

Puritans and Spiritual Desertion

The progressive development of Puritan pastoral psychology

Reinier W. de Koeijer

Introduction

In his *A Child of Light Walking in Darkness*, the Puritan Thomas Goodwin addresses the pastoral reality of spiritual desertion:

Think with yourselves, what is the worst thing, next to the eternal loss of God, really and indeed, that can be supposed to befall this man. What worse than to have that cranny, through which he first espied that beam, to be as it were clean shut up, the 'light of God's countenance' withdrawn; yea, all light and appearance to him of his own graces withheld and overclouded; the face of heaven so overcast with darkness that neither sunlight nor starlight appeareth to him, so as he hath no light; yea, further, finds his soul beset and besieged round with all the powers of hell and darkness, and the terrors of the Almighty shot into his soul? And he, thus quite left, walking in this darkness, is filled with strong fears and jealousies that God is not his God [...].¹

Although Goodwin articulates this problem succinctly in terms of human experience, he views spiritual desertion as that act whereby God withdraws his gracious influence to such an extent that the spiritual well-being of the believer will be seriously affected by it. As a consequence of this withdrawal the believer loses the experience of God's presence and the comfort of spiritual graces like faith and love, which will seriously affect his assurance of salvation. There is an evident connection with human sin, for the expressions *terrors of the Almighty* and *wrath* are references to God's punitive activity. Moreover, Goodwin posits that deliverance from this spiritual affliction can only come about by God's grace and by faith.

In this article the view of several Puritan authors regarding spiritual desertion will be analyzed. The reason of this focus on Puritanism is that spiritual desertion belongs to the classic spiritual themes which received ample pastoral attention within this Reformed pietistic

¹ Thomas Goodwin, *Works of Thomas Goodwin*, vol. 2, Edinburgh 1862, 235-36.

movement and whereby it most probably influenced similar Reformed circles in early modern Europe, first of all in the Netherlands.²

At the end of the sixteenth century, when the aspirations of the Presbyterian reformation of ecclesiastical structures had been impeded by Queen Elisabeth and her bishops, English Puritan preachers pursued a new internal reformation of individuals, of families, of the church, and of society.³ Employing a style referred to as *practical divinity*, they wished on the one hand to lead church members to conversion, and on the other hand to foster the spiritual progress of believers. As the authors of famous pastoral literature, which was commonly based on their sermons, these Puritan preachers pursued one and the same objective.⁴

Within their ecclesiological context, they apparently encountered serious-minded hearers who were wrestling with inner troubles being caused by moral failings as well as by the absence of spiritual enjoyment and of assurance. Puritan authors analyzed this inner turmoil in detail, connecting it to theological-spiritual notions such as sin, God's providence, satanic activity, and spiritual pedagogy. They viewed these forms of spiritual trouble as spiritual trials, and thereby they wished to communicate that God is the One who governs all that people and believers experience spiritually, and that He is thereby pursuing his own pedagogical objectives. They also sought to move believers to a renewed spiritual surrender to God, while at the same time being desirous to encourage weak Christians by assuring them that notwithstanding their spiritual troubles and failures they were authentic believers.

Spiritual desertion was undoubtedly an important subordinate theme for the Puritans, but it does not represent the totality of their

² The influence of English Puritanism on the Netherlands and other parts of Europe is analyzed by W.J. op 't Hof: 'De internationale invloed van het puritanisme', in: W. van 't Spijker et al., *Het puritanisme. Geschiedenis, theologie en invloed*, Zoetermeer 2001, 271-384; 'Die Niederlande als Brücke zwischen Puritanismus und kontinentalen Pietismus bis 1700', in: Udo Sträter et al., *Interdisziplinäre Pietismusforschung*, Tübingen 2005, 655-65.

³ The recent study of Randall J. Pederson provides a historiographical and historical survey of English Puritanism as well as an attempt to solve the persistent issue of its definition (*Unity in Diversity: English Puritans and the Puritan Reformation, 1603-1689*, Leiden 2014).

⁴ R.W. de Koeijer, *Geestelijke strijd bij de puriteinen. Een spiritualiteit-historisch onderzoek naar Engelse puriteinse geschriften in de periode 1587-1684*, Apeldoorn 2010, chapter 8.

thinking regarding spiritual suffering, for in this context they also address spiritual affliction and spiritual melancholy.⁵ As we observed in Goodwin's *A Child of Light*, spiritual desertion is also being defined by the alternate term 'darkness'. This classic spiritual metaphor makes clear that the withdrawal of both God's felt presence and the supposed decline of faith and assurance means that there is a regression in the experiential knowledge of God and His grace. Other terms like 'dryness' and 'deadness' are used mainly to emphasize the lack of spiritual experience, whereas the related descriptions 'dejection' and 'depression' refer particularly to the negative psychological consequences of a decline of one's spiritual health.⁶

Spiritual tradition

The puritan analysis of spiritual desertion is rooted in a long spiritual tradition. While in the early church Origen (185-253/54) wrote about spiritual suffering, in the early Middle Ages it was Gregory the Great (540-604) who addressed this subject. Particular attention for this form of suffering became clear in their interpretation of the biblical book Song of Songs, wherein they applied the conjugal love to the mystical communion between God and the believer. The pattern of both the withdrawal and the return of the bridegroom, which is described in detail and with emotional language in the Song of Songs, they considered to be descriptive of God's incomprehensible dealings with the believer, and the bride's experience of God's absence was therefore viewed as an illustration of spiritual desertion. Although this dark experience caused great inner turmoil, it was intended for the deepening of spiritual love as well as desire and so it acted as a preparation for the experience of God and contemplation.⁷

⁵ For the analysis of these forms of inner suffering: R.W. de Koeijer, *Een donkere wolk die voorbijgaat. Engelse puriteinen over geestelijk lijden*, Apeldoorn 2014.

⁶ David Chou-Ming Wang, 'The English Puritans and Spiritual Desertion: A Protestant Perspective on the Place of Spiritual Dryness in the Christian Life', in: *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 3 (2010), 42-65.

⁷ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, New York 1991, 122-24 (Origen); idem, *The Growth of Mysticism*, New York 1994, 60-62 (Gregory). The influence of the Song of Songs in early modern England is analyzed by: Elizabeth Clarke, *Politics, Religion and the Songs of Songs in Seventeenth-Century England*, Basingstoke 2011; Tom Schwanda, *Soul Recreation: The Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Puritanism*, Eugene 2012, 35-75. Although two Puritan authors of this article, Goodwin

By his emphasis on spiritual experience Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1155) greatly influenced the history of Western spirituality. His *Sermones super Cantica* are a detailed description of the mystical marriage between Christ as the Bridegroom and believers as the bride. In the line of Augustine God's grace gets absolute priority, but at the same time human effort also plays an indispensable role according to Bernard by his statement that God offers his grace to those who follow the path of love and long for deepening and contemplation. However, Bernard does not pay specific attention to spiritual desertion.⁸

Within the English mystical tradition, however, spiritual desertion was a specific theme in especially two fourteenth century writings: *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the work of an anonymous author, and Walter Hilton's (died 1396) *The Scale of Perfection* (between 1386 and 1396). The first work aims a synthesis of the mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius and that of Bernard. The monastic writer, who lived in Syria around 500 and presented himself as Dionysius the Areopagite (Acts 17: 34), developed a negative (apophatic) theology, wherein he emphasized that God is unknowable. Within his dialectical view of the relation between God and the world it is only possible to approach the hidden God by metaphors as 'darkness', 'cloud' and 'silence'. Through this approach Dionysius had a considerable influence on thousand years of Western spiritual history. The writer of 'The Cloud' connects Dionysius's mysticism of being with the love-mysticism of Bernard, so that God surprisingly does not any more appear as the unknowable God, but in the person of Christ as the bridegroom of the soul. The particular aim of the knowledge of God is by rising beyond the love to Christ to penetrate into the clear, spiritual love of God.⁹ Following *The Cloud*, Walter Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection* connects negative theology with Christology and explains spiritual darkness as the distance to Jesus which is caused by sin. When the soul is willing to admit this and to loosen herself from wrong inner desires and worldly temptations, she will make the next step to live in the darkness of

and Symonds, occasionally refer to Songs of Songs, they don't present a running commentary of this part of the Bible.

⁸ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 165-76, 185-90, 211-12; Arie de Reuver, *Sweet Communion: Trajectories of Spirituality from the Middle Ages through the Further Reformation*, Grand Rapids 2007, 46-63.

⁹ Wolfgang Riehle, *Englische Mystik des Mittelalters*, München 2011, 241-53; Bernard McGinn, *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism (1350-1550)*, New York 2012, 397-424.

not-yet-knowing and not-yet-seeing of God. But in this darkness instead of the unknowable God he discovers Jesus. Here, again the bridal mysticism of Bernard appears, because the mystical darkness of spiritual dying from the world is enlightened by the love-communion with Jesus. In this way the soul longs for experiencing something of the mysterious God.¹⁰

The most famous sixteenth-century writing on spiritual desertion is *The Dark Night of the Soul*, the most detailed work on this subject authored by the Spanish mystical writer St. John of the Cross (1542-1591). In this work several 'dark nights of the soul' are distinguished as very painful but necessary steps leading to a mystical marriage with the transcendent and hidden God.¹¹

It is not clear how far Puritan writings on spiritual desertion have been influenced by these late-medieval and early modern spiritual sources, because the authors of our study usually do not refer to pre-reformation writings. Yet, it is very well possible that Puritan authors have borrowed from this classical spiritual reservoir. At the same time, Puritan authors developed a particular concept of spiritual desertion, which is shaped by the Reformed-orthodox emphasis on God's grace.

Methodology and the state of research

One of the primary questions raised by this article is how Puritan writers define spiritual desertion, and what their spiritual objective is in addressing this pastoral issue. Related issues are also discussed, such as why this form of suffering occurs, what its consequences are, and the various ways in which pastoral solace is being offered.

This article will first of all focus on the early phase of the Puritan movement, when William Perkins laid the theological foundation for the Puritan view regarding spiritual desertion. Several decades later, the Puritan treatment of this pastoral and spiritual theme reached its zenith in the analyses of Thomas Goodwin and Joseph Symonds. Goodwin

¹⁰ Riehle, *Englische Mystik*, 277-78; McGinn, *Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism*, 372-96.

¹¹ K. Kavanaugh, 'Spanish Sixteenth Century', in: Leon Dupré and Don E. Saliers (eds.), *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern* (vol. 3), New York 1989, 78-84. For a spiritual-historical comparison between St. John of the Cross and the Puritan Joseph Symonds, see: David Chou Ming Wang, 'Two Perspectives on Spiritual Dryness: Spiritual Desertion and the Dark Night of the Soul', in: *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 4 (2011), 27-42.

discussed this subject in greater detail, combining Perkins's theological perspective with giving more attention to the believer's experience. Symonds brought the Puritan analysis of spiritual desertion into sharp focus by his very detailed discussion of its experiential ramifications. A sequential discussion of these three authors will yield the opportunity of examining the development in their Puritan interpretation of it, as well as describe the mature Puritan treatment of spiritual desertion.

A matter of special interest is the ambivalent position of this spiritual experience. Sometimes the experience of God's absence was considered to be the consequence of God's chastisement, and it was therefore deemed to be a reliable reflection of His dealings with the sinner. However, on more than one occasion the pastoral advice was given not to be misled by what one's experience might communicate, presenting spiritual desertion as a foretoken of eternal destruction. Instead, one was counselled to trust God's promise of salvation. Finally, the international influence exerted by the Puritan treatment of spiritual desertion will be addressed.

Since most Puritan writers were first and foremost preachers, the sources consulted for this article are primarily of a homiletical nature. Although we cannot easily trace what sort of changes preachers made when transitioning from a sermon to a book, it appears credible to deem Puritan writings on spiritual desertion on the whole as reliable renderings of the spoken word.¹² This focus on published sermons means that personal writings like autobiographies and diaries are not included. Therefore, this article does not analyze the personal reaction of church members to the Puritan message about spiritual desertion, but rather concentrates on the message itself. Although a knowledge of both the reception and the application of religious ideas contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of its meaning, it is a matter of primary importance that such religious ideas be searched out as clearly as possible.¹³

There are several ways in which the analysis of the Puritan view of spiritual desertion can be integrated in current research. Firstly, in recent years a growing interest in the significance of spiritual emotions within early modern European culture and spirituality has been emerging, as well

¹² Arnold Hunt discusses in detail the process from sermon to print (*The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and their Audiences, 1590-1640*, Cambridge 2010, 117-87).

¹³ So Leif Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians in England, c.1590-1640*, Farnham 2014, 7-8.

as within Reformed Protestantism. Instead of distrusting spiritual emotions, Reformed Protestants increasingly focused on the significant role experience has within the context of pastoral guidance and the development of spiritual life.¹⁴ Included within the emotional context of experience are also ‘dark’ experiences such as repentance, affliction, despondency, and desertion.

Secondly, several recent studies have analyzed the Puritan view of suffering.¹⁵ These studies are important because they emphasize the overarching framework of God’s providence as well as the believer’s response to suffering, but their focus is on external suffering. Although such suffering has its impact on believers, the inner troubles that are precipitated by external suffering are implied and not explicitly identified.

Thirdly, the Puritan view of internal suffering has been researched as well. In his *Protestantism, Puritanism and Practical Divinity in England, c.1570-c.1620*,¹⁶ Jason Yiannikou notes that the puritan ‘afflicted conscience’ is rooted in the repression of English Protestants during the reign of Mary (1553-1558). During the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603), affliction was interpreted as a component of contrition, and was being used as the context of a believer’s account of personal deliverance by God’s grace. The seventeenth century Puritan analysis of spiritual affliction became increasingly lengthy and detailed. This begs the question whether external factors such as persecution and being marginalized have permanently molded the Puritan identity, and whether they are reflected in writings that focus on spiritual affliction. This is not the case in the period following Mary’s reign, when, in spite of religious and social tensions, the Puritan movement was not dominated by polemical thinking. The Puritan focus on spiritual affliction has to be explained as being motivated by pastoral and spiritual concerns.

As far as we know, only one explicit study of Puritan writings on spiritual desertion and depression has been published. In his *The Genius*

¹⁴ Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany*, Oxford 2010; for England: Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, Oxford 2013 (Part I: The Protestant Emotions).

¹⁵ Ann Thompson, *The Art of Suffering and the Impact of Seventeenth-century Anti-Providential Thought*, Aldershot 2003; Brian H. Cosby, *Suffering and Sovereignty: John Flavel and the Puritans on Afflictive Providence*, Grand Rapids 2012; Raymond Brown, *Spirituality in Adversity: English Nonconformity in a Period of Repression, 1660-1689*, Milton Keynes 2012.

¹⁶ Ph.D. Diss. University of Cambridge, 1999.

of *Puritanism*, Peter Lewis provides us with a clear assessment of the homiletical and pastoral background of these writings. Analyzing the conditions, causes, and cure of spiritual desertion, he investigates what relationship there is between God, Satan, and the believer.¹⁷ However, since Lewis discusses soul trouble only from the vantage point of spiritual depression, other aspects of spiritual desertion, such as the absence of spiritual experiences and spiritual barrenness, are hardly addressed. The main restrictions of his thematic approach are that the distinctive profile of various Puritan authors is not highlighted sufficiently, while certain developments during the course of the seventeenth century, especially after 1660, are not analyzed.

Within the context of an emerging focus on experience within Reformed spirituality and devotional literature, particularly the studies of Yiannikou and Lewis have contributed significantly to the study of the Puritan view of spiritual suffering. At the same time, as this article does, it is useful to opt for an approach that is of a more chronological and comparative nature.

A. William Perkins: theological framework and distinction

Introduction

While enrolled at the university of Cambridge, William Perkins (1558-1602) became a member of the puritan brotherhood.¹⁸ Subsequent to 1584, as a lecturer at Cambridge, Perkins sought to achieve the reformation of both the individual and the congregation by way of preaching, pastoral care, and writing and, in so doing, he exerted much influence in Puritan circles as well as on the international scene.¹⁹ Perkins published a remarkable quantity of writings, ranging from a treatise on predestination to one dealing with proper discipline within the family. The

¹⁷ Haywards Heath 1977.

¹⁸ For Perkins's life: Ian Breward, 'Introduction', in: idem (ed.), *The Work of William Perkins*, Abingdon 1970, 1-129; Michael Jenkins, 'Perkins, William (1558–1602)', in: Colin Matthew et al. (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [in the following: *ODNB*], Oxford 2004, online edition, 2007, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21973>, accessed 10 Aug 2015.

¹⁹ For a recent interpretation of Perkins's theology and historical significance: W.B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England*, Oxford 2014.

Puritan way of interconnecting theology, spirituality, and morality is clearly manifested in these writings.²⁰

Spiritual desertion of unbelievers

In his book *A Declaration of Certaine Spiritvall Desertions, Serving to Terrifie All Drowsie Protestants, and to Comfort Them Which Mourn for Their Sinnes*,²¹ Perkins addresses spiritual desertion, and he seeks to reach out pastorally to believers who are troubled about their sins during such a season of spiritual suffering. However, the title indicates that he is also addressing a different audience, namely *drowsie protestants*. Given the use of the general term *protestants*, we are to think here of nominal or counterfeit Christians who, except they repent, should view their spiritual desertion as being preliminary to their eternal perdition.

Already at the outset of his book, Perkins posits that spiritual desertion is a consequence of God dealing punitively with his creature:

[...] which is nothing else but an action of God forsaking his creature. Furthermore, God forsakes his creature, not by withdrawing his essence or being from it: for that cannot bee, considering God is infinite; and therefore must needs at all times bee euery where: but by taking away the grace and operation of his Spirit from his creature.²²

Though not abandoning him, God nevertheless withdraws the *grace and operation of his Spirit*. This theological dimension is indicative of the significant influence of the orthodox and Reformed doctrine of predestination, teaching that God's omnipotence governs the lives of all men in general and of believers in particular.²³ This influence is evident when Perkins makes a sharp distinction between the spiritual desertion of believers and that of unbelievers. He characterizes the latter group as *that part of mankind which is prepared to destruction*, and as *reprobates*.

²⁰ William Perkins, *The Workes of William Perkins*, Cambridge, John Leggat, 1612-13.

²¹ This writing forms part of: *A Treatise Tending Vnto a Declaration Whether a Man Be in the Estate of Damnation or in the Estate of Grace*, London, R. Robinson, 1590(?); A.W. Pollard et al., *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad 1475-1640*, 2nd, rev. ed., 3 vols., London 1976-91, 19752.3 (in the following: *STC*.); Perkins, *Workes of William Perkins I*, 353-420.

²² Perkins, *Workes I*, 415.

²³ Perkins' doctrine of predestination is analyzed by Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins*, Durham 1986, 129-73; Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians*, 61-122.

Spiritual desertion in the general sense of the word refers to this category of reprobates. As is true for believers, unbelievers do indeed interact spiritually with the Bible, the preaching of the Word, and the sacraments, but these means of grace do not yield for them a life with Christ. Perkins believes that the majority of Church members find themselves in such a troubling spiritual predicament.²⁴

The title of his book indicates that Perkins addresses the spiritual desertion of nominal Christians in order to awaken them spiritually by way of shock effect (*terrifie*). It is evidently no question for him whether his call to repentance can coincide with his emphasis upon eternal reprobation, for he does not know who the reprobate are. He believes that repentance and a believing surrender are even possible for the most hardened of men.

Spiritual desertion of believers

Though reprobates will ultimately be fully and eternally deserted, the desertion of believers is only partial as God never forsakes them fully, and it is only temporary since their spiritual desertion only pertains to their earthly existence.²⁵ Perkins can articulate it as such since he views believers in light of their eternal election, and their ultimate salvation is therefore secure in God's electing decree.

Regarding believers, Perkins distinguishes between two categories of spiritual desertion. The first is a punitive desertion, or a *desertion in punishment*. This refers to difficult circumstances in one's life which God uses as a means of chastisement, and they are neither diminished nor removed. Consequently they can affect one's spiritual well-being. Perkins then addresses the manner in which God works when inflicting punitive desertion. For example, He can temporarily withhold his blessing upon the use of the means of grace in order to awaken in believers a love and intense desire for himself and his *former favour*. God can even temporarily withdraw *all sense and feeling* of his gracious gifts, resulting in the believer experiencing spiritual barrenness. For Perkins this highlights a significant aspect of God's mode of operation, namely, that graces will issue forth and grow when the opposite appears to be the case (*in or by contraries*). He illustrates this paradoxical reality by the frequently used Puritan metaphor of a barren tree in the winter. This

²⁴ Perkins, *Workes* I, 415.

²⁵ Perkins, *Workes* I, 417.

metaphor indicates that though God's grace can indeed be hidden experientially for the believer, it has not disappeared. Furthermore, the 'barren tree' greatly emphasizes the pedagogical objective of spiritual desertion, namely, the exercise and growth of faith.²⁶

However, Perkins also points out the perilous aspect of the concealment of God's gracious gifts, because especially then a believer no longer perceives any difference between himself and a hypocrite, and he will consequently seriously doubt his being a partaker of salvation:

The man which hath had some good perswasions of Gods fauour in Christ, comes afterward vpon many occasions to be troubled and to bee ouerwhelmed with distrustfulnesse and grieuous doubtings of his saluation, so as hee iudgeth himselfe to haue beene but an hypocrite in former times, and for the time present a cast-away. [...] and the rather if with this desertion be ioyned a feeling of Gods anger [...].²⁷

The combination of the absence of the assurance of salvation and the experience of God's wrath renders the believer fearful that he will perish forever, and spiritual despair will then threaten to overtake him.

Perkins addresses the second form of spiritual desertion in greater detail, namely *desertion in sinne*. In such a case God will withdraw the help of his Spirit, causing the believer to fall into open sin. Though God then appears to become the Author of evil, Perkins holds sinful man and the devil fully accountable for this. Albeit that God can withdraw his hand from the believer, the believer himself will always remain responsible for his actual missteps. According to Perkins it is especially the second form of spiritual desertion that indicates that sin is the primary reason for its occurrence. This is particularly true for human pride:

The elect children of God, are diseased with an inward, hidden, and spiritual pride; whereby they affect themselues, and desire to bee something in themselues forth of Christ [...] God therefore in great mercie to remedie this dangerous corruption, lets his elect seruants fall into trouble of minde and conscience, and if they happily be of greater hardnesse of heart, into some actual sinne [...].²⁸

²⁶ Perkins, *Workes* I, 418.

²⁷ Perkins, *Workes* I, 418.

²⁸ Perkins, *Workes* I, 419-20.

When focusing upon spiritual healing, we also encounter this paradoxical manner of God's dealings. An example from the medical world will illustrate this. Just as a medical doctor will occasionally administer to a patient a medicinal cure that is worse than the disease, likewise God will occasionally permit a believer to fall into sin to deliver him from pride.²⁹

The focus upon sin reemerges when the pedagogical intent of spiritual desertion is addressed. An important objective of the uncovering of one's guilt is not merely the stimulation of a more profound sense of humility, of a more thorough confession of guilt and of a determined resolution not to commit evil, but also of a more profound sense of love, patience, and desire.³⁰

Evaluation

1. Spiritual desertion is, according to Perkins, a form of spiritual barrenness during which the experience of God's nearness and power are absent. The troubling consequences of this spiritual malady are a lack of assurance regarding one's personal interest in salvation and a being fearful of God's judgment. When discussing desertion in sin, Perkins makes it clear that this spiritual suffering is frequently God's reaction to the sin of human pride.

2. Perkins places spiritual desertion squarely within the context of the orthodox Reformed doctrine of predestination. This theological perspective yields two important consequences. First, Perkins posits that the spiritual desertion of the reprobates is a precursor of their future perdition, and hereby he wishes to stir up nominal Christians and hypocrites to seek spiritual transformation. However, the most important objective of his book is the pastoral encouragement of assaulted believers, doing so with the confidence that even spiritual desertion cannot undo their spiritual status which is secure in their eternal election. Secondly, God's providence is of central significance, for thereby the spiritual desertion of believers has a pedagogical objective, namely, the exercise and deepening of their faith.

B. Thomas Goodwin: pastoral-psychological elaboration

²⁹ Perkins, *Workes* I, 420.

³⁰ Perkins, *Workes* I, 419-20.

Introduction

Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) also contributed to the Puritan discussion of spiritual desertion by way of his *A Child of Light Walking in Darkness*. He has further expounded Perkins' analysis of this spiritual suffering by a more elaborate analysis of both spiritual desertion and the assaulted believer. His publication is also worthy of our attention, for it was a bestseller in its day.³¹

Subsequent to his conversion in 1620, Goodwin became entrenched in the theological, homiletical, and spiritual tradition of Perkins.³² When he served as pastor in Cambridge and in London, he subscribed to the form of church government known as congregationalism. As a result of the Puritans being repressed by the government, he fled to the Netherlands, where in Arnhem he was able to implement his views regarding church government in a congregation of English refugees. In 1641, Goodwin returned to England and promoted his congregational views regarding church government. From 1650-1660 Goodwin was president of Magdalen College (Oxford) and after the Restoration he served an independent congregation of London as pastor until his death in 1680.

Goodwin's writings can generally be classified as belonging to the Puritan tradition of *practical divinity*. His significance as a Puritan pastoral theologian has become more evident by virtue of the scholarly assessment of his Christology, his Pneumatology, his views regarding the assurance of salvation, and the Christian life.³³

Spiritual Desertion

Goodwin's book about spiritual darkness was published in 1636: *A Childe of Light Walking in Darknes: or, A Treatise Shewing the Causes, by Which the Cases, Wherein the Ends, for Which God Leaves His Children to*

³¹ Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism*, Oxford 2000, Appendix I, s.v. 'Goodwin, Thomas'.

³² For Goodwin's life: T.M. Lawrence, 'Goodwin, Thomas (1600–1680)', in: *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10996>, accessed 10 Aug 2015.

³³ Mark Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth: The Christology of the Puritan Reformed Orthodox theologian, Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680)*, Göttingen 2010; Paul R. Blackham, *The Pneumatology of Thomas Goodwin*, Ph.D. Diss. University of London, 1995; Michael S. Horton, *Thomas Goodwin and the Puritan Doctrine of Assurance: Continuity and Discontinuity in the Reformed Tradition, 1600-1680*, Ph.D. Diss. Universities of Oxford and Coventry, 1996; Paul Ling-Ji Chang, *Thomas Goodwin on the Christian Life*, Ph.D. Diss. Westminster Theological Seminary, 2001.

Distresse of Conscience.³⁴ It is based on sermons about Isaiah 50:10-11, in which the prophet exhorts the believer who walks in darkness to trust in God. Goodwin describes *spiritual darkness* as spiritual desertion, saying that *God leaves his children*. His extensive discussion of spiritual desertion appears to indicate that this inner trouble was not an unknown phenomenon for his reading audience. However, at the conclusion of his book he emphasizes that in light of the restrictive language of Isaiah 50:10 - *Who is among you?* - such walking in darkness is the portion of but a small number of believers. Nevertheless, Goodwin makes a deliberate pastoral choice by evidently concentrating on the relatively small category of assaulted believers.

The darkness referred to in Isaiah 50:10 is, according to Goodwin, an inner darkness, which is experienced within the believer and pertains to his relationship with God:

It is principally to be understood of the want of inward comfort in their spirits, from something that is between God and them; and so meant of that darkness and terrors which accompany the want of the sense of God's favour. And so darkness is elsewhere taken for inward affliction of spirit and mind, and want of light, in point of assurance, that God is a man's God, and of the pardon of a man's sins [...].³⁵

Spiritual darkness ensues due to the absence of experiencing God's favor, and then as it particularly manifests itself in the forgiveness of sins and one's personal interest in redemption. This darkness is therefore closely connected to the lack of the assurance of salvation.

Goodwin especially focuses upon the ordinary seasons of spiritual darkness which frequently can be related to personal sins, an emphasis we also discovered in Perkins. Goodwin has in mind here spiritual pride, the neglect or formal use of the means of grace, as well as bitterness in response to afflictions.³⁶

³⁴ London, M. F(lesher); *STC.*, 12037.5. This work was also published as part of other pastoral-spiritual writings in: *Certain Select Cases Resolved: Specially Tending to the Comfort of Beleeveres, in Their Chiefe and Usuall Temptations*, London, s.n., 1644; Donald Wing (comp.), *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America and of the English Books Printed in Other Countries, 1641-1700*, 2nd ed., 3 vols., New York 1982-94 (Wing), G1226A. Use has been made of: Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 12 vols., Edinburgh 1861-1866, vol. 3.

³⁵ Goodwin, *Works of Thomas Goodwin*, vol. 3, 238, 241.

³⁶ Goodwin, *Works* 3, 288-91, 294-95.

In Goodwin's description of spiritual desertion, the repeated use of the words *sense* and *sensible* are conspicuous:

When, therefore, here he says he hath no light, the meaning is, he wants all present sensible testimonies of God's favour to him; he sees nothing that may give sensible present witness of it to him. God's favour, and his own graces, and all the sensible tokens and evidences thereof, which are apprehended by spiritual sight, are become all as absent things, as if they were not, or never had been [...].³⁷

Doing so more emphatically than his Puritan predecessor Perkins, it indicates that Goodwin focuses on the believer and enlarges upon spiritual desertion at the experiential level.

Affirming that a man may be a real believer and yet be incapable of discerning God's favour, Goodwin makes a pastoral distinction between the presence of God's grace and the knowledge of it: 'the influence of God's favour may be really in the heart, when the sense, sight, and light of it is withdrawn [...].'³⁸ In this way it is possible to acknowledge the seriousness of spiritual desertion while simultaneously consoling the believer by emphasizing the authenticity of his spiritual life.

Causes and Objectives of Spiritual Desertion

In the aforementioned definition, Goodwin does not define spiritual desertion as being exclusively a lack of spiritual experience, for considering his use of the word *terrors* he also has in mind that spiritual terror that increases the gravity of spiritual darkness. In order to get a better picture of such spiritual terror, we will focus upon God, the devil, and the human heart as the threefold cause of spiritual darkness. By engaging in an extensive and detailed analysis of the activities of these three parties, he also provides us with an in-depth assessment of the believer that is both pastoral and psychological.

As did Perkins, Goodwin places spiritual darkness within the framework of God's sovereignty, and he considers it to be a process by which God's Spirit incrementally responds to the sins of believers. At the initial level the Spirit withdraws the experience of God's love, and at the next level He manifests God as an angry Father, whereas at the deepest

³⁷ Goodwin, *Works* 3, 239.

³⁸ Goodwin, *Works* 3, 241.

level He can even confront the believer's conscience with God's eternal judgment:

And such impressions of immediate wrath, as expressions and effects of God's anger, the Holy Ghost may make upon the spirit of his child. For it is a truth that God is angry and wroth with them when they sin; which anger he may make known, not only by dumb signs in outward crosses and effects, but by an immediate witnessing, and plain and express speaking so much to their consciences [...].³⁹

When God chastises the believer incrementally, it will engender grave uncertainty in the believer regarding his personal salvation as well as fear for eternal perdition. However, Goodwin wishes to encourage the assaulted believer by assuring him that spiritual darkness is but an expression of God's *temporal wrath* and does not sever the Father-child relationship. He therefore posits that the intimate relationship between spiritual darkness, doubts, and fears is of a different origin. Evidently God's chastisement triggers the unified response of the sinful human heart and the devil to this condition:

Satan and their own hearts, unto which he may and doth often further also leave them, may take occasion from these dispensations of the Holy Ghost, which are all holy, righteous, and true, to draw forth false and fearful conclusions against themselves and their estates, and start amazing doubts and fears of their utter want of grace, and lying under the curse and threatenings of eternal wrath at the present, yea, and further, of eternal rejection for the future, and that God will never be merciful [...].⁴⁰

Whereas spiritual desertion is a manifestation of God's temporary displeasure, having pedagogical objective the chastising and restoration of the believer, the two spiritual adversaries of the soul will suggest that this spiritual suffering is proof of one's hypocrisy and will therefore culminate in God's eternal punishment of the soul.

Goodwin first of all discusses man's carnal reason as a dangerous point of entry for spiritual mischief. Such carnal thinking becomes evident by a wrong use of the Scriptures. Whereas the unconverted and hypocrites deem themselves to be spiritually healthy by an illegitimate

³⁹ Goodwin, *Works* 3, 245.

⁴⁰ Goodwin, *Works* 3, 246.

appropriation of salvific passages, the Christian in spiritual desertion is readily inclined to be negative in the assessment of his spiritual condition by evaluating the experience of God's desertion as an affirmation of his not being a child of God, as well as a foretoken of his eternal rejection. He will do so because he misinterprets God's dealings with him, for he will judge them by the works and dispensations of God that he sees and feels, rather than by judging God according to His word of promise.⁴¹

The third party contributing to spiritual darkness is the devil.⁴² Though Goodwin underscores that God's providence determines the limits and measure of all Satanic activity, nevertheless, the devil can increase the believer's inner suffering by endorsing carnal reason's abuse of scriptural words.⁴³ However, not only does Satan foster the misapplication of God's threatening words, but he also *doth now delight to make God a liar to us in our apprehensions, by questioning his promises*, thereby taking advantage of God's 'dark' dealings with the believer. His most dangerous mode of operation is in the realm of the conscience when he engages the knowledge of sin of the believer; that is, his *guilt of conscience*. Goodwin provides an example of this:

[...] Satan oft argueth and chargeth the conscience of one distressed in this or the like manner: 'Those in whom any sin reigneth, or in whose hearts hypocrisy and selflove is the predominant principle, are not in the state of grace.' 'But such a one art thou,' &c. For the proof of which *minor* he musters up and sets in order, in the view of conscience, a multitude of instances of sins committed, thus heinously, thus oft; of duties omitted, and if performed, yet with such and such pride of heart, self-aims, &c.⁴⁴

By insinuating that their sins yield proof of hypocrisy, the devil aims at undermining the spiritual stability of believers who are conscious of their guilt.

Furthermore, Satan endeavors to intensify the doubt he has thereby engendered regarding being partakers of salvation by working

⁴¹ Goodwin, *Works* 3, 250, 252.

⁴² Lewis devotes ample attention to the role of Satan in the experience of spiritual desertion (*Genius of Puritanism*, 91-103).

⁴³ For Satan's activity in Puritan practical divinity, see: De Koeijer, *Geestelijke strijd bij de puriteinen*, 277-91.

⁴⁴ Goodwin, *Works* 3, 269.

upon the *passions and corrupt affections*, especially upon those of fear and grief:

He can immediately, by his own power, stir the passions of fear and grief, &c., excite them beyond nature, as the winds can raise the billows in the sea, and make the floods to make a noise; so can he tumult in the affections [...] and cause such thunders and lightnings as shall hurl all in a black confusion, such as if hell and the soul would presently come together.⁴⁵

By threatening him with God's eternal judgment, Satan aims at bringing the believer to spiritual despair.

Goodwin's emphasis upon God's providence surfaces again when he discusses the objectives to be achieved by spiritual darkness. When during a spiritual trial God sustains and restores a believer, his omnipotence and his love become very transparent, and it is simultaneously evident that the assaulted believer is completely dependent upon *his spiritual comforts and refreshments*, for example the bringing forth of His gifts with increased clarity in the believer. This is especially true for faith and its focus upon God's grace:

[...] a man relies on God, when all his dealings would argue he had forsaken a man; that though God put on never so angry a countenance, look never so sternly, yet faith is not dashed out of countenance, but can read love in his angry looks, and trust God beyond what he sees [...].⁴⁶

It is faith which enables the believer during a season of in spiritual desertion to look beyond the paradoxical perception of God's actions to His unchangeable love.

Pastoral Guidance

The Puritan link between spiritual suffering and sin once more comes to the fore when Goodwin first of all exhorts his readers in their state of spiritual desertion to engage in painstaking self-examination, for it is his belief that the hiding of God's face is frequently precipitated by either a sin of commission or a sin of omission. The confession of one's guilt is therefore the first evidence of spiritual restoration.

⁴⁵ Goodwin, *Works* 3, 283.

⁴⁶ Goodwin, *Works* 3, 304.

Although Goodwin wishes to stimulate deserted believers to live by faith, at the same time he avails himself of a mark of grace when he exhorts his readers to reflect on God's grace in the past. However, we discern in him the usual Puritan ambivalence regarding these marks of grace, for he deems it possible that the remembrance of former signs does not yield any genuine comfort. He therefore makes an appeal not to remain mired in internal *reasonings and disputings*, but rather, to strive for the present strengthening of one's faith. The primary means to achieve this is to concentrate on God's Name as the warranty of his salvific promises in Christ. This orientation upon God's Name must be accompanied by a persistent use of especially the prayer for deliverance.⁴⁷

Conclusion

1. Goodwin places spiritual desertion under God's providence, and in so doing he builds upon the foundation laid by Perkins. However, Goodwin addresses himself exclusively to believers, which makes the matter of spiritual comfort a more prominent feature. This dovetails quite well with their ecclesiological differences. Whereas Perkins focused upon the broad spectrum of the common people that constituted the local church, and thus upon a multitude that was spiritually very mixed, Goodwin as a Congregationalist addressed himself especially to a smaller group of devoted church members. By his assertion that only a small number of Christians experience spiritual desertion and by his attention to primarily this category, it is all the more obvious that Puritan pastoral theology had a special fondness for the spiritual encouragement of weak Christians.

2. In regard to Perkins, there is a noteworthy progression in that Goodwin not only offers a more elaborate analysis of spiritual desertion, but he also gives a more in-depth description of the believer and his experience that is both pastoral and psychological. First, he focuses on the inner life of the believer in connection with his definition of spiritual desertion in which the want of a spiritual sense of God's favour is conspicuous. Further, this focus is also evident relative to the contradictory operations of God, Satan, and man's carnal reason, all of which are described in detail as having a considerable impact on the conscience of the believer. Finally, this is evident in the attention Goodwin

⁴⁷ Goodwin, *Works* 3, 326.

gives to the so-called signs marks of grace as internal evidences of the believer being a partaker of salvation. By focusing upon the believer more extensively and in greater detail, Puritan pastoral guidance increasingly focuses on the experience those who suffer from spiritual desertion.

C. Joseph Symonds: zenith of the pastoral-psychological approach

Introduction

After having been an assistant at Rotherhithe, Symonds became rector of St. Martin's in London in 1632.⁴⁸ Due to his congregational views regarding church government, Symonds like Goodwin left for the Netherlands, where he became the preacher of an English congregation in Rotterdam. In 1647 he returned to England and secured a leading position at Eton College Windsor. He passed away in 1652.

Symonds published the most extensive and thorough book regarding spiritual desertion: *The Case and Cure of a Deserted Soule: or, A Treatise Concerning the Nature, Kindes, Degrees, Symptomes, Causes, Cure of, and Mistakes about Spirituall Desertions*. This work was published for the first time in 1639, and it can be classified as the zenith of the Puritan treatment of spiritual desertion.⁴⁹ Given the title, the reader should not only anticipate a thorough analysis of the nature, various forms, and remedy for this spiritual suffering, but rather, this work also probes the depth of the deserted soul both pastorally and psychologically. Symonds's work also yields a good opportunity to make comparisons with Perkins and Goodwin.

Theological context

In his preface, Symonds makes it clear that spiritual desertion explicitly relates to the spiritual experience of believers. Spiritual communion with God is subject to fluctuation, and negative experiences can be so predominant that believers will feel that they have been forsaken of God.

⁴⁸ For Symonds' life: Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints*, Grand Rapids 2006, s.v. 'Joseph Symonds'.

⁴⁹ *STC.*, 23590; Green, *Print and Protestantism*, Appendix I, s.v. 'Symonds, Joseph'. In the period 1639-1651 three editions were published, after which no new editions followed. Use has been made of the edition Edinburgh 1721.

These fluctuations and experiences are described by way of several expressive images:

Where shall we find a Man that hath not met with these Rocks and Sands, and hath not seen some gloomy Days, and winter Storms, passing through many Changes, sometime rejoicing, as the Plants in the Spring, in the Sight and Sense of God's gracious Presence, sometimes again mourning for his Loss of God, sometimes lift up to Heaven in his Soul, and mounting as it were on Eagles Wings; sometimes again depressed to the Depths of Hell, and held as with Chains of Brass or Iron, now quickened, but growing dull again. Few can say they have once found God, but may say they have often lost him.⁵⁰

In line with Perkins and Goodwin, Symonds believes that spiritual desertion is a component of God's providence and thus it transpires within a theological context. Spiritual desertion comes about when God withdraws his grace. When Symonds addresses this, he does not have in mind the indestructible core of life in the believer, to which he refers as *habitual grace* or *the principle of life*,⁵¹ but rather he means *assisting grace*, that which determines the well-being of spiritual life. *Assisting grace* is subject to fluctuations and can therefore decline as to its efficacy. Though existential fellowship with God does not vanish due to the decline of this grace, the spiritual health of this fellowship is affected thereby.⁵²

The theological context of God's sovereignty also comes to the fore when Symonds emphasizes that instruction and correction are the two interrelated pedagogical motives of spiritual desertion. Both motives are discussed within the context of the temporary nature and the brokenness of one's earthly existence, during which the Christian finds himself to be but a sojourner.⁵³ During this sojourn, spiritual desertion confronts him with the fact that spiritual instruction and correction are necessary so that he will remain focused upon the future world as being the ultimate

⁵⁰ Joseph Symonds, *The Case and Cure of a Deserted Soule: or, A Treatise Concerning the Nature, Kindes, Degrees, Symptomes, Causes, Cure of, and Mistakes about Spirituall Desertions*, Edinburgh, John Mosman and Company, 1721, 3-4.

⁵¹ By using this scholastic term puritan writers wanted to make clear that spiritual life is God's gracious and indestructible gift. See Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, Grand Rapids 1985, s.v. 'habitus'; idem, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, Grand Rapids 2003, 358-59.

⁵² Symonds, *Case and Cure*, 16.

⁵³ Symonds, *Case and Cure*, 256-57.

destiny of his journey. Within the context of spiritual correction Symonds analyzes various sins that precipitate spiritual desertion, especially human pride. With regard to instruction spiritual desertion yields the important lessons of a deeper knowledge of self and a deeper knowledge of God. Self-knowledge will first of all prompt believers to focus upon inner uncleanness and weakness, whereas a deeper knowledge of God will particularly relate to the sovereignty and necessity of God's grace, for such self-knowledge will teach the believer not only that he is not worthy of God's grace but also that he continually needs this grace. This in turn forges a strong union with Christ:

The Death of Comfort occasions a greater Life and Strength towards Christ, both in Desire of him, and Dependence upon him, and for this Cause God shakes the Soul with Earthquakes, that it may stand faster upon its true Basis and Foundation. That which at first brings the Soul to Christ, is his Worth, and our Need, and the more we see our selves necessitous, the more our Hearts gather in to Christ.⁵⁴

As is true for Perkins, Symonds also views spiritual desertion paradoxically in connection with the growth of the life of faith, especially growth in the knowledge of Christ.

An in-depth pastoral and psychological analysis

Although Symonds emphasizes spiritual comfort for assaulted believers, it is emphatically not his intention to underestimate the pastoral issues at stake here. Consequently, he engages in an extensive discussion regarding the various symptoms of spiritual desertion, stating the seriousness of this spiritual malady and simultaneously yielding profound pastoral and psychological insight into its spiritual consequences.

A significant symptom of spiritual desertion is the loss of comfort. Symonds describes this with strongly-worded experiential vocabulary such as *Missing the Light of God's Countenance*, *The Quicknings of His Spirit*, *The Subduing of Lusts*, *Success in our Prayers*, *Tastes of Heaven*, or in this manner:

[...] he could formerly mourn bitterly in the Remembrance of his Sins, but now the Heart is frozen, and cannot relent, he could have prayed with

⁵⁴ Symonds, *Case and Cure*, 260. For Symonds analysis of both self-knowledge and knowledge of God: Wang, 'Two Perspectives on Spiritual Dryness', 35.

much Affection, and holy Boldness, but now the Heart is cooled, weakned, straitned, indisposed [...].⁵⁵

Spiritual desertion results in a significant inner and sensible chilling of communion with God. There is a spiritual deadness that pervades the entire life of faith giving room for the growth of sinful desires.

The pastoral and psychological approach of Symonds clearly comes to the fore when he analyzes the various degrees of such a loss of spiritual comfort. The first step is that God's quieting presence is no longer as noticeable in the believer as before: "The Soul that was a *dwelling Place* to her Friend, is but an *Inn* now." The second step is that inner peace nearly vanishes, and thereafter a *Night of Darkness and woful Deadness* manifests itself in which not only all comfort has evaporated, but also the faith of the believer languishes. The highest degree of such darkness, described extensively by Symonds, precipitates an emergency situation:

[...] God sometimes comes to set out a Sin unto Man, and then it is very dreadful, such a Terror and Astonishment seizeth upon him by a full Sight and Sense of Sin, as that, if there be not a supporting Hand of Grace and Mercy extended to him, he cannot stand under it. [...] When the Soul seeth that Vastness of Eternity filled with Death and Sufferings, and seeth not the Refuge in the Gospel, this is a great shaking to the Soul.⁵⁶

While the believer is confronted intensely with his guilt, a sight of God's grace and his personal interest in salvation is withheld from him. When he moreover becomes ensnared in an *abundance of dark and black thoughts and passions regarding himself*, and when added to this there are the intrigues of the devil, he is in danger of succumbing to spiritual despair.

Symonds' focus upon the spiritual experience of this suffering is most prominent when he analyzes spiritual desertion from three different vantage points: in regard to graces, sinful corruptions, and the means of grace. Firstly, spiritual desertion manifests itself in regard to believer's graces by way of a diminished inability of the mind to motivate the heart to engage in spiritual activity and to resist sinful desires. The diminished operation of God's Spirit also affects the human will. While the performance of external duties such as listening to the preaching of God's

⁵⁵ Symonds, *Case and Cure*, 19.

⁵⁶ Symonds, *Case and Cure*, 238-39.

Word and prayer continues as usual, there is a decline in inward actions and motions such as self-examination, contrition, a yearning for Christ, and faith. Finally, spiritual desertion also pertains to one's human emotions. The believer experiences an inner chilling, such as diminished love and a decline of the spiritual enjoyment of God, which is described visually and experientially:

If you did delight in God as before, what means your hanging back from him? [...] It may be, to be with God hath in Times past been to thee better than thine appointed Food, but now thou comest to Duties, as to Meals when thou has no Stomach. What then more clear than this, that thy Delight is less in God.⁵⁷

Emotional symptoms of desertion are also a decline of sorrow over sin as well as an increasing neglect of the prayer for spiritual assistance.

Secondly, spiritual desertion affects the manifestation of the inner corruption of the believer. During spiritual desertion the power of sinful desires increases, and this in turn affects the quality of the life of faith. Since the mind cherishes the temptation and draws the heart to it, also the will and the affections are influenced, fostering a desire to sin. If the believer yields to this, evil will be victorious.

Thirdly, spiritual desertion will also affect the use of the means of grace. Symonds posits that the believer then has a diminished desire for the Word of God, the sacraments, and prayer, whereas the spiritual effect of their use is also significantly diminished.⁵⁸

Prevention and healing of spiritual desertion

Symonds also addresses the prevention and healing of spiritual desertion in much greater detail than Perkins and Goodwin. Noteworthy are not only his pastoral motive either to keep believers from this experience or to deliver them from it noteworthy, but also the manner in which he plumbs the psychological depths of the believer.

The most prominent means to prevent spiritual desertion is to maintain an existential walk with God as being the very essence of the life of the Christian. The responsibility of the believer plays a significant role in this. Symonds deems this calling to be the exercise of self-examination,

⁵⁷ Symonds, *Case and Cure*, 54.

⁵⁸ Symonds, *Case and Cure*, 58, 69-70.

contrition, meditation, prayer, and the reading of the Bible. Additionally, the Christian's walk plays a role in this, and this is particularly true in regard to the foundational disposition of love which yearns after holiness and steadfastly resists all inclinations to the contrary. Symonds' emphasis upon the calling of the believer is based upon his conviction that *men regenerate have power to do something of themselves*. Though he repeatedly stresses that both the initial conversion of the believer, as well as his daily renewal, are to be attributed to the grace of God, he wants to counter any inclination toward spiritual passivity by positing that God engages the believer through the use of the means of grace.⁵⁹

Besides the prevention of spiritual desertion, Symonds also addresses the spiritual healing of this suffering. This only transpires when believers repent regarding their loss of fellowship with God and the causes of this, namely, spiritual carelessness and a yielding to sinful desires. This is expressed in a touching way by letting a penitent speak for himself:

Oh! Wretch that I am, that that precious Communion, which I had with my God, was of no more Esteem with me, that those sweet Streams of Comfort which I now want, but then had from the Well of Life, those quickning Beams from the Sun of Righteousness, those refreshing, those ravishing Sights and Tastes of Jesus Christ, those pleasant Banquets which I had in the Ordinances and in Duties, those blessed Embraces of the everlasting Arms of the Lord my God; were of so low Account with me, that I should lose them by my Folly.⁶⁰

The next step toward spiritual restoration is a surrender to Christ, and Symonds therefore makes an urgent appeal to his readers to go to the Father in this way.⁶¹ The affectionate articulation of Christ's gracious offer of salvation, as well as the believing surrender to Him, are distinctive features of Symonds' analysis of spiritual restoration. The believer must come to Christ via a prayer that is characterized by confession of guilt, love, desire, and a trusting in the promise of salvation. This will culminate in renewed fellowship with God.

The two-fold pastoral objective of Symonds' book about spiritual desertion is highlighted clearly in the paragraph about its prevention and

⁵⁹ Symonds, *Case and Cure*, 94-151.

⁶⁰ Symonds, *Case and Cure*, 181.

⁶¹ Symonds, *Case and Cure*, 279.

healing. On the one hand, he wishes to warn believers for spiritual desertion via preventative advice, and on the other hand he wishes to encourage them by positing that this perilous spiritual condition can be remedied.

Evaluation

1. Symonds addresses spiritual desertion most extensively and includes the nature, the distinct variants, and the symptoms of spiritual desertion as well as the prevention and healing thereof. Furthermore, there is the centrality of God's providence. This enables him to ascribe several pedagogical objectives to spiritual desertion, such as the unveiling of the gravity of sin, confession of guilt, repentance, and a deepening of the life of faith.⁶² Symonds' primary pastoral objective is to demonstrate that even though spiritual desertion can deeply affect the believer's experience, from the vantage point of God's omnipotent and pedagogical providence it can both be managed and treated.

2. When compared to Perkins and Goodwin, Symonds gives the most detailed, and in-depth pastoral and psychological analysis of spiritual desertion as well as its prevention and its healing, and along with this considerable attention is given to human experience. This focus upon experience is especially evident when Symonds discusses spiritual desertion as being the absence of comfort. Here he primarily views the loss of communion with God from the vantage point of his actions, while at the same time describing it emphatically from the vantage point of the spiritual experience of the believer.

God's activity and human experience

As they increasingly emphasized the psychological and experiential dimension of spiritual desertion, Perkins, Goodwin and Symonds thereby introduced a pastoral ambivalence between God's dealings and human experience. In light of their Reformed-Orthodox theology, it was impossible that believers could lose God's grace, whereas both the indwelling of his Spirit and the concurrent spiritual peace were principally and incontrovertibly affirmed. Yet the question remained how they should explain God's dealings in regard to spiritual desertion. Though they

⁶² Although Lewis mentions several examples regarding both the discovery and remedy of sin, he does not stress that this is the first pedagogical objective of the Puritan pastoral analysis of spiritual desertion (*Genius of Puritanism*, 77-83).

focused on matters such as divine withdrawal, absence, and wrath, they certainly did not want to suggest that with God this was merely a matter of pretence. Therefore when considering spiritual desertion from a theological perspective, the three Puritan authors maintained that communion with God could not be lost, whereas when considering it from an experiential perspective they taught that God could withdraw himself.

Though spiritual desertion results in the experiential loss of God's nearness, it is not an indication that God is really absent, for He is still engaged secretly within the soul. It was therefore the Puritan view that spiritual experience can be a misleading guide, and the believer was consequently exhorted not to live by his feeling, but rather by faith. Deeming the loss of assurance of salvation as being perilous for believers, Puritan authors asserted that an important pedagogical objective of spiritual desertion is to foster the exercise of trusting God's salvation in spite of one's feelings.

However, the Puritan pastoral approach did not resolve the aforesaid tension, making clear that not only could one have a dark spiritual experience, but also that one could encounter a dark spiritual reality. As we observed, spiritual desertion was frequently explained as God punishing sin, albeit that this activity did not contradict his deepest intention, namely, the spiritual well-being of his people. Therefore, a distinction was made between judicial punishment which has been removed through union with Christ, and paternal chastisement which is pedagogical in nature.⁶³ Thus the believer's experience of God's absence could be a true indication of his paternal chastisement for their persistent sins. Among them were numbered not only reoccurring and daily transgressions, but also conscious departures or chronic spiritual negligence. Though God would not withdraw himself completely, He nevertheless could hide himself in such a manner that the experience of his nearness, power, and comfort would ebb away. Therefore, Puritan writers customarily call their readers to self-examination, confession of sin and faith in God's promise of forgiveness, for this is the way in which God's absence will be reversed.⁶⁴ However, the experience of guilt might cause believers to be troubled with paralyzing thoughts of spiritual hypocrisy and the concurrent fear of eternal perdition. However, this was

⁶³ Goodwin, *Works of Thomas Goodwin* 3, 245.

⁶⁴ Perkins, *Workes of William Perkins* 3, 420.

not caused by God's desertion, but rather, by virtue of Satan's devious activity.⁶⁵

Thus, the three Puritan writings on spiritual desertion are ambivalent in regard to the immutability of God's grace and the vacillating nature of spiritual experience. On the one hand, believers are exhorted not to allow themselves to be governed by their experience, but rather, by believing that God is caring for them in spite of their spiritual darkness. On the other hand, these Puritans also emphasized that the experience of spiritual desertion could very well be an indication of God's displeasure toward their sins. In that sense experience contributes in its own unique way to the troubling of souls, especially the souls of believers who lack assurance and thus are doubting 'weak Christians'. Considerable pastoral instruction was primarily intended for the healing of such believers, rather than merely making a distinction between faith and feeling. Perkins, Goodwin and Symonds taught that spiritual desertion is not always a manifestation of God's anger, but rather that it could also be intended as a testing of faith and to foster a deepening of spiritual life. The intensity of this experience is contingent upon the influence exerted by both the devil and human temperament. Yet these instructions appeared to have had but a limited effect, for it was difficult to separate feeling from faith, to identify the precise causes of spiritual desertion, and to distinguish between the spiritual dimension of the divinely initiated desertion and the psychological influence of the human temperament.

Nevertheless an explicit method was employed to foster the healing of spiritual desertion. The first step was self-examination, so that thereby it might be discovered what sins precipitated spiritual backsliding. The next step consisted of the confession of sin, repentance, and the exercise of faith unto the forgiveness of sins. This was followed by believers seeking renewed communion with God by using the means of grace, and by waiting upon Him to grant them a new spiritual experience of his grace and love. Although Perkins, Goodwin, and Symonds thus deemed the believer's experience to be an unreliable guide for spiritual life, they also emphasized that the experience of God's absence was connected to sin, and therefore called for self-examination, repentance, and renewal.

⁶⁵ Goodwin, *Works of Thomas Goodwin* 3, 256-87.

Notwithstanding the ambivalent relationship between God's activity and experience, spiritual desertion was viewed as being in the context of a deeper experience of God's grace. This connection becomes evident when one views it in parallel with the Puritan view of initial conversion. Puritans considered both conviction of sin and one's radical break with evil as indispensable preparations for union with Christ, for the knowledge of forgiveness, and for Christian living. Consequently they understood the Christian life to be a sort of devotional cycle wherein the knowledge and confession of sin, as well as humility, were dialectically related to the knowledge of God's grace and spiritual joy.

Puritans believed that spiritual growth consisted of a spiritual cycle that not only leads to a deeper self-knowledge, but especially to a deeper and more gratifying relationship with God. These latter aspects reveal a mystical strain in Puritan spirituality.⁶⁶ Spiritual desertion also played an important role within the context of spiritual growth, because it stimulates self-examination, confession of sin, and a renewed trust in God, all of which leads to a deeper knowledge of grace:

Therefore God sends back the Soul into her old Prison, to feel the Weight of her ancient Irons and Chains, and causeth her to put on her old cast Garments of Mourning, that Sackcloth and Ashes which she wore in the Days of Old, that by laying this Rod upon her [...] so a new Life may come into the dying Love, and now Mercy is raised to its former Price, and Christ is advanced on high, now the Soul returns with redoubled Strength, and with multiplied and increased Thankfulness.⁶⁷

Thus the Puritan pastoral analysis of spiritual desertion not only yields an ambivalent relation between faith in God's promises and spiritual experience, but as a movement that was theologically influenced by Reformed Orthodoxy, Puritanism particularly emphasized that the knowledge of God's grace was governed by the overarching involvement of God's providence, as well as by the pedagogical lessons yielded by the cyclic structure of self-examination, repentance, and restoration.

International influence

The influence of Puritanism in the Netherlands was significant, which is also affirmed by the translation into Dutch of the three Puritan works that

⁶⁶ Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*.

⁶⁷ Symonds, *Case and Cure*, 271-72.

have been addressed in this article. Perkins' work on spiritual desertion was published separately at Amsterdam for the first time in 1663, and was entitled: *Eene Verklaringe van eenige Geestelijke Verlaatingen*, whereas the work of Goodwin appeared in Dutch as *Een Kind des Lichts, wandelende in duysternisse*, initially without a date, and subsequently in 1655. Given the number of editions, it appears that Symonds' writing was the most prominent of these publications. His work was initially published in 1660 as one of Jacobus Koelman's (1632-1695) translations: *Van geestlyke verlatingen in opzicht van heylighmakingh en verwakking in godtzaligheidt*. Subsequent editions followed in 1687 and 1722.⁶⁸

The influence of these three works is especially evident in the writings of Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676). In 1646 his *Disputaty van Geestelicke Verlatingen* was published,⁶⁹ whereas his later work *Ta askètika sive Exercitia pietatis* (1664) addresses the subject of spiritual desertion in a separate chapter. Voetius refers regularly to sources within English Puritanism, doing so particularly and repeatedly in regard to Perkins's writing, while he also refers to the work of Goodwin, and once to that of Symonds.⁷⁰

In his *Logikè Latreia, d.i. Redelijke Godsdienst*, another famous author of the Dutch Further Reformation, Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711), devotes a separate chapter to spiritual desertion. However, he does not refer to Puritan spiritual sources, though it seems probable that he was acquainted with them.⁷¹

The writings of Perkins and Goodwin were also published in Germany, whereas this was not the case for those of Symonds. Perkins' work was published in 1610 as: *Gründliche Erklärung etlicher geistlichen Verlassungen*, as part of *Zwey lehr- und trostreiche Stück[e] Guilielmi Perkinsii* [William Perkins]. Other editions were included in: *Drey nützliche und lehrreiche Büchlein*, and were published in 1660 and 1666. Goodwin's

⁶⁸ J. van der Haar, *From Abbadie to Young: A Bibliography of English, Most Puritan Works, translated i/t Dutch Language* (FATY), Veenendaal 1980, 1501-02 (Perkins), 873-74 (Goodwin), 1754-56 (Symonds); see also *Pietas Online*.

⁶⁹ This work contains a translation of Voetius's earlier Latin disputation on spiritual desertion (see A.C. Duker, *Gisbertus Voetius*, vol. 3, Leiden 1989 (reprint), 56, n. 2) and a work of Johannes Hoornbeeck (1617-1666) on this subject.

⁷⁰ Gisbertus Voetius, *De praktijk der godzaligheid (Ta askètika sive Exercitia pietatis – 1664)*, ed. and transl. C.A. de Niet, Utrecht 1996, chapter 20 (397-422).

⁷¹ 's Gravenhage 1700, vol. 2, chapter 18 (619-636).

work was published as: *Ein Kind des Lichts wandelnd im Finstern*, and was included in *Geistreiche Schriften*, published in 1705, 1715, and 1730.⁷²

Conclusion

By analyzing spiritual desertion, Puritan authors like Perkins, Goodwin, and Symonds address a classic theme in the history of Christian spirituality. Whereas Perkins describes spiritual desertion among both believers and unbelievers, Goodwin and Symonds focus exclusively on this spiritual suffering in the life of believers. An explanation for this difference is rooted in their ecclesiology. Perkins was a member of the early Puritan movement within the Elizabethan church, and he was therefore confronted with great spiritual diversity, whereas Goodwin and Symonds were active in congregational communities where more spiritually homogeneity could be found.

The Puritans combined a Reformed-orthodox doctrine of God's grace with an experiential spirituality that also focused on disconcerting experiences such as spiritual desertion. The theological affirmation of the Puritan's paramount emphasis upon God's grace is evident in the fact that Perkins, Goodwin, and Symonds assign to God's providence a position of central importance. By aligning their Reformed and orthodox view regarding God's providence with the Father - child relationship between him and believers, they posit that spiritual desertion usually serves the purpose of chastising sin in believers. In so doing, it is God's pedagogical objective to elicit their confession of sin, as well as to foster repentance and spiritual growth. By thus addressing spiritual desertion pastorally, these Puritan authors desire to lead believers to a deeper knowledge of God's grace. At the same time they insist upon the believer's personal responsibility, which means that he must be actively engaged in entering into communion with God by the daily use of the means of grace.

During the course of the seventeenth century, the pastoral and psychological dimension of the Puritan movement increasingly internalized, as is evidenced by comparing Perkins, Goodwin, and Symonds, and thus an increased emphasis upon the experience of spiritual desertion begins to manifest itself. As to the realm of Christian experience and spiritual desertion, Puritan authors may have been

⁷² Edgar C. Mckenzie, *A Catalogue of British Devotional and Religious Books in German Translation from the Reformation to 1750*, Berlin 1997, 821-23 (Goodwin), 1340-42 (Perkins).

influenced by Bernard of Clairvaux as well as by (late) medieval English mystical spirituality. There is a tension between the Puritan emphasis upon God's omnipotent and gracious activity, and the increased focus both pastorally and psychologically upon the experience of spiritual desertion. On the one hand, this experience of desertion is generally speaking an unreliable foundation for one's spiritual well-being, and therefore the believer is exhorted to live by faith. On the other hand the experience of God's absence is viewed as the spiritual indicator and as the common manifestation of divine activity calling for repentance, spiritual renewal and a deeper knowledge of grace.

Within the orthodox, Reformed, and theological context of God's gracious activity the unique pastoral contribution of the Puritans to the discussion of spiritual desertion is certainly their affirmation of the inseparable relationship between sin and grace as reflected in the cyclical reoccurrence of contrition, repentance, and renewal. Divine activity not only results in spiritual desertion, but it also remedies it, fostering a pietistic spirituality that is preeminently experiential.

Summary

This article analyses the writings of three Puritans on spiritual desertion: William Perkins (1558-1602), Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), and Joseph Symonds (d. 1652). Although Perkins mentions spiritual desertion with regard to the unconverted, this spiritual reality mainly pertains to believers, and Goodwin and Symonds therefore restrict spiritual desertion to the lives of believers. According to these authors, God's providence and sin are the two related causes of this spiritual suffering. Spiritual desertion is regarded as God's reaction toward sin and therefore calls for repentance and spiritual renewal. Therefore, by their emphasis on God's activity, Perkins, Goodwin, and Symonds want to comfort the believer by assuring him that even spiritual desertion cannot prevent his ultimate salvation. An important development is an expanding emphasis upon experience. Though Perkins' attention to the experience of spiritual desertion is limited in its scope, Goodwin's approach is much more focused on the inner life of the believer, whereas Symonds brings the Puritan pastoral approach to full fruition by his detailed and experiential description of the internal workings of spiritual decline and restoration. The dual emphasis upon God's activity and spiritual experience engenders a pastoral ambivalence between God's real objective regarding spiritual suffering and the occasionally deceptive influence of human experience. Despite such apparent ambivalence, the unique pastoral contribution of the Puritans to the discussion of spiritual desertion is certainly

their affirmation of the inseparable relationship between sin and grace as reflected in the cyclical reoccurrence of contrition, repentance, and renewal.

Dr. Reinier W. de Koeijer
Independent researcher
rwdkoeyer@filtnet.nl

“Sweetnesse in Communion with God”: The Contemplative–Mystical Piety of Thomas Watson

Tom Schwanda

Dewey Wallace summarizes a key component of Puritan piety when he states:

Heavenly mindedness was the spiritual person’s foretaste of the joys of heaven through meditation. This not only strengthened the soul for earthly trials but was one place in Puritan spirituality where the mystical element entered. The heavenly minded person was absorbed in divine things, weaned from earth, and advanced in communion with God because proleptically transported into that blessed state where the saints see God and enjoy his presence forever... To meditate on that state, binding one’s heart so closely to God that all else paled into insignificance, was the aim of the heavenly minded. Equally prominent with heavenly mindedness as a locus for Puritan affective mysticism was the theme of union with Christ... Union with Christ thus was a reality for believers, but also an experience to be cultivated or anticipated.¹

Wallace is clearly correct to speak of the “mystical element” in Puritanism. However, for some people the combination of the terms Puritanism and mystical element are foreign and inconceivable. Fortunately more scholars are recognizing and seeking to recover this mystical element within Puritanism.² To date typically these researchers are early modern historians rather than scholars of the more specific discipline of Christian spirituality. This is evidenced by the recent publication of the *Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism* and the *Wiley–Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*.³ While these sources contain essays written by historians they are more generally reflective of the discipline of Christian spirituality. The *Cambridge Companion* has two brief references to Puritanism that rely upon older and more limited resources. The *Wiley–*

¹ Dewey D. Wallace, Jr. (ed.), *The Spirituality of the Later English Puritans: an Anthology*, Macon 1987, xvii.

² For an introduction and summary of this research see Tom Schwanda, *Soul Recreation: the Contemplative–Mystical Piety in Puritanism*, Eugene 2012, 11–22.

³ Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (eds.), *Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge 2012 and Julia A. Lamm (ed.), *The Wiley–Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, Malden 2013.

Blackwell Companion devotes a full chapter to exploring the mystical element in Luther and Calvin and has a reference to the most recent and complete study of Puritan mysticism.⁴ In comparison, Dewey Wallace, a well-respected early modern historian, has recently devoted a full chapter to Peter Sterry whom he calls a Calvinist mystic. Wallace's research increases the visibility of this topic when he writes of the "mystical strain" of Sterry's Puritanism.⁵ Even more helpful is his conclusion that "like others before, he [i.e. Sterry] drew out the mystical potential of Calvinist theology and Puritan spirituality".⁶

The language of the mystical element figures even more prominently in Bernard McGinn's magisterial study of the history of Christian mysticism. To date McGinn has written five volumes that have only reached 1550. Rather than attempt a precise definition of mysticism that many agree is futile he speaks more broadly of the "mystical element" within Christianity.⁷ As he explores the rich history of Christian spirituality McGinn is attentive to the mystical theology, mystical language, mystical practices and mystical experiences. I prefer to employ the term of contemplative-mystical piety to mysticism when examining Puritanism since the language of contemplation is less problematic and confusing to many Protestant readers.⁸

Life and Ministry of Thomas Watson

This article seeks to trace the contemplative-mystical piety of Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) who was a prominent and highly respected Puritan of seventeenth-century England. One reason for selecting him is that he is a helpful response to James Houston's lament for the lack of contemplation within Protestantism. Houston writes: "It is one of the unfortunate reactions of the Reformation that Protestants cut themselves off from the whole medieval contemplative heritage of the church, on the grounds that the gift of contemplation was 'popish'."⁹ This essay will

⁴ Lamm, *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, 539.

⁵ Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660–1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation*, Oxford 2011, 52.

⁶ Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism*, 85.

⁷ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, New York 1991, xvi.

⁸ Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 17-18.

⁹ James Houston, 'Spiritual Theology, Part II: The Nature and Purpose of Spirituality', in: *Crux*, 27 (1991), 25-33, here 26.

clearly demonstrate that Watson was intimately familiar with the writings of medieval monasticism and equally discerning to appropriate the wisdom and sources of contemplation of the western Catholic Church without becoming entangled in the theological battlegrounds of “popery” that would challenge the Reformed theological sensibilities of Puritanism.

We know very little about the early life of Thomas Watson. He matriculated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge in 1635 and earned his BA in 1639, and MA in 1642. Upon graduation he became chaplain to the family of Lady Mary Vere, wife of the former Horace Vere to whom he penned an epistolary dedication in *Three Treatises* (i.e. *Christian Charter*, the *Art of Divine Contentment*, and *A Discourse on Meditation*) in 1660. She was a patron of numerous Puritans including Isaac Ambrose.¹⁰

In 1646 Watson moved to London and served first as lecturer for ten years and then rector for another six years at St. Stephen’s, Walbrook. He was increasingly attracted to the Presbyterian movement during the Civil War and like many other Presbyterians he supported King Charles I and strongly protested his execution. He joined the circle of Christopher Love and other London Presbyterians. He was accused of plotting to return Charles II to the throne for which he was briefly imprisoned in 1651.¹¹ He was later reinstated to his parish at St. Stephen’s. Watson was ejected by the Act of Uniformity in 1662 though he continued preaching throughout London in scattered locations. Eventually Stephen Charnock, another graduate of Emmanuel College, joined him and they served together until Charnock’s death in 1680. Watson was a prolific writer; best known for his posthumously published *A Body of Practical Divinity*, being 176 sermons on the Westminster Shorter Catechism published in 1692.

¹⁰ Isaac Ambrose, *Media: the Middle Things, in Reference to the First and Last Things*, London, T.R. and E.M., 1657 (Wing / A 2960). For an overview of Lady Vere’s patronage of Puritans see Jacqueline Eales, “An Ancient Mother in Our Israel’: Mary, Lady Vere’, in: Johanna Harris and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann (eds.), *The Intellectual Culture of Puritan Women, 1558–1680*, Basingstoke 2011, 84-95.

¹¹ In reality the London Presbyterians tried to gather news about Charles and about their brethren in Scotland, for which they did correspondence and exchanged the news at meetings in their homes. The accusation of a plot does not seem to be appropriate, although the gathering of news by the Presbyterians brought them in touch with Royalists who might have plotted to return Charles II to the throne, F.W. Huisman, ‘Het leven van Christopher Love (1618-1651)’, in: W.J. op ’t Hof and F.W. Huisman (eds.), *Nederlandse liefde voor Christopher Love (1618-1651). Studies over het vertaalde werk van een presbyteriaanse puritein*, Amstelveen 2013, 11-78, here 35-39.

These were intended for catechetical instruction as evidenced by the preliminary chapter on catechizing. Of his *Discourses on Interesting and Important Subjects* the ODNB assesses that they were “primarily meditational, at times even mystical, and often expressed in ecstatic language”.¹² He preached a fast sermon before the House of Commons in December 28, 1648, that Parliament refused to publish because of his sharp attack upon their hypocrisy and his support for King Charles I.

Watson was highly appreciated in the seventeenth century not only in his native England but equally well received by Dutch and German readers. Henry Newcome records that when asked to suggest books for establishing a library for a local school he expressed his desire to select the “most practical” books and named the following authors “Perkins, [...] Sibs, Hooker, Bolton, Love, Watson’s Workes”.¹³ That places Watson in an impressive list of seventeenth-century Puritan devotional writers. His *Art of Divine Contentment, The Godly Mans Picture, The Doctrine of Repentance*, a collection of his works as well as various sermons appeared in Puritan collected works in Dutch.¹⁴ Similarly a number of Watson’s works were translated and reprinted in German.¹⁵ In the eighteenth century Philip Doddridge reports that Watson’s *Heaven Taken By Storm* was instrumental in the conversion of Col. James Gardiner (1688-1745).¹⁶ In the nineteenth century Charles Spurgeon was attracted to Watson and penned a brief memoir of him in a reprint of Watson’s *A Body of Divinity*.¹⁷ Even though the Puritans and Presbyterians of seventeenth-century Hungary did not appear to translate Watson’s works he has been received recently by the renewed contemporary interest in Puritanism and Pietist

¹² Barry Till, ‘Thomas Watson’, in: H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28867> (limited access).

¹³ Henry Newcome, *The Diary of the Rev. Henry Newcome, from September 30, 1661, to September 29, 1663*, Thomas Heywood (ed.), Manchester 1849, 175.

¹⁴ Cornelis W. Schoneveld, *Intertraffic of the Mind*, Leiden 1983, 243, cf. 170, 171, 229, cf. J. van der Haar, *Van Abbadie tot Young: Een Bibliografie van Engelse, Veela Puritaanse in het Nederlands Vertaalde Werken*, Veenendall 1980, 132-34.

¹⁵ Edgar C. McKenzie, *A Catalog of British Devotional and Religious Books in German Translation from the Reformation to 1750*, Berlin 1997, 3-3, 13-14, 413-17 and Udo Sträter, *Sonthom, Bayly, Dyke und Hall*, Tübingen 1987, 109, 146.

¹⁶ Philip Doddridge, *Some Remarkable Passages in the Life of the Honourable Col. James Gardiner*, London, J. Buckland, 1785 (T155591), 44.

¹⁷ Charles Spurgeon, ‘Brief memoir of Thomas Watson’, in: Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, Grand Rapids, s.a., iii-vii.

authors.¹⁸ While there is no full-length contemporary monograph devoted to Watson it would be a mistake to assume that he has been forgotten as so many other significant seventeenth-century Puritan divines have been. Therefore numerous scholars have noticed the importance of Thomas Watson and his writings.¹⁹ When the Banner of Truth Trust was established in 1957 for the purpose of reissuing Puritan classics they selected Thomas Watson's *A Body of Divinity* as one of the first volumes to be published.²⁰ However, no one has addressed the robust nature of Watson's contemplative-mystical piety. Therefore by writing on him I hope to contribute to the expanding scholarship on Puritan piety and more specifically retrieve Watson for both the academy and church today.

Contemplative-Mystical Theology of Thomas Watson

Central to all writings of Christian mysticism is the essential theme of mystical union. Typically western Catholic writers employ the terminology

¹⁸ See for example Thomas Watson, *Cím és Szerzőségi Közlés: A Bűnbánat*, Sára Molnár (trans.), Kolozsvár 1999.

¹⁹ Joel Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, Grand Rapids 2004, 74, 78-79, 87, 97, Jennifer C. Niemeyer, 'Thomas Watson: The Necessity of Meditation', in: *Puritan Reformed Journal*, 2 (2010), 166-181, and Norbert Haukenfrers, 'Bellows of Affection: The Meditative Spirituality of Thomas Watson', MCS's thesis, Regent College, 1998. On Watson's treatment of meditation; William S. Barker, 'A Body of Divinity by Thomas Watson (D. 1686)', in: Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (eds.), *The Devoted Life: the Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, Downers Grove 2004, 200-10 and the numerous references in Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, Grand Rapids 2012 on Watson's theology; Christopher Jenkins, 'Thomas Watson and How to Live a Godly Life', in: *The Power of God in the Life of Man*, Stoke-on-Trent 2005, 27-36 on Watson's understanding of godliness; Hughes O. Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, vol. 4. Grand Rapids 2002, 313-17 on Watson's sermons; Elizabeth Clarke, *Politics, Religion and the Song of Songs in Seventeenth-Century England*, Basingstoke 2011, 177-83 on Watson's usage of the Song of Songs; and H. R. Trevor-Roper, *The Crises of the Seventeenth Century*, New York 1967, 334-35, 338 and John F. Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament: Puritanism During the English Civil Wars, 1640-1648*, Princeton 1969, 95, 101n, 155-57, 167 on Watson's fast sermon before the House of Commons and Presbyterianism.

²⁰ <http://banneroftruth.org/us/about/the-story-of-banner/>, accessed February 5, 2014.

of union with God while Protestants,²¹ and in particular, the Puritans,²² frequently utilize the more specific designation of union with Christ. John Calvin had followed the same practice of speaking of union with Christ.²³ One of the primary reasons is that Protestants eschewed the traditional Roman Catholic understanding of the three-fold way of purgation, illumination, and union. According to this pattern union with God was the culmination of a life-long pilgrimage that was only reached in heaven as opposed to the Protestant perspective that taught union with Christ begins as a person experiences conversion and believes in Jesus Christ. Recent Roman Catholic scholarship has sought to revise this following the Protestant understanding that union with Christ must be initiated by grace and precede each phase of the *triplex-via*.²⁴

The premiere biblical book for medieval mysticism was the Song of Songs and western Catholics and Puritans alike employed it as the foundation for developing the metaphor of mystical union or spiritual marriage, as it was often called.²⁵ Watson preached two sermons on the Song of Songs; one on Canticles 2:16 on the nature of the believer's mystical union with Christ²⁶ and a much larger series of sermons from Canticles 5:16 entitled *Christs Loveliness*.²⁷ In the former sermon Watson unfolds much of the standard Puritan theology of union with Christ. He describes this mystical union as a "natural", "sacred", "faederal",

²¹ For a helpful overview of mystical union within Protestantism see Kimberly Long, *The Eucharistic Theology of the American Holy Fairs*, Louisville 2011, 25-60.

²² For the Puritans on mystical union see Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 54-72 and Jean Williams, 'The Puritan Quest for the Enjoyment of God' (PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 1997), 159-76.

²³ See for example Dennis E. Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard*, Louisville 1994. Twice Calvin uses the specific language of "mystical union" in his well-known *Institutes*. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.12.7, 3.11.10, John T. McNeill (ed.), Ford Lewis Battles (trans.), vol. 1, Philadelphia 1960, 473, 737.

²⁴ See Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 55.

²⁵ Charles Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, Chapel Hill 1982, 28-29 and John Coffey, 'Letters of Samuel Rutherford', in: Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (eds.), *The Devoted Life: the Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, Downers Grove 2004, 104.

²⁶ Thomas Watson, *Shewing the Mystical Union Between Christ and the Saints in The Godly Mans Picture*, London, Thomas Parkhurst 1666 (Wing/ W 1124), 343-361. For accuracy I will site this sermon according to its pagination in the *Godly Mans Picture*.

²⁷ Thomas Watson, *Christs Loveliness*, 2nd ed. (1659), in: *Three Treatises*, 5th ed., London, Ralph Smith, 1660 (Wing / W 1145).

“vertual”, and “*mystical*” relationship with Christ.²⁸ Because this is a “marriage—union with Christ” Watson speaks of it as a “holy marriage”.²⁹ He also illustrates the believer’s union with Christ through the imagery of a “marriage knot”.³⁰ This union is with the soul of the believer and therefore Watson declares that, “in other marriages, two make *one flesh*, but Christ and the believer make one spirit, I Cor. 6.17”.³¹ Unfortunately Watson does not include his customary marginal references that are frequently revealing of his sources. This may indicate his desire to publish the sermon immediately without further refinement and expansion. Interestingly 1 Corinthians 6:17 was Bernard of Clairvaux’s (1090–1153) favorite text for describing union with God.³² Additionally Watson provides the important reminder of the depth and delight that the believer experiences with Christ when he declares, “this spiritual union, brings in more astonishing delights and ravishments, than any other marriage—relation is capable of, the joy that flows from the mystical union, is *unspeakable and full of glory, I Pet. 1.8*”.³³

Clearly this union with Christ involves each person of the Trinity. Watson reminds his listeners “God the Father gives the bride, God the Son receives the bride, God the Holy ghost tyes the knot in marriage; he knits our wills to Christ, and Christs love to us.”³⁴ From the human side of this relationship faith is the essential principle and according to Watson even the smallest “Pearl of Faith” can unite a person with Christ for “a weak hand can tye the Nuptial Knot; a weak Faith can unite to Christ as well as a strong [one]”.³⁵

The larger sermon of *Christs Loveliness* contains a number of references to Bernard of Clairvaux but since the focus is that Jesus is

²⁸ Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 343-45.

²⁹ Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 346. Calvin parallels this language when he speaks of union with Christ as “sacred wedlock”. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.1.3 (vol. 1, p. 541).

³⁰ Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 344, 347, 349, cf. Thomas Watson, *Gods Anatomy Upon Mans Heart*, London, Ralph Smith, 1654, (Wing (2nd ed., 1994) / W1125A), 28; and Thomas Watson, *A Pastors Love Expressed to a Loving People in a Farwel Sermon*, London, s.n., 1662, 15 (Wing / W1136).

³¹ Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 346, cf. 345.

³² Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great through the 12th Century*, New York 1994, 213, 215.

³³ Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 347.

³⁴ Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 344.

³⁵ Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 331, cf. 349.

altogether lovely in his crucifixion it does not relate to the Puritan retrieval of medieval mysticism. However, in the *Christians Charter*, which Ian Green terms a “Long treatise on the blessings of a believer” that went through at least six editions before 1729,³⁶ Watson quotes Bernard approvingly when he speaks of our union with Christ. He defines it as “conjugal” and then referencing Bernard states that as Christ’s spouse we share in his glory.³⁷

Not surprisingly Watson is consistent with other Puritans in employing the bridal language of Christian mysticism in speaking of God as the believer’s husband³⁸ and the believer as God’s spouse.³⁹ On one occasion Watson employs the metaphor of God as husband directly quoting Isaiah 54:5 (“*Thy Maker is thy husband*”).⁴⁰ While the mystical union is begun on earth it is never fully consummated until heaven. After a reference to Tertullian Watson then declares, “The day of a Christians death, is the birth–day of his heavenly life; it is his Ascension day to glory; it is his marriage–day with Jesus Christ. After his funeral begins his marriage.”⁴¹ This can be somewhat misleading unless one remembers that union with Christ begins with the espousal of believers when they are justified and believe in Jesus Christ. Therefore the fullness of spiritual marriage is not experienced until one reaches heaven.⁴²

³⁶ Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England*, Oxford 2000, 668.

³⁷ Thomas Watson, *Christians Charter in Three Treatises*, 5th ed., London, Ralph Smith, 1660 (Wing / W1145), 38.

³⁸ See for example Thomas Watson, *A Christian on the Mount or a Treatise on Meditation*, 2n ed. (1659), in: *Three Treatises*, 5th ed., London, Ralph Smith, 1660 (Wing / W1145), 422; Watson, *Christians Charter*, 91; Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 18, 348, 350, 354, 356, 358, 359, 360, 361; Thomas Watson, *A Divine Cordial*, London, Thomas Parkhurst, 1663 (Wing / W 1121), 66, 113, 128; Thomas Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, London, Tho. Parkhurst, 1669 (Wing / W 1127), 215; etc.

³⁹ See for example, Thomas Watson, *The Holy Eucharist or the Mystery of the Lord’s Supper Briefly Explained*, London, A. Maxwell, 1668 (Wing / W 1129), 13, 19; Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 200, 344, 353, 359; Watson, *Divine Cordial*, 52, 88 and Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, 215.

⁴⁰ Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes: or a Discourse Upon Part of Christs Famous Sermon on the Mount*, London, Ralph Smith, 1660, (Wing (2nd ed.) / W1107), 33.

⁴¹ Watson, *Christian Charter*, 29, cf. Watson, *Divine Cordial*, 70.

⁴² See Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 168 where he contrasts the difference between the godly experiencing the initial benefits of spiritual marriage on earth with the necessity of waiting until heaven for its fulfillment. Cf. 347-48.

Contemplative–Mystical Practices of Thomas Watson

Watson places a high priority on the ordinances of God. That typically includes not only the sacraments, most notably the Lord’s Supper, but also prayer and meditation. One benefit of engaging in these ordinances is “This sweet enjoying of God is, when we feel his Spirit co–operating with the Ordinance, and distilling Grace upon our Hearts.”⁴³ This reveals two significant principles for Watson’s spiritual theology. The Spirit is responsible for initiating and guiding our spiritual practices, but further it is the role of grace to deepen and further guide a person’s participation in these spiritual exercises. Elsewhere Watson teaches that Christ converses with the soul through his Spirit and the soul responds back to Christ by prayer and meditation.⁴⁴ Indeed the Holy Spirit is the indwelling Spirit who resides in the believer’s heart⁴⁵ and without depending upon the Spirit’s guidance we are nothing more than “Parrots” merely mouthing empty words rather “than *weeping Doves*” that we should be when we communicate with God.⁴⁶ Therefore Watson urges his readers to “pray *for* the Holy Ghost, that you may pray *in* the Holy Ghost.”⁴⁷ The Holy Spirit guides the believer in two other ways in practicing spiritual duties, through employing the proper motivation and deepening the intensity of prayer. Watson maintains that a “spiritual prayer” is when the Spirit activates the heart.⁴⁸ Further a spiritual prayer is one that is “fired by love”.⁴⁹ Elsewhere Watson warns his readers, “Duties not mingled with love, are as burdensom to God, as they are to us... Love is the most noble and excellent grace, it is a pure flame kindled from Heaven, by it we

⁴³ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity*, London, Thomas Parkhurst, 1692 (Wing / W1109), 9.

⁴⁴ Watson, *Christs Loveliness*, 464.

⁴⁵ Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 89.

⁴⁶ Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 127. Similarly Calvin is insistent that the Holy Spirit is the “inward teacher, [who] comes to them [i.e. the sacraments], by whose power alone hearts are penetrated and affections moved and our souls opened for the sacraments to enter in”. Calvin, *Institutes* 4.14.9, (vol. 2, p. 1284).

⁴⁷ Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 131.

⁴⁸ Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 120. Watson further instructs that since a person is “naturally *dead*” they cannot read Scripture unless the Spirit “*shines into our heart*”. Thomas Watson, *Art of Divine Contentment*, 6th ed., in: *Three Treatises*, 5th ed., London, Ralph Smith, 1660 (Wing/ W1145), 182.

⁴⁹ Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 124.

resemble God who is *love*.”⁵⁰ Additionally the Spirit is active in enlarging the passion of prayer. Watson declares, “A righteous man is carried up to heaven in a *Fiery Chariot* of Devotion: This holy Fervency is caused by the Spirit of God, which both indites and inflames the Saints prayers. *Rom. 8.26*.”⁵¹

Clearly there is a dynamic dialogue that believers experience when they engage in these practices. Watson develops it in this fashion: in the Word we hear God’s voice, in the sacraments we have his kisses and enjoyment of God.⁵² Watson reflects Calvin’s high view of the Lord’s Supper who believed that the Word and Sacrament should ideally be always joined together.⁵³ The mutual interaction and complimentary relationship shine forth as Watson argues: “The Sacrament hath a peculiar excellency above the Word preached. In the Word there is the Breath of God in the Sacrament the Blood of God; in the Word we hear his Voyce, in the Sacrament we have his kisse. The Word proceeds out of Gods mouth, the Sacrament out of his sides.”⁵⁴ Watson believed that in the ordinances Christ removes the veil and reveals his smiling face. He leads the believer into the banqueting house. Watson stresses elsewhere how

⁵⁰ Watson, *Divine Cordial*, 116. Watson similarly asserts that we must “perform spiritual duties spiritually”. Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 230. Watson also challenges his readers, “Let us get our hearts fired with love to God... Servile fear makes the soul fly from God, sacred love makes it fly to him.” Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, 216.

⁵¹ Thomas Watson, *A Plea for the Godly*, London, Tho. Parkhurst, 1672 (Wing / W 1138), 25, cf. Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, 204.

⁵² Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 10. The phrase Jesus “kisses us with the kisses of his lips” is common in Watson’s corpus. See Thomas Watson, *A Christian on Earth Still in Heaven in Three Treatises*, 5th ed., London, Ralph Smith, 1660 (Wing/ W1145), 417; Watson, *Christians Charter*, 42; Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 212; Watson, *Beatitudes*, 441 and Thomas Watson, *The Saints Delight*, 1659, in: *Three Treatises*, 5th ed., London, Ralph Smith, 1660 (Wing/ W1145), 313. Richard Sibbes devotes a full sermon to the kisses of Song of Songs 1:2. Richard Sibbes, ‘The Spouse, Her Earnest Desire After Christ’, in: *The Works of Richard Sibbes*, Alexander B. Grosart (ed.), vol. 2, Edinburgh 1983, 197-208, cf. James Durham, *The Song of Solomon*, Edinburgh 1982, 73-75, 77 for a Puritan commentary on this verse and Lamm, *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, 29-39 for a summary of the kiss in the western and Roman Catholic tradition.

⁵³ Calvin, *Institutes* 4.14.6 (vol. 2, p. 1281), 4.14.8 (vol. 2, p. 1284), cf. John Calvin, ‘Summary of Doctrine Concerning the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments’, in: *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, J. K. S. Reid (trans.), Philadelphia, s.a., 170-7.

⁵⁴ Watson, *Divine Cordial*, 17, cf. Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, 200.

the ordinances reveal Christ's "smiling face".⁵⁵ Then he declares, "The Godly have in the use of the Ordinances, had such Divine Raptures of Joy and Soul-transfiguration, that they have been carried above the World, and despised all things here below."⁵⁶ These sentences are reminiscent of Bernard of Clairvaux and other medieval contemplative–mystical writings.

Asceticism has been a standard component of Christian spirituality since the New Testament (e.g. 1 Tim 4:8; etc.). The desert Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries took this to new heights often being called God's spiritual athletes. A similar pattern of intensity in cultivating one's relationship with God has prompted J. I. Packer to refer to Puritanism as "reformed monasticism".⁵⁷ Likewise Charles Hambrick–Stowe employs the language of "Puritan contemplative" to reflect the intensity and depth of intimacy experienced by Puritans. Puritans employed the same practices as one would find in western and Roman Catholicism.⁵⁸ Watson in particular, emphasizes the role of prayer, meditation, and the sacraments and devoted a full work to spiritual duties.⁵⁹ Watson produced another work exclusively on meditation.⁶⁰ He describes meditation as the "bellows of the affection".⁶¹ He also follows the popular medieval imagery that understood meditation as "chewing the cud".⁶² Watson cites Jean Gerson (1363–1429) that "meditation is the nurse of

⁵⁵ Watson, *Christ's Loveliness*, 464; Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 10 and Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 151.

⁵⁶ Watson, *Body of Practical Divinity* (1692), 10.

⁵⁷ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: the Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, Wheaton 1990, 28, 331. Many scholars have commented on the Puritan intensity in cultivating their hearts and minds for God. See for example Williams, 'Puritan Quest for the Enjoyment of God', 131-133, 137, 218, 221, 346, 369, 390; Theodore D. Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion & Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638*, Chapel Hill 2004, 103, 174, 177; Willem J. op 't Hof, 'Protestant pietism and medieval monasticism', in: Fred van Lieburg (ed.), *Confessionalism and Pietism Religious Reform in Early Modern Europe*, Mainz 2006, 31-50.

⁵⁸ Hambrick–Stowe, *Practice of piety*, 285, cf. 287.

⁵⁹ Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*.

⁶⁰ Watson, *Christian on the Mount*.

⁶¹ Thomas Watson, *A Sermon Preached July 2 at the Funeral of Mr. John Wells*, London, Tho. Parkhurst, 1676 (Wing / W1143), 24.

⁶² Watson, *Christian on the Mount*, 334. Compare with McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 135.

prayer”.⁶³ But the Puritans were similar to many medieval writers in not clearly distinguishing between meditation and contemplation and seeing meditation as the preparation for contemplation.⁶⁴ Watson maintains that, “Meditation is like a perspective glasse by which we contemplate heavenly objects.”⁶⁵ On either side of this quotation Watson cites Bernard, first regarding *lectio* and *meditatio* and then following it with the combination of *oratio* and *meditatio*.⁶⁶ Significantly these three terms are the first three movements of *lectio divina*, the common monastic way for praying Scripture that ended with *contemplatio*.⁶⁷ Watson again blends meditation and contemplation when he warns readers, “Meditate much on Hell. Let us go into Hell by contemplation, that we may not go to hell by condemnation.”⁶⁸ That thought strongly resembles Bernard’s “let us descend to hell now so we won’t spend eternity there later”.⁶⁹

One of the most frequent biblical reminders of the importance of meditation and contemplation is Isaac. Genesis 24:63 records his practice, “And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide.”⁷⁰ Immediately after this reference to Isaac, Watson quotes Bernard who asserts “nothing so rouses and encourages the person to all good works and all effort, as the contemplation of grace.”⁷¹ This further confirms how the terms meditation and contemplation could be employed interchangeably. Watson preached a sermon entitled ‘A Christian on

⁶³ Watson, *Christian on the Mount*, 396, “*Meditatio nutrix orationis*.” Since Watson rarely provides a full citation it is difficult to know if he was aware of Gerson’s classic *The Mountain of Contemplation* that was known in seventeenth-century England.

⁶⁴ Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 123-24.

⁶⁵ Watson, *Christian on the Mount*, 407. Elsewhere Watson declares, “The word is a Spiritual Optick Glass, through which we may see our own hearts.” *Godly Mans Picture*, 83.

⁶⁶ Watson, *Christian on the Mount*, 405, 407, “*Lectio primo occurrit, et data materia mittit nos ad meditationem*” and “*Oratio sine meditatione tepida; meditatio sine oratione infrugifera*.”

⁶⁷ For a helpful treatment of *lectio divina* from a monastic perspective see Guigo II, *Ladder of Monks and Twelve Meditations*, Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (trans.), Kalamazoo 1979, especially 65-86.

⁶⁸ Watson, *Christian on the Mount*, 367.

⁶⁹ Isaac Ambrose, *Media*, 251, cf. Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 128.

⁷⁰ All Scripture is from the Authorized Version unless otherwise noted.

⁷¹ Watson, *Funeral for John Wells*, 24, “*Nil hominem ita excitât et adjuvat ad omne opus bonum et omnem laborem, quam gratia contemplationis*.” Watson reiterates the model of Isaac and Genesis 24:63 in *Christian on the Mount*, 335, 391.

Earth Still in Heaven' based on Psalm 139:18, "When I awake I am still with thee." He asserts one of the ways to still be with God is through contemplation.⁷² Naturally Watson turns to David as an exemplar in contemplation. He states, "*Dauids minde was a spiritual mint, he minted most gold, most of his thoughts were heavenly. Thoughts are as travellers and passengers in the soul; Dauids thoughts were still traveling towards the Jerusalem above... in Dauids contemplations he was still with God.*"⁷³ It is not surprising that Bernard of Clairvaux referred to David as the *maximus contemplator*.⁷⁴ Watson also draws upon Calvin when he speaks of David as a model for meditation asserting that he "did shoot his heart into heaven by desire" through meditation.⁷⁵ Additionally Watson also employs the biblical story of Zaccheus to illustrate the best environment for cultivating contemplation. Due to his small physical stature Zaccheus could not see Jesus and climbed a sycamore tree (Luke 19:4). Watson allegorizes the story and declares, "When we are in a crowd of worldly businesse, we cannot see Christ: Climb up into the tree by divine contemplation: If thou wouldst get Christ into thy heart, let heaven be in thy eye: *Set your affections upon things above. Colos. 3.2.*"⁷⁶ Bernard McGinn further refines our understanding when he asserts, "that contemplation consists not so much in the actual enjoyment of the vision of God here below as in the unceasing desire for reaching the full *visio Dei* in heaven".⁷⁷

Once again Watson turns to Bernard for support for the benefits of withdrawal and solitude to better concentrate on God. He quotes Saint Bernard who instructed his readers to leave all worldly thoughts behind because the world restricted his meditation.⁷⁸ Later in the same work Watson quotes from Bernard's sermon 40 on the Song of Songs saying it was a "sweet saying" of Bernard, that "Christ is bashful [...] [and therefore]

⁷² Watson, *Christian on Earth*, 417.

⁷³ Watson, *Christian on Earth*, 418.

⁷⁴ Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, 508n317.

⁷⁵ Watson, *Saints Delight*, 418. Unfortunately there is no substantial study on Calvin's understanding of contemplation. For some helpful sources to guide such an exploration see Tamburello, *Union with Christ*; Randall C. Zachman, *John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor, and Theologian: The Shape of His Writings and Thought*, Grand Rapids 2006 and Randall C. Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin*, Notre Dame 2007.

⁷⁶ Watson, *Christians Charter*, 32.

⁷⁷ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 140.

⁷⁸ Watson, *Christian on the Mount*, 335.

Retire thy self by Meditation into the closet, or field, and there thou shalt have Christs embraces.”⁷⁹ This is obviously a significant teaching for Watson since he continues to expand his point by quoting from Bonaventure (1217–1274) that “the top of [Mount] *Olympus* was always quiet and serene”.⁸⁰ I imagine that Watson connects this to Jesus’ personal pattern of frequently retiring to the mountains to spend time alone with God (Matt 14:23; 15:29; cf. Luke 5:16).

Watson is realistic and acknowledges that meditation and contemplation require effort. Many in his day were unwilling or felt their time too limited to engage in meditation. He challenges this reporting that Gerson took three or four hours to get his heart in the proper spiritual frame to be with God.⁸¹ This unrealistic time commitment might work against him today but Watson’s attempt was to encourage others not to give up. This is in light of his own counsel that a person should seek to devote at least 30 minutes a day to cultivate contemplation.⁸² Once again Watson draws upon Bernard in what he calls “an excellent saying”, quoting the Cistercian monk, “*Lord, I will never come away from thee without thee.*” Watson then adds, “Let this be a Christians resolution not to leave off his Meditations of God till he finde something of God in him; some *moving of bowels after God*, Cant. 5.4. Some *flamings of love*, Cant. 6.8.”⁸³ There are other references that further illustrate Watson’s strong appreciation for Bernard but it clearly reveals his indebtedness to ‘Blessed Bernard’ as the Puritans sometimes referred to him. Finally for Watson contemplation must always lead to action. Interestingly he inserts a reference from John Cassian (c. 365–c.435) to reinforce this necessity of practicing one’s piety.⁸⁴

Contemplative–Mystical Experiences in Thomas Watson

Watson was well known for his piety and received the general respect of many throughout his life.⁸⁵ While he did not leave a diary there is one specific account of the depth of his piety and his gift for prayer. Calamy

⁷⁹ Watson, *Christian on the Mount*, 381.

⁸⁰ Watson, *Christian on the Mount*, 384.

⁸¹ Watson, *Christian on the Mount*, 383.

⁸² Watson, *Christian on the Mount*, 392.

⁸³ Watson, *Christian on the Mount*, 392, “*Domine nunquam a te absq; te recedam*”.

⁸⁴ Watson, *Christian on the mount*, 408.

⁸⁵ Edward Calamy, *The Nonconformist Memorial*, Samuel Palmer (abr.), 2nd ed., vol. 1, London, J. Cunder, 1802, 188.

records that “on a lecture–day, before the *Bartholomew–act* took place, the learned Bp. *Richardson* came to hear him, who was much pleased with his sermon, but especially with his prayer after it, so that he followed him home to give him thanks, and earnestly desired a copy of it. ‘Alas! (said Mr. *Watson*) that is what I cannot give, for I do not use to pen my prayers; it was no studied thing, but uttered, *pro re nata*, as God enabled me, from the abundance of my heart and affections.’ Upon which the good Bishop went away wondering that any man could pray in that manner extempore.”⁸⁶ In *Watson’s* farewell sermon to his congregation at St. Stephen’s, Walbrook he provides the additional insight that the task of a minister is both head and heart. Clearly his deep love and affection for his beloved congregation is strongly evident. While his task is to be balanced it appears that *Watson* does give a decided tilt towards the heart. This is revealed by his comments regarding the apostle Paul, that he sweetened all of his sermons with love even when he reproved the Corinthians of their sins.⁸⁷

While we do not have any first–hand accounts of *Watson’s* experiences with God there are frequent references throughout his works of desire and the resulting delight that one might taste as he seeks God with all of his heart. *Watson* paints a compelling word picture when he asserts “Desires are the sails of the soul, which are spread to receive the gale of heavenly blessing.”⁸⁸ This suggests that an external force can motivate desires and equally that desires generate movement in some direction. Obviously *Watson* liked this imagery because he used it again in his *Saints Delight* sermons on meditation. There he wrote “He that delights in God, doth not complain he hath too much of God, but rather too little: he opens and spreads the sails of his soul to take in more of those heavenly gales, he longs for that time when he shall be ever delighting himself in the sweet and blessed vision of God.”⁸⁹ Significantly he clarifies the nature of desire, that it is directed towards God.

⁸⁶ Calamy, *Nonconformist Memorial*, 189.

⁸⁷ *Watson, Pastors Love*, 3.

⁸⁸ *Watson, Holy Eucharist*, 54, cf. *Watson, Plea for the Godly*, 13 and *Watson, Divine Contentment*, 275.

⁸⁹ *Watson, Saints Delight*, 328. This language is highly suggestive of the beatific vision. Space limitations prevent me from addressing this significant topic within the writings of *Watson* here but will be included in my chapter in the forthcoming book by Alec Ryrie and Tom Schwanda, *Puritanism and Emotion in the Early Modern World*, Basingstoke.

Another common mystical expression of desire drawn from the Book of Canticles is to be “sick of love” (Song 2:5; 5:8). In his farewell sermon to his London congregation Watson reminds them not only to serve God with all of their might “but [to] be sick with love to God”.⁹⁰ In Watson’s work, the *Godly Mans Picture*, which is focused on creating the portrait of a mature Christian, he concludes this treatise that a “bruised soul is big with holy desires, yea, is sick of love”.⁹¹ Alternatively, Watson employs a variation of this phrase to capture the depth of desire that he wants his auditors to embrace when he proclaims that our hearts should burn in love to God.⁹² Naturally one’s desires are not constant and can decline. In those situations Watson declares, “So when the flame of your love is going out, make use of Ordinances, and Gospel-promises, as fuel to keep the fire of your love burning.”⁹³ In his treatise on spiritual duties Watson concludes with a similar reminder, “Let us get our hearts fired with love to God.”⁹⁴ Significant within the larger study of Christian spirituality the themes of fire and love have been called the dominant images of contemplation.⁹⁵

The culmination of this desire might well lead the believer to a profound experience of delight and enjoyment of God. I say might for the Puritans like the earlier medieval believers were clearly aware that the joys of contemplative–mystical piety were always a gift from God. The person could engage in various spiritual duties, but that was never a guarantee that the desired longing would be experienced. Both western Catholic mystics and Puritans often employed the language of fruition. In Watson’s classic, *A Body of Divinity*, he maintains that there is a twofold fruition of enjoying God, one in this life and another in the life to come.⁹⁶ More significantly is Watson’s deep appreciation for Bernard. When the saints hear the words “come ye blessed of my father” (Matt. 25:34) in heaven they are filled with “ineffable joy”. Watson translates the Bernard

⁹⁰ Watson, *Pastors Love*, 16.

⁹¹ Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 320, cf. 30, 143. Watson uses the same language in his *Holy Eucharist*, 60 and *Body of Divinity*, 2.

⁹² Watson, *Divine Cordial*, 122.

⁹³ Watson, *Divine Cordial*, 138.

⁹⁴ Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, 216, cf. 54.

⁹⁵ Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, New York 1998, 49.

⁹⁶ Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 9. For a helpful overview of the Puritan understanding of joy see Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, Oxford 2013, 77–95.

citation as “like musick in the eare, and a Jubily in the heart”.⁹⁷ In another work Watson quotes ‘Saint *Bernard*’ saying: “there is that ‘sweetnesse in communion with God’.”⁹⁸ There is also a “delicious sweetnesse in God”.⁹⁹ Unquestionably this enjoyment was a result of the intimacy of being in sweet communion with the Triune God. While Watson, similar to most Puritans, rarely quotes directly from Calvin, the theme of sweetness of God is present in the Genevan reformer.¹⁰⁰ Once again Watson asserts that the delight of heaven can begin first on earth; “If we are in Christ while we live, we shall go to Christ, when we dye; union is the ground of privilege; we must be in Christ, before we can be with Christ.” Therefore a person’s love for God is the foundation for this enjoyment as he writes, “To serve God, to love God, to enjoy God, is the sweetest freedom in the world.”¹⁰¹ Watson asks how can this be, to which he responds with a quotation from Chrysostom, his most popular Eastern Church writer, “that faith is the uniting grace” that makes this possible.¹⁰² For Watson this spiritual joy in the Holy Spirit is essential for the earthly believer because it supports the soul in times of trouble since “Joy stupefies and swallows up Troubles”¹⁰³ and for those who “walk in close Communion with God” have feelings of joy that are “infinitely ravishing and full of glory”.¹⁰⁴ This enjoyment of God can actually be cultivated before heaven because “the Sabbath is a Delight, Religion is a Recreation” and therefore one can experience already on earth the “Divine Joys [that] are so

⁹⁷ Watson, *Christians Charter*, 91, “*Melodia in aure, Jubilum in corde.*”

⁹⁸ Watson, *Saints Delight*, 327, cf. Watson, *Christian on Earth*, 417; Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, 211; Watson, *Holy Eucharist*, 25 and Watson, *John Wells Funeral*, 23 for ‘sweet communion’ references. Watson also counsels his readers that if they desire “constant communion with God, [they] must double their devotion”. Watson, *Christian on Earth*, 431.

⁹⁹ Watson, *Divine Cordial*, 118.

¹⁰⁰ Calvin, *Institutes* 3.25.10 (vol. 2, p. 1005). For an excellent study of this topic in Calvin see I. John Hesselink, ‘Calvin, Theologian of Sweetness’, in: *Calvin Theological Journal*, 37 (2002), 318–32.

¹⁰¹ Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, 125.

¹⁰² Thomas Watson, *The Holy Longing: or, the Saints Desire to be with Christ*, London, Ralph Smith, 1659 (Wing (2nd ed.) / W1130), 39, cf. Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 353 that communion is found in union with Christ.

¹⁰³ Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 211.

¹⁰⁴ Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 214, cf. Watson, *Plea for the Godly*, 47, 48 and Watson, *Divine Cordial*, 154 on the enjoyment and joy that can be experienced in God.

Delicious and Ravishing.”¹⁰⁵ One of Watson’s central pastoral concerns was that his congregation might know the same delight and communion in God that he knew. In his farewell sermon in which he lists twenty directions to encourage his faithful flock his first priority is for them to maintain a continual relationship with God by “keep[ing] intercourse with heaven”.¹⁰⁶ Communion with God must be cultivated so it does not become stale or lifeless. Drawing from the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:15 Watson understands there is a huge difference between “*being* in Christ” and “*growing* in him” between “our ingrafting, and our flourishing: be not content with a *modicum* in Religion”.¹⁰⁷ This active and intentional growing in Christ is reflected in another biblical image of “walking with God” which “implies the Familiarity and intimacy the soul hath with God [...] [for] there is sweet intercourse between God and his people”.¹⁰⁸ Once again this intersects with Watson’s strong emphasis upon the use of spiritual duties and its relationship to contemplation. In addressing the believer’s promise in 1 John 1:3 of being in fellowship and communion with God Watson asserts, “A gracious soul hath sweet intercourse with Heaven; he goes to God by prayer, and God comes to him by his spirit; How happy is that person who hath the Angels to guard him, and God to keep him company!” What is most illuminating about this description is the marginal reference to Estius. This is most likely Willem Hessels (1542–1613) a Dutch Roman Catholic biblical scholar who was esteemed by Catholics and Protestants alike. The quotation from Estius can be translated this fellowship “will be perfected in the highest contemplation of the blessed Trinity” to which Watson adds that this is the “sweet intercourse with Heaven”.¹⁰⁹

Because our life on earth is short it is critical that believers do not squander their time. In a funeral sermon for John Wells, a fellow minister, Watson urges his listeners to keep “up a close communion with God” through “holy meditation” because it “brings God and the Soul together”.¹¹⁰ Beyond meditation Watson also stresses the necessity of

¹⁰⁵ Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 213.

¹⁰⁶ Watson, *Pastors Love*, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Watson, *Divine Contentment*, 274.

¹⁰⁸ Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 251.

¹⁰⁹ Watson, *Plea for the Godly*, 41, “*consummatio erit in ultima contemplatione beatissime Trinitatis.*”

¹¹⁰ Watson, *John Wells*, 23–24.

employing the broader category of ordinances¹¹¹ as well as singling out prayer¹¹² keeping the Sabbath¹¹³ and the Lord's Supper¹¹⁴ as means to growing in communion with God. However, Watson does not want his listeners to be confused and think that their spiritual duties are the means to achieving this sweet communion with God. Instead he communicates that we can climb to heaven only by the cross of Christ.¹¹⁵

As already evident Watson, reflective of many Puritans, employed the vivid love language of the Song of Songs to capture the delight and enjoyment of God. Certainly ravishment is a potentially ambiguous term.¹¹⁶ While the word could be used in the forceful overpowering a person, most likely a woman in rape, it was used predominantly by the Puritans to speak of the positive sense of being carried away by the liberating and fulfilling love of God.

For example, Jesus kisses us with the kisses of his lips and in speaking of the angels in heaven Watson declares that they are ravished with delight in praising God.¹¹⁷ However, it is not only the angels who are ravished but that believers also experience the same overwhelming delight. The intimacy of spiritual marriage with Christ produces similar rich descriptions of enjoyment; "this spiritual union brings in more astonishing delights and ravishments, than any other marriage–relation is capable of."¹¹⁸ In the *Body of Divinity*, Watson instructs, "That which is the chief Good *must ravish the Soul with pleasure* [...] this is to be enjoyed only in God." He continues by drawing a comparison between the partial joy that can be experienced now in relation to the culmination of that in heaven, "If there be so much delight in God, when we see him only by Faith, 1 Pet.

¹¹¹ Watson, *Divine Cordial*, 96.

¹¹² Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, 202.

¹¹³ Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, 64, 69, cf. Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 331–49 on Sabbath–keeping.

¹¹⁴ Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 354 and Watson, *Divine Cordial*, 16.

¹¹⁵ Watson, *Divine Contentment*, 300. Watson enjoys applying this metaphor that Jesus or the ordinances are the ladder or Jacob's ladder to ascend to heaven. Watson, *Christs Loveliness*, 445; Watson, *Christians Charter*, 108 and Watson, *Beatitudes*, 445, 460.

¹¹⁶ For a helpful treatment of ravishment in Puritanism see Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 163–96. For an overview of its usage in the medieval church see Hollywood and Beckman, *Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, 189–99.

¹¹⁷ Watson, *Saints Delight*, 313, 327. The reference is to Song of Songs 1:2.

¹¹⁸ Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 347.

1.8. what will the joy of Vision be when we shall see him face to face?”¹¹⁹ Watson understands ravishment as the result of gazing on God, “He who loves God, is ravished and transported with the Contemplations of God, *Psal. 139.17.*” And to encourage his auditors Watson questions “Can we say we are ravished with delight when we think on God? Have our thoughts got wings? Are they fled aloft? Do we contemplate Christ and Glory?”¹²⁰ Even a casual reading of Watson’s writings shouts a resounding affirmation to his question. Due to this importance of contemplating on the beauty and splendor of God Watson does not tire of repeating this truth. Later he declares, “The soul while it is musing on Christ, is filled with holy and sweet raptures, it is caught up into Paradise, it is in Heaven before its time.” Watson includes a marginal reference that reinforces this teaching by citing Bernard’s emphasis of the “grace of contemplation”. In this same context Watson speaks of the person who “contemplates the beauty of Holiness, the love of Christ”.¹²¹

In a treatise appropriately entitled, *Christian On Earth Still in Heaven*, Watson observes that the Lord “manifests himself in the comforts of his Spirit, which are so sweet and ravishing, that they *pass all understanding*; and do you wonder the soul is so strongly carried out after God?”¹²² This sentence provides a good definition for the nature of ravishment in attempting to find words to express the ineffable nature of God’s love in the believer’s experience of it. Watson draws once again upon the bridal language of the book of Canticles when he reveals his awareness of spiritual intoxication; “Christ will bring his Spouse into the *banqueting-house*, and she shall be inebriated with his love; O what joy to be drinking in this heavenly Nectar [...] Thus all the senses will be filled

¹¹⁹ Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 11. Watson also rejoices in the mystical union that has begun on earth and is consummated in heaven that creates “infinitely transporting and ravishing” comforts. Watson, *Beatitudes*, 118.

¹²⁰ Watson, *Divine Cordial*, 95, cf. Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, 55, 213.

¹²¹ Watson, *Plea for the Godly*, 13, “*quam gratia contemplationis*”.

¹²² Watson, *Christian on Earth*, 424. For a broader sampling of Watson’s use of ravishment see Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 151, 230, 281, 315, 355; Watson, *Plea for the Godly*, 12, 86; Watson, *Divine Cordial*, 51; Watson, *Divine Contentment*, 203; Watson, *Beatitudes*, 19; Watson, *Fight of Faith Crowned*, 14, 15; etc.

with joy.”¹²³ While not specifically named, this language is reflective of Bernard and many other medieval Christian contemplative writers.¹²⁴

In describing the “*Delectability*” of being blessed in his treatise on the *Beatitudes* Watson writes, “A kiss from Gods mouth puts the soul into a Divine Extasie.”¹²⁵ Once again Watson turns to the Song of Songs to find words that might capture the depth of a person’s communion with God. In a funeral sermon in which Watson preached for a fellow minister he seeks to stretch the spiritual imaginations of his listeners and readers by declaring “think what it will be to be led into Christs *wine-celler*, to have the kisses of his mouth”.¹²⁶ However, it is critical to recognize that as one grows in deeper intimacy and communion with God that one’s experience may indeed produce different expressions than joy and rapture. Watson contends that another very appropriate demonstration of recognizing God’s presence is that of tears.¹²⁷ Tears are often associated with sadness for sin but can also be an expression of gratitude. Watson emphasizes that, “The pardoned sinner is a weeping sinner.”¹²⁸ Further, “Spiritual joy and mourning are not inconsistent [...] and the sweetest joy is from the sourest tears.”¹²⁹ He expands on these possibilities when he describes the various experiences a believer might have at the Lord’s Table. He reports instead of joy it might be in a renewed sense of strength or it may be tears.¹³⁰ Drawing upon the biblical example of Hannah, Watson recognizes “A Christian thinks himself sometimes in the suburbs of heaven when he can weep.”¹³¹ In reality it would take a full article to explore the depth and variety of Watson’s uses of tears throughout his

¹²³ Watson, *Christians Charter*, 43.

¹²⁴ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 197, 212, 219. De Reuver also acknowledges the importance of spiritual inebriation in Bernard and claims he borrowed it from Augustine. Arie de Reuver, *Sweet Communion: Trajectories of Spirituality from the Middle Ages through the Further Reformation*, Grand Rapids 2007, 50, cf. Williams, ‘Puritan Quest for the Enjoyment of God’, 119.

¹²⁵ Watson, *Beatitudes*, 25.

¹²⁶ Watson, *Fight of Faith Crowned*, 23, cf. Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 282 and Watson, *Divine Cordial*, 52 for other examples of the kisses of his lips as an expression of intimacy with Christ.

¹²⁷ Watson, *Holy Eucharist*, 83.

¹²⁸ Watson, *Christian Charter*, 21.

¹²⁹ Watson, *Christians Charter*, 137.

¹³⁰ Watson, *Holy Eucharist*, 82, 83, cf. Watson, *Christians Charter*, 93.

¹³¹ Watson, *Beatitudes*, 93.

corpus.¹³² Significantly McGinn notes that “the constant flow of tears, [is] an important element in all Christian piety, but especially among monastics.”¹³³

Formation and Development of Watson’s Contemplative–Mystical Piety

Recognizing the richness of Watson’s contemplative–mystical emphasis raises the important question regarding its origin. It is likely that a number of formative themes shaped his vibrant piety. First, a person’s temperament and disposition can contribute significantly to one’s piety. There are many challenges to reconstructing an accurate psychological profile of any person, especially if he is dead. The limited resources of Watson’s life further complicate this reconstruction. Nonetheless some suggestive insights can be gathered from his sermons and other sources. As already indicated Watson displays a strong appreciation for solitude and reveals a sensitive disposition to contemplation. He frequently articulates his desire for sweet communion that is built upon gazing at God that is further stimulated by a longing to enjoy God more fully. This emphasis in his writings would most likely have mirrored his own spiritual duties. In one of Watson’s farewell sermons he communicates the importance of loving others, even those whom we call our enemies.¹³⁴ Further his writings reflect an irenic spirit¹³⁵ and even Simon Patrick’s highly critical conformist work, *Friendly Debate*, accords him respect due to his balanced manner of relating to others.¹³⁶

Second, a person’s education is likely to contribute to shaping one’s piety. Watson matriculated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge in

¹³² See for example Watson, *Godly Mans Picture*, 70–74; Watson, *Plea for the Godly*, 27; Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, 129, 150, 301; Watson, *Beatitudes*, 72, 91; Watson, *Divine Cordial*, 97, 98; Watson, *Fight of Faith Crowned*, 18–19; Thomas Watson, *Crown of Righteousness*, London, Joseph Cranford, 1656 (Wing (2nd ed.) / W1120), 6, 23; etc.

¹³³ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 137, cf. Michael J. McClymond, ‘The Practice of Holy Tears: Compunction, Theosis, and Union with the Dying and Rising Christ’, unpublished American Academy of Religion (AAR) paper, November 24, 2013 Baltimore, Maryland, USA.

¹³⁴ Edmund Calamy, *A Compleat Collection of Farewell Sermons*, London [no publisher], 1663, (Wing / C 5638 aA), unpaginated, quote at image number 100.

¹³⁵ Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm*, 146. For example compare Watson’s critique of Bonaventure’s teaching that the crown of righteousness is by merit not God’s mercy and his later appreciation of him in the same work. Watson, *Crown of Righteousness*, 3, 28, cf. above for Watson’s appreciative citations of Bonaventure’s instruction on piety.

¹³⁶ Calamy, *Nonconformist Memorial*, 188.

1635 and received his BA in 1639 and MA in 1642. He was known as a “hard” or industrious student.¹³⁷ Recent studies of Emmanuel College and more broadly, Cambridge University reveal, “that we know far less than many historians have claimed of what students actually studied”.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, there are many facts that can be woven together to provide at least a broad background to Watson’s probable education. Emmanuel College, Cambridge was established in 1584 under the direction of Sir Walter Mildmay (c. 1520–1589). The original statutes written by Mildmay reveal the primary purpose was to provide for “the education of young men in all piety and good letters and especially Holy Writ and Theology, that being thus instructed that they may therefore teach true and pure religion” and further this “one aim, [was] of rendering as many persons as possible fit for sacred ministry of the Word and the sacraments”.¹³⁹ From its earliest day, Emmanuel had a reputation of being a “Puritan college”.¹⁴⁰ While there are numerous mundane organizational and administrative details to these statutes, it does significantly require daily public prayer and “especially on Sundays” for “the increase of faith, and probity of morals”.¹⁴¹ Mildmay’s statutes were still in effect during Watson’s time.

A central influence in any seventeenth-century student’s education would be their tutors. While there are lists of tutors during Watson’s time we do not know which of them may have guided his formation.¹⁴² Masters of the college also exert a significant influence on the shaping of the student’s education and piety. Watson matriculated during the final years of Dr. William Sancroft’s (1582–1637) tenure as master at Emmanuel (1628–1637). The popular London preacher and future delegate to the Westminster Assembly, Dr. Richard Holdsworth (1590–1649), served as master throughout the remainder of Watson’s studies. Patrick Collinson assesses that Holdsworth was “probably the

¹³⁷ Calamy, *Nonconformist Memorial*, 188.

¹³⁸ Victor Morgan, *A History of the University of Cambridge, vol. II 1546–1750*, Cambridge 2004, 468.

¹³⁹ Frank Stubbings (trans. and introduction), *The Statutes of Sir Walter Mildmay for Emmanuel College*, Cambridge 1983, 25, 60.

¹⁴⁰ Stubbings, *Statutes of Walter Mildmay*, 3.

¹⁴¹ Stubbings, *Statutes of Walter Mildmay*, 59, cf. 76.

¹⁴² For a brief overview of the responsibilities of a tutor see John Twigg, *The University of Cambridge and the English Revolution 1625–1688*. Woodbridge 1990, 7, 14–15 and Morgan, *History of the University of Cambridge*, 314–42.

best master that Emmanuel ever had” as well as being a “great preacher” who “aroused real devotion” in his students.¹⁴³ Holdsworth, the author of the *Directions for a Student in the Universitie*, establishes the principles for the undergraduate education¹⁴⁴ around the four primary subjects of logic, ethics, physics and metaphysics (including theology). More insightful are the specific books that Holdsworth commended to his students for reading “that you may increase in Piety, & saving knowledge as well as in humane learning” specifically naming works by Bishop Joseph Hall, Richard Sibbes, John Preston, Robert Bolton, John Davenant, William Perkins, etc.¹⁴⁵ Further guidance is given for taking notes from the student’s reading and the creation of a “Common place book” that is to function as a treasury recording the best of their studies for both the present and future use in ministry.¹⁴⁶ The student’s commonplace book was also used in assisting them in listening to sermons and lectures.¹⁴⁷ Unfortunately there is no record of Watson’s commonplace books in the Emmanuel College library or archives.

The preaching they heard would have also shaped the students. No doubt Watson heard many sermons from Holdsworth but beyond that it is difficult to recreate a more specific list. Cambridge students were required to attend Great St. Mary’s, the University church, but there does not appear to be detailed records of those who preached. It is probable that Watson would have also heard Samuel Ward’s (1572–1643) sermons, master at Sidney Sussex College, the other Puritan college. Significantly both Holdsworth and Ward were strong royalists and that likely had some

¹⁴³ Susan Bendall, Christopher Brooke and Patrick Collinson, *A History of Emmanuel College, Cambridge*. Woodbridge 1999, 224, 225, 226, cf. John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes Towards Reason, Learning, and Education, 1560–1640*, Cambridge 1986, 287 for Holdsworth’s ability to cultivate godliness in his students. Cf. John Ward, *The Lives of the Professors of Gresham College*, London, John Moore, 1740 (T145612), 63.

¹⁴⁴ For a summary of the graduate study of theology see William T. Costello, *The Scholastic Curriculum at Early Seventeenth-Century Cambridge*, Cambridge, MA, 1958, 108–28.

¹⁴⁵ Richard Holdsworth, *Directions for a Student in the Universitie* in H. F. Fletcher, *The Intellectual Development of John Milton*, vol. 2, Urbana 1961, 640. For a helpful overview to Holdsworth’s *Directions* see pp. 84–88.

¹⁴⁶ Holdsworth, *Directions for a Student in the Universitie*, 650, 651.

¹⁴⁷ Holdsworth, *Directions for a Student in the Universitie*, 652. For a detailed summary of one example of a commonplace book see Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church*, Cambridge 1982, 116–28.

bearing on Watson's sharp criticism of the execution of Charles I. However, despite the reputation of Emmanuel College being a "nursery for Puritanism" opposing voices were already rising during Watson's time. Benjamin Whichcote, one of the future Cambridge Platonists, served as a fellow of Emmanuel College and was a regular preacher beginning in 1636 at Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge.¹⁴⁸ Further the theological landscape was more variegated and inconsistent to the point that one historian has concluded "What is abundantly clear is that Emmanuel came in the 1630s and 1640s to contain every shade of theological opinion in the Protestant fold of the day, from high church to puritan to what we would call broad church."¹⁴⁹

Third, Watson demonstrates a deep appreciation for the Song of Songs, which has earlier been acknowledged as the premiere book of Christian mysticism. Wallace is certainly correct in his assessment that, "Clearly, erotic language and a fondness for the Song of Solomon in explicating the spiritual life and describing mystical experience were characteristic of many Puritan and Calvinist writers."¹⁵⁰ John Owen in his preface to James Durham's popular commentary on the *Song of Solomon* accurately reflects the opinion of Watson and many other Puritans that this book "is one holy declaration of that mystically spiritual communion, that is between the great Bridegroom and his Spouse, the Lord Jesus Christ and his Church, and every believing soul that belongs thereunto".¹⁵¹ Not only did Watson preach two major sermons on the Song of Solomon but he consistently employs numerous references to this book throughout all of his writings. He was acquainted with Bernard's masterpiece on the Songs of Songs and twice cites a specific reference to it.¹⁵² This again reflects his appreciation for and adoption of the language of bridal mysticism of the western Catholic tradition.

¹⁴⁸ Morgan, *History University Cambridge*, 525.

¹⁴⁹ Morgan, *History University Cambridge* 475–76. For the growing presence and challenge of Laud and Arminianism in the 1630s at Cambridge University see Twigg, *University of Cambridge*, 29–31, 33–34.

¹⁵⁰ Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism*, 67. For a detailed study of the Song of Songs in Puritan mysticism see Williams, 'Puritan Quest for the Enjoyment of God', 177–211. See John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions*, Cambridge 1997 for Samuel Rutherford's extensive use of the contemplative and erotic imagery of the Song of Songs.

¹⁵¹ Durham, *Song of Solomon*, 21.

¹⁵² Watson, *Christian on the Mount*, 31 for sermon 40 and Watson, *Divine Contentment*, 202 for sermon 30.

Watson's usage of Bernard and other medieval and patristic sources was possible due to the well-stocked library at Emmanuel College. The inventory of the library indicates that he would have had access to all of the sources that he mentioned in the development of his contemplative–mystical piety including the writings of Cassian, Gerson, Bonaventure, and especially his favorite, Bernard of Clairvaux.¹⁵³ Some scholars note that the abundance of western Catholic writings could also be used in the weekly disputations that were required of students.¹⁵⁴

Fourth, a person's friends are likely to influence an individual's growth and development not only as a pastor but also in their personal devotional life. This is an area that requires far more research to determine Watson's friends and their possible formation of his piety. However, we do know that he was acquainted with or served in varying capacities of ministry with the following ministers: Ralph Robinson, from St. Stephen's church, John Beadle, his father-in-law, Christopher Love, Simeon Ashe, William Bates, Edward Reynolds, Samuel Annesley, James Janeway, Peter Sterry, Stephen Charnock, Anthony Burgess, Thomas Manton, Thomas Goodwin, Richard Baxter, John Owen, and many more. While this list covers a rather broad spectrum regarding ecclesiastical and liturgical sensitivities it prompts at least two observations. First, Watson came in contact with these leaders at different times in his life and not all would have exerted the same degree of influence. Second, and far more importantly, Watson demonstrates the truth that the boundary lines between the various streams of Puritans nonconformity (i.e. Presbyterians, Independents, Congregationalists) was more fluid than scholars originally thought. Indeed, the same has been argued regarding the distinction between conformity and nonconformity.¹⁵⁵ Additionally since Watson was predominately a 'devotional' writer concerned about piety that is likely a primary attraction to many of these fellow Puritans.

Given the robust nature of Watson's contemplative–mystical piety an important question is whether there was a maturing of this theology and piety throughout his works or was it already well established in his

¹⁵³ Sargent Bush, Jr. and Carl J. Rasmussen, *The Library of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, 1584–1637*, Cambridge 1986. For reference to the opera of Bernard, Bonaventure, Cassian and Gerson see respectively pp. 157, 164, 169, 179.

¹⁵⁴ Bendall, *History of Emmanuel College*, 204-5.

¹⁵⁵ Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, especially 3–9.

earliest writings. Often 1662 is used as a fulcrum point for comparing the nature and texture of Puritan writings. While many of Watson's most significant works were published after that time he had already penned a number of essential works before the Ejection. More importantly to the subject of his contemplative–mystical piety there does not appear to be any major transitions or expansion of his thinking. What is clear is that the specific subject of his writing was a more critical determinant of his piety than the time in which it was written. Therefore the *Christians Charter* (1655) and the *Saints Delight* (on meditation, 1657) have some rich illustrations of his contemplative–mystical theology, vocabulary, practices and experience. But the *Divine Cordial* (1663), the *Godly Mans Picture* (1666), *Holy Eucharist* (1668) and *A Plea for the Godly* (1672) also reflect a similar appreciation of the same themes and sources as evident in his earlier work. Since most of Watson's writings were of a devotional nature one can observe a consistency of these themes across the time–span of his writing.

This raises the related question regarding the broader nature of contemplative–mystical piety within Puritanism. Since I have previously studied Isaac Ambrose I can offer a preliminary comparison between these two Presbyterian ministers. In many areas they parallel each other such as in their usage of the bridal language of the Song of Songs. While Ambrose never devoted a specific sermon to the book of Canticles as Watson, he repeatedly drew upon it in his writings. Likewise both men built their theology of affection on desire and delight in the Triune God. Clearly the ministry of the Holy Spirit and union with Christ occupied a central place in both of their theologies though Ambrose was more likely to use the specific language of spiritual marriage than Watson. Additionally Watson at times can be less precise in his usage of terminology. This was previously noted in his descriptions regarding the origin and growth of the believer's union with Christ. There are places in his corpus that Watson hints that union with Christ must wait until heaven. But certainly this is a matter of fulfillment and not the point of origin that becomes clear once all of his passages on this topic are read together. Both ministers indicate the importance of spiritual duties or exercises by devoting full–length books to cultivating growth in godliness. More specifically both also write at length about the nature and importance of meditation including heavenly meditation that is foundational to a contemplative–mystical piety. The beatific vision that

significantly relates to heavenly mindedness is present in both authors as well. Though Ambrose tends to employ the more specific contemplative language of beholding and gazing on God than Watson.

There are also some distinctions that can be observed. Nowhere in Ambrose's writings does he speak of spiritual inebriation as Watson does. Unlike Watson, Ambrose, similar to Calvin, emphasizes creation as one major arena in which to meditate upon and experience God. This highlights the most critical difference between our two Puritans, that Isaac Ambrose kept a diary and while it was destroyed he wove numerous accounts of the experiences of his personal and public life into his work on spiritual duties. Further, while both Watson and Ambrose stress the necessity of withdrawing into solitude to focus on God Ambrose actually took a thirty-day retreat each May in the woods to review his diary and practice spiritual duties. The extant records of his retreats and public ministry provides readers with a valuable window to examine at least some of his contemplative-mystical experiences. However, these variations should not imply different streams of Puritan contemplative-mystical piety as much as different emphases within a common stream. While the limits of space prevent a more detailed comparison of this topic it is instructive to recognize that neither Watson nor Ambrose reveal the strong appreciation for neoplatonism that is present in the contemplative-mystical writings of Peter Sterry.¹⁵⁶ Obviously this serves as a reminder that there is much research that still needs to be done among the broad spectrum of Puritans who exhibit a contemplative-mystical piety.

Conclusion

Throughout this article Thomas Watson's deep reliance upon medieval mysticism for shaping his own contemplative-mystical piety has been demonstrated. While Bernard is clearly his favorite he does reveal an appreciation for Gerson and Bonaventure as well. Beyond these medieval writers there are abundant references to Augustine, Chrysostom, Jerome as well as awareness of Cassian, Gregory, Basil, Gregory Nanzianus, etc. Further the references to Bernard indicate a broad based acceptance of the Cistercian monk's devotional writings.

¹⁵⁶ Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism*, especially 58–61. Wallace also underscores Sterry's receptivity to some of Jacob Boehme's theology. See pp. 79–81.

In every case where Watson cites these medieval and patristic writers he does so approvingly. However, that does not imply that he was blind to the doctrinal issues that the Puritans often gathered together under the label “popish” or “papal”. This provides a helpful reminder that the Puritan usage of medieval sources was predominantly limited to devotional literature. Puritans and other Protestants eschewed the doctrinal writings of Rome because of what they perceived to be distorted theology. One illustration of this is the Puritan retrieval of the western Catholic’s most popular devotional writing: Thomas à Kempis *Imitation of Christ*, and how it was adapted to fit the Puritan theological framework.¹⁵⁷ The best-researched example of this is Maximillian von Habsburg’s study of the Protestant revisions of à Kempis *Imitation of Christ*. The primary areas in which Protestants revised the *Imitation of Christ* was by deleting book four on the mass. Protestants also reworked references to monasticism, since the Western Catholic Church excluded lay readers, they reformulated discussion on intercessory prayers to the saints, while still maintaining the importance of intercessory prayers, they clarified the teaching on purgatory and they reduced the strong emphasis upon human merit in relation to one’s salvation.¹⁵⁸

Significantly this paralleled similar cautionary concerns of Watson in his sermon against popery in which he listed thirteen errors that reflect these concerns of earlier Protestants plus veneration of the saints, ascribing that the Pope was the head of the Church, thus creating competition with Christ, violation of the second commandment, etc.¹⁵⁹ It is important to realize that Watson was not alone in these concerns. The Morning Exercises at Cripplegate includes twenty-five different sermons on various aspects of the Puritan anxiety with the papists.¹⁶⁰ Significantly these sermons were preached during the early 1660s when there was the

¹⁵⁷ On the Puritan adaption of Western Catholic devotional writings see Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 131–32, esp. 131n59, 170. On Puritan acceptance of western Catholic devotional writings and rejection of doctrinal writings see Op ‘t Hof, ‘Protestant Pietism’, 49–50 and Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 134.

¹⁵⁸ Maximillian von Habsburg, *Catholic and Protestant Translations of the Imitatio Christi, 1425–1650*. Farnham 2010, 127–44.

¹⁵⁹ Edmund Calamy, *A Compleat Collection of Farewel Sermons*, London, s.n., 1663 (Wing / C 5638), unpaginated, image numbers 298–302.

¹⁶⁰ *Puritan Sermons 1659–1689 Being the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate*, vol. 5, Wheaton, 1981.

renewed Puritan fear of King Charles II's greater openness to Roman Catholicism.¹⁶¹

That aside Watson recognized the rich reservoir of the mystical writings of the western Catholic Church. Where he believed it was consistent with sound theology he had no reservation of employing it since he and other Puritans believed that writers like Bernard of Clairvaux were a faithful witness to Scripture. Thomas Watson is not a name that is included when scholars speak of the “mystical element” of Puritanism, but surely his writings on the desire and delight of enjoyment of God demonstrate a legitimate and robust contemplative–mystical piety that must not be neglected not only in Puritan studies but more broadly in Christian spirituality!

Summary

Thomas Watson (1620-1686) was a prolific and popular English Puritan who was best known for his many devotional and practical writings as well as his posthumous *A Body of Practical Divinity*, sermons on the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The *ODNB* entry describes his writings to be “at times even mystical, and often expressed in ecstatic language.” In recent years there has been a renewed interest in the study of Christian mysticism, not only within the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions but also within Protestantism as well. This article employs the term “contemplative–mystical piety” as a more appropriate label for exploring Watson’s piety as an example of Puritan piety. Watson’s teaching on union with Christ is derived from the bridal language of the Song of Songs and reveals a deep appreciation for Bernard of Clairvaux. Through the intentional efforts of meditation and other spiritual practices a person is able to experience the sweetness of communion and enjoyment of God. This study considers the possible formative sources that influenced the development of Watson’s vibrant contemplative–mystical piety. While this article will illustrate the Puritan dependence upon patristic and medieval sources and affirm that there are major points of continuity within the affective tradition of the Western Catholic Church, it will also demonstrate a legitimate Reformed expression of contemplative–mystical piety.

Dr. Tom Schwanda
Wheaton College.
tom.schwanda@wheaton.edu

¹⁶¹ John Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603–1689*, Basingstoke 1998, 12, 146.

Book reviews

Dominic Erdozain, *The Problem of Pleasure. Sport, Recreation and the Crisis of Victorian Religion* (Studies in Modern British Religious History, 22), Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010; 304 pp.; ISBN 978-1843835288; £ 60,00.

The position of Christianity, or perhaps more accurate, Christendom in nineteenth century Western and Northern Europe has been described in terms of secularization.¹ The problem, to put it bluntly, was of course discussed by contemporary commentators, and during the course of the long twentieth century the secularization of Western and Northern Europe has been explained from different sociological, economical, and historical perspectives. In Sweden, as in other parts of Europe, scholars like Hugh McLeod, Hartmut Lehmann and Callum G. Brown have influenced many Church historians. With his book *The Problem of Pleasure*, Church historian Dominic Erdozain contributes to the recent debate among theologians and historians on the impact of secularization.

The eruptive role of the Evangelical revival within the British society during the nineteenth century is well-known. If thinking about the devoutness, the eagerness, and the activism that marked this movement one could easily depict it as a spiritual revolution.

In his book, Erdozain shows that the revulsion towards different kinds of recreational activities (for example sports) was heavily manifested within the evangelical movement. As time passed this seems to have changed, and as a consequence of the activism that distinguished the movement, sports and other kind of amusements became an important component of the Christian life in many congregations and denominations. There was a growing feeling that acceptance of, for example, sporting activities would help to promote the Christian cause and boost the individual Christian's belief.

In many European societies, and particularly within the evangelical movements, the latter half of the nineteenth century was characterized by a preoccupation with issues concerning moral standards. Both in countries such as Great Britain and Sweden, the moral issues and the emphasis on good character was part of the discourse, i.e. this was part of the social discipline of the time. This discourse, even if that is a concept which Erdozain seems to avoid, influenced the evangelical movement and resulted in a moralism that became extremely stark. One of Erdozain's more important observations is that this notion of intense moralism lost its religious foundation overtime, and that this actually prompted secularization. In other words, the evangelicals laid the

¹ A Swedish version of this review has previously been published in *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift* 2013, the annual journal of the Swedish Ecclesiastical History Society.

pediment for a social ethic for which an overarching theological framework was unnecessary. To put it directly, one could say that salvation became a worldly affair. In that view, the activism of the evangelical movement had an intrinsic value regardless of the personal belief in God among its followers. Paradoxically, initiatives as Christian Manliness/Muscular Christianity, represented by Charles Kingsley, Thomas Arnold and others, which aimed to counteract the de-Christianization of society, thus paved the way for secularization.

Since it includes an in-depth discussion on the processes of secularization and historiography, Erdozain's book is of vast importance even for non-British Church historians. In a very pervasive manner, Erdozain argues that the result of the immense criticism of the old secularization paradigm actually has resulted in another form of reductionism. It seems as if scholars have found it so appealing to falsify the narrative of a continuous process of secularization, that they as a substitute for an old meta-narrative have created a new one. According to Erdozain, it is a goal in itself for these scholars to prove the societal and cultural role of religion. Erdozain is of the opinion that this is a definition of religion which is too wide. He finds it meaningless to measure all forms of religion according to the same yardstick, and he emphasizes that there is a qualitative difference between the Great Awakenings of the nineteenth century and present day notions of believing without belonging or *New Age* (to take some examples).

According to Erdozain there is a need for a more theological point of departure, and he finds it important to use qualitative criteria to discuss the process of secularization. Whether or not there has been a secularization of society cannot be defined from cultural or contextual perspectives exclusively, since it results in historicism. In addition scholars need to adapt certain fundamental theological premises, e.g. belief in God and Church attendance. Thus it is important to discuss the impact of Christian ideas, dogmas and values. Secularization does, if one concurs with Erdozain, not occur when religion ceases to be a cultural fundament. Rather it is the opposite way around; secularization takes place when the individual belief has become irrelevant and religion has been reduced to a strictly cultural phenomenon.

Since the book is part of the series *Studies in Modern British Religious History* it comes as no surprise that it lacks an international perspective. Even so, it is easy to see similarities between the situation in Victorian England and other geographical areas and religious contexts. Since the end of the nineteenth century the process has been similar in many countries in Western and Northern Europe. A more theologically based Christianity has been reduced and replaced by a more diffuse form of Christianity focusing more on ethics than on what has been considered the traditional content of the Christian belief system. A German and Swedish example that could fit in this frame would be the development of the so called *Kulturprotestantismus* and its long-run consequences.

Erdozain is convincing, but he is also arguing for his thesis in a polemic and almost bantering way. His indictment of colleagues is rather harsh. His way of expressing himself comes through as somewhat awkward to a Swede longing for consensus; though at the same time it's catchy and triggers the reader to continue. However, it is important to keep in mind that Erdozain's interpretation of the past is biased, especially since he emphasizes the need to value the religious change of the nineteenth and twentieth century from a theological perspective. From my point of view, a discussion on what is included in this perspective more than traditional theological dogma is lacking.

The Problem of Pleasure pays attention to several important questions regarding religious change. Of course it highlights the relation between sports and recreation on the one hand and religion on the other. More importantly, it raises questions concerning historiography as well as the pre-understanding and epistemological starting points upon which each researcher dealing with history needs to reflect. In addition we have Erdozain's important call for the significance of evident qualitative premises when it comes to understanding, explaining, and assessing the religious change that has characterized Modernity. In that way, this book about British evangelicals during the nineteenth century has a wider scope. Thus, Erdozain's research could be an interesting point of departure for Church historians in many other European countries.

Dr. Alexander Maurits
alexander.maurits@teol.lu.se

Simon J.G. Burton, *The Hallowing of Logic: The Trinitarian Method of Richard Baxter's Methodus Theologiae* (Brill's Series in Church History and Religious Culture, 57), Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012; 415 pp.; ISBN 9789004226401; € 105,00.

Recently several studies of Puritan theology have been published, such as Joel R. Beeke's and Mark Jones's *A Puritan Theology* and Christopher Cleveland's research regarding the influence of Thomas Aquinas on John Owen. Simon Burton's study of the intellectual roots of Richard Baxter's theology is part of this resurgence of Puritan research. As is true for Owen's practical works, Baxter's practical works not only greatly influenced the English world, but also the Netherlands and Germany. His theological works, however, have remained less known than those of Owen. This is also true regarding the intellectual roots of his idiosyncratic Puritan theology.

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Theologiae. This work, published in 1681 and thus during the latter part of his life, can be considered as the ripe harvest of his theological thinking and discussion. Although Baxter belongs to the most scholastic among Puritan authors, his *Methodus Theologiae* has received relatively little scholarly attention. This is surprising given the fact that this work is particularly suited to trace his intellectual and theological roots.

Burton's eminent research focuses for the first time on the scholastic Baxter and proves that Puritans, as Reformed-orthodox theologians, were conversant with and used several medieval scholastic sources. The recent research of Christopher Cleveland (*Thomism in John Owen*) affirms that Owen was influenced by Thomas Aquinas and early modern thomistic sources, but Baxter orientated himself toward Johannes Duns Scotus (1265/66-1308), as is evident in his doctrine of God, his view of the freedom of the human will, and the prominent place of love. According to Burton, Baxter gives a central place to the Trinity. This not only frames his theological method and the global structure of his theology, but it also leaves room for man's threefold response of faith, hope, and love.

In this review, I wish to focus on Baxter's ambivalent reception in Reformed circles. On the one hand, as a practical writer, Baxter has appealed to a considerable circle of readers with his urgent call to repentance, for the living of a conscientious Christian life, and for meditation upon future glory. This is affirmed by the multiple reprints of his writings.

On the other hand, several of Baxter's theological views have been criticized severely by his contemporaries, especially his doctrine of justification as expressed in his *Aphorisms of Justification* from 1649. Although he states that human contribution to salvation is only a "hot peppercorn", it nevertheless constitutes an indispensable component of the application of salvation. Baxter is therefore simultaneously an important practical Puritan writer, as well as a controversial theologian.

Burton has significantly expanded scholarly research on Baxter by shifting one's attention from the doctrine of justification to the whole of Baxter's theology. By positing *Methodus Theologiae* as the most mature of his theological writing, he has made this work the focal point of attention, making it clear how much Baxter has been influenced by medieval scholastic sources, as was true of the whole Reformed-orthodox movement. Never before has it been argued that Baxter was scholastic-orientated to such a degree.

Two aspects of Burton's analysis are important. First, there is his recognition of development in Baxter's theological thinking. Whereas Baxter allotted a small but nevertheless significant place to human contribution in justification, in his later thinking he would have emphasized God's grace more strongly, doing so mainly by focusing on the Trinitarian nature of God's operations. This accentuation of grace is evident, for example, in his doctrine of

election, for there he assumes an intermediate position between the Reformed and Arminian views.

According to Burton, however, Baxter gravitates much more to the first than to the second. He states that Baxter, being influenced by John Davenant (1672-1641), espoused a very moderate doctrine of predestination, which he saw mirrored in the Canons of Dordt. However, Baxter goes beyond moderate Calvinism by teaching merely election. According to Burton, Baxter also wishes to emphasize God's grace also in his doctrine of justification, stating that in the new reality issuing forth from Christ's atonement the human contribution to salvation is placed within the context of God's merciful acceptance.

Secondly, Burton attempts to ascertain Baxter's position more fully from his Pneumatology, doing so by focusing on the relation between God's grace and human responsibility. Here we observe Baxter's unique position once more, differing from Owen by not opting for the thomistic position which focuses on grace by way of the doctrine of the infused and growing habitus. Baxter fears that the human contribution to salvation will consequently be neglected. Instead, he manifests Scotistic influence, stating that God takes the human response seriously from the very outset. Although God moves man spiritually and governs spiritual life throughout the entire course of the Christian's life, he continually gives credence to the faith and sincerity of the believer.

I challenge the conclusion that there is theological development in Baxter's thinking, resulting in God's grace being increasingly emphasized. Ultimately, his *Methodus Theologiae* contains the same elements as his early theological position expressed in his *Aphorisms*. Baxter remains an original, complex, and idiosyncratic Puritan writer, whose emphasis on human responsibility was strongly fuelled by his lifelong opposition to Antinomianism, which, in his opinion, emphasized God's grace to such a degree that the human response was neglected. His theological reaction to this engendered a great deal of discussion in Puritan circles. Burton's extensive research is an attempt to position Baxter in close proximity to the classic Reformed position. However, he remains at a distance from this position in the areas of predestination, justification, and regeneration.

Dr. Reinier W. de Koeijer
rwdkoeijer@filternet.nl