309, 392-4.

⁶⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 212.

⁶⁵ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 975.

⁶⁶ Ambrose, *Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 35.

⁶⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 233.

⁶⁸ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 979. cf. p. 321-2.

more and he that desires let him desire yet more abundantly.”⁶⁹ Not only is it critical to seek God’s assistance in stirring up desires, but also it is equally important not only to speak the words of longing but also actually to feel them deeply in your soul.⁷⁰

Further, Ambrose recognizes the importance of *contemptus mundi* and realizes that his desires and those of all people need to be refined and that “God sends afflictions to weane us from the world.”⁷¹ Therefore, Walsh is correct when she asserts, “[a]bsence inflames desire as selective memory forgets all unpleasantness and longing grows pure.”⁷² More specifically Belden Lane maintains that for the Puritans, “[a]ffliction, then, far from being a sign of God’s indifference or lack of covenant love, becomes a means of testing, teasing, and binding the believer to the Divine Lover more closely than ever.”⁷³ This reinforces Ambrose’s previous earnest request that God would “wound very deeply our hearts with the dart of thy love.” This paradoxical nature of God’s love is traced to Song of Songs 2:5, “for I am sick of love.” The painful absence of the bridegroom intensifies the desire and longing of the bride for her lover.⁷⁴ De Reuver reminds readers of another paradox that lovesickness comes from meditating on Christ’s *via dolorosa*.⁷⁵ These painful, often debilitating experiences of affliction, suffering, and death, serve to make the soul more tender and reveal a person’s deepest needs and refine their desires and redirect them more fully towards yearning intimately for God. Ambrose confesses the specific motivation for

⁶⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 217. *Bern: delect: evang: serm.* is listed as the source.

⁷⁰ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 635.

⁷¹ Ambrose, *Ultima* (1640), 111.

⁷² Walsh, *Exquisite Desire*, 22.

⁷³ Belden Lane, “Rivers of Pleasure,” 85, cf. 86-9.

⁷⁴ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 61.

⁷⁵ de Reuver, *Sweet Communion*, 42.

writing *Looking Unto Jesus* was recovering from a serious illness in 1653.⁷⁶ Related is the addition of the Saints Suffering section in the later editions in *Media*. He understood suffering as a spiritual duty that could shape and further encourage a person's spiritual growth. Further, Ambrose includes three deathbed experiences that reveal personal experiences of ravishment. Edward Gee, a colleague of Ambrose who died in 1659, experienced spiritual ravishment and heavenly joy that await fulfillment beyond this life.⁷⁷ A second deathbed experience was Mr. Holland, who in preparation for his death asked his minister to expound Romans 8. Those words produced an experience of being ravished in his spirit.⁷⁸ A third example was an unnamed "godly woman" who was overwhelmed with spiritual desertion but as she approached the Lord's Supper she was filled with unspeakable joy. This soul-ravishing joy continued for a fortnight after eating at the Lord's Table.⁷⁹ The fact that a person could prepare for and deepen his or her desire and love for Jesus is further reinforced by a lengthy meditation composed to stir up the soul to seek and love Christ more fully. He imagines Jesus speaking to the soul and reminding her that while the soul has mistreated and been unkind to Jesus, Jesus still remains "*thy friend, thy Lord, thy brother, thy husband, and thy head.*" Ambrose suggests that these "blessed words" of Jesus caused the person to fall at his feet and cry out, "*my Saviour and my Lord*". In response, he continues the soliloquy; "[o] my soul rouze up, can thy heart be cold when thou thinkest of this? What? Art thou not yet transported, and ravished with *love*?"⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, To the Reader, [1].

⁷⁷ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 184.

⁷⁸ Ambrose, *Communion with Angels*, 283.

⁷⁹ Ambrose, *Communion with Angels*, 263. Ambrose also connects Jesus' absence with the increase of desire in *Looking Unto Jesus*, 211.

⁸⁰ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 231.

Autobiographical Experiences of Isaac Ambrose

Bernard McGinn distinguishes between mystical language, mystical theology, and mystical experience.⁸¹ Ravishment frequently appears throughout Ambrose's corpus and is employed in each of these categories.⁸² Further, Ambrose uses the biblical examples of Peter and Mary to illustrate the richness of the nature of ravishment as well as a full range of other examples to encourage believers to desire the delight and enjoyment of spiritual marriage with Jesus. However, ravishment was more than a term that Ambrose used in describing others but actually something he himself experienced.

Ambrose was clearly no stranger to the delight and enjoyment of being ravished by God. Many of his personal experiences occurred during his annual retreats in May.⁸³ He used these times to review his diary and pray, fast, read Scripture, and practice other spiritual duties. On May 20, 1641 he was overwhelmed by a Trinitarian experience and recorded in his diary under the caption of "*Gods love to the Saints*", "[t]his day the Lord cast one into a spiritual, heavenly, ravishing love trance; he tasted the goodnesse of God, the very sweetness of Christ, and was filled with the joyes of the Spirit above measure. O it was a good day, a blessed fore-taste of Heaven, a love-token of Christ to the Soul."⁸⁴ Significantly, here and in two additional elaborations on this retreat Ambrose reveals some of the common

⁸¹ McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 307.

⁸² Ravishment appears forty seven times in *Looking Unto Jesus*; twenty times in *Media* (1657); thirteen times in *Ultima* (1654); six times in *Communion with Angels*; four times in *Prima* (1654); and once in both *Redeeming the Time* and *War with Devils*. I did not make the same detailed accounting of the words rapt or rapture but they appear less frequently in Ambrose's writings.

⁸³ See chapter 3 above for a description of his practice and pattern for these annual periods of withdrawal.

⁸⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 183.

characteristics of mystical experiences; tasting the goodness and sweetness of God, being filled with the joy of the Spirit, receiving the kisses of God's mouth and experiencing the foretaste of ecstatic delight and ravishment of heaven. Ambrose provides a column of texts that describe his experience as one of "*great delight*" and sweetness (Cant. 2.3); "*exceedingly joyfull in all our tribulation*" (2 Cor. 7.4); and "*filled with joy, and with the holy Ghost*" (Acts 13.52). Significantly he supplies another category of biblical passages that he calls dispositions. Their purpose is in "answering Gods mind in every particular *Experience* [that they] may be written in our hearts, and brought forth in our life afterwards."⁸⁵ In other words, these are the specific results that Ambrose wants to experience and deepen. The first text is 1 Peter 1:8 and contrasts a faith that is unseen which transitions to one of seeing that is refreshed with joy unspeakable and fullness of glory. The second passage from Revelation 22:17, 20 records the interaction between the Spirit and Bride who hear and thirst and cry out for Jesus to come quickly.

This was not the only occasion Ambrose referred to this experience. In the first edition of *Media* he has styled this differently and provides additional significant details of his dramatic encounter with the triune God; "[t]his day in the Evening the Lord in his mercy poured into my soul the ravishing joy of his blessed Spirit. O how sweet was the Lord unto me? I never felt such a lovely taste of Heaven before: I believe this was the *joyful sound*, the *Kisses of his mouth*, the *Sweetnesses of Christ*, the *Joy of his Spirit*, the *new wine of his kingdom*; it continued with me about two days."⁸⁶ Unlike his 1657 account Ambrose acknowledges the gift of God's mercy in declaring that this was the most "lovely taste of Heaven" he had experienced.

⁸⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 181.

⁸⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 71.

Further, he had been touched by the “[k]isses of his mouth” and tasted “*the new wine of his kingdom.*” More incredibly this experience continued for two days.

Readers can gain a better perspective of the powerful nature of this retreat when Ambrose refers to this event yet a third time. On this occasion he is examining the evidence or assurance of his faith. He defines these “as *inherent and habitual observations of the Spirits actings in the Soul.*”⁸⁷ He then instructs his readers how to gather, keep, and improve or enlarge these experiences and offers this personal evidence, “[t]he unspeakable joy of Gods Spirit, which sometimes I have felt in and after Ordinances; and especially once, when for the space of two dayes I was carried away into extasie and ravishment: This was when I began to see Spiritual things; and (that which makes it my Evidence) upon which followed more desire and endeavors after grace.”⁸⁸ Once again Ambrose’s method of presenting his material expands the reader’s understanding. He lists Ps 89:15; Is 12:3; Jn 15:11; Rom 14:17; Gal 5:22; 1 Pt 1:8 all of which contain God’s promise for experiencing joy. Additionally, “extasie” is mentioned though this is not the only occasion that he makes use of it.⁸⁹ Ambrose follows the earlier pattern of Bernard utilizing this term infrequently.⁹⁰ But

⁸⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 190.

⁸⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 214. While no date is provided the similarity of description between these two accounts and the repetition of the two days of experience suggest these all took place on May 20, 1641.

⁸⁹ See *Media* (1657), 54, 261, 263; *Ultima* in *Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 221; *Looking Unto Jesus*, 251 (incorrectly numbered 152), 434, 800, 840, 1000; and *Communion with Angels*, 211. Flavel draws a distinction between “extraordinary” ecstasies where the soul is raptured out of the body as Paul in 2 Cor 12:2-3 and “ordinary” where the person experiences the “foretastes of heaven.” *Soul of Man*, 54-7.

⁹⁰ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 508n325.

unlike Bernard, Ambrose does not use the language of spiritual inebriation for ecstasy that Williams maintains “was often compared to intoxication.”⁹¹

It is apparent from Ambrose’s three-fold description that this was a landmark spiritual experience. The “Lord cast” him into this experience, that is it came by God’s grace and initiative, not his own. This does not imply that his spiritual duties did not prepare a greater degree of receptivity since in fact he maintains that “in and after Ordinances” these experiences occurred. Unlike Bernard who spoke of the brevity of these ecstatic encounters Ambrose is carried away by joy for two days. Extravagantly and lavishly he piles the descriptions on top of one another; it was “a spiritual, heavenly, ravishing love trance.” It was multi-sensory and involved both the more general references to sound and sight as well as those of taste and touch that were common in earlier medieval mystical experiences.⁹² Further, it was Trinitarian, involving the “goodness of God” “the very sweetness of Christ” and “the joys of the Spirit above measure”. Ambrose recognized the proleptic nature of his experience and understood it as a “foretaste of heaven” or as he called it a “love-token of Christ to the Soul”. It clearly created a new awareness and desire in his life than enabled him to perceive God more fully. Apparently from his description this was the first time Ambrose had such an experience and that could be one reason for his three-fold repetition of it. Placing these experiences within the landscape of Christian spirituality it is significant that these are not the words of Teresa of Avila or Bernard of Clairvaux or Jan Ruusbroec, but of a moderate seventeenth-century Lancashire

⁹¹ Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 119. On Bernard and spiritual inebriation see McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 197, 212, 219. For Puritan examples of spiritual drunkenness see Sibbes, *Glance of Heaven*, 169 and *Commentary 2 Corinthians*, 480 and Rous, *Mysticall Marriage*, 349.

⁹² For Bernard’s use of the spiritual senses see McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 185-189.

Puritan. Hearing this affective delight and desire for God only increases the misfortune that Ambrose's complete diary no longer exists, making it impossible to gain a deepening awareness of his mystical experiences.

Additionally, Ambrose recorded an amazing nocturnal experience of ravishment dated July 19, 1647 from his diary:

This night desiring God to sanctifie my sleep and dreams, that I sinned not in them: I dreamed, that after some troubles of life, my time limited was at an end, and that I heard the very voyce of God calling me by name into his glorious Kingdom; whither when I came, heavenly ornaments were pat upon me by the hand of God, and of Christ: My soul was exceedingly ravished. *The Lord grant I may make some use of this, to be more heavenly minded, and to breathe more after Christ.*⁹³

Amazingly, Ambrose had cultivated such a spiritual awareness of God that he was conscious of God even in his dreams. On this occasion he rejoices that God calls him personally by name. Once again the result of this experience is a deepening desire to be heavenly-minded or more focused on Jesus and the kingdom of God.

Dynamics of Ravishment

According to Ambrose a wide range of individuals can experience ravishment. His recipients include Jesus Christ, angels, specific biblical individuals such as Peter and Mary, Ambrose himself, as well as a number of his friends and colleagues. Further, there are numerous general references to the Church or the disciples of Jesus. Consistent with Song of Songs 4:9 Jesus, as the divine Bridegroom, can be ravished by the Church. Typically the cause of Jesus' ravishment is his great love for the Church or individual believers or their faith in him, "[w]hen he [Jesus] sees the grace or acts of faith, he so approves of them, that he is ravished with wonder; he that rejoiced in the view of his creation, rejoyceth no lesse in the reformation of his

⁹³ Ambrose, *Media* (1650), 76.

creature, *behold thou art faire my love, behold thou art faire, there is no spot in thee, my sister, my spouse, thou hast wounded my heart, thou hast wounded my heart with one of thy eyes*, Cant. 4, 7, 9.” This might strike some as surprising, but Christ is overwhelmed by the beauty and response of his followers. Jesus’ willingness and even desire to be ravished affirmed his deep enjoyment and participation in the covenant of grace or spiritual marriage. By far the more frequent usage by Ambrose is for the Church or bride to be ravished by Jesus, the Bridegroom. Nevertheless, on a number of occasions Ambrose uses ravishment in this former manner.⁹⁴ The *Geneva Bible* translates *leb* as wounded, however, even then the term was often understood as ravish. Joseph Hall paraphrases the verse as “[t]hou hast utterly ravisht me from myselfe ... thou hast quite ravisht my heart with thy loue euen one cast of one of thine eyes of faith; and one of the ornaments of thy sanctification wherewith then art decked by my spirit, haue thus stricken mee with loue: how much more, when I shall have a full sight of thee, and all thy graces, shall I bee affected toward thee.”⁹⁵

The angels already know that believers will some day experience the fullness of joy in heaven. Ambrose envisions that these heavenly messengers “know what Christ hath done and suffered for them [the saints], *The mystery of godlinesse is seen of Angels*, it is so seen, that they take great delight to behold, yes, they are ravished in the very beholding of it.”⁹⁶ Peter and Mary are the most popular biblical figures in Ambrose’s writings to experience ravishment. Before examining them, two other examples must be mentioned. One relates to the spiritual duty that Ambrose calls

⁹⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 414, cf. 28, 504, 505, 1046 for other examples of Jesus being ravished by the Church. This is the only occasion where Ambrose translates *leb* as wounded rather than ravish.

⁹⁵ Hall, *Salomons Divine Arts*, 39-40.

⁹⁶ Ambrose, *Communion with Angels*, 205.

“Reading the Word,” “[t]hat it happens sometimes such raptures may seize on a man, even while he is reading the Scriptures; as the Disciples *hearts burned within them, whist our Saviour talked with them, going to Emmaus*, and if so, then the heart opens itself to close with and draw in that ravishing object.”⁹⁷ The other example relates to the apostle Paul, “[t]hus *Paul* prayed for the *Thessalonians*, and when *Timothy* came, and brought him good tidings of *their faith and charity*, he was not only *comforted*, but in his ravishment he cries, *What thanks can we render again to God for you?*”⁹⁸ Ambrose includes 1 Thessalonians 3:6, 7, 9 in the margin which indicate that Paul is overjoyed with the good news that he has received from Timothy regarding these believers.

Ambrose recognizes the origin or cause of ravishment can be God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and Scripture, which normally represents the voice of Jesus. Additionally, the use of spiritual duties can ravish humanity and therefore, as previously stated, the Church has the ability to ravish Jesus. Since elsewhere in this chapter many references to God and Jesus have already been examined only the Holy Spirit, Scripture, and spiritual duties’ ability to ravish will be examined. Consistent with Calvin’s strong emphasis upon the “inner witness” or testimony of the Holy Spirit Ambrose follows that same Reformed pattern, “[t]here is a testimony of the Spirit which sometimes the Spirit may suggest and testifie to the sanctified conscience with a secret still heart-ravishing voice.”⁹⁹ Not surprisingly the Holy Spirit often engages with Scripture and spiritual duties to create ravishment. In the discussion of

⁹⁷ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 482.

⁹⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 451.

⁹⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 889, cf. 809, 881; Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 201; *Media* (1657), 10, 184, 492; and *War with Devils*, 184 for other examples of the Spirit’s role in “ravishment”. For Calvin on the inner witness of the Spirit see *Institutes*, 1.7.4-5, 3.2.34.

hearing the Word Ambrose declares, “[o]h what meltings, chearings, warmings of the Spirit had such a one? and such a one? the Word was to them as honey ...I wonder at Saints that tell of so much sweetnesse, and comfort and ravishing of heart.”¹⁰⁰

Finally, the Spirit can work through spiritual practices as acknowledged by Ambrose from his personal retreat experience, “[t]he unspeakable joy of Gods Spirit, which sometimes I have felt in and after Ordinances and especially once, when for the space of two dayes I was carried away into extasie and ravishment.”¹⁰¹ His colleague John Angier had a similar experience, “oh how enlarged was he in those Days and Duties! he seemed to be transported into Extasies of Admiration.”¹⁰²

Additionally, while most of these experiences are mediated through spiritual duties or meditation on Scripture some are the result of direct causality. Peter’s post-Easter experience reflects this, “Christs apparitions are ravishing sights; if he but stand on the shore, *Peter* throws himselfe over-board to come to Christ.”¹⁰³ And again as he speaks of loving Jesus for his coming into the world through his incarnation, “me-thinks the very sight of Christ incarnate is enough to ravish thee with the apprehension of his infinite goodnesse: see how he calls out, or (as it were) draws out the soul to union, vision, and participation of his glory!”¹⁰⁴ These samples of direct causality illustrate the “ravishing” power of Jesus’ glory. That is when people see Jesus in the splendor of his beauty and holiness, such as Peter at the

¹⁰⁰ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 809, cf. 490, 773, 817 and *Media* (1657), 54, 233, 482, 492 for Scripture’s ability to ravish.

¹⁰¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 214, cf. 36, 162, and 256 for the use of spiritual duties in ravishment.

¹⁰² Heywood, *Narative of John Angier*, 44.

¹⁰³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 769. Peter’s experience is the same at Jesus’ Transfiguration. *Looking Unto Jesus*, 459. On the importance of the Transfiguration see McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 67, 206-7, 222.

¹⁰⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 338, cf. 213, 273, 481, 505, 725, 769, 908, 990 for other examples of direct causality.

Transfiguration or Mary on Easter morning or the saints in heaven they cannot but be ravished by the overwhelming sight of Jesus' beauty.

Ambrose follows the pattern of Bernard in emphasizing the importance and interaction of the intellectual and affective development of rapture.¹⁰⁵ He declares that his method of meditation is to "begin in the understanding [and] end in the affections." Here he quotes Bernard in a familiar passage related to the integration of these two approaches, "[f]or as holy contemplation has two forms of ecstasy, one in the intellect, the other in the will; one of enlightenment, the other fervor."¹⁰⁶ Scholars indicate while the Cistercian abbot desired a balance he often preferred the affective dimension.¹⁰⁷ This was likely due both to his resistance to the more intellectual approach of his rival Peter Abelard and the less stable nature of the intellect since the Fall.¹⁰⁸ Ambrose asserts that the intellectual forms the foundation for the affective and a careful reading of his uses of rapture confirms that he consistently follows this pattern. Further, if the intellect is lacking there cannot be any affective response. This is clearly revealed by those who foolishly neglect the spiritual duties that could provide a rich experience of Jesus. Ambrose bewails this sadness, "[t]hey have not that love to Christ, which Christ's beholders have; they meditate not upon Christ as lovers on their love; they delight not themselves in Christ... Surely they have no flaming, burning love to Christ... O they feel not those ravishing comforts, which usually Christ speaks to the heart, when he speaks from his heart in love."¹⁰⁹ Further, in a revealing passage Ambrose declares, "Christ's inward beauty would ravish love

¹⁰⁵ McGinn discusses the interplay of knowledge and love in Bernard. *Growth of Mysticism*, 200-3.

¹⁰⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 222. This reference is to Bernard SCC 49.4.

¹⁰⁷ See Casey, *Athirst for God*, 100 and Butler, *Western Mysticism*, 102.

¹⁰⁸ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 201.

¹⁰⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 34, cf. 35.

out of the devils, if they had but grace to see his beauty.”¹¹⁰ This statement is significant for two reasons. First, it reiterates that the devil cannot be ravished because it cannot possess any awareness of Christ’s beauty. Secondly, it reveals ravishment is a gift from God, dependent upon grace.

In his meditation on the soul’s love to Jesus he begins by confessing, “[t]hese, O these were the blessed words, which his Spirit from his Gospel spake unto me, till he made me cast my self at his feet, yea into his armes, and to cry out, *my Saviour and my Lord*; And now, O my soul rouze up, can thy heart be cold when thou thinkest of this? What? are thou not yet transported, and ravished with *love*? is it possible that thy heart should hold, when it remembers these boundlesse compassions?”¹¹¹ The same dynamic interaction between the intellect and affection is at work when Ambrose speaks of the penitent thief from the cross. Reflecting on his experience of gazing upon Jesus he declares, “I deny not but the other joyes in Heaven are transcendent and ravishing, but they are all no better than accessories to this principal, drops to this Ocean, glimpses to this Sun. If you ask, how can our souls enjoy this *Godhead*? I answer, two ways; first, by the *understanding*; secondly, by the *will*.”¹¹² These are representative of Ambrose’s balanced usage of the interaction of affections and intellect.

However, that does not diminish the reality that in some situations the intellect is dominant while in other occasions the affection takes the primary role. The former is reflected by Ambrose’s declaration of Christ’s resurrection, “[o]n these things may

¹¹⁰ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 481.

¹¹¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 231.

¹¹² Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 212.

the soul expatiate; O it is worthy, blessed, soul-ravishing subject to think upon: and the rather if we consider that conformity which we beleeve.”¹¹³ An affective dominant usage of ravishment focuses upon the beauty of Christ’s holiness, “holyness gives the soul a dear communion with God and Christ, ... holyness admits the soul into the most intimate conferences with Jesus Christ in his bed-chamber, in his galleries of love; ... holyness attracts the eye, and heart, and longings, and ravishments, the tender compassions, and everlasting delights of the Lord Jesus.”¹¹⁴ Significantly this pattern of combining and integrating the intellectual and affective dimensions is reminiscent of the Spiritual Movement Matrix employed in chapter 3 in developing the contemplative biography of Isaac Ambrose. While there are no exceptions to this pattern there are modified variations, for example, when the angels or saints of heaven are ravished they do not require the same sort of knowledge as those do on earth. However, their experiences still include a content or awareness that creates their ravishment.

For the most part Ambrose uses ravishment mentally rather than physically. However, on a few occasions there are bodily reactions to ravishment. On Easter morning Jesus reveals himself to Mary, “this one word *Mary*, lightens her eyes, dries up her teares, cheares her heart, revives her spirits that were as good as dead.... And hence it is that being ravished with his voyce, and impatient of delays; she takes his talke out of his mouth, and to his first and other word *Mary*, she answers, *Rabboni*.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 762. According to my reading Ambrose uses the intellect dominantly and the affective dominantly both nine times.

¹¹⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 881.

¹¹⁵ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 764. cf. *Media* (1657), 451 for another example of tears as the response to ravishment.

Additionally those who were ravished could not eat or sleep, Peter jumped overboard and swam ashore to greet Jesus, and fainting and swooning overcame others.¹¹⁶

Another category that can expand the understanding of the dynamics of ravishment is that experience can be either metaphorical or visual. The majority of cases are metaphoric but unlike the mental and physical comparison there are significantly more that are visual. On the one hand, the metaphoric is demonstrated when Ambrose refers to Patrick Forbes of Corse in his teaching on the third and deepest power of Scripture in its operation on the human heart. Ambrose quotes Forbes, declaring, “*while the word not only ravisheth with admiration, and striketh the conscience with terrour, but lastly filleth it with sweet peace and joy.*”¹¹⁷ Later in the same work, within the context of the Holy Spirit’s illuminating power, Ambrose refers to Robert Bolton’s *General Directions for A Comfortable Walking with God* and declares, “[t]here is a testimony of the Spirit which sometimes the Spirit may suggest and testifie to the sanctified conscience with secret still heart-ravishing voyce... *thou art the child of God.*”¹¹⁸ Conversely, Christ’s Transfiguration was an overpowering visual experience for Peter, “now if ever, whiles he was upon earth, was the beauty of Christ seen at height, *Peter* saw it, and was so ravished at the sight, that he talked he knew not what.”¹¹⁹ Yet another group who experienced the visual dynamic of ravishment were the saints in glory who “now *see the face of Christ*.... O this lovelinesse of Christ ravishes the souls of the glorified.”¹²⁰ Finally, Mary’s Easter

¹¹⁶ Ambrose, *Communion with Angels*, 263 and *Looking Unto Jesus*, 769, 881.

¹¹⁷ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 490.

¹¹⁸ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 889.

¹¹⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 459, cf. 213.

¹²⁰ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 481, cf. 908, 990.

morning experience of ravishment was also tangible and visual.¹²¹ None of Ambrose's personal experiences exhibit the visual dynamic, but those that do are related to the direct encounter with Christ whether here on earth with Peter, Mary, or a person facing death or his saints in heaven who behold the radiant beauty of Jesus.

Ambrose's metaphorical use of ravishment alerts readers to the importance of the spiritual senses.¹²² This significant aspect of Ambrose's anthropology was introduced in chapter 4 though little was said about its nature and purpose. Just as a person has five external senses to perceive life spiritual writers from at least the time of Origen spoke of the internal spiritual counterparts to these external senses. Ambrose described the senses as the "windows of the soul" and therefore a person must be vigilant to "guard" these gates of awareness.¹²³ While the senses are susceptible to temptation and can lead a person astray the "spiritual senses [are also] ... the very way by which we must receive sweetness and strength from the Lord Jesus."¹²⁴ Interestingly angels play a critical role in Ambrose's understanding of the senses, especially at the time of death. He quotes from Gregory saying, "*sometimes by heavenly inspiration they [i.e. those facing death] penetrate with their spiritual eyes the very secrets of heaven itself.*"¹²⁵ The stimulation of the spiritual senses can greatly deepen a person's experience.

¹²¹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 796.

¹²² For an introduction to the spiritual senses see Sheldrake, "Senses, Spiritual." s.v. and McGinn, *Foundations Mysticism*, 121-4. For Bernard's usage of the spiritual senses see McGinn, *Growth Mysticism*, 185-90.

¹²³ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 50. cf. *War with Devils*, 57.

¹²⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 47.

¹²⁵ Ambrose, *Communion with Angels*, 277. The Gregory reference is *Dia*. I.4.c.16.

Therefore, in surveying Ambrose's usage of the spiritual senses he employs each one at least once while sight is the dominant means for experiencing ravishment.¹²⁶ Peter is often captivated by the glorious presence of Jesus but sight is used more broadly to include others, "[a] sight of Christ in his beauty and glory would ravish souls, and draw them to run after him."¹²⁷ Many of these experiences relate to the beauty or the holiness of God or Jesus. The last chapter established that there is a strong connection between the title, *Looking Unto Jesus*, and the visual beholding of Jesus. The spiritual sense of sound, frequently associated with Mary, is also significant. According to Bernard, hearing must precede seeing due to our fallen state.¹²⁸ Mary's Easter morning experience clearly confirms this premise.¹²⁹ She didn't recognize Jesus visually until he spoke her name audibly:

One word of Christ wrought so strange an alteration in her, as if she had been wholly made new, when she was only named. And hence it is that being ravished with his voice, and impatient of delays, she takes his talk out of his mouth, and to his first and only word Mary, she answers, Rabboni, which is to say, Master, q.d. Master, is it thou? With many a salt tear have I sought thee, and art thou unexpectedly so near at hand! ... I feel I am exceedingly transported beyond myself.¹³⁰

The remaining three senses are used far less frequently than sight and sound. This is one more indication that Ignatius and his richer usage of the senses did not likely influence Ambrose. However, in his 1641 retreat experience Ambrose spoke of tasting God's sweetness.¹³¹ Further, he describes how in reading Scripture people can "clearly discern the glory and beauty of those heavenly mysteries, and taste of the goodness of them, they cannot but ravish readers with admiration, yea transport them

¹²⁶ According to my tabulation sight is used twenty times, sound nine times, taste six times and touch and smell once each.

¹²⁷ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 793.

¹²⁸ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 187.

¹²⁹ Mary's Easter morning experience with Jesus is another common biblical text for mystical experiences in the early church. McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 67.

¹³⁰ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 764.

¹³¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 183.

with strong and heavenly affections of love, joy and desire.”¹³² While Ambrose does not use the language of sweetness in relationship to ravishment as frequently as Flavel, he does use it abundantly in his writings.¹³³ Finally, the sense of smell and touch are used only once each.¹³⁴ Ravishment exerts an overwhelming power on the senses. According to the *Westminster Annotations* ravishment burns “hotly in love, whose strange force it is to transvulnerate and stupifie the very soule, so as no sense nor reason is left.”¹³⁵ This parallels Cuthbert Butler’s conclusion that in ecstasy the mind is often separated or alienated from the body.¹³⁶ However, it is the common opinion of Puritan authors that “in ecstasies, all the senses and powers are idle, except the understanding.”¹³⁷ Therefore, when believers experienced ravishment God “did not bypass the natural faculties, but was worked through the mind and affections.”¹³⁸

Benefits and Effects of Ravishment

My analysis of the effects of ravishment yields four general categories of benefits; a sense of knowledge or new awareness from the experience of God, assurance or confidence of some promise or blessing of God, greater desire to seek or long after God, and the delight of enjoyment of God. In *Looking Unto Jesus* Ambrose provides a vivid illustration of how ravishment can create a new sense of knowledge or awareness. Significantly the nature of this knowledge can vary and take on many different expressions from awareness of human rebellion, to the amazing depth of Jesus’ love and his ravishment by the Church, to how to live and

¹³² Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 482.

¹³³ See for example Flavel, *England’s Duty*, 215, 220, 223.

¹³⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 907, 34.

¹³⁵ *Westminster Annotations*, Sg 4:9 n.p.

¹³⁶ Bulter, *Western Mysticism*, 51.

¹³⁷ Flavel, *Soul of Man*, 55 and Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 117-8 where she provides examples from Owen and Sibbes to verify this Puritan understanding.

¹³⁸ Williams, “Puritan Enjoyment of God,” 118.

follow Jesus, to an awareness of the future benefits of heaven. In the conforming to Jesus section in relation to his gift of salvation to humanity during his earthly life

Ambrose writes:

O the sweet expressions, gracious conversation! Oh the glorious shine, blessed lustre of his divine soul! Oh the sweet countenance, sacred discourse, ravishing demeanour, winning deportment of Jesus Christ! and now I reflect upon my selfe, oh alas! Oh the total, wide, vast, utter difference, distance, disproportion of mine thereform!...Ah my rudenesse, grosenesse, deformity, odiousnesse, sleightnesse, contemptiblenesse... how clearly are these, and all other my enormities discovered, discerned, made evident, and plaine by the blessed and holy life of Jesus.¹³⁹

Therefore, the ravishing sight of Jesus reveals the huge chasm that separates him from humanity and only heightens the awareness of a person's utter rebellion and distance from a holy God.

Occasionally Ambrose has Jesus speak the words of Canticles 4:9 and address his Church:

*Turne away thine eyes, for they have overcome me; thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse, with one of thine eyes: Christ was held in the galleries, and captivated with love to his people, so that his eye was ever upon them, ...and is Christ so tender in his love towards us, that he ever minds us, and shall our mindes be so loose to him? so fluttering, and fleeting? shall there be no more care to binde our selves in cords of love to him, who hath bound himself in such cords of love to us?"*¹⁴⁰

While initially Jesus is ravished by his deep love for the Church that knowledge of his love overwhelms the Church and creates in them a new awareness of the love they must reciprocate to him. For Ambrose Scripture plays a central role in ravishing and creating this new knowledge of God. It serves as a reminder of the Puritan devotion to the reading and preaching of the Word. Additionally, ravishment can produce a new awareness of God's divine love. The specific context is of a person mediating on

¹³⁹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 522.

¹⁴⁰ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 28, cf. 504-5 for greater expansion of this theme.

Jesus' suffering for those condemned because of sin, "[i]ndeed with what lesse than ravishment of spirit can I behold the Lord Jesus, ... into what extasies may I be cast to see the Judge of all the world accused, judged, condemned?... Oh what raptures of spirit can be sufficient for admiration of this so infinite mercy? be thou swallowed up O my soul in the depth of divine love."¹⁴¹ Ambrose also provides a list of ten different categories of biblical passages that affected his soul personally from "rebuke of corruption" to "comfort him against outward crosses" to the "privileges in Christ" to "sweet passages, which melted his heart" to "[p]laces that in reading, he found sensible comfort and ravishing of heart in."¹⁴² The list is vast and far ranging and includes numerous specific references to fourteen different Old Testament books and eleven different New Testament books. This suggests that Ambrose could be ravished by a very broad cross section of biblical texts.

The experiences of Peter at the Transfiguration and Mary at Easter morning have already been considered and it is now clear that both of these situations created a deepening knowledge of Jesus' identity and mission as well as a responsive love to this new awareness.¹⁴³ Peter sees the glorified and transfigured Christ and hears the voice of God and gains new insight and information about Jesus. Similarly, Mary hears the voice of Jesus and discovers the good news that he is truly alive, as the angels had declared. Mary's ravishing encounter confirmed the promise of Jesus that he would rise after three days (Mt 16:21; Mk 8:31; Lk 9:22). Therefore, in both of these experiences, Peter and Mary were led to a deepening awareness of knowing and

¹⁴¹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 658.

¹⁴² Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 486-8, 492.

¹⁴³ See McGinn, "Love, Knowledge and *Unio Mystica*" for the history of love and knowledge as it relates to union with God.

loving Jesus. Mary's experience further indicates that some of these areas of new knowledge suggest the promissory nature of ravishment.

The second category of assurance of God's promises also covers a range of benefits including God's love, presence, and protection, to the promise that Jesus has purged a person's sins and there is assurance of salvation, to a confident peace at the time of death, to the promise of joy that awaits a person in heaven. Ambrose recounts his visit to his "dear and Reverend Brother M. *Edw. Gee*" during the "horrid temptations" that he faced on "his death-bed". He writes "at that time of his last sickness I went to visit him, and I found him as full of spiritual ravishings and heavenly joyes as (I thought) his heart could hold."¹⁴⁴ On this occasion ravishment provided a deep sense of peace and comfort during the final hours that the Puritans felt were often periods of greatest doubt and onslaught of temptations by the Devil. However, God frequently provides a deep sense of "the Spirit of Assurance" long before a person reaches this eschatological stage. In writing about the privilege of adoption as God's children, Ambrose proclaims how the "Spirit bears witness with us in every part, premises, and conclusion; onely it testifies more clearly, certainly, comfortably, sweetly, ravishing the soul with unspeakable joy, and peace in the conclusion."¹⁴⁵ He also uses Bernard as an illustration and then comments that the use of spiritual duties is "brim full of rare and ravishing comfort."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 184. cf. *Communion with Angels*, 283-4 for a similar deathbed experience involving ravishment that created an assurance of Mr. Holland's promise of being in heaven.

¹⁴⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 10.

¹⁴⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 36. Elsewhere Ambrose asserts that ravishment speaks the word of comforting assurance to our troubled conscience. *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 201.

According to Ambrose, while ravishment can create a deep peace and assurance of God's promises, he reminds his readers that ravishment itself is not always reliable. He states that some "have *tasted the good Word of God* (have found some relish in the sweet and saving promises of the Gospel) *and the powers of the world to come* (have had some ravishing apprehensions of the joyes and glory in heaven); *and yet fall away* (by a total apostacy)."¹⁴⁷ Earlier chapter 3 established that a person should not put his or her confidence in an experience regardless of its significance since experiences can be derived from sources other than God. In the next category of desire, it will be apparent that the previous categories of knowledge and awareness and assurance of God's promises also function as a means toward increased desire.

Third, Ambrose articulates that one of the primary benefits of ravishment is that it increases the desire and longing for God. This is clearly revealed from his May retreat experience cited earlier in this chapter, "[t]he unspeakable joy of Gods Spirit, which sometimes I have felt in and after Ordinances; and especially once, when for the space of two dayes I was carried away into extasie and ravishment: This was when I began to see Spiritual things; and upon which followed more desire and endeavors after grace."¹⁴⁸ It is important to recognize that this was not a single experience, but rather a common pattern. Ambrose teaches the same message in *Prima* when he declares, "they [God's promises] would even ravish thee, and quicken thy *desires*."¹⁴⁹ Likewise, earlier in *Prima* after Ambrose describes the sight of Jesus to a humbled sinner as a "most pleasant, ravishing, heavenly sight" he asserts the very

¹⁴⁷ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 817. The same principle is repeated in *Media* (1657), 389 and *Ultima* in *Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 193.

¹⁴⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 214.

¹⁴⁹ Ambrose, *Prima* in *Prima (Appendix), Media, Ultima* (1654), 50.

next step to encourage this new birth is “an hungering desire after Christ and his merits.”¹⁵⁰ He reiterates this again in *Looking Unto Jesus*, when he declares, “[a] sight of Christ in his beauty and glory would ravish souls, and draw them to run after him.”¹⁵¹ Earlier in the same work Ambrose asserts the expanding and transformative nature of “spiritual desires after Christ, [that they] do neither load, nor cloy the heart, but rather open, and enlarge it for more and more.”¹⁵² Clearly for Ambrose ravishment created a growing desire to yearn for deeper intimacy with God and reciprocally this desire also prepared him and others for being ravished by God. It is also evident that any aspect of Jesus’ presence whether his beauty or spiritual duties to engage with him or his promises had the potential to stir up and enlarge his desires after God. In fact, the mere thought of reflecting on Jesus was enough to ravish Ambrose’s soul. He confesses his inability to love Jesus properly, “[h]ad I a thousand hearts to bestow on *Christ*, they were all too little, they were never able to *love* him sufficiently.”¹⁵³ Further, Ambrose declares, “[t]here is a twofold *love*, one of *desire*, which is an earnest longing after that which we believe would do us much good, if we could attain to it; another of *complacency*, when having attained that which we desire, we hugge and embrace it, and solace our selves in the fruition of it.” The first love, which Ambrose also calls an “affectionate longing or thirsty love” is the love that has been examined.¹⁵⁴ The second love that matures into fruition leads to the final benefit of ravishment that is delight and enjoyment of God.

¹⁵⁰ Ambrose, *Prima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 34-5.

¹⁵¹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 792-3.

¹⁵² Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 321.

¹⁵³ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 229.

¹⁵⁴ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 224

This fourth benefit once again draws upon Ambrose's May 20, 1641 seminal retreat experience to learn more fully his understanding of ravishment and how it can create a sense of joy and foretaste of the heavenly consummation of spiritual marriage.¹⁵⁵ There he effusively declares, "[t]his day the Lord cast one into a spiritual, heavenly, ravishing love trance; he tasted the goodnesse of God, the very sweetness of Christ, and was filled with the joyes of the Spirit above measure. O it was a good day, a blessed fore-taste of Heaven, a love-token of Christ to the Soul."¹⁵⁶ Clearly the spiritual practices of this retreat not only provided him with a future taste of the joys of heaven, they also granted him a present experience of the same joys through the Holy Spirit. Ambrose appended a series of verses that serve as an expansion of his experience. Not surprisingly the dominant theme is joy and four out of the five passages are directly related to the enjoyment of God.¹⁵⁷ His first reference is Song of Songs 2:3, "*I sate down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.*" Next he cites 2 Corinthians 7:4, "*I am filled with comfort, I am exceedingly joyfull in all our tribulations.*" Another verse is Acts 13:52, "*And they were filled with joy, and with the holy Ghost.*" The fourth reference of 1 Peter 1:8 also reinforced the theme of joy, "[w]hom having not seen, ye love, in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing ye rejoyce with joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

Enjoying God was a significant theme in Ambrose's lengthy meditation that was intended to stir up believers with the expectation of eternity in heaven. As he

¹⁵⁵ On the Puritan enjoyment of God see Gwyn-Thomas, "Puritan Doctrine of Joy," 119-40 and Yuille, *Inner Sanctum of Puritan Piety*, 85-94. For spiritual enjoyment within Dutch Pietism see de Reuver, *Sweet Communion*, 190-1, 216-21, 227-8, 240-1.

¹⁵⁶ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 183.

¹⁵⁷ The remaining passage is Rv 22:17, 20 and extends the heavenly invitation to come and enjoy the benefits of heaven.

progresses through the various phases of this meditation Ambrose asks; “what are the effects, O my soul, of this eternity?” He replies; “[o] what ravishing of spirit will the souls of the just be cast into, at this recalling of time past and that the memory of things here below.”¹⁵⁸ Later the meditation addresses the “[f]ruition of God” which includes the “happinesse of Heaven.” He continues by declaring, “[a]nd in this kinde of love of God, and enjoyment of themselves in God, the Saints are ravished with God and are in a kinde of extasie eternally.” This expansive experience involves all of the faculties of the soul. For “here is the pure, spiritual quintessential joyes of Heaven! the Saints are so swallowed up in God.”¹⁵⁹ Ambrose employs almost identical language in a sermon entitled *Heavens Happiness*. After he introduces the theme of fruition he asserts, “[t]o be with God, implies the fruition of God.” One aspect of fruition is to “enjoy God fully.” Next, he speaks in a manner reminiscent of Bernard of Clairvaux and mentions three degrees of love. The third degree “is a love of the glorified Saints; and in this kinde of love of God, and enjoyment of our selves in him, the soul shall be ravished with God, and be in a kinde of extasie eternally.”¹⁶⁰ At this point a person has passed from the personal experience here on earth to the expectation of the fuller experience in heaven. That focus is more clearly articulated in *Looking Unto Jesus*. Ambrose reminds believers of their earthly experience when Jesus “whispered to thy soul the forgiveness of thy sinnes... oh what joy was then? what meltings, movings, stirrings, leapings of heart were then in thy bosome? but was that joy any thing to this? or to be compared with this? that was a drop, but here’s an Ocean, here’s fullness of joy; oh what leapings of heart, what ravishments will be

¹⁵⁸ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 256.

¹⁵⁹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 260-1.

¹⁶⁰ Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 221. Ambrose begins with Bernard’s second degree of love since his focus is on loving God and not self.

within when thou shalt see thy self in the armes of Christ.”¹⁶¹ Ambrose employs another water metaphor as he reinforces that present enjoyments are nothing in comparison to their eschatological fulfillment in heaven; “even so all the enjoyments of God in the use of meanes, graces, blessings, ordinances are infinitely inferiour to than enjoyment of God which shall be without all meanes; all ravishments of our spirit in prayer, hearing, reading, meditating, is but a sip of those rivers which we shall have in heaven.”¹⁶² These examples reveal Ambrose’s concern that his listeners and readers would not miss the promised joy and delight that awaits those who will be consummating their “spiritual marriage” with Christ in heaven. Clearly the enjoyment of God that begins in a very real sense already on earth is proleptic and the experience of ravishment and joy will grow more fully in heaven. Using the language of covenant that often parallels that of spiritual marriage, Ambrose reiterates that enjoyment of God grows as a person lives more fully in him. He declares,

He hath made a covenant with thee, of spiritual mercies; even a covenant of peace, and grace, and blessing, and life for evermore; God is become thy God, he is all things to thee; he hath forgiven thy sinnes, he hath given thee his Spirit, to lead thee, to sanctifie thee to uphold thee in that state wherein thou standest; and at last he will bring thee to a full enjoyment of himself in glory, where thou shalt blesse him, and rejoyce before him with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.¹⁶³

Therefore, deepening intimacy with God in spiritual marriage and the resulting ravishment creates a growing sense of enjoyment of God. That in turn produces an expanding awareness or knowledge that brings a person full circle from where he or she began this section. Later in the same work he enlarges this fullness of God’s

¹⁶¹ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1108.

¹⁶² Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1084.

¹⁶³ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 236-7.

presence and joy because he “is *All in all* to all his Saints” because “God is the very top of heavens joy.”¹⁶⁴

Before summarizing the insights of the ravished soul in the writings of Ambrose it is significant to recognize that the effects of ravishment closely parallel the research of Cuthbert Butler for some of the early patristic and medieval spiritual giants. For example in Augustine the benefits of ravishment were “[c]learer perception of the truth” and “full enjoyment” for Gregory, “self-knowledge, humility, fervour and love” and for Bernard “love, fervour, active zeal”.¹⁶⁵

Conclusion

Much territory has been covered in this chapter and it is now possible to summarize some of the primary insights. Ravishment was a highly charged word and Ambrose used it to communicate being overcome by or taken out of this world by the love of the Triune God. It was a term of heavenly delight and therefore captured a sense of the intensification of desire of a person who had experienced being carried away by divine joy of spiritual marriage. There does not appear to be any change in Ambrose’s usage of ravishment in his works. While his treatment is consistent, what is evident is how the specific theological nature of his writing controls the usage of ravishment. Therefore in *Media*, a work on sanctification that emphasizes the role of spiritual duties, ravishment is frequently connected with engaging spiritual exercises. In *Looking Unto Jesus*, with its strong christological focus, ravishment tends to relate to beholding or listening to Jesus. The references in *Ultima, Communion with Angels*, and *War with Devils* include a number of experiences around death. Obviously there

¹⁶⁴ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1111.

¹⁶⁵ Butler, *Western Mysticism*, for Augustine, 49, for Gregory, 82, for Bernard, 108.

is a strong eschatological nature to rapture since a person is more likely to focus on God and meditate on heaven the closer they approach death, however, that is not to minimize the very real benefits of it while a person is still on earth.¹⁶⁶

Ambrose maintains that while rapture is a gift of God's grace, a person can prepare to be more receptive and therefore more likely to experience it through the use of spiritual practices. Reflecting Bernard, these experiences are rare and episodic rather than continuous, though on one occasion Ambrose enjoyed this experience for two days. Additionally, gender does not have any major effect upon rapture as Ambrose draws equally upon the examples of Peter and Mary. Again following Bernard's lead, though in a more balanced fashion, Ambrose develops his theology and experience of Christ mysticism through the interaction of the intellect and affections. Further, most of Ambrose's uses of rapture were metaphoric and mental rather than visual and physical, though there were exceptions in both categories. At the completion of the next chapter when the important topic of retrieval will be introduced, it will be necessary to return to rapture and consider whether this ambiguous term is still usable today.

The next chapter focuses on the twin challenges of resistance and retrieval. Already during the seventeenth-century the potential dangers and abuse in mystical experiences were present. Isaac Ambrose and Puritans who shared his contemplative-mystical piety found themselves in the middle, bordered on the one side by the enthusiasm of the Quakers and on the other side by the fears of Rome. That sets the

¹⁶⁶ Williams, "Puritan Enjoyment of God," 198n174; Dewey Wallace, "Saintliness in Puritan Hagiography," 36-7; and more broadly on the spiritual significance of death see Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 224-41.

stage for the final goal of this thesis of retrieval. However, before that can be attempted the highly significant barrier of resistance cast by residual shadows of Karl Barth must be examined. In exploring the landscape of the twentieth-century it will be evident that not all Reformed Christians shared Barth's pessimism about mysticism or about experience. Barth will be compared with his earlier contemporary Herman Bavinck, another significant theologian in the Reformed tradition, who responded more favorably to contemplative-mystical theology and experience. This in turn will create the means for recovering seven principles from Ambrose for challenging and deepening contemporary Reformed Christians in their theology and piety.

Chapter 6

Resistance and Retrieval

The people seemed to have a renewed taste for those old pious and experimental writers, Mr. Hooker, Shepard, Gurnal, William Guthrie, Joseph Allein, Isaac Ambrose, Dr. Owen, and others; ... The evangelical writings of these deceased authors, as well as of others alive, both in England, Scotland, and New England, were now read with singular pleasure; some of them reprinted and in great numbers quickly bought and studied.¹

The last chapter examined the language of delight and enjoyment of God that emerged from Isaac Ambrose's writings on contemplation. The centrality of spiritual marriage was the foundation from which a person could experience this divine enjoyment with God. Ambrose employed the term ravishment ninety two times. The ambiguous nature of this term was examined as well as the importance of desire and *eros*. This desire and longing for God was inspired and deepened by the initial experience of God's love that had already been tasted on earth and that awaited full eschatological fulfillment. A detailed exegesis of Ambrose's use of ravishment followed including the nature, dynamics, and effects on ravishment upon a person's soul.

This thesis has raised the question whether a contemplative-mystical piety existed within the moderate stream of English Puritanism. More specifically it has been focused on Isaac Ambrose to determine whether there is any evidence of a contemplative-mystical theology and experience in his writings. However, there is another crucial question that still requires attention, and that is whether the piety and practices of Isaac Ambrose can be retrieved for the twenty-first century. Before that

¹ Gillies, *Historical Success of the Gospel*, 2:170-1. This reference pertains to the Great Awakening in America.

can be determined it is first necessary to recognize that Ambrose and other Puritans were equally critical of certain spiritual practices and their resulting mystical experiences in the seventeenth-century. More problematic in addressing the prospects of a contemporary retrieval of a contemplative-mystical piety is the well-known resistance of Karl Barth who once referred to mysticism as “esoteric atheism.”² Barth’s theological influence casts a very long shadow over the landscape of the contemporary academy and even to some degree the Church. However, Barth does not speak for all Reformed Christians and his interpretation of mystical experience distorts a more balanced understanding of the contemplative-mystical piety of the Reformed tradition. The term “Reformed tradition” is used here to speak of the theological descendants of Calvin. Therefore, this chapter will first examine the seventeenth-century concerns regarding mysticism followed by an analysis of Barth’s misgivings pertaining to contemplative experiences. The focus will then shift to Herman Bavinck for reconstructing a more balanced Reformed understanding. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a summary of contemplative-mystical principles from Ambrose that can be retrieved for the contemporary Church.

Seventeenth-Century Resistance to Mysticism

While this thesis has been exploring the possibility of a seventeenth-century contemplative-mystical piety within Puritanism, at one level the Puritans were strongly suspicious of mysticism. Consequently Ambrose and most Puritans would have been aghast to be called mystics. McGinn reminds readers that this label would have equally confused Bernard and other medieval Christians.³ In fact, chapter 1 reported, mysticism was an invention of the seventeenth-century in France. A

² Barth, *CD I/2*, 322.

³ McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, xvi. cf. Harmless, *Mystics*, 232.

primary reason for Ambrose's suspicion was the Quakers. No doubt Ambrose's fears were heightened because the Quakers were particularly strong in Lancashire and records indicate their presence in Preston during his ministry.⁴ While George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, was raised in a Puritan home he had radically jettisoned those roots. Geoffrey Nuttall summarizes the outcome asserting that Fox and his fellow Quakers "disturbed this conjunction ... between God's Word in Scripture and the Holy Spirit."⁵ Ambrose confirms Nuttall's summary, warning his readers to be alert to the blasphemies of the "Quakers and Ranters" because they do not have "the Spirit of Christ within them."⁶ Ambrose's remarks reveal one of the common themes within Quaker theology that alarmed the Puritans. Fox created a distinction and growing tension between the internal word of the Spirit from the external Word of Scripture.⁷ Over time the internal word grew in importance to the diminishment and even exclusion of the external Word. Overall, Ambrose seldom mentions the Quakers in his writing. However, that should not minimize their significance due to Ambrose's irenic spirit and his desire to eschew controversies because they reduced his contemplative attitude. However, it is possible to view the seriousness of the Quaker danger from a different angle. In his discussion of assurance of heaven and the role of the Holy Spirit Ambrose declares that, "the holy Ghost works not by enthusiasmes or dreames" instead a person can find assurance through "*the promises of the*

⁴ Nightingale, *Quaker Movement in Lancashire*, 10, 36. cf. Welch, "Quakers, Ranters and Puritan Mystics," 66 and Watts, *The Dissenters*, 195-6.

⁵ Nuttall, *Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith*, 26. cf. Nuttall, "Puritan and Quaker Mysticism," 522 and Nuttall, *Puritan Spirit*, 174-5. For a helpful treatment of the issues surrounding this conflict see Adam, *Word and Spirit: Puritan-Quaker Debate*.

⁶ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 901. While there is a technical difference between Quakers, Ranters, and Seekers they were often combined due to their common heterodoxy.

⁷ Nuttall, *Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith*, 30.

*Gospel.*⁸ To summarize his primary concern, Ambrose declares, “*the testimony of Gods Spirit is ever agreeable to the Word.*”⁹ Therefore, one of his primary reasons for rejecting the mysticism and enthusiasm of the Quakers was that they had failed to maintain the critical balance of Word and Spirit.¹⁰ Instead the Spirit became excessively prominent and eventually this created an even stronger inner subjectivism. John Owen also criticized Quakerism because their understanding of the “Spirit rendered the written Word of no value” not because of their teaching of direct contact with the Spirit.¹¹ Ambrose also condemned the Antinomians, specifically Tobias Crisp, because his theology paralleled the Quaker tendency of disrupting the proper balance between Word and Spirit.¹² While Ambrose was irenic and resisted polemics, Rutherford often engaged in them and frequently criticized Crisp.¹³

Ambrose does not direct any criticism against Roman Catholic expressions of mysticism or contemplative prayer though other Puritans did. John Owen wrote a detailed critique of contemplative or mental prayer in response to the Benedictine Dom Serenus de Cressy.¹⁴ No doubt part of Owen’s rebuke of Cressy was due to his

⁸ Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 197. Ambrose specifically names Quakers as “dreamers.” *Looking Unto Jesus*, 1157.

⁹ Ambrose, *Ultima in Prima, Media, Ultima* (1654), 199.

¹⁰ Cornick, *Letting God Be God*, 93.

¹¹ King, “Affective Spirituality of John Owen,” 226n25.

¹² Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 199-200, cf. *Looking Unto Jesus*, 888. On the connection between Antinomianism and Quakers see Mack, *Visionary Women*, 155, 157, 277.

¹³ Rutherford, *Christ Dying*, 24, 104-6, 165, 247, 257, 319-22, 499 (incorrectly numbered 463), 507-13 (incorrectly number 471-7), 537 (incorrectly numbered 501), 548 (incorrectly numbered 512) and *Survey of the Spiritual Anitchrist*, 193 (Part I), 234 (Part II).

¹⁴ Owen, *Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 328-38.

conversion to Roman Catholicism.¹⁵ Owen declares that “whatever there may be in the height of this ‘contemplative prayer,’ as it is called, it neither is prayer nor can on any account be so esteemed.”¹⁶ According to Owen, the primary fault of mental prayer is that it bypasses the importance of the mind or understanding.¹⁷ Additionally, he finds no biblical support for it and the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples employed words.¹⁸ Further, Owen associates mental prayer with the Quakers and Ambrose’s reaction to them illuminates the seriousness of this charge.¹⁹ Surprisingly, Owen can also approve of “mental prayer, and all actings of the mind in holy meditations” provided that the mind is actively engaged.²⁰ Therefore, in reality Owen affirms the value of contemplative prayer:

The spiritual *intense fixation of the mind*, by contemplation on God in Christ, until the soul be as it were swallowed up in admiration and delight, and being brought unto an utter loss, through the infiniteness of those excellencies which it doth admire and adore, it returns again into its own abasements, out of a sense of its infinite distance from what it would absolutely and eternally embrace, and, withal, the inexpressible rest and satisfaction which the will and affections receive in their approaches unto the eternal Fountain of goodness, are things to be aimed at in prayer, and which, through the riches of divine condescension, are frequently enjoyed. The soul is hereby raised and ravished, not into ecstasies or unaccountable raptures, not acted into motions above the power of its own understanding and will; but in all the faculties and affections of it, through the effectual workings of the Spirit of grace and the lively impressions of divine love, with intimations of the relations and kindness of God, is filled with rest, in “joy unspeakable and full of glory.”²¹

¹⁵ *DNB*, 5:75-6. The controversy and criticism that surrounded Cressy was at least partially due to his editing of Augustine Baker’s works. See Lunn, “Augustine Baker.”

¹⁶ Owen, *Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 334-35.

¹⁷ Owen, *Holy Spirit in Prayer*, esp. 335, cf. 328-31, 336.

¹⁸ Owen, *Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 330, 337.

¹⁹ Owen, *Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 331.

²⁰ Owen, *Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 335. For mental prayer in the Puritans see Scougal, *Life of God in Soul of Man*, 121-3 (incorrectly numbered 121); Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion*, 85-9; and Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, 2:125n149. Both Wakefield and Davies mention Ambrose in relation to mental prayer.

²¹ Owen, *Holy Spirit in Prayer*, 329-330. For a helpful elaboration of Owen’s perspective on contemplative spirituality see King “Affective Spirituality of John Owen.”

Clearly Owen was not opposed to all types of contemplative prayer, only those that ignored the mind and the other faculties of the soul. Therefore, what at first appears to be resistance to contemplation dissolves upon closer examination and in reality many Puritans eagerly embraced contemplative practices.

Reception of Isaac Ambrose Since the Seventeenth-Century

Before examining the contemporary resistance to a contemplative-mystical piety it is significant to recognize the reception of Ambrose's works following his death.²² The popularity of his writing is reflected in the numerous editions of his *Complete Works* beginning with the first edition in 1674 followed subsequently by those republished in 1682, 1689, 1701, 1723, 1759, 1768, 1769, 1799, 1813, 1816, 1820, 1829, 1835, 1839, etc. Additionally many of his individual publications went through numerous editions. John Wesley edited major portions of his writings that filled two volumes in his *Christian Library*.²³ Furthermore references to Ambrose appear in the eighteenth²⁴, nineteenth²⁵, and twentieth-centuries.²⁶

Contemporary Resistance to Contemplative-Mystical Piety within the Reformed Tradition: Karl Barth

There is no evidence that anyone criticized Ambrose during his time or since for his contemplative-mystical piety. However, in traveling across the centuries since Ambrose, Karl Barth towers above most in his resistance to a more experiential

²² For a broader treatment of the heritage of Puritanism see Coffey, "Puritan Legacies."

²³ Wesley, *Christian Library*, 7:311-9:132.

²⁴ Gillies, *Historical Success of the Gospel*, 2:170-1; Oliver, *History of English Calvinistic Baptists*, 264; and Jones, "Evangelical Revival in Wales," 242.

²⁵ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 51 (first series) and *Treasury of David*, 1:348, 360, 436; 2:30, 399; and 3:245.

²⁶ Griffiths, *Example of Jesus*, 7, 38, 44, 57, 87, 184. In addition there have been numerous editions of Ambrose's works in Dutch. See pages 309-10 for details.

relationship with the Trinity. Karl Barth (1886-1968), arguably the most prominent theologian of the twentieth-century, is best known for his massive thirteen volume *Church Dogmatics*, that unfortunately were uncompleted due to his death. Barth has been selected because of his prominence and the significant influence of his theology on numerous Reformed theologians. Indeed his misgivings and ever cautious anxiety regarding experience and contemplative piety are somewhat typical of others within the Reformed and Evangelical tradition, at least until recent years. Therefore, an examination of Barth will enable readers to better understand the Reformed resistance and apprehensions to contemplative piety. In similar fashion, the Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck serves as a corrective to the myopic vision of Barth in considering the possibility for retrieval of a Reformed contemplative piety. For present purposes, I am using Barth and Bavinck solely as conversation partners in relation to the specific question of resistance and retrieval. In the previous chapters of this thesis four main themes were surveyed from the writings of Isaac Ambrose: the importance of *unio mystica* or spiritual marriage, the role of experience of God, spiritual practices and contemplative experiences, and the language of delight and enjoyment. These four central themes of Ambrose will now be used to examine the theology of Barth and Bavinck and their perception of a contemplative-mystical piety. It will soon become evident that Ambrose and others in the seventeenth-century previously articulated some of Barth's criticisms waged against experience and mysticism in the twentieth-century and therefore, serve as a wise reminder for contemporary efforts of retrieval. However, it will also be clear that some of Barth's disparagement was significantly distorted by his own context and may have limited significance for today.

unio mystica

Exploring Barth's understanding of spiritual marriage reveals his complexity and according to George Hunsinger he was not always clear in his writings "seeming to take away with one hand what he has just established with the other." This was partially due to his dialectic theology. Other factors create additional challenges for those interested in understanding him. Not surprisingly Hunsinger declares that "Karl Barth has achieved the dubious distinction of being habitually honored but not much read." Hunsinger summarizes some of the key challenges in reading Barth including his "seemingly interminable sentences", his style that continually repeats and expands his thoughts, and his bewildering dialectic.²⁷

Barth briefly defines *unio mystica* as "the presence of grace in which God can give Himself to each individual, or assume the individual into unity of life with Himself, in the Christian experience and relationship."²⁸ His more detailed treatment of *unio mystica* comes when he addresses "The Vocation of Man." Here he declares "the goal of vocation" is "the fellowship of Christians with Christ." Clearly Barth shares the common Reformed understanding that union enables a person to become a Christian, "[t]he union of the Christian with Christ which makes a man a Christian is their conjunction in which each has his own independence, uniqueness and activity."²⁹ Later he reiterates the importance that "the Christian's *unio cum Christo*" is not the "climax of Christian experience and development in the face of which the anxious question might well be raised whether we have reached the point, or will ever do so"

²⁷ Hunsinger, *How to Read Barth*, 27, cf. 28-30. cf. Bromiley, *Theology of Karl Barth*, 246-7 and John Webster, *Cambridge Companion to Barth*, 9-12 for additional challenges in reading Barth.

²⁸ Barth, *CD IV/2*, 55.

²⁹ Barth, *CD IV/2*, 540.

rather Barth asserts that union with Christ is “what makes us Christians whatever our development or experience.”³⁰ Returning to his description of the nature of this union with Christ, Barth recognizes it is a relationship that is “true, total and indissoluble union.”³¹ Clearly for Barth, Christ takes the initiative through his grace in drawing and welcoming humanity unto himself. Therefore, he asserts “Jesus Christ [i]s the Subject who initiates and acts decisively in this union.”³² Barth expands this principle declaring “[t]he purpose for which Christians are already called here and now in their life-histories within universal history is that in the self-giving of Jesus Christ to them, and theirs to Him, they should enter into their union with Him, their *unio cum Christo*.” The nature of this union with Christ is “a single totality, a fluid and differentiated but genuine and solid unity.”³³ Barth proceeds to explore the New Testament foundation for this union beginning with John 15, Jesus is the vine and individual Christians are the branches that are engrafted into him and then continuing with John 14:20, “I in you” and “Ye in me.” He broadens his consideration by referring to numerous Pauline variations of “being in Christ” or “in the Lord” (e.g. Rom 8:1; 2 Cor 5:17, 12:2; Phil 2:5; Col 2:6; etc.)³⁴ Barth then raises the very practical question, what is the nature and meaning of the word “in”? He responds, “the ‘in’ must indeed indicate on both sides that the spatial distance between Christ and the Christian disappears, that Christ is spatially present where Christians are, and that Christians are spatially present where Christ is.”³⁵ Therefore, according to Barth the *unio mystica* provides for a deep relational intimacy between Christ and

³⁰ Barth, *CD IV/3*, 548, cf. II/2, 601.

³¹ Barth, *CD IV/3*, 540.

³² Barth, *CD IV/3*, 541.

³³ Barth, *CD IV/3*, 540.

³⁴ Barth, *CD IV/3*, 545-6.

³⁵ Barth, *CD IV/3*, 547.

Christians.³⁶ Additionally, he recognizes the Old Testament bridal language that “Yahweh is always the Lover, Bridegroom and Husband.”³⁷

This leads Barth to a historical excursus on mystical union. He also begins to display a growing hesitation regarding this foundational concept of union with Christ. While he reviews both Luther’s and Calvin’s understanding of *unio mystica* accurately³⁸ he previously articulated a very different message, especially in relation to the biblical foundation and that of Calvin. In speaking of Calvin’s use of the *unio mystica* he laments that Calvin ever used it and asserts that this type of language should never be employed “unless it is highly qualified.”³⁹ This reflects Barth’s aversion to mysticism that will be examined in the next section. He recognizes that mystical union has often been linked with mystical experiences. In an interesting historical comment Barth refers to A. E. Biedermann, who was the “greatest exponent of Neo-Protestantism after Schleiermacher” and in relation to his treatment of this topic declares, “the concept of the *unio mystica*, ... has been quietly and secretly filled out in a way which we can only describe as highly questionable.”⁴⁰ This provides a valuable insight into Barth’s polemic, that while he does not object unilaterally to the principle of mystical union he does raise serious reservations as he battles the anxieties of his past. It also reminds readers that no one should read Barth flat-footed without some awareness of his context and audience. Therefore, Barth cautiously warns, “[u]nless we consider, safeguard and expressly state these things [i.e. in relation to *unio mystica*], we do better not to speak of ‘Christ-mysticism’ when

³⁶ Hunsinger explores this theme in *How to Read Barth*, 173-5, 179.

³⁷ Barth, *CD III/1*, 316, cf. 315-8.

³⁸ Barth, *CD IV/3*, 549-54.

³⁹ Barth, *CD IV/3*, 539-40. The Calvin reference is *Institutes*, 3.11.10.

⁴⁰ Barth, *CD IV/2*, 57.

there is obviously no compelling reason to do so.”⁴¹ Strangely Barth affirms that it is only John and Paul who provide a biblical sanction for employing the living “in Christ” passages in the New Testament. Additionally, in commenting on these two biblical authors he mentions their “disturbing boldness” in using the language of mystical union.⁴² It is one thing to challenge Calvin’s use of mystical union, but it seems inappropriate to cast the same judgment upon the writers of Scripture. This is all the more bewildering when one realizes that John and Paul contribute over half of the New Testament writings.

Experience

Barth’s name has become synonymous with challenging humanity’s ability to experience God.⁴³ In fact a contemporary Barthian interpreter has remarked, “[o]ne can read many pages of ‘The Word of God and Experience’ before realizing that Barth wants to *affirm* the necessity of ‘Christian experience’.”⁴⁴ Indeed he does, for Barth declares “[e]xperience therefore, of the Word of God must at least also be experience of His presence.”⁴⁵ Barth’s reticence to give proper weight to experience is a radical shift from his early emphasis upon the experiential that was indebted to Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Herrmann.⁴⁶ However, World War I created a personal crisis that deeply shook Barth’s theological foundations. He was deeply troubled to discover that many of his liberal theological professors including his own highly respected mentor Herrmann supported the Kaiser’s justification for Germany’s

⁴¹ Barth, *CD* IV/3, 540.

⁴² Barth, *CD* IV/3, 549, cf. 54 for Barth’s nervousness of speaking of biblical mysticism.

⁴³ Barth bemoans that fact that his critics were continually accusing him of placing “revelation and faith from the believer’s standpoint up in the clouds.” *CD* I/1, 239.

⁴⁴ Mangina, *Barth on the Christian Life*, 49n39.

⁴⁵ Barth, *CD* I/1, 235, cf. 238, 239, 256.

⁴⁶ Mangina, *Barth on the Christian Life*, 21 and Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life*, 62.

participation in and further expansion of the war. In a letter to Herrmann, Barth reveals his shaken conviction that “we learned to acknowledge ‘experience’ as the constitutive principle of knowing and doing in the domain of religion.” Further, he objects to the “the fact that German Christians ‘experience’ their war as a holy war is supposed to bring us to silence.”⁴⁷ This forced Barth to recognize the unstable and ambiguous nature of experience. McCormack accurately summarizes his dilemma, “[i]f religious experience could give rise to such divergent and even contradictory conclusions, perhaps it could no longer be relied upon to provide an adequate ground and starting-point for theology.”⁴⁸ Additionally, this explains Barth’s strong aversion to natural theology due to its subjective origin in humanity and further connection with Nazi Germany.⁴⁹

Katherine Sonderegger provides a nuanced summary of Barth’s revised understanding of the nature and role of experience, “Barth does not *deny* human experience, its inwardness, piety, and self-certainty, but rather *unsettles* it: creaturely reality can reflect but cannot ground Christian knowledge of God. To *begin* with human experience of God, with faith, is to enter an airless room. We leave with what we took in – our own ideas, passions, and introspections.”⁵⁰ These words are best understood in relation to Barth’s understanding of the objective and subjective dynamics of experiencing the Word of God.⁵¹ Schleiermacher and others had made

⁴⁷ McCormack, *Barth’s Dialectical Theology*, 113, cf. 111-7 for the broader details on the war’s effect upon Barth’s thinking. See also Barth, “Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher,” 263-4.

⁴⁸ McCormack, *Barth’s Dialectical Theology*, 113.

⁴⁹ John Webster, *Cambridge Companion to Barth*, 32-3, 229-32, 302.

⁵⁰ Sonderegger, “Barth and Feminism,” 262. cf. McCormack, *Barth’s Dialectical Theology*, 157n129.

⁵¹ Hunsinger asserts that objectivism is one of the six major motifs for reading Barth. *How to Read Barth*, 35-39.

humanity the determinant for experience and truth.⁵² However, Barth questions, “[c]an we say with final human certainty that this is so?”⁵³ Barth stresses the danger of this highly subjective approach, reminding readers that this self-determination robs humanity of any guide for discerning truth, “[i]f we hold to what we may fix and investigate as man’s acknowledgment of the Word of God, to the experienceable in Christian experience--- where do we get the criterion for separating this experience from others, what is genuine in it from what is not?”⁵⁴ Therefore, the only solid foundation for “having knowledge of the Word of God, [is] by our self-determination being determined by the Word of God.”⁵⁵ The Holy Spirit serves a critical role in Barth’s understanding of the experience of the Word of God, “[t]he work of the Holy Spirit is that our blind eyes are opened and that thankfully and in thankful self-surrender we recognize and acknowledge that it is so.... He is the Spirit of the Word itself who brings to our ears the Word and nothing but the Word.”⁵⁶ Barth reveals an additional insight into this through a very illuminating treatment of evangelical hymnody.⁵⁷ As he traces the unfolding history from the sixteenth-century through the eighteenth-century he detects both a growing preoccupation with the self and a greater emotional emphasis. The tragedy of this according to Barth is that “confession and proclamation have given way to religious poetry” and hymns have become

⁵² Barth’s relationship to Schleiermacher extends beyond the scope of this thesis. For Barth’s assessment, appreciation, and critique of Schleiermacher see Barth, “Schleiermacher.” in *Protestant Theology in Nineteenth Century*, 411-59 and Barth, “Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher.” See also Torrance, “Christian Experience of Schleiermacher and Barth,” 83-113.

⁵³ Barth, *CD I/1*, 246, cf. 247.

⁵⁴ Barth, *CD I/1*, 248.

⁵⁵ Barth, *CD I/1*, 256.

⁵⁶ Barth, *CD I/2*, 239, cf. 247, 244, 246-248, 268, 271, 272, 276 for Barth’s fuller understanding of the interaction between Word and Spirit. cf. Macchia, “Spirit of God and Spirit of Life.”

⁵⁷ Barth, *CD I/2*, 252-7.

increasingly self-focused.⁵⁸ By the time of the nineteenth-century Barth contends that, “[e]ven Reformation praise of God disappears in the gurgling gullet of modern religious self-confession.”⁵⁹ Barth is alarmed by the changing landscape of increased subjectivity and romanticism in hymnody and believes this danger created two results, “[f]irst, Jesus Christ would cease to be understood unequivocally as the Lord; and second, we ourselves would consequently come to usurp the center which rightfully belongs to him.”⁶⁰ Before departing this discussion a brief comment is needed regarding the interaction between the intellect and the affect. While obviously Barth recognizes their importance he does not appear to provide any sustained development of their interaction. However he briefly mentions in a lecture on Calvin given in Paris, “theology...moves the head and heart most fully.”⁶¹

It is now possible to examine Barth’s understanding of mysticism as a case study of his theology of experience. Perhaps surprisingly to some readers Barth acknowledges the legitimacy of a certain type of mysticism. Referring to Paul in Galatians 2:20 Barth apprehensively questions, “[i]s this mysticism? Well, if and so far as it is mysticism, then Paul too was a mystic.... If this is mysticism, then mysticism is an indispensable part of the Christian faith.” Barth also reveals an appreciation for “Bernard’s mysticism, with its strongly Christological character” and did not believe it should “be regarded as mysticism in the more dubious sense.”

⁵⁸ Barth, *CD I/2*, 254.

⁵⁹ Barth, *CD I/2*, 256.

⁶⁰ Hunsinger, *How to Read Barth*, 40. Barth declares, “[t]he self-satisfied man rests upon himself and has no need of God.” *CD I/2*, 263.

⁶¹ Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life*, 244. For Barth on reason see Mangina, *Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness*, 49. For Barth on affectivity see Mangina, *Barth on the Christian Life*, 125-63.

Similarly he affirms the “Sabbath mysticism of Calvin.”⁶² In his development of experience of the Word of God, Barth declares that the person who is “claimed by the Word of God” is “a participator in the reality of the Word” and that this rightly introduces the “concept of mysticism.”⁶³ A few pages later Barth enlarges his position, “[i]f we care to give the name of mystical thought to the thought of what is Beyond all experience and which becomes visible at that moment, it is not worth while objecting to the expression. So long as it remains clear--- what is so-called mystical thinking often does not remain clear.”⁶⁴

While the previous paragraph reveals that Barth can be sympathetic to some forms of highly qualified mysticism overall his indiscriminate usage of language and failure to qualify his specific focus has earned him his bad reputation. Therefore, according to McGinn, Barth “saw little good in mysticism.”⁶⁵ Clearly his disdain for the term mysticism⁶⁶ and its comparison to agnostic philosophy⁶⁷ or “esoteric atheism”⁶⁸ did not improve his cause. Further, Barth enumerates the major errors he finds in mysticism including its tendency towards “world-renunciation,”⁶⁹ the use of human “technique and craft” that seeks to reach a union with God apart from Scripture,⁷⁰ “self-surrender and ultimately of absorption,”⁷¹ and its apophatic or

⁶² Barth, *CD* III/4, 59. Elsewhere Barth employs Bernard only in brief illustrative ways except for a cursory comment that Luther came to the very edge of mysticism as Calvin did also “probably treading in the footsteps of Bernard.” *CD* IV/3, 549.

⁶³ Barth, *CD* I/1, 242.

⁶⁴ Barth, *CD* I/1, 254.

⁶⁵ McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 269.

⁶⁶ Barth, *CD* IV/2, 57.

⁶⁷ Barth, *CD* I/2, 750.

⁶⁸ Barth, *CD* I/2, 322.

⁶⁹ Barth, *CD* IV/2, 545.

⁷⁰ Barth, *CD* III/4, 59.

⁷¹ Barth, *CD* I/2, 261.

“negative comprehensibility.”⁷² Additionally, Barth finds great disagreement with the “pious egocentricity” of the “quietistic mystical type” that includes “Madame de Guyon, Pierre Poiret and Gerhard Tersteegen.”⁷³ He even refers to Tersteegen’s piety as “reformed mysticism”⁷⁴ or “mystical Pietism.”⁷⁵ Barth takes a similar negative opinion of “natural mysticism” that found one popular expression in Schleiermacher.⁷⁶

Practices and Contemplation

While Isaac Ambrose would have had little disagreement with Barth’s teaching on christocentric mysticism that agreement would have quickly vanished with his understanding of spiritual practices and contemplation. Barth occasionally employs contemplation synonymously with to “think” or “reflect” upon something.⁷⁷ However, almost universally he has nothing positive to say about contemplation. Most damaging is his assertion that contemplation has no biblical foundation and “is not especially Christian” since it is built upon “mystical technique.”⁷⁸ One wonders how Barth would interpret the rich contemplative themes of Psalm 27:4, 42:2, 63:1-5, 73:25, 131:2? Further, he maintains that “[c]ontemplation in itself and as such, therefore, can be only a *cul-de-sac*” and that “God withdraws from every kind of contemplation.” Clearly a significant motivation for Barth’s resistance is his belief that God could not be the object of contemplation.⁷⁹ Instead the individual encounters

⁷² Barth, *CD* II/1, 193-4.

⁷³ Barth, *CD* IV/3, 568.

⁷⁴ Barth, *CD* II/2, 113.

⁷⁵ Barth, *CD* IV/3, 553. cf. I/2, 255. Elsewhere Barth asserts that “Christian mysticism” is a parallel movement to Pietism. *CD* IV/2, 11.

⁷⁶ Barth, *CD* III/4, 119-22.

⁷⁷ See for example Barth, *CD* I/2, 730, III/2, 98, III/3, 55.

⁷⁸ Barth, *CD* III/4, 560.

⁷⁹ Barth, *CD* III/4, 563.

only himself in contemplation.⁸⁰ It is a pity that Barth, who was aware and appreciative of Hans Urs von Balthasar's work on Christology, was not equally aware and appreciative of his work on prayer.⁸¹ There von Balthasar faithfully confesses, "[t]he object of contemplation is God, and God is trinitarian life; but for us he is life in the incarnation of the Son, from which we may never withdraw our gaze in contemplating God."⁸² The only positive statement that I have discovered in Barth's usage of contemplation pertains to humanity's love to God, "[a]s one element in the activity which puts the love to God into effect, there may be a place for a feeling of enjoyable contemplation of God." However, Barth quickly qualifies this, "[b]ut it cannot take the place of that activity."⁸³ Therefore, the freedom to engage in contemplation is tempered by Barth's fear that it will reduce the greater priority of action. This is related to Barth's foundational concept of actualism. Hunsinger asserts that it is both "the most distinctive and perhaps the most difficult of [Barth's] motifs." Hunsinger continues, "[a]ctualism emphasizes the sovereign activity of God in patterns of love and freedom."⁸⁴ Therefore, God's acts are central to Barth's theology because they reveal God's identity. Christ is also active and according to Lewis Smedes' interpretation of Barth, "[t]o be united with Christ means to be doing something."⁸⁵ Therefore, one could say that actualism places a greater emphasis upon doing than being. Barth is clear that humanity must also rest and relax so that they can function properly in doing their work.⁸⁶ However, in Barth's theology "The Active Life" occupies a central role and his limited comments on contemplation are

⁸⁰ Barth, *CD III/4*, 562, cf. II/1, 651.

⁸¹ Barth, *CD IV/1*, 768.

⁸² von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 154.

⁸³ Barth, *CD IV/1*, 104.

⁸⁴ Hunsinger, *How to Read Barth*, 30, cf. 30-2.

⁸⁵ Smedes, *Union with Christ*, 14.

⁸⁶ Barth, *CD III/4*, 550-2.

subsumed into this section.⁸⁷ This overarching emphasis upon activity provides little freedom to contemplate the mighty acts of God. Moreover, he tends to equate the term “indolence” with contemplation⁸⁸ and perceives it as ultimately hiding or withdrawal from the world.⁸⁹ Barth’s binary thinking imprisons his perception that contemplation and action are not equally legitimate expressions of the Christian life.⁹⁰ While he affirms, “[o]ra! and therefore *Labora!*”⁹¹ his understanding of the interaction between these two movements is illuminating:

Where theology is concerned, the rule *Ora et labora!* is valid under all circumstances—pray and work! And the gist of the rule is not merely that *orare*, although it should be the beginning, would afterward be only incidental to the execution of the *laborare*. The rule means, moreover, that *laborare* itself, and as such, is essentially an *orare*. Work must be that sort of act that has the manner and meaning of a prayer in all its dimensions, relationships, and moments.⁹²

Barth’s emphasis on work as prayer dismantles the original balance of prayer and work and undermines the centrality of prayer as a significant means for guiding Christian action. Smedes summarizes the implications of Barth’s active theology, “to be ‘in Christ’ means being where the action of Christ is going on. The theologian of the ‘wholly other’ is not likely to be burning the mystic flame.”⁹³

Further, Barth’s understanding of prayer “is decisively petition” and provides little room for contemplation. The primary form of prayer becomes invocation, not interior listening. In reality, for Barth the Lord’s Prayer was focused more upon

⁸⁷ Barth, *CD III/4*, 470-564

⁸⁸ Barth, *CD III/4*, 473-4.

⁸⁹ Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 83.

⁹⁰ Barth, *CD III/4*, 500-1, cf. 473-4.

⁹¹ Barth, *CD III/4*, 534. Barth does not indicate that this is the Benedictine motto though he does reveal some knowledge of Benedict and refers specifically to the *Rule* on a few occasions. *CD IV/2*, 13, 16, 17, 18, cf. I/2, 783, IV/2, 12, 14. However, Barth reveals his great displeasure with the final sentence of the *Rule*. *CD IV/2*, 18.

⁹² Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 160.

⁹³ Smedes, *Union with Christ*, 63.

ethics than the spiritual life. While obviously petition is not the only form of prayer it is the overarching means since no one can present “himself as worthy or of presenting anything worthy to God.” Therefore, petition is representative of coming before God with “empty hands.”⁹⁴ Barth’s reference to Ignatius of Loyola is particularly damaging to the nature of spiritual practices:

If by devotions we mean this simple thing, then we may understand prayer as a devotional exercise. But if by devotion we mean an exercise in the cultivation of the soul or spirit, i.e., the attempt to intensify and deepen ourselves, to purify and cleanse ourselves inwardly, to attain clarity and self-control, and finally to set ourselves on a good footing and in agreement with the deity by this preparation, then it is high time we realized that not merely have we not even begun to pray or prepared ourselves for prayer, but that we have actually turned away from what is commanded us as prayer. This type of exercise, as evolved and prescribed by Ignatius Loyola for his pupils and as variously recommended in modern secular religion, can perform a useful function as a means of psychical hygiene, but it has nothing whatever to do with the prayer required of us. Prayer begins where this kind of exercise leaves off; and this exercise must leave off where the prayer begins in which neither the collected man nor the distraught, neither the deepened nor the superficial, neither the purified and cleansed nor the impure, and not even the clear and strong, has anything whatever to represent or offer to God, but everything to ask of him.⁹⁵

Leaving aside the question as to whether this is an accurate description of Ignatius of Loyola,⁹⁶ it clearly depicts Barth’s animosity to other expressions of prayer. More succinctly he declares, “wordless prayer ... cannot be regarded as true prayer.”⁹⁷

Isaac Ambrose would radically disagree with his very narrow assessment of “devotional exercise” since *Media* was devoted to cultivating spiritual practices to assist a person in the process of sanctification.

⁹⁴ Barth, *CD* III/4, 97.

⁹⁵ Barth, *CD* III/4, 97-8.

⁹⁶ It is difficult to gauge Barth’s first-hand knowledge of Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*. However, this distorted attack suggests that either he had not read them or grossly misunderstood them. Aside from this blistering assault there are only two references to Ignatius in the *CD*. See *CD* IV/2 and 12, IV/3, 23.

⁹⁷ Barth, *CD* III/4, 112.

Language of Delight and Enjoyment

Reflective of his time Barth read the Song of Songs in a purely literal manner. In fact, he baldly declares that this book “is not an allegory.”⁹⁸ Therefore, one would not expect to find the devotional language of delight and enjoyment such as “ravishment” that was so prominent in Ambrose and other Puritans in Barth’s writings. However, due to his allergic reaction to mystical experiences Barth’s assessment of the German pietistic hymns of Nicolai and Gerhardt is surprising. He asserts that it is better to have some “religious eroticism” than simply sterile dusty dogmatic correctness. Barth continues by declaring “[b]ut how arid would be our hymn-books if we were to purge out all elements of this kind! ... If a choice has to be made, is it not better to say a little too much and occasionally to slip up with Nicolai and even with Zinzendorf and Novalis than to be rigidly correct with Kant and Ritschl and my 1921 *Romerbrief* and Bultmann.”⁹⁹ Though once again, Barth asserts the opposite perspective with equal force speaking of “debased religious eroticism” of pietistic hymns.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, a deeper consideration once again requires a tempering of Barth’s initial enthusiasm for devotional language. This was demonstrated previously in the discussion on subjectivity and Barth’s fear that this language could turn the focus inward and away from Christ.

To summarize, it is obvious Barth was no champion of contemplation. While at times he can speak favorably of a highly qualified form of Christian mysticism his inconsistency of expression often communicates greater confusion than clarity. It is one thing to know the sources of contemplative piety and adamantly disagree or even

⁹⁸ Barth, *CD* III/1, 319, cf. III/2, 294.

⁹⁹ Barth, *CD* IV/2, 798.

¹⁰⁰ Barth, *CD* IV/2, 795.

reject them, but it is entirely another thing to simply not be conversant with them. A review of the index to the *Church Dogmatics* reveals that Barth does not mention Granada or Gerson, two names that specifically influenced Isaac Ambrose. Additionally Barth's references to Bernard are extremely weak, not to mention his absence of Sibbes, Baxter, and Owen. However, there are a few references to William Ames and one to William Perkins. Therefore, it appears at least part of his confusion towards contemplative piety was his lack of awareness of the primary sources. While it is certainly appropriate to challenge Calvin's interpretation of Scripture as Barth does, it is obvious that his own selective reading of Scripture distorts the biblical witness to contemplation. The central weakness of Barth in relationship to this present study is his binary thinking. His tendency of arranging topics as polarities in tension with themselves prevents him from recognizing that opposites are required to bring balance and not to create division as he assumes. Barth appears intent to separate what Scripture and the best of the history of Christian spirituality has sought to integrate. His divisive either/or position radically shifts the focus to one side or the other rather than integrating two biblical truths. This is most clearly evinced in his perception that contemplation is at odds with action.

Further, Barth's perception that God cannot be the object of contemplation and that it is nothing more than a self-centered *cul-de-sac* reveals his foundational fear regarding experience. While all people have been shaped by their past, Barth's anxieties from his earlier years appear to have made him unduly apprehensive about engaging in a relationship of devotion and love to God through union and communion with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Alan Torrance, a Barth scholar, perceptively observes that Barth stressed "Christian experience" over "Christian

experiences”¹⁰¹ and continues his judgment that “[o]ne suspects that Barth’s theology would perhaps have been enriched if he had been able to appreciate equally fully the music of Beethoven or Brahms or perhaps even Rachmaninoff in addition to that of Mozart!”¹⁰² Therefore, it is indeed unfortunate that Barth’s misgivings of experience of God in general and contemplative piety in particular have created a distorted perception and fear that is still present today within some portions of the Reformed Church.

Continuation of Barthian Resistance to Contemplative-Mystical Experience

Significantly, the trajectory of resistance to mystical experiences begun in Barth has continued into the twenty-first century with his disciples. Donald Bloesch is one Reformed theologian who both acknowledges his deep appreciation for Barth and continues to exhibit a similar resistance to contemplative piety.¹⁰³ Since he addresses contemplation and mysticism in a number of his writings only his most recent work that represents his mature thinking will be used. While occasionally Bloesch can affirm that the terms “Christian” and “mysticism” can actually coexist¹⁰⁴ his fundamental conviction is that “[m]ysticism has been treated in this book as a Christian aberration” and “stands in contrast to biblical, evangelical faith.”¹⁰⁵ Bloesch also works from an inflexible binary model that tends to ossify his categories. Therefore, rather than appreciating the dynamic biblical interaction between

¹⁰¹ Torrance, “Christian Experience of Schleiermacher and Barth,” 112.

¹⁰² Torrance, “Christian Experience of Schleiermacher and Barth,” 111.

¹⁰³ Bloesch, *Spirituality Old & New*, 20 and Chung, *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology*, xv.

¹⁰⁴ Bloesch, *Spirituality Old & New*, 37, 50, 137.

¹⁰⁵ Bloesch, *Spirituality Old & New*, 143, 145, cf. 18, 50, 68, 81. cf. Houston, “Reflections on Mysticism,” 167.

contemplation and action he tends to depict them in stark contrast to each other.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, following Barth he delineates prayer as predominantly petition¹⁰⁷ and creates another unnecessary distinction that prayer “is not being transported into glory” but “an exchange of ideas for the purpose of doing God’s will.”¹⁰⁸ While more could be said regarding Bloesch’s antipathy to contemplation and healthy biblical mysticism Bruce Demarest, another Reformed theologian, has clearly assessed the primary weakness of this book. “[m]ystical spirituality in the soft (i.e. biblical) or relational sense is not a dangerous distortion of Christian life and mission, but is the very essence thereof.”¹⁰⁹

Retrieval of Contemplative-Mystical Piety within the Reformed Tradition: Herman Bavinck

While Barth articulates a strong resistance to contemplative-mystical piety he is not representative of all Reformed theologians. Another Reformed voice that has become increasingly more prominent in recent years is the Dutch neo-calvinist Herman Bavinck (1854-1921). This is directly related to the English translation of his *Reformed Dogmatics*.¹¹⁰ Bavinck was older than Barth and there is no indication that he was familiar with the *Church Dogmatics*. However, Barth did include a number of references to Bavinck’s theology and for the most part it was appreciative.¹¹¹ Nonetheless, while Bavinck shares some of Barth’s concerns regarding mysticism he is far more receptive to a healthy and biblically balanced experience of contemplation.

¹⁰⁶ Bloesch, *Spirituality Old & New*, 42, 58, 133.

¹⁰⁷ Bloesch, *Spirituality Old & New*, 94, 133.

¹⁰⁸ Bloesch, *Spirituality Old & New*, 81, 82, cf. 41.

¹⁰⁹ Demarest, review of *Spirituality Old & New*, 113.

¹¹⁰ This translation began in 2003 and was completed in 2008.

¹¹¹ Vissers, “Karl Barth’s Appreciative Use of Bavinck.”

unio mystica

Unlike Barth who frequently qualifies and cautions against using the terminology of *unio mystica* Bavinck approaches this topic with much greater confidence. He asserts that the origin of “the mystical union between Christ and his church, existed long before believers were personally incorporated into it--- or else Christ could not have made satisfaction for them either.”¹¹² Further, his understanding of *unio mystica* was consistent with that of Bernard, Calvin, and the Puritans. He defines it as a “most intimate union with God by the Holy Spirit, a union of persons, an unbreakable and eternal covenant between God and ourselves, which cannot be at all adequately described by the word ‘ethical’ and is therefore called ‘mystical.’”¹¹³ Bavinck reveals another distinction from Barth by frequently emphasizing the Holy Spirit’s role in uniting the individual into union with Christ.¹¹⁴ Additionally, Bavinck continues that this “union of persons, [is] not only in will and disposition but also in being and nature.”¹¹⁵

However, Bavinck is quick to qualify and maintains that union with Christ “is not a pantheistic mingling of the two [Christ and the individual], not a ‘substantial union,’ as it has been viewed by the mysticism of earlier and later times, nor on the other hand is it mere agreement in disposition, will, and purpose, as rationalism understood it and Ritschl again explained it.”¹¹⁶ Bavinck then immediately declares that what “Scripture tells us of this mystical union goes far beyond moral agreement in will and disposition” and then lists numerous biblical grounds for union with Christ

¹¹² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:214.

¹¹³ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:304.

¹¹⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:570; 4:89, 251, 541, 577-8 and Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 398.

¹¹⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:577.

¹¹⁶ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:250.

including references that “Christ lives and dwells in believers” (Jn 14:23, 17:23, 26; Gal 2:20; Eph 3:17) and “that they exist in him” (Jn 15:1-7; Rom 8:1; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:17). He additionally reminds his readers that this same union is sometimes compared to a “husband and wife” (1 Cor 6:16-17; Eph 5:32) and a “cornerstone and building” (1 Cor 3:11, 16, 6:19; Eph 2:21; 1 Pt 2:4-5).¹¹⁷ Later he declares that the mystical union “can only be made somewhat clear to us by the images of the vine and the branch, the head and the body, a bridegroom and his bride, the cornerstone and the building that rests on it.”¹¹⁸

For Bavinck, much like Calvin, the locus of a person’s relationship with Christ centers in the Lord’s Supper and he provides his most sustained treatment of *unio mystica* at this point.¹¹⁹ Within this framework, Bavinck recognizes the many benefits a person receives from his or her union with Christ. Again similar to Calvin, Bavinck remarks that a person’s union with Christ is “strengthened in the Supper.”¹²⁰ Bavinck also asserts that the mystical union is the primary means for imitating Christ.¹²¹ Consistent with the best of Reformed theology he perceives the parallel but not equal nature of Word and Sacrament affirming, “in the Lord’s Supper we indeed do not receive any other or any more benefits than we do in the Word, but also no fewer.”¹²² This mystical union “transforms humans in the divine image and makes them participants in the divine nature (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 2:20; 2 Pet. 1:4).”¹²³ Further, it is through mystical union that all of Christ’s benefits from justification to sanctification

¹¹⁷ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:251.

¹¹⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:567-68, cf. 576.

¹¹⁹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:567-68, 575-81. For a further elaboration on this topic see Gleason, “Calvin and Bavinck on Lord’s Supper.”

¹²⁰ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:577-8.

¹²¹ Bavinck, *Imitation of Christ* (1885-86), 21, cf. 17, 22.

¹²² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4: 567, cf. 577.

¹²³ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:304.

accrue to the individual.¹²⁴ The intimacy of *unio mystica* naturally leads to a consideration of experience. Once again it will become clear that the apprehension and anxieties of Barth have receded as Bavinck embraces a deeper appreciation for experiencing God's presence.

Experience

Bavinck also faced a major personal crisis that challenged his understanding of experience, however, unlike Barth they did not cripple him. Similar to Barth, Bavinck's father was a pietistic pastor. Bavinck was raised within the Secession Church that had broken away from the National Reformed Church in 1834 due to the lack of vibrant faith and orthodox theology. This fledging denomination reflected many of the same principles and practices of the *Nadere Reformatie* and English Puritanism. In preparation for his pastoral training he first attended his denomination's seminary in Kampen. However, after his first year he transferred to the more prominent University of Leiden. This was motivated by his desire for the most progressive and modern theological teaching. His father and others were concerned about his faith due to the strong liberal nature of Leiden. While Bavinck writes in his journal of his desire to "remain standing [in the faith]" and succeeds in that desire, he looks back in retrospect commenting, "Leiden has benefited me in many ways: I hope always to acknowledge that gratefully. But it has also greatly impoverished me, robbed me, not only of much ballast (for which I am happy), but also of much that I recently, especially when I preach, recognize as vital for my own spiritual life."¹²⁵ In fact, he once described his training at Leiden as "stones for

¹²⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:591, cf. 4:123, 578-81 and Bavinck, *Sacrifice of Praise*, 24.

¹²⁵ Editor's introduction, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:13.

bread.”¹²⁶ Before his departure from Kampen Bavinck confessed, “I am a child of the secession, and I hope always to remain one.”¹²⁷ Amid this personal struggle he successfully weathered the theological challenges and according to John Bolt, editor of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck was “thus definitely shaped by strong patterns of deep pietistic Reformed spirituality.”¹²⁸ However, Bavinck equally critiqued the weaknesses of his Church recognizing the potential for an other-worldliness and anti-cultural withdrawal.¹²⁹ Nonetheless, Bavinck validated his piety and orthodoxy by returning to Kampen in 1882 as professor.

However, some scholars in examining this tension are prone to view “Bavinck as a man between two worlds.”¹³⁰ Unfortunately, to date there is no biography or even expanded treatment of Bavinck in English to further explore the reality or dynamics of this question.¹³¹ Clearly Bavinck is aware of this conflict:

The antithesis, therefore, is fairly sharp: on the one side, a Christian life that considers the highest goal, now and hereafter, to be the contemplation of God and fellowship with him, and for that reason (always being more or less hostile to the riches of an earthly life) is in danger of falling into monasticism and asceticism, pietism and mysticism; but on the side of Ritschl, a Christian life that considers its highest goal to be the kingdom of God, that is, the moral obligation of mankind, and for that reason (always being more or less adverse to the withdrawal into solitude and quiet communion with God), is in danger of degenerating into cold Pelagianism and an unfeeling moralism. Personally, I do not yet see any way of combining the two points of view, but I do know

¹²⁶ Bolt, “Between Kampen and Amsterdam,” 269. For an elaboration of Leiden’s effect on Bavinck see Dosker, “Herman Bavinck,” 450-52 and Harnick, “Something That Must Remain,” 250-55.

¹²⁷ Bolt, “Between Kampen and Amsterdam,” 269, cf. 268.

¹²⁸ Editor’s introduction, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:12, cf. 4:24 and Veenhof, “History of Theology and Spirituality,” 276.

¹²⁹ Bolt, “Imitation of Christ Theme,” 77.

¹³⁰ Editor’s introduction, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:13. For an expansion on this see Bolt, “Between Kampen and Amsterdam,” 264-69 and Harnick, “Something that Must Remain,” 249-52.

¹³¹ Ron Gleason is in the process of preparing an English biography.

that there is much that is excellent in both, and that both contain undeniable truth.¹³²

While some might interpret this as confusion, I perceive this as a healthy balance within Bavinck's piety and agree with Bolt's assessment "about the unity of the two streams in Bavinck" and that unlike Barth he both sought and was successful in being "pious, orthodox, and thoroughly contemporary."¹³³

Bavinck articulates his understanding of experience most lucidly in his 1908-09 Princeton Stone Lecture "Revelation and Religious Experience." There he maintains the importance of revelation as the foundation for experience.¹³⁴ Further, "[e]xperience by itself is not sufficient. Scripture is the norm also for our emotional life and tells us what we ought to experience."¹³⁵ Bavinck clearly asserts the essential nature of experience, "that dogmatics, especially in the doctrine of the *ordo salutis*, must become more psychological, and must reckon more fully with religious experience."¹³⁶ Previously he wrote, "[o]nly through experience does one first understand the truth. Experience discovers in the words of Scripture an entirely new spiritual meaning; it shows us a truth behind the truth, not because it wants to say something else, but because we have then experienced and benefited from it in our hearts."¹³⁷ Even more forcefully he declares, "[t]hese experiences [e.g. "longing for God, communion with God, delight in God"] do not merely exist but have a right to exist; they are inseparable from godliness, and therefore find their classic expression

¹³² Editor's introduction, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:14.

¹³³ Bolt, "Between Kampen and Amsterdam," 269. cf. Harnick, "Something that Must Remain," 252.

¹³⁴ Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 208. This specific lecture was not delivered at Princeton but elsewhere during his visit in the United States.

¹³⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:534.

¹³⁶ Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 209.

¹³⁷ Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 42.

in the Bible as a whole, especially in the Psalms.”¹³⁸ One quickly recognizes Bavinck’s boldness that was absent in Barth. Nonetheless, Bavinck is critical of the psychology of religion movement that studied conversions and those who had experienced revivals because it shifted the focus of dogmatics from the “exposition of the doctrine of Scripture” to “a description of conscious religious ideas or pious emotions.”¹³⁹

Bavinck also understands that experience alone can never be the foundation for faith because there must be some objective truth that first invites a response.¹⁴⁰ As previously stated, Bavinck understood “Scripture is the norm also for our emotional life and tells us what we ought to experience.”¹⁴¹ Barth no doubt would approve of that assessment. However, Bavinck unlike Barth does not panic when subjective experiences are mentioned because, “[t]he word “faith” ... expresses subjective religiousness.”¹⁴² It must be stressed that Bavinck’s subjective dimension of faith is radically different from Schleiermacher’s subjectivism.¹⁴³ In *The Certainty of Faith* Bavinck reveals the essential dynamics of both truth and experience, “[t]here is a certainty that pertains to objective religious truth and a certainty that pertains to the subject’s share in the benefits promised by that truth. The two kinds of certainty are doubtlessly very closely interconnected, but they should, nevertheless, be distinguished and not confused.”¹⁴⁴ More succinctly he summarizes his position in his

¹³⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:533-34.

¹³⁹ Bavinck, *Essays on Religion*, 62. cf. *Philosophy of Revelation*, 210. Bavinck devotes an entire chapter to this topic in *Essays of Religion*, 61-80.

¹⁴⁰ Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 67, 69, 92.

¹⁴¹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:534, cf. 3: 26.

¹⁴² Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 225. cf. *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:130.

¹⁴³ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:66-70, 521.

¹⁴⁴ Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 28, cf. 82.

Stone Lecture declaring faith is “a trustful knowledge and a knowing trust.”¹⁴⁵

Additionally, the Holy Spirit plays a significant role in this dynamic of experience, “[h]ence the subjective activity of the Holy Spirit has to be added to the objective word.”¹⁴⁶ Earlier Bavinck refers to the Spirit’s role in “subjective revelation” as illumination.¹⁴⁷ His more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic relationship between Word and Spirit and a person’s experiences of God will come following his critique of mysticism.

Not only is Bavinck’s comfort level in relation to the subjective dimension of experience greater than Barth’s he also articulates a more balanced treatment of the intellect and affections. Bavinck asserts, “[t]he heart cannot be separated from the head, nor faith as trust from faith as knowledge.”¹⁴⁸ In his inaugural address at the Free University of Amsterdam he defines his vision for doing theology and declares it is “a service of worship, a consecration of mind and heart to the honor of His name.”¹⁴⁹ Bavinck demonstrated this in both his writings and lifestyle. Henry Dosker, his life long friend, confirmed this balance, “[Bavinck] had a thoroughly disciplined mind, with the heart of a child.” Later as a summary of Bavinck’s method Dosker declared, “[t]he service of God, both with heart and intellect, is the aim of all true Christian theology.”¹⁵⁰ Significantly, Bavinck appreciated the unique contribution of these human faculties and never sought to elevate one over the other. Therefore, he maintained the intellect and the will “are consistently interconnected

¹⁴⁵ Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 240.

¹⁴⁶ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:460.

¹⁴⁷ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:350.

¹⁴⁸ Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 208. cf. *Essays on Religion*, 26.

¹⁴⁹ Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 7.

¹⁵⁰ Dosker, “Bavinck,” 454, 463.

and reciprocally support and promote each other.”¹⁵¹ Bavinck demonstrates their mutual significance in his communion meditation, *The Sacrifice of Praise*. In describing the importance of introducing children to Scripture he claims it must “be both instruction and training, at the same time working upon mind and heart.”¹⁵² As Bavinck expands his teaching he highlights first the danger of emphasizing only the emotions, “[t]he cultivation of emotions and the awakening of affections without true and clear representations is even dangerous.”¹⁵³ Likewise, he warns of the risk of ignoring the affections, “[h]e, who impresses the truth upon his mind, without having his heart in it, receives only the image of the things, while he remains a stranger unto the things themselves.”¹⁵⁴ Clearly Bavinck exhibits a greater balance again than Barth on this point.

Bavinck’s historical context affected his understanding of mysticism and his reservations regarding it. The balanced mystical piety of the first generation of the *Nadere Reformatie* was eclipsed by an increasing otherworldly withdrawal from society. This same pattern was repeated in Bavinck’s time with the Secession.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, Bavinck’s assessment of mysticism can be summarized in relation to three primary concerns. First, he objects to its exclusive nature. Since it is typically associated with monasticism it reduces the experience “to a small number of privileged persons.”¹⁵⁶ Second, while not an accurate assessment, Bavinck believed

¹⁵¹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:153. cf. *Essays on Religion*, 199-204 where he asserts the cooperative interaction of the intellect and will rather than the primacy of one over the other.

¹⁵² Bavinck, *Sacrifice of Praise*, 42.

¹⁵³ Bavinck, *Sacrifice of Praise*, 43.

¹⁵⁴ Bavinck, *Sacrifice of Praise*, 44. cf. *Certainty of Faith*, 76.

¹⁵⁵ Bolt, “Imitation of Christ Theme,” 55-7.

¹⁵⁶ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:148.

that pantheistic¹⁵⁷ and Neoplatonic roots inspired Pseudo-Dionysius rather than a biblical foundation.¹⁵⁸ Third, and most importantly mysticism tended to either undervalue or over time dispense with using Scripture.¹⁵⁹ Bavinck's position becomes clearer in examining his critique of "Anabaptist mysticism", which likely refers to the Quakers. In true irenic fashion he praises the early Anabaptists who had "many upright believers" and that many sacrificed "their blood for the cause of the Lord."¹⁶⁰ However, according to Bavinck, their zeal eventually created two serious errors. First, people became content "with the internal Word alone, despising Scripture and church, office and sacrament, appealing to private revelations and becoming guilty of various excesses." This parallels Ambrose's critique of the seventeenth-century Quakers. Second, "when the initial exuberance was past, gradually the internal Word was robbed of its special, supernatural character, coming to be more and more identified with the natural light of reason and conscience." The resulting tragedy from Bavinck's perspective was that the Anabaptists and others who followed this pattern "despised the Word [and] surrendered the criterion that alone enabled them to distinguish properly between nature and grace."¹⁶¹ This reflects the central Reformed doctrine of Word and Spirit.¹⁶² If either the Word or Spirit become marginalized it creates an unhealthy experience. On the contrary, Bavinck asserts, Christ "by his Word directs our faith to his sacrifice, by his Spirit incorporates us into his fellowship, and by both Word and Spirit prepares and preserves us for heavenly

¹⁵⁷ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:69, cf. 4:75, 456-7 and *Imitation of Christ* (1885-86), 18.

¹⁵⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:191

¹⁵⁹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:467, 473; 2:68; 4:102, 441.

¹⁶⁰ Bavinck, *Saved By Grace*, 73.

¹⁶¹ Bavinck, *Saved By Grace*, 73. cf. *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:467; 3:580; 4:456-7.

¹⁶² Bavinck, *Saved By Grace*, 73-4, 79. cf. Veenhof, "History of Theology and Spirituality," 297.

blessedness.”¹⁶³ The dynamic interaction between Word and Spirit is a familiar refrain in Bavinck.¹⁶⁴ Further, and more significantly one perceives from Bavinck’s emphasis upon the internal operation of the Holy Spirit and the “testimony of the Holy Spirit”¹⁶⁵ that if a healthy balance was maintained between Word and Spirit that the resulting experience of mystical piety would be acceptable to him.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, Bavinck carefully delineates the difference between “true mysticism” and “general mysticism”¹⁶⁷ between orthodox and pantheistic mysticism.¹⁶⁸ Further, he acknowledges that there is a mysticism “of the Reformed church”¹⁶⁹ and once described his father’s preaching as “healthy mysticism.”¹⁷⁰ Clearly Bavinck did not reject all forms of mysticism and displays a more balanced perspective than Barth.

Practices and Contemplation

At first glance it appears that Bavinck shares a number of Barth’s fears regarding spiritual practices and contemplation. More specifically Bavinck’s objections are three-fold. First, he is critical that contemplation tended to “disparage knowledge” and reduce “clarity of mind.”¹⁷¹ Second, he frequently associates contemplation with asceticism¹⁷² and perceives asceticism as Pelagianism calling it

¹⁶³ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:595.

¹⁶⁴ See for example Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:593; 4:332, 395, 442, 457, 459; *Philosophy of Revelation*, 241; *Sacrifice of Praise*, 38, 40; *Our Reasonable Faith*, 406-7, 433, 514.

¹⁶⁵ Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 422-23, 511 and *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:585.

¹⁶⁶ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:467, 473 and 4:102; *Sacrifice of Praise*, 40. This was the case in the *Nadere Reformatie*. See Beeke, “Evangelicalism and Dutch Further Reformation,” 161.

¹⁶⁷ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:529.

¹⁶⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:148.

¹⁶⁹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:191.

¹⁷⁰ Dosker, “Bavinck,” 450.

¹⁷¹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:149.

¹⁷² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:493; 4:239, 242.

“nothing other than self-willed religion.”¹⁷³ Third, he adamantly rejects the Roman Catholic doctrine of superadded grace and the beatific vision that he connects with the practice of contemplation.¹⁷⁴ However, Bavinck does recognize that there can be an authentic or biblical asceticism.¹⁷⁵ Others have described him as “the man of quiet contemplation”¹⁷⁶ and in his own words he asserts, “[w]e come to the knowledge of God only by contemplating God’s revelation in nature and Scripture.”¹⁷⁷ Likewise he maintains that “a proper Christian meditation on God’s works, and words... is enjoined by” Scripture.¹⁷⁸ Bavinck also claims that the task of theology is not only to guide individuals how to live life in this world and the next but “[i]t must lead us to rest in the arms of God.”¹⁷⁹ The apparent gap between Bavinck’s resistance and his more nuanced reception of contemplation can be resolved by recognizing that he accepted the common Protestant distortion that medieval Roman Catholics were Neoplatonic and taught a union of indistinction.¹⁸⁰ Bavinck even incorrectly associates Bernard with the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius.¹⁸¹ Yet elsewhere he speaks more approvingly of Bernard’s practice of mysticism.¹⁸²

¹⁷³ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:243. cf. Bavinck, *Imitation of Christ* (1918), 45.

¹⁷⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:545; 3: 529; 4:722. cf. *Imitation of Christ* (1885-86), 17.

¹⁷⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* 4:674, cf. 243 and Bavinck, “Catholicity of Christianity,” 248.

¹⁷⁶ Harinck, “Something that Must Remain,” 250, cf. 253.

¹⁷⁷ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:69.

¹⁷⁸ Bavinck, *Imitation of Christ* (1885-86), 17.

¹⁷⁹ Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 17.

¹⁸⁰ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* 2:539, cf. 187-91.

¹⁸¹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* 1:148-9. Casey asserts, “that Pseudo-Dionysius had scarcely any impact at all” on Bernard. *Athirst for God*, 31.

¹⁸² Bavinck, *Imitation of Christ* (1885-86), 14.

Additionally, in exploring the interaction between contemplation and action Bavinck demonstrates a radically different sensitivity than Barth. In his 1888 lecture at Kampen Bavinck acknowledges:

The mystical life has its own legitimacy alongside activity; the busyness of work makes rest necessary.... In this dispensation we will never achieve the full harmony and unity that we expect in the future. Some oneness will remain in us as persons and churches. None of us has our intellect, emotions and will, our head, heart and hand, equally governed by the Gospel. However, in order to prevent the “spiritual” (*godsdienstige*), side of Christianity--- that which in the good sense of the term can be called the “ascetic” side--- from degenerating into an improper mysticism and monastic spirituality, it needs to be supplemented by the moral (*zedelijke*)--- the truly human side.¹⁸³

More pointedly Bavinck continues by asserting that these two legitimate expressions of Christianity need to be integrated into one, “[f]aith appears to be great, indeed, when a person renounces all and shuts himself up in isolation. But even greater, it seems to me, is the faith of a person who, while keeping the kingdom of heaven as a treasure, at the same time brings it out into the world as a leaven, certain that He who is for us is greater than he who is against us and that He is able to preserve us from evil even in the midst of the world.”¹⁸⁴ Later in his Stone Lectures Bavinck declares, “Mary and Martha were very different in religious disposition, but Jesus loved them both.”¹⁸⁵ He expands the interaction between contemplation and action by considering his own denomination, “[t]his tradition [i.e. the pietistic Dutch Secession movement] overestimated and overemphasized the one thing needful, which, on the other hand, is often lacking in the busyness of contemporary life. While these nineteenth century Christians forgot the world for themselves, we run the danger of losing ourselves in the world.”¹⁸⁶ Further, the spiritual life is the foundation for every dimension of life within the world, therefore “in fellowship with God, he is

¹⁸³ Bavinck, “Catholicity of Christianity,” 248.

¹⁸⁴ Bavinck, “Catholicity of Christianity,” 248.

¹⁸⁵ Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 234-35.

¹⁸⁶ Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 94.

strengthened for his labors and girds himself for the battle. But that mysterious life of fellowship with God is not the whole of life. The prayer chamber is the inner room, although it is not the whole house in which he lives and functions.... Rather it is the power that enables us to faithfully fulfill our earthly calling, stamping all of life as service to God.”¹⁸⁷ Unquestionably Bavinck recognizes the dynamic interaction of prayer and service and once again reveals a more healthy perspective than Barth.

Language of Delight and Enjoyment

Similar to Barth, Bavinck does not employ the devotional language of ravishment and unlike Barth he does not appear to address the emotional nature of pietistic hymns. However, Bavinck does recognize that a “fervent, sincere faith” should produce a “little genuine enthusiasm”¹⁸⁸ and that by maintaining the proper balance of Word and Spirit would prevent the error of “enthusiasm of the Anabaptists.”¹⁸⁹ Likewise to “delight in God” is an appropriate expression of spiritual hunger.¹⁹⁰ Conversion produces a “lively joy in God”¹⁹¹ and therefore believers can enjoy communion with God.¹⁹² Bavinck’s understanding of enjoyment is Trinitarian, since a person may “enjoy the heartfelt joy in God through Christ.”¹⁹³ Further, this joy comes through the Holy Spirit¹⁹⁴ and without faith it is impossible to enjoy the benefits of God.¹⁹⁵ According to Bavinck the future blessedness consists of “contemplation (*visio*), understanding (*comprehensio*), and enjoyment of God (*fruitio*)

¹⁸⁷ Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 95-6.

¹⁸⁸ Bavinck, *Certainty of Faith*, 9.

¹⁸⁹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:326, cf. 332.

¹⁹⁰ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:533.

¹⁹¹ Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 237, cf. 241 and *Imitation of Christ (1918)*, 28.

¹⁹² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:91, 103, 152.

¹⁹³ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:158, cf. 3:527.

¹⁹⁴ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:257.

¹⁹⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:103, cf. 257, 578.

Dei)¹⁹⁶ however, a person begins to enjoy these eschatological benefits already on earth.¹⁹⁷ Significantly, Bavinck believes that Jesus' invitation to the Lord's Supper offers believers the "joy of heaven" and "communion with Christ."¹⁹⁸

To summarize, Bavinck noticeably demonstrates a greater receptivity than Barth to a contemplative-mystical piety. G. C. Berkouwer, who later occupied the same chair of theology at the Free University as Bavinck, offers this valuable summary:

In spite of his objections to experiential theology, Bavinck did not think that the purpose of this theology was to make subjective, pious experience the criterion of religious truth. Kuyper was more critical of experiential theology, and thought Bavinck's critique was too mild. He suspected that a pantheistic streak ran through experiential theology. Bavinck, on the other hand, was more sensitive to the dangers of dead orthodoxy, of a confession that one believed in place of a living faith that one confessed. Great theologian that he was, Bavinck certainly was aware that the Christian had to reflect about the manner in which divine revelation entered convincingly into human consciousness.¹⁹⁹

Therefore, Bavinck reveals a greater flexibility to both the need for and importance of experience than Barth. While he expresses some concerns regarding mysticism, they are significantly less than those of Barth. Clearly Bavinck's theology and piety are more reflective of Ambrose's viewpoint than Barth and Bavinck's overall theology is more conducive to creating the opportunity for a person to experience God more contemplatively.

Previously it was noted that the restrictive trajectory of Barth's resistance to contemplative piety has continued to the present affecting some of his disciples, such

¹⁹⁶ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:722.

¹⁹⁷ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:721-3.

¹⁹⁸ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:640, cf. 576.

¹⁹⁹ Berkouwer, *Half Century of Theology*, 14.

as Bloesch. In a like manner, there is a more positive trajectory of retrieval embracing a contemplative piety extending back to the seventeenth-century, connecting through Bavinck and extending to the contemporary Church. The parallels between the *Nadere Reformatie* and English Puritanism have already been mentioned and significantly they embraced the writings of Ambrose very early in their history. *Prima, Media, Ultima* was Ambrose's first work to be translated into Dutch in 1660.²⁰⁰ The first Dutch translation of *Looking Unto Jesus* appeared in 1664.²⁰¹ The works of Puritanism experienced a revival of interest in mid-nineteenth-century Holland and no less than four editions of *Looking Unto Jesus* were published in twenty-four years.²⁰² The second half of the twentieth-century witnessed another revival of interest in the writings of Ambrose. This time seven editions of *Looking Unto Jesus* were published.²⁰³ Willem op't Hof, an expert in Dutch Pietism and Puritanism, remarks that Lewis Bayly's *The Practice of Piety* was the number one bestseller among pietistic literature in the seventeenth-century with forty eight editions to only four to Ambrose's *Looking Unto Jesus*. However, "the appreciation of Ambrose as an edifying writer is still alive [today in contrast to that of Bayly] and perhaps more lively than ever." Op't Hof identifies Ambrose's eclipse of Bayly and contemporary popularity as due to his "reformed, experimental, mystical and especially christocentric character."²⁰⁴ This popularity of Ambrose's *Looking Unto Jesus* makes it likely to be found in most "families of the experimental reformed" tradition.²⁰⁵ Interestingly, most of the publications of Ambrose's works originated in

²⁰⁰ Schoneveld, *Intertraffic of the Mind*, 137 and Van Der Haar, *From Abbadie to Young*, 3.

²⁰¹ Van Der Haar, *From Abbadie to Young*, 2.

²⁰² Op't Hof, "Dutch Reception of Ambrose," 6-7.

²⁰³ Op't Hof, "Dutch Reception of Ambrose," 7.

²⁰⁴ Op't Hof, "Dutch Reception of Ambrose," 10.

²⁰⁵ Op't Hof, "Dutch Reception of Ambrose," 8.

northern Holland, the same region of Bavinck's birth and early ministry, though he does not reveal any awareness of Ambrose in his writings. Apparently Ambrose's works were only translated into Dutch.²⁰⁶ In the United States Ambrose's *Looking Unto Jesus* as well as *War with Devils*, renamed as *The Christian Warrior*, have been republished in the past few decades.²⁰⁷ In summary, while Bavinck does not indicate any awareness of Isaac Ambrose the tradition from which he came was well acquainted with him.

Retrieval of Isaac Ambrose for the Contemporary Church

The examination of Barth and Bavinck revealed that there is more than one approach to Reformed theology and piety. In reviewing the contemporary landscape of the Reformed tradition it becomes clear that Barth has unfortunately carried the day. Howard Rice accurately observes that, "[t]here is a particularly deeply embedded resistance to spirituality among those churches within the denominational tradition called Reformed." Rice advances a number of reasons for this resistance including "the rigorous exercise of the intellect as a sign of obedience to God" and a highly active faith that concentrates its energy on addressing the needs of society.²⁰⁸ It is illuminating that Rice does not include Barth in his survey of key Reformed leaders for recovering a renewed piety.²⁰⁹ However, there are promising signs that more Reformed theologians are embracing a contemplative piety today.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Op't Hof, "Dutch Reception of Ambrose," 9.

²⁰⁷ *Looking Unto Jesus* was published by Sprinkle Publications in 1986 and *The Christian Warrior* was published by Soli Deo Gloria in 1997.

²⁰⁸ Rice, *Reformed Spirituality*, 9.

²⁰⁹ Rice, *Reformed Spirituality*, 17.

²¹⁰ See for example Moltmann, "Theology of Mystical Experience"; Ferguson, "Reformed View," 193; Postema, *Space for God*, 65-66, 130, 173, 196; Eugene

Further, drawing upon the insights of Tracy and Sheldrake this retrieval is a necessity so that Reformed Christians can be reconnected with the fullness of their own roots and tradition. According to Tracy a “classic text” is of perennial value and warrants retrieval for challenging and provoking contemporary readers. Moreover, Sheldrake asserts the importance of retrieval because it recovers “aspects of the past, long forgotten and even deliberately submerged”²¹¹ and that this task “is important for our present identity and desire to live more complete Christian lives.”²¹² Further, this retrieval is critical for Reformed Christians because without a greater awareness of their contemplative roots their piety will be impoverished. Directly related to this is the bold assertion of James Houston that Puritanism collapsed, at least in part, because it did not give greater and sustained attention to contemplation. He contends, Puritan spirituality “might have been a richer, more sustained spirituality if the contemplative life had” been more fully considered.²¹³ Tracy also warns of the potential “temptation to domesticate all reality” yet “any classic text[s] will resist” this.²¹⁴ Therefore, the proper posture for reading any classic text such as Isaac Ambrose’s writings is one of “critique and suspicion.”²¹⁵ Within this hermeneutic of suspicion it is also important to be sensitive to the originating and receiving contexts. Much has occurred since the seventeenth-century and the purpose of this thesis is not

Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 74-86, *Contemplative Pastor*, and *Eat This Book*, 109-17; Rice, *Reformed Spirituality*, 88-90, 110-17; Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 157-86; Johnson and Dreitcer, *Beyond the Ordinary*, esp. 138-43. Evangelicals are also reclaiming the richness of contemplative piety: Foster, *Prayer*, 155-66 and *Streams of Living Water*, 23-58; Huggett, *Joy of Listening to God*, esp. 32-74; Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading*; Webber, *Divine Embrace*, 16, 20-1, 26, 37, 43-55; Houston, “Reflections on Mysticism”, *Transforming Friendship*, 115-6, 191-222, 261-8, and *Pursuit of Happiness*, 253-66.

²¹¹ Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 31.

²¹² Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 108.

²¹³ Houston, “Spirituality.” s.v., 1050.

²¹⁴ Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 15.

²¹⁵ Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 79, cf. 111, 112. cf. Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 183-4.

to transplant or create a neo-Puritan culture in the twenty first-century. However, as one approaches the respective cultures with sensitivity are there principles and themes that emerge from the writings of Isaac Ambrose that can address similar concerns and needs today? Or to borrow William Harmless' language, "why mystics matter"²¹⁶ why does Isaac Ambrose matter? One factor that assists in this hermeneutical process is the common tradition and continuity in theological foundation between Ambrose and contemporary Reformed believers.

Therefore, the challenge is to retrieve the contemplative-mystical piety of Isaac Ambrose that has the qualities of a "classic text." In reality this is a two-step process. Many readers may not need to take the first step, but some members of the Reformed tradition may respond similarly to Charles Hodge (1797-1878) who when asked to review John Williamson Nevin's (1803-1866) *The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Calvinistic Doctrine of the Eucharist* resisted for two years.²¹⁷ Hodge was shocked that his former student's theology was so divergent from Calvin. However, many Reformed theologians would now agree that Nevin's theology was more representative of Calvin than Hodge who was more Zwinglian in his understanding. Possibly some readers may approach the contemplative-mystical piety of Ambrose with a hermeneutic of suspicion fearing it to be unreformed. Yet no one has ever challenged Ambrose's theology or piety. Moreover, if it strikes readers as being unreformed that fear probably says more about them than it does about the integrity of Ambrose's theology. Moreover, a careful reading of Ambrose will reveal a faithful confirmation of all of the major tenants of Reformed theology including a belief in a Triune God who is powerful and transcendent and personal and immanent.

²¹⁶ Harmless, *Mystics*, 264.

²¹⁷ Cornick, *Letting God Be God*, 134-5. cf. Hageman, "Reformed Spirituality," 74-5.

Reformed theology perceives God as one who is worthy to be worshiped and also seeks friendship and fellowship with humanity. Additionally, Reformed theology is sensitive to the reality of human brokenness through sin, God's gracious initiative to redeem and restore all of creation, the centrality of union with Christ, a balanced reliance upon Word and Spirit, the importance of integrating head and heart, and a ministry of compassion and social justice to those in need.

The second step of the retrieval process recognizes that by retrieving Ambrose's piety a person is also retrieving his sources. This may be problematic for some readers since Ambrose made frequent use of Western Catholic writings. However, the previous chapters confirmed that Calvin, Ambrose, and his fellow Puritans were willing to embrace and even strongly endorse medieval sources, especially those of Bernard of Clairvaux. David Cornick accurately affirms a central characteristic of Reformed piety, maintaining its "continuity" with the early church and that "[to] be Reformed was to be Catholic"²¹⁸ and Richard Muller asserts that "Reformed orthodox theology" gives witness to "a conscious catholicity."²¹⁹ This should not imply a homogeneous theology or an indiscriminate reception of all Western Catholic scholastic theology. Chapter 4 illustrated Reformed authors always filtered these writings through their own theology.²²⁰ Additionally, the same chapter revealed that Ambrose and other Puritans developed a strong resistance to the post-Tridentine writers such as Ignatius of Loyola. However, moving into the eighteenth and the early portion of the nineteenth-century a sharper cleavage of discontinuity emerges. This is a complex matter to sort out and obviously there are numerous factors

²¹⁸ Cornick, *Letting God Be God*, 131, cf. 132-3.

²¹⁹ Muller, *After Calvin*, 47, cf. 51, 53, 54.

²²⁰ See for example Hambrick-Stowe, *Early New England Meditative Poetry*, 13, 18-20, 61 and B. R. White "Echoes of Medieval Christendom," 84.

involved. While space does not permit a detailed treatment of the causes of this unfortunate gap a few brief comments are in order. The demise of scholasticism and the expanding pervasiveness of the Enlightenment certainly contributed to this discontinuity. The decline of scholasticism encouraged less emphasis upon patristic and medieval texts, the very sources most widely used by the Puritans. Additionally, the Enlightenment increased the priority of rationalism while marginalizing enthusiasm, thus decreasing the importance of mystery. Interestingly Wesley did not include Bernard in his *Christian Library*. Significantly as a result of rationalism both Roman Catholic and Protestant historians disapproved of Bernard.²²¹ With the turn of the century and the advance of romanticism there was “an idolizing of the Middle Ages” and an “interest in this medieval saint [i.e. Bernard] was rekindled.”²²² This coincides with the renewed receptivity among nineteenth-century Reformed writers of Western Catholic sources.

Therefore, just as there are theological principles to guide readers in being able to retrieve Ambrose’s piety there are also theological principles to retrieve his sources as well. This is a significant step and ultimately achieves two important outcomes: the concerned reader can be assured of maintaining faithfulness to a Reformed identity and also a hermeneutics of consent allows the interested persons to benefit from the robust nature of Ambrose’s contemplative-mystical piety. For the sake of demonstration Bernard will be used, though these theological principles are also applicable to other medieval sources. Mark Noll summarizes Bernard’s popularity declaring that he was a “defender of orthodoxy.”²²³ Significantly, Bernard’s solid

²²¹ Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 176-9.

²²² Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 180.

²²³ Noll, *Turning Points*, 102.

exegetical foundation elevates the importance of Scripture and a strong Pauline theme is evident throughout his writings. This is manifested in two specific ways; on one hand Bernard is very fond of St. Paul's metaphor of union with Christ. This is understood as a union of wills (1 Cor 6:17) and never becomes a union of essence or indistinction that created confusion and suspicion among later observers in both Catholic and Reformed traditions regarding mysticism. On the other hand, Bernard's Pauline dependency reflects an Augustinian piety that is attentive to sin, grace, and experiencing God. Bernard valued both the intellect and affect in relationship to one's experience of God and also recognized the importance of both love and faith. This combined with his strong christocentric emphasis made him very appealing to Reformed Christians. Additionally, while he was a monastic, Bernard was still active in traveling beyond his monastery to engage in ministry.

Therefore, by asking the question why Isaac Ambrose matters today for the Reformed tradition seven principles are revealed that can inspire and guide Reformed theology and piety. The first three themes provide a theological foundation and structure from which the remaining four principles of spiritual practice can emerge. First, as chapter 2 demonstrated, *unio mystica* is central to Ambrose's theology and parallels both the Reformed principle of God's nature and covenant making. Although the Reformed tradition has always emphasized the importance of union with Christ as the beginning of a person's relationship with God it has rarely been understood as fully as in Ambrose. Frequently, the contemporary Reformed tradition focuses upon the forensic themes of justification and sanctification with little regard

for the relational dimension and fellowship with God.²²⁴ This perception neglects Ambrose's theology of union and communion with Christ that he describes as spiritual marriage that was presented in chapter 2. Not only does Jesus save and forgive a person's sins, he also draws that individual into a deepening intimacy with the Trinity. Therefore Ambrose declares, "[u]nion is the ground of our communion with Christ; and the nearer our union, and the greater our communion."²²⁵ For Ambrose this is both personal and corporate and resolves Bavinck's concern of a highly individualized communion with Christ. The contemporary Reformed Church would greatly benefit from expanding its understanding of *unio mystica* to include the full doctrine of communion or spiritual marriage with Christ and thus enjoying the relational intimacy that Jesus offers to all who will embrace it. That would then enable people to join with Ambrose in declaring, "[o]h it's an happy thing to have Christ dwell in our hearts, and for us to lodge in Christs bosome! Oh its an happy thing to maintaine a reciprocal communication of affairs betwixt Christ and our souls!"²²⁶

Second, Ambrose challenges the contemporary Church to integrate and maintain the critical balance between Word and Spirit. An immediate benefit of this interaction creates a more biblical theology of experience that avoids the all too common contemporary expressions of fragmentation and compartmentalization. Therefore, Ambrose reminds readers, "*if the Spirit of Christ come along with the Word, it will rouze hearts, raise spirits, work wonders.*"²²⁷ Clearly, Ambrose would

²²⁴ While Andrew Purves emphasizes union with Christ in his writings his focus is essentially forensic. *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology*.

²²⁵ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 913.

²²⁶ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 40.

²²⁷ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 723.

be alarmed to discover the growing tendency among his Reformed descendants to reduce or ignore the importance of Scripture as well as over emphasizing either the intellect or the affections to the neglect of the other. Further, his method of meditation to “first lay down the Object [i.e. the biblical theme], and then direct you how to *look* upon it [i.e. stir up the affections to experience it]”²²⁸ would quiet the fears of Bavinck who felt many Anabaptist mystics discounted Scripture. A close corollary is the development of a sanctified imagination for reading Scripture. While there is a growing receptivity to spiritual reading today this has not always been well received in some sections of the Reformed tradition. To form healthy and biblically balanced disciples of Jesus, the restrictions of binary thinking must be transformed into a welcome dependency upon the Word and Spirit through a sanctified imagination to experience the fullness of God, including contemplative experiences of God.

Next, it was noted that Ambrose has much to teach Reformed Christians about a theology of intentionality. This forms a critical component of Ambrose’s theological structure from which he intentionally engaged in the cultivation of solitude and spiritual practices. Though he withdrew for his annual May retreats he was cognizant of the subtle dangers and temptations of these prolonged periods of isolation. In chapter 3 Ambrose recognized that the Holy Spirit and good angels were not the only ones to inhabit the spiritual world. He was personally aware of spiritual combat with the powers of darkness and realized that one should carefully discern if God was calling a person to withdraw into solitude. Richard Foster articulates a similar caution, “[i]n the silent contemplation of God we are entering deeply into the

²²⁸ Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 129, 259, 365, 539, etc. cf. *Media* (1657), 222.

spiritual realm, and there is such a thing as supernatural guidance that is not divine guidance.”²²⁹ Ambrose’s wisdom drawn from Scripture is “[i]f we are led into a wilderness by Divine Providence, and in our calling, and that we run not our selves rashly into a temptation, we may confidently expect a comfortable issue out of it”²³⁰ can be extended today to the increased popularity of retreats and the growing interest in spiritual practices. Anyone who engages in these disciplines would greatly benefit from Ambrose’s wisdom on the nature of spiritual reality, the discernment of motivation, and seeking God’s guidance before embarking upon such disciplines. Further, the uniqueness of Ambrose’s annual retreats demonstrates the importance to a culture preoccupied with externals, physical exercise, and beauty to the more enduring discipline of spiritual training and cultivation of a contemplative-mystical piety that would enhance relationships with both God and humanity.

The next four spiritual practices are all derived from the previous theological foundations. Fourth, Ambrose can wisely encourage contemporary Reformed Christians in communal spiritual practices that were part of their earlier heritage. Many have criticized spirituality as being strongly individualized and disconnected from daily life. This parallels Bavinck’s concern about the privatized nature of asceticism and pietism. While Ambrose spent a month a year in isolation he did not neglect the public means of grace. Chapter 3 revealed that many of his contemplative experiences were communal in nature through meeting with others, public fasts, and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Additionally, he emphasized the Puritan practice of conferences. While parallels exist between them and the contemporary interest in small groups for Bible study and prayer, the reality is that many small

²²⁹ Foster, *Prayer*, 157.

²³⁰ Ambrose, *War with Devils*, 172.

groups today devote more time to sharing and fellowship than cultivating spiritual maturity. One specific first step would be to follow Ambrose's counsel to encourage people to communicate their experiences to others "for the advancement of holiness, must not deny such knowledge to the body; Christians must drive an open and free trade, they must teach one another the mystery of godliness."²³¹ Efforts in this direction could reduce the inordinate amount of individualized and isolated spirituality and encourage others to recognize that they are not the only ones who have struggled or conversely have had unique spiritual experiences with God.

Recovering a contemplative piety and attitude is the fifth insight from Ambrose. According to him contemplation is "soul recreation" and therefore, one of the significant ways in which a person can enjoy God. Ambrose refutes Barth's criticism of the elite nature of contemplation by democratizing it for all people. Chapter 4 presented Ambrose's conviction that heavenly meditation was one of the primary spiritual practices for cultivating one's relationship with God. *Looking Unto Jesus* confirms the obvious importance of this for Ambrose and perhaps its popularity was due in part to people's hunger to learn how to meditate on heaven. Additionally, it is critical to recognize that the overall contemplative focus of Ambrose was constructed upon the premise of looking or beholding Jesus, which captures a central theme of contemplation. Clearly this desire for heaven was not an escape or withdrawal from the many dangers the English nonconformists faced in the seventeenth-century. Rather they were motivated by love and since they had entered into spiritual marriage with Jesus they longed for the consummation of what they had already tasted in part on earth. Therefore, the practice of looking unto Jesus or

²³¹ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 339.

heavenly meditation was a contemplative-mystical expression of love and grateful gazing upon Jesus. One wonders how Barth would have responded to Ambrose's *Looking Unto Jesus*? Clearly his practice of contemplation was not a *cul-de-sac* and God was the object of it. Further, it was Word-centered, Christ-focused, Spirit-empowered, and God-glorified. Perhaps the recovery of Ambrose's "contemplative-mystical piety" today faces its greatest challenge in the Western world where people are so attached to their earthly possessions that the prospects of heaven are not that compelling. However, Reformed theologian Bruce Demarest persuasively argues the necessity of recovering mysticism and contemplation because they are "not a perilous aberration of Christian faith, but the promise of a rewarding life with and for Christ."²³² Therefore, Ambrose can direct others to "[g]et we into our hearts an habit of more heavenly-mindednesse, by much exercise, and intercourse, and acquaintance with God, by often contemplation, and foretaste of the sweetnesse, glory, and eternity of those Mansions above."²³³

Sixth, and an important corollary of cultivating a contemplative piety, is the biblical integration of contemplation and action that was evident in both chapters 3 and 4. Indeed, it is unfortunate that Barth was constrained by his anxieties and binary thinking and failed to see the possibility and strengths that Bavinck understood in this combination. Habitually Reformed Christians have tended to emphasize the active engagement with the world more than refreshing the soul in prayer. While service is necessary, over time it frequently creates depleted and demoralized followers of Jesus. One tangible means for addressing this was sudden meditation or ejaculatory prayer. Ambrose wisely encouraged practicing this and other spiritual duties

²³² Demarest, "Mysticism: Peril or Promise?" 17.

²³³ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 55.

throughout the day asserting that a “particular calling, with which I may either mingle some actings of grace, or ejaculatory duties, as suddenly to look up to heaven, and to behold the face of God, to whom I am to approve my self in my particular calling.”²³⁴ A contemporary adaptation of this approach could correct the fragmented division of sacred and secular and assist Christians in recognizing God’s presence throughout the day, regardless of their tasks. It could also bring a renewed focus of contemplative gratitude to whatever activity a person was involved in since the actions would be renewed through prayer and the prayers would motivate new action and engagement.

Seventh, Ambrose challenges his readers to discover and develop a language of delight and enjoyment in their experience of God. This principle summarizes many of the previous themes and reflects numerous Reformed theological principles of Ambrose. A person is able to experience God because of God’s gracious invitation. When a person responds to God’s Spirit and lives in spiritual marriage with Jesus he or she can grow in deeper contemplative delight and love through spiritual practices. As in any growing relationship of intimacy desire and enjoyment are important elements. Maturing relationships can challenge individuals to find adequate language to express the depth and passion of their love. Chapter 5 uncovered Ambrose’s usage of the erotic language of the Song of Songs to speak of both being ravished by the love of Jesus and ravishing Jesus with love. To illustrate the former he asserts, “[a]nd in this kinde of love of God, and enjoyment of themselves in God, the Saints are ravished with God and are in a kind of extasie eternally.”²³⁵ While the language of ravishment could be problematic in the contemporary over-sexed culture it could also perhaps begin to transform the world

²³⁴ Ambrose, *Redeeming the Time*, 19.

²³⁵ Ambrose, *Media* (1657), 260-1.

with a purer and nobler understanding of desire and love. Significantly, Ambrose's usage of this language of delight and enjoyment could serve another important function in distinguishing between a person's intense desires for Jesus experientially rather than the all too common contemporary focus of seeking Jesus merely for his gifts and benefits. While critics might view this principle unrealistic, given the contours of the contemporary culture, it must be recognized that the process of recapturing the intensity of contemplative desire for Jesus and usage of the language of ravishment is already growing within some circles of the Church.²³⁶

Conclusion

One central theme that has emerged throughout this chapter has been the critical importance and balance of the Word and Spirit. It appeared early in the examination of Isaac Ambrose's personal resistance to the Quakers and like-minded Antinomians. Both Barth and Bavinck recognized the importance of the Word and Spirit for experiencing God; however, Bavinck displayed a better balance that created greater potential for a healthy contemplative-mystical piety. The chapter reached its apogee in examining seven themes from Isaac Ambrose's writings that can be retrieved for contemporary Reformed Christians. Clearly Isaac Ambrose matters today just as he did in the seventeenth-century because he can guide the way to a more robust and experiential faith that emphasizes both the intellect and affect and creates a relationship of intimacy that takes great delight and enjoyment in God.

²³⁶ Mike Bickle of the Kansas City IHOP has written an allegorical study guide for the Song of Songs with a chapter entitled "The Ravished Heart of God" and the priests of St. Aldates Anglican Church in Oxford, England preached thirteen sermons on the Song of Songs from 2003-7. Belden Lane has written a forthcoming book with the title, *Ravished By Beauty: Nature and Desire in Reformed Spirituality*. Additionally most current versions of the Bible continue to use the word ravish when translating Sg 4:9.

Contemporary Dutch Pietists have already discovered the great benefit and wisdom of Ambrose. It is now time for his influence to expand and become better known. Isaac Ambrose matters because he charts a path that invites people to examine the dynamics of contemplative-mystical theology, language, and experience and to engage and enjoy a vital “soul recreation” with God.

CONCLUSION

This thesis began by asking two questions: was Isaac Ambrose a Puritan mystic and can the contemporary Church retrieve any wisdom from his writings? Jean Williams' detailed analysis of Puritan sermons, commentaries, diaries, letters, and other literature has persuasively argued and clearly established that Puritan mysticism was not uncommon nor was it an aberration as many scholars have previously thought but rather a common reality among many moderate Puritans. However, this present study is greatly indebted to the ongoing research of Bernard McGinn. He articulates that a broader definition of the mystical element of Christian spirituality is more helpful for studying the possibility of Christian mysticism. The present author strongly agrees. For not only does this open up the possibilities of discovering mystical elements within the more traditional field of the Western and Roman Catholic tradition, in which one is more likely to find them, but also is very suggestive for that within Protestantism in general and more particularly, within Puritanism. This thesis has renamed McGinn's concept of the mystical element as contemplative-mystical piety. This terminology is more conducive to Reformed theology and experience and hopefully removes the residual fears and gross exaggerations that may still exert influence in certain sections of the Reformed community.

Unlike William's research that covered a broad spectrum of seventeenth-century Puritans this present work focuses primarily on Isaac Ambrose. Ambrose was a moderate Lancashire Puritan divine who was ejected in 1662 for nonconformity. Writers from previous generations have called him "the most

meditative Puritan of Lancashire”, “of a contemplative disposition”, and even a “religious mystic.” However, the reality is that no one has actually made a detailed study of his theology and piety. While there have been a few theses that have briefly considered Ambrose, no one has made him the primary subject of study. Therefore, in one sense, this research is distinctive and fills a gap by providing a careful examination of Ambrose’s theology and particularly his contemplative-mystical piety. Further, this thesis can accurately confirm and demonstrate that Ambrose was indeed a contemplative. There are five specific conclusions to this research.

First, Isaac Ambrose possessed a rich contemplative-mystical piety. That prompts the necessary question, what was the shape of Ambrose’s contemplative-mystical piety? McGinn expands his understanding of the mystical element of Christianity by speaking of mystical theology, mystical texts and mystical experiences, mystical practices, and mystical vocabulary. A careful reading of Ambrose’s mystical texts, especially those of *Media* and *Looking Unto Jesus* revealed all of these categories were present within his understanding of Christianity and provided a window into his soul that traced the contours of his life. It became clear that Ambrose experienced God across a full spectrum of means including his annual month-long retreats in which he intentionally engaged in a variety of spiritual practices as well as regularly facing the personal struggles and temptations of his soul, practicing the active ministry of being a physician of the soul to both clergy and laity, and participating in times of fasting and times of celebrating the Lord’s Supper. He also experienced the transformative role of place, whether in the woods during his retreats or in villages and cities such as Preston or London. Further, there were some significant practices that undergirded his life. Ambrose always combined a deep

study of Scripture without neglecting an affective praying of Scripture. Further, and reflective of many Puritans, he was a student of the Communion of Saints. Ambrose was not ignorant of the roots of Christian mysticism and demonstrated not only an awareness of the patristic and medieval representatives, but also some of the Eastern Orthodox tradition as well. Additionally, Ambrose recognized the great importance, indeed, the necessity of the Holy Spirit to guide his theology and direct his life. One further aspect of his contemplative-mystical piety was the importance of spiritual marriage with Jesus and how through living in that conscious relationship with gratitude awakened him to know and love God more fully. Briefly, that summarizes the nature of Isaac Ambrose's contemplative-mystical piety.

Second, this research has revised Simon Chan's conclusion of placing Ambrose within the ascetical stream of Puritan meditation. Clearly Ambrose displayed a strong ascetical theme within his theology and piety. However, where Chan misreads and distorts Ambrose is by minimizing the equal importance of the Holy Spirit in his theology and practice of meditation. Chan's two categories are not intended to be exclusive or binary and one is likely to find varying degrees of dependence upon asceticism or the Holy Spirit in different Puritans. Nonetheless, the weakness of this approach is that it tends to create an unhealthy dichotomy that drives a wedge between one of the most fundamental foundations of Reformed theology of Word and Spirit. This critical theme emerged at various points throughout this study and whenever it became unbalanced it produced distorted expressions of mysticism. However, whenever the unity of Word and Spirit was maintained, as it was in Ambrose's theology and piety, it produced a healthy biblical contemplative-mystical piety. Therefore, it is essential in casting Ambrose as ascetical, that readers do not

miss the equally present importance of the Holy Spirit throughout his writings. Additionally, this Reformed principle of Word and Spirit nicely echoes Bernard of Clairvaux's teaching that contemplation is of both the intellect and the affect. This thesis has emphasized that Ambrose's method of meditation was built on this principle, to begin by laying down the understanding of Scripture and then stirring up the affections of the soul to deepen a person's experience of that Scripture.

Third, while mystical experience is essentially ineffable, a tremendous amount of words have been written and spoken attempting to describe it. The Puritans read Song of Songs allegorically and turned to it not only for a biblical theology of spiritual marriage and intimacy but also for an erotic vocabulary to express their desire and delight in Jesus, the divine Bridegroom. Ambrose made full usage of this language of delight and enjoyment. Ravishment in particular, was a favorite word used to describe a person's experience with God. Significantly, Ambrose used this word autobiographically to express his own relationship of spiritual marriage with Jesus. He also employed it in his writings to encourage others to delight and enjoy God. While many scholars have commented on the frequency of the word ravish throughout the history of Christian spirituality, I am not aware of anyone who has made a detailed examination of the nature, dynamics, and benefits of ravishment within Puritan piety as presented in chapter 5. Further, this research has confirmed the assertion of other writers of the strong continuity between the language of Puritan piety and that of Bernard and other medieval Christians. Additionally, this study cautiously encourages the exploration of reclaiming the use of the term ravishment for the contemporary Church. Perhaps, the awareness and proper usage of ravishment

and other love-language reminiscent of the Song of Songs might encourage a greater desire and hunger for God.

Fourth, this dissertation has examined specifically the contemplative-mystical piety of Isaac Ambrose. Ambrose used the metaphor of “soul recreation” as one of his primary images of contemplation. In one sense, all of his writings are a commentary on how the soul might engage in recreation with God. Again, while there has been some very helpful research on the nature of contemplation within Puritan piety, this writer has not discovered anyone who has followed Dewey Wallace’s observation regarding the importance of heavenly meditation within Puritanism. This study has been attentive to Ambrose’s teaching and practice of heavenly meditation. Therefore, it accepts Wallace’s challenge and also takes it as a motivation for this writer’s future research. Frequently Ambrose spoke of beholding or gazing at God and his massive and most popular *Looking Unto Jesus* is a sustained meditation of looking at Jesus in love and gratitude. Chapter 4 indicated that one of the primary benefits of looking at Jesus in a contemplative manner is that the person is transformed to become more like him. The biblical foundation for this transformative looking is 2 Corinthians 3:18 which has been a favorite text in the history of Christian mysticism. Chapter 6 included the importance of recovering heavenly meditation as a form of contemplation for the Church today that leads to the final conclusion.

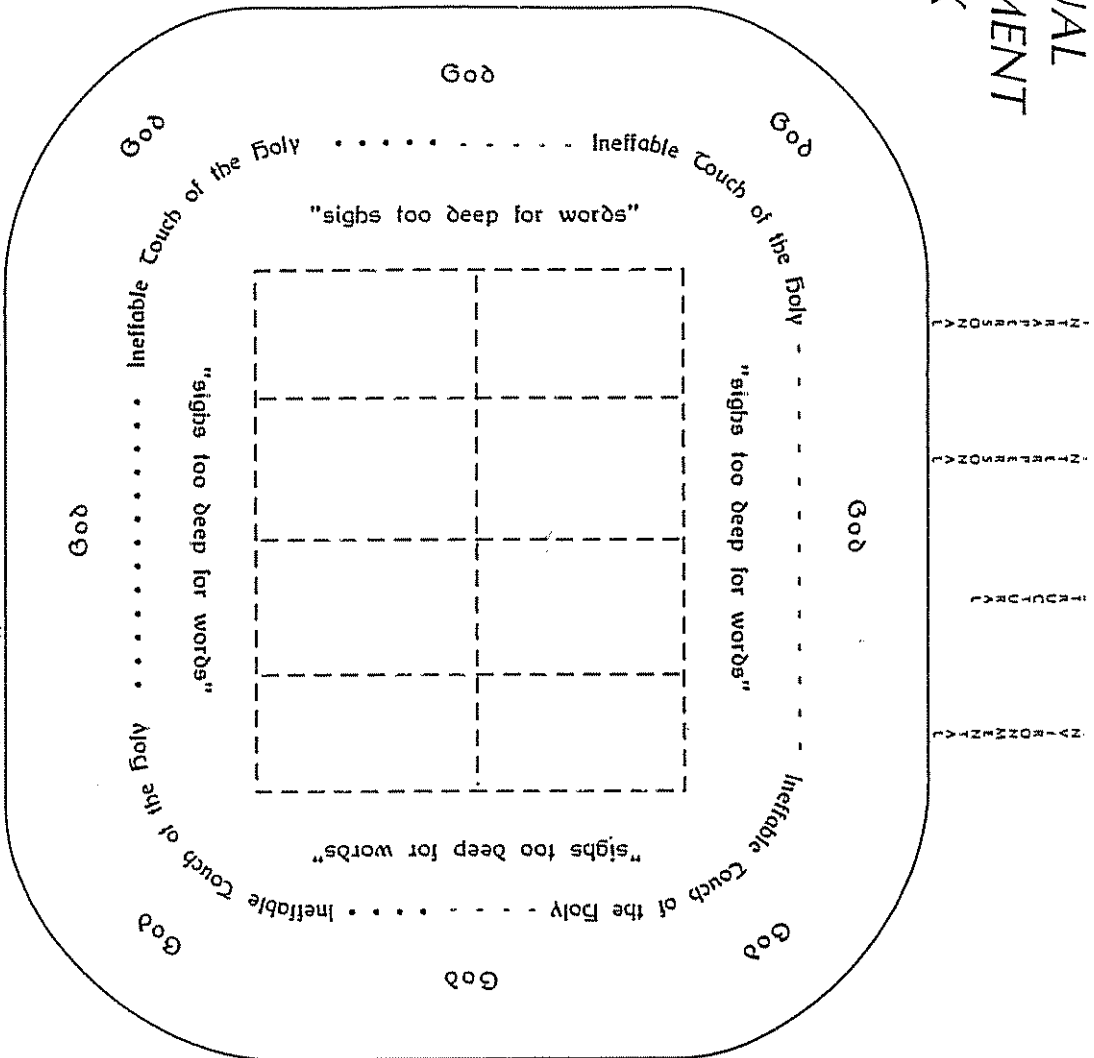
Fifth, and finally, it has previously been stated that this thesis asked two questions. The first four conclusions all reinforce that Isaac Ambrose’s understanding of basic Christianity reflected a strong contemplative-mystical piety. In many ways, the second question is even more critical for this author. If Ambrose’s ministry was

motivated and sustained by his contemplative-mystical piety what if anything can the Reformed Church learn from him today? A typical pattern for those of the Reformed tradition who become interested in the practice and study of Christian spirituality is to bemoan the lack of models and resources within their heritage. It is not uncommon to find Reformed Christians searching the lives and writings of the spiritual giants of the Roman Catholic tradition because of its rich spiritual reservoir of resources. There is often a feeling of embarrassment that the Reformed tradition is devoid of similar resources and that there appears to be an emphasis on the overly intellectual or cognitive without any great sensitivity to the affective. However, this thesis has demonstrated that contemplative-mystical piety while richly present within the Western and Roman Catholic tradition is not absent from the Reformed tradition. Therefore, the challenge is to recover the lost heritage of piety within Reformed theology that in itself is certainly not exclusive of patristic and even medieval piety. Not only does the Reformed tradition include many historical examples of contemplative-mystical piety, as Isaac Ambrose and his fellow Puritans demonstrate, but also perhaps more importantly Reformed theology supports and actually encourages the cultivation of “soul recreation” that delights and enjoys God with both head and heart. It is hoped that this thesis might provide some impetus to, and help in, retrieving and nourishing the holistic Christianity that so characterized the faith of the Reformed tradition.

SPIRITUAL MOVEMENT MATRIX

APPENDIX 1

Drawing from the entire direction session place words or brief phrases on the matrix.
Trace the movement of the conversation.
Notice difficulties and openings.
Describe "new word spoken", if any. (Notice simultaneity of transformation)



- God is simultaneously present in every arena of human experience.
- God initiates a "flood of newness", "a new word spoken".
- The experience of the touch of the Holy leads to transformation.
- Both interpretive and affective dimensions are vital for the fullness of the transformative experience.

← ARENAS OF HUMAN
EXPERIENCES
↑ DIMENSIONS OF SPIRITUAL
EXPERIENCE

God

Ineffable touch of the Holy
"flood of newness"
"new word spoken"
"sighs too deep for words"
Inexpressible attraction
silence, tears

Interpretive dimension

Description, words
concepts, names
rules, insight
doctrine, theology
interpretations
understandings
metaphor, images

Affective dimension

metaphor, images
affective awareness
felt attraction/pull
kinesic/bodily
sensations
fantasy, feelings

"Sighs too deep for words"
Inexpressible attraction
silence, tears

Ineffable touch of the Holy
"flood of newness"
"new word spoken"

God

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