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# Gazing at God: Some Preliminary Observations on Contemplative Reformed Spirituality

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We live in a world of alienation, and the contemporary desire for spiritual experience is one indicator of our hunger for wholeness. Perhaps that is one reason why some people question whether there is anything which resembles a Reformed spirituality. Their interaction with Reformed Christians has been dry and devoid of joy. Unfortunately, there have been some within the Reformed household of faith who have lost the historical Christian integration of head and heart. Instead of cultivating a healthy sense of wonder and the experience of God, they have communicated a faith laden with disconnected knowledge and explanation. This experience is by no means unique to Reformed Christians; almost every denomination or faith tradition has had similar struggles. However, since my roots are Reformed, I write from this perspective. Over the years some of these frustrated persons have migrated to explore a wide range of spiritual options ranging from charismatic to non-Christian expressions of the New Age. Sadly, rather than recognizing the valid critique their exodus offers, members of the Reformed tradition are apt to look with critical eyes on those who moved to more emotional or expressive faith practices.

However, the deeper reality, both for those who have been frustrated and for those who are captivated by the cognitive approach, is that this is not an accurate picture of Reformed piety. Our historical amnesia has severed us from a rich reservoir of earlier spiritual treasures. Further, as we return to previous generations we discover not only a viable and engaging spirituality but also one that was richly contemplative and affective.

Conversely, some within the Reformed tradition who are anxious to embrace a more contemplative spirituality are hasty to baptize and adapt non-Reformed practices.<sup>1</sup> The Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), for example, contributes unintentionally to the mistaken assumption that contemplative spirituality is absent from the Reformed tradition. The denomination's website for spiritual formation provides a glossary of key spiritual terms. All five of the definitions used to describe contemplation are Roman Catholic.<sup>2</sup> Certainly one of the hallmarks of Reformed theology has been its willingness to engage in dialogue with other Christian traditions. This is both healthy and necessary. However, drawing spiritual practices exclusively from other traditions perpetuates the distorted perception that contemplative spirituality is foreign to Reformed Christians. While it is fruitful to engage in conversations with other faith

traditions, those who are Reformed need to discover and recover their own spiritual heritage in order to become full participants in these conversations. This requires the challenging but illuminating work of historical recovery and acquainting our self with the saints and devotional practices of earlier generations.

### Reformed Resistance and Understanding of Contemplation

Unfortunately, space limitations prevent us from examining in any depth the related and important topic of why numerous Reformed and evangelical Christians have resisted contemplative prayer.<sup>3</sup> Many of the reasons seem to center around fear and suspicion.<sup>4</sup> This is the essence of Paul Cook's concern in his evaluation of Puritan Thomas Goodwin. He acknowledges both that there are "mystical elements of the biblical faith" and that "Thomas Goodwin gave due place to what we have called the 'mystical elements' of biblical teaching as did the Puritans generally."<sup>5</sup> However, Cook ultimately concludes that Goodwin was not a mystic because he relies upon the caricature of medieval classical mysticism rather than working from his earlier biblical awareness of mysticism.<sup>6</sup> Recently, a number of Roman Catholic scholars of Christian spirituality have been arguing for a renewed sense of what qualifies as mysticism. Bernard McGinn, in his massive multi-volume study on the subject, asserts that the older perception that linked mysticism with union with God needs to be expanded. He suggests a better method of defining the term: "The mystical element in Christianity is that part of its belief and practices that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God."<sup>7</sup> A related fear is directed towards the occasional medieval distortion of contemplative spirituality that confused the nature of our relationship with God. However, most spiritual writers correctly perceive that our lives are never absorbed into the person of God.

Cook is also concerned that contemplative or mystical spirituality is exclusive and creates levels of spiritual elitism.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, resistance among many Reformed Christians appears to be due more to a distorted understanding of mystical or contemplative spirituality than to a total rejection of it. Likewise, James Houston asserts that evangelical resistance to mysticism occurred because it was "viewed as an expression of Roman Catholic piety which denies or ignores the principles of the Protestant Reformation."<sup>9</sup> John Owen, one of the premier Puritans of seventeenth-century England, declares that "whatever there may be in the height of this 'contemplative prayer,' as it is called, it neither is prayer nor can on any account be so esteemed."<sup>10</sup> However, Owen's strong condemnation came in response to a specific Roman Catholic writer, Benedictine Dom Serenus de Cressy. In reality, Owen champions the cause for contemplative prayer just a few pages later:

The spiritual *intense fixation of the mind*, by contemplation on God in Christ, until the soul be as it were swallowed up in

admiration and delight, and being brought unto an utter loss, through the infiniteness of those excellencies which it doth admire and adore, it returns again into its own abasements, out of a sense of its infinite distance from what it would absolutely and eternally embrace, and, withal, the inexpressible rest and satisfaction which the will and affections receive in their approaches unto the eternal Fountain of goodness, are things to be aimed at in prayer, and which, through the riches of divine condescension, are frequently enjoyed. The soul is hereby raised and ravished, not into ecstasies or unaccountable raptures, not acted into motions above the power of its own understanding and will; but in all the faculties and affections of it, through the effectual workings of the Spirit of grace and the lively impressions of divine love, with intimations of the relations and kindness of God, is filled with rest, in "joy unspeakable and full of glory."<sup>11</sup>

As this clearly indicates, Owen was not opposed to all types of contemplative prayer, only those that ignored the will and affections. For Owen it was important to include the mind in the practice of praying. Ronald Rolheiser, a contemporary Roman Catholic writer on spirituality, agrees: "Contemplation restores wonder not by bypassing the critical faculty, but by helping bring on a 'second naïveté.'"<sup>12</sup> Further, Rolheiser argues that much of our contemporary resistance to contemplation is traceable to our cultural context rather than theological tradition. He believes that narcissism, pragmatism, and unbridled restlessness are the greatest barriers that block people from greater contemplative awareness.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, it is illuminating to realize that some Roman Catholics express suspicion about mysticism for some of the same reasons as Owen and other Reformers.<sup>14</sup> We shall shortly come to the important matter of definitions, but for now let us understand mysticism as a broad spiritual movement within the history of Christian spirituality, and contemplation as one of the devotional practices that can lead to it. A remarkable number of contemporary writers representative of both evangelicalism and the Reformed tradition have written very supportively of contemplative piety.<sup>15</sup> Bruce Demarest affirms that "We need an evangelical mysticism."<sup>16</sup> Further, we must recognize that the waterfront of contemplative and mystical spirituality is vast and broad.<sup>17</sup>

The "preliminary" in the title of this article indicates that, while some research has been done by this author, much more is required. The words of Thomas Merton offer comfort. He captures the tentativeness of many writers as they seek to frame their ideas when he writes, "If a writer is so cautious that he never writes anything that cannot be criticized, he will never write anything that can be read. If you want to help other people you have got to make up your mind to write things that some men will condemn."<sup>18</sup>

While the focus of this article is on contemplative spirituality, there is some overlap with the broader term *mysticism*. Before proceeding further, we need to establish a few definitions to guide the remainder of our exploration. Hugh Feiss suggests that mysticism is “an intense and abiding sense of the presence of God.”<sup>19</sup> Contemplation is one of the pathways that can lead to mysticism. Walter Burghardt understands contemplation to be “a long loving look at the real.”<sup>20</sup> Ronald Rolheiser states that to be contemplative “is to experience an event fully, in all its aspects. Biblically this is expressed as a knowing ‘face to face.’”<sup>21</sup> Richard Foster writes, “Put simply, the contemplative life is the steady gaze of the soul upon the God who loves us.”<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere he declares, “Contemplative prayer is a loving attentiveness to God.”<sup>23</sup> *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* maintains, “While contemplation has to do with the presence of God, it should not be thought of as making ‘acts of the presence of God.’ It is rather a way of making oneself aware of the presence of God who is always there.”<sup>24</sup> During the seventeenth century, contemplation was defined as “the action of beholding, or looking at with attention and thought.”<sup>25</sup> Dewey Wallace captures the essence of Puritan contemplation in his phrase “heavenly mindedness.” He asserts, “Heavenly mindedness . . . 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.” Further, Wallace reverses the common contemporary perception that this was a rarity among Puritans to state, “Heavenly mindedness was one of the most prominent themes of Puritan spirituality in this era (after 1660).”<sup>26</sup> The common thread that unites these various definitions is that contemplation is a loving and sustained gaze upon God and God’s creation. It is far more about noticing and admiring God’s presence than it is about esoteric absorption into the divine essence.

### **Some Illustrations of Reformed Contemplation**

In reality, Wallace’s assessment is correct not only for the Puritans following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 but also for Reformed Christians both before and after this period. The following illustrations are a very brief sampling of the contemplative desire, awareness, and experience of earlier Reformed believers. The use of desire and awareness in the previous sentence is very intentional and recognizes that contemplation is a gift rather than the direct result of our efforts. While we can engage in certain spiritual exercises and prepare ourselves, the result of contemplation is always at God’s disposal. Further, recognizing the importance of contemplative desire and awareness prepares us for the possibility of greater contemplative experience. These samples are grouped around the various themes that inspired their contemplative experiences. Frequently the focus was on God and creation. John Calvin (1509-1564) declares:

Consequently, we know the most perfect way of seeking God, and the most suitable order, is not for us to attempt with bold curiosity to penetrate to the investigation of his essence, which we ought more to adore than meticulously to search out, but for us to contemplate him in his works whereby he renders himself near and familiar to us, and in some manner communicates himself.<sup>27</sup>

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) expresses the delightful change that occurred in his life as he viewed creation differently:

God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in every thing; in the sun, moon and stars; in the clouds, and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water, and all nature; which used greatly to fix my mind. I often used to sit and view the moon, for a long time; and so in the day time, spent much time in viewing the clouds and sky, to behold the sweet glory of God in these things: in the mean time, singing forth with a low voice, my contemplations of the Creator and Redeemer. And scarce any thing, among all the works of nature, was so sweet to me as thunder and lightning. Formerly, nothing had been so terrible to me. . . . But now, on the contrary, it rejoiced me. I felt God at the first appearance of a thunderstorm. And used to take the opportunity at such times to fix myself to view the clouds, and see the lightnings play, and hear the majestic and awful voice of God's thunder: which often times was exceeding entertaining, leading me to sweet contemplations of my great and glorious God.<sup>28</sup>

Sarah Pierrepont Edwards (1710-1758) was no stranger to contemplation. The following observation of her husband captures the intensity of her experience:

I have been particularly acquainted with many persons that have been the subjects of the high and extraordinary transports of the present day . . . a very frequent dwelling, for some considerable time together, in such views of the glory of the divine perfections, and Christ's excellencies, that the soul in the meantime has been as it were perfectly overwhelmed, and swallowed up with light and love and a sweet solace, rest and joy of soul, that was altogether unspeakable. . . . The heart was swallowed up in a kind of glow of Christ's love, coming down from Christ's heart in heaven, as a constant stream of sweet light, at the same time the soul all flowing out of love to him, so that there seemed to be a constant flowing and reflowing from

heart to heart. The soul dwelt on high, and was lost in God, and seemed almost to leave the body; dwelling in a pure delight that fed and satisfied the soul; enjoying pleasure without the least sting, or any interruption; a sweetness that the soul was lost in.<sup>29</sup>

Another common theme of contemplation was a longing for heaven. It is essential to grasp the significance of this within Puritan piety. Heavenly mindedness was not the desire to escape from frequent persecution but rather the longing to experience more fully the joy of union with Christ that had already begun on earth. Elizabeth Singer Rowe (1674-1737), an English poet and devotional writer, gave shape to her longing in these words:

O Infinite delight! My eager soul  
Springs forward to embrace the promis'd joy,  
And antedates its heav'n. The lightsome fields,  
And blissful groves are open to my view,  
The songs of angels and their silver lutes  
Delight me, while th' Omnipotent they sing.  
On all his glorious titles long they dwell,  
But love, unbounded Love, commands the song;  
Their darling subject this, and noblest theme.  
Here let my ravish'd soul forever dwell,  
Here me let gaze, nor turn one careless look  
On yonder hated world, here let me drink  
Full draughts of bliss, and bathe in boundless floods  
Of life and joy, here let me still converse.<sup>30</sup>

Mary Winslow (1774-1854), an American writer and mother of the Reformed pastor and theologian Octavius Winslow, captures a similar delight and desire for heaven: "Heaven in prospect is very sweet to me. My happiest moments are spent in its contemplation. . . . I delight to contemplate some near and dear to me (dearer and nearer now than ever), who have recently passed away from a world of sin and sorrow. My soul seems swallowed up in God. I feel heaven so near, that I am almost in the actual presence."<sup>31</sup>

The Lord's Supper provided Reformed Christians with an opportunity to connect the themes of union with Christ, deepening intimacy, and grace. Jodocus van Lodenstein (1620-1677), a Dutch Reformed pietist, preached a communion sermon on the Song of Songs 1:4 in which he asserted:

The Sacrament was but the doors to give entrance to the way to the inner movement of love and to the soul-ravishing communion with the Lord, to the Inner-room of the Savior. . . . The sweetness and charms of the Lord Jesus are never better perceived than when we turn our eyes from the world, see no

vanities (Ps 119:37) and fix our senses on the contemplation of Jesus' perfect love.<sup>32</sup>

Dinah van Bergh, another Dutch pietist who immigrated to New Jersey and became the wife of John Frelinghuysen and, after his death, Jacob Hardenbergh, captures her heart-felt experience around the Lord's Table:

I was his, my beloved, and his desire was toward me. As I partook of the elements, I enjoyed endearing fellowship with my near kinsman and bridegroom, the Lord Jesus, and with the Father and the Spirit in him, and so also with the members of the body of Christ, indeed, with the glorified above. My heart was lifted above the earth where Christ is, and I received so many tokens of his tender inclination and love toward me, that my pen is unable to express them. I had an expressive experience of the blessed consummation of the marriage union, and felt profound desire to be with the Lord.<sup>33</sup>

Elisabeth West reports her experience during a Scottish "Sacramental occasion" in 1704:

On Friday afternoon, when I was at secret prayer the Lord was pleased graciously to shine on me with the Word, "I will make all my glory pass before you," then I was persuaded that the Lord was calling me to this solemn ordinance. O but the impressions of this were sweet and continued that night. . . . On Saturday morning I got a great and wonderful discovery of the love of God to me, while I was reading a sermon of Mr. Flavel's, on Prov. viii. 31. I thought at the reading of this, my very heart was ravished out of me, at the love of God in Christ to me; when I could read no longer, but fell a wondering in a rapture of admiration, and went to prayer, but cannot tell in what frame I was; for I could do nothing but ask questions about the love of God to lost men; but, what these questions were is not recordable, for I fear I tell a raving.<sup>34</sup>

Other contemplative experiences centered on the use of devotional practices. Cotton Mather (1663-1728) provides a glimpse into his personal life in the following entry from his diary dated November 1698:

The *Methods* of Devotion, which I used this Day, were much the same that I have observed on some other Dayes like this. But the *Delights* and *Raptures*, whereto the Lord raised my Soul, in these Methods, were beyond, what I have ordinarily enjoy'd. The Holy Lord has this Day dealt familiarly with me; I have this Day gone into the Suburbs of *Heaven*, the *Spirit* of

my Lord has carried me thither, and has told me glorious Things; yea *Heaven* has come near unto me, and fill'd me with *Joy unspeakable and Full of Glory*. I cannot utter, I may not utter, the Communications of Heaven, whereto I have been this Day admitted: but this I will say, *I have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*<sup>35</sup>

Richard Baxter's (1615-1691) *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* is devoted to contemplating on heaven to better prepare us for our future home. When Baxter speaks of this devotional practice on the Lord's day he counsels his readers, "The fittest temper for a true believer is to be in the Spirit on the Lord's day; this was St. John's temper on that day, Rev. 1:13; and what can bring us to this ravishment in the Spirit but the spiritual beholding of our ravishing glory? Surely, though an outward ordinance may delight the ear, or tickle the fancy, yet it is the view of God that must ravish the soul."<sup>36</sup>

### **Isaac Ambrose: Cultivating an Attentive Attitude**

While it is valuable to sketch in broad strokes an overview of contemplative Reformed spirituality, it is perhaps more instructive to focus on a single individual to examine the nature and practice of contemplative spirituality. Isaac Ambrose will be our guide for this journey of discovery and spiritual delight. Ambrose (1604-1664) was known as the "most meditative Puritan of Lancashire."<sup>37</sup> He was educated at Brasenose College, Oxford, and was ordained in the Anglican Church. He served as one of the King's Preachers. Those who held this position were responsible for advancing the Reformation doctrines and faith, especially in the strongly entrenched regions of Roman Catholicism. After a few short pastorates he became pastor at St. Johns Preston and later St. Helens Garstang, a small community north of Preston. During the Civil War, Ambrose became a Presbyterian and served in numerous leadership roles. He was one of the two thousand Puritan pastors ejected after the Act of Uniformity (1662), and was best known for his work *Looking Unto Jesus* (1658), which was written after recovering from a serious illness. He maintained that looking unto Jesus was the most foundational devotional practice and defined it as the "inward experimental knowing, considering, desiring, hoping, believing, loving, joying, calling on Jesus, and conforming to Jesus."<sup>38</sup> Ambrose resisted controversy whenever possible and is a balanced representative of Puritan or Reformed spirituality. The following six principles capture some of his main points and can help us cultivate a contemplative awareness for contemporary use and application.

Ambrose constructs his devotional classic, *Looking Unto Jesus*, on the essential practice of looking or beholding. Specifically, Ambrose calls his readers to focus their attention on Jesus. He makes the distinction between ocular and mental looking and insists that "mental sight is far above the ocular sight: for there are more excellent things to be seen by the eye of the mind, than

by the eye of the body."<sup>39</sup> To look at Jesus we must first look away from the world so we are not distracted and able to focus completely on Jesus, for we are unable to look at two things simultaneously. Ambrose instructs us that "the eye cannot look upwards and downwards at once in a direct line; we cannot seriously mind heaven and earth in one thought."<sup>40</sup> In his earlier work, *Media*, he explored the means to grow more deeply in Christ, and he stressed the priority of watch-fulness, which "is the first and principal help to all exercises of religion; it is the eye to see them all well done and used, and therefore we set it in the front of all duties."<sup>41</sup>

Ambrose describes how our beholding or gazing transforms us into the object of our focus. Hence the importance of looking unto Jesus. Listen to Ambrose as he defines it in his own words: "We are changed by beholding, into the same image (2 Cor. 3:18). If we look unto Jesus in this respect, this look will have such an influence upon us, that we shall conform to Jesus."<sup>42</sup> Further, "Let us look fixedly on Jesus Christ, let us keep our spiritual eyes still on the pattern, until we feel ourselves conforming to it. . . . The beholding of Christ is a powerful beholding: there is a changing, transforming virtue goes out of Christ, by looking on Christ. . . . If I seriously meditate on any excellent subject, it will leave a print behind it on my spirit."<sup>43</sup> Ambrose frequently links our looking to the appreciation and admiration of Jesus' glory and beauty. He challenges us to "consider the excellency of this object. A sight of Christ in his beauty and glory, would ravish souls, and draw them to run after him."<sup>44</sup> The two most frequently cited examples were Peter at Jesus's transfiguration (Matthew 17, Luke 9) and Jesus' appearance to Mary on Easter morning (John 20). When we gaze at Jesus we cannot remain the same because of the brilliance of his transfiguring glory.

Throughout *Looking Unto Jesus*, Ambrose develops a rhythm of first establishing the biblical foundation of Christ in each of the various ways of his ministry. He begins his consideration of Jesus before his incarnation. He then traces the unfolding of his life and ministry until his second coming. This expanding vision draws his readers into the vast spectrum of God's grace and trains them to be continually looking at Jesus in every aspect of his ministry. Then he calls his readers to meditate on each of them so that they might experience that aspect of Jesus more fully in their own lives. When guiding his readers in the meditation of loving Jesus in his work of the resurrection, Ambrose exhorts them, "Come then, stir up thy appetite, bring into thy imagination the idea of Christ as in his resurrection; present him to thy affection of love, in that form wherein he appeared to his disciples; as gazing upon the dusty beauty of flesh kindleth the fire of carnal love, so this gazing on Christ, and on the passages of Christ in his resurrection, will kindle this spiritual love in thy soul."<sup>45</sup>

Regardless of the spiritual tradition, attentiveness is always foundational to cultivating a contemplative awareness. It is impossible to experience and enjoy God without first noticing the presence of God's goodness and grace. Andrew Dreitcer suggests for Reformed Christians that "attentive gratitude" is a helpful

way of expressing and encouraging contemplation.<sup>46</sup> The attentive emphasis Ambrose calls us to in looking unto Jesus shapes us to notice God in all areas of life. This echoes Jesus' commands for us to listen (Mark 4:3, 9, etc.) and watch (Matt. 24:42; 26:38,41; etc.). Consistent with Reformed spirituality is the recognition that God is present wherever we go. The more we focus our vision on the reality that we belong to God, the more we will see the evidence of God's gracious and bountiful providence. Perhaps the biggest challenge for contemporary Christians who are overloaded with ever-expanding information and whose senses are dulled and unimaginative is to learn afresh how to become aware and recognize the world around them and within them. As we consciously seek to encourage ourselves to notice the graciousness of God, we will grow in both gratitude and attentiveness to God's gifts.

### **Knowing through Experiential Learning**

Reformed people often have been characterized as being strongly rational and cognitive. There is no denying that the Reformed tradition values the importance of careful and clear thinking. Unfortunately, across the landscape of Reformed history some representatives have forgotten that knowing at its fundamental root is relational. The best of the Reformed tradition understands that, while the mind is important, there is more to life than simply accumulating information and trying to explain everything. Ambrose is representative of this balanced Reformed perspective, and he continually emphasized the importance of experience. He instructed his congregation and readers that "God teacheth inwardly. . . . Man may teach the brains, but God only teacheth the reins [i.e., "the most inward parts of the body"]; the knowledge which man teacheth is swimming knowledge; but the knowledge which God teacheth is a soaking knowledge."<sup>47</sup> Further, he maintained, "God teacheth experimentally; the soul that is taught of God can speak experimentally of the truth it knows. . . . In this case the scripture is the original, and their heart is the copy of it."<sup>48</sup> These examples reflect the experiential or experimental nature that has always characterized the best of Reformed theology. Believing in Jesus Christ is more than knowing the right words to confess; it is also trusting and depending upon this same Jesus to provide for all of our needs. "Study therefore, and study more, but be sure thy study and thy knowledge be rather practical than speculative; do not merely beat thy brains to learn the history of Christ's death, but the efficacy, virtue and merit of it: know what thou knowest in reference to thyself."<sup>49</sup>

The Puritan principle of knowing also was intended to stir up the affections. The affections are more than emotions and are best understood as J. I. Packer defines them, "set inclinations of heart with a feeling-tone."<sup>50</sup> Our love towards Jesus Christ expands as our knowledge does. Ambrose engages in a soliloquy with his soul and seeks to stir up his response when he ponders the covenant of love Christ has made with him: "O my soul, canst thou ponder on this, and not love him dearly, who hath thus loved thee?"<sup>51</sup> As he continues his meditation on

this aspect of Jesus his intensity heightens as his heart overflows in loving passion: "Ah! what flames of divine affection, what raptures of zeal, what ravishments of delight, what ecstasies of obedience can be enough for my blessed God and dearest Redeemer?"<sup>52</sup> Soliloquy, the practice of talking to oneself, was one of the primary ways of moving the knowledge from one's head down to one's heart.

Our contemporary culture often seems to oscillate between that which is very emotive and feeling oriented and that which is strongly rational and devoid of experience. The Reformed emphasis upon head and heart might need to challenge some portions of the contemporary church to concentrate more on the affections, while other groups might require more focus on the head and reflection. Regardless, the desire is to have a true experience that begins with an objective reality of truth that is processed through the heart as a lived experience.

A related concern is the confusion over the nature of knowledge. This problem is traceable at least back to the Corinthian church, whom Paul had to warn about the danger of misguided knowledge: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; but anyone who loves God is known by him" (1 Cor. 8:1-3). This debate surfaced again in the twelfth century between Peter Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux. Abelard took the rational approach and emphasized learning for knowledge's sake. Bernard on the other hand insisted that knowledge must be linked with devotion and was for God's sake. While Bernard won the debate, the church has a tendency to revert back to Abelard's position. The distinction is probably never entirely clear but knowing that is devoid of experience must always be suspect and avoided. Henri Nouwen dramatically captures this tension when he writes, "Books written to be savored slowly are read hastily to fulfill a requirement, paintings made to be seen with a contemplative eye are taken in as part of a necessary art appreciation course, and music composed to be enjoyed at leisure is listened to in order to identify a period of style."<sup>53</sup> Where there is no experience, truth is often left disconnected and appears unbelievable; therefore, all parents, pastors, and educators need to continually be alert to the necessity of connecting our knowing with being and doing.

### **Recognizing the Limits of Reason**

While there have always been representatives of the Reformed family who have been uncomfortable with mystery, there have also been many others who acknowledge the limits of human reason. Ambrose cautions us not to be too curious. This is not intended to encourage lazy thinking but rather to accept the limits of our human reason in the face of God's incomprehensibility. In speaking about Christ's intercessory ministry on behalf of Christians, Ambrose remarks, "I answer, not actually, but mystically; when Christ intercedes, he takes our persons, and carries them in unto God the Father, in a most unperceivable way to us; for the way or manner, I leave it to others, for my part, I dare not be

too inquisitive in a secret not revealed by God."<sup>54</sup> Likewise in exploring the time of Christ's resurrection, Ambrose declares, "I dare not be too curious in giving reasons for this set time, and the rather because Christ is a free worker of his own affairs."<sup>55</sup> Further, when encouraging his listeners to meditate upon the resurrection for their own life, he cautions, "In this meditation be not too curious, whether the print of the nails were but continued till Christ had confirmed his disciples' faith, or whether he retains them still for some further use."<sup>56</sup> Ambrose's appreciation for the limits of human reason can be further detected in his desire to avoid controversy. He recognized the value of debates over critical topics of faith, but felt others were more able to engage in mental battles on some of the finer points of theology and piety.

Additionally, when Ambrose explores the importance of seeing God as he is, he acknowledges the long-standing principle of apophatic spirituality. He writes,

The most that we see of God now is by way of negation, rather than any positive sight: when we say of God, he is incomprehensible, that is, he is such a God as cannot be comprehended, that is, but negation; when we say of God, he is infinite, that is, he is such a God as hath no bounds of his being; that is still a negation, to say what God is not: but now in Heaven, we shall not see God only by way of negation, but we shall see that positive excellency of God, *We shall see him as he is.*<sup>57</sup>

When he is speaking of our enjoyment of God, he again recognizes the limitations of our ability to comprehend: "Yet I mean not so, as if the soul, which is a creature, could take in the whole essence of God, which is incomprehensible."<sup>58</sup> This negative way of knowing is a further recognition of the inadequacy of human minds and reason for fathoming the great length and width and breadth and depth of God's vastness.

As we experience the initial shift from modernity to post-modernity, there is a growing appreciation for mystery. This will be continually compounded due to the relentless exponential explosion of information. It is no longer realistic to expect scholars or experts to know everything within their given fields, even if narrowly defined. Further, people are beginning to recognize that, while knowing needs to include the cognitive, it must not be limited to this alone.<sup>59</sup> The arts and the more intuitive expressions of knowledge, whether through the aegis of ritual and symbolism in worship or the natural beauty of creation, will call us to a more holistic way of knowing. Instead of continually feeling the need to analyze and explain every aspect of theology and spirituality, we will need to become more comfortable with the equally important principles of appreciating and experiencing the truths of faith. Calvin was conscious of this same necessity. No one would ever accuse him of being a mental lightweight, yet he was not reticent to acknowledge the limits of human knowing. After wrestling with the nature of Christ's body within the Lord's Supper he admits,

“Now, if anyone should ask me how this takes place, I shall not be ashamed to confess that it is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare. And to speak more plainly, I rather experience than understand it.”<sup>60</sup>

### **Appreciating the Necessity of Solitude and Silence**

Ambrose speaks words that might be difficult for active Christians, especially within our frenetic culture, to hear. Nonetheless, he follows the biblical example of Jesus and reminds his readers to come apart and not to be afraid of silence. He spent each May in the woods on retreat devoting his time to praying, meditating on Scripture, fasting, and reviewing his journal. Unlike earlier monastic Christians who followed this pattern as a way of life, Ambrose was married and had three children. While this practice appears to have been rare, Joseph Alleine, a fellow English Puritan, developed the similar habit of taking shorter retreats. Ambrose draws upon the experience of Jesus being driven into the wilderness as an important model for us to emulate. He contends,

In this respect, I know not but the wilderness might be an advantage to Christ’s design: In this solitary place, he could not but breathe out more pure inspiration; heaven usually is more open, and God usually more familiar and frequent in his visits in such places. I know not what others’ experiences may be; but if I have found anything of God, or of his grace, I may thank a wood, a wilderness, a desert, a solitary place, for its accommodation; and have I not a blessed pattern here before me?<sup>61</sup>

An entry from his diary, which sadly has been lost except for a few fragments preserved elsewhere in his writings, records this motivation for spiritual retreats: “I retired myself to a solitary place, to practice especially the secret duties of a Christian, my ground is that of Cant, 2:11-12, ‘Come my beloved, let us go forth into the fields, &., there will I give thee my loves.’ The bridegroom of our souls (said Bernard) is bashful, and more frequently visits his bride in the solitary places.”<sup>62</sup> Oliver Heywood, another seventeenth-century English Puritan, acknowledges the benefit of withdrawing when he counsels, “A man will best enjoy himself alone; solitary recesses are of singular advantage, both for getting and increasing grace.”<sup>63</sup>

The rhythm of Ambrose’s pattern is the same as Jesus’ ministry of withdrawal and return. Unlike some earlier contemplatives who minimized the value of action, the Puritans, who frequently drew upon the wisdom of Bernard, sought to weave the contemplative and active dimensions of life together. Likewise today, many of our lives lack a healthy rhythm. The recent interest in reclaiming the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship is indicative of both the need and sensitivity towards this. While many people lack the freedom and flexibility of schedule to go on retreats, we can all seek to become more aware of our need

for silence and shorter periods of withdrawal in solitude to attune our lives more fully to our triune God. Perhaps the first hurdle to overcome is our discomfort with silence, coupled with the fear of what we might hear when we intentionally listen to God.

### **Nurturing Desire that is Born of Love**

Spiritual hunger or longing is the natural response of one who has experienced God. David prays, "One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple" (Ps. 27:4). The apostle Paul expresses his passionate longing when he writes, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (Phil. 3:10-12). Desire, for Ambrose, was built upon a reciprocating love. We love God because God first loved us. As we experience and taste this love we are inspired to long for it more fully. Ambrose confesses, "If I love Christ, I cannot but long for communion and fellowship with Christ."<sup>64</sup> The more we experience this inviting love the more we are drawn to it. When Ambrose reflects upon what Christ has accomplished for us in his ascension and outpouring of his Spirit, he overflows with delight: "Oh! Who can think of the glory that is in this dainty delightful one, and not be swallowed up in love? . . . And are we not all in a burning love, in a seraphical love, or at least in a conjugal love? O my heart! How is it thou are not love-sick?"<sup>65</sup>

The result of experiencing this love is a desire that enlarges and longs for more. Ambrose defines desire as "a certain notion of the appetite, by which the soul darts itself towards the absent good, purposely to draw near, and unite itself thereunto."<sup>66</sup> Later, as he continues to explore this important topic, he asks his readers, what is desirable in Christ's life? His short answer is everything. There is no aspect of Jesus that is not desirable, since wherever we look we discover evidence of what Christ has done for our benefit. Therefore he summons all Christians, "Come then, cast up thy desires after Christ, breathe, O my soul, after the enjoyment of this Christ: fling up to heaven some divine ejaculations, 'Oh that this Christ were mine! Oh that the actions of Christ, and the person of Christ were mine!'"<sup>67</sup>

The good news is that Christ is ours, or better, we are his. The initial answer to the Heidelberg Catechism contains this refreshing reminder, "I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ."<sup>68</sup> Since we share in the benefits of Jesus Christ, why do we so often settle for empty and superficial scraps when the table is filled to overflowing? Abba Poeman, a desert father of the fourth or fifth century, provides needed counsel for our super-saturated consumer culture when he warns us, "Do not give your heart to that which does not satisfy your heart."<sup>69</sup> A valuable spiritual

discipline for contemporary Christians is the evaluation of your heart's desires and asking whether those desires lead you closer or farther from Jesus. Another approach for framing this is to remember the ways in which you have experienced God's love and consider what desires would naturally follow if you really allowed this love to take root within you.

### **Enjoying the Gift and Fruit of Contemplation**

Bernard of Clairvaux was no stranger to many Puritans. Their spiritual theology and grammar of gazing was inspired both by him and their reading of the Song of Songs. Many contemporary readers who have accepted the distorted sour and dour caricature of the Puritans are surprised to discover their great enjoyment of life. They appreciated and celebrated the numerous gifts and blessings of God's creation. This message has long been articulated through the celebrated first question and answer of the Westminster Catechism that our chief and highest end is to glorify God and enjoy God forever.

Puritans knew that enjoyment was a primary fruit of their relationship with God. Their longing for deeper communion with Jesus was united in the interactive themes of union with Christ and spiritual marriage. Woven throughout Isaac Ambrose's entire process of looking unto Jesus is the reality of being in union with Christ. Unlike the monastic recognition that this union was the culmination of the lifelong spiritual journey, the Reformed believer perceived union with Christ as the beginning, occurring at conversion. Therefore Ambrose and many of his fellow Puritans used the imagery of spiritual or mystical marriage as a reflection of the Christian's relationship with Jesus Christ the bridegroom. While this marriage began on earth, the fullness of joy was not realized until the believer reached heaven. Not surprisingly, spiritual marriage or the intimacy of the church or individual believer with Christ was a common theme of Puritan sermons.

When Ambrose looks ahead with expectant longing, he proclaims to his listeners: "As the bridegroom after the nuptials leads his bride to his own home, that there they may live together, and dwell together, so Christ our royal Bridegroom will lead us into the palace of his glory. And is not this joy of our Lord enough to cause our joy? Oh! what embraces of love, what shaking of hands, what welcomes shall we have in this city?"<sup>70</sup> It is significant to realize that this was not just a future-oriented joy, but also something that had been tasted already here on earth. Ambrose compares the present experience with the future fulfillment: "Our enjoyment of God is but here in its infancy, there it will be in its full age; here it is in drops, there it will be in the ocean: here we see God's back parts, and we can see no more; but there we shall see his face . . . which is grace and favor enjoyed by faith. . . . And, Oh! How excellent is this enjoyment above all present enjoyments."<sup>71</sup> Further, he reminds his congregation and readers of their unique ability to experience these joys: "The saints are in covenant with Jesus Christ, and therefore in nearer relation than any others . . . the children of God the Father, the very spouse and bride of God the

Son; in some respect nearer than the angels themselves, for the angels are not so married to Christ in a mystical union, as God's people are."<sup>72</sup> We alone, as the pinnacle of God's creation, possess the ability of enjoying God.

It is important to recognize the type of language used by the Puritans to express their spiritual intimacy and enjoyment of God. Jean Williams observes, "Enjoyment of God reached its high point in moments when the soul was 'ravished' or 'love-sick' with 'joy unspeakable and full of glory.'"<sup>73</sup> While this rhetoric of ravishment was common in Bernard, the biblical model inspired the Puritans as well. The Geneva Bible (1599) translated Song of Songs 4:9 as, "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thy eyes, with one chain of thy neck." Ambrose's language soars as he attempts to capture in words the depth of this experience, "And in this kinde of love of God, and enjoyment of themselves in God; the Saints are ravished with God, and are in a kind of extasie eternally."<sup>74</sup> Earlier in his life he recorded the following entry during his retreat time on May 20, 1641: "This day the Lord cast one into a spiritual, heavenly, ravishing love-trance; he tasted the goodnesse of God, the very sweetness of Christ, and was filled with the joyes of the Spirit above measure. O it was a good day, a blessed foretaste of Heaven, a love-token of Christ to the Soul, a kisse of his mouth whose love is better than wine."<sup>75</sup> Perhaps the challenge for contemporary readers is to recognize that God still delights in those who are in union with Jesus Christ. Enlightenment rationalism or the penchant for scientific explanation may dissuade many from enjoying God or believing that it is even possible. This is not something we can demand or expect from God simply by following a predictable formula or the newest techniques. It is always a gift given at God's discretion. However, God may graciously lavish this upon us as we seek to be attentive and lovingly gaze upon Jesus Christ.

For too long, those within Reformed and evangelical circles have had to apologize for leaving their spiritual roots or feel guilty for embracing devotional practices which appeared to be foreign to their tradition. This brief overview and preliminary exploration into the contemplative writings of earlier Reformed Christians has provided a different perspective. I trust that this introduction will grant permission to Reformed and evangelical Christians to search more fully into the rich treasures of this tradition to uncover and recover more examples that reflect contemplative awareness, which the church so desperately needs today.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See for example John H. Taylor, *Pilgrim Spirit: An Introduction to Reformed Spirituality* (Norwich, England: Canterbury Press, 1999). While the content is faithful to the principles of Reformed spirituality, the prayer exercises developed by Helena McKinnon are at times more Buddhist (pp. 24-25). Likewise, Presbyterian

writer Barbara A. Pursey, *Prayer Beyond the Beginnings: Exploring Contemplative Prayer* (Oklahoma City: Presbyterian and Reformed Renewal Ministries International, 1984), draws upon the examples of Teresa of Avila and Anthony Bloom and ignores the Reformed contributions and practices.

<sup>2</sup> [www.pcusa.org/spiritualformation/glossary.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/spiritualformation/glossary.htm)

<sup>3</sup> See James M. Houston, "Reflections on Mysticism: How Valid is Evangelical Anti-Mysticism?" in *Loving God and Keeping His Commandments*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Helmut Burkhardt (Giessen: Brunnen-Verlag, 1991), 163-81. Richard Foster is one of a growing number of evangelicals who is calling the church to cultivate a contemplative attitude. The contemplative tradition is the first of six traditions that Foster believes are necessary to create a biblical and balanced approach to Christian spirituality; Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 23-58.

<sup>4</sup> See Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 274n.

<sup>5</sup> Paul E. G. Cook, "Thomas Goodwin—Mystic?" in *Diverse Gifts* (London: Westminster Conference, 1980), 46-47, 48.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*. Vol. 1 *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991) xvii. See also Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 67.

<sup>8</sup> See Cook, "Goodwin," 56.

<sup>9</sup> Houston, "Reflections," 164.

<sup>10</sup> John Owen, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer," in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 4 (Edinburgh and Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 334-35.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* See also David M. King "The Affective Spirituality of John Owen" *Evangelical Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (1996), 223-33 for a helpful elaboration of Owen's perspective on contemplative and experiential spirituality.

<sup>12</sup> Ronald Rolheiser, *The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering God's Presence in Everyday Life* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994), 57.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-61.

<sup>14</sup> See for example Hugh Feiss, "Rethinking the Mystical: Thoughts from the Spiritual Sub-Basement, *A Roman Catholic Perspective*" *Word & World* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1987), 143-45. Additionally, a personal conversation of the present author with Philip Sheldrake, a Roman Catholic professor and president (at the time this article was written) of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality expressed that some Roman Catholics share many of these same concerns (July 9, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> See for example Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001); Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water and Prayer, Finding the Heart's True Home* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992); Joyce Huggett, *The Joy of Listening to God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986); Richard V. Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading: Experiencing God through Scripture* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1996); Jan Harris, *Quiet in His Presence* (Grand

Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), as well as the writings of A. W. Tozer. Charismatics tend to be more intentional about the importance of experience and therefore seem to be more receptive to contemplative experiences than some evangelicals. Perhaps this is most clearly revealed in their music. See for example Graham Kendrick's Epiphany song, "Shine, Jesus, Shine": "As we gaze on Your kingly brightness, So our faces display Your likeness; Ever changing from glory to glory, Mirror'd here may our lives tell Your story" (Make Way Music, Ltd., 1987). A representative sampling of Reformed writers includes Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987). Most of Peterson's other writings reflect a similar contemplative perspective and appreciation. See also Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999), which devotes a full chapter to contemplative prayer and also calls for a recovering of evangelical mysticism; Charles Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1982); Richard Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather: Origins of American Evangelicalism* (Washington, D. C.: Christian University Press, 1979); Ben Campbell, Johnson & Andrew Dreitcer, *Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); and Don Postema, *Space for God* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1983). Joel Beeke, president and professor of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, responded to a letter entitled, "Longing for Spiritual Communion with Christ" as follows: "If desiring God means being too mystical, then rank me among the mystics too" (*Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* 5, no. 4 [April 1997]: 94-95).

<sup>16</sup> Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 114.

<sup>17</sup> See for example Bernard McGinn, "Quo Vadis? Reflections on the Current Study of Mysticism," *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1998), 13-21.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Direction Books, 1961), 105. Readers may respond to this article by contacting the present author at:

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<sup>19</sup> Feiss, "Rethinking the Mystical," 141. Michael Downey articulates the same theme when he asserts that mysticism "is rather more a matter of attending to God's presence to us and responding to God's presence by being altogether present to the divine presence which is always near." Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 67-68.

<sup>20</sup> Walter J. Burghardt, "Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real," *Church* (Winter 1989): 15.

<sup>21</sup> Rollheiser, *The Shattered Lantern*, 20.

<sup>22</sup> Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 49.

<sup>23</sup> Foster, *Prayer Finding the Heart's True Home*, 158.

<sup>24</sup> William H. Shannon, "Contemplation, Contemplative Prayer," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 209. This entry also provides a brief but helpful summary of the distinctions between the kataphatic and apophatic pathways to contemplative spirituality.

- <sup>25</sup> J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, ed. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd. ed., vol. 17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 811.
- <sup>26</sup> Dewey D. Wallace, Jr. *The Spirituality of the Later English Puritans: An Anthology* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer Univ. Press, 1987), xvii.
- <sup>27</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.5.9. Calvin also quotes Augustine approvingly when he speaks of our need to “gaze upon his (God’s) works.” Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Personal Narrative in Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn, vol. 16 (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1998), 794. *The Personal Narrative* is an abundant reservoir of numerous examples of Edwards’s contemplative desire and awareness.
- <sup>29</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival in Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. C.G. Goen, vol. 4 (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1972), 331-32. See also Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, 789-90 for another expression of the contemplative nature of Sarah P. Edwards.
- <sup>30</sup> Madeleine Forel Marshall, *The Poetry of Elizabeth Singer Rowe (1674-1737)*. *Studies in Women and Religion*, vol. 25 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1987), 283.
- <sup>31</sup> Octavius Winslow, ed. *Life in Jesus: A Memoir of Mrs. Mary Winslow* (Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria Press, 1993), 320, 238. Further, she observes, “Few people are aware of the communications that are going on between earth and heaven. I do not wish to be a visionary, but many such manifestations have I had” (330).
- <sup>32</sup> Iain S. Maclean, trans., “Jodocus van Lodenstein A Sermon on Song of Songs 1:4, ‘The King brought me into His Inner-Room’” *Calvin Studies VI* (Colloquium on Calvin Studies Jan, 1992), 24-25.
- <sup>33</sup> *The Diary of Dinah van Bergh*, trans. Gerard Van Dyke, introduction and notes by J. David Muyskens (Occasional Papers Series of the Historical Society of the Reformed Church in America no. 3; New Brunswick, NJ: Historical Society of the Reformed Church in America, 1993), 87.
- <sup>34</sup> Elisabeth West, *Memoirs, or Spiritual Exercises of Elisabeth West: Written by her own hand*. First American edition, from the last Edinburgh edition (Exeter, NH: C. Norris, 1817), 199.
- <sup>35</sup> Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed. *Diary of Cotton Mather*, vol 1. (New York: Frederick Unger, 1957), 278. Hambrick-Stowe devotes his final chapter to Cotton Mather and entitles it, “The Contemplative Puritan” (*The Practice of Piety*, 278-87).
- <sup>36</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest in The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, vol. 3 (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000), 301.
- <sup>37</sup> Robert Halley, *Lancashire: Its Puritanism and Nonconformity*, vol. 2 (Manchester, England: Tubbs and Brook, 1869), 195.
- <sup>38</sup> Isaac Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1986), 28.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 26. Additionally Ambrose separates mental looking into notional and theoretical or practical and experimental. While the notional “enlightens our understanding” the experimental engages our “Minds and hearts, whereby we not only see spiritual things, but we are affected with them,” (Ibid., cf. p. 654).
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., 21.

- <sup>41</sup> Isaac Ambrose, *Media, The Last Things in The Compleat Works* (London: Rowland Reynolds, 1674), 96.
- <sup>42</sup> Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 158.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 476.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 477.
- <sup>46</sup> Andrew D. Dreitcer, "The Contemporary Interest in Contemplative Spirituality," *Reformed Liturgy & Music* 30, 2 (1996), 61.
- <sup>47</sup> Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 125. Ambrose liked this analogy for experimental knowing and used it again when he stated, "This experimental looking on Jesus, is that my text aims at; it is not a swimming knowledge of Christ, but an hearty feeling of Christ's inward workings; it is not heady notions of Christ, but heart motions towards Christ, that are implied in this inward looking" (*Looking Unto Jesus*, 27).
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.
- <sup>50</sup> J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1990), 66.
- <sup>51</sup> Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 83.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.
- <sup>53</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Lifesigns* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1986), 62.
- <sup>54</sup> Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 569-70.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 415.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 460.
- <sup>57</sup> Isaac Ambrose, *Ultima, The Last Things in The Compleat Works* (London: Rowland Reynolds, 1674), 468.
- <sup>58</sup> *Looking Unto Jesus*, 648.
- <sup>59</sup> See for example Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (nl: Basic Books, 1985).
- <sup>60</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.32.
- <sup>61</sup> Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 235.
- <sup>62</sup> Ambrose, *Media*, 118.
- <sup>63</sup> Oliver Heywood, *Heart Treasure* (Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 80.
- <sup>64</sup> Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 461.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 546.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 201. For a helpful development of desire within Calvin and the Puritans, see Belden C. Lane, "Spirituality as the Performance of Desire: Calvin on the World as a Theatre of God's Glory," *Spiritus* 1, no. (Spring 2001), 1-30, and "Two Schools of Desire: Nature and Marriage in Seventeenth-Century Puritanism," *Church History* 69, no. 2 (June 2000), 372-402.
- <sup>67</sup> Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 298.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1988), 13.
- <sup>69</sup> Benedicta Ward, trans. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 178, no. 80.
- <sup>70</sup> Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 686.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 648.

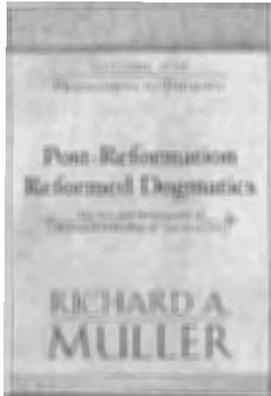
<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 578.

<sup>73</sup> Jean Williams, "Puritanism: A Piety of Joy" *Kategoria*, no. 10 (Winter 1998), 10.

<sup>74</sup> Ambrose, *Media*, 203.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 164. The language of rapture was not rare to Ambrose. He used the term at least forty-two times in *Looking Unto Jesus* to express the joy and delight of being in union and communion with Christ.

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