

# **SPIRITUAL AFFECTIONS AND THE PASTORAL DISPOSITION**

by

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## SUMMARY

This thesis, *Spiritual Affections and the Pastoral Disposition*, makes a case that spiritual affections exist in close and defining relation to the Christian life. Moreover, it contends that the gratuitous nature and recurrent movements of divine love welcomed within those called to the pastoral ministry of Jesus Christ is constitutive of gracious and fruitful practice.

The thesis shows that the desirous nature of spiritual affections shapes the pastoral disposition by means of a received grace that is adaptive, imaginative, courageous and wise. In other words, it is from the open and spiritually tended heart of the believer—the pastoral minister in this literary context—that rivers of living water flow (John 7:28). Hence, my research question is as follows: *Are spiritual affections, as defined and attested to across a breadth of the Christian tradition, still of vital importance to pastoral ministries in contemporary contexts?*

I begin the thesis by engaging with the findings of present affect theorists who challenge long-held anthropological, psychological and philosophical assumptions about the primary roles of cognition and language within any social ordering. I argue that their insights regarding the “autonomy of affect” are invaluable to a theological consideration of responsive spiritual affections in direct relation to pastoral bearing and practice.

Substantively, I explore this thesis topic and its underlying question through selected writings of two pastoral reformers who represent a certain breadth and veracity of thought within the Christian tradition. They are Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (c.1090-1153) and Pastor Jonathan Edwards of New England (1703-1758).<sup>1</sup> After addressing pertinent aspects of their life, thought, biblical inspirations and a specific example of each’s sermonising, I then seek to summarise their

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<sup>1</sup> The use of “pastoral reformers” is deliberate. I am not seeking to name either as a major Reformer of the Christian Church. Rather, each (as I will show) represents a significant renewing and expanding movement within an ecclesial and social context.

religious experience and emergent theology through a shared emphasis on spiritual affections as they pertain to what I describe as the pastoral disposition. I then bring that synthesis into conversation with two streams of contemporary practical theology characterised most notably by Andrew Root and Kathleen Cahalan.

For both Bernard and Edwards, God's revealed nature is constitutive of an active disposition of mutual, unifying love—namely, the Holy Trinity. This eternally expressive goodness, truth and beauty was, for each, both the energy and attraction of redemptive love operative in the world. The pastoral disposition so framed and defined by God's relational being is thereby practically expressive due to its dependent nature. My contention, then, is that by virtue of the spiritually affected and orientated dispositions of humility, spiritual longing, listening with the ear of the heart, a wise and discerning bearing, artistic leanings and movements of compassion, pastoral practice in the way of Christ—the Good Shepherd—continues to arise fruitfully and faithfully.

Finally, given that my research method is of a heuristic nature, here meaning an integration of the writer's own lived experience within and before the designated subject matter, my prose is descriptive, yet also explorative. By this I mean, through the rigour of research and writing, I aim to make better sense of repeated encounters with the God of grace in the midst of my own pastoral calling. Therefore, relevant, yet modest points of existential connection are included throughout. Appendices 1 and 2 are indicative of the integrative journey of life, faith and vocation that the main body of the thesis seeks to reflect in more scholarly form

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## **DECLARATION**

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

16th of December 2019.

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Along this circuitous path I have been blessed with an abundance of mentors who have sought to live from a spiritually affected heart and mind; men mainly, though not exclusively. Sadly, a number of these are now deceased. On the edge of that older category now, I hope that I can also pass on what I have learned from their faith-filled and honourable company. Of the personally known, these include, Brian Phillips, Greg Pearce, Laurie Mickan, Dan Novotny, Professor Mark Burrows, Bill Connolly, SJ, Catherine LaCugna, Joanna Battaglia, Brian Daley, SJ, Nairn Kerr, Philip Carter, John Pfitzner, Betty Smith, Monsignor Professor Denis Edwards (who kindly read my evolving Bernard chapters before he died suddenly in March 2019 and encouraged me to keep writing about the relational being of God) and Fr. Michael Casey, OCSO, who among other memorable things suggested that I needed “to feed the chooks but write what I wanted to write.”

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My father, Joseph Henry Gilbert, Jnr died in May 2018. For many years he quizzed me about the thesis completion date. "How long is a piece of string," I used to say, knowing in my heart that it was always going to be too far into the future for him to see the actual day. Out of deep gratitude and love for my Dad, I dedicate this thesis to his legacy, support and treasured memory.

Adelaide, Holy Thursday, 2019.

*There's a thread you follow. It goes among  
things that change. But it doesn't change.  
People wonder about what you are pursuing.  
You have to explain about the thread.  
But it is hard for others to see.  
While you hold it you can't get lost.  
Tragedies happen; people get hurt  
or die; and you suffer and get old.  
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.  
You don't ever let go of the thread.*

**William Stafford**<sup>1</sup>

*For an affection to be religious, it must be based in God's self-revelation. Religious affections are obtained through spiritual sight in illumination and are efficaciously applied to the heart by the Spirit, or in other words, are the regenerate human response to witnessing the beauty and glory of God.*

**Oliver Crisp & Kyle Strobel**<sup>2</sup>

*Each one of us has their own gifts, their own means and their own vocation. Mine are as a Christian who prays and as a theologian who reads a great many books and takes many notes. May I therefore be allowed to sing my own song! The Spirit is breath. The wind sings in the trees. I would like, then, to be an Aeolian harp and let the breath of God make the strings vibrate and sing. Let me stretch and tune the strings—that will be an austere task of research. And then let the Spirit make them sing a clear and tuneful song of prayer and life!*

**Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit***<sup>3</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him. "What is written in the law? How do you read?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live." (Luke 10:25-28, cf. Matthew 22:34-40 & Mark 12:28-34).

### a) Overview of topic and research question

This thesis, entitled *Spiritual Affections and the Pastoral Disposition*, is about living the pastoral vocation openly and well from within the gratuitous and unfolding love of God. For the imperative

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<sup>1</sup> William Stafford, "The Way it is," *Ask Me: 100 essential poems* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Crisp and Kyle Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to his Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2018), 184.

<sup>3</sup> Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (New York: Crossroad Herder Publishing Company, 1997), x.

to love as captured in the above scriptural context is not merely an ethical or religious obligation. It is derivative of, and dependent upon, the One who leads, calls and equips for service in Love's name (John 15:4-17). In other words, the affection of God—an all-embracing love—is given freely to be received and reciprocated. That is its relational dynamic for the living or more accurately for my purposes here, ministering affectively in the ways and means of Jesus Christ.

My emphasis on affectivity and disposition is both theological and practical. It is not meant to be a cure-all or yet another pastoral technique to employ strategically. I contend that a pastoral disposition opened by the moving and shaping nature of divine love, holds great promise for practising the ministry of Jesus Christ imaginatively and tangibly, even within the complexity, secularism and religious indifference of late modernity. Therefore, this thesis argues for the primacy of spiritual affections lived attuned to, thus orientated towards, God's own relational disposition of seeking and enfolding love (Luke 15:1-32).<sup>4</sup> It is my contention that such a graced premise of the Christian life is not well understood or practiced in contemporary environments.

As indicated above, to be spiritually affected (*affectus*), refers to an open proclivity of the mind, heart, and will.<sup>5</sup> In sum, these are affections that are consciously inclined toward, thus creatively responsive to, the self-giving love (*affectio*) of God that is revealed in Christ and gifted by the Holy Spirit. Foremost, then, they are *gracious* affections, operative and *felt* in the continual forming and re-forming of the Christian minister, and present redemptively within the ambiguity and messiness

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<sup>4</sup> The choice and use of the descriptors, "attuned" and "attunement" throughout the thesis is deliberate. Various voices within the Christian tradition also speak of "ordered" or "orientated" spiritual / religious affections, however it is the musical, thus soulful imagery that attracts my use of the root word and its derivations. This is expressed by Yves Congar in the third epigraph that began this Introduction which arguably had its origin in the thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar in his *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. 1. Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982): "The concept of attunement (*Stimmung*) embraces both the aesthetic and theological elements. An existence is envisaged which is like an instrument tuned by the Spirit: at the breath of the Spirit, the instrument like the Aeolian harp rings out in tune. This is an attunement (*Gestimmtsein*) which is a concordance (*Übereinstimmung*) with the rhythm of God himself and therefore an assent (*Zustimmung*) not only to God's Being, but to his free act of willing which is always being breathed by God upon man." 244.

<sup>5</sup> Here and throughout defined and understood as an "inherent or inclined quality of mind and character" or "an inclination or tendency to do" though within the theological nuance that a truly spiritual affection is naturally, if not courageously expressive. This is also indicative of "a personal cast of temper or intellect." See, *Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 233.

of human existence. As such, spiritual affections resist tight and easy definition, even in a body of work such as this. For rarely do they manifest themselves by means of predictability, through religious certitudes or even sound practices of belief. Rather they are a mirroring of God, yet in a graduated, imperfect way. As the poet and seasoned farmer Wendell Berry wrote wisely at the conclusion of a poem about life's painful ambiguities, "We live the given life, and not the planned."<sup>6</sup> This is the fluid domain and context for the spiritually affected heart and mind to express itself, either individually or corporately.

By emphasising the interrelatedness of the received love of God and the affective shaping of the pastoral disposition, it can be argued that I am stopping short, ignoring the pointy and tangible end of ministry practice, so to speak. That is, commissioned pastoral ministry is commonly defined by such practices as preaching, presiding at the sacraments, worship leading, teaching for faith formation and pastoral care.<sup>7</sup> I have also wondered about this seeming sense of impracticality. However, I have also learned by experience over a period of thirty years as an ordained Minister of the Word in the Uniting Church in Australia, that the pastoral disposition is *everything*. And while such a bold and conclusive statement need not be taken literally, I believe it should be taken seriously.

To be clear at this point, when writing of the pastoral disposition, I am not speaking about mere persona, i.e., a social or institutional façade of role and function. Enactments of such potentially superficial ways of being are short lived and potentially harmful to self and others.<sup>8</sup> By way of defining contrast, the renovating indwelling of God's grace—an abiding and deepening affective

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<sup>6</sup> Wendell Berry, *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*. "Ye Must Be Born Again III." (Berkeley, California: Counterpoint, 1998), 178.

<sup>7</sup> See, Kathleen Cahalan, *Introduction to Ministry Practice* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010), 69-97. Cahalan's listing is longer than this. It is inclusive of teaching, preaching, care, prayer and worship, social mercy and justice and leadership and administration. These are all based on the ministry practices of Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> See, Parker J. Parker, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: JosseyBass, 2000), 9-36. See also, Eugene Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 204-217.

capacity within the practitioner—empowers the given tasks, fills and shapes pastoral encounters, challenges personal attitudes and behaviours, animates liturgical gestures with courage, and flows with the ways of Christ’s justice and restorative compassion. In other words, the pastoral disposition is dependent upon a continual tuning of spiritual affections in light of, and in response to, the freely given love of God, revealed in Christ (John 1:14) and given through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5).

Bernard Bonowitz, OCSO, describes such a derived and attuned affectivity (*affectus*) in terms of the intentionality of spiritual development. It is a broad definition, but his emphasis on unfolding, forward movement is critical to the thesis as a whole:

*Affectus* is the capacity to be sensitive to reality; you can be affected by what is outside you. It is vulnerability. Even grammatically it is passive. It starts out as a passive principle. It is the disposition to be touched and moved by what is in and around you. We could say in modern terms that the opposite of *affectus* would be rigidity: where an individual gives a hard and fast definition to himself and his environment and insists on it at all costs. Bernard’s term for this rigidity is *obduritia cordis*, hardness of heart... [he] says this is the worst of all vices because God cannot get to you; nothing can get to you. You have made yourself inaccessible to reality... An *affectus* with a capacity to be moved is the best possibility.<sup>9</sup>

Bonowitz’s stress on vulnerable self-offering is not easily quantified or even measurable by today’s accumulative educational and employment standards. Yet it is real and lasting, often veiled due to the integral and pervasive nature of pastoral humility. Spiritual affectivity is of genuine pastoral gravitas because it demonstrates the capacity of the Christian minister to be moved and relationally affirmed by divine love and, significantly for this dissertation, its pastoral inhabitation can similarly move and affirm those who have entrusted themselves to its oversight. The spiritual engagement of the affections in and for pastoral ministry encourages others towards an enlargement of their own graced capacities while also encouraging an audaciousness of hope and

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<sup>9</sup> Bernard Bonowitz, *Saint Bernard’s Three Course Banquet: Humility, Charity and Contemplation in the “De Gradibus”* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013), 45. Bonowitz’s stress on *obduritia* corresponds with Charles Taylor’s notion of late-modern “disenchantment.” That is a non-porous, thus non-vulnerable state of being. See, James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 29.

creative participation within the world. In the paraphrased words of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux from one of his *On the Song of Song* sermons, “Filled by such a love as this, what boundary can be set for the seeking?”<sup>10</sup> In other words, it is love that frees vocational desire to give of itself with no small amount of daring.

Therefore, through the mystical eloquence of Bernard (circa 1090-1153), a medieval monk and abbot, and via the beauty of vision in the meticulous writings of the New England puritan pastor, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), my task is to exposit the following research question in conversation with more recent theological writers and pastoral practitioners, myself included: *Are spiritual affections, as defined and attested to across a breadth of the Christian tradition, still of vital importance to pastoral ministries in contemporary contexts?*

## **b) Methodology in outline**

In order to address the above question and achieve my integrative goal, I have devoted a considerable amount of my research to the religious experience and thought of the two above-mentioned reformers of the Christian tradition. Bernard represents a pre-Reformation, monastic voice, whilst Edwards was influenced by European reformed movements specifically expressed within the transported puritan system of English Congregationalism. Echoes of St. John’s gospel, particularly the received teaching of Jesus’ disciples in its pivotal fifteenth chapter, are also a contributing resource to the thesis as a whole.<sup>11</sup> Other New Testament texts, such as the one cited

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<sup>10</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, Vol. IV, trans. Irene Edmonds (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1980), Sermon 84. I.1, 188.

<sup>11</sup> This is hardly surprising, given the theological and spiritual emphasis that both Bernard and Edwards placed on a spiritual participation in God, through Christ and in the Spirit; this being, in essence, their working definition of the unfolding Christian life of missional service and gratitude. Indeed, separated from this gifted and sustained spiritual union with the Holy Trinity, Christianity in their estimation is but a contradiction in terms or, at the very least, a poor imitation of its true identity and calling. The Johannine scholar, C.H. Dodd echoes this thought, though in more positive terms: “John... makes use of the strongest expressions for union with God that contemporary religious language provided, in order to assure his readers that he does seriously mean what he says: that through faith in Christ we may enter into a personal community of life with the eternal God, which has the character of agape, which is essentially supernatural and not of this world, and yet plants its feet firmly in this world.” As quoted by Michael J. Gorman, *Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018), xv.

at the outset of this introduction are drawn on to reinforce or further elucidate the pastoral theologies of Bernard and Edwards in their potential application. Each reformer knew the Christian scriptures broadly and intimately well, often referring to pivotal texts that they measured their thoughts against. These are referred to numerous times throughout this dissertation.

As an extensive exercise in theological reflection, this thesis reflects a circuitous yet dynamic methodology I have been developing over the past seven years in my role as a classroom and on-line lecturer in ministry practice at Uniting College for Leadership and Theology in South Australia. Gleaned from respected writers and resources referenced in the first chapter, at this juncture it suffices to suggest that the lived, locative and affected experience of God's grace is a valid and vitalising entry point into serious biblical, theological, historical and cultural discourse. Indeed, the often-unexpected experience of divine grace is, I believe, the very *substance and means* of theological reflection, not merely an important [re]source of it.

Although human experience has often been dismissed in reactionary periods of modernity for its seeming lack of objectivity or tendency towards the romantic, it is now the case that rigorous reflection on lived experience is seen to be a trustworthy teacher and guide in numerous disciplines. Significantly, it has found its way into theological academic conversation, primarily through feminist cultural critiques<sup>12</sup> and by way of a general re-appreciation of the Christian mystical or spiritual tradition. Correspondingly, lived experience is also a respectful conversation partner with broader cultural and environmental realities. As such, it seeks not to impose, but to understand and frame both human meaning and purpose in existential terms and not only conceptual ones.

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<sup>12</sup> For example, see, Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1993), 61-75.

Therefore, the graced religious experiences of Bernard, Edwards—and myself to a consciously limited degree—is woven into the text of this thesis in accord with my chosen heuristic method of research and writing.<sup>13</sup> This methodology is further explicated in the latter part of Chapter One. However, here is an opportune point to quote Clark Moustakas, a key figure in the method's formulation:

(Heuristic) refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. Heuristic processes incorporate creative self-processes and self-discoveries.<sup>14</sup>

Framing this introduction five years after beginning the demanding processes of doctoral research and writing, Moustakas' insight resonates with my own methodological approach. I have learned much on many interrelated levels, not least of which has been a growth into the gratuity of divine love<sup>15</sup> that I have further sought to understand from a theological, historical and pastoral standpoint. It has also been an enriching journey into the gift of self-directed education. Indeed, the unfolding congruence of method and content, has been both surprising and guiding, particularly given this project's intuitive and scattered beginnings. Appendix 1, an edited Research Journal that I kept in the latter part of 2015, is descriptive and, I sense, illuminative of this life and educationally broadening process.

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<sup>13</sup> From the Greek *heuriskein* meaning literally, "to discover and find."

<sup>14</sup> Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology and Applications* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990), 9.

<sup>15</sup> Or, in the striking words of Wesley J. Wildman, *God Is... Meditations on the Mystery of Life, the Purity of Grace, the Bliss of Surrender and the God beyond God* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2019), 7: "... we are not always crushed, and deliverance does find us. This inexplicable act of *capricious love*—of free divine grace—is the miracle upon which our continual survival depends every minute of every day." (Emphasis added).

### c) Literary sources

In terms of project-defining research, my major literary sources are a selective breadth of primary texts from Bernard's and Edwards' writings. It has been my aim to read their own words so as to better understand theological and pastoral perspectives in light of their own unique historical and social contexts. It helps that both were preachers of the Christian gospel. It is a genre of communication I know professionally, notwithstanding the marked difference in form and world view. This familiarity with, and fondness for, the pastoral art of preaching partly explains a given thesis chapter on a germane sermon in each pastoral reformer's extensive collection.<sup>16</sup>

These primary sources include translated works of Bernard of Clairvaux from Latin to English. Specifically, *On the Song of Songs* volumes I-IV (containing Sermon 18, "The Two Operations of the Spirit," the literary focus of Chapter Three); *On Loving God; Treatise on Consideration; On Conversion; On Humility and Pride; Sermons on Advent and Christmas; Concerning Grace & Free Will; Sermons for Lent and the Easter Season*. Saint Benedict's *Rule* in various translations and even paraphrase will also be referred to in the context of Bernardine writings.

(Given the repeated use of Bernard's commentary *On the Song of Songs*, following a full citation in the footnotes, I will designate the volume, chapter, section, sub-section and volume page number. For example, I, 18.III.4, 135 refers to, *On the Song of Songs*, volume 1, chapter 18, section 3, sub-section 4, volume page number, 135).

The major resource for Edwards' writings is the Yale University twenty-three volume *Works of Jonathan Edwards*. The written works of Edwards frequently referred to throughout the thesis will be: *Religious Affections; The Great Awakening; Discourse on the Trinity, Treatise on Grace; Ethical*

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<sup>16</sup> I am indebted to Fr. Michael Casey, monk of Tarrawarra Abbey, Victoria for this insightful suggestion.

*Writings (Charity and its Fruits); The Spirit of the True Saints is a Spirit of Divine Love; A Personal Account; Sermons and Discourses 1730-1738* (containing “A Supernatural and Divine Light” which is the literary focus of Chapter Five).

(Following an initial full citation of the particular volume, editor and sermon / treatise I will then use the common abbreviation of *WJE* followed by the volume number and page number. E.g., “Religious Affections,” *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, 323 will thereafter be cited as, *WJE* 2:323).

All biblical quotes are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, 2007 edition unless specified. Edwards used the King James Version (1611) and Bernard predominately used the Jerome Latin Vulgate or paraphrased the translation within his writings.

Important secondary sources for the contemporary reading and monastic application of Bernard are from key monastic authors, such as Michael Casey, Jean Leclercq, Thomas Merton, Charles Dumont and Bernard Bonowitz. The contemporary biographical survey, Adriann H. Bredero is referenced frequently. The significant theological summary by the Etienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard* is also referenced a number of times. *Cistercian Studies* is a current journal and was an important resource.

Secondary sources regarding Jonathan Edwards abound and that is reflected in my numerous citations, many of those authors and works published relatively recently. Edwards scholarship has flourished in the last fifty years, corresponding with the full publication of the voluminous and exacting Yale collection. Of major importance to this thesis is the definitive biography and subsequent writings of George Marsden. Also, the various editors of Edwards’ Yale works are authoritative voices, John E. Smith (vol. 2, 1959) in particular.

Kyle Strobel is of note due to his visual and distinctively aesthetic interpretation of Edwards' theology. Coupled with his novel approach is his preparedness to take Edwards' thought into ecumenical environments and personally contrast his writings with that of the Catholic contemplative theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, to whom I refer a number of times in the final chapter of the thesis. Richard B. Steele's doctoral dissertation, *"Gracious Affection" and "True Virtue" According to Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley*, was a key text in my early research. *Jonathan Edwards (online) Journal* issuing out of Yale is a highly credible and current journal, thus was useful in my research.

So far as a contemporary thought and pastoral practice is concerned, I have primarily focussed on the practical theology writings of Andrew Root in contrast to that of Kathleen Cahalan. Of interest to me as a practicing pastoral theologian—and whilst writing Chapter's Six & Seven of the thesis—a certain gravitational pull took me beyond modern practical theologians and back to those who have reliably inspired my theological and pastoral reflections previously, viz. the Patristics, John Calvin, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, von Balthasar and perhaps most notably, Catherine LaCugna through her ground breaking work, *God For Us* (1991). In my considered opinion, and perhaps largely offered here as an aside, the caricatured divide between systematic and practical theology doesn't need to exist. There are still many who model a prayerful synthesis of reaching thought and compassionate, wise praxis.

And finally, given the subject matter of spiritual affections and theological readings of given realities, both a creative and imaginative grammar of poetics will find its way into this thesis at appropriate stages, albeit in modest and edited form.

## d) Chapter content and progression

Chapter One is broad in scope yet the key to all that follows. That is, the phenomenon of affect and affective responses to life are universal to the human experience, whether they be constructive, ethical, destructive, immoral, creative, imaginative or neutral. Cultural theorists are cited, particularly in relation to the “autonomy of affect.” Such an observable autonomy becomes a phenomenological bridge to the theological world of Christian faith that confesses, “We love because he [God] first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

This initial chapter also seeks to introduce and define key concepts of the thesis, namely, “spiritual affections” and the “pastoral disposition.” As intimated earlier in this Introduction, their fluid and unfolding nature makes this task more difficult than it first sounds. Also, the explorative nature of theological reflection that fully integrates human experience is discussed. The chapter then concludes by more fully introducing and demonstrating the heuristic research method being employed throughout the thesis.

Chapter Two is a biographical sketch of Bernard’s monastic way of life and theological survey of his pastoral writings. The chapter introduces Bernard as an experiential theologian who displays affective artistry through his pastorally attentive and attuned words. The desirous love of God as revealed in Christ the Word and sealed in the human heart by the gifting of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5) is the core of Bernard’s dispositional (relational) understanding of the Christian life and of its constituent, thus affective practice of ministry to others.

Chapter Three focuses on one sermon, “The Two Operations of the Spirit.” It is the eighteenth sermon within Bernard’s corpus of eighty-six in *On the Song of Songs*, an allegorical reading and exposition of the canticle, *The Song of Songs*. Considered by many to be a Western literary

masterpiece, Bernard's commentary was written in Latin yet with a lyrical French accent.<sup>17</sup>

Consequently, pertinent aspects of translation from the Latin text are highlighted and considered.

"The Two Operations of the Spirit" asserts the infusive nature of divine love that in Bernard's theological eloquence is complementary, yet necessarily prior to the effusive nature of its pastoral and missional expression. Within the sermon, Bernard does not hold back in his criticism of those in leadership within the church who, "presume to teach what they have not yet grasped." It is a relevant polemic of functional or spiritually affect-less pastoral practice, hence important to the thesis topic and question at hand.

Chapter Four mirrors the first chapter on Bernard, in that elements of Jonathan Edwards' life and thought pertinent to the thesis topic and question are summarised. A particular focus is given to Edwards' recollected conversion experience that lifts him out of a culturally common "notional" understanding of the Christian faith, into a deep and enfolding sense of God's gloriousness and beauty finding a home within his own soul. This redemptive, participatory experience before and within the expressive personal nature of Holy Trinity shapes all his theologising and its pastoral application. Indeed, the "happy" relational nature of the Godhead becomes his working vision for the Christian Church and all its ministries.<sup>18</sup> Attention in this chapter is also given to Edwards' mature and summative work, *Religious Affections*. Three of the twelve listed affections described by Edwards are examined with a view to contemporary consideration and possible application.

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<sup>17</sup> An aside offered to me by Fr. Michael Casey in October 2015.

<sup>18</sup> See, Rhys S. Bezzant, *Jonathan Edwards and the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 65-66. Bezzant quotes the Edwards scholar Krister Sairsingh in this context: "Since the love which binds the Trinity together is the same love which binds the church to the Son and the saints to each other, we can rightly conclude that the structure of the relationship which constitutes the glory of God or God's internal fullness is the same structure which constitutes the reality of the church... The re-presentation of the societal and relational structure of God's trinitarian life in the community of the saints, is, in a manner of speaking, the visibility of God in the world." 66.

Chapter Five focuses upon a formative sermon Edwards preached in 1734 and re-edited for broader, tract circulation. “A Divine and Supernatural Light” not only seeks to return puritan theology towards the reformed emphasis of God’s initiating grace and human dependence upon it, but Edwards also appeals to the promise of spiritual participation in God’s goodness and beauty. This refers to a highly sensate, existential and unitive experience of the Christian faith in contrast to a contractual sense of moral obligation. In short, this distinctive sermon raises the potentially positive role of the affections when progressively attuned towards the divine vision of relational harmony, thus dispositional and expressive beauty alive within the world.

Chapter Six seeks to link applicable threads of theological and pastoral insight within the writings of Bernard and Edwards. I describe that synthesis as, “The gift of participation (2 Peter 1:4) within the relational nature of God through the unifying operation of the Spirit (Romans 5:5) who both creates and sustains a pastoral disposition of desirous and graced faith.” This is the ‘golden’ thread upon which the chapter is then woven.

Central to this distillation of thought, is that affective pastoral ministry is relationally expressive of the pastoral action of God, the Holy Trinity who, as redeeming Love, is continuously operative within the world. Such a faith conviction remains in tension with contemporary explication and imitative pastoral practices, wherein human agency has arguably taken centre stage, diminishing the transformative potential of spiritual affect, and thus undervaluing the redemptive quality of a spiritually affected disposition.

In light of the preceding discussion and argument, Chapter Seven lists six key pastoral dispositions arising out my reading of Bernard and Edwards and these are interfaced with more contemporary voices. These are also consistent with my own unfolding pastoral and personal experience. They

are: *Humility, Spiritual Longing, Listening with the Ear of the Heart, Wise and Discerning Bearing, Artistic Leanings and Movements of Compassion.*

My contention throughout this chapter is that a spiritually affected disposition is by theological definition, highly engaged and imaginatively active in its missional stance. Or, echoing Bernard, the infusive love of God is simultaneously its ready effusion. However, as he also stresses, “First be filled, then control the outpouring.” This wise, spiritual ordering offers great potential, I believe, in regard to the education and ongoing formation of those called to pastoral ministry in the present complex and culturally ambivalent times. It may well mean that the Christian Church’s greatest resources for faith renewal are not competencies and an efficient skills base. Paradoxically, faith renewal could actually arise from a *broken hearted* thus genuinely receptive capacity to bear Christ’s cruciform love and justice to one another and to the world of God’s making.

*Affective relationship to God in Christ Jesus is the totality of spiritual life. Love of God surpasses in importance all the worthy and more immediate goals preachers proclaim: religious observance, keeping the commandments...The difficulty of proposing a love-based religion is that such religion needs to draw life from within... How can anyone be initiated into the mysteries of the spiritual world who steadfastly refuses to quit – be it ever so briefly – the world of tangible reality?*

**Michael Casey, monk of Tarrawarra**<sup>1</sup>

*'The light within,' I think, means affection, affection as motive and guide. Knowledge without affection leads us astray. Affection leads, by way of good work, to authentic hope.*

**Wendell Berry**<sup>2</sup>

*Sometimes, at moments you least expect and for reasons not necessarily explicable, a quiet prompting can well up from the murk of the unconscious. It is clear and compelling and comes from who knows where, but there it is in front of you, undeniable. It could be called intuition or a gut feeling, but might it not be information from those depths of your being where the Divine operates?*

**Bruce Cockburn**<sup>3</sup>

*Affectivity is not optional, but compulsory.*

**Donovan O. Schaefer**<sup>4</sup>

## Chapter One

### The potentiality of the affections in life & faith

#### 1.1 Introduction and trajectory

Over the course of this chapter I will develop foundational understandings of spiritual affections in close and working relation to expressive dispositions of love and mercy. These insights will be initially drawn from a phenomenological viewpoint and then considered by way of biblical and theological perspectives. In order to do this, I will make reference to recent cultural theorists, interfacing recent research regarding the universal nature of affect with Christian faith confessions chiefly concerned with the redemptive actions of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Casey, *Strangers to the City: Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of Saint Benedict* (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2013), 146.

<sup>2</sup> Wendell Berry, *It all Turns on Affections: The Jefferson Lecture and Other Essays* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2012), 35.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Cockburn, *Rumours of Glory: A Memoir* (New York: Harper Collins, 2014), 520.

<sup>4</sup> Donovan O. Schaefer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 14.

I will then further introduce the thesis topic and question at hand, positively framing the affecting nature of grace upon the pastoral disposition. I will then seek to establish a Christian anthropology defined not by thought and action but in expressed desire and by means of rigorous reflection upon experience. To conclude, I will introduce the heuristic principles of my research and writing method in relation to the thesis topic and question at hand.

## **1.2 Jane Campion: “... that gesture was very touching, very moving.”**

Jane Campion is a filmmaker, an artist. Widely respected, she has consistently demonstrated an ability to conceive and portray story lines notable for their stirring, aesthetic and, at times, disturbing qualities. *The Piano* (1994) is her iconic piece, yet other significant movies and, of late, the television series, *Top of the Lake* (2013, 2016), bear witness to a certain imaginative genius. In 2008, Campion wrote, produced and directed *Bright Star*, a film about the English romantic poet John Keats and his beloved Fanny Brawne. Critically acclaimed yet not so popularly received, the released DVD of the film included a mini documentary entitled *Working with Jane*.<sup>5</sup>

In the documentary piece, Campion speaks of a creative hiatus of some four years, describing it as “my work at the time in which I was doing nothing.” Her hiatus ended one day in an isolated paddock when a group of six or more horses meandered past where she was picnicking. A mare stopped and made her way over to a picnic bag looking for a treat of sugar or something similar.

Campion describes the scene:

It was a problem for her to open it. And I watched her open the flap of my bag with her hoof—just moved it over—and then very gently put her nose into the bag...and I think something in that gesture was very touching, very moving for me, because it was tender and delicate and gentle, and so I thought, that’s what’s interesting to me now, that’s the sort of work I want to do.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Bright Star*, Hopscotch Entertainment, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, “The Documentary: *Working with Jane*.”

By Campion's own admission, *Bright Star* had its genesis in a seemingly obscure moment of noticing that gave rise to fresh glimpses of possibility. In other words, she was affected by the scene played out before her in the paddock, and her attentiveness to it led to a creative synergy for the future. And whilst Campion's experience is illustrative of, if not analogous to, this particular project, it is not meant to be totally descriptive of it. I would be doubtful that Campion would ascribe corresponding notions of spiritual affect and related spiritual practice to her own life context.

Rather, my attraction to her otherwise ordinary narrative is its accessibility, both conceptually and experientially, from which I can begin to locate a particularity of theological perspective and practice. In sum, Jane Campion's stirring of affections, that is, her willing alignment to the given affect, resulted in a significant artistic vision and creative investment. Indeed, Campion's matter-of-fact narrative illustrates something of the latent power of affect in daily, 'ordinary' guise.

Therefore, what I would describe via Campion's experience as sequential yet interrelated steps of affective capacity, attraction, attunement and vocational intensity, offer an interpretative lens through which to establish a common anthropological reference point, thereby strengthening the veracity of the theological assertions made throughout the course of this dissertation. For in it, I will contend that theology and human experience do not need to be viewed as mutually exclusive categories of knowledge. There is, I contend, a hospitable and natural meeting point between theology and human experience and it is located in the commonality and shared impact of the affections.

### 1.3 The commonality and potential of affected human experience

Attentive and responsive human experience, as illustrated by the Jane Campion narrative above, is arguably the underlying context and guide for any substantive exercise of theological reflection, such as this thesis seeks to be.<sup>7</sup> For theology, as I will seek to describe and demonstrate through my chosen research method and writing, functions most honestly from within the realm of life's given and often surprising realities, thus helping to shape subsequent expressions of a grounded and explorative faith. Theology as a discipline cannot be true to its relational, evolving self in a purely conceptual, static vacuum that it has often inhabited.<sup>8</sup> For when framed primarily in metaphysical or conceptual terms, it grows increasingly unresponsive to what is most tangible and pressing within common life, becoming a caricature of itself in the process. In abstract form, God is then readily reduced to propositional truths or obdurate ethics. This then means that what originated as a *way* of communal, saving faith (Acts 9:2) becomes yet another ideology to protect, fight about and insensitively promulgate.<sup>9</sup> Practiced in like manner, the Christian faith becomes—ironically—the antithesis of its founder's example (John 5:39-40).

Therefore, whilst human experience—or more specifically, interpretive reflection upon graced experience—will not dominate the following discussion, it is an integral part of it due to the ontic nature of affect and its objective force of encounter.<sup>10</sup> True to the heuristic methodology I am employing and will further describe at chapter's end, my own spiritual experience is offered in

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<sup>7</sup> See, Rev. Gordon Wild, <https://vatfe.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/role-of-experience-in-theological-reflection.pdf> viewed on 20/10/17.

<sup>8</sup> See, Denis Edwards, *Human Experience of God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983): "When I speak of experience of God, I will always mean pre-conceptual experience. God always transcends our senses and our intellects... The concept of pre-conceptual experience allows us to speak of a real human awareness of God who yet remains always incomprehensible to our intellects. It is... precisely as mystery that we experience God's presence and action." 13.

<sup>9</sup> See, Brian E. Daley, "A Mystery to share in: The trinitarian perspective of the new Catechism," *Communio* (Fall, 1994), 409-436.

<sup>10</sup> Edwards, *Human Experience of God*: "The concept of experience as the product of an intersection or an encounter makes it clear that experience has its objective side. The reality encountered, the person who is having the experience, and the actual meeting between the two are clearly objective realities. At the heart of experience is the moment of encounter which is quite objective." 8.

selective parts, speaking as one who has also been encountered by the unsolicited, surprising grace of God. As such, I am a glad recipient and purveyor of divine grace whilst at the same time recognising the value of rigorous interrogation of these encounters and a needed wisdom of discernment so far as their life-application is concerned.

## 1.4 Principles of affect and the affections:

### a) The autonomy of affect and affective capacity

Cultural theorists of affect and those of the Christian tradition who have written about the spiritual affections share common ground about affect's attention-grabbing and alignment-seeking nature, irrespective of religious or non-religious assumptions. Therefore, a given affect, perhaps without even being fully comprehended, can have a powerfully shaping role within individuals and societies as a whole; a role that is potentially destructive,<sup>11</sup> constructive and with a breadth of neutral ground in between.<sup>12</sup>

The above principle of attraction is particularly true of the advertising and fashion industry that relies heavily upon the bodily and commercial impact of affect for subsequent sales.<sup>13</sup> The logical difference between the two interpretative worlds (phenomenological and theological) is that affect theorists work within the bounds of cultural phenomenology, meaning that questions of

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<sup>11</sup> The love of the German "fatherland" in the 1930's or a compulsive, blind patriotism of any kind are obvious examples of how a passionately expressed affect on a religious / socio / political scale can be cynically utilised with destructive, even evil results. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's writings from that period, most notably *Life Together* (New York: HarperOne, 1954), contrasts the leader of a community grounded in the life-harmonising Word, through the Spirit, with the inflated spirit of the "wish-dreamer" who leads by derisive power and influence. 26-28. See also, Donovan O. Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 120-146. In this chapter, Schaefer discusses "American Islamophobia" from the perspective of the "affective turn." This 'turn' is powerfully expressed as a socially inhabited hatred born of, and sustained by, ordinary, daily affects. Hence it is a viscerally charged and *animalistic* "economy of hate."

<sup>12</sup> Striking also is the convergence of descriptive language related to affect. For example, "encounter," "potential" and "intensity" have the breadth of meaning and a certain capacity to cross language/cultural/theological boundaries.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Wissinger, "Always on Display: Affective Production in the Modelling Industry" in, *The Affective Turn: Theorising the Social* editors. Patricia Ticineto Clough with Jean Halley (London: Duke University Press, 2007): "... to work with affect is to work with something volatile and difficult to control. There is a certain "irrationality to affective investment," and yet, in the affective economy, value is produced through enlivening, capacitating, and modulation affect. In such an economy, a primary goal of production is to stimulate attention and motivate interest by whatever means are possible, to produce affect in a volatile and or turbulent situation... Thus, while the reigning ideas of what a model could and should look like seem to be very stringent and uniform, in practice, they incorporate a variability of elements into the process to stimulate attention in the volatile world of affect production." 238.

transcendence—the possibility of affect being expressive of a transcendent source—is not considered. This is understandable, as any theological question or premise would be duly speculative, that is, beyond quantifiable observation.

Whereas for the Christian theologian, spiritual affect, confessed to be life-stirring movements of the Holy Spirit, presupposes a self-communicative, beneficent and transcendent Good, Truth and Beauty. Indeed, as the two pastoral reformers to be examined in this study— Bernard of Clairvaux and Jonathan Edwards—are eager to cite at every given opportunity, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Romans 5:5b). Such a freely given love (affect), in their experience and thought, is divinely initiated and potentially redemptive in a myriad of contextual and vocational applications.

Of foundational importance to this written project and consistent within otherwise radically different disciplines, affect is *a given*. It lies before, beyond and outside of human contrivance. In fact, affect is autonomous in its encounter with persons and circumstance meaning that human initiative cannot generate its arrival nor determine its departure.<sup>14</sup> So far as human agency is concerned, then, it is more a matter of bodily capacity, contingent only upon a dispositional state of awareness.<sup>15</sup> As a result, affect can be experienced or not consciously experienced. It can be noticed or go relatively unnoticed. It can be acted upon or not acted upon. In short, affect is not an imposition of an exterior will upon another for conformity’s sake. Affect comes and goes freely and interplays within innate freedoms of choice. Therefore, it cannot be held captive to any choices made or conclusions formed. And in this focal context, the affect theorist Brian Massumi states:

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<sup>14</sup> See, Brian Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” *Cultural Critique*, No. 31, ‘The Politics of Systems and Environments, Part II’ (Autumn, 1995): 83-109. Massumi’s article was considered to be ground-breaking at the time of writing and has remained an important point of reference for affect theorists ever since.

<sup>15</sup> Australian indigenous wisdom speaks about the listening and radically open disposition of ‘dadirri.’ See, <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/education/deep-listening-dadirri> viewed on 19/09/18.

Affects are *virtual synaesthetic perspectives* anchored in (functionally limited by) the actually existing, particular things that embody them. The *autonomy* of affect is its participation in the virtual. *Its autonomy is its openness*. Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is. Formed, qualified, situated perceptions and cognitions fulfilling functions of actual connection or blockage are the *capture* and closure of affect.<sup>16</sup>

In less technical terms, the autonomy of affect is its potential gifting. Autonomy in this context is not a predetermination. Rather, as impulse, it remains open-ended, thus invitational.

### **b) The autonomy of affect and affective attraction**

Returning to our initial case study of Jane Campion to help ‘ground’ the above propositions of Massumi, although the film maker had capacity to notice the affect created by the mare’s gentle actions and was subsequently responsive to it, she did not manufacture or coerce the momentary sensation of being moved. In the midst of an otherwise common human experience—though an unmistakably aesthetic one—affect happened to her and, arguably within the mystery of all things, *for* her. In this latter sense, a theological rendering of affect’s autonomy is its sheer gratuitousness, present for the sake of a more whole, engaged and explorative way of being. In this context of potential, affect theorists Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth provide an insight that is instructive for this thesis in its entirety. They state:

... these affective moments—at once all-powerful and powerless—do not arise in order to be deciphered or decoded or delineated, but, rather, must be nurtured (often smuggled in or, at other times, through the direct application of pressure) into the lived practices of the everyday as perpetually finer-grained postures for collective inhabitation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” 96. Emphasis in the text is his.

<sup>17</sup> Melissa Gregg & Gregory J. Seigworth, editors, *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). 21. This statement, admittedly void of the spiritual origin of affect is, nevertheless, almost a succinct summary of the present thesis. See also, Scott R. Sanders, “The Force of Spirit,” in *The Force of Spirit* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000). Sanders essay is a highly lucid, non-theological expression about the pressure or *compulsion* of affect. He writes (with no small amount of wonder), “This power is larger than life, although it contains life. It’s tougher than love, although it contains love. It’s akin to the power I sense in lambs nudging the teats of their dams to bring down milk, in the raucous tumult of crows high in trees, in the splendour of leaves gorging on sun. I recognize this force in children puzzling over a new fact, in grown-ups welcoming strangers, in our capacity, young or old, for laughter and kindness, for mercy and imagination. No name is large enough to hold this power, but of all the inadequate names, the one that comes to me now is spirit. I know the risks of using such a churchy name. Believers may find me blasphemous for speaking of the wind that blows through all things without tracing the breath to God. Nonbelievers may find me superstitious for invoking any force beyond gravity, electromagnetism, and the binding energy of atoms. But I must run those risks, for I cannot understand the world, cannot understand my life, without appealing to the force of spirit.” 15.

In theological parlance, such smuggled or pressured moments of significance are invitational of a spiritual quality of life progressively attuned toward the benevolent nature of God. These moments are therefore confessed to be the prompting operations of the Holy Spirit wherein the dynamism of exchange is dependent only upon a trusting inclination of soul, that is, a willing dependency within the mind and heart of the believer.<sup>18</sup> Expressed theologically and deliberately in dispositional terms, such moments and their latent fruitfulness are the result of a grateful expectancy in relation to life's Giver and represents a dynamically hopeful stance of creative and courageous religious faith.<sup>19</sup> In the words of the influential writer on the spiritual life, Jean-Pierre de Caussade, SJ, this radicalised trust means: "If we open our mouths they will be filled. The divine activity permeates the whole universe, it pervades every creature... it goes before them, and it follows them; all they have to do is to let the waves bear them on."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Dependence, so defined and not merely in a functional manner, e.g., a mother bird feeding its infant, but an ultimate dependency which Friedrich Schleiermacher famously defined in these terms: "... faith in God, which was nothing but the certainty concerning the feeling of absolute dependency, as such, i.e. as conditioned by a Being placed outside of us, and us expressing our relation to that Being." Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 1999), 68. See also, Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): "Religion's essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling. It wishes to intuit the universe, wishes devoutly to overhear the universe's own manifestations and actions, longs to be grasped and filled by the universe's immediate influences in childlike passivity... Religion breathes there where freedom itself has once more become its nature." 22-3. Finally, on this point of ultimate dependency, see Michael Casey, *Grace: On the Journey to God* (Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2018), 21-22. Casey links the thought of Schleiermacher to that of the mystical tradition which is prepared to live in the creative tension of being suspended between heaven and earth, the gravitational pull of earth making the demanding, yet graced journey towards God not an act of intellectual assent but one of *affectus*. Only such a depth of ultimate dependence is capable of the transformative and faith-filled journey.

<sup>19</sup> This will be an important consideration throughout, elucidated by different authors using different terms, yet all indicative of a reaching, leaning posture toward the dynamism of transcendence within the immanence of life. In the mind of the Reformed theologian and philosopher, Paul Tillich, it represents an open stance—thus a faith / life trajectory—before Transcendence (Spirit) upon which a desired human self-transcendence is utterly dependent. See, Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Vol. 3): *Life and the Spirit. History and the Kingdom of God*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963): "Religion was defined as the self-transcendence of life under the dimension of spirit." 96.

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Pierre de Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2008), 7. Caussade (1675-1751) was a French Jesuit priest whose paradigmatic point of reference—as is the case for many influential catholic writers—is the virginal Mary: "Their [those who have well lived the spiritual life] minds, incessantly animated by the impulsion of divine grace, turned imperceptibly to each new duty that presented itself by the permission of God at different hours of the day. Such were the hidden springs by which the conduct of Mary was actuated... Her answer to the angel when she said, "Let it be for me according to your word," contained all the mystic theology of her ancestors to whom everything was reduced, as it is now, to the purest, simplest submission of the soul to the will of God." 3-4.

### c) The autonomy of affect and affective attunement

As someone introduced to the rhythmical movements of the ocean at an early age, learning the art of catching a wave either by body, board and now kayak, I understand viscerally de Caussade's analogy. For there exists a critical moment in gauging the lift of swell and timing a run before its surge when human effort is no longer required. Indeed, an over investment of exertion or control can result in an embarrassing undoing. And not only to a successful ride, but to the wonder and joy of participating in something far bigger than oneself. Awe is surely an appropriate word to use in this context, it being an ancient word that has its origins in reverential interactions with the divine.<sup>21</sup>

The above wave-catching analogy seeks to be descriptive of a potential synergism that exists between the given affect and receptive affections; a co-mingling often described as an experience of ecstasy or flow that is expressed through a beauty of bodily movement. And while it may not first appear to be productive, that is in an economic or ethical sense, it is creative potentially within a broader, life-enhancing sense.<sup>22</sup> The Australian novelist Tim Winton, himself a life-long surfer, draws a similar analogy within his own celebrated art of writing:

That is how I experience writing... I show up. I wait. When some surge of energy finally arrives, I do what I must to match its speed. While I can, I ride its force. For a brief period I am caught up in something special, where time has no purchase, and my bones don't ache and my worries fall away. Then it's all flow. And I'm dancing.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See, "Fear", in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, E-J (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 256-260.

<sup>22</sup> In his book, *Breath* (Camberwell, Victoria: Penguin Press, 2008), Tim Winton writes about the social juxtaposition of normally hard-bitten men, "dancing" and "whooping" across the waves when surfing: "I couldn't have put words to it as a boy, but later I understood what seized my imagination that day. How strange it was to see men do something beautiful. Something pointless and elegant, as though nobody saw or cared." 28.

<sup>23</sup> Tim Winton, *The Boy Behind the Curtain*, (Australia: Penguin Random House, 2016), 135. See also from a more overtly humanistic perspective wherein joyful experience is correlative to religious experience—though any conscious sense of originating source of joy is missing—Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1990): "Yet we have all experienced times when, instead of being buffeted by anonymous forces, we do feel control of our actions, masters of our own fate. On rare occasions that it happens, we feel a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in memory for what life should be like... This is what we mean by *optimal experience*... It is what a painter feels when the colours of the canvas begin to set up a magnetic tension with each other, and a new *thing*, a living form, takes shape in the front of the astonished creator." 3. And further to this, Csikszentmihalyi comments, "... one of the most universal and distinctive features of optimal experience takes place [when]: the people become so involved in what they are doing

The above “dancing” analogy of Winton is therefore indicative of both affective energy and attunement; that is, a sense of participating as a mutually engaged partner in the powerful life-force at play.

#### **d) The autonomy of affect and affective intensity**

A theological affirmation of the gratuitous and redemptive grace continuously operative in the worlds of God’s making,<sup>24</sup> undergirds all of what is to follow. And while such a confession may not initially appear to be able bear a weight of academic scrutiny, it does contain self-evidential truths by virtue of lived and duly examined experience.<sup>25</sup> Within the context of Christian faith, these examined experiences repeatedly offer witness to a recurring veracity of principle:<sup>26</sup> Holy affect, that is, the gifting of redemptive love through the prevenient operations of the Spirit, when noticed and gratefully received, gives demonstrative rise to inhabited, desirous and fruitful ways of being. Significantly for this thesis, and here I am paraphrasing Friedrich Schleiermacher, authentic religious experience has its genesis through intuition and feeling and not primarily via thinking or acting.<sup>27</sup> As I argue in the latter chapters, this theological contention continues to be counter-intuitive to common religious sensibilities that regularly define and frame the Christian life and its pastoral ministries primarily in cognitive, active and effectively measurable terms.

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that the activity becomes spontaneous, almost automatic; they stop being aware of themselves as separate from the actions they are performing.” 53.

<sup>24</sup> Redemptive grace is a deliberate turn of phrase at this juncture. Its operative force, by virtue of the “economic” revelation of God as Trinity in history, is a saving, reconciling and healing one.

<sup>25</sup> Though more will be said in this chapter about methodology, it is my reasoned conviction that rigorous reflection upon experience offers far more than a resource of insight or knowledge. Rather, it represents the very context or grounding for further application of acquired knowledge. In the context of this research, the *evangelical*—literally meaning a substantive of good news—literature explored in and through the sermons / writings of Bernard and the sermons / writings of Jonathan Edwards, is demonstrative of such a distillation of self-authenticating truths gleaned via lived and reflective and reflexive experience.

<sup>26</sup> The monastic tradition, in particular, will be one well-credentialed source of insight within this body of work. “Workshopped” since the third and fourth centuries in various monastic contexts, Christian belief and its expressed life in and through community, has arguably been honed, not to the exclusion of reality and truth but to deepest encounters with such. Father Michael Casey, a monk at Tarrawarra Abbey in Victoria, Australia, is a living example of the distillation of well-articulated monastic wisdom. His globally respected writings on the thought and practice of Bernard of Clairvaux feature in this dissertation.

<sup>27</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion; Speeches*, 22.

## 1.5 The precognition of affect and its relationship to desire

If it is true to say that affect is autonomous in its encountering forms, it is logical to suggest that any attraction to the affective nature of grace is also pre-cognitive.<sup>28</sup> Grace comes not as a concept or an idea to decipher but as an inner movement of spirit to notice or, as is equally possible, to ignore. These movements or suggestions of Spirit could be a surprising sense of consolation in the midst of grief. They might be pangs of deep remorse for hurtful actions against another. It might be a fleeting vision of possibility or the strange confidence that in the midst of illness all will be well, when in fact, life-circumstances are dire. Whatever these affective moments of grace communicate, their mode of encounter is not only pre-cognitive but beyond-cognition. Affect is experienced viscerally and is therefore not dependent upon the vehicular human constructs of language, belief or concept.<sup>29</sup> The affective nature of grace is encountered at the soulful level of desire and manifested through persons in relation to one another, not as a protected and privatised religious experience.

The link between spiritual affect and desire is an important one in the context of this project given that the art of pastoral practice, that is, responsive expressions of love to God and neighbour, are offered in situational and often volatile contexts that defy pure rationality of approach.<sup>30</sup> In light of my own pastoral experience, I believe it true to suggest that one doesn't simply think clearly or

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<sup>28</sup> Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect," 101-106.

<sup>29</sup> Donovan O. Schaefer, *Religious Affects*: "The linguistic fallacy misunderstands religion as merely a by-product of language, and misses the economy of affect – economies of pleasure, economies of rage and wonder, economies of sensation, of shame and dignity, of joy and sorrow, of community and hatred – that are the animal substance of religion and other forms of power." 9-10.

<sup>30</sup> Given that the Gospel of John—more particularly its fifteenth chapter, will be an integrative part of this dissertation—it is relevant to introduce Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus, as an example of affective, thus artful ministry practice. Seemingly at odds with logic or even religious observance, she consistently responds from an affected heart with words and actions reflective of an indwelling and relationally dignifying grace (John 12:3-4). In a more philosophical, contemporary framework, Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity: Thinking About Love & Truth & Justice*, (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1999), describes a Catholic sister caring for patients in a psychiatric hospital who expressed an affective capacity that extended well beyond the great care of the professional staff: "In the nun's case, her behaviour was striking not for the virtues it expressed, or even the good it achieved, but for its power to reveal the full humanity of those whose affliction had made their humanity invisible. Love is the name we give to such behaviour." 20.

strategize their way forward on a daily basis. Rather, simply desiring to be a spiritual presence can clear the way for something beyond oneself to flow through word, action and gesture.

That said, this thesis is not seeking to establish nor promote anti-rational or supernatural principles that would negate human responsibilities of personal integrity, purpose, education and training, ethical behaviour and informed action. To notice spiritual affect at some depth of soul is one thing, to then practice pastoral ministry wisely and imaginatively before and within the swell of its spiritual potential, is quite another. Similar to Jane Campion, the desirous human will does need to be engaged at a necessary depth and commitment to both process and final outcome if an “affective circle” is to be complete. Within the context of the Christian faith, this rarely occurs without a struggle against resistant or indifferent forces such as a spiritual entropy<sup>31</sup> or, more traditionally, *acedia (torpor)*.<sup>32</sup>

For an axiom exists within the history of Christian spiritual practice that wherever grace is operative and potentially life transforming, spiritual resistance often exists in equal measure, wilfully expressing itself through various forms of self-sufficiency.<sup>33</sup> Or, in other more extreme cases, the diabolical is expressed in and through destructive pathologies of narcissism.<sup>34</sup> In both cases, resistance to grace is an assertion of ego that belies the alienating nature of human sin and the communally corrosive patterns of pride. Hence, the wise and ironic words of Rumi, the Sufi

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<sup>31</sup> See, Scott M. Peck, *The Road Less Travelled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth* (London: Rider Book, 1978), 271-277. Peck’s notion of entropy or laziness as being constituent of original sin, corresponds closely to Calvin’s understanding of depravity, that is, a dullness born of the self-deprivation of God’s glory.

<sup>32</sup> See, Kathleen Norris, *Acedia & Me: A Marriage, Monks, and A Writer’s Life* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008).

<sup>33</sup> See, Rowan Williams, “This Christmas, Receive the Gift of Grateful Dependence,” ABC Religion & Ethics, 20 Dec 2016: “As we learn how to be gratefully dependent, we learn how to attend to and respond to the dependence of others. Perhaps by God’s grace we shall learn in this way how to create a society in which real dependence is celebrated and safeguarded, not regarded with embarrassment or abused by the powerful and greedy.”

<sup>34</sup> See, Nina W. Brown, *Coping with Infuriating, Mean, Critical People: The Destructive Narcissistic Pattern* (Westport, Connecticut, London: Praeger Press, 2006): “... the destructive narcissist is empty at the core of self, knows of no other way of being, and assumes that others are as empty as he or she is. This emptiness is terrifying, and many of their actions are attempts to deny, or to prevent awareness of being empty at the core of self.” 28. Also, see, Scott M. Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* (London: Arrow Books, 1988).

mystic of the thirteenth century: "Be helpless, dumbfounded, unable to say yes or no. Then a stretcher will come from grace to gather us up."<sup>35</sup>

The theological conviction thus being that the vulnerable reception of divine love at the seat of the human affections requires not simply a noticing, but a desirous attunement to the relational and healing nature of its Giver. This *self-emptying* relational principle (Philippians 2:1-11) constantly repeated in the writing of Bernard and Edwards, is analogous to the theologically astute poetics of T.S. Eliot whereby to live within the transformative knowledge of transcendent grace(s) one needs to, "...put off sense and notion/you are not here to verify/instruct yourself, or inform curiosity or carry report. You are here to kneel/where prayer has been valid."<sup>36</sup> Desire in this poetic context being the letting go of all that would inhibit or block the divine flow of love, thus further hinder harmonious relational expression.

## **1.6 The pre-emotional nature of affect and its relationship to emotional honesty**

Closely aligned to the principle of pre-cognition outlined above, affect as a visceral perception is also experienced in pre-emotional states. However brief may be the time between the moment of affect and an emotional response, affect remains the key point of integrative and reliable reference for reflection. On this subtle yet important difference between emotion and affect,

Massumi writes:

Emotion is a qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity... It is intensity owned and recognised. It is crucial to theorise the difference between affect and emotion. If some have the impression that it has waned, it is because affect is unqualified. As such, it is not ownable or recognisable, and is thus resistant to critique.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> As quoted by Roger Housden in, *Ten Poems to Change Your Life* (New York: Harmony Books, 2001), 43.

<sup>36</sup> T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding" 1.40, in *Four Quartets* (New York: HBJ Publishers, 1988), 50-51.

<sup>37</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual Movement: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 60-61.

In short, affect is what presents within a given moment, thus being for the receiver an intensity to encounter. It is then something to process at both cognitive and emotional levels. As an originating force, affect can trigger motivating forces of desirous will, as was the case for Jane Campion. For as I suggested earlier, in her case the mare's gentleness was not an imposition upon the psyche but an intense transitory movement of potential, i.e., a latent possibility of creative attunement. Campion herself needed to decide (and embody) what such a trajectory would look like.

Correspondingly, when speaking of the "wind" (*pneuma*) of the Spirit, Jesus was recorded to have said to the figurative religious seeker Nicodemus, "The wind / Spirit blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8). We can infer that spiritual affect is located in autonomous movement of the Spirit in and around us and will not be held captive to either human cognition or emotion. Again, as a figurative religious figure, the person of Nicodemus is presented as one who comes to Jesus "by night," blinded by a religious "sight" (John 9:41), thus held captive to textual or literal belief (John 5:39). The movement of the Holy Spirit, which is no less the gift of God's unifying and truthful love (John 16:13), leads the believer beyond fixed cognitive and emotional states into the very heart and mind of God who is the qualitative and boundary-shattering experience of eternal life (John 17:3).

It is reasonable to suggest, then, that emotions engaged by a particular affect can either track towards a certain congruence of expressive being—as it did for Jane Campion—or they may cause one even to flee from potential states of greater integrative being. An example is the case of a grieving spouse who unexpectedly experiences a painful reminder of their deceased partner's absence months after the funeral and begins to weep in the supportive presence of other family

members. Within such a poignant and moving moment, she forces herself to stop crying, saying to those around her, "I'm sorry, I don't know what has overcome me. I'm alright, really, I am. I need to stay strong for you all."

Obviously, and with all good intention, the above response is offered so as to cause the least amount of concern or discomfort for others and perhaps even to deny the intensity of her own grief. However, it is nevertheless an incongruent response to the hollowing loss of her life-long partner.<sup>38</sup> And whilst this is understandable on the level of social interaction, it can hinder the flow of what is most real, blocking honest and arguably healthy expressions of emotion in self and others.

In sum, the pre-emotional nature of affect can invite an emotional honesty, cum intelligence. This is particularly relevant in the realms of Christian ministry training where theological reflection seeks to delve into the felt experiences of practice, targeting the residue of what most affected the student before, during or after a pastoral event.<sup>39</sup> Perceived and recognised dissonance is a key indicator that congruence of affect and expressed feeling is not occurring sufficiently to the detriment of the student and to the potential harm of those being ministered to.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> That is not to say that affect is non-related to, or contained within, the human experience of loss or grief and therefore expressive as emotions. Rather, such affects are bodily *givens*, existing below or even alongside the emotions. I recall beginning a particularly challenging funeral address due to the tragedy of circumstances by saying, "Grief is bodily." In other words, it is far more than a passing emotion and one very difficult to fully express emotionally due to its embodied, thus intrinsic intensity. Since first penning this footnote, my own father's death has only reinforced my understanding of the autonomy of affect, in that the severe pain of loss comes and goes, almost at whim and even in one's sleep. It cannot be rationalised or controlled.

<sup>39</sup> This being a key process of the pedagogy of Supervised Field Education offered at the Adelaide College of Divinity that I presently oversee and teach. See, "The Art of Theological Reflection," *Ministry Practice Handbook for SFE Students*, editor, Sean Gilbert (Adelaide: ACD, 2015), 10-18.

<sup>40</sup> See, Patricia O'Connell Killen and John de Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2011 reprint), 27-35. Although the above authors do not delineate between affect and human emotions as I have sought to do above, they nevertheless understand the bodily and potentially redemptive nature of honest disclosure. They write: "Feelings we want to avoid we call bad, those we possess we call good. It is not humanly possible, though, to avoid feelings or to experience them on demand. When we conceive of feelings as things that can be avoided or possessed, we distance ourselves from true feeling. This diminishes our person and stunts our capacity to be human because it blocks our ability to reflect." 32.

## 1.7 The potentiality of affect and vocational intensity

Finally, by way of the previously listed and closely related phenomenological principles, it is logical to describe affect as a potentiality or simply as an emergent.<sup>41</sup> According to affect theorists, such descriptions do not guarantee substantive virtue of either the affect or the potential response. Rather, they are indicative of affect as an embodied life-force or movement, whether negative, positive or even benign in essence. On this significant point, Gregg and Seigworth suggest, “...approaches to affect would feel a great deal less like a free fall if our most familiar modes of inquiry had begun with movement rather than stasis, with process always underway rather than a position taken.”<sup>42</sup>

In Jane Campion’s case, the given affect was congruent with an artistic sensibility already guiding her creatively and vocationally. Significantly though, the affect in question—Campion being moved intensely by the beauty and grace of the mare—did spark a strong mixture of desire, imagination and intellect that culminated in a widely acclaimed work of cinema art. Not surprisingly, then, when *Bright Star* was released, its many reviewers and critics spoke in the same dispositional terms Campion employed to describe the mare’s tender and graceful actions. For most, Campion’s film was noteworthy for its aesthetic, gentle and poetic qualities<sup>43</sup> and, for those who worked with her on the movie, her direction of the actors and technicians displayed a similar quality of embodied, empathic and patient interaction.

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<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of “emergence” as a key interface between worlds of neuroscience, biology and theology, see Denis Edwards, *Partaking of God: Evolution, and Ecology* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014), 116-129.

<sup>42</sup> Gregg & Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*, 4. Potential dialogue between cultural studies and a theological position based in an inherent poesis (making), are hopeful at this juncture. Indeed, in light of Gregg and Seigworth’s insightful commentary, the practical implications for theology and ecclesiology are far reaching. For as was stated earlier and is repeated throughout this thesis, faith is not a position to defend, nor is God an immovable object, primarily of human making. Divine being necessarily flows and moves, and that should not come as a surprise. As gift, divine love is what constitutes the Christian life and by extension is what motivates the exercising of ministry in Christ’s name. These two authors possibly have no idea how close they are to the early framers of the key Christian doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity—thus substance of the Christian way of life—whereby the *ecstasis* of relational love is the very the unifying and emerging (processional) nature of God alive in the world.

<sup>43</sup> See, <https://www.sbs.com.au/movies/review/bright-star-review> Viewed 28/9/18.

One can conclude, therefore, that there exists a latent potentiality within any given affect irrespective of a so-called holy or a-holy end. Encountered and engaged desire is arguably what then further shapes and wings the human heart from one life-position to another, giving it creative meaning and vocational purpose.<sup>44</sup> As was clearly stated by Bernard Bonowitz in the Introduction, obduracy of heart and mind stymies the potentiality of affective response, this being particularly so in a spiritual context wherein God can readily be reduced to a fixed idea(ology) and the Christian life so defined by mandated behaviours, with the result that institutionalised religion can destroy rather than mediate the redemptive, thus always emerging nature of divine grace (John 10:10).

By way of a summation regarding the corresponding roles and potential nature of affect, Seigworth and Gregg also state:

Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name given to those forces— visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can otherwise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world’s apparent intractability. Indeed, affect is persistent proof of a body’s never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world’s obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals and invitations.<sup>45</sup>

In sum, the potentiality of affect is its ceaseless trajectory forward. To respond to affect’s “forces” and flow is to move and therefore develop as a thinking and feeling human being. This need not be a positive or constructive development, but it does underline the power of affect personally, socially, politically and religiously.

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<sup>44</sup> Ann Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 1998), 168: “Both the philosopher (Socrates) and the poet (Sappho) find themselves describing Eros in images of wings and metaphors of flying, for desire is a movement that carries yearning hearts from over here to there, launching the mind on a story. In the city without desire such flights are unimaginable. Wings are kept clipped.”172.

<sup>45</sup> Gregg and Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*, 1.

## 1.8 “I desire; therefore, I am”

It has been my repeated experience in the course of this doctoral research, writing and associated public speaking that religious emotionality is often negatively or, at best, cautiously assumed to be synonymous with the spiritual affections. Consequently, spiritual affectivity is often discounted as a reliable base for competent and wise pastoral practice, particularly given the transitory and even fickle nature of human emotions. In one instance, the host of a forum where I was to present an academic paper wondered if I might change my topic title replacing “spiritual affectivity” with “spiritual emotionality” given that, in his mind, they were one and the same and that the prospective audience needed to know more clearly what I was going to speak about.<sup>46</sup>

One could draw certain conclusions from this simple misreading of both theology and the spiritual life. Namely, a still dominant modernist mindset exists, particularly within Protestant circles which locate the word (*logos*) within conceptual or ideological framed and contestable forms. Within this immanent framework of textual-based faith, the chief communicative means of God is assumed to be propositional or didactic, and unambiguously so, thus leaving little opportunity for distortions of biblical truth by means of any introduced subjectivity. In large part, this hermeneutical approach reflects the influential legacy of Cartesian dualism stretching well into late modernity: “I think, therefore, I am (*Cogito, ergo sum*).”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Therefore, not to be trusted, particularly in realms of faith which in essence is a believing or a trusting in something unseen. The default position, in light of an unfamiliarity of spiritual affect and the affections within the Christian tradition, being a heavy (re)reliance on cognition to deal with doubt or ambiguity; modernity, by another name. See, Gregory S. Clapper, “Orthokardia: John Wesley’s Grammar of the Holy Spirit,” in *The Spirit, the Affections and the Christian Tradition*, edited by Dale M. Coulter & Amos Yong, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2016), 259-278: “The difference in terminology between “emotion” talk and “affections and passions” talk, then, was more than a mere verbal difference, more than an updating of quaint language. The realities that these words seek to identify are quite different from one another.” 265.

<sup>47</sup> Cartesian dualism is perhaps best described as the separation of inner and outer worlds, wherein inner one’s perception and the resultant knowing / idea becomes a sure and certain reality to propound or contest with another’s sense of knowing. Arguably this is the foundation of present Western culture and its stress on scientific empiricism, i.e., a knowing defined and practiced by human reason alone; a seeming triumph of the singular mind over the soulful, communal and mysterious dimensions of (human) being. This cultural assumption was illustrated recently by a proffered “scientific” view as to why Uluru in central Australia should

Rene Descartes' dictum still holds significant sway, even over biblical imperatives of the abiding and fruit-bearing religious knowledge of God (John 15:1-5). The lived experience of divine grace which is the catalyst of loving God, neighbour and self with all one's heart, mind and soul (Deuteronomy 6:5, Ps. 119:36-40, Matthew 22:37, Luke 10:27) is understood as primarily, and perhaps exclusively, in cognitive terms. Consequently, the operative Spirit of grace, in close relationship to the living Word (John 16:13) and in existential relation to the human soul (Psalm 42:7a), is often displaced within such a reductionist system. And ironically so, because it is maintained rigorously to the exclusion of transformative holy mystery which / who is locked out, as it were, from rationally protected or bounded religious systems.<sup>48</sup>

The Christian philosopher James K. A. Smith has recently argued for a substantially different assumed anthropology to that described and critiqued above. His anthropology is provocatively framed as "The human person as lover." He writes: "We are what we love, and our love is shaped, primed, and aimed by liturgical practices that take hold of our gut and aim our heart to certain ends."<sup>49</sup> Knowledge of God, according to Smith in his essentially Augustinian theological rendering,<sup>50</sup> is not a derivative of clear or rational thinking. Rather it is born of a surprisingly given and received grace within the yearning depths of the human soul. In sum, knowledge born and nurtured by being intimately known and cared about. Smith adds, "We still get a somewhat stunted anthropology that fails to appreciate that our primordial orientation to the world is not knowledge, or even belief, but love."<sup>51</sup>

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still be able to be climbed by tourists in contradistinction to the wishes of indigenous custodians of the land. In the speaker's mind, this prohibition was but mere "superstition" and therefore morally irrational. ABC Radio, "Australia All Over," 2/6/2019.

<sup>48</sup> "We forget the divine Holy Mystery at our peril. Our broken world dances anxiously amongst the teeth of the dragon, its future unknown. Too often the church sings its dreary songs there, too, having forgotten that the divine is too expansive even for the gospel to capture, foolishly infatuated with the comforting assurance of salvation. To learn to dance with honest terror, with simple wisdom, with disarming delight—this is to live." Wesley J. Wildman, *God Is...*, 8.

<sup>49</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 40.

<sup>50</sup> Smith basis much of his argument upon Augustine's envisaged *City of God* where love and not ideas are the basis for both its faithful and socially constructive life.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

The potentially damaging dualism, wherein faith becomes primarily a cognitive base for effective function, has an immediate and long-term impact on Christian pastoral ministry. Emergent spiritual dispositions of humility, discernment of spirit, compassion, etc., can remain largely uninhabited in the pursuit of concretised objectives, even the Kingdom of God! Conscious expressions of affectivity are thereby often left to artistic faith communities, representatives of which, in my experience at least, have lamented the lack of encouragement offered by the institutional Church so far as the arts and their accessible links to the spiritually affecting life is concerned.<sup>52</sup>

So, rather than “I think, therefore, I am,” an affective basis for faith and vocational expression would affirm the dictum, “I desire, therefore, I am.” Such a deliberate reaching beyond the known worlds of thought and experience is, I believe, a prerequisite for spiritual maturation and pastoral leadership within worlds of complexity and ambiguity.<sup>53</sup> As is discussed in the following chapters, the anthropological premise of desire or soulful thirst is key to understanding the theological grammar and pastoral imperatives of Bernard of Clairvaux and Jonathan Edwards.<sup>54</sup> Their preaching “pitch,” while never being without an appeal to the curious mind, is squarely aimed at

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<sup>52</sup> From 2006 to 2011 the Uniting Church faith community I served as Minister of the Word, held an annual Artist in Residence program. In that time, we hosted—wherein the worship sanctuary was transformed into the artist’s studio—a songwriter, poet, paper sculptor, visual artist, musician/movement teacher and a storyteller. All of them, bar one, remained on the edge of Christian community, unable to sit comfortably with its fear of an artistic / affective centre, coupled with personal experiences of misunderstanding or the institutional need to control their eventual product, thus regulate their charism. However, this diagnosed self-privation of Spirit is currently being redressed by the emergent church movement. See, Mary Gray-Reeves & Michael Perham, *The Hospitality of God: Emerging Worship for a Missional Church* (London: SPCK, 2011) and is being thoroughly discussed by mainline denominational scholars, particularly within the scope of the core practice of Christian worship. See also, Bruce Ellis Benson, *Liturgy as a Way of Life: Embodying the Arts in Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 99-126. See also, Douglas Purnell, *Being in Ministry: Honestly, Openly and Deeply* (Eugene: WIPF & Stock, 2010) and William A. Dyrness, *Poetic Theology: God and the Poetics of Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). In her recent survey work of neighbourhood churches across the USA, Diana Butler-Bass suggests in relation to the transformative potential of artistic expression: “Other Christians, however, engage art for the sake of mystery instead of a message. Art reaches toward God, where humanity touches divinity, and where the intellectual fades to apprehending beauty... One Seattle Lutheran said that beauty, “raises [people] out of the mundane, media-blitzed, cubical-induced lives that they live every day and somehow gives them a glimpse and hope of eternity.” Diana Butler-Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighbourhood Church is Transforming Faith* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006), 213.

<sup>53</sup> Sean M. Gilbert, “Reaching: The Synergy of Poetry and Prayer,” *Eremos: Exploring Spirituality in Australia* December 2013, no. 125, 23-26.

<sup>54</sup> Desire (Lt. *desiderium*) is a derivative of the word, absent (*desse*). As Michael Casey then simply puts it: “We cannot desire what we already possess; desire is the way love expresses itself when the object of is affection is absent.” From, *Grace: On the Journey to God* (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2018), 20.

the desirous, reaching human heart for that is where longstanding and willing change can realistically take place.

## 1.9 A theological and pastoral congruence of dispositional being

From a theological perspective, a working understanding of spiritual affect sharpened by contemporary phenomenological terminologies and findings is instructive. When posited as core to lived experience, the givenness of affect within human capacities may alert the pastoral practitioner to the place, specificity and potential guidance of spiritual affections within their own unfolding vocational context. That will mean, though, practicing ongoing discernment in light of, or according to, a definitive and *attractive*<sup>55</sup> point of pastoral reference—Jesus of Nazareth, the “Word made flesh” (John 1:14), who is also pronounced to be the Good Shepherd (John 10:11).<sup>56</sup>

The religiously familiar yet socially striking metaphor of the Good Shepherd (John 10: 11-14)<sup>57</sup> and its relational implications is consistent with the pastoral disposition that I am seeking to name and

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<sup>55</sup> For a helpful discussion on Jesus as the “divine Attractor” in both theological and evolutionary terms, see, Denis Edwards, *Partaking of God*, 80-87. He writes, “At the most human level, Jesus-Wisdom draws us in the ups and downs of our existence, attracting us, even in our resistances, into the new, not only in our lives, but also, above all, in our deaths.” 86.

<sup>56</sup> Borrowing from the insights of the influential Ignatian spiritual tradition, a key question in such a discernment process is, does the inner movement—one closely aligned to an engaged desire—lead towards a sense of *consolation* or *desolation* with the human spirit? Thus, will it encourage an enlargement of loving being in relation to God, self and others or, in fact, might the given affect merely lead to a diminishment of being in relation to God, self and others? This then means, does the perceived movement of affect draw one’s desirous will closer to that of Christ’s, or does it lead it further away from a greater fullness of expressive and compassionate being? Either way, it is ultimately a question of disposition, that is, to whom or what is the soul’s key point of relational attraction or stance. The *Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola* is perhaps the most instructive text with these simple principles of discernment in mind. Set in narrative, they maintain a certain authenticity, if not readability. See, *The Classics of Western Spirituality, Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 70-71. A contemporary Jesuit commentator writing on a needed discernment of spirits at the level of the affections and desire, plainly states: “For Ignatius, this cosmic struggle between good and evil is played out both in our hearts and the larger world. The struggle is waged between light and darkness, between egoism and altruism, and between death and life... These simple descriptions point to two contrasting sets of values... [Jesus] calls us to simplicity, poverty of spirit, selflessness, sharing, compassion, cooperation, concern for others, community, inclusion, and solidarity with the poor. In contrast, Satan calls us to consumerism, competition, narcissism, individualism, exclusion and suspicion of others. See, Gerald M. Fagin SJ, *Putting on the Heart of Christ* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2010), 102-103.

<sup>57</sup> A common, critical target of the Hebrew Prophets was the professional priestly class who did not shepherd (pastorally care for the weak and vulnerable) God’s people as God had instructed them, nor as God had demonstrated to them as the exemplar Shepherd. See, Ezekiel 34:1-10 and Jeremiah 23:1-8. See also, Andrew Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019) who characterises God’s essential and expressive being as that of a shepherd who continually ministers grace to an otherwise wayward and inattentive people. He writes: “To call God shepherd is to presume that God is a minister, and to say God is a minister is to say that ministry is the constituting reality of God’s being, given to the world through God’s action... If we can broaden or, better, deepen our conception of [common, not specified] ministry, shaking it loose from a clerical operation to

advance within this dissertation. Namely, a dependable expression of gracious, humble, wise, courageous, imaginative and liberating oversight within a faith-seeking community. Also, it implies a preparedness for self-sacrifice at the expense of self-interest and, amongst other integral characteristics, a desire to live out of the relational unity and processional love of the Triune God irrespective of any conferred institutional or ecclesial title.<sup>58</sup> In fact, the working definition of “pastoral” within this thesis will remain deliberately detached from any formal ecclesial descriptor, calling or function, yet being, at the same time, inclusive of them.

The catholic layman Jean Vanier’s exhortation to all members of the Christian Church to be pastoral in the non-territorial way of the Good Shepherd within every relational aspect of their life, is therefore a key point of reference. For in this context he states, “Jesus is the “Good Shepherd” leading us all into oneness with God. He is also calling each one of us to grow in responsibility to care for others and to become good shepherds: servant leaders. This is a sign of spiritual maturity.”<sup>59</sup>

Correspondingly—yet surprisingly so—in his landmark lecture series, *Security, Territory, Population*, the French philosopher Michel Foucault, described and contrasted the shepherding / governing function of the Hebrew and Christian God to that of the Greco Roman world of the gods in terms of a desire to travel with the flock and attend to its existential wellbeing (*Shalom*).<sup>60</sup> This expression of peripatetic leadership existing in stark contrast to an enforced state or institutional

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constituting it as the state of God’s own being that we are invited to share in, we may find new ways of helping our people recognise, claim, and participate in God’s being, even, or most particularly, in a secular age.” 174-175.

<sup>58</sup> Clearly, then, I am not seeking to imply that the pastoral disposition is exclusive to those who have been ordained in whatever specified ministry role. It is a broader consideration about ministry roles and practices though obviously relevant to the ranks of the ordained.

<sup>59</sup> Jean Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 183. Pertinent to this thesis’ stress on received grace as being foundational to any practice of Christian ministry, Vanier writes, “In order to be real shepherds who lead others, we have to learn first to be followers. Jesus is revealed as the “Lamb of God” before he reveals that he is the Good Shepherd... Can we teach others if we have not learned from others? How can we love if we have not been loved?” 186.

<sup>60</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures and the College De France, 1977-78*. Edited by Michel Senellart, translated by Graham Burchell (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 115-156. See, Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age*, 153-169.

control, that is, within a fixity of time and place. And it is from within this de-institutionalised frame Foucault expounds the Hebrew / Christian ‘shepherding-paradox,’ that being the protective care of the singular within the context of the ninety-nine (Lt. *Omnes et singulatim*); a radicalised and subversive vocation that willingly shoulders a heightened sense of accountability to the one true Shepherd of the sheep (Luke 15:4).<sup>61</sup> About the self-giving nature of pastoral power, Foucault surmises:

... pastoral power is, I think, entirely defined by its beneficence; its only *raison d’être* is doing good, and in order to do good. In fact, the essential objective of pastoral power is the salvation (*salut*) of the flock... But the salvation that must be assured to the flock has a very precise meaning... Salvation is first of all essentially subsistence. The means of subsistence provided, the food assured, is good pasture. The shepherd is someone... who feeds the flock first by leading it to good pastures, and then by making sure that the animals eat and are properly fed. Pastoral power is a power of care. It looks after the flock, it looks after individuals of the flock, it sees to it that the sheep do not suffer, it goes in search of those that have strayed off course, and it treats those that are injured.<sup>62</sup>

It can be argued then, that spiritual affections which bear direct relation to the pastoral disposition need to display a growing congruence between the shepherding nature of God’s grace and one’s own cognitive, emotional and physical responses to it.<sup>63</sup> Encountering the enlivening gift of the Spirit in both its intensity yet intrinsic modesty of presence invites a similarly radicalised, though incremental conformity of, will to the integrative mind (Gk. *nous*) and heart of Christ (Romans 12:2). This ever-budding state of unitive being, therefore, engages and employs spiritual imaginings extending well beyond rote learning and a dexterity of spiritual discernment encompassing far more than the first naiveté of literalistic belief or religious conformity. The

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 128. See also, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, “Qualities of the Abbot,” 2:8.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 126-127. The Irish writer, John Connell personalises and grounds Foucault’s philosophic descriptions in the person of his parish priest. He writes, “Father Sean is our parish priest. He is also my *anam cara*, my soul friend... He believes in me, in my work, in my decision to be back in Ireland and write for a year. Above all else he has faith that my writing will see the light of day... On Sundays at mass we do not speak, for he is at work... Sometimes I stand at the back of the church and watch the people of the parish and wonder about their lives. I do not know everyone here, but I do know that we are Father Sean’s family; he is our shepherd and cares for us all. Like many of us, he is a tiller too, a tiller of the soul.” John Connell, *The Cow Book: The Story of Life on an Irish Family Farm* (London: Granta Books, 2018), 52-53.

<sup>63</sup> The well-known author and USA Presbyterian pastor, Eugene Peterson stated it this way: “The Christian life is the lifelong practice of attending to the details of congruence—congruence between ends and means, congruence between what we do and the way we do it, congruence between what is written in Scripture and our living out what is written... congruence between preaching and living, congruence between the sermon and what is lived in both preacher and congregation, the congruence of the Word made flesh in Jesus with what is lived in our flesh.” *As Kingfishers Catch Fire: A conversation on the ways of God formed by the words of God* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2017), xviii.

imbued, missionally expansive love of God is both the content and relational nature of the enlivened spiritual affections (John 17:3).

Understood and lived within such a nuanced though practical framework, the Christian faith cannot be practiced as an inert form of religiosity without first inflicting the wound of impotence to its very relational substance of being. For faith (Lt. *fides*) is ultimately a relational contingency, that is, an adaptive way of being that is attentive to, and displays a trusting fidelity towards, the operations of divine love at play within many contrasting, even conflicting seasons of human experience. Defined in such a movement-based manner, the Christian life and its constituent expressions of pastoral ministry cannot, therefore, be easily defined functionally or by virtue of a task-defined competencies. By way of significant contrast, practices of pastoral ministry that are attuned to affect suggest movements of the Spirit are operative even within the harshest vagaries of life. The contemporary poet and professed Christian Chris Wiman, a long-suffering survivor of a virulent form of cancer, states as much in this particular context:

Faith is not some hard, unchanging thing you cling to through the vicissitudes of life. Those who try to make it into this are destined to become brittle, shatterable creatures. Faith never grows harder, never so deviates from its nature and becomes actually destructive, than in the person who refuses to admit that faith is change. I don't mean simply that faith changes (though there is that). I mean that just as any sense of divinity that we have comes from the natural order of things—is in some ultimate sense *within* the natural order of things—so too faith is folded into change, is the mutable and messy process of our lives rather than any fixed, mental product.<sup>64</sup>

Theological and pastoral congruence, therefore, is a relational and unfolding state of courageous and explorative being within the world. In the same way that faith is not a fixed intellectual assent, pastoral ministry can ill afford to become duly mechanised according to sure and certain principles of successful practice. Arguably, the capacity for adaptive, imaginative and emergent change born

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<sup>64</sup> Christian Wiman, *My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 17.

of an inclined heart in relation to God still remains the pivotal and defining pastoral (interior) resource.<sup>65</sup>

### **1.10 Lived, located and affected experience and the process of theological reflection**

As previously suggested, lived, located and affected human experience, even when simplified into logical or manageable parts, remains something of a poor-country cousin to the common elevation of human reason. Practically this means that personal and even communal experience is not trusted readily nor is it seriously engaged as a reliable source of knowledge or considered constituent of imaginative future directions in a world of hard-fought-for concepts, frameworks and contested ideas.<sup>66</sup> Even within the shrinking domains of Western Christian practice in late-modern social environments, the “cultural apartheid” of reason ruling over experiential imagination<sup>67</sup> still arguably exists, although with the rise of praxis orientated theologies of liberation and hope (social, political, cultural and economic), the rational stranglehold is beginning to be loosened.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> See, William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002). He writes, “Stephen (the Church’s first martyr) reminds us that leadership in the church is cruciform. It is also eschatological, that is, a matter of what God is doing more than what we ought to do. The cross and resurrection of Jesus serve as a critique of all our models of ministry... It is well for pastors to struggle for appropriate, biblically sanctioned metaphors and focal images for pastoral work. The struggle to be transformed by Christ rather than conformed to the dominant culture is a constant one for pastors. We work in the confidence that God is able to give us the gifts and graces needed for ministry in our time and place.” 74. See also, Christian A.B. Scharen and Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, in *Auburn Studies*, Winter 2016, “Learning Pastoral Imagination: A Five-Year Report On How New Ministers Learn in Practice:” “Through connecting phronesis with the gifts and work of the Holy Spirit, we argue, pastoral imagination emerges as an integrative, embodied and relational capacity.” 5.

<sup>66</sup> Significantly for the discipline of practical theology, French philosopher and phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2012 edition), makes a plea to his peers in its celebrated Preface, that philosophical writers and teachers regularly need to learn to let go of previously established conceptual “truths” of their own making, so as to start afresh in light of new perceptions of embodied, unfolding reality. “Seeking the essence of the world is not to seek what it is as an idea, after having reduced it to a theme or discourse; rather it is to seek what it is in fact for us, prior to every thematization.” xxix.

<sup>67</sup> A term coined and developed, particularly in relation to scholastic and modernist relegation of imagination by Malcolm Guite, *Faith, Hope and Poetry: Theology and the Poetic Imagination* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012): 1-30. Guite pinpoints the Christian tradition’s overt suspicion of the fallen nature of imagination, over and above an equally fallen nature of reason; the latter being less open to further corruption, apparently! He adds, “In fact, the fallenness of our mental capacities may rest precisely in the disordering or imbalance of relations *between* our capacities of reason and imagination.” 11.

<sup>68</sup> Hope in itself is an imaginative seeing of, and an existential reaching for, new and needed social realities. Jürgen Moltmann’s highly influential, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM Press English trans., 1967) was foundational to these ecclesial and social movements. Later in life he has written again about hope, yet from the perspective of Christian joy. He writes, “Life in joy is already an anticipation of eternal life; the goodly life here is already the beginning of the glorious life there... In joy over the hoped-for

Institutionalism, often the right arm of religious certitude, is increasingly crumbling in the West, throwing the responsibility of faith's nurture, growth and creative expression back on to smaller groupings and individuals.<sup>69</sup> Reflective / reflexive practices wherein lived experience is dynamically operative at an interpretative, conversational and educational centre, is now common place within many liberal arts disciplines such as teaching, social work, writing, nursing, but to name a few.<sup>70</sup>

Correspondingly, methods of theological reflection that intentionally begin with a lived, located and spiritually affected experience—prior to a presenting or overlaying religious conviction or conclusion<sup>71</sup>—are now being adopted by virtue of their effectiveness in terms of transformational learning,<sup>72</sup> thus vital to adaptive professional practices.<sup>73</sup> In this context, practical theologian

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future, we live here and now, completely and wholly, weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice, as Romans 12:15 says. Life in hope is not half a life under a proviso; it is a whole life awakening in the daybreak colours of eternal life." 190. Interestingly, Moltmann has been criticised by his theological peers for his turn to experiential considerations and more poetic forms of theological prose. His experience when writing about God as Trinity and the Spirit (1980-1994) was transformative to that more lyrical or spiritual end. See, Jürgen Moltmann, *A Broad Place: An Autobiography* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 285-294.

<sup>69</sup> The historian, Philip Sheldrake, author of *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method* (New York: CrossRoad, 1992) and *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998), puts this in historical context, that being, the tension that has always existed between social expressions of spirit and institution. Unfortunately, in historical terms, the institution of the Christian Church, fearful for its survival, for the presence of the heretic or spiritually renewing movements, has often dealt a heavy and even violent hand against such threats to its central, defining and highly reasoned place. According to the philosopher, Louis Dupré, the now-needed conscious stance toward God and life implies, "... confronting each person with his or her unique responsibility to decide on a personal attitude toward existence instead of having it conveyed by society or inherited from ancestors. Each person must find his or her own way in the world. This becoming a Christian "from within" is a daunting task. But I can think of no other that would contribute more to the integration of our culture at the present period." *The Christian Century*, July 16-23, 1997.

<sup>70</sup> For example, see, Gillie Bolton, *Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2010, Third Edition).

<sup>71</sup> The modernist Wesleyan Quadrilateral is regularly used in protestant settings, including the Uniting Church in Australia. The primacy of scripture is understandably underscored yet with minimal nuance of intent. However, such an emphasis is often stressed to the detriment of compassionate and attentive dialogue with the equally determinative and contextual nature of the human experience of God. Affect can be trodden on, in other words, much like W.B. Yeats's substantive dreams (and feelings) in the poem, "He wishes for the Cloths of Heaven." The trumping of human experience with propositional renderings of the Christian Scriptures, whether it be from the pulpit or the theological seminary classroom, is a continual present-day stress in ecclesial contexts.

<sup>72</sup> Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) is particularly instructive so far as a transformational model of learning is concerned. As one who undertook a CPE Unit in a Mental Health institution some 30 years ago, I can testify to the important changes in personal perception—and thus practice—that its educational processes facilitated. The learning tool of the verbatim, that is the location of event and record of dialogue and feeling, is a powerful catalyst for potential transformation, not only in actions but in one's actual disposition towards a given vocation.

<sup>73</sup> Perhaps the most influential text is James D. Whitehead & Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Chicago: Sheed & Ward, 1995, Revised Edition). See also, Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM, 2005). Significantly the first method listed is, "Theology by Heart," 18-46.

Gordon Wild has written, “Experience is more than a *source* of theological reflection; experience is also the context for theological reflection... healthy theological reflection is locative.”<sup>74</sup>

It is from within this unfolding (German: *entfalten*)<sup>75</sup> and locative existential framework that I will endeavour to write yet with due attention given over to what is academically pertinent and pressing. Admittedly, this is a daunting task. However, I take heart that like many others before me, including St. Augustine, John Calvin and Eugene Peterson, it is in and through the exploration of rigorous research and writing within a conscious standpoint of exploration<sup>76</sup> that significant discoveries are made<sup>77</sup>—discoveries that take the learner beyond preconceived ideas and convictions towards a greater sense of originality and creativity. Quoting Augustine to his readers in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*, John Calvin identifies something of his own methodology as, “I count myself one of the number of those who write as they learn and learn and they write.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Gordon Wild, “The Place of Personal Experience in Theological Reflection,” in *Research Methods in Practical Theology*, November 2003, 31. See also, David Heywood, *Kingdom Learning: Experiential and Reflective Approaches to Christian Formation* (London: SCM Press, 2017). Heywood states: “In the Experience phase (of the “pastoral cycle”) the aim is to focus on the experience from which the reflection arises, be this a specific incident, an ongoing situation in the life of the church, family, workplace or organisation, encountered in person or through pages of a newspaper or a television bulletin. And here we need to allow the experience speak for itself.” 77.

<sup>75</sup> This is a word repeatedly used by the poet Rilke, almost by way of protest to the dogmatic constraints and demands of institutional religion. His use of processional / outward movement—“I live my life in widening circles...”—and his refusal to be “folded,” “for there I am a lie” powerfully resonates with the present author. See, Rainer Rilke, *Rilke’s Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*, trans. Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005), 45.

<sup>76</sup> See, Killen and de Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection*, 16-19. The authors contrast and compare three faith standpoints or dispositions. They are, in turn, the standpoints of certitude, self-assurance and exploration. By way of summary they write, “Theological reflection nurtures growth in mature faith by bringing life experience into conversation with the wisdom of the Christian heritage. To practice theological reflection, we must be able to pay attention to and inquire about the meaning of our individual experiences, our world, and our religious heritage. The standpoints of certitude and self-assurance block our ability to do so. The standpoint of exploration supports it. Transformative theological reflection takes place in the standpoint of exploration.” 19.

<sup>77</sup> A working definition of heuristic research and writing is derivative of search and discovery, yet of an internal, integrated nature. One could argue that Odysseus’ long geographic journey homeward is ultimately a heuristic voyage of internal discovery. See, also, Eugene Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: HarperOne, 2011). Following years of near depression, what Peterson describes as the “bad lands” he discovered the heuristic method of research and writing, wherein the destination did not need to be known in the opening chapter. This freed him to write and to write, learn and teach in meaningful and fulfilling ways, previously unknown.

<sup>78</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1, editor: John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 5.

## 1.11 A heuristic research methodology

On the potentially vexed matter of personal engagement with the research topic and question—the development of spiritual affections for the sake of a qualitative pastoral disposition—heuristic research pioneer, Clark Moustakas is unequivocal:

Heuristic research is a demanding process. It requires “rigorous definition, careful collection of data, and a thorough and disciplined analysis. It places immense responsibility on the researcher.” (Frick p.79, 1990) In heuristic research the investigator must have had a direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated. There must have been actual autobiographical connections. Unlike phenomenological studies in which the researcher need not have had the experience (e.g., giving birth through artificial insemination), the heuristic researcher has undergone the experience in a vital, intense and full way—if not the experience as such, then a comparable or equivalent experience.

And further to this Moustakas adds:

The heuristic research process is not one that can be hurried or timed by the clock or calendar. It demands the total presence, honesty, maturity, and integrity of the researcher who not only strongly desires to know and understand but is willing to commit endless hours of sustained immersion and focused concentration on one central question, to risk the opening of wounds and passionate concerns, and to undergo the personal transformation that exists as a possibility of every heuristic journey.<sup>79</sup>

With Moustakis’ bold assertions in mind, I am including below the first entry of a research journal I kept during a 2015 sabbatical granted by my employing theological college. I will include an edited form of the journal as Appendix 1. It traces a timeline, but more importantly reflects my research method in process, thereby an appropriate and integrative addition to the thesis as a whole. The entry included in the main text reveals an exploratory desire to know more about a subject matter I wanted to share more coherently and intelligently with others. What I had not fully anticipated at that time was the level of existential change that the subject matter was inviting—even demanding—of me within the unfolding research and writing processes:

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<sup>79</sup> Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications*, 14.

## Monday, July 27:

At home, finishing notes taken on the “12 signs of Spiritual Affections” (Jonathan Edwards) and struck deeply—also in light of some stuff on Aquinas, Luther and Calvin—that this faith thing is no child’s play. By that I mean, what I am embarking on here is no simple *or vain* exercise of academic enquiry. The very nature of the subject matter demands an existential / faith response from me. To be sure, I am being continually put in potentially converting places. I expected that on one level, but it has been an arresting revelation on another.<sup>80</sup>

Regarding my particular and perhaps generic research method, therefore, it will seek to be qualitative<sup>81</sup> in broad terms, phenomenological<sup>82</sup> in narrower terms, and heuristic in specific terms. For if I were to frame spiritual affections in relation to pastoral dispositions purely in phenomenological or inquisitive terms, even using reliable sources such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Jonathan Edwards and, to a lesser extent, my own lived experience, the result would be less than satisfactory in terms of honest engagement. As well as further equipping my teaching knowledge, ability and responsibilities, this project has arisen as a timely gathering of my own religious and life experiences. And that by way of summation is a surprising grace that extends well over a 40-year period and has created the means and an end towards educational and vocational fulfilment.

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<sup>80</sup> Sean M. Gilbert, *Outside Study Leave Journal*, (unpublished—see, Appendix 1)

<sup>81</sup> Taking this as a broad and somewhat common though reworked definition: Qualitative Research is exploratory in nature. It is employed to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. It provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential quantitative research. In the more specific words of John Swinton and Harriot Mowat, “Qualitative research is a process of careful, rigorous enquiry into aspects of the social world. It produces formal statements or conceptual frameworks that provide new ways of understanding the world, and therefore comprises knowledge that is practically useful for those who work with issues around learning and adjustment to the pressures and demands of the social world.” See, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2016), 30.

<sup>82</sup> Obviously, a phenomenological research method shares much in common, regarding values and goals, with a heuristic approach, other than a necessary personal engagement with the subject matter to the point of personal transformation. It is open, curious, “fascinated” by the subject matter and critical of a so-called uncovered or controlling knowledge of the universe. So suggests Max Van Manen in *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (Albany, NY: New York University Press, 1990): “So phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world. This project is both new and old. It is new in the sense that modern thinking and scholarship is so caught up in theoretical and technical thought that the program of a phenomenological human science may strike an individual as a breakthrough and a liberation. It is old in the sense that, over the ages, human beings have invented artistic, philosophical, communal, mimetic and poetic languages that have sought to (re) unite them with the ground of their lived experience.” 9

The repeated impact of divine love upon my own affections often leaves them theologically and soulfully expressive. That is not to say that I do not experience disquieting periods of lethargy or seasons of alienation from God, others and self. But within the continuum that exists between divine absence and presence, this is all good grist for the mill of faith and discernment. Therefore, my lived experience of the Christian faith is not simply descriptive in nature or tone nor can I write about it from a safe distance from the subject matter itself. The personal legacy of divinely initiated grace is so close and transfiguring whereby even curiosity or fascination about ideas are often translated into theological reflection and a corresponding doxology. That is, an effusive gratitude arises for the gift of Spirit and for a life in continual process of renewal in the midst of a pastoral vocation.

### **1.12 A converting method of research and writing**

Spiritual affectivity is a nuanced subject matter to introduce and then define. For the phenomenologist, affect can be noticed, analysed and recorded with a certain moral, spiritual and scientific detachment. However, spiritual affections, as I am seeking to define and explicate them, necessarily engage religiously attuned capacities, my own included. These are affections arising from the receptive heart of faith which the influential Reformed theologian, Karl Barth, insisted is born and sustained of a graced meeting or “encounter” (German: *das Treffen*). They are the gift of the truth-piercing yet life-giving Word (*logos*)<sup>83</sup>—a Word that convicts, invites and, in harmony with the eternal Spirit, empowers existential change at both cognitive and volitional levels of being. This religious experience is, in Barth’s estimation, the essence of true religion. The bearing, practice or beliefs of this “true religion” do not become faultless through repeated encounters,

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<sup>83</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959): 15-21.

rather they are consciously disposed towards the bearer of justifying and truthful faith.<sup>84</sup> And in sum this is his understanding of the existential nature of justification by grace: An honest vulnerability (German: *Verletzlichkeit*) before the healing nature of God's mercy is the primordial stance or disposition of the Christian (Luke 18:14).

In even more specific terms, this is an encounter with the risen Jesus Christ who is biblically confessed to be God's eternal Word, "full of truth and grace" (John 1:14). Therefore, any subsequent renewing of mind (Romans 12:2) and heart (Romans 5:5) lies beyond human agency or contrivance. It is the domain of the converting Word acting upon the deadened or dulled human mind in partnership with the Holy Spirit who correspondingly awakens and sanctifies the deepest recesses of the will. As the Christian tradition testifies—Bernard and Edwards being indicative of it—throughout each new generation of believers, such an affective experience of divine grace readily dismantles human independencies and ideological concepts for the sake of a relationally restored and joyously fruitful life.<sup>85</sup>

The life and unfolding path of conversion is no trifling matter or process (Hebrews 10:31). In short, *conversio* is a whole bodied and integrative response to the beauty and terror of divine love,<sup>86</sup> not

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<sup>84</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* vol. 1, "The Doctrine of the Word of God" 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956): "Religion is never true in itself as such. The revelation of God denies that any religion is true, i.e., that it is in truth the knowledge and worship of God and reconciliation of man with God. For as the self-offering and self-manifestation of God, as the work of peace which God Himself has concluded between Himself and man, revelation is the truth beside which there is no other truth, over against which there is only lying and wrong." 325.

<sup>85</sup> See, Jürgen Moltmann, *The Living God and Fullness of Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015): "Real joy stimulates the soul, makes relationships flourish, makes the heart light and limbs nimble, mobilizes undreamed-of powers, and increases confidence. Genuine happiness lays hold of the person's whole being. In joy, the ecstatic nature of human existence finds its true expression. We are made for joy. We are born for joy." 97.

<sup>86</sup> See, Don E. Saliers, "Beauty and Terror" in, *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005): "One thinks of Rilke's line from the First Duino Elegy: "For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror." How often the terrifying and its aftermath of grieving may lead to surprising but unbearable beauty. Terror and beauty lie unacknowledged for most of us, until the conditions of perception come around: typically, when pain and terror strike by chance, or when we are enraptured by the splendour of something radically "other." Without ritualising into embodied patterns of knowing, feeling, and acting, intense experiences of terror or beauty can be deceptive. They can "lie"—in the sense of distorting our view of what and how the world is. What is revealed in extremity requires retrospect and recollection in order to illumine how to live. Christian spirituality has a stake in receiving and interpreting such experiences and guarding against lies and distortions." 304.

merely a sideways shift in conceptualities and re-badged behaviour.<sup>87</sup> Nor are the searing winds of existential change necessarily experienced within cloistered worlds of cultural or institutional predictability. Similar to the Hebrew prophet Isaiah's experience in the Jerusalem temple before the holiness (Hebrew: *kadosh*) of Yahweh, an initial confession of faith is often expressed in the striking terms of, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a person of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."<sup>88</sup>

The substance of this profoundly affected faith experience, therefore, is a grace-induced renovation (French: *renovaré*) of life-perspective and character.<sup>89</sup> Importantly for a theological underpinning of holy affect upon the affections, such grace, notwithstanding the above reference to Isaiah, isn't necessarily demonstrative or even public—remembering the subtly suggestive *mare* in the Jane Campion illustration. In fact, one could argue for a due modesty or hiddenness of divine encounter in keeping with the substance of the affect (John 1:10-12) making the ever reaching or desirous nature of faith an imperative in itself.<sup>90</sup>

In my own experience as a non-religious twelve-year-old, I awoke one night to be confronted by the luminous sight of two figures at the foot and to the left-hand side of my bed. Thinking that the

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<sup>87</sup> See, Morton T. Kelsey, *Companions on the Inner Way: The Art of Spiritual Guidance* (New York: Crossroad, 1985): "There is a lot of talk about being born again. And certainly, all of us need be born again and again. When I am asked if I have been born again, I like to reply, "Which time?" The idea that with one conversion all of our confusion and chaos can be wiped away and we are pure and sinless would be humorous if it were not so tragic. Most people with this frame of reference bury their former evil impulses and actions and then project them out onto others. They become standard bearers for law and order and righteousness. But they want nothing to do with spiritual direction, nor do they wish to share all of their inner being with another person, for then they may have to face the suffering and pain that are involved in every genuinely integrated life. And churches that suggest that one conversion solves everything usually treat spiritual guidance, direction and companionship as the plague." 192. See also, Alan Jones, *Soul Making: The Desert Way of Spirituality* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 143-184.

<sup>88</sup> Isaiah 6:5 (NRSV) See also, Act 2:37: Now when they heard this [the evangelical preaching of the apostle Peter], they were cut to the heart and said... "Brothers, what should we do?"

<sup>89</sup> See, Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1975): "To be sanctified is to have our character determined by our basic commitments and beliefs about God...Christian character is the formation of our affections and actions according to the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith and life." 203.

<sup>90</sup> The generational Christian attraction to *The Song of Songs*, something that will be more fully developed in this thesis through the writings of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, is largely due to the interplay between divine presence and absence; an existential reality for all human beings, including those of practicing faith. In sum, the holy affect of encounter may well be partial and fleeting—Gregory of Nyssa is well known for this theological reflection in relation to Moses and seeing only the back of God passing through the cleft of a rock—yet paradoxically it may well be enough for a lifetime of seeking and desiring greater depths of communion.

whole house would have been woken by the radiance of light and the accompanying thunderous, speechless noise, I stammered through an otherwise paralysing fear, “Who are you? What do you want?” Engaging the figure on his left with a glance, the taller and seeming central character motioned towards me with his right finger. Beyond that definitive and lasting gesture, I have no recollection. The moment of epiphany (“a showing forth”) ended.<sup>91</sup> The vision was fleeting and nothing even remotely similar to it has taken place in my experience since.

What I do recall is judiciously asking my siblings at breakfast if anyone else had been woken unexpectedly during night. When all replied with a non-interested and cereal-crunching, “No,” I let it drop and put it all down to a bad dream. Only in my later years has the visitation experience resurfaced with a pressing vividness and a deepening sense of vocational and spiritual meaning. The clear memory has become an important note of assurance in the midst of doubt, listlessness and a growing sense of my own mortality.

In light of the above recollection, I would contend existentially—and theologically—that transcendent encounter and calling belong to the mysterious realms of divine initiative, yet within the common frame of immanence.<sup>92</sup> In this self-defining sense, religion does not need to be viewed as a supernatural construct or an avoidance of reality as it is so often caricatured within western, secular societies. By way of needed contrast, religious faith can be gleaned, then existentially framed, from the depths and vicissitudes of reality itself into which the relationality,

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<sup>91</sup> After nervously retelling this story to Fr. Michael Casey at Tarrawarra Abbey, his nonchalant response went along the lines of, “That’s interesting. Normally this happens earlier in life than at twelve years of age.” In other words, the dividing line—so called—between transcendence and immanence can be understood to be porous or transmutable by way of both divine initiative and the yearning human heart. See, Mark S. Burrows, “The Energy of Poetry in a Culture of Saturation,” *arts* 24:2 (2013). Burrows quotes Charles Taylor in this context of divine epiphany: “These may be moments... when ‘ordinary reality is “abolished” and something terrifyingly *other* shines through,’ a state of consciousness which Musil describes as ‘*der andere Zustand*’ (the other condition). 19.

<sup>92</sup> See, Andrew Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age*, 12-14. Using the descriptive terminology of Charles Taylor, Root surveys movements of theology that have reduced or displaced God to such a manageable extent, that the question of the in-breaking of transcendent presence can only be conceived in supernatural terms. “The immanent frame,” he argues, “was being used to define as completely secular not only our ordinary lives but also the pastoral task.” 12-13. See also, Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church’s Obsession with Youthfulness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), xv-xxii.

or radiance of grace discreetly comes and changes everything.<sup>93</sup> To reference Karl Barth again, the Christian religion only has a potency for goodness, truth and beauty when it lives by the ongoing reception and generous sharing of grace. He states:

Revelation singles out the church as the *locus* of true religion. But this does not mean that the Christian religion as such is the fulfilled nature of human religion. It does not mean that the Christian religion is the true religion, fundamentally superior to all other religions. We can never stress too much the connection between the truth of the Christian religion and the grace of revelation. We have to give particular emphasis to the fact that through grace, the Church lives by grace, and to that extent it is the locus of true religion.<sup>94</sup>

My own selective confessions of Christian experience are possibly problematic within the confines of a research project such as this. However, they are deliberately provocative and integral to what I understand my coherent method of research and writing to be. For in themselves, they take even well-developed and reasoned theological conclusions into non-verifiable territory. And other than by the persuasive weight of an experience of divine grace that tangibly translates into socially acknowledged expressions of love, justice and compassion (John Newton and Mother Teresa are often universalising symbols of this congruence), social credence is rarely given to religious experience alone. Particularly in the largely cynical and pragmatic landscape of Australia, wherein matters of spirit and faith are either privatised to the point of cultural meaninglessness or so crassly promulgated they express in equal measure an increasing social irrelevance.

Bernard Lonergan is a widely respected Jesuit philosopher and theologian who placed lasting store in the empiricism of religiously founded love. Significantly for this topic and my own particular

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<sup>93</sup> St. Augustine's *Confessions* are an obvious case in point, so far theological biography is concerned, yet even less polished and arguably as poignant, is the World War II journal of Ety Hillesum, published posthumously in 1983. See, *An Interrupted Life and Letters from Westerbork* (New York: Henry Bolt and Company, 1996): "Perhaps, oh God, everything happening together like that was a little hard (a serious illness and the death of her confidant). I am reminded daily of the fact that a human being has a body, too. I had thought that my spirit and heart alone would be able to sustain me through everything. But now my body has spoken up for itself and called a halt. I now realise, God, how much You have given me. So much that was beautiful and so much that was hard to bear. Yet whenever I showed myself ready to bear it, the hard was directly transformed into the beautiful. And the beautiful was sometimes much harder to bear, so overpowering did it seem. To think that one small human heart can experience so much, oh God, so much suffering and so much love, I am so grateful to You, God, for having chosen my heart, in these times, to experience all the things it has experienced." 198.

<sup>94</sup> Barth, "The Doctrine of the Word of God," 2, 298.

expression of the explore-to-discover research method, he suggested that the quality and veracity of such love is only known or fully comprehended by a willing participation in and with it, not by so-called objective observance. He writes:

In the realm of religious experience Oliver Rabut has asked whether there exists any unassailable fact. He found such a fact in the existence of love. It is as though a room was filled with music though one can have no sure knowledge of its source. There is in the world, as it were, a charged field of love and meaning; here and there it reaches a noble intensity; but it is ever unobtrusive, hidden, inviting each of us to join. And join we must if we are to perceive it, for our perceiving is through our own loving.<sup>95</sup>

In light of the above wisdom, my subject matter can ill afford to be an abstraction from commonplace reality; that is, a theology foisted on the reader from the temporal world of religious emotionality or the impenetrable realms of religious concept. Rather, it will seek a demanding middle ground, or what the ancient monastic voice of John Cassian described as the “royal road” of interpretation, in contrast to a presumptuous “excessive fervour” on the right and a careless “sluggishness of spirit” on the left.<sup>96</sup>

Therefore, my writing will endeavour to be a respectful and imaginative exercise of theological reflection, offered squarely from within specific yet broad perceptions of human reality.

Significantly for this schema, the key theological and pastoral players in question throughout this thesis—Bernard of Clairvaux and Jonathan Edwards—also sought an exacting congruence of reasonable and affective faith; in themselves, and within those who, through engaging in the pastoral writings, find their own confessional, imaginative voice. Above all, and as an exercise of

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<sup>95</sup> Bernard Lonergan, SJ, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 290. See also, Esther Lightcap Meek, *A Little Manual for Knowing* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014): “Knowing ventures begin out of love or desire. This starting point is the watershed difference between the knowledge-as-for information approach and the loving-to-know approach to knowing... It is desire that shapes the venture into a venture in the first place... Knowing rides the wave of our desire.” 19.

<sup>96</sup> John Cassian, *Conferences*, trans. Colm Luibeid (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 62.

theological reflection, there is not a fixed and certain point of arrival. Instead, there is only a trajectory and the lived hope of renewed discovery.

### **1.13 A nuanced but important subject matter**

Though arguably a potential touchstone of spiritual generativity within pastoral expression, the affectivity of grace and the potentiality of responsive affections to that grace are rarely examined carefully as I have sought to do here. So closely related are the affections to human experience—bodily and emotionally—that they tend to be fused convolutedly. For many, as I have suggested, affectivity is emotionalism by another name, hence a somewhat subjective, perhaps non-reliable source for an active faith. This dissertation seeks to rehabilitate something of the guiding and forming nature of spiritually attuned affections. This aim is similar to the one articulated by the poet, novelist, farmer and philosopher Wendell Berry who, in the 2012 Jefferson Lecture, entitled “It All Turns of Affection,” sought to introduce the potentiality of affectivity to a discourse concerned with the United States’ “affectless economics.” Obviously, his was not a theological treatise but he is worthy of citing in this context because of the striking congruency of language and intent. Berry stated, “‘The light within,’ I think, means affection, *affection as motive and guide*. Knowledge without affection leads us astray. Affection leads, by way of good work, to authentic hope.”<sup>97</sup>

As previously stated, the course of this dissertation is consciously theological with pastoral application. That means, from the perspective of the Christian faith as articulated within a certain breadth of tradition, the so-described autonomy of affect is suggestive not only of an existential phenomenon in general terms, but of a divine, benevolent presence freely operative in particular

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<sup>97</sup> Wendell Berry, *It All Turns on Affection: The Jefferson Lecture & Other Essays* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2012), 35. Emphasis added.

terms. As such it is a truly redemptive activity that persistently invites grateful and generative responses within the unique parameters of human choice and vocation. I believe this to be a constructive contribution to the goals of a theological discipline that is both practical and pastoral at heart.

To write of graced affect and potential attunement of the spiritual affections<sup>98</sup> in ways introduced above, seeks to bear witness to the intimate experience of redemptive transcendence wherein the primordial desire for spiritual union is repeatedly sought outside of oneself.<sup>99</sup> In fact, this yearning for self-transcendence or a relational “rest” in God in the famous dictum of Saint Augustine and “complacency” in the writing and preaching of Jonathan Edwards,<sup>100</sup> is what clearly distinguishes this discussion from cultural or anthropological considerations of presenting affect.

Phenomenology is not theology, nor does it pretend to be. Nor is theology an ostensibly descriptive or detached discipline from its subject matter. Its self-transcending (reaching) nature and purposes are the ongoing harmonisation of relation and therefore it is reverential in both tone and trajectory. That being said, the observational, yet immanently bounded frameworks regarding the phenomena of affect are invaluable to a theological discourse such as this.

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<sup>98</sup> Jonathan Edwards, a major figure within this research project, speaks of “religious affections,” as do many others within the Christian tradition. In opting for the term “spiritual affections” I am seeking to make both term and lived experience more accessible to a late modern sensibility understanding. Religion is a difficult and loaded descriptor for many. It readily gives rise to caricature, if not a hostile prejudice, particularly in an Australian social landscape.

<sup>99</sup> See, William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996). For Placher, the needed emphasis on unknowing (mystery) and yet a recognition of the divine, graced movement toward the world in Christ and Spirit, would seek to redefine transcendence away from established theistic, highly “functional” caricatures of God. He writes, “We have to try to hear God speak to us, if we are to escape worshipping an idol. That means we cannot simply fit God in as one component of our intellectual systems or think only of a God who fits our categories and purposes... God has come to us, and when that happens and manage to notice, we will find all our intellectual, moral and social orders mightily upset.” 17 See also, Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Books, 2013 edition). In particular, the first chapter, “God and the Gifford Lecture,” wherein Hauerwas critiques any form of (natural) theology that does not first embody the divine grace of the Christ event, culminating in the cross, for the sake of transformation of human character. Repeatedly he makes the point that theological claims and “lives well lived” need to be inseparable from each other. 39.

<sup>100</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Treatise on Grace” in, *Writings on the Trinity*, edited by Sang Hyan Lee, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 21 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 174.

By virtue of a faith *locus*, an initiating Source of love is seen and experienced beyond human limitations of self and environment through what might be described as a visceral recognition and reception of love's Giver. Therefore, through a trusting, open disposition of faith, that is, a leaning into the transformative gifting of grace, the spiritually affected person or community is renewed repeatedly in that which reorients the human soul towards, and that which expands within, divine love. This moved and moving constituency is, in my considered opinion, the very foundation of a creative pastoral disposition in the ways and means of Jesus the Good Shepherd.

### **1.14 Conclusion: The gift and possibility of spiritual participation**

In conclusion, this chapter has posited the impact of affect upon and within the unfolding reality of human experience. As has been argued, this is a universal and embodied phenomenon that is autonomous in nature and pre-cognitive and pre-emotional in experiential form. Translated into confessional theological terms, "autonomy of affect" can logically be conceived and named as the powerful, surging gift of God's Spirit who comes as incarnational love to stir human affections into renewed and reorientated life (Romans 5:5). That is, in more specific terms, a gratuitous, self-emptying Love who encounters human beings at the level of their deepest desires for dignity, worth and acceptance and thus endows bodily capacities—here framed as the pastoral disposition—to daringly bear God's swells of love and mercy to the world.

Participation in these transformative movements of God's grace, therefore, and not mere descriptions of them, is key to a contemporary articulation of practical theological reflection. Accordingly, Swinton and Mowat state that, "Practical Theology is critical theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to

ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, and for the world."<sup>101</sup>

Even more eloquently, Philip Sheldrake proposes an attentive disposition:

(But) theology is in its richest sense essentially performative as well as informative; it is concerned with action as well as ideas. Consequently, the title "theologian" does not imply someone who provides a specialized analysis and information while standing at a personal distance from the object of reflection. "Being a theologian" involves a quality of presence to the reality we reflect upon as much as a concern for the techniques of a specific discipline.<sup>102</sup>

The above definition of Sheldrake is not included to suggest or in any way infer that thoughtful rigour cannot or will not be applied throughout this research and writing project. Indeed, it will be offered to the best of my abilities. However, criteria for the evidence to support the thesis question, *Are spiritual affections, as defined and attested to within a breadth of the Christian tradition, still of vital importance to pastoral ministries in contemporary settings?* will keep returning to the potentially transformative impact of divine love upon the affections, and thus the trusting and effusive disposition of the pastoral minister. In other words, does the practitioner's desired attunement to the gift of God love, make a discernible difference for the common good or not? Furthermore, does such a repeated and radicalised yielding to grace facilitate a revealing sense of spiritual presence for individuals and give rise to social expressions of creative, just and generative hope?

A willing and glad participation in the flow of God's transformative grace is the existential context for meaningful answers being given to these pressing questions. As the poet Denise Levertov has so imaginatively and vulnerably written, knowing something about her own "clench-fisted" resistances, the gifting of this affecting love is as forceful and constant upon the human body as might be a high and ceaseless waterfall upon the rocks below.

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<sup>101</sup> Swinton & Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 7.

<sup>102</sup> Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God*, 23.

*To live in the mercy of God.*

*To feel vibrate the enraptured*

*waterfall flinging itself  
unabating down and down  
to clenched fists of rock.  
Swiftness of plunge,  
hour after year after century...*

*Thus, not mild, not temperate,  
God's love for the world. Vast  
flood of mercy  
flung on resistance.<sup>103</sup>*

By way of a concluding note to this chapter, I sense it prudent to declare my own hand, so to speak, for it is a socially conditioned one with which I write. I am a white, middle-aged male. I have lived a privileged life. This includes remarkable educational opportunities, gifted mentors, world travel, meaningful employment, a deeply holding second marriage, healthy children and now grandchildren. I have been an ordained Minister of the Word in the Uniting Church in Australia for over 30 years, serving in congregational ministry for twenty-two of those and am now engaged in teaching practical theology to the next generation.

I write as one who continues to be moved and motivated by the many graces of God but can also resist them as stubbornly as does Levertov's "clenched fist of rock." I write as a pastor who has learned slowly over time to incline my affections with greater intentionality toward the Spirit of Christ for the sake of others. Finally, I write as one who hopes through the explication of significant voices within the Christian tradition to provide an intelligent framework for dispositional, multi-faceted pastoral practices and to encourage others who are drawn to the shepherding vocation. With that in mind, I will now begin with the written legacy of Saint Bernard

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<sup>103</sup> Denise Levertov, *The Stream & the Sapphire: Selected Poems on Religious Themes* (New York: New Directions, 1997), 32.

of Clairvaux, a medieval pastor, preacher and passionate teacher of God's love who continues to have a lasting influence within the life and witness of the Christian Church.

*It is not the fact of feeling which requires scrutiny and discernment. What needs to be examined is, rather, the object of this tendency to love. Affect becomes disordinate to the extent that it attaches itself to an inappropriate object. This can happen easily, hence in Bernard's view, the reorientation of the affect is a constant task. It is a matter, not of violently suppressing a wandering affect, but of gently and intelligently redirecting its growth.*

**Michael Casey**<sup>1</sup>

*"You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul and your whole strength." It seems to me, if no more suitable meaning for this triple distinction comes to mind, that the love of the heart relates to a certain warmth of affection, the love of soul to energy or judgment of reason, and the love of strength can refer to constancy and vigor of spirit. So, love the Lord your God with full and deep affection of your heart, love him with your mind wholly awake and discreet, love him with all your strength, so much so that you would not even fear to die for love of him.*

**Bernard of Clairvaux**<sup>2</sup>

*The charity which activated him (Bernard) makes light of obstacles and, so to speak, gives wings to the mind. For him learning is not the final goal, but rather a path leading to God; it is not the cold object of empty speculation, an intellectual diversion, fascinating the mind with its play of light and glory, but is moved, impelled, and governed by love.*

**Pope Pius XII**<sup>3</sup>

## Chapter Two

### Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and Spiritual Affections

#### 2.1 Introduction and trajectory of the chapter into the next

In this first chapter on Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, I will offer initially what I consider to be a relevant personal narrative. It will be in keeping with the heuristic research method employed throughout. In sum, it tells the story of my own encounter with Bernard's writings while still a relatively young pastor living and studying beyond Australia's shores. As such, the narrative seeks to ground my subject matter within the realms of experiential reality and potential vocational application.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Casey, *Athirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1988), 103-4.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs: Sermons 1-20*, trans. Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1971), 150.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Pius XII, "Doctor Mellifluous" included in, Thomas Merton, *The Last of the Fathers: Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and the Encyclical Letter Doctor Mellifluous* (San Diego: Harvest Books, 1982), 97-98.

I will then outline some pertinent biographical information about Bernard, give a broad summary of his influences, style and content of writing, then concentrate on the applicable nature of his affective theologising. As an important biblical point of reference, I will touch on the catalytic text for the Abbot of Clairvaux, 1 John 4, “God is love” (*Deus caritas est*), and by its pastoral and missional extension, “We love because God first loved us.”

It will be my contention throughout these two chapters on Bernard, whilst spiritual or mystical in essence,<sup>4</sup> his theological vision of God remains accessible to the Christian life and a dispositional, practical practice of Christian ministry. As will be shown, Bernard had a low tolerance level for theological speculation, that is, pronouncements about God and directions for a life of discipleship that did not ring true to lived, reflective experience.

Relevant primary sources to be resourced in this framework of interpretation will cover the beginning, middle and end of his writing career, namely, *The Steps of Humility and Pride (De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae)* 1119, *On Loving God (De Diligendo Deo)*<sup>5</sup> 1126-7, *On Free Will and Grace (De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio)* 1126-7, and *On the Song of Songs (Sermones super Cantica canticorum)* 1135-53. The following chapter will deal specifically with Sermon 18, “Two Operations of the Holy Spirit” within the literary context of the 86 sermons on *The Song of Songs*.

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<sup>4</sup> Etienne Gilson’s *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publishing Inc., 1990) is a standard text in Bernardine studies and was a ground-breaking synopsis of Bernard’s life and work, first published in 1940. I am hesitant to use the oft misunderstood term “mystical” in the overriding context of ministry practice, though I understand why Gilson would choose to use it.

<sup>5</sup> Translated by Fr. Michael Casey as, “On the God who must be loved.”

## 2.2 Experiencing the thought and vision of Bernard

In the northern hemisphere summer of 1993, I travelled with my family to Massachusetts to enrol in a Master of Arts Research degree program. Andover Newton Theological School was then a vital part of the Boston Theological Institute, providing me with a pool of teacher specialisation and choice of graduate classes that was not feasible in Australia. I was ordained as a Minister of the Word in the Uniting Church in Australia five years earlier and had just completed my first parish ministry placement in rural South Australia with an abiding sense of satisfaction. This did not lessen the grief I felt in the departure from both it and my homeland, but I knew that I still had much more to learn about theology and its corresponding pastoral applications. And as Paul Tillich contended, such important discoveries about self and vocation are often made away from home bases:

The path into an alien country may also signify something wholly personal and inward: parting from accepted lines of belief and thought; pushing back beyond limits of the obvious; radical questioning that opens up the new and uncharted. In Nietzsche's words, it means moving into 'the land of our children' and out of 'the land of our fathers and mothers.' It is a temporal, not a geographical emigration.<sup>6</sup>

Ironically, though, I arrived in the United States with a weighted agenda. Heavily influenced by John Macquarrie's then recent, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*,<sup>7</sup> my aim was to write a thesis that focused on the humanity of Jesus by means of critiquing what I thought to be an over emphasis on the divinity of Christ. The "two natures" of Chalcedon (451) was, in my opinion, potentially too divided within itself—if not impossible—to be accessible to the modern faith seeker or any serious thinkers still attending church on any given Sunday.

That said, I did want people within my pastoral influence to follow Jesus more closely in their daily experience but what I had noticed over a considerable period was a default attraction to

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Tillich, *On the Boundary* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 92.

<sup>7</sup> John Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London: SCM Press, 1990).

supernaturalism within faith and practice. In my pastoral view, this high view of biblical spirituality tended to diminish the messy yet glorious possibility of being human *and* Christian. And even more specifically, faith and life's daily complexities didn't appear to make many meaningful connections. On Sunday morning's when we earnestly sang and prayed to the transcendent God, existential connections seemed pretty tenuous and short-lived as we all made our way into the unfolding week. I felt I needed to try to address this disconnect as well as I could by adjusting balances within what I considered to be the imbalanced theological paradox.

An early, unexpected encounter with Patristic thought through the teaching of Father Brian Daley, SJ, at Western Seminary, radically shifted my academic focus and irrevocably changed my faith perspective. Specifically, it became apparent through the confessional, theological and pastoral writings of Irenaeus, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Augustine and Maximus, to name a few, that their personal redemptive experience dynamically shaped the way they then doxologically framed and taught the classical Christian doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity. By this I mean, ambiguity (looking through a glass darkly), paradox and mystery were not filtered out of creedal pronouncements, but such unknowables gave these writers a certain energy, hence liturgical accessibility and impact.<sup>8</sup> In other words—and this was news to me at the time—theology need not be an edifice of purified thought delivered from an unassailable height.<sup>9</sup> In fact, theological reflection could be innately prayerful, arising from within worshipping faith communities, in which

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<sup>8</sup> See, Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1984), 18. Here Kavanagh contends that the pastoral experience of liturgy within the Christian Church has often been the major shaper of theology and not vice versa as is often assumed. "It is worth remembering that the first syntheses of Christian theology were accomplished by people such as these (pastoral theologians). The ambience of their work was immediately pastoral, the purpose of their work was pastoral... The inference that can be drawn from this is that theology was then regarded as a necessarily and intimately pastoral task, something regularly done by servants of the community, done live and in its solemn if often rowdy presence. The theology we today call patristic was thus a profoundly pastoral theology in its ambience, purpose, and execution."

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Kavanagh goes on to trace the rise of medieval scholasticism and the bifurcation of Christian thought and practice: "Theology began to withdraw from pulpits and the liturgy into the classroom and study. Thus, a bifurcation in teaching functions set in and competing ways of going about reflection upon matters of faith and practice began to develop. The results of this are all around us today: a pastorate which, although not cut off altogether from the love of learning, has little time for learning's demanding practice and an academic structure with little real access to pastoral contexts in which the faith which theology is said to reflect upon is normally lived."

leadership could be an integral, not overbearing presence. Together, then, worshipping communities could modestly explore the Christian faith, happily limited by the finitude of human language, understanding and sigh and still offer a vibrant strength of adoration and praise.<sup>10</sup>

As a consequence, the question that soon arose for me was that perhaps the two natures of Jesus Christ, and by extension the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, had more to do with the saving hope of what the early Greek speaking fathers called *theosis* or deification, rather than highly structured statements about abstract metaphysical principles.<sup>11</sup> In other words, Christian theology did not need to be a list of belief statements to give intellectual assent to, but could be public confessions of God's gratuitous and invitational grace to enter progressively into and be changed by. Hans Urs von Balthasar captures this thought strikingly when he writes, "We never really believe in principles, but rather, in a single reality, which unfolds itself to us, for us, and in us, and is at the same time our highest truth and deepest salvation."<sup>12</sup>

Subsequently, by the second semester of the degree program I had radically adjusted my course choices. I fell into a life-long reading of Thomas Merton, took a class on psychological self-

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<sup>10</sup> A famous case in point was the experimentation within the set liturgy of St Basil (330-379), wherein the Holy Spirit—by virtue of a common dynamism of faith experience—was named and confessed as God, co-equal to the Father and Son. Significantly, this was post Nicaea (325) and pre-Constantinople (381) after which the Creed was altered to include the confession, "And (We believe) in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver... (*Et in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et vivificantem...*)" See, St Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980). "One cannot see the Father without the Spirit! It would be like living in a house at night when the lamps are extinguished... It is the same in the spiritual world; it is impossible to maintain a life of holiness without the Spirit." 64.

<sup>11</sup> St. Athanasius perhaps provides the most succinct and well known definition of deification, "And if they (Christ's works) be human, let him scoff; but if they are not human, but of God, let him recognize it, and not laugh at what is no matter for scoffing; but rather let him marvel that by so ordinary a means things divine have been manifested to us, and that by death immortality has reached to us all, and that by the Word becoming man, the universal providence has been known, and its giver the artificer the very Word of God. For he was made man that we might be made God (literally, "He was humanized that we might be deified."); and he manifested himself by a body that we might receive the idea of the unseen Father; and he endured the insolence of men that we might inherit immortality." "On the Incarnation," 54, as quoted in, *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 107-8. See also, Denis Edwards, *Partaking of God Trinity*, 37-53.

<sup>12</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Credo: Meditations on the Apostles' Creed* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 29-30. See also a definitive work on Christian Creeds, Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). "... such phrases as 'believing in,' 'believing that,' and even 'confessing that,' according to the usage of the New Testament and most of the Christian tradition through the centuries, do not have creedal propositions as their ultimate point of reference. Rather, they are directed to the personal God of biblical revelation, the God who has acted concretely in the events of biblical history and finally in 'these last days' in the history of Jesus Christ, therefore the God to whom believers pray and in who believers trust and hope." 64.

awareness, began exploring poetics, and eventually wrote a thesis about the mystery of the Triune God and suggested paths of faith / liturgical renewal in the Uniting Church in Australia. These were, upon reflection, treasured days of vocational learning and personal development. I saw something refreshingly new of divine beauty and began following its traces as best as I could.

In accord with the above described paradigm shift was my enrolment in a five-day intensive at Glastonbury Abbey in Hingham, Massachusetts. Taught and coordinated by Professor Mark Burrows, a Medieval Church historian at Andover Newton, *Readings in Retreat* was an all-too-brief, yet meaningful immersion into the working, praying life of a Benedictine monastery. More principally for the ostensibly liberal Christian ministry students who enrolled and lived in, class and individual reflection revolved around set readings from Saint Bernard's commentary, *On the Song of Songs* (*Sermones super Cantica canticorum*) and the English Saint Aelred of Rievaulx's, *On Spiritual Friendship*. For many of us new to medieval religious literature and to a monastic community that prayed the Hours, Glastonbury Abbey was an unfamiliar, though strangely attractive world.

Bernard of Clairvaux was simply a name among many other Christian luminaries up until this point and first impressions of his dense and lyrical writings *On the Song of Songs* were not favourable. An allegorical, and thus, I believed, fanciful Christian commentary on an ancient, sensual poetic text, did not arouse much interest in my mind (so conditioned I was to highly rational hermeneutical practice). That was to change, however, when Professor Burrows led the class through the dialectic themes of Sermon 18, "The Two Operations of the Spirit" in a daily chapter meeting of the students in the library of the Glastonbury Abbey guest house.

In this sermon, as will be explicated towards the end of the next chapter, I recognised clear and honest insights about the human condition in relation to the spiritual dimension of life. In fact, in

my listening and subsequent reading, I felt, no small amount of conviction as a relatively young minister. For I recognised the common malaises that Bernard also knew and listed such as spiritual hubris, presumptions of knowing, impatience for growth, impositions of pastoral oversight, lack of genuine prayer and, most significantly, a self-abnegation due to a deprivation of received grace. In other words, he accurately described a gnawing lack of self-directed love; a self-diminishment, as he argues, which in turn drives psychologically needy actions: “For if you are mean to yourself, to whom will you be good?”<sup>13</sup>

Bernard’s use of *The Song of Songs* gave him the perfect vehicle to speak of important Christian leadership concerns. For the Lover (the Word) extols the deep and innate beauty of the Beloved, not merely her functionality in his service. And he calls out to her in that relational context, saying, “Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come...” (Song 2:10b). Commenting on this particular verse, Bernard writes:

What is this invitation but an inward pulse of charity (*affectio*), lovingly inciting us to zeal for our brother’s salvation, to zeal for the beauty of God’s house, for an increase in his rewards, an increase in the fruits of his righteousness, the praise and glory of his name? The man who is charged with the spiritual direction of others or with the duty of preaching may believe with certainty—as often as he feels himself inwardly moved by genuine love of God—that the Bridegroom is present, inviting him each time to the vineyards. To what end but that he may pluck up and destroy, that he may build and plant.<sup>14</sup>

In the abovementioned graced moments of piercing truth, and within the gentle holding days of retreat that followed, Bernard’s voice became reassuring of more fruitful paths in vocation and life.<sup>15</sup> That is, the encouragement to open one’s heart and mind repeatedly to the converting voice and presence of Christ, and the given and consoling graces of the Spirit. Such conscious receptivity is in itself a non-passive movement beyond self-sufficiency or egocentricity, towards more a more

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<sup>13</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, I, 18:II.4, 136.

<sup>14</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, vol. III, trans. Kilian Walsh and Irene Edmonds (Cistercian Publications, 1979), Sermon 58.II.3, 109-110.

<sup>15</sup> See, Appendix 2, “Holy Thursday.”

fertile and well-disposed ground of being. At one juncture in “The Two Operations of the Spirit,” he pointedly states:

Charity never lacks what is her own, and all she needs for her own security. Not alone does she have it, she abounds with it. She wants this abundance (*abundat*) for herself that she may share it with all; and she reserves enough for herself so that she disappoints (*deficiat*) nobody. For charity is perfect only when full (*plena*).<sup>16</sup>

Coinciding with my growing respect of monastic practice, my reading and understanding of Bernard increased. So also did my proclivity to quote key parts of “The Two Operations of the Spirit” in various preaching and teaching contexts over the next 25 years. That is not to say that he or I were well understood, particularly in light of the allegorical, symbolic and highly metaphorical nature of the discourse. However, I instinctively knew that his was a word of grace for the ages.

## 2.3 Saint Bernard: A life in context

### a) Hagiography

Biographies of the canonised are predictably biased. In large part they have been written to promote a greater devotion to the Christian life in the reader by virtue of the Saint’s love of God, not to tell an objective story. This observation is certainly true of the first biography / hagiography of Saint Bernard, *Sancti Bernardi Vita Prima*, which, unknown to him, was in the process of being written while he was still alive (at the point of death a number of times) and completed through subsequent volumes after his death. The *First Life’s* most well-known contributing author was William of St. Thierry (1075-85—1148), who knew a great deal of Bernard’s life detail from his own personal interactions. He also shared many of his theological premises and experiential applications.<sup>17</sup> In many commentators’ minds, William was actually superior to Bernard in

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<sup>16</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, I, 18:11.3, 135.

<sup>17</sup> For greater detail, see G.R. Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5-21.

theological insight and scope yet consistently deferred to him;<sup>18</sup> a level of veneration and fidelity from an older man that contributed to the Abbot's Europe wide attraction, fame and legendary Christian character.<sup>19</sup>

## **b) Formative life**

Bernard was born at Fontaines, near Dijon in the north of France in 1090 or 1091. His parents were of minor nobility, most notably on his mother's side. As a result, they were financially secure and able to provide their six sons and one daughter with a good level of education at St Vorles at Chattillon-sur-Seine where the family also kept a house. His father, Tescelin the Red, had a decorated fighting background. Aleth, his devout and devoted mother, died prematurely in 1103 or 1104 when Bernard was entering adolescence.<sup>20</sup> Through her father Bernard of Mountbard, Aleth had direct links to the French aristocracy, which, in the midst of Bernard's increasing ecclesial and political travel beyond the Clairvaux Abbey after 1125, gave him ready links to people of influence and power.

The *prima vita* records that Aleth had a dream that her third son was to be a "barking" watch-dog of Christian orthodoxy.<sup>21</sup> In speaking to a holy man about the dream, she was told, somewhat reminiscent of significant biblical birth narratives, "There is no need to be afraid... you are to be a mother of a wonderful dog who is destined to be the guardian of the Lord's house... He is to be a

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<sup>18</sup> Perhaps best expressed by Etienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard*: "Everything would be much simpler if we could consider Bernard as the master and William the disciple. William indeed would have us believe it, and it is true that he was so; but then has the disciple nothing to teach his master?" 5.

<sup>19</sup> Adriann Bredero's 1996 biographical study on Bernard, *Between Cult and History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), has become an important resource in Bernardine studies. Because details of Bernard's life remain veiled by the legend built up around his name, Bredero has sought to separate fiction from reality, more by means of textual analysis than historical recording. However, so entrenched in historical consciousness are the claims and assertions of the hagiographers, that it remains a difficult task to change perspective. For example, even in the light of clear historical evidence, such as Bernard's birthdate which Bredero argues is unequivocally 1091, not 1090 as most so-called definitive biographies claim.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Casey, *Athirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1988), 7.

<sup>21</sup> Bredero, *Between Cult and History*, 29-33.

marvellous preacher, and as a dog will lick its master's wounds... so the words that his tongue speaks will heal and cure many of the evils that disease men's souls."<sup>22</sup> It is a description that is strangely dissonant with the written pastoral essence his monastic vocation and seemingly more reflective of a justifying reductionism in light of Bernard's mistake-ridden ventures into wider church and politicised situations which will be referred to in brief throughout this chapter.

Little historical detail is recorded about Bernard's education, other than an assumption of its fine quality due his grasp of languages, rhetorical skill, and eloquence of written expression and love of reading. And as to the trajectory of his education, it is surmised that his parents encouraged Bernard towards the priestly life and his brothers toward military service, given their mother's night vision and their father's knightly title.<sup>23</sup>

Following his basic schooling, Bernard most likely took up residence again at his family walled-chateaux, having sufficient leisure time to begin searching his religious conscience in relation to an eventual vocation.<sup>24</sup> Later writings<sup>25</sup> reveal a particular unease he had with anger and aggressiveness in his youth and perhaps the strength of this personal characteristic drove or led him to consider an intentionally religious, purging way of life.<sup>26</sup> That eventually led to his making monastic vows in an ostensibly lay and egalitarian movement. It's debatable, however, if monastic life fully healed this propensity, given the passion of his preaching for the second crusade in 1146

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>23</sup> Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 7. Tradition would suggest that the widowed and retired Tescelin ended his days as a monk at Clairvaux.

<sup>24</sup> Parallels to the autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola are interesting at this point. Forced leisure—the young Ignatius was recuperating for battle or skirmish wounds—also took him to decidedly affective places of discernment. For each future Saint, the primacy of religious experience over and above received dogma, began at an early age and has had profound effects on others.

<sup>25</sup> Namely, Bernard's Monastic Chapter Lenten sermons on Psalm 90.

<sup>26</sup> See, Jean Leclercq, "Introduction" in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 15-17. See also, Dennis E. Tamburello, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Spiritual Master* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 27-29.

at the behest of a former monastic student, Pope Eugenius III (1088-1153) and his vitriolic, and at times, cruelly inaccurate portrayals of those he considered to be less than orthodox.<sup>27</sup>

### **c) A monastic vocation**

At the relatively young age of 21, Bernard decided to enter into monastic life, though this was not a solitary pursuit. In the course of a year he convinced his uncle, brothers, cousins and numerous friends to accompanying him to the nearby proto-Cistercian Citeaux monastery, as legend has it, just before the Easter of 1112.<sup>28</sup> They numbered 30 in all and represented in major part—particularly given Bernard’s lasting recruiting and evangelical influences—a wave of faith regeneration within monastic life and practice.<sup>29</sup>

Bredero suggests that the expansion of influence was due in part to the new Cistercian order raising the age of novitiate entry to 16, meaning that broader levels of education, coupled with established patterns of cultural interaction beyond the particular social and historical circumstance of the monastery, were significant in a new-found ability to interact meaningfully with the nature of society as a whole.<sup>30</sup> This was certainly true of the well-read and culturally versed Bernard. It is not an overstatement to suggest, therefore, that the subsequent flowering of Cistercian monastic life in France and beyond, and the largely positive impact this had upon the institutional Church, was due to his missional influence in partnership with the saintly reputation that grew up around him.

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<sup>27</sup> See, Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 16-21, for a succinct overview.

<sup>28</sup> His sister, Humbline was converted in 1122. His brother Robert left monastic life in 1119.

<sup>29</sup> Bredero, *Between Cult and History*, records that the large number of recruits that followed him to Citeaux, also, in major part, followed him to Clairvaux. This suggests to Bredero that something else may have been at play, other than an allegiance to the relatively new Cistercian order. Bernard’s own charisma and reforming strategies for monastic life were therefore instrumental to the establishment of Citeaux’s daughter house—Clairvaux—and then its many, if not disproportionate in number, affiliate houses: “Nevertheless, we must confront another question: should the entry of Bernard and his companions (to Citeaux) not also be viewed as a detour on the road toward the establishment of his own community, which he eventually realized when he founded Clairvaux in his native country. A desire to have his “new monastery” where he himself could be the abbot, would certainly have corresponded to his nature.” 209.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

What also needs to be stressed in light of the above considerations is that the monastic vocation fully defined his understanding of the imperatives of the Christian life. His noted evangelical zeal was expressed squarely within this bordered context, Clairvaux often being an evocative metaphor for the anticipated heavenly city of Jerusalem, that is, *the* place of spiritual formation for what is yet to come. This meant a formation not simply based upon the acquisition of virtue or knowledge but on the conscious practice of spiritual poverty before a beckoning divine love, both literal and figurative in form. For Bernard, this was a work of the unifying and vivifying Spirit, as it was the monastery and not the scholastic classroom where lasting spiritual learning took place through dialogue, not rote instruction.<sup>31</sup>

#### **d) Reformer**

Notwithstanding the Gregorian Reforms that began under Pope Gregory VII in 1050 (activating an institutional disentangling of church and state while seeking also to address lax clerical ethics), the personal rejuvenation of the Christian faith which was embodied so effusively in Bernard, took the reforming processes a needed step further. That being so, a strategic movement towards a rigorous re-grounding in the prayer practices is outlined Benedict's Rule. As clearly evidenced from Bernard's ensuing life of leadership as an advocate for monastic life, this was not an introspective or cloistered way of being. The common, repeated prayer was understood and experienced to be a wellspring of overflowing grace. So, for Bernard, constant renewal of faith had broad social application and ready human implications for Christian ministry. Thomas Merton, when writing at the behest of Pope Pius XII on the 800<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Bernard's death, suggested as much in

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 196. "He [Bernard] must have also viewed the approach to theology by Abelard and Gilbert de la Porree as a menace to monastic life. He saw it as an attack on the monastic practice of theology, since the scholastic method was taught in classrooms, the personal dialogue between leader and pupil was eliminated. In monastic theology this dialogue was regarded as essential for spiritual formation."

retrospect, though I suspect with a certain post World War II idealism of which he himself was a living symbol:

Clairvaux and Bernard both meant one thing above all: the great 12<sup>th</sup> century revival of mysticism, a spiritual renaissance which had its effects in all the other renaissances of the time. For Bernard was to influence everything from politics to the Roman Court and the whole humanistic trend to “courtly love.” He left his mark on schools of spirituality, on Gregorian chant, on the clerical life, and on the whole development of Gothic architecture and art. One of the signs of spiritual revival that is really spiritual is that it effects every kind of life and activity around it, inspires new kinds of art, awakens a new poetry and a new music, even makes lovers speak to another in a new language and think about one another with a new kind of respect.<sup>32</sup>

At the time of the arrival of Bernard and his companions in ca. 1112, the Abbey of Citeaux, known at the time as the New Monastery, was arguably in a fledgling state of existence.<sup>33</sup> However, having been founded in 1098 by the originator of the (Benedictine) Cistercian movement, Robert of Molesme, it was, in fact, a pliable context and challenge for the aspirational Bernard. The renewal of Benedictine practices was Robert’s vision for reform also, though he did not stay long at the New Monastery as its abbot to nurture its budding life, returning to Molesme due to the insistent requests of its monks for him to do so.<sup>34</sup>

### **e) The call to Clairvaux and beyond**

In 1115, the charismatic yet ascetically orientated Bernard was instructed by his order to establish a chapter house in Clairvaux in the Champagne region of north-eastern France so familiar to him. This he did willingly, yet with a lofty asceticism that negatively impacted his health.<sup>35</sup> It is recorded that he very nearly died in his first years seeking to establish the Clairvaux community.<sup>36</sup> Still, as Jean Leclercq suggests, not only did he give himself to the ascribed and demanding role as a

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Last of the Fathers: Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and the Encyclical Letter ‘Doctor Mellifullus’* (San Diego: HBJ, 1982), 29.

<sup>33</sup> This is another cultic assumption contested by Bredero. He claims that under the leadership of Abbot Stephen Harding, Citeaux at the time of Bernard’s arrival, was in a relatively good and expanding state of health. See, *Between Cult and History*, 206-208.

<sup>34</sup> Tamburello, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 26-27.

<sup>35</sup> According to legend, the Clairvaux site and buildings was initially a “robbers lair” that was frequented by prostitutes. This in itself sets up the religious contrast of *pauperes Christi*—those who are poor for Christ’s sake.

<sup>36</sup> Merton, *The Last of the Fathers*, 30-31.

spiritual father (Abbot) and shepherd to his growing community,<sup>37</sup> but in time and with the help of his two brothers Gerard and Guy, also proved himself to be an excellent administrator and long-term strategist. Within three years at Clairvaux, a new affiliate-house was formed in Trois-Fontaines beginning a multiplying pattern of two new houses being established every year which continued for well over thirty years.<sup>38</sup>

The years between 1115 and 1125 were a season of located stability and growing self-awareness for the relatively young abbot. It is no coincidence, therefore, that his first major written work, *De Gradibus Humilitatis (On the Steps/Degrees of Humility)*, was written in 1119, as it arose out of the exacting period of the Abbey's establishment and through the trials of personal sickness. A radically open and seeking disposition before God, self and others became the foundation for all Bernard's espoused preaching and writing that was to follow. Following the monastic wisdom and practice of John Cassian (365-435), Bernard focused on purity of heart (Matthew 5:3) or *humilitas*. This state of being was preconditional upon keeping the thought (*contemplatio*) of God always before one's mind, so, "you must cling totally to this formula for piety: "Come to my help, O God; Lord, hurry to my rescue" (Psalm 70:1).<sup>39</sup>

And so, as his health gradually improved and his reputation for spiritual wisdom grew, Bernard began to travel locally, then extensively. First establishing Clairvaux affiliate houses then offering

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<sup>37</sup> *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, trans. Cardinal Gasquet (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2007), Chapter 2: "What the Abbot Should Be." E.g., "The abbot in his teaching should always observe the apostolic rule which says, *reprove, entreat, rebuke*. That is to say, as occasions require ought to mingle encouragement with reproofs. Let him manifest the sternness of a master and the loving affection of a father." And, "The abbot must... be aware that the shepherd will bear the blame wherever the father of the household finds that the sheep have yielded no profit." 6.

<sup>38</sup> Jean Leclercq, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercian Spirit* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1976), 16.

<sup>39</sup> John Cassian, "Conference X," in *Conferences*, trans. & ed. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1985). "It is not without good reason this verse has been chosen from the whole of Scripture as a device. It carries within it all the feelings of which human nature is capable. It can be adapted to every condition and can be usefully deployed against every temptation. It carries within it a cry of help to God in the face of every danger. It expresses the humility of pious confession. It conveys the watchfulness born of unending worry and fear. It conveys a sense of our frailty, the assurance of being heard, the confidence in help that is always and everywhere present... This is the voice filled with the ardour of love and of charity." 133. See also, Michael Casey, "The Journey of Fear to Love: John Cassian's Road Map," in *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, Pauline Allen, Raymond Canning and Lawrence Cross, editors (Brisbane: Watson Ferguson & Company, 1998). In Casey's reading of Cassian, who directly influenced Benedict and by extension, Bernard, humility was the foundation of a non-abstracted life of deification—"Christlikeness." 195.

them pastoral oversight, he began to enter the wider political-ecclesial domains by responding to invitations to write, preach and offer counsel on more complex fronts than his charisma had a realistic and ultimate capacity for.<sup>40</sup> His willingness to become involved in heresy trials and preach the disastrous second crusade is indicative of this, though the details of these complex circumstances extends well beyond the scope of this thesis.

Bernard's latter years were spent giving greater focus to his pastoral and administrative duties as Clairvaux's abbot. In particular, his delivery and final editing of *On the Song of Songs* chapter sermons, are evidence of a certain renewed stability and compunction of heart, specifically in light of the bloodshed and terror of the ill-conceived and preached Second Crusade.<sup>41</sup> Bernard died at Clairvaux in 1153 at the age of 62. His final Sermon (86) remained incomplete, though writers of the latter Bernardine circle sought to finish the series yet without Bernard's artistic and spiritual flair.

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<sup>40</sup> See, Leclercq, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercian Spirit*, 51-70. The chapter, aptly entitled, "Man of Action," lists the numerous forays Bernard made into the socio / religious / doctrinal / political world of the time. Most, if not all, were away from the chapter house in Clairvaux, to which he eventually returned to deliver his last sermons due to failing health and humiliation (compunction) in light of the second, disastrous Crusade that Bernard had advocated via his preaching. In summary, Leclercq states, "Throughout his entire career, in the most diverse activity, the important place held in his work by the thought of Clairvaux is undeniable. Perhaps the most continuous current in his life was his concern to work for the reform of the Church, which he conceived primarily as an interior reform and thus only able to be accomplished within the souls of men (sic), and not be institutions alone." 69.

<sup>41</sup> Detail of this important period of Bernard's life nevertheless lie outside the scope of this thesis. For reliable biographical, historical and interpretative information, see Bredero, *Between Cult and History*, 194-281. See also, Jean Leclercq, "Introduction" in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, 15-29.

## 2.4 Doctor Mellifluous: *Artistry in action*

### a) An existential theologian

Like the writings of Jonathan Edwards to be discussed in following chapters, Bernard of Clairvaux offers even the modern reader a genuine originality of thought. This is most often expressed in his writings as an artful imagination; that which sings of the courting grace (*caritas*) of God repeatedly invoked as something to live by and as an expression of an affective ordering of the heart (*ordinatio caritatis*).<sup>42</sup> As a word-smith of the social vernacular<sup>43</sup> and of traditional theological confession, Bernard wove biblical texts, daily idioms and evocative metaphors seamlessly into his writings, often with a poetic licence for translation and ready application.<sup>44</sup>

It is true to say, then, that Bernard was not an academic or innovative theologian *per se*. Rather, in the words of Bernardine scholar and monk Bernard Bonowitz, Bernard of Clairvaux was an existential theologian, who taught and preached out of his own oscillating movements of seeking faith within the monastic life so as to evoke a responsive faith in others.<sup>45</sup> This was his most influential charisma. Significantly for him, the divinely initiated encounter of love was not a concocted or privatised experience of mind and heart, but ultimately an anointing of the Holy Spirit for the vocational sharing of divine love. This means both theologically and missionally that the third person of the Trinity is not given for the pleasure of spiritual experience alone but is gratuitously poured out as embracing and hopeful love for all (Romans 5.5). Therefore, it is a spiritual gifting for a growing conformity to and within the holy nature of God who, as the

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<sup>42</sup> Bernard wrote in Medieval Latin with a colloquial French verve or vivacity, making for a highly lyrical style and resonance. He was assiduous in editing and stylising his manuscripts for publication and circulation. In many ways his writing reflected what T.S. Eliot described as being where, “every word is at home... the complete consort dancing together.” ‘Little Gidding,’ V, 58.

<sup>43</sup> The grammar of holy desire, as some have described it.

<sup>44</sup> See, Michael Casey, *Athirst for God*, 21.

<sup>45</sup> Bernard Bonowitz, *Saint Bernard's Three-Course Banquet*, 2.

processional Trinity, is always in graced relation to the world.<sup>46</sup> It was, therefore, a spiritual sweetness to “taste” and be progressively changed by. It was not meant to be a subjective experience of religious self-satisfaction.

In the midst of a persuasive address to scholars, clerics and students in Paris around 1140, Bernard stated confidently:

You do not need any speech of mine to commend this [the rewards of eternal life] to you. The Spirit reveals it himself. You do not need to look it up in the pages of a book. Look to experience instead. Man does not know the price of wisdom. It comes from hidden places and it has a sweetness with which no sweetness known to living men can compare. It is the sweetness of the Lord, and you will not recognise it unless you taste it... Not learning but anointing teaches it; it is not grasped by knowledge but by conscience. It is holy. It is a pearl.<sup>47</sup>

And similarly, in his summation of *On Free Will and Grace*:

Let us then beware lest, when we perceive these things to be invisibly enacted within us and with our co-operation, we attribute them either to our own will, which is weak; or to any necessary external necessity imposed upon God, of which there is none; and not to grace alone of which he is full (John 1:14).<sup>48</sup>

For Bernard, then, it is the Holy Spirit that gives the light of grace to the human heart and mind.

And in this way, the knowledge of God is not merely informational. Rather, it is unveiled as the dispositional love of the Triune God infused within the affections and best conveyed through the affections as an effusive disposition of love to others.

### **b) *Humilitas* as the ground of deification**

As already indicated, core to a consenting spiritual sensibility (*affectus*) before the converting word of Christ and the consoling grace of the Holy Spirit<sup>49</sup> was a contemplatively renewed humility

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<sup>46</sup> See, Charles Dumont, *Pathway of Peace: Cistercian Wisdom According to Saint Bernard* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1999), 24-30. Dumont quotes Bernard's first sermon on the *Song of Songs*, “Anointing alone teaches this kind of song (the song of mutual, willing, love), and experience alone learns it. Those who have had such an experience recognise themselves in it; those who have not had this experience burn with desire, not so much to know about it, but to experience it. 28. Stated plainly here is Bernard's fundamental anthropology of, “I desire, therefore I am.”

<sup>47</sup> St. Bernard, “On Conversion,” *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, XIII.25, 85. History suggests that approximately 25 of those who gathered in Paris to hear Bernard deliver this treatise were professed as monks at the Clairvaux Abbey twelve months later.

<sup>48</sup> St. Bernard, *Concerning Grace and Free Will*, trans. Watkin W. Williams (London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 81.

<sup>49</sup> Bonowitz, *St. Bernard's Three-Course Banquet*, helpfully defines *affectus* in this context in terms of, “The whole story begins with that keyword of the Cistercians, *affectus*... It is a very difficult word to translate. It is strange, because it is so pivotal in the Cistercian vocabulary, but it is very hard to say in English exactly what it means. I will give an old-fashioned word here, and then I

in grateful and missional relation to God (Psalm 70:1, Luke 1:38). In this light, the Abbot of Clairvaux was a professed Cistercian monk, thoroughly grounded and schooled in the Rule of St. Benedict (480-547) and daily shaped by Marian devotion.<sup>50</sup> The written Rule is a communal standard that, by its author's own admission, sought to shape monasteries into practical workshops of God's enlarging, healing love.<sup>51</sup> The common life of the monks was therefore to be the habitual, sanctifying practices of the work of God (*opus Dei*), that is, a unifying life of prayer and manual work, motivated and sustained by the mercy and providence of God:

We are establishing a school in the Lord's service. In this formation we hope not to prescribe anything that is harsh or too heavy. If there is some restriction, it is because reason demands it for the correction of vices and the preservation of love. Do not be frightened by this and the desert way of salvation, because it is narrow only at the beginning. As we make progress in the monastic life and in faith, the heart will be enlarged, and the way of God's commandments will be run in the extreme sweetness that comes from love.<sup>52</sup>

It is out of this disciplined, communal world that Bernard wrote, preached and offered pastoral oversight. As already indicated, the complexity of his character and the sheer weight of public discourse cannot be understood in full measure without the converting (*conversio*) and deifying nature of monastic life being borne in mind. From his perspective, it was entirely within the

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will develop it: "sensitivity." I would define it as such. *Affectus* is the capacity to be sensitive to reality; you can be affected by what is outside you. It is vulnerability. Even grammatically it is passive. It starts out as a passive participle. It is the disposition to be touched and moved by what is in and around one. We could say in modern terms that the opposite of *affectus* would be *rigidity*: where an individual gives a hard and fast definition to himself and his environment and insists on it at all costs. Bernard's term for this rigidity is *obduritia cordis*, hardness of heart... Saint Bernard says that it is the worst of all vices because God cannot get to you; nothing can get to you. You have made yourself inaccessible to reality." 45

<sup>50</sup> This is not an insignificant point, though a fuller discussion lies beyond this thesis. It is enough to offer at this juncture something of an insight into Bernard's attraction and devotion to Mary, as expressed in his famous Advent Sermon, 'Missus Est.' He states, "Again, we can be saved with virginity, not without humility. A soul that has to deplore the loss of virginity may still be acceptable to God by humility: without humility, I will venture to say that even the virginity of Mary would not have been pleasing to Him, the Divine Majesty. Upon whom shall my spirit rest, if not on him that is humble and peaceable? He says not on the virgin, but on the humble, if, therefore, Mary had not been humble the Spirit would not have rested on her." *Sermons of St. Bernard on Advent and Christmas: Including the Famous Treatise on the Incarnation Called "Missus Est"* (Nabu Public Domain Reprints), 29.

<sup>51</sup> *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, 3. Also, Dumont, *Pathway to Peace*: "Liberation is imperative, and this is the whole theme of the treatise *On Grace and Free Choice*. In Chapter IV of this treatise we see that conversion and holiness consist essentially in liberation from slavery. Its goal is to restore our freedom as children of God. This comes about slowly and imperceptibly, as do God's kingdom and the agreement of our will with his. In the abbot of Clairvaux's teaching, it is important for us to notice this progressive and unobservable conversion which culminates in union with God. Slow and gradual, conversion is very often identified with the whole aggregation of monastic observances which constitute the school of charity, because charity consists particularly in free and persevering acquiescence to God's will. The affections imperceptibly begin to be healed and become spiritual love. Saint Bernard well expresses monastic life's effectiveness in healing freedom. 42.

<sup>52</sup> As translated and quoted by, Michael Casey, *A Guide to Living in the Truth: Saint Benedict's Teaching on Humility* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori Publications, 2001), 45-46.

monastic profession that lay both a spiritual framework and a missional springboard into ecclesial and social renewal. On this point, Gillian Evans comments, “[Bernard] saw his monastic vocation as also a missionary vocation, to a degree perhaps not envisaged in Benedict’s Rule... William of St. Thierry depicts Bernard as such a seductive preacher that people hid their loved ones at his approach.”<sup>53</sup>

Given his strong capacity for religious persuasion, coupled with an awareness of his and others’ propensity to manipulate, it is no surprise that Bernard’s first major written work, written at age 29, concerned itself with the ascending affection of humility in contrast to the descending, disaffected nature of pride.<sup>54</sup> In many ways, his vocationally defining work *The Steps of Humility and Pride (De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae)*, represented a theological, psychological and spiritual foundation upon which Bernard built his subsequent pastoral responsibilities and writings. According to him, humility—a consensual sensibility of the affections in relation to the Holy Trinity of love—was the converting way, that is, a deepening union of mind and will with Christ’s in the unifying love of the Spirit.

Therefore, this pathway of God’s calling was not a way of resignation or passivity. Rather, humility is the courage of willing participation in the unfolding paschal journey of Jesus. For the monk, then, it was the demanding way of return to God and the core disposition needed to love neighbour as one is called to love oneself:<sup>55</sup> “Christian love, then, is a communion of poverty. It does not consider the neighbour’s qualities, talents and abilities, nor his faults, but his plight.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 28.

<sup>54</sup> By his own admission late within the treatise, Bernard spent more time speaking of pride than the steps of humility. A pivotal text quoted in the seventh chapter of the Rule—on which this particular treatise largely rested—and one that is recited often in monastic Services of the Hours, is Psalm 131. “Lord, my heart is not exalted, nor my eyes raised too high...but I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother, my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.”

<sup>55</sup> Bonowitz, *St. Bernard’s Three Course Banquet*, 38-39: “This arduous and painful truth of humility is the *skopos* (ultimate meaning) of the monastic life. Cassian himself had used humility as a possible synonym for purity of heart in in First Conference, and Benedict makes it the standard... So humility is the immediate goal of the monastic life; it is where you want to get to. It is what Christ is in the theology of Saint Augustine.” 38.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

Hence Christian humility is experienced in the little by little (Lat. *paulatim*) steps made towards divinisation for the monk and Christian alike, as all contribute towards a promised and satisfied end in God. Bernard further writes:

Here is a definition of humility. "Humility is the virtue by which a man recognises his own unworthiness because he really knows himself (Augustine)." This description fits those who have resolved to make the climb and who go from strength to strength, that is, step to step, until they reach the highest peak of humility, on which, standing as though in Zion (Ps 83:6), that is, at a vantage point, they see the truth.<sup>57</sup>

### **c) A missional theology of embrace**

Such was the famed extent of Bernard's communicative skills across 12<sup>th</sup> Century Europe, he embodied for many the possibility of monastic and, by extension, societal reform. This influence, though, was established primarily before the steady and influential rise of scholasticism; an age and era equated with the prominence of St. Anselm (1033-1109), wherein Christian theology was first articulated as a faith imperative seeking further understanding. Anselm's dialogical approach of ideas contrasted significantly with Bernard's more poetic emphasis on the relational embrace (*amplexus*) of God (Luke 15: 20), from which all reposed understanding could and would naturally flow. Even the harshest critic of the Cistercian abbot would be hard pressed to deny the attractiveness and hope of his mellifluous rhetoric in this regard.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, *Selected Works*, "On Humility and Pride," (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 103.

<sup>58</sup> Bernard commonly became known as Doctor Mellifluous, suggestive of a purveyor of honey coated and euphonious words. However, in his introduction to *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), Jean Leclercq helpfully states, "His very title, "Doctor Mellifluous" was bestowed because of his interpretation of Scripture and has nothing to do with the characteristic sweetness of honey. Instead, the epithet is in keeping with traditional explanation, derived from Origen and developed by Bernard himself. According to the theory, one draws the hidden meaning from the literal sense of the biblical text, just as honey is made to flow from the honeycomb or as Moses drew water from the rock." 33. See also, Thomas Merton, *The Last of the Fathers*. The Papal Encyclical Letter of 1953 is instructive of Bernard's underlying motivations as teacher and monastic pastor: "The charity which activated him makes lights of obstacles and, so to speak, gives wings to the mind. For him learning is not the final goal, but rather a path leading to God; it is not the cold object of empty speculation, an intellectual diversion, fascinating the mind with its play of light and glory, but is moved, impelled, and governed by love. Wherefore, borne up by this wisdom and means of meditation, contemplation and love, Bernard ascends the peak of the mystical life and is united with God Himself, tasting at times almost infinite happiness even in this mortal life." 97-8.

Indeed, Bernard has been referred to as the 'last of the Fathers, yet in no way the least of them' in that both his epistemology and anthropology are grounded in the redeemed desire to love and worship God.<sup>59</sup> From this place of being-in-relation, knowledge has both a faith context and unified eschatology. That is, the oft prayed-for Kingdom of God.

Importantly for Bernard and other reformers like him, only through this spiritual desire can genuine knowledge of God and ensuing action be unified in being and purpose. As I have suggested earlier, from the thirteenth century to the present, the fissure in the content of religious knowledge from its relational Source progressively began to occur via the institutionalism of the scholastic method, that is, the gradual separation of the worshipping / missional faith community from a professional academy still operative in its name.<sup>60</sup>

#### **d) Biblical soundings**

Bernard's monastic profession practically meant that his worship and working life was saturated in the recitation and the reading (*lectio*) of the Psalms, and deep listening (*audire*) to the Christian scriptures. However, such adaption and integration of the scriptural texts within his writing was not what might be called in the modern era proof-texting or Biblicism. Rather, it was one of subtle, poetic layering, born out of years of contemplative listening and rehearsing, and in relation to the

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<sup>59</sup> Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991): "Nevertheless, to praise you is the desire of man, a little piece of your creation. You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." 3. See also, James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 46-47. Smith writes, importantly for the praxis of Christian ministry, "Thus, in contrast to both the person-as-thinker and the person-as-believer models, I want to articulate a more robustly Augustinian anthropology that sees humans as most fundamentally orientated and identified by love. Only such a robust anthropology – which accords a more central, formative place to embodiment—can yield a truly alternative understanding of pedagogy." 46.

<sup>60</sup> Saint Bonaventure (1222-1274), often depicted as a foil to the scholasticism and Aristotelianism of Saint Thomas Aquinas, is equally a bearer of the Augustinian, neo-Platonic understanding / praxis of faith. Famously (and poetically) he wrote in the Preface to his landmark treatise, *The Soul's Journey into God / The Journey of the Mind to God*, "Wherefore, it is to groans of prayer through Christ Crucified, in whose blood we are cleansed from the filth of vices, that I first of all invite the reader. Otherwise he may come to think that mere reading will suffice without fervour, speculation without devotion, investigation without admiration, observation without exultation, industry without piety, knowledge without love, understanding without humility, study without divine grace, reflection as a mirror, without divinely inspired wisdom." *Bonaventure*, trans. E. Cousins (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 55.

imperatives of experience and faith. In the words of Michael Casey, an Australian Trappist monk who wrote his doctoral thesis on holy desire in Bernard's commentary *On the Song of Songs*, "Bernard was not a biblical fanatic... interpreting it in a narrow, fundamentalist mode. He used the bible easily and naturally as one of God's greater gifts; he marvelled at the mysteries it enshrined but did not hesitate to incarnate its meaning into his own human discourse."<sup>61</sup> And remarkably, as Casey has estimated, for every two lines of Bernard's commentary *On the Song of Songs*, there is a direct reference to (or echo of) a biblical text, some being more demonstrably applicable or relevant than others.<sup>62</sup> This pattern of contemplative thought and writing is clearly seen in both the text of the commentary and in the copious amounts of annotated cross-references.<sup>63</sup> In many ways, Bernard's reception and communication of the biblical text, was born out of habitually listening with the ear of the heart to the precepts of the Master (*patris*) that St. Benedict impressed upon his readers with the very first line of his Rule.

#### **e) Philosophical groundings**

Akin to the major Patristic preachers, teachers and writers, Bernard was imbued with—and assumed—a Neo-Platonic philosophical framework. Theologically adapted from the time of the Cappadocian fathers and Augustine, this philosophical framework supposed an incrementally ascending, re-unification of the human soul with God; that is, through the humanly redeeming Jesus Christ and in the deifying operations of the Holy Spirit.<sup>64</sup> In fact, one could argue this liberating movement from the alienating power of sin and to increasingly virtuous steps toward

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<sup>61</sup> Casey, *Athrist for God*, 25.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24: "The monk's book was the Bible. This was Bernard's principal source and main inspiration. The Scriptures saturated his whole subjectivity, not only with their teaching, but also with images and languages and associations."

<sup>64</sup> Bernard's soteriology is thoroughly Trinitarian in nature and Augustinian in tone. All members of the Trinity are equally involved in saving, redeeming grace; Christ is the penetrating, humble wisdom of God, the Spirit is the expressed love and unifying will of God (and the 'tenderiser' of the human will) and the Father is the effusive Source / Fountain of God.

the fullness of God, represented an underlying tenet of Bernard's witness to faith. Thomas Merton suggests as much when he writes:

Saint Bernard's theology of grace presupposes his Neoplatonic conception of the soul created in God's image and destined by God for perfect union of likeness with Himself... Human freedom, aided by the power of the Holy Spirit, can aspire to far more than a mere intellectual contemplation of eternal ideas: that is, in Saint Bernard's mind, would be little better than frustration. God does not remain cold and distant, attracting the soul by never yielding Himself to it. He Himself both begins and finishes the work of the soul's transformation, and this whole work is an *ordinatio caritatis*, that is to say the elevation, disciplining, and redirection of all the soul's capacity for love by the actual motion of the divine Spirit.<sup>65</sup>

Merton's philosophical reading of Bernard at this point is accurate, though it is important to stress how deeply immersed in the scriptural texts the Abbot of Clairvaux was. In other words, Bernard's philosophical leanings were not without biblical legitimacy and warrant.

#### **f) Friendship and disinterested love**

Correlated with Bernard's philosophical assumptions, the writings of Cicero (106-43 BCE) appear to have been influential within his thinking and practice, as they had been for Augustine.<sup>66</sup>

Specifically, he seems to have valued Cicero's, *On Friendship (De amicitia)* particularly the philosopher's celebrated notion of disinterested love. That being so, he saw that a virtuous love—love for love's sake—can be resiliently offered despite a non-guarantee of return; *sic nos amantem quis non redamaret* or, "...so we even love the one who does not return it."<sup>67</sup>

Bernard either consciously or unconsciously utilised the personalised courtly love movement of 12<sup>th</sup> Century Europe that had been influenced by the re-reading of Cicero and Ovid (43 BCE—

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<sup>65</sup> Merton, *Last of the Fathers*, 49. It is worth noting at this juncture that the great Italian poet, Dante Alighieri, had Bernard accompany the Pilgrim, beyond the guiding of his beloved Beatrice, almost the "summit" of Paradiso. Only the Virgin Mary was higher on Dante's scale of human worthiness or holiness. Of Bernard's benevolent character, Dante (one very quick to assassinate characters) writes, "I expected one thing, but another answered me: I thought to see Beatrice, but I saw an old man clothed like the glorious ones; his eyes and cheeks were suffused with benevolent rejoicing, his compassionate bearing was such as befits a tender father." *Paradiso* edited and translated by Robert M. Durling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Canto 31.58-61, 623.

<sup>66</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, Book III iv (7), 38-9.

<sup>67</sup> Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience 350-1250* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publishing Inc., 1988), 253: "Clairvaux's passion for proselytising drew on an acquaintance with the expression of friendship present in classical authors. Many of the early Cistercians had gone to school and read these writers. In Bernard we find resonances of Cicero's *De amicitia*: sometimes there are passages close to direct quotations, but usually only indirect formulae."

17/18 AD), as a cultural vehicle for his own theologising and praxis of monastic life. Though well beyond the concerns of this study, it remains an important sociological backdrop to Bernard's life, times and writings, however different courtly and Cistercian understandings of love actually were.<sup>68</sup> Namely, the difference can be summarised as an *ecstasis* of human *eros* orientated ultimately unto itself, compared with *ecstasis* of human desire and love progressively orientated toward its desirous Giver.

As a mentor to Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-67), the abbot of Clairvaux encouraged Aelred's writings around similar, conversant themes of love and friendship, the result being the highly influential treatise, *Spiritual Friendship*. Early in the book, Aelred significantly defines friendship strictly according to Cicero: "Friendship is mutual harmony in affairs human and divine coupled with benevolence and charity (*caritas*)."<sup>69</sup>

Etienne Gilson, a venerated Bernardine scholar of the early twentieth century, offers six points of intersection between *On Friendship* and Bernard's (Cistercian) thought, perhaps the most pertinent to this thesis being in light of Bernard's seminal treatise, *On Loving God*. Gilson summarises a part of Bernard's thought by stating, "The source of friendship lies in love as opposed to practical utility. By this we must understand that *benevolentia* springs from an inward feeling of affection (*sensum diligendi*), a certain tenderness (*caritatem*), whereby we will do nothing but the good of the beloved."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See, Etienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard*, 186-197. Strongly resisting historian attempts to connect the two vibrant social movements, he writes, "It is therefore chimerical to seek out an influence of mystical on courtly love, beyond a few verbal borrowings. Of all that which defines the one nothing passed into the definition of the other because no passage from the one to the other was possible at all." 193.

<sup>69</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1977), 53.

<sup>70</sup> As quoted by Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Bernard of Clairvaux*, 10.

## 2.5 *Imago Dei* in Bernard's theology: The connecting thread

In the light of the above observations, Bernard might be accurately described in contemporary categories as a Christian humanist. By this I mean, he did not disparage the sinful and painful realities of humanity. In fact he personally understood them in desirous (*desiderium*) relation to a transcendent, transformative God.<sup>71</sup> Most determinative for him and the Benedictine / Cistercian tradition, therefore, was that whilst the likeness of God could be erased from the human form, even distorted, the image of God (*imago Dei*) could not. And herein lies Bernard's originality in that such an image is constituted not by an incomprehensible essence of God (*ad se*) but by the revealed incarnational nature of Christ the Word (*in se*). In this way, the *imago Dei* is an eternally relational dimension of being human, made fully accessible again by Christ's ascension to God's right hand and the Spirit's seal of adoption.<sup>72</sup>

This intrinsic image, Bernard contends, contains a threefold interrelated desire for God, via common human choices for freedom, truth and love.<sup>73</sup> The *imago Dei* cannot be fully destroyed, therefore, because it exists as the ontic reality of created life's desire; ultimately a desire not for

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<sup>71</sup> In essence, this is Bernard's anthropological framework when theologising. The human being is by innate nature, desirous. At that fundamental or base level, it is amoral, hence the need to awaken the desire for God—the object of all goodly desire—by virtue of the attraction and attachment (*affectus*) to a non-contractual (*agape*) love. Casey in *Athirst for God*, states, ““For Bernard, love and desire appeared as complimentary realities: love being more appropriate as a response to the presence of the object of one's affection; desire being especially a consequence of his being absent.” 88.

<sup>72</sup> The Feast of the Ascension was particularly important for Bernard. It represented the reunification of humanity with God, in Christ, through the Spirit. It was the completion or consummation of the redemptive cycle, that is, the descent or condescension of the incarnated Word, the self-giving for sin in the event of the cross, the resurrection from the dead and finally, the ascent of the rescued humanity in Christ back into the full embrace of God. In his well-known *Sermon II for the Ascension* he [pastorally] says, “My beloved, you must persevere in the lessons which you have learned: raise yourself up by humility. That is the way: there is no other. He who seeks to make progress some other way falls more quickly than he climbs. Humility alone exalts and leads to life. As God, Christ could not grow, since there is nothing greater than God. He did find a means of growth by coming down, however, taking on our flesh, suffering and dying to save us from eternal death. Then God exalted him, Jesus rose from the dead, ascended, and is seated the right hand of God. ‘Go and do likewise.’” As quoted in Leclercq, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 148.

<sup>73</sup> Dumont, *Pathway of Peace*, 38: “While being accomplices with a kind of duplicity and willing slaves, we still pine for our primordial freedom. In a certain way this is the voice of the image, buried deep within us but still intact. The spirit seeks its truth over and above the deviations of pride's blinding error. Lastly, love—which quickens the other two aspects of the search—desires the object which will fulfil its expectations by assuaging its anxiety and dissatisfaction.”

consumable product(s) but for relational intimacy and consummation of which freedom, truth and love are an integral part.<sup>74</sup> In *On Loving God*, Bernard pointedly writes:

The wicked, therefore walk around in circles, naturally wanting whatever will satisfy their desires, yet foolishly rejecting that which could lead them to their true end, which is not in consumption but in consummation. Hence, they exhaust themselves in vain instead of perfecting their lives by a blessed end. They take more pleasure in the appearance of things than in their Creator.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, the grace of God, is unable to be entirely shut out of the human experience by virtue of the divine initiative that is desirous of relational union and actively seeks it through the stirring of human desire through the wooing and potentially converting voice of the Word.<sup>76</sup> Desire, in this theological rendering, is not a construct of human experience—much like the attraction of affect—rather it is a given within human experience: “He (God) makes you desire, he is what you desire.”<sup>77</sup> In Sermon 58 of Bernard’s commentary *On the Song of Songs*, he expands this thought with both the accessible and absencing presence of the redeeming Word in mind:

To be drawn to the bridegroom is to accept from him that desire by which he himself is drawn, the desire for good actions, the desire for producing fruit for the bridegroom. For such a one the bridegroom is the whole of life and to die is gain.<sup>78</sup>

According to Bernard, that which is necessary for reunification with God, is for human beings to habitually exercise their innate freedom of choice (closely linked to *desiderium*) by freely consenting to the alluring beauty and truth of holy love. Such love is the drawing holiness of the Authoring God, revealed in the Word and confirmed by the Spirit. Astutely, his frequent usage of

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<sup>74</sup> Casey, *Athirst for God*, 63-189. “In Bernard’s view, the basis of the human being’s yearning for the Absolute is the nature with which the Creator has endowed him. It is because he has been made in God’s image—with a natural affinity with his Maker—that the human being cannot be wholly engaged or satisfied by realities in his own order of existence. Thus, he is driven by a natural tendency to transcend his own order and seek the divine.” 131.

<sup>75</sup> *On Loving God*, trans. Jean Leclercq & Henri Rochais (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995), VII. 19, 22.

<sup>76</sup> Bernard’s trinitarianism is hardly systematic in its expression, rather it is doxological, and specifically so in its unified, ecstatic, redeeming, missional (economic) graces that fully include and honour the Holy Spirit. Arguably, Bernard is a thoroughgoing theologian of the Spirit, given his emphasis on the human experience of transformative grace. In the course of Sermon 8, *On the Song of Songs*, he says, “So, although it has been said: ‘Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent,’ still, if that act of mission demonstrates the good pleasure of both the Father lovingly sending his Son and of the Son freely obeying the Father, then the Holy Spirit is not passed over in complete silence, for he is implied in the mention of so immense a grace. The Holy Spirit indeed is nothing else but the love and benign goodness of them both.” I, 8 II.4, 47.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, VII 21. 24.

<sup>78</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, III, 58 I.1, 108.

“freedom of choice” and not freedom of the will, is Bernard’s way of seeking to avoid endless debates regarding human merit and the initiating grace of God. Consequently, he wrote:

And it is consent of the will, free, not necessitated, which, seeing that in it consists our righteousness or unrighteousness, make us deservedly blessed or the reverse. Such consent, then, on account both of the inalienable freedom of the will, and of the inevitable judgement which reason everywhere and at all times exercises when we act, is not (I think), unfittingly called free choice, being self-determining on account of the will, and self-judging on account of the reason.<sup>79</sup>

If taken heed of, Bernard’s nuanced yet arguably wise path in such a pivotal matter of theology and practical faith may have changed the tone of acrimonious debate during the Protestant Reformation. Indeed, he was respectfully read and assimilated by John Calvin, Martin Luther and Jonathan Edwards in this specific context, the latter writing a whole treatise on freedom of the will.<sup>80</sup>

Bernard’s *Concerning Grace and Free Will*, literally, *On Free Judgment and Grace (de Gratia et libero arbitrio)*—thought to have been written at Clairvaux in 1128, is considered to be his most theologically reasoned and carefully constructed treatise. Merton suggests that it is fundamental to his monastic theology and his expansive way of life, as do Gilson and Tamburello by virtue of dense pages of technical observation and careful extrapolation.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Concerning Grace and Free Will*, 10.

<sup>80</sup> For the Calvin connection, see, Dennis E. Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994): “Although Calvin does not always interpret Bernard accurately or in context, the majority of the references (and in fact all references added after the 1539 edition) contain favourable evaluations of Bernard’s theology. It is worth noting that the mystical *Sermons on the Song of the Canticles* are the most frequently quoted works.” 2.

<sup>81</sup> Merton states, “Our basic freedom, *liberum arbitrium* or freedom of choice, is only the beginning of the ascent. The capacity to choose between good and evil is only the shadow of true liberty. Genuine freedom is the work of grace.” 53. And Gilson, who has obviously been read by most other Bernardine scholars since 1940, contends, “[Bernard] borrows; but all that he borrows is ordered in such a way as to prepare the solution of his own particular problem, namely: to give a coherent doctrinal interpretation and a complete theological justification of the Cistercian life.” 46. This meaning, Bernard’s stress on the image of God being most evident in the exercising of freedom within the will and not via intellectual cognition as per Augustine, grounds the monastic imperative of seeking virtuous ascent into God within a well-reasoned theological indicative. See also, Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard*, 23-29.

Aligning the image of God to the human soul and its integral forces of desire and will, was an innovative departure from Augustine's focus on essentially human cognitive capacities in relation to God and to the Christian life in general. As well summarised by Gilson:

In full accord with St. Augustine, St. Bernard places the image of God in the mind of man: *mens*; but while St. Augustine seeks it for preference in intellectual cognition where the Divine illumination attests the continual presence of the Creator to its creature, St. Bernard puts it rather in the will, and very especially in freedom.<sup>82</sup>

Significantly for this dissertation, then, Bernard's nuanced distinction between the convinced mind and a spiritually impacted will brings the affective action of divine love (*afficere*) and the invitation to respond in love via spiritual affection (*affectus*) to the forefront of theological discourse, spiritual formation and the pastoral disposition within the repeated practices of Christian ministry.

## 2.6 The restorative action of grace

For Bernard, therefore, theology was not simply another speculative idea or rarefied science. By way of lasting contrast, a soulful surrendering to God's gathering and sending love was the foundation of all seeking prayer and a fruitful, maturing life of discipleship. It can be argued, then, that he continually sought a synergy between reasoned theology and a graced way of becoming. And more simply than his many interpreters on this key issue, Bernard states in response to the lover's exclamation in *Song of Songs* 2.16, "My beloved is mine and I am his!", "I think it would satisfy our blunted and untutored understanding if we take the words, 'My beloved is mine' to mean, inclines, so the meaning is: 'My beloved inclines to me, and I to him.'"<sup>83</sup> He continues:

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<sup>82</sup> Gilson, 46.

<sup>83</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, IV, 67.V.9, 12-13. An inclination towards God in Bernard (and in Jonathan Edwards) is the active and consensual posture of the spiritual affections. It is a relational disposition more than an intellectual curiosity, of which Bernard has little or no tolerance. In fact, he lists curiosity, i.e., "about what is not one's proper concern" it as number 1 in the regressive steps of human pride (*On Humility and Pride*, 'The Steps', 100). The consensual and trusting soul leans into the embrace (*amplexus*) of love for the sake and hope of being love and grace for others. By way of stark contrast, the inward *curva* of the human soul is its self-deprived dullness (Calvin). "The thing that so disfigures us is the earthward curvature, the loss of all relish for Divine things, which is charity; instead of being moved by love we are henceforth subject to fear..." Gilson, 54.

Why this? Surely that she may show herself more full of grace when she surrenders wholly to grace, attributing to him both the beginning and the ending. How indeed could she be full of grace if there were any part of her which did not itself spring from grace? There is no way for grace to enter, if [a sense of] merit has taken residence in the soul. A full acknowledgement of grace then is a sign of the fullness of grace. Indeed, if the soul possesses anything of its own, to that extent grace must give place to it; whatever you impute to merit you steal from grace. I want nothing to do with the sort of merit which excludes grace. I shrink from what I possess, that I may truly possess myself, unless that which makes me my own is to some extent my own. Grace restores me to myself, freely justified and thus sets me free from the bondage of sin. For where the Spirit is, there is liberty.<sup>84</sup>

For Bernard, then, particularly within his pastoral practice of preaching, there existed a point of attractive or beautifying connection between received theology and the possibility of the Christian life. Hence, he expressed the hope of a lasting and restorative loyalty to God issuing from the stirring of the affections, however improbable as that might first seem. Charles Dumont sums up this point in a somewhat poetic, congruent fashion:

This nature, which has remained basically good but has deteriorated, needs grace in order to recover its original beauty. By its freedom it has retained a kind of innate desire to respond to grace. Conversion will consist in consenting to grace, which is also somehow God's response to freedom's desire. Like two persons who love one another, grace and freedom yearn to be united. Perversity lies in refusing what nature has been inarticulately waiting for.<sup>85</sup>

For Bernard, movements of incremental ascent from even hellish places of human experience are always possible within the ennobling grace of God. And even further to that, such raw experiences can continue to offer a needed learning for the ascending, healing way. The human continuum in relation to God is broad and never fully severed, as I have already indicated. Yet human affections swing from love to fear and from joy to despair on a regular, alternating basis. This variable set of human actualities are the very basis or context for Bernard's loquacious preaching of the Christian gospel; the good news, in that the grace of God, incarnated in Jesus the Word (John 1: 14) and poured into human hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5: 5), finds its way into the very depths and

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, IV., 67.VI.10, 14.

<sup>85</sup> Dumont, *Pathway of Peace*, 38-39.

breadth of human reality. It is both an incarnated grace and an empowering grace—this being a confession of faith in God that sounds throughout all of Bernard’s writings:

Do you keep watch? He keeps watch also. If you rise at night before the time of vigil and hasten to anticipate the morning watch, you will find him there. He will always be waiting for you. You would be very rash if you claimed to love him first or love him more; his love is greater, and it preceded yours.<sup>86</sup>

So, Bernard was certainly not sectarian in his thinking or practice, although paradoxically, he displayed little patience and mercy for those who were viewed with suspicion as being unorthodox in their theology.<sup>87</sup> He read widely, gleaning what he considered to be worthy or purposeful thought to integrate with his own. He expressed a certain freedom and daring in this, so confident was he of the non-transactional nature of divine benevolence.

Jean Leclercq, one of the foremost commentators on Bernard, summarised him and his written work in this original way:

“... a poet. His way of looking at the world made him a creator. He added to what he saw, transformed what he contemplated, discovered something beyond the obvious. He penetrated to the very designs of God whose light, shining through him, embellished the objects apprehended by his senses... Bernard was an artist. He needed beauty.”<sup>88</sup>

Bernard’s experiential and lyrical theology was not abstracted from the real and every day.

Indeed, one needs to be careful not to describe him loosely nor romantically as a mystic without first accurately defining the term. That may mean a reconstruction of its often-dismissive use and meaning.<sup>89</sup> For Bernard was a visible, accountable and active pastor of souls in the most astute

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<sup>86</sup> *Song of Songs*, IV, 69.III.8, 35.

<sup>87</sup> Peter Abelard is the obvious example to cite here. See, G.R. Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 118-129. See also, Anthony N. S. Lane, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Theologian of the Cross* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013), 27-40, 158-159.

<sup>88</sup> Jean Leclercq, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercian Spirit*, 17-18.

<sup>89</sup> Harvey D. Egan’s tryptic definition of the mystic, the mystical theologian and the mystagogue is helpful in this regard. He writes, “The mystic leads a mystical life, replete with the immediate consciousness of God. The mystical theologian provides the theory and understanding of such a life. The mystagogue leads others in the pursuit of this life. One and the same person may possess all three gifts, but frequently this is not the case.” In, *Soundings in the Christian Mystical Tradition* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010), xx. Bernard of Clairvaux may well fit all three descriptions, yet he certainly does not boast about an immediate consciousness of God, preferring to speak eloquently about God’s seeming absence in proportion to God’s presence. His was a unitive—mystical—experience of the divine yet not without the important nuance of veiledness and clear discernment of thought.

and practical sense of the term. He also displayed competent administrative oversight for his monastic order and, as previously indicated, travelled widely in the service of Popes and the Church. By way of a contemporary but instructive turn of phrase, he kept showing up and performed his leadership responsibilities effectively. That did not stop him making major mistakes and adopting disproportionately hostile stances towards those he presumed were unorthodox. However, his synergistic love of God, neighbour and self is self-evident in his writings and lives on within the Cistercian legacy. For ultimately, it was the gratuitous and enlivening love of God that motivated him to the core:

God is not loved without a reward, although he should be loved without regard for one. True charity cannot be worthless, still, as “it does not seek its own advantage,” it cannot be termed mercenary. Love pertains to the will, it is not a transaction; it cannot acquire or be acquired by a pact. Moving us freely (*cordis affectus*), it makes us spontaneous. True love is content with itself; it has its reward, the object of its love [God the Trinity].<sup>90</sup>

In order to move towards a conclusion of this chapter, it will be important to ground this lived experience of divine love and its positive impact upon the affections further in the corpus of Bernard. This will be via a Johannine text he returned to over and over again by virtue of the principle clearly enunciated within it.

## **2.7 “God is love:” Bernard and 1 John 4**

“Whenever a saint puts to himself a new question, or an old question under a new form, the Christian tradition stands ready with all the materials required for the formulation of the answer; but of course the saint has to be there to put it.”<sup>91</sup> In Etienne Gilson’s reckoning above, the first letter of John, and in particular the fourth chapter, represents in condensed yet unalloyed form, the Christian tradition’s clear voice on the present hope and promise of union with God, through

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<sup>90</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God*, trans. Jean Leclercq & Henri Rochais (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 20.

<sup>91</sup> Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Bernard of Clairvaux*, 21.

Christ and in the Holy Spirit.<sup>92</sup> For Bernard of Clairvaux, this was a scriptural validation for monastic practices in their intensity and purposefulness; the union freely given in Christ by virtue of his life, death, resurrection and ascension, and intimately tied to the sending of the deifying Spirit, was to be acted out in unfolding fullness, seriousness<sup>93</sup> and joy.

In Bernard's expressed thinking, both monk and monastery sought to be tangible signs of God's incarnational and healing love by virtue of their repeated and progressive enlargement of consensual affections (Psalm 25:1-5, Psalm 70:1), thus creating a deepened capacity to flow in God's steady stream of grace and truth to the world.<sup>94</sup> This latter imagery is a pointer towards Bernard's theological and pastoral uniqueness. That is, his distinctiveness is visible in the subtle yet discernible contrast to the Augustinian tradition and the future rise of scholasticism, where intellectual capacity assumed the place of graced and processed encounter.<sup>95</sup> For Bernard and the Cistercian tradition, "... pure love... is essentially a mystical experience. What we have to do with here is neither an idea, nor a habitual disposition, but the brief and perpetually interrupted *excessus* of the soul of the mystic, when God unites it with Himself by exceptional graces."<sup>96</sup> In sum, God's love is not a religious concept to decipher and then promulgate as a persuasive idea. For Bernard, God's redemptive love is an actualised, embracing spiritual presence to receive and willingly embody in both spirit and truth. (John 4:24)

Significantly for this project, the biblical text(s) and Bernard's imaginative and multifaceted interpretations are not presented as religious conceptualisations or proof-texts. Rather, the core

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<sup>92</sup> Gilson is also quick to point out Bernard's attraction and reliance on the Johannine corpus as a whole.

<sup>93</sup> In a personal conversation with Fr. Michael Casey at Tarrawarra Abbey in August 2018, he mentioned that when interpreting St. Benedict's keen focus on the motivating fear of God when writing or publicly speaking about such things, he often uses the word "seriousness" to indicate the depth of intent and purpose behind the monastic vocation to holiness.

<sup>94</sup> *On Loving God*, X: 28, 30.

<sup>95</sup> See, *Confessions*, X: xxvii (38), 201. Augustine is highly mind and memory orientated, even in his eventual discovery of God's initiating, interior and sensate love. This is primarily reflected in his Trinitarian analogy of God in human form: Memory, Intellect and Will.

<sup>96</sup> Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Bernard of Clairvaux*, 143.

experiential confession, “God is love” (*Theos agape estin - Deus caritas est*) (1 John 4:8b, 16b), and all that emanates from it is offered in light of the affectivity of grace which can only be encountered and responded to from deep within the consenting soul. As such, it is a visceral welcome of gratuitous love not merely a cognitive or emotive apprehension of the same. Indeed, it is a doxology for a gifted life in God, not a strident statement of religious principle. For in the estimation of Bernard, after Maximus the Confessor, “To be affected is to become Godlike (*deificare est*).”<sup>97</sup> In this context, it is to have all human affections suffused—melt from themselves—into the primary affect of divine love, which is no less than the gift of God in Godself.<sup>98</sup>

The confession, “God is love,” therefore, is a deep knowing of God (Psalm 42:7), conceived and born by God’s restorative grace and not by means of human reckoning or agency; a grace when yielded to and carefully considered (*diligentia*), rightly orders the mind (*mens*) and heart (*cor*) for affective and willing service in God’s name (*ordinatio caritatis*). “Love is a great reality,” preached Bernard, “and if it returns to its beginning, and goes back to its origin, seeking its source again, it will always draw fresh from it, and thereby flow freely.”<sup>99</sup>

Therefore, such a movement-orientated understanding of the affections is not a transitory sentimentality, akin to the eventual rise of romanticism and the unstable poetics of the human heart.<sup>100</sup> *Affectus* in the Bernardine tradition is certainly an experiential and willing way of being,

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>98</sup> *On Loving God*, X: 28, 30: “O pure and sacred love! O sweet and pleasant affection! O pure and sinless intention of the will, all the more sinless and pure because it sets us free from the taint of selfish vanity, all the more sweet and pleasant, for all that is found in it is divine. It is deifying to go through such an experience. As a drop of water seems to disappear completely in a big quantity of wine, even assuming the wine’s taste and colour... so it is necessary for the saints that all human feelings melt in a mysterious way and flow into the will of God. Otherwise, how will God be all in all?”

<sup>99</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, IV, 83:II.4, 184.

<sup>100</sup> At the risk of over-simplification, the English poet John Keats (1795-1821) was well versed in the language and exercise of the affections. Highly imaginative, sensate and desirous—an artist—he nevertheless often fell victim to the intensity and ultimate non-direction of feeling. According to the poet and commentator, Jane Hirschfield, *Hiddenness, Uncertainty, Surprise: Three Generative Energies of Poetry* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 2008): “Knowing and not knowing, uncertainty and certainty were much on Keats mind during the early nineteenth-century winter. A month earlier, he wrote in another letter, “*I am certain of nothing but the heart’s affections and the truth of imagination—what the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or*

yet it is lived out in close relation to the otherness of God that is rigorously holistic in its communally disposed expression; humble, spirited, grounded, empathic, ethical, soulful, feeling and intelligent.<sup>101</sup> In a celebrated sermon on the Ascension, Bernard states:

There are two powers within us which need cleansing, the intellect so that it may know and the affect so that it may will... This is so because the intellect is disturbed and maybe even completely blinded and because the affect is soiled, and soiled badly. Christ will, however, bring light to our intellect, and the Holy Spirit will cleanse our affect.<sup>102</sup>

And on the above emphasis of renewed human affections harmonising with and energising the will (*affectus, id est voluntas*), Michael Casey makes the important observation that the will for Bernard was not “a matter of unfeeling compliance with reason or duty. [Amor] *affectus est non contractus*: ‘love is a feeling, not a contract.’ For him, there was always present in will some element of sweetness. In the restored human being, doing good and feeling good progressively coincide.”<sup>103</sup>

Transformation towards the relational nature and redemptive will of God is then possible, this being in summary the lived hope and practice of Saint Bernard and the Cistercian tradition as whole. As Gilson comments, “That is a point which the Cistercian mystics always had in mind; it explains why the Holy Spirit always... plays the part of the bond by which the soul is united to God and the spiritual life becomes a participation in the Divine life.”<sup>104</sup>

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*not.*” By mid-January, he wrote “There’s nothing stable in the world—uproar’s your only music.” The preceding century’s Enlightenment confidence in rationality and control has been thoroughly discarded, yet the paralysis of Shakespeare’s Danish prince is nowhere to be found. In place of objective knowledge and permanence, Keats puts his faith in the chameleon interior life: quick on its feet, subjective, supple, and eager to be seized by the ground it finds itself on...” 27-28.

<sup>101</sup> J. Blanpain, “Language mystique, expression du desire”, as translated and quoted by Casey: “It is necessary to emphasis (sic) that the *affectus* in Bernard, as in the patristic tradition, is not to be confused with the *affectus* of the scholastic authors. These understood the phrase *affectus cordis* exclusively as a movement of sensibility or sentiment, according to the current use of these words. If this distinction is not appreciated, then Bernard will seen wrongly as the initiator of affective piety which developed in the Middle Ages and which has lasted until the present.” 102.

<sup>102</sup> *Sermon on the Ascension of Christ*, 3.2, as quoted by Casey, *Athirst for God*, 101.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 101-102.

<sup>104</sup> Gilson, 23.

## 2.8 Responding to God is responding to love

For Bernard of Clairvaux, and somewhat in keeping with how I have previously spoken of affect's autonomy in the first chapter, the affect *of* God, tangibly operative as the converting Word of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5), is utterly gratuitous and overflowing in its self-giving. So far as Christian faith is concerned, then, nothing more than a receptive gratitude and reciprocated love is required. Indeed, as offensive as it may be to sensibilities and paradoxical to the human mind, a poverty of spirit—a practiced *emptiness*—is the constituent mark of an affectively fruitful life (John 15:5, Phil. 2:5-8, 1 John 4:8).<sup>105</sup> However, such a radical state of being is not a religious nihilism by another name. Rather it is an expectant emptiness; a space consciously left open to grace for the sake of a spirited fruitfulness of vocational life. Though unsettling on the ears some 860 years later, Bernard finds this spiritual principle disposed in Mary, mother of Jesus, enthusing in *On the Missus Est*, "Happy was Mary in whom neither humility or virginity was wanting. O glorious virginity! Which fecundity honoured but did not contaminate."<sup>106</sup> Consequently, 1 John 4:19, "We love because he first loved us," (*Nos ergo diligamus Deum, quoniam Deus prior dilexit nos*) is utterly foundational for Bernard in all his practical theologising. The Johannine affirmation consistently answers his own question about how God might best be loved in his early, yet formative treatise, *On Loving God*. Prayerfully considered, God-orientated love, he suggests, is responsive and not calculated.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, it is not concerned with

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<sup>105</sup> See, Bonowitz, *St. Bernard's Three Course Banquet*, 30-42: "We are pure receptivity, capacity. We are what God chooses to make of us and in our human case he has chosen to make us unlimited capacity, so capacious that he himself can fit into us without have to squeeze." 31.

<sup>106</sup> *Missus Est* I, 32. The Trappist monk, Thomas Merton wrote illustratively on the soul's *le point vierge*—the virginal point—in his famous essay, "A Member of the Human Race," in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Doubleday, 1966): "At the centre of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives...This little point of nothingness and *absolute poverty*, is the pure glory of God in us... It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody." 158.

<sup>107</sup> Hence the title of Bernard's treatise. *Diligendo* implies awareness and carefulness of intent in the loving action. It is *amor* directed and capacitated by the Spirit. Significantly *eros* is not used in such a context as it can readily be a misguided, though highly emotional expression of relational love.

reward, though reward beyond measure will always reveal itself in the Object of a spiritually-directed love.<sup>108</sup> As such, spiritual affections, as will be shown in a more systematic way in the writings of Jonathan Edwards, are characterised by reflexive humility, gratitude and conveyed by concrete yet aesthetic expressions of charity (*caritas*). Importantly, they have their origin in and through gifted divine infusion, *Caritas ex Deo est* (1 John 4:7a), not in human construct, strategy or religious effort, however demonstrative or seemingly impressive in form or function. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

What is described as being the third experiential stage of love, named by Bernard as loving God for God's sake, is considered to be the realistic goal of the Christian / monastic life on earth.<sup>109</sup> Such a spiritually affective stage is signified by constantly "tasting the sweetness of the Lord," so that knowledge of God's love is not dependent even upon first hand testimony to grace (John 4: 42) but upon first-hand experience of grace.<sup>110</sup> Bernard goes on to say:

A man who feels this way will not have trouble in fulfilling the command to love his neighbour. He loves God truthfully and so loves what is God's. He loves purely and he does not find it hard to obey a pure commandment, purifying his heart, as it is written in the obedience of love. He loves with justice and freely embraces the just commandment. This love is pleasing because it is free. It is chaste because it does not consist of spoken words but of deed and truth. It is just because it renders what is received. Whoever loves this way, loves the way he is loved, seeking in turn not what his, but what belongs to Christ.<sup>111</sup>

## 2.9 Bernard's spiritual experience of love and longing

I will bring this chapter to a close by focusing on a rare and revealing glimpse into Bernard's own spiritual narrative. By way of its biographical and summative nature, I seek to highlight the integral

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<sup>108</sup> *On Loving God*, VII: 17, 20: "God is not loved without a reward, although he should be loved without regard for one."

<sup>109</sup> This is preceded by the first degree of love: Man loves himself for his own sake, the second being, man loves God for his own benefit. It is followed by the more demanding degree of love, Man loves himself for the sake of God, usually the domain of the martyrs or those who are now at rest in God. As Tambrello, *Union with Christ*, suggests, the first two stages are not to be disparaged as they are reflective of realistic human experience, i.e., in faith, progressive movements beyond self-centeredness towards true charity which is no other than God himself. 66.

<sup>110</sup> *On Loving God*, IX: 26, 28.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

nature of the spiritual affections within his own experience, and thus underscore the affective tenor of all his preached and written theology. This summation will also provide a segue into the next chapter that will examine in some depth, Sermon 18, “The Two Operation of the Spirit” from his commentary *On the Song of Songs*. And, as I will show in Chapter Four, Bernard’s experiential reflection resembles Jonathan Edwards’ use of personal story in that his carefully crafted account is as didactic as it is biographical. Therefore, it is an invaluable resource of refined thought and encouragement for the unfolding state of Christian being.

Like the Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 11:1-30, 12:1-13), there existed in Bernard a reluctance to speak of his own spiritual experience for fear of it being received as boasting or an elevation of standing within community. On the one hand, this appears odd, given Bernard’s stress on a desirous, mystically unitive experience of God, yet on the other, his writings consistently evoke a familiarity of the ebbs and flows (*alternatio or vicissitudo*) of a common human existence in relation to self, world and Creator.<sup>112</sup> This means, he didn’t need to make a literal example of his own life story when the congruence of his language and person in the act of preaching was generally self-authenticating. Furthermore, his rigorous schooling in monastic practices of humility would have ensured, I would suggest, a given modesty in presentation; an “invisibility within visibility” as Michael Casey has helpfully described it.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Jean Leclercq, “Introduction,” *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*: “The aim of the ancient and medieval spiritual authors was not to provide food for reflection; rather they sought to encourage an experience through recollections of a poetical nature... it can be said that for Bernard everything begins and ends with experience and, between, experience is the object of reflection. God is the source of all things, including experience, but the first object of man’s thought is himself and the experience of his unique personal history. He tries to understand that history with the help of God’s grace and in light of his word. This experience of himself and his pitiable condition sends him back to God and causes him to experience his love; it also leads him to put that love into practice according to the circumstances in which he is called to serve... Bernard’s theology is practical and authentic; although it involves a measure of speculative thinking, it is rooted in an intended for every day.” 31.

<sup>113</sup> Casey, in conversation with the present author at Tarrawarra Abbey, August 3, 2018. Also, Bernard’s 12<sup>th</sup> step of humility is, “Containment of one’s interests, which shows itself in a humble bearing and lowered eyes.” *On Humility and Pride*, 100. See also, Chapter 2 of the Rule of St. Benedict, “What the Abbot Should Be.” “The abbot ought to ever bear in mind what he is and what he is called; he ought to know that to whom more is entrusted, from him more is exacted. Let him recognise how difficult and how hard a task he has undertaken, to rule souls and to make himself a servant to the humours of many.” 6.

## a) Sermon 74

Towards the end of his life, though, Bernard preached in the Clairvaux chapter a personally revealing sermon on the Song of Songs 2:17b: “[Re]turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle or a young stag on the cleft mountains.”<sup>114</sup> This is now known as Sermon 74 which Harvey Egan, a Jesuit systematic and mystical theologian, suggests “... can be read as one of the most stunning attempts in the entire Christian mystical tradition to describe mystical experience.”<sup>115</sup> One would assume that the sufficiently weighted topic demanded the personalisation and that his spiritual maturity could both carry and convey it.

As for the sermon’s subject matter, through the single word uttered by the yearning bride, “return,” Bernard readily—though with an expressed reluctance—enters into a pivotal theme of his existential, pastoral theology. Namely, it is the embracing and ultimately desirous presence of the Word who is full of grace and truth. Interestingly, this positive affirmation is juxtaposed alongside the Word’s equally mysterious and repeated absences, hence the constant need for the yearning invocation of “return!” It is apparent from the opening sentences of the sermon that his community had asked him to address this specific and perplexing question, that is, the Word’s ongoing relationship to the soul; a question which on face value may appear obtuse, yet when further considered, goes to the very heart of vocational, existential faith.

Bernard says to his questioning monks, “Indeed, you force me to walk in great matters and mysteries which are beyond me... Hear me then as a man who is afraid to speak but cannot remain silent. My very trepidation will perhaps justify my presumption; even more, if it increases, your edification.”<sup>116</sup> The pastor and poet then dives headlong into his own unique brand of exposition:

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<sup>114</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, IV, 74.I.1, 85. The sermon actually only focuses on the word and spiritual principle of “return.”

<sup>115</sup> Egan, *Soundings in the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 76.

<sup>116</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, IV, 74.I.1, 86.

Return, she says. Good. He departed, he is called back. Who will disclose to me the mystery of this change? Who will adequately explain to me the going and returning of the Word? Surely the Bridegroom will not stoop to inconstancy? Where can he come from? Where can he return to, he who fills heaven and earth?

... Let us then follow this discourse of pure love and say that the Word of God, God himself, the Bridegroom of the soul, comes to the soul and leaves it again as he wishes but we must realize that this happens as a result of the soul's sensitivity, and is not due to any movement of the Word. Indeed, when the soul is aware of the influence of grace she acknowledges the presence of the Word; but when she is not, she mourns his absence, and again seeks his presence... Thus the word is recalled—recalled by the longing of the soul who has once enjoyed his sweetness. Is longing not a voice? It is indeed, and a very powerful one.

... For when she calls him back she proves that she deserves his presence, even if not in its fullness. Otherwise she would have called him to come, not to return. But the word "return" signifies a recalling.

... He makes to go past, desiring to be held back, and seems to go away, wishing to be recalled; for he, the Word is not irrevocable; he comes and goes according to his own good pleasure, visiting the soul at daybreak and then suddenly putting it to the test. His going is part of his own purpose, and his return is always part of his own will; both are within his infinite wisdom. His reasons he alone knows.<sup>117</sup>

Sensing that his audience at this juncture needs more than poetic musings about the conundrum of Christ's consoling presence then desolating absences, Bernard implores his community to bear with his "foolishness" for a short moment. The repeated, yet mysterious coming of Word (who is the fullness of relational grace and truth) into his experience, he says, is not due to his own religious contrivance, devotion or control. Nor is it a purely humanly sensate experience, because the Word extends well beyond his sinful and bodily limitations. Significantly, and dissimilar to St. Augustine in *Confessions*, who happily found God alive to and within his senses, Bernard pushes the boundaries of human-divine comprehension well past cognitive capacity into the affective realms of a stirring and potentially embracing love: "The coming of the Word was not perceptible to my eyes, for he has no colour, nor to my ears, for there was no sound; nor yet to my nostrils, for he mingles with the mind, not the air."<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 86-88.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 90.

Anticipating the question of his fellow monks, Bernard asks of himself "... how I knew he was present, when his ways in no way can be traced?"

He is life and power, and as soon as he enters in, he awakens my slumbering soul; he stirs and soothes and pierces my heart, for before it was hard as stone, and diseased. So, he has begun to pluck out and destroy, to build up and to plant, to water dry places and illuminate dark ones; to open what was closed and to warm what was cold; to make the crooked straight and the rough places smooth, so that my soul may bless the Lord and all that is within me may praise his holy name. So, when the Bridegroom, the Word came to me, he never made known his coming by any signs, not by sight, not by sound, not by touch. It was not by any movement of his that I recognised his coming; it was not by any of my senses that I had perceived he had penetrated to the depths of my being. Only by the movement of my heart (*affectus = felt feelings*)... did I perceive his presence; and I knew the power of his might because my faults were put to flight and my human yearnings brought into subjection. I have marvelled at the depth of his wisdom when my secret faults have been revealed and made visible; at the very slightest amendment of my way of life I have experienced his goodness and mercy; in the renewal and remaking of the spirit of my mind, that is of my inmost being, I have perceived the excellence of his glorious beauty, and when I contemplate all these things I am filled with awe and wonder at his manifold greatness.<sup>119</sup>

The preacher then goes on to speak of his own coldness of heart "when the Word has left me" and yet identifies the holy desire at play within his own cries of "return!" He states, "I will implore him to give back to me the joy of his salvation and restore himself to me."<sup>120</sup> He then concludes, giving greater substance to the Word's self-giving, in that he comes as converting truth and grace.

So once again, Bernard frames such language, not in conceptual but poetical terms, squarely within the context of the soul's desired transformations. Truth, in particular, though "seasoned with grace," is posited as that which penetrates the soul and, through the piercing affect of compunction, is able by means of the Spirit to move the soul from duplicity to simplicity, falsehood into a "daring" originality of being. Bernard's conclusion is highly instructive in this regard: "May he (the Word) enter as one who brings peace, joy, and gladness; but may he enter with the gravity of maturity, to purify my joy and control my arrogance with the stern gaze of truth."<sup>121</sup> Invisible and mysterious as this Word maybe, the unifying movement of Spirit, who is

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 96.

also the expressive love of the Father and Son, ennobles and emboldens the human being to greater works of charity and goodness. “Love pertains to the will, it is not a transaction; it cannot acquire or be acquired by a pact. Moving us freely, it makes us spontaneous.”<sup>122</sup>

## 2.10 Summary

What can be summarised, then, from this sermon and the lengthy discussion that preceded it? I believe it can confidently be said that:

Firstly, Bernard theologised out of contemplatively attuned experience. His was not exclusively a theology from below, so to speak, nor strictly was it from above. It was born of transcendent and immanent relational encounter experienced within the expansive capacities of soul; that is, at the heart of Bernard’s theology is a continuing embrace of God and his own consenting responses to that embrace. As a direct consequence, his theology sings of faith, hope and love born in the desire of God for restorative union. It would be contrary to its doxological nature to render such faith into propositional or prosaic form, given its uniquely pastoral expression, i.e., nurturing of the soul toward a maturity of disposition in relation to God and the world. For that reason alone, I believe, it has many points of potential application for contemporary dispositional practice.

Secondly, divine love is not an idea to speculate about, nor is it a philosophical basis for an ethical life. Rather, divine love *is* the Triunity of God, mysteriously veiled, yet concretely revealed in attractive, tangible, accessible and unifying graces; specifically, the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Such revealed and received love is the initiating Gift of the Holy Spirit who is operative at the will-shaping level of the affections, stirring and reawakening the desire for God (and God’s Kingdom), which is the indestructible and creative vestige of the *imago Dei*.

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<sup>122</sup> *On Loving God*, VII: 17, 20.

Finally, the Christian life, is therefore, continuously disposed or inclined towards a dependent, joyful and expectant response to God's revealed love. By virtue of the indwelling Spirit, it is characterised by the relational nature of Christ, that is, in his invocational prayerfulness and obedient, joyous sense of God's mission. Such a life, whether it be monastic or otherwise, is vocationally charged and steered; i.e., away from other's harm and towards their well-being. It is unashamedly a spiritual or mystical life in that the unity of being and purpose known with God, through Christ and in the Spirit is dependent upon the believer's open dispositions of receptivity and a daring. The freedom, truth and love born of the divine embrace is the essence of authentic and original expressions of Christian being and identity. Again, though articulated over 850 years ago, Bernard's voice is arguably one to pay careful and contextual attention to when considering contemporary expressions of ministry and missional practice.

To make these contentions clearer still, I will now extrapolate and address the applicable content of Sermon 18, "The Two Operations of the Spirit" in Bernard's commentary, *On the Song of Songs*.

*Now about St Bernard. It must be realised that his method is “without method,” exceeding the style and capability of almost all men of genius. He more that all the rest stresses Scripture in all his sayings... his procedure is always devout, always artful. He takes a certain theme or something in place of it—i.e., some matter which he intends to handle—and begins it artfully, divides it into two, three or many members, confirms it, and ends it, using every rhetorical colour so that the whole work shines with a double glow, earthly and heavenly; and this, as it seems to me, invites to devotion those who understand more feelingly.*

**Robert of Basevorn**<sup>1</sup>

*Nonetheless, St. Bernard is, above all, an affective genius. Love is his proper domain and it is through love that he attains his loftiest experiences. Here there is no need to search out isolated passages. There is an unlimited supply of them. The abundance of his heart simply pours itself forth.*

**M. Corneille Halfants**<sup>2</sup>

*It is the “great mystery (or sacrament) of Godliness” that occupies Bernard before all else. What is that mystery? Not an idea, not a doctrine, but a Person: God Himself, revealed in the Man, Christ. How is this doctrine understood? When the Person is known. How is He known? When loved. How loved? When He lives in us and is Himself our love for his Father. Loving the Father in us, He makes us one with the Father as He Himself is.”*

**Thomas Merton**<sup>3</sup>

## Chapter Three

### “The Two Operations of the Holy Spirit” (Sermon 18): Theological & Pastoral Implications

#### 3.1 Introduction and trajectory

The previous chapter sought to lay historical, contextual and theological foundations for what is now to follow. That being, an exposition of a substantive sermon of Bernard’s, one of an unfinished series of eighty-six that he preached to his monastic community over an eighteen-year period on Solomon’s, *The Song of Songs*.<sup>4</sup> Given the sermon’s specificity of time and content, it is

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<sup>1</sup> Robert of Basevorn, “The Form of Preaching,” trans. Leopold Krul O.S.B. in *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*. ed. James J. Murphy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 131.

<sup>2</sup> M. Corneille Halfants, “Introduction,” Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, Vol. 1, xxiv.

<sup>3</sup> Merton, *The Last of the Fathers*, 62.

<sup>4</sup> The authorship of Solomon is certainly the working and theological assumption of Bernard and his monastic community. It is not meant to reflect my own opinion. Indeed, modernistic questions of the text and its best hermeneutic are not greatly relevant to this discussion. Bernard’s own interpretation as to *The Song of Songs* inspired origin is of interest here, though: “But King Solomon himself, unique as he was in wisdom, renowned above all men, abounding in wealth, secure in his peace, stood in no need of any particular benefit that would have inspired him to sing those songs. Nor does Scripture in any place attribute such a motive to him. We must conclude then it was a special divine impulse that inspired these songs of his that now celebrate the praises of Christ and

not meant to be summative of Bernard's theological vision and thought. Rather, it is synchronous to the thesis topic at hand: "Spiritual Affections and the Pastoral Disposition." For, Sermon 18 of the *Song* series raises important and, as I will seek to show, pressing questions about Christian ministry's operative source of divine love (*caritas*) coupled with its wisest, thus distinctly affective quality of spiritual expression. Meaning in Bernard's own words, "... these operations of the Holy Spirit, that we take note of either in ourselves or in others, are named from their method of functioning: we call them infusion (*infusionem*) and effusion (*effusionem*)."<sup>5</sup>

It will be the aim of this chapter to posit a purpose and pastoral context for the preaching of *On the Song of Songs* series. I will then address the genre and allegorical method used. Penultimately, I will identify and further describe the recurring pneumatological theme within the sermon corpus which undergirds the specific sermon in question: Sermon 18, "The Two Operations of the Holy Spirit." Finally, I will exposit the text itself and offer relevant commentary throughout. In question throughout this chapter will be the possibility of in-principled links between a near 900-year-old sermon that was first addressed to a medieval monastic community with contemporary practices for Christian pastoral ministry.

### **3.2 Bernard's purpose for preaching and writing, *On the Song of Songs***

As has already been established, St. Bernard was a Cistercian monk at the Abbey of Clairvaux and long-term Abbot (1115-1153) to both it and the many filiations established during his tenure.<sup>6</sup>

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his Church, the gift of holy love, the sacrament of endless union with God. Here too are expressed the mounting desires of the soul, its marriage song, an exultation of spirit poured forth in figurative language pregnant with delight." *On the Song of Songs*, I, 1.IV, 7-8, 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, I, 18.I.1, 133.

<sup>6</sup> See, Bredero, *Between Cult & History*, 249-263. A more objective view of history would suggest that many factors and personalities beyond Bernard were also responsible for Cistercian expansionism—some of which was remarkable for its reach and lasting influence. However, as Rene Locatelli states, "In the midst of the numerous agents of this success, who are listed in the Cistercian annals, the name of Bernard himself immediately jumps to the front... his active working life coincided with the emergence of the white monks. Historians have often emphasised his role: by his many interventions, and his constant travels in the Christian part of the world; by his charismatic personality and his writings; by his ties with the Burgundian nobility and the network of relationships he wove around himself, he did much to give high visibility to the Cistercian cause." As quoted by Bredero, 257-258.

According to the Rule of St. Benedict, teaching—after the way of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-18)—was a key responsibility of the Abbot. Consequently, this was to be characterised by consistent embodiments of justice, wisdom, goodness, equanimity, congruence of word and deed, encouragement, reproof, adaptability and always seeking the nurture of souls entrusted to him.<sup>7</sup>

Benedict thus instructs:

In his teaching, the abbot must always hold to the apostles teaching, in which he says, rebuke, punish, entreat, and reproach. He must mingle severity with mildness, so that he may show his fatherly severity and his gracious love. That is, he must rebuke the restless and hard-hearted, and punish and entreat the obedient, the docile, and the patient, so that they may do better and better.”<sup>8</sup>

I believe it true to suggest that St. Bernard’s 86 sermons *On the Song of Songs* consistently express the Benedictine characteristics of faithful community leadership as listed above.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, they concern themselves ultimately with the seeking monastic trajectory of deification (inherently a humanisation), thereby are intentionally pastoral in the truest meaning of the term.<sup>10</sup> That is, over a lengthy period of time, his carefully chosen words are designed to encourage ever deepening spiritual attraction towards, and further fruit bearing within, Jesus Christ, the living Word.

Monastic teaching in the way of the Good Shepherd, therefore, was a dialogical calling out of

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<sup>7</sup> Saint Aethelwold of Winchester, *The Old English Rule of Saint Benedict*. Trans. Jacob Riyeff (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2017) Chapter II, 23-25a, 43.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter LXIV, 126-130. See also, Chapter III, 54-46, this being an important rejoinder to the wide-ranging authority of the abbot who must also display a willingness to listen carefully to members of his community: “The brothers take counsel and so give their advice, with all humility and submission, so that no one presumes to defend his advice with obstinacy. Rather every counsel stand in the abbot’s judgement. He will do what seems best and most salutary, and they in turn will eagerly obey him.” Bernard’s sermons *On the Song of Songs* often indicate ongoing dialogue with, and even puzzled questions from, the Clairvaux community.

<sup>9</sup> Bredero, *Between Cult and History*, makes the important point that within the complex (somewhat protective at points) and hurried movement for Bernard’s canonisation that occurred in 1174—only 21 years after his death—the voice of the monks he served were by in large of a lesser influential note than his traveling, ecclesial/political achievements, miracles included. He writes, “After Bernard’s death, many Cistercian monks who had known him as their spiritual leader and abbot were more interested in concrete, anecdotal memories that in what they were mostly offered in the *prima vita*. Often they were but little aware of his activities outside his monastery and order. Expressions of their appreciation for Bernard were... written down without much system between 1170 and 1180.” 77.

<sup>10</sup> Contemporary pastoral care is often understood by its recipients and even practiced by practitioners in the “passive voice.” That is, it represents a form of coddling, not an urging forward in imperative matters of faith and life. In the context of the monastery, the Abbot’s care was deliberately exhortative. That is not to say that words of consolation were not offered in due and needed season. However, words of wise encouragement, often born out of the leader’s own lived experience of faith, were expected: “In this way, by fearing the inquiry concerning his flock which the Shepherd will hold, he is solicitous on account of others’ souls as well as his own, and thus whilst reclaiming other men by his corrections, he frees himself also from all vice.” *The Old English Rule*, Chapter 2.7.

others giftedness for the sake of communal vocation. It was not merely information giving or rote learning of theological doctrines.<sup>11</sup>

And whilst Bernard's monastic theology didn't ignore speculative theology, particularly as he was thoroughly schooled in the Western tradition, he viewed it as the latter's completion (*sursum*) and not its functional application.<sup>12</sup> Hence, his desire to see Christian doctrine grounded and further understood through spiritual contemplation and practice. This is principally true of his expressed Trinitarian, and by extension, Pneumatological theology that I will address more fully in due course. Augustinian to the core in terms of God and humanity's correlation via reason, will and memory, and dependent upon the well-honed insights of his compatriots, William of St. Thierry (ca. 1080-1148) and Richard St. Victor (1110-1173), Bernard nevertheless encouraged the experiential seeking of the felt divine embrace not merely a doctrinal precision regarding the possibility of embrace. In Sermon 11, for instance, he weaves theology, doxology and the receptive Christian life into a vibrant whole:

Man, noble though he be, was unwillingly subjected to this triple form of futility, but hope was nevertheless left to him. For he who satisfies with good the desire of the soul will one day himself be for the reason fullness of light, for the will, the fullness of peace, for the memory, eternity's uninterrupted flow. O truth! O love! O eternity! Oh, blessed and beatifying Trinity!<sup>13</sup>

In sum, the existential freedom and hope of spiritual union with God the Father, in Christ the Word, through the deifying actions of the Holy Spirit continually affected Bernard for the sake of his own and others healing (*sanitatem*). In this context, Michael Casey quotes Bernard's aim in

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<sup>11</sup> This anthropological and theological principle—the teacher as a person in spirited relation—being, in major part, the premise of Parker Palmer's seminal work, *The Courage to Teach*. "Good teaching," he suggests, "cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher." Such relationally orientated teaching thus being the ability (and joy) to lead others out into their own truth and congruent paths of vocation. So, for Palmer, the teacher's creative and potentially transformative power is a, "capacity to awaken a truth within us, a truth we can reclaim years later by recalling their impact on our lives." See, Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 10, 22.

<sup>12</sup> See, Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 222-225. Applied theology, now known as practical theology, still arguably suffers from this hierarchy or dualism, when in fact, theology in the abstract has little experiential, practical or pastoral benefit. In Leclercq's estimation, speculative theology is always in need of its own self-transcendence in order to arrive at an integral way of divine knowledge (*integre cognoscere*).

<sup>13</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, I, 11. III.5, 73.

preaching and writing these sermons as, “to teach thirsting souls how to seek the one by whom they are themselves sought.” He then adds, “His fundamental motivation was the *propositum aedificandi*, the intention of building up and strengthening the lives of his readers.”<sup>14</sup> Presumably Casey means by virtue of the unifying bond of the Holy Spirit (*unus spiritus*) through the concurrence of wills (*conniventia voluntatum*).<sup>15</sup>

By way of contrast to modern examples of biblical exegesis and exposition, that is, beyond an extensive scriptural cross-referencing, Saint Bernard offered little or no scientific analysis of *The Song of Songs* text. This seeming lack extends to questions of authorship, intent or original context. Rather, the purpose of the incomplete, 86-sermon and 18 year-long succession, was to imaginatively utilise *The Song of Songs* for explicating the daily tenets of monastic life and stay attuned to its broad reach of personal and communal reform. Unlike what the modern reader of biblical commentaries would be used to, *On the Song of Songs* was not written to offer a detailed (and perhaps experientially detached) commentary on an exotic text. Casey suggests as much when he states:

Bernard was not interested in writing a commentary on *The Song of Songs*, as such an endeavour would later be understood. Instead he was engaged in giving a synthetic presentation of his vision of the ascent of the soul to God through the medium of series of sermons based on the biblical book which seemed to epitomise that ascent, *The Song of Songs*.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Casey, *Athirst for God*, 53. References being in order from *On the Song of Songs*, IV, 84.7 & II, 27.1.

<sup>15</sup> Tamburello, *Union with Christ*, 68.

<sup>16</sup> Casey, *Athirst for God*, 52. Merton, in *The Last of the Fathers*, argues similarly when he writes, “Saint Bernard was more than explaining the text of this Song of Songs. He lived it and blended the traditional mystical interpretation of the Canticle with the experience of his own union with God... Above all, the sermons on the Canticle are a magnificent treatise on the union of Christ and His Church. The mystical union of the Word with individual soul is simply an expression of the union of the Incarnate Word with His Church.” 62.

### 3.3 Preaching, writing & re-writing

Notable in the above quote, and equally present within much of Bernardine literature, is the stress placed on his writing and rewriting of the sermons, not simply the event of their preaching.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, his received works reveal highly stylised editing and keen attention to grammatical detail. So, whilst it is appropriate to stress their localised, pastoral intent, it is accurate to also say that Bernard had wider audiences in mind, even those living well past his own lifetime. Therefore, what we have at our disposal today as *On the Song of Songs*, in terms of literary form and fluency of language, is not what would have been first presented by the Abbot in the Clairvaux chapter house. Jean Leclercq states, "... the first sketch of Bernardine writing was the result of great art, but it did not satisfy the exacting requirements of its author. Bernard re-read, listened anew, dictated corrections and practised that *emendatio* (corrections) recommended by the literary tradition."<sup>18</sup>

In the final years of his life and following his disastrous foray into the religious politics of the second Crusade (1144-1150), Bernard took great care in the editing of his written corpus, the key criterion being an even greater level of expressive beauty within his writing. Yet, in Bernard's mind, this was not an artistic aesthetic in itself or, indeed, for itself. Rather, his was a thoughtfully articulated beauty of written expression in relation to and mirroring of his converting experience of the self-revealing God. And while it is obvious that human ego plays unconscious roles in lofty religious idealism, it is also accurate to assert that Bernard's writing in *On the Song of Songs* does express an allure of both form and content that consciously points beyond himself. Or, stated another way, his writings express an enduring artistic excellence that is reliably congruent with the

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<sup>17</sup> Bredero, *Between Cult and History*, states, "They (Bernard's sermons) must... be viewed as part of his literary oeuvre, which through the centuries has fascinated and inspired its readers, regardless of whether they were able to recognise the theological teachings Bernard intended to develop in these sermons or to understand those in their historical context." 4.

<sup>18</sup> Leclercq, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercian Tradition*, 32. See also, Jean Leclercq, "The Making of a Masterpiece," *On the Song of Songs*, IV, ix-xxiv: "The beauty of the book explains its influence." xxiii.

beauty of perceived divine Form.<sup>19</sup> That is, I would suggest, the essence of their inspirational durability over many generations. Charles Dumont, a current day French Cistercian, writes of this relational synergy in terms of:

There is in Saint Bernard a theology of aesthetics... His spirituality, like Cistercian formation, is completely centred on the form of the Creator who has been imprinted on his creature... Bernard speaks daringly about God's desire to see his Bride (the Church or soul) adorned with the same beauty at his Image, Christ. This beauty is a moral beauty, but in some way, it affects the body and its behaviour: gestures, words, glances, way of walking, laughter. Over and above strength (power) and wisdom (knowledge) there is beauty, the synthesis of both, so to speak, perfection of form and in this sense of conformity; a being's perfect likeness to the divine Image that is Christ, and consequently, union in love and fruitfulness.<sup>20</sup>

### 3.4 Allegory and figurative speech

In the Gospel of John, the disciples of Jesus express an exasperation with his repeated use of figurative or symbolic speech. During the farewell discourse (John 12-17), and the "little while" of his stated going and returning, the small band of follower's murmur among themselves about their leader's lack of plain speech; a literary and theological tension that is only resolved by the author of John when it is expressed through the mouths of his close followers—"Yes, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure of speech! Now we know that you know all things, and do not need to have anyone question you; by this we believe that you came from God." (John 16:29-30)

It can be shown that Bernard faced similar murmurings and confusions within his own community in regard to his evolving teachings on the *Song of Songs*. On a number of occasions his own rhetoric suggests prior comments or stated concerns about the amount of "spiritual meaning" being taught in relation to the given text. The monks may well have been asking him, "Where is the moral place of application?" Or perhaps, "What on earth has this got to do with us?" For instance, at the beginning of Sermon 80 Bernard writes:

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<sup>19</sup> A term Bernard uses in *Concerning Grace and Free Will* in the context of the awakening of the human being by virtue of the grace of redemption; the "deformed to be reformed by means of the Form himself." 86. Logically speaking then, the Christian life and its constituent ministries will increasingly express such Form in its relational, creative nature.

<sup>20</sup> Dumont, *Pathway of Peace*, 134-135.

Some of you, I hear, are resentful because for some days I have been regaling you by talking of the amazing and wonderful mysteries of God, yet the sermon I was giving savoured too little if at all of moral considerations. This is most unusual. But allow me to repair the omission.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps even more to the point in relation to modern readership, Bernard's figurative and allegorical reading of the biblical text can be a major obstacle to an understanding or persistence with his thought. Generally speaking, the modern mind is intolerant and suspicious of such an imaginative or fluid hermeneutic<sup>22</sup> and by fluid I mean that which is based largely on poetic licence and even an artful imprecision that adds to its innate beauty.<sup>23</sup> The ironic saying, never let the truth get in the way of a good story, is certainly apt here. For Bernard was more interested in a broader meaning and human-making picture, not in replicative precision of each brush stroke. Or to use another suggestive analogy, this one from Leclercq, Bernard liked to play with Scripture. "He made it serve his own ends and did not hesitate... to modify it to fit the precise and harmonious message he wished to communicate. One sometimes has the impression that he was amusing himself, in a way, by seeking 'biblical effects.'"<sup>24</sup>

Bernard once wrote of his biblical methodology, "... my purpose is not so much to explain words as to inspire hearts (*non verba pensanda sunt, sed affectus*). I must both draw the water and offer it as a drink, a work that I shall not accomplish by a spate of rapid comments but by careful

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<sup>21</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, IV, 80.I.1, 145.

<sup>22</sup> This suspicion is perhaps best summarised by Philip Schaff who describes pre-modern allegorical exegesis as being "wild" in essence, with its focus more upon the reader's spiritual "fancies" than upon the "real meaning of the writer." As quoted by, Mark S. Burrows, "To Taste with the Heart: Allegory, Poetics, and the Deep Reading of Scripture" in *Interpretation*, April 2002, 168-169. It is also important to recognise the re-appreciation of allegorical interpretation within post-modern literary environments, particularly in relation to the subversive (a deconstructive or imaginative) re-reading of dominant "objective" narratives.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, "... allegory might still teach us, if we approach it as a constructive theological method, a poetic sensibility of enormous creativity and resilience. It can model for us a means of listening for scripture's "poetic speech," as Brueggemann has called it, to broaden the constrictions of our "prose flattened world," encouraging us to learn something of the evocative art of poetry and the almost lost art of deep reading." 179.

<sup>24</sup> Leclercq, "The Making of a Masterpiece," xx-xxi. Leclercq observes three occupations in Bernard's writing: precision of vocabulary, grammatical quality and euphony. The latter he defines as being closely related to a 'sweetness of voice' that originates from the ear and taste, rather than from reason. In other words, there needed to be a certain flow, rhythm and melody that would create startling, though resonate impact. With Bernard, Leclercq says, "the poet and the artist were at the service of the theologian" (xx) and that, "The art of writing is the art of astonishing. Bernard knew this. He submitted himself to the demands of the profession." (xxii)

examination and frequent exhortation.”<sup>25</sup> Significantly for my later discussion on the pastoral disposition, Bernard’s experience of his own pastoral and communal stability—evident within the above quote—is demonstrably decisive for transformative and creative states of missional being. In other words, the monastic vow of stability (*stabilitas loci*), wherein careful examination and frequent exhortation (here in the form of allegorical readings of the sacred text) naturally occurs over seasons of time, thus patiently fashioning a grounded and receptive context for Christian generativity.

As intimated, a playful platform for expositing a canonical text remains a stumbling block for modernistic readers and even an offense to the sensibility of many western scholars.<sup>26</sup> However, it can be argued that Bernard wasn’t being irreverently reckless with the received text nor was his allegorical methodology undisclosed. His was unashamedly a Christian spiritual reading of *The Song of Songs* after the acclaimed literary practices and legacies of Origen (184-253), Gregory of Nyssa (335-394) and Gregory the Great (d. 604);<sup>27</sup> that being, an intentional mining for the promise and truth of desirous being in relation to a desirous God. His hermeneutical lens, therefore, could not be an exercise of speculative prosaicism. It was necessarily contemplative and lyrical, or what Mark Burrows describes as, “a constructive interpretive art, shaped by an aesthetic or a poetic approach to the biblical text.”<sup>28</sup> And even more specifically with Bernard’s sermonising in mind, Burrows states:

What these sermons make clear is that the monk’s conversion, the dramatic journey of reconstituting the “self” in the monastic vocation, meant learning to read text and body together as a unified act... This suggests the manner in which Bernard’s use of allegory might be understood

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<sup>25</sup> As quoted from, Mark S. Burrows & Sean M. Gilbert, *The Imaginative Spirit*, ed. Tony Rogers (Adelaide: Effective Living Centre Publications, 2002), 48.

<sup>26</sup> An immediate qualifier would be for those who understand the poetic or suggestive nature of the text in the first place and are not fazed by imaginative interpretations. Indeed, scholarly conclusions can be carried by metaphor and not simply rely on prose. For example, Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), suggests, “The theological importance of the Song is that it represents the reversal of that primordial exile from Eden. In a word, it returns us to the Garden of God.” 232.

<sup>27</sup> See, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament IX, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* ed. J. Robert Wright (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 286-368. “In one sense, all this is a tale of rapture veiled in allegory (Augustine), but in another sense it represents truth known in the flesh because what we desire is not always what we do (Gregory the Great).” 286.

<sup>28</sup> Burrows and Gilbert, *The Imaginative Spirit*, 37.

as a reading deliberately subversive of prevailing cultural norms—viz. the uninterpreted literal sense of text/body which adult initiates into Cistercian monasteries renounced to enter religious life.<sup>29</sup>

Two interrelated factors sustained Bernard's allegorical method of sermonic writing and delivery. Firstly, the daily monastic practice of divine reading (*lectio divina*) wherein the imperative to seek and see God's transcendence alive in the immanent, through a spirit-led rumination on the Scriptures is normative.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, and integral to St. Benedict's opening injunction of the *Rule*, "My child, hear the precepts of your master and incline to them with the ear of your heart," the monastic theology of Bernard ultimately concerned itself with an ongoing conversion (*conversion*) of the disposed heart (*affectus*) by means of the renovating words of the incarnated Word piercing the mind and healing places of deepest affliction. This was the formational lens and intent when reading the scriptures slowly, indeed the monastic reason for chanting them in the midst of the community's prayer of the hours. Burrows offers this helpful summary:

To interpret allegorically is to read expectantly... It is a hermeneutical strategy based not upon suspicion but critical trust of the text. The practice of allegorical reading requires the reader's receptivity to the text's continual ability to generate meaning in the present. Such an interpretation need not, of course, be uncritical... But in a pre-critical culture such as that of the early monastic readers, allegory remained innocent of the critical apparatus developed in modernity.<sup>31</sup>

In summation, Bernard's allegorical reading of *The Song of Songs* is potentially counterproductive to the practical scope of this otherwise pastorally orientated project. Soaring religious imagination does not seemingly equate to grounded or an inclusively just pastoral praxis, though within a biblical context it remains commonplace. E.g., the prophets, John of Patmos. However, as I have sought to show, Bernard's Cistercian context and its *raison d'être* demanded an existential

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<sup>29</sup> Mark S. Burrows, "Hunters, Hounds, and Allegorical Readers: The Body of the Text and the Text of the Body in Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*" in *Studies in Spirituality*, 2004, 118.

<sup>30</sup> "As food is sweet to the palate, so does a psalm delight the heart (*psalmus in corde sapit*). The soul that is sincere and wise will not fail to chew the psalm with the teeth as it were of the mind, because if he swallows it in a lump, without proper mastication, the palate will be cheated of the delicious flavour, sweeter even than honey that drips from the comb." *On the Song of Songs*, I, 7.IV.5, 41-42.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

hermeneutic through which the unfolding sacred text of the Church is read in conjunction with the similarly unfolding sacred text (*littera*) of human experience.<sup>32</sup> The synergy created by such a correlative reading thereby being a vital catalytic force within the broadening of faith and a progressive sanctification in grace.

The integral reading model which Bernard advocates, therefore, is not an avoidance of the *intellectus*. Rather, it is an affective expectation of the received text and an affective observation of human life; viz. imbued wisdom. For that reason alone, I believe, it is worth paying close attention to in contemporary pastoral and ecclesial settings. And by *affectus*, Bernard means an intimate knowing of God who is the well spring of the converted, thus fruitful life. Indeed, *affectus* not *intellectus* is the spiritually connecting and captivating language of the Word because it is the language of desirous human existence.<sup>33</sup> In this context, Bernard writes, “It is thus: it is the *affectus*, not the intellect, which has spoken, and it is not for the intellect to grasp.”<sup>34</sup>

### 3.5 Christ the Lover and the Christian Church as the beloved

The allegory in question and operative metaphorically throughout St. Bernard’s *On Song of Songs* is the Christological personification of the Lover / Bridegroom and the ecclesial personification with the Beloved / Bride. Due to the allegorical reading, each character is necessarily adaptive and unpredictable in their own inimitable way. Significantly, though, the ecclesial interpretation is somewhat porous in that the Beloved easily moves between being an individual soul in intimate relation to the Word and the Christian Church dynamically alive to and within the same relation. In

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<sup>32</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, I, 3.1.1, 16.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, IV, 67.II.3, 6-7. “The *affectus* have their own language, in which they disclose themselves even against their will. Fear has its trembling, grief its anguished groans, love its cries of delight. Are the lamentations of mourners, the sobs of those who grieve, the sighs of those in pain, the sudden frenzied screams of those in fear, the yawns of the replete—are these the result of habit? Do they constitute a reasoned discourse, a deliberate utterance, a premeditated speech? Most certainly such expressions of feeling are not produced by the processes of the mind, but by spontaneous impulses. So a strong and burning love, particularly the love of God, does not stop to consider the order, the grammar, the flow, or the number of words it employs, when it cannot contain itself, providing it senses that it suffers no loss thereby. Sometimes it needs no words, no expression at all, being content with aspirations alone.”

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

this sense, the text and its main players are given freedom to engage with the reader's imagination and life situation.

True also to the general purpose of Hebrew wisdom literature, of which *The Song of Songs* is an integral part, there exists an opportunity within the universality of daily experience to hear wisdom's voice crying out in the shared marketplace of life (Proverbs 8:1-21). Christianised by Bernard, yet not simply in dogmatic terms, the reasoned, wooing voice of the Lover is the voice of Christ, who is the embodied wisdom of God—a personification who, by living in the very midst of human self-alienation (John 1:10-11) is then able to speak with genuine authority. His knowledge base is experiential and therefore affectively wise. This consensual disposition doesn't preclude a sound or rigorous reasoning, yet it does suggest deeper integrative processes at work for the sake of expressive, reliable love. And in true prophetic purpose, his words achieve God's ends, having the innate power to, "Pluck up and pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." (Jeremiah 1:10b). Jean Gerson (d. 1429) is enlightening at this point:

The holy doctors, especially Saint Bernard, make an important distinction between knowledge and sapience, because knowledge belongs principally, and, as it were, only to understanding, and sapience to affectivity; sapience is more important because it is savoury knowledge, as its name suggests. Savour has to do with a person's affections, desire, appetites, and will. Someone can have a great deal of knowledge and education but little or no sapience, because he or she finds no savour or attraction in what is known.<sup>35</sup>

In Bernard's dextrous theological and pastoral hands, *On the Song of Songs* is an artistic allegory of God's desire for [re] consummated love with humanity played out within a highly perceptive poem imbued with the ecstatic joys and despairing alienations of human love. Simultaneously, it is an allegory of Christ's incarnated, didactic and self-sacrificing nature as the living Word in as much as

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<sup>35</sup> As quoted by Dumont, *Pathway of Peace*, 203. He also comments, "To set affectivity and understanding (knowledge) in opposition, as has too often been done, is to misunderstand what St Bernard meant... The distinction is not between ignorance and knowledge, but between wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom is a broadening and deepening of what we know, along with the attraction which knowledge exercises as it procures for us the happiness of loving Truth." 202-3.

it is also an allegory about the intimate kiss and unifying embrace of the Holy Spirit.<sup>36</sup> In short, the *super canticum* and its place of written or dramatic origin, authorship, social context, and operative place within Jewish and Christian canons is, through Bernard's spirited imagination, subsumed into a much larger drama with eternal and cosmic ramifications.

Whether this utility of the original text is a violent imposition, that is, from a religious or broader literary viewpoint, is not my present concern. In fact, I believe Solomon's *The Song of Songs* is able to bear the weight of Bernard's allegory without losing its literary or artistic integrity. As an experientially-charged art piece, replete with the joys of physical, emotional and spiritual union and inclusive of the common human vicissitudes of alienation, loneliness and random violence, *The Song of Songs* is a highly representative literary form which begets imaginative and life engaging responses, as is the given nature and educational purpose of all good poetics.

For poems are, in the words of Edward Clark, "exercises in slow reading so that life is accelerated by intuition."<sup>37</sup> This poignant description is certainly true to Bernard's experiential way of living and learning from the affecting presence *and* absence of Christ, the Word. In his own words on the matter, "Only the touch of the Spirit can inspire a song like this, and only personal experience can unfold its meaning. Let those who are versed in the mystery revel in it; let all others burn with desire rather to attain to this experience than merely learn about it."<sup>38</sup> And furthermore,

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<sup>36</sup> Jean Leclercq summarises the spiritual theology of the allegory in these terms: "The kiss of the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit. Christ gives the kiss to his spouse, or bride, whom he fills with his Spirit. The Spirit, in turn, unites the bride to the Father through the Son. Mystical union is the extension of the relationship of love that exists among and unites the three divine Persons. The bride, who is actually the Church and the soul, hopes that this mystery of charity will be fulfilled in her. The fulfilment can take place only through the working of the Holy Spirit, who enables the bride to experience mystical knowledge in which love becomes understanding." "Introduction" in *Selected Works*, 47.

<sup>37</sup> As quoted by Mark Burrows in the Introduction to, *The Paraclete Poetry Anthology: Selected and New Poems* ed. Mark Burrows (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2016), xviii. Relevant to the above discussion of Bernard's use of poetic allegory, Burrows writes, "Poems invite us to attend to the surfaces of things in order to sense traces there of larger and deep excess. The even reach for us in what Auden called "the deserts of the heart" so that we might "let the healing fountains start," touching us "in the prison of [our] days" in order to teach us, a free women and men, "how to praise." They startle us into seeing how things have depth and complexities, how beauty waits for us in often unexpected places. They invite us, by means of the peculiar order of metaphor, to wander into truths often hiding in plain view." xviii.

<sup>38</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, I, I.VI.11, 6.

Anyone who has experienced love will easily recognise the meaning of this poem...because it is not about music but about the heart's exaltation; it is harmony, not of voices, but of wills... From beginning to end it is a marriage song telling of... harmony of life and the charity which comes from mutually consenting affections.<sup>39</sup>

### 3.6 The Holy Spirit in *On the Song of Songs*

Finally, before fully engaging the text of Sermon 18, "The Two Operations of the Holy Spirit," it would be prudent to sketch something of the organising role of pneumatology within sermon series as a whole. As a reformer, Bernard of Clairvaux knew that all aspects of personal and communal renewal depended upon the felt, vivifying activity of the Spirit founded upon the transfiguring Word who is Christ. As the unifying love of the Father and Son and as their expressed, ecstatic (*ecstasis*) healing love to the self-wounded world, the Spirit was, and is, the encountering presence of God.<sup>40</sup> His 86 sermons, therefore, whilst being an unfolding drama of the sent and incarnated Word, are but a constant celebration of the Spirit's soulful embrace of love the midst of human waywardness and sin. In Sermon 24 he unambiguously writes:

It is the Spirit who teaches, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. Therefore, God made man righteous in this soul, not in the body made of earthly slime. He created him according to his own image and likeness. He is the one of whom you sing: The Lord God is righteous, and there is no iniquity in him. God in his righteousness made man righteous, and there is no iniquity in him... iniquity is a fault in the heart, not in the flesh, and so you should realize that the likeness of God is to be preserved or restored in your spirit, not in the body of gross clay. For God is a spirit and those who wish to persevere in or attain to his likeness must enter into their hearts, and apply themselves spiritually to that work, until with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, they become transfigured into the same likeness, borrowing glory from that glory, as the Spirit of the Lord enables them.<sup>41</sup>

Given that the spiritual marriage of the affected will between God and humanity is a constant pastoral theme of Bernard's monastic preaching, it would be logical to assume that he would be able to well articulate an accessible theology of Spirit. For Bernard, however, this could ill-afford to

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<sup>39</sup> Dumont, 122-123.

<sup>40</sup> Though well beyond the scope and interest of this thesis, the rise of "Third Article Theology" is established upon this experiential, thus presently applicable, reference point of first encounter. And further to Jürgen Moltmann's, "Cinderella Syndrome" of the Spirit, it seeks to be a movement of re-statement about the Spirit's co-equality. See, *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics* ed. Myk Habets (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2016).

<sup>41</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, II, 24.II.5, 46.

be conceptual or in any way remote from the human experience. As is evident in the above quote, a theology of Spirit was ostensibly a life lived in and through the deifying Spirit, that is, a personal witness to the Holy Spirit's gifting of grace for loving and truthful living, not a theoretical treatment on the Spirit's role and nature.

As I have been suggesting throughout these two chapters on Bernard and will raise again in my subsequent chapters on Jonathan Edwards, the lived experience of God was not yet another source of revelation amongst significant others. Rather, it was the embodied *context* for all sources of revelation to interrelate with, the Christian Scriptures notwithstanding.<sup>42</sup> In other words, if theology—literally, words about God—did not interface directly with the human soul in its desirous and universal trajectories for freedom, truth and love, it was, in Bernard's considerations, of little consequence and without power for transformation. If, however, confessed theology connects via resonate symbol and metaphor and an authenticity of reflective experience, it has every chance to be an affective wellspring of hope, faith and love at play within the world. Theology in this active sense—a doxological testimony to what the Spirit is constantly doing—is not a vain exercise of wistful speculation.

Christian theology, thus framed and nuanced, can then be a dynamic shaper and incliner of the will towards the expressed, missional life of the Holy Trinity. And so, defined in such an integrative and soulful way as Bernard consistently did, the increasingly popular expressions of a disembodied rationalistic theology—“Aristotelian syllogisms” and the “wordy utterances of philosophers”—

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<sup>42</sup> In Protestant circles, and particularly when the Wesleyan Quadrilateral is used as an authoritative teaching tool, the primacy of the Christian Scriptures is often expressed in relation to human reason, tradition and experience. The very notion of primacy is arguably, if not demonstrably, regressive. Subtly or not so-subtly, it relegates the veracity of lived human experience under a canon of chronicled lived human experience. Such a dishonest thus artificial hierarchy does not exist in St. Bernard for this very reason; the book of experience, he suggests, needs to be read in conjunction with the canon; it is not subservient to it. Arguably, John Calvin argued along the same lines at the beginning of his *Institutes* when he writes of two forms of knowing: “The knowledge of God and that of ourselves are connected.” In fact, Calvin's first sentence in *Institutes* reads in parenthesis: “Without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960, 35.

were for him, anathema.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, he writes colourfully in Sermon 41, “The Intellect, Faith and Contemplation”:

The truth is a jewel of great excellence, so are purity and candour, and especially the power to make sober estimate of oneself. The intellect of rationalists and heretics is not endowed with this *radiance* of purity and truth; hence they spend their time and energy pimping and festooning it with the tinsel of words and tricks of sophistry, lest it be seen for what it is, and the shame of its falseness be revealed was well.<sup>44</sup>

So far as Bernard’s pneumatology is concerned, then, he expressed a fidelity of theological discourse according to the Augustinian tradition. Likewise, he wrote in accord with the polished insights of his contemporary Richard of St. Victor. However, it was not enough for his preaching to posit an accurate theology of Spirit in a purely conceptual realm. If it be that the Holy Spirit is the indwelling Gift of divine grace (Romans 5:5) and the derivative power of participation within the divine life (2 Peter 1:4, 1 Corinthians 6:17), then far more than intellectual capacity is engaged in the divine—human encounter. Instead, it is the deeply yearning soul seeking of, and then responding to, the healing and loving touch of God. This consideration again underlines Bernard’s attraction to *The Song of Songs* with its innate capacity to convey what he understands the intimately given Gospel of grace to be.

#### **a) The spiritual metaphor of the kiss**

Such an intimate and reciprocal touch of Spirit in Bernard’s *On the Song of Songs* is captured very early on in his text through the evocative metaphor of the spiritual kiss. Indeed, it lingers throughout his musings and is the prolonged and focused subject matter of the first eight sermons. And while from the second verse of *The Song of Songs* text, “Let him kiss me with the

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<sup>43</sup> See, Casey, *Athirst for God*, 36-37: “Bernard’s objection was not to learning as such; he was happy enough to receive students such as Auxerre into Clairvaux and to make use of his talents. What he particularly inveighed against was the ‘wind’ and the sterility of those who made a cult of words and minute distinctions.” 36.

<sup>44</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, II, 41.1.1, 205. Emphasis added. “Radiance” in this context is the language and experience of epiphany, that is the in-breaking of God’s presence to treasure above all else, materiality and human knowledge included. Echoing Jesus in Matthew 4:1-4, the German poet Hilde Domin succinctly states, “We eat bread, but we live from radiance.” See, Burrows, “The Energy of Poetry in a Culture of Separation,” 20.

kisses of his mouth!” interpreted allegorically refers to the kisses of Christ (the Word), in Bernard’s mind and through his quill, he is in no doubt as to who the direct kisser is. In the pivotal Sermon 8 he refines the theology of God’s gratuitous kiss of grace on the lips of the desirous soul (her) to that of the Holy Spirit, in that:

Hence the bride is satisfied to receive the kiss of the Bridegroom, though she be not kissed with his mouth. For her it is no mean or contemptible thing to be kissed by the kiss, because it is nothing less than the gift of the Holy Spirit. If, as is properly understood, the Father is he who kisses, the Son is he who is kissed, then it cannot be wrong to see in the kiss the Holy Spirit, for he is the imperturbable peace of the Father and the Son, their unshakable bond, their undivided love, their indivisible unity.<sup>45</sup>

And furthermore:

So, although it has been said: “Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent,” still if that act of mission demonstrates the good-pleasure both of the Father lovingly sending his Son and of the Son freely obeying the Father, then the Holy Spirit is not passed over in complete silence, for he is implied in the mention of so immense a grace. The Holy Spirit indeed is nothing else but the love and the benign goodness of them both.<sup>46</sup>

The final sentence of the above quote is a definitive confession of Bernard’s experiential faith. And as such, it represents the theological and pastoral premise at play throughout Sermon 18 in *On the Song of Songs*. That being, God’s relational goodness is self-diffusive not self-contained (*bonum est diffusivum sui*). And whilst this initially might not sound earth-shaking, it was, and still is a radicalised understanding of the Godhead received as an eternally given, flowing and recapitulating grace (*fons divinitas*).<sup>47</sup> For in contrast to philosophical constructs of belief that in ways have sought to protect the notion of Deity by means of doctrines such as impassability, that is, the inability or need to empathise, feel or suffer,<sup>48</sup> Bernard’s existential focus, coupled with his anthropology of desire, made such a singularly removed god totally immaterial to core human experiences of love and desire.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, I, 8.1.2, 46.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 8.11.4, 47.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Merton eloquently expresses this emphasis of Bernardine thought: “The One God Who exists in Three Persons is a circle of relations in which His infinite reality, Love, is ever identical and ever renewed, always perfect and always total, always beginning and never ending, absolute, everlasting and full.” *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1962), 68.

<sup>48</sup> See, Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 21-30, 47-52.

<sup>49</sup> See, Denis Edwards, *Partaking of God*, 11-36.

Within his existential concern and focus, Bernard was following, somewhat unwittingly, in the theological and apophatic tradition of Pseudo-Dionysius (late 5<sup>th</sup> to early 6<sup>th</sup> Century).<sup>50</sup> He was also reliant upon the fresh insights of Richard of St. Victor and, in some respects, anticipated the theological eloquence of St. Francis's successor, St. Bonaventure (ca. 1217-1274). In sum, for divine goodness to be *truly* good—benign and not in any way harmful—it is naturally communicable and relationally effusive. As evidenced by the Incarnation of Christ (John 1:14, Phil. 2:5-11), divine goodness generously gives of itself, its empathic and mutualising nature eliminating any sense of selfishness or reserve.<sup>51</sup> Contrarily, a purely philosophical basis for the presence and reality of divinity, often leads in the direction of an aloof demigod. In the wise reckoning of the Trinitarian theologian, Catherine LaCugna, when considering the redemptive synergy existing between divine goodness and self-diffusion:

From the standpoint of this tradition, the idea of being as communion makes a great deal of sense. The deep yearning and desire for God we find inscribed in our hearts in more intelligible if that desire is rooted in the very nature of God, that is, if God too desires another, not out of need or lack but out of plenitude of love. Love by its very nature is outgoing and self-giving... Love seeks attachment and affiliation, never fragmentation, solitariness, or autonomy. Divine self-sufficiency is exposed as a philosophical myth.<sup>52</sup>

By way of a summary before I enter the bounded, textual world of Sermon 18, Bernard assumed that God's recapitulating, restorative love communicated fully in the Word (Jesus Christ) and

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<sup>50</sup> "Apophatic" meaning theological confession by means of the negative way (*via negativa*). In this schema, what God is not is the starting point for all theological reflection and subsequent confession. Mystery is not discounted or side-stepped, then. Rather it is a place of invitation, begetting a needed humility and unknowing of approach and yet a progressive discovery. This pathway doesn't preclude divinisation. Such a disposition is its very pivot. See, *Pseudo Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), "The Mystical Theology," 133-143.

<sup>51</sup> See, "Book Three of the Trinity," Chapter I, in *Richard of St. Victor*, trans. Grover A. Zinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1979): "[However,] where there is fullness of all goodness, true and supreme charity (*caritas*) cannot be lacking. For nothing is better than charity; nothing is more perfect than charity. However, no one is properly said to have charity on the basis of his own private love of himself. And so, it is necessary for love to be directed toward another for it to be charity. Therefore, where a plurality of persons is lacking, charity cannot exist." 374. See also, St. Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind to God*, Chapter VI. 2., trans. P. Boehner, ed. S. Brown (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993): "By reason of Their supreme goodness, the three Persons must necessarily have supreme communicability; by reason of their supreme communicability they must necessarily have supreme consubstantiality; and by reason of their supreme consubstantiality, they must have supreme likeness in their nature. Then, by reason of all these, they must have supreme coequality, and hence supreme coeternity. Finally, from all the foregoing taken together, they must have supreme mutual intimacy, by which one Person is necessarily in the other by reason of their supreme identity, and one acts with the other because of the absolute indivision of the substance, power, and activity of the Most Blessed Trinity Itself." 34.

<sup>52</sup> Catherine M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 353.

ecstatically given in the person (the kiss and embrace) of the Holy Spirit, is utterly good, invitational and gratuitous. Consequently, because this divine love is born continually out of God's desire for a complete renovation of the human mind and will, it can only be fully responded to from the primal reaches of human desire via the spiritual affections.<sup>53</sup> The rational mind simply cannot contain nor express the grace and mystery of this gift that seeks not an intellectual assent to the truth of Christ's revelation but rather a spiritual inclination of will, body and heart, reorientated towards his deeply felt presence.

And in relational essence, this is the love story and experience of the Beloved in *The Song of Songs*. Her expressed longing for consummated union of mind and will with her Lover is met repeatedly through his own desirous presence. Admittedly, though, her desire is exacerbated and heightened by his equally mysterious absence. Orientated desire towards her Lover as he truly is defines her very being and activity in the *Song*, not calculated or manipulative thought as how to best capture him to her needs: "Upon my bed at night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer. I will rise now..." (Song 3:1-2a).

Bernard clearly understood this ontic, thus highly motivational reality of being human, artistically tapping into and communicating its potent symbolic and symbiotic energy because even highly descriptive prose cannot carry its gravitas.<sup>54</sup> It is arguably also the distinctive calling and role of any professed Christian cleric or pastor.

Finally, in this summative context, Dumont offers a clear Bernardine insight that is pertinent to this thesis: "Because it is love which unites us to God most truly, it falls to the Spirit of love to dispose

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<sup>53</sup> "The affections, truly, considered in themselves, belong us to by nature; in a certain sense they originate from ourselves; that they are directed towards their proper objects is due to grace. Nor, indeed, is the case otherwise than that the virtues are none else than the affections rightly ordered." *Concerning Grace and Free Will*, 29.

<sup>54</sup> Casey, *Athirst for God*, states that desire is, "...an ontological reality; it is the movement of an incomplete being toward its divine completion... Desire (*desiderium*) is alternatively delighted love and fearful emptiness. Neither one pole nor the other can be dispensed with if there is to be genuine growth...what matters is not which species of experience is paramount at any given time, but that the search continue." 60-62.

our hearts by an outpouring of charity, which is nothing but good will. The Spirit bends our will or rather, straightens it up and orientates it increasingly towards the Spirit's own will."<sup>55</sup> To that operatively infusive and effusive ministry of Spirit I now turn.

### 3.7 The place and purpose of Sermon 18

*The Song of Songs* 1:3b—"Your name is oil poured out," (*Oleum effusum nomen tuum*) is the scriptural basis for Bernard's Sermon 17 and 18 in *On the Song of Songs*. Somewhat predictably, his immediate and unquestioned interpretation of the word oil (*oleum*) is emblematic of an outpouring of the fragrant Holy Spirit. And whereas in the restrained character of Sermon 17 in which the Spirit's mysterious coming and going is spoken of through an exhortation to remain alert and on guard against the Devil's distracting envy, Bernard begins 18 in an affirmative spirit of faith confession. What will this outpouring positively mean for the monastic, cum Christian life? Significantly for this discussion, the imagery of out-pouring (*effusum*) shapes the entire scope of the sermon and its potential application. That meaning, Bernard's pastoral and practical ministry focus remains with the liberal sharing of divine love (*caritas*), thus the ennobling character and role of the Spirit. Written in such a way, it is not merely conceived as an introspective or self-satisfied *in* pouring. In direct response to the verse at play throughout the text he states:

If he [Solomon] had meant infusion (*infusum*), he would have said "poured in." When the bride says: "Your name is oil poured out," she refers to the perfume sprinkled on her breasts, attributing their scent to the Bridegroom's name, as if it were an unguent poured on her breasts. Any man who perceives that he is endowed with an exterior grace enabling him to influence others, can also say the Lord: "Your name is oil poured out."<sup>56</sup>

Having then established the priority of the freely given and outward flow of charity, Bernard carefully nuances his pastoral purpose by raising the question of a synergy needing to coexist

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<sup>55</sup> Dumont, 124.

<sup>56</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, I, 18.1.1, 133.

between infusive and effusive love. In fact it is a warning to his listeners and readers, not to selfishly keep what one is called to give away but also not to squander what has been gifted “for our own welfare.”<sup>57</sup> This startling interplay of seeming opposites remains a pedagogical strategy throughout the sermon and is indicative of a well-honed, broader method of writing and speaking.<sup>58</sup>

### 3.8 The contrasting metaphors of reservoir and canal

“The man who is wise, therefore, will see his life as more like a reservoir (*concham*— lit. shell) than a canal (*canalem*).”<sup>59</sup> In light of all I have been positing about Bernard’s existential expression theology and its affective emphasis, this statement makes consistent sense as he goes on to say, “The canal simultaneously pours out what it receives; the reservoir retains the water till it is filled, then discharges the overflow without loss (*deteriorem*) to itself.”<sup>60</sup> His negative stress on simultaneously (*simul et recipit*) meaning that grace has not yet had sufficient time to take root within a receptive and softened will so as to properly, or rather in some restored strength, be reorientated back towards God. Grandly demonstrative, yet an all-too hurried piety can lack a goodly disposition, motivated by shallow self-conceit rather than a deepening attachment to holy desire.

In Bernard’s reckoning, such common place expressions of the Christian life and leadership are superficial, self-serving and bound to run dry within its own scarcity of Spirit. Hence it robs others and itself of healing, ennobling graces and can therefore further *damage* the already afflicted soul, not be of practical help to it. Again, by way of significant contrast, “The reservoir retains the water

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>58</sup> Thus, making his teaching all the more memorable. Bernard’s play on similarly sounding words is well known, e.g. humanity’s true end is found “not in consumption but in consummation” and even more colourfully, humanity’s redeemed path of “deification is by means of defecation.”

<sup>59</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, I, 18.1.3, 134.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

(of life) till it is filled, then discharges (*communicat*— lit. shares) the overflow without loss to itself.” So, when considered within this imaginative and symbolic metaphor, the human will is continually immersed in the processes of spiritual reorientation. Correspondingly, the affections are continually awash with renewed gifting of the Spirit’s empowering grace.

### 3.9 For those called to teach

It is at this juncture in Sermon 18 that Saint Bernard delivers some memorable lines of assertion—ancient in their observant wisdom, yet thoroughly contemporary in an ability to expose a certain artlessness of modern thought and practice:

Today there are many in the Church who act like canals, the reservoirs are far too rare. So urgent is the charity of those through the streams of heavenly doctrine flow to us, that they want to pour it forth (*effundere*) before they have been filled (*infundi*); they are more ready to speak than to listen, impatient to teach what they have not grasped, and full of presumption to govern others while they not know how to govern themselves.<sup>61</sup>

The repeated play on words evident between *effundere* and *infundi* and their grammatical variations serve to reinforce the needed balance required within the vocational monastic / Christian life of leadership. For Bernard, there is no substitute for the continual seeking and experiencing of God’s all-embracing grace, that is, the indwelling plenitude of the Holy Spirit, who alone is the actuating and motivating bearer of consensual faith, and the fecundity of *communicat*. Ironically, he suggests, in the rush to be a conduit of God’s love the Spirit can be ignored or even resisted by those in positions of most influence. The affections are still in play, so to speak, but only in a tangibly disordered and self-orientated fashion. They can even appear to be godly—and will often fool the spiritually naïve—but are in fact irreligious in both intent and expression by virtue of a lack of virtue unto fruitfulness (John 15:4-5). Indeed, such droplets of spiritual charity (*caritas adhuc aut nulla est*) leave the soul open to all manner of injurious chaos. For example, “It

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

bows to flattery... is entangled by ambition, disquieted by suspicions, tormented by insults, exhausted by anxieties, puffed up by honours... If you discover this chaos in your own interior, what madness drives you to insinuate yourself into other people's business?"<sup>62</sup>

Bernard, therefore, encourages an aspirational yet incremental seeking after the fullness of grace. And he does so, not in an idealised or conceptual sense, but through that which is spiritually moved at the core of one's being, thus directly affecting ways of relating with others in the world. Michael Casey, like Paul Tillich before him, identifies self-acceptance as a constituent experience of living in such a reconciling experience of grace: "Self-acceptance involves, first of all, accepting the deep-down duality of our lives. It means that we need to get behind the public self to find out who we really are... it involves cutting down on the spin we use to present ourselves to others in a favourable light."<sup>63</sup>

Bernard's advice is similar, based on the premise of first receiving the healing embrace (*amplexus*) of God: "You too must learn to await this fullness (*pleno*) before pouring out your gifts, do not try to be more generous (*largior*— lit. lavish, abundant) than God."<sup>64</sup> Arguably, the fullness of self-acceptance resides in the innate beauty of soul that is repeatedly affirmed by the desirous voice and truthful presence of the living Word: "Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly lovely..." (The Song of Songs 1:16a). Bernard would recoil at the thought of this precious gifting from God being persuasive self-talk. It is a transcendent truth, spoken to both stir and breach the unbelieving, hard heart.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Casey, *Grace: On the Journey to God*, 74. See also, Paul Tillich, "You are Accepted," in *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950): "Simply accept the fact that you are accepted! If that happens to us, we experience grace. After such an experience we may not be better than before, and we may not believe more than before. But everything is transformed. In that moment, grace conquers sin, and reconciliation bridges the gulf of estrangement. And nothing is demanded of this experience, no religious or moral or intellectual presupposition, nothing but *acceptance*." 162.

<sup>64</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, I, 18.II.4, 136.

### 3.10 “First be filled then control the outpouring.”

Returning to his overarching theme of effusive, processional love—as this is the merciful tenor of Christ’s teaching (Luke 10:37) that Bernard wants his listeners to live more fully attuned to—he neatly summarises his argument by emphatically stating, “First be filled, and then control the outpouring. The charity that is benign and prudent does not flow outwards until it abounds within (*affluere consuevit*).”<sup>65</sup> In saying as much, he reveals a good deal about his own working experience of grace and perhaps something about his own repeated stumbling’s as a follower of Christ. For Bernard, the fruitful monastic (Christian) life with all its needed energies, ingenuities and complexities of thought, is not a construction of the human mind, nor are its earnest practices in any way meritorious in the eyes of God. Rather, Christian faith is best engaged as a devoted response to, and in participation with, the eternally flowing fountain of life (*fons vitae*), in whom all human thirsts are sated, and desires fulfilled. In sum, the effusive Christian life is not simply a function of being. It is, like its Author, a fecund and good relation of disposed being.

In the concluding chapter of his treatise, *Concerning Grace and Free Will*, Bernard states in accord with the above lyrical understanding of God’s initiating and sustaining love: “Grace it is which moves free choice, when it sows the seed of good thoughts; which heals it, when it changes the disposition; which strengthens it, when it persuades it to external action; which keeps it so that it may not suffer failure.”<sup>66</sup> In his thinking, then, even the choice for sharing love with the world is the result of an infusive gifting of God. Otherwise, what might be shared out of a religious zeal, could still be vacuous of the Holy Spirit. And so, if it is lacking in truly redemptive graces, it will be inevitably injurious to self and others. Bernard perceptively writes further on in Sermon 18, “For if you are mean (*tu tibi nequam*—lit. a criminal or robber) to yourself, to whom will you be good?

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> *Concerning Grace and Free Will*, 81.

Help me out of your abundance (*cumulo*— lit. swell of clouds or the sea) if you have it; if not, then spare yourself the trouble.”<sup>67</sup>

### 3.11 The need of a scalpel and the cleansing tears of compunction

As I have noted in and around his writings, Bernard is certainly a theological and pastoral realist.

Despite his eloquent and attractive language, he understands that constant invocation and appropriation of the Spirit further into the expressive human will, is by no means easy.

Furthermore, the coming of the Spirit to the wounded soul is not a supernatural event as might be assumed, for such encounter would then bypass participatory human processes of deification.

Rhetorically he asks, “Is it possible to find any person whom the devil’s sword (*gladio*) does not wound (*vulneratam*), even after the wound of original sin has been healed by the medicine of baptism?” The answer obviously being no, Bernard then graphically equates the embedded nature of original sin to an ulcerous (*supercrevit*— lit. fungates or gangrenous) tumour that has grown upon the existing, diabolically inflicted wound.

Faced with this dire ailment, there is only one sure-fire solution for all humanity— radical surgery, so that the wound will find the space and healing air to heal. Significantly, though, the wound remains yet the scarring fades.<sup>68</sup> For the gift and exercise of faith is not an avoidance or instant cure-all for Bernard. Rather, it is a plumbing the depths of what it means to be a human being alive in the real world whilst being in close relation to the tri unitive, gracious and holy God.

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<sup>67</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, I, 18.II.4, 136.

<sup>68</sup> Though well beyond the scope of this section of the thesis, yet certainly not beyond its applications in ministry practice, the ever-present wounding (*vulneratam*) of life and even via the diabolical, is a critical existential consideration for how ministry practice will be embodied. Healing wounds and “sacred” scarring can be points of continued and needed learning, that is, for the expressed sake of practical wisdom (*phronesis*). Frodo, who is the ring bearer in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* is an archetypal example as is Odysseus in Homer’s, *The Odyssey*. See, Jean Houston, *The Hero and the Goddess: The Odyssey as Mystery and Initiation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992): “There is the Sacred Wound, which reframes life’s cruelties and betrayals, both physical and psychological, in such a fashion that we come to see them as gateways to deeper understanding, greater vulnerability, and empathy.” 77.

Echoing Bernard's principle of drastic spiritual surgery, the twentieth century poet T.S. Eliot posits Christ the Word as, "... the wounded surgeon who plies the steel / that questions the distempered part; / beneath the bleeding hands we feel / the sharp compassion of the healer's art."<sup>69</sup> The cancerous disaffection of original sin ("Adam's curse" in Eliot), needs to be similarly, "sliced away with the scalpel (*ferro acutae*— lit. sharp steel) of piercing sorrow (*compunctio*) according to Bernard. The pain (*dolor*) will be bitter (*acerbus*), but it can be alleviated with the ointment of devotion (*unguento devotionis*), which is nothing other than the joy of the hope of pardon (*indulgentiae exsultatio*)."<sup>70</sup>

In Bernard's monastic experience, compunction is foundational to the Christian way of life. Indeed, it is the Spirit's subsequent and cooperative work, with and within the converting and humbling word of Christ. It is also a progressive work in harmony with spiritually attuned affections. As the word itself suggests, it involves a puncturing of inflated illusions (non-freedoms) in order to retrieve a God-perspective so as to live a renewed life of truth, which is a growing state of non-illusion.<sup>71</sup> Yet like the myth of Icarus, this often-sudden perforation of hubris does not come without consequential, bone-jarring falls from elevated places of ego. Such is the candid and humbling nature of the Word (Hebrews 4:12), yet correspondingly, such is the advocating and encouraging nature of the Spirit in the saving purposes of God the Father (John 16:5-15). In this perichoretic light, Thomas Merton states, "... I am really beginning to discover the depth of Saint Bernard... I have realised that the foundation of his whole doctrine... is that God is Truth and Christ

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<sup>69</sup> T.S. Eliot, "East Coker," IV, 29.

<sup>70</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, I, 18.III.5, 137.

<sup>71</sup> In Bernard, compunction it is very often equated with the gift of tears. See Sermon I, 3.I.2, 17. "It is up to you, wretched sinner, to humble yourself...so that you may be rid of your wretchedness. Prostrate yourself on the ground, take hold of his feet, soothe them with kisses, sprinkle them with your tears and so wash not them but yourself." See also, Gerald M. Fagin, SJ, *Putting on the Heart of Christ*: "Compunction is often associated with tears—tears of penitence that turn into tears of joy. Joan Chittester aptly describes these tears: "To the ancients, tears of compunction were the sign of a soul that knew its limits, faced its sins, accepted its needs, and lived in hope.' Compunction pierces the human heart. Our heart is pierced with sorrow, but more profoundly by the love of God that purifies our hearts and opens them to God." 61-62.

is Truth Incarnate and the Salvation and sanctity for us means being true to ourselves and true to Christ and true to God.”<sup>72</sup>

In the context of Sermon 18, Bernard highlights the ready illusion of the spiritual life lived independently from God and, more particularly for this study, the common delusion of being able to administer / pastor God’s love without one’s ongoing “performances of penances.” That is, a spiritual life well versed and practiced in practice of honest confession. In a similar vein, Bernard says, “... so let the food of good works be moistened with the beverage of prayer (*orationis potus*), that a work well done may rest quietly (*componens*— lit. composes or arranges) in the stomach of conscience and give pleasure to God.”<sup>73</sup>

Clearly, there is no flurry of anxious activity evident in the above, either in Bernard’s writing or in his strong exhortations to love one’s neighbour. Rather, there exists a patient trust that is born of repeated patterns of prayer and through which arises a daring cooperation with the Spirit of initiating and conveying grace.<sup>74</sup> Congruently, he says by way of conclusion to this penultimate segment of Sermon 18:

In prayer one drinks the wine that gladdens a man’s heart, the intoxicating wine of the Spirit that drowns all memory of the pleasures (*voluptatum*) of the flesh. It drenches (*humectat*) the arid recesses of the conscience, stimulated digestion of the meats of good works, fills the faculties of the soul with a robust faith, a solid hope, a love that is living and true; it enriches all the actions of our life.<sup>75</sup>

Therefore, far from being an onerous or pain-ridden practice, prayer that leads to compunction is simultaneously a reorientation of desire and thus redirected love for God, others and self.

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1953), 271-272.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Daring or confidence is a fruit of the spiritual life in Bernard. In Sermon 83.I.1, 181, he states that when a soul is in close relation to the Word, “Why should it not venture with confidence (daring) into the presence of him by whose image it sees itself honoured, and in whose likeness it knows itself made glorious?”

<sup>75</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, I, 18.III.5, 137-138.

### 3.12 “Finally, God himself is love”

In Sermon 18’s concluding paragraphs, Bernard returns to the infusive and initiating nature of divine love. By doing so, he reiterates the substance of all 86 sermons, namely, that *caritas* is not simply a by-product of divine activity. Instead, it is the converting, sanctifying and relational disposition at the heart of all divine activity. So rather than divine love being considered an impersonal force to employ impressively for appearance sake or self-gain, the abbot of Clairvaux is at pains to equate love not only with the Spirit but with the saving processions of God as Holy Trinity. Therefore, he argues that vanity can find no air space in the affections when they are possessed (*occupant*) by such overflowing goodness and glory. This is a conviction he succinctly put forth in Sermon 83 just prior to his death in 1153: “Love is sufficient for itself; when love is present it absorbs and conquers all other affections.”<sup>76</sup> And then even more aesthetically he writes:

Love is sufficient for itself... it is its own merit and own reward. Love needs no cause beyond itself, nor does it demand fruits; it is its own purpose. I love because I love; I love that I may love. Love is a great reality, and if it returns to its beginning and goes back to its origin, seeking its source again, it will always draw afresh from it, and thereby flow freely. Love is the only one of the motions of the soul, of its senses and affections, in which the creature can respond to its Creator, even if not an equal, and repay his favour in some similar way.<sup>77</sup>

*Denique Deus caritas est*” or in fuller form, “Finally God himself is love, and nothing created can satisfy the man who is made to the image of God, except the God who is love, who alone is above all created natures.”<sup>78</sup> In this confession, Bernard restates the Augustinian axiom but does so in a noticeably polemical tone with Christian leadership in his sights. For immediately after the above quotation he defiantly writes, “The man who has not yet attained to this love (*affectus*) is

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., IV, 83.I.3, 182-183.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>78</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, I, 18.III.6, 138.

promoted (*promovetur*) at the gravest risk (*periculosissime*— lit. a danger) to himself, no matter how distinguished he be with other virtues.”<sup>79</sup>

Quite possibly Bernard was seeking to address difficult spiritual and leadership issues alive within his own community. He may have also been making a broad comment based on his first-hand experience of pride and impatience. Irrespective of either possibility, his Trinitarian theology in general and pneumatology in particular, displays a consistency of pastoral and spirit-orientated application. In short, this means that those who are called to minister / shepherd in the name and being of Christ, can do so only *within* his received and truthfully integrated love. Otherwise, without such an indwelling of charity, that being the Holy Spirit, and here Bernard lays it squarely on the line, such actions are *caritate vacuus est* (empty of divine love altogether).

Returning to the premise of first be filled, then control the outpouring, Bernard closes his argument with another memorable word play, “See how precious the graces that must first be infused, so that when we venture to pour them out we may dispense them from a spirit that is filled (*de plenitudine*) rather than impoverished (*de penuria*).<sup>80</sup> To live in such an intention of fullness, and by means of a definitive conclusion, he then lists seven dispositional spiritual practices, namely, compunction of heart (*compunctio*), fervour (*devotio*) of spirit, the labour (*labor*) of penance, works of charity (*pietatis*), zeal (*studium*) for prayer, leisure (*otium*—lit. repose or unemployment!) for contemplation and love (*dilectionis*—lit. choice) in all its fullness.

Following, Bernard then claims:

All these are the work (*operator*) of one and the same Spirit, accomplished by the process called infusion; and in so far as it has taken place those services (*administretur*) called effusion can be truly (*pure*) and hence safely performed to the praise and glory of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the same Holy Spirit lives and reigns, God, for ever and ever. Amen.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 139.

### 3.13 Sermon 18: A pastoral word for the ages?

Bernard's above concluding stress on the purity and a needed safety of administered grace, indicates how seriously he took the pastoral charge. For him, the infusive love of God was of such value and beauty, that it should never be conceived as a commodity or 'thing' to buy and trade in the religious marketplace. Rather, as indicated by this sermon, the infusive love of God is no other than the saving presence of the eternal Word given freely in the Holy Spirit. Consequently, divine love's effusion to the world via the lives of those called to exercise the ministry of Christ, needs to mirror the same gracious and fulsome relational nature. Expressive faith in this Bernadine context is foremost a congruent dispositional bearing. This means that pastors of Christ in any shape or form are not mechanical dispensers of grace, they are Christ-like bearers of grace. And this relational principle makes all the difference.

The pneumatological premises of infusion and effusion coupled with scrupulously honest leadership principles charted by Saint Bernard in Sermon 18, convey a timelessness of wisdom, that is, so far as the Christian experience of God's embracing and commissioning grace is concerned. Even more germane to this project on pastoral ministry, Bernard's affective application for the practice of Christ's reconciling ministry (2 Corinthians 5:20) is self-apparent.<sup>82</sup> By this I mean that the knowledge of God that is fully revealed in Christ and shed abroad in human hearts by the Holy Spirit, can only be fruitfully shared with the world when the affections are regularly orientated towards the inviting beauty of such a holy and dynamically redemptive love. At home within this given experience of grace, Bernard suggests the following:

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<sup>82</sup> This is a conviction strengthened by expositing this sermon to seasoned group of Protestant ministers, many of whom had not heard of the Clairvaux abbot. Our shared experience would suggest that pastoral wisdom and imagination, born of the piercingly true and humbling words of Christ, and sustained by the love of the Holy Spirit, can only be consistently expressed when due attention is given to the spiritual life.

Let your love be strong and constant, neither yielding to fear nor cowering at hard work. Let us love affectionately, discreetly, intensely. We know that the love of the heart, which we have said is affectionate, is sweet indeed, but liable to be led astray if it lacks the love of the soul. And the love of the soul is wise indeed, but fragile without the love which is called the love of strength.”<sup>83</sup>

Such theological and pastoral conviction regarding the fruitful capacity of the affected heart and mind obviously does not belong to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux alone. Jonathan Edwards, a Calvinistic puritan pastor of New England, may not have spoken in such mellifluous tones, however his voluminous writings and vision concerning the triune God and the duly responsive and harmonious Christian life are similarly penetrating by virtue of his clear sight. Akin to Bernard, Edwards experienced the converting beauty of divine holiness and expressed that affectional disposition within all aspects of his pastoral call. He believed also that it was in the consensual will and expressive nature of the affections where a truly loving and creative Christianity was most fully able to flourish. And so, towards Jonathan Edwards and his distinct theological voice, cum awakening of spirit, I will now turn.

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<sup>83</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, I, 20.III.4, 150.

*Now by a hard heart, is plainly meant an unaffected heart, or a heart not easy to be moved with virtuous affections, like a stone, insensible, stupid, unmoved and hard to be impressed. Hence the hard heart is called a stony heart and is opposed to an (sic) heart of flesh, that has feeling, and is sensibly touched and moved.*

**Jonathan Edwards**<sup>1</sup>

*In Edwards... by contrast, beauty is at the centre of a practical dynamic. His outlook might be said to be a theology of active beauty. Beauty is first of all a quality radiating from the centre of all reality. Edwards connects beauty closely with God's holiness and with God's love. At the centre of reality are the persons of the Trinity, who perfectly manifest these qualities in the harmony of their mutual love... The highest beauty is perfect love, manifested to us in the sacrificial death of Christ on behalf of the undeserving. Beauty is thus an active power.*

**George M. Marsden**<sup>2</sup>

*God, for Edwards, was "a full and overflowing and inexhaustible fountain of love." This divine love has its source in the eternal life of the Trinity: it "has its seat in the Deity as it is exercised with the Deity, or in God toward himself. But it does not remain in such exercises only, but it flows out in innumerable streams toward the created inhabitants of heaven." In Edwards's trinitarian reflections, love replaces power as the primary divine attribute, setting the relationship between God and humanity in a much larger frame.*

**Amy Plantinga Pauw**<sup>3</sup>

## Chapter Four

### Jonathan Edwards and Spiritual Affections

#### 4.1 Introduction and trajectory of the chapter into the next

It will be the intent of this chapter to sketch something of Jonathan Edwards' early religious life, focusing initially on his written account of his conversion to the Christian faith.<sup>4</sup> Though conditioned by retrospective time and theologically sculptured processes, it is a vivid narrative that holds vital clues to his life-long emphasis on the fruitful role played by spiritually shaped

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Concerning the Nature of the Affections, and their Importance in Religion," *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* vol. 2, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 117.

<sup>2</sup> George M. Marsden, "Foreward" in Dane C. Ortlund, *Edwards and the Christian Life: Alive to the Beauty of God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2014), 14.

<sup>3</sup> Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Personal Narrative" (1739/40), *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, edited by John E. Smith, Henry S. Stout and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). This represents a 19-year gap between the writing and the conversion experience described.

affections in close and ordered relation to the self-communicative love of the Triune God.<sup>5</sup> By such means, I aim to show that his affective frame of reference was neither a psychological system of belief nor a rejection of rigorous theological thought. Rather, it was derivative of first-hand religious sensibilities and equally notable for a consensual stance toward a sacred aesthetic, thus a potentially harmonising force within individuals and whole communities.

The chapter will conclude with a rationale and overview of Edwards' mature treatise *Religious Affections*, and in particular, affections inclined toward the revealed love of God that pertain to wise, humble and imaginative pastoral practices. As such, this discussion will be foundational for the second Edwards chapter, where the primary focus will be upon his seminal sermon, "A Divine and Supernatural Light" and its potential instructive insight within contemporary settings.

## 4.2 Experiencing the thought and vision of Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards is a key figure in the development and subject matter of this thesis. His breadth of theological reflection within a philosophical disposition,<sup>6</sup> constituent of an eclectic personality has engaged my mind for well over twenty years.<sup>7</sup> This is an odd attraction in many respects given that his political, ecclesial and social conservatism are clearly at odds with my own twenty-first century worldview.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In relation to Edwards' "Personal Narrative," Clyde A. Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley and Nature* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1987) wisely suggests, "This is a piece to be approached with some care. The development of Edwards's religious life shown in it was written in retrospect, and therefore is coloured deeply by ideas long after the events and descriptions of his spiritual state occurred. The reader cannot be confident that what is before him (sic) is the earliest evidence of first-hand experience; rather, as in much autobiographical writing, the experience is so overlaid with didactic purpose and matured thought that one must look beyond the words themselves." [22]

<sup>6</sup> See, Oliver D. Crisp & Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to His Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing), 2018. This is an important distinction or ordering in the author's minds. Prior to 2003, they contend, Edwards was predominantly understood to theologise within a philosophical framework applicable to unfolding Enlightenment principles. Strobel, in particular, has challenged this assertion, seeking to reclaim his theological, if not biblical centre.

<sup>7</sup> See, Peter J. Thuesen, "Edwards's Intellectual Background," in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). Simply as a thinker, thus prior to the question of theology, Edwards is eclectic, that is a person who sought "wisdom from any quarter." [23]

<sup>8</sup> See what is roundly considered to be the definitive biography of Edwards, George M. Marsden's, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). Although such a broad social, religious and cultural shaping exists outside the boundaries of

However, it is Edwards as the explorative theologian soulfully engaged in pastoral and missional application in whom vital points of affinity are most readily found. His aesthetically articulated vision of God and the Christian life continues to resonate with me, though ironically my initial encounter with his writings came by way of a short, paraphrased quotation in the larger body of a devotional resource. Even in such a context, Edwards' hope of an affected mind and heart in the love of Christ and humanity seized my attention and began to intersect with my own pastoral imagination:

I am bold in saying this, but I believe no one is ever changed, either by doctrine, by hearing the Word, or by preaching or teaching of another, unless the affections are moved by these things... In a word, there is never any great achievement by the things of religion without a heart deeply affected by those things.<sup>9</sup>

Within such a confident confessional stance, Edwards spoke directly into my personal and vocational narrative wherein spiritual maturity did not come easily. I had discovered that communal depth of motivation and potential fruitfulness could not be achieved by ethical exhortation or appeals to greater needs for social justice. I also realised it could not be secured by more religious effort or self-talk. And certainly, it would never be wrought by mere rational persuasion from the pulpit or classroom, however eloquent it might be in given moments of delivery.

In sum, Edwards' eloquent and glorious vision of God touched an existential nerve. He became, in my lived experience, a trustworthy and aspirational voice. The New England reformer posited the Christian life in highly spirited ways yet did so while embracing the enlightenment quest for greater human understanding and knowledge. His, I sensed, was a congruous and non-dualistic

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this thesis, it obviously does impinge upon Edwards' espoused and lived theology. Where most relevant to the discussion, such considerations will be looked at in greater depth.

<sup>9</sup> *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups*, ed. by Richard J. Foster & James Bryan Smith (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993), 21. For the original text, see, Jonathan Edwards, "Religious Affections," *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 102.

disposition of faith confession that remains attractive and workable to me given its premise of *unfolding* movement within the real and tangible.<sup>10</sup> As I began to read more widely in his writings, I experienced Jonathan Edwards to be an insightful voice that the contemporary church could well re-consider. In part, this will be a major focus for this thesis as a whole.

### 4.3 “A blazing beauty at the centre of the universe”

Born only eighty years after the arrival of the *Mayflower* to the shores of Massachusetts, Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) represented continuity and an innovative departure from the religious and social experiment that was puritanism and, in particular, non-separating puritanism.<sup>11</sup> He was the fifth born of eleven healthy children and the only boy within Timothy and Esther Edwards’ multifarious household.

Edwards was initially educated within a parsonage environment, predominantly by his father. Congruently, this home schooling was underpinned by Calvinistic precepts, yet more precisely, expressive of a Reformed theology<sup>12</sup> and an inculcation of puritan spiritual practices. By the age of twelve he was able to read Greek and Latin, at the age of thirteen he began undergraduate studies at Connecticut Collegiate School (soon after to become Yale), and by nineteen had compiled seventy serious “Resolutions” for the determining of his present and future Christian life. Attuned to Puritan ideals, his first Resolution began, “Resolved, that, I will do whatsoever I think to be most

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<sup>10</sup> A key reason for this is both Edwards’ philosophical and theological focus on disposition or being- in-relation, not upon substance in the Aristotelian schema of the “Unmoved Mover.”

<sup>11</sup> See, Donna M Campbell, "Puritanism in New England." Literary Movements. Dept. of English, Washington State University <http://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/purdef.htm> Viewed April 10, 2017. “The term “Puritan” first began as a taunt or insult applied by traditional Anglicans to those who criticized or wished to “purify” the Church of England. Although the word is often applied loosely, “Puritan” refers to two distinct groups: “separating” Puritans, such as the Plymouth colonists, who believed that the Church of England was corrupt and that true Christians must separate themselves from it; and non-separating Puritans, such as the colonists who settled the Massachusetts Bay Colony, who believed in reform but not separation. Most Massachusetts colonists were non-separating Puritans who wished to reform the established church, largely Congregationalists who believed in forming churches through voluntary compacts.

<sup>12</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, “New Englanders did not often use the word or concern themselves with the teaching of John Calvin. Rather they saw themselves as the heirs to what they considered the truly biblical outlook of “the Reformers.” 86.

to God's glory." This was followed by a more definitive and, arguably, original one: "Resolved, to be continually endeavouring to find out some new invention and contrivance to promote the aforementioned things."<sup>13</sup>

Consistent with the above voiced intent, from an early age Edwards showed acumen for observational and reflective writing, often in response to the charged realms of nature and in sway of the influential writings of Sir Isaac Newton who posited natural laws of harmony that coincided with his own lived experience.<sup>14</sup> He was an enthusiastic explorer of the Connecticut Valley and woodlands, an environmental context that continued to shape his written considerations and stimulate his theological imaginings.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, many of his Sabbaths—when later the pastor of Northampton—were spent exploring the surrounding woods on horseback with his equally nature-loving wife, Sarah Pierpont, who experienced God's creation as, "of his nearness to me, and of my dearness to him."<sup>16</sup> And as is evident from the published three volume collection of *The Miscellanies*, totalling some 1150 entries, Edwards' notebook was always close at hand on these sauntering's, with his rudimentary notes and observations often becoming the inspirations for latter sermons and significant theological treatises. Clyde A. Holbrook, himself a native of the Connecticut Valley, has suggested that:

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<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Resolutions" (1722), *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, edited by John E. Smith, Henry S. Stout and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 274. In full, the first resolution reads: "Resolved that, I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good, profit and pleasure, in the whole of my duration, without consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence. Resolved to do whatever I think to be my duty, and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved to do this, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many and how great soever."

<sup>14</sup> See, George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 64-72. See also, Robert. J. Jensen, "Christology" in, *The Princeton Companion of Jonathan Edwards*, 77.

<sup>15</sup> See, D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism: True Religion in a Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 127-135. Making a convincing case for Edwards' intellectual engagement with Newtonian science, that is without loss to his deep sense of God's imbuing grandeur (on the contrary), Hindmarsh writes, "There seemed no end to his intellectual curiosity about the natural world. He also displayed the characteristically Newtonian concern for observation, mathematical reasoning, and, to a limited extent, even experimentation." 128.

<sup>16</sup> As quoted by Hindmarsh. Sarah's sentiment, suggests Hindmarsh, "... expresses well the spirituality that was basic to Edwards' whole intellectual project. God's immediate presence was for Edwards principal—a basic axiom for both physics and metaphysics." 130.

It is worthy of comment that Edwards's deepest experiences of God... did not occur with Bible in hand or in a church. He was undoubtedly in a high state of religious excitement within these experiences of the natural world, but he did not lose his grip upon the sheer facticity of nature.<sup>17</sup>

The above consideration is a major one in the flow of this thesis that seeks to affirm the definitive role spiritual affections play within fruitful dispositions of pastoral ministry. This meaning, that the visibility of God's glory and grace is a consistent and attractive means of spiritual reorientation, thus spirited, vocational expression. The Triune God who happily communicates or "emanates" himself in the midst of the natural order is logically, for Edwards, the same God who calls women and men to participate in the redeeming ways of Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega of the creative order itself. Strange as the language may initially sound, such a lived response is described by Edwards as a "remanation" of God's goodness and glory. In short, a mirroring of the life of God back to God.<sup>18</sup>

As a sixteen-year-old senior enrolled at the renamed Yale College, Edwards undertook a written scientific / theological study of a so-called flying spider, entitled, "Of Insects."<sup>19</sup> He later incorporated this detailed observational report into what is now known as "The Spider Letter."<sup>20</sup> At his father's urging, Edwards sent it to Judge Dudley, Fellow of the Royal Society in London, in the hope of publication and scientific recognition.<sup>21</sup> Disappointingly for the young man, who was never shy of expressing his ambitions of lasting literary and spiritual influence, the paper was never published in scientific journal form.

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<sup>17</sup> Clyde A. Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley and Nature: An Interpretative Essay*, 24. Earlier, Holbrook states, "This combination of history, memory and love of nature came together in my study of Edwards. I have come to believe that nature contributed far more to Edwards' philosophy, theology and ethics than has usually been allowed by his interpreters. I find myself, therefore, at odds with the opinion of one author, who has argued that Edwards's principal purpose in his published works was 'to set nature apart from supernature in the domain of religious experience.'" [11]

<sup>18</sup> See, Kyle S. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 13-17.

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Of Insects," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 6, *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "The Spider Letter," (1723), *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, 1-8.

<sup>21</sup> See, Richard A. Hall, "Jonathan Edwards on the "Flying" Spider: A Model of Ecological Thought in Microcosm," in *Jonathan Edwards Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2015).

According to prominent members of the School of Jonathan Edwards Studies at Yale University, Smith, Stout and Minkema, “For the more empirically minded students of the eighteenth century, natural science was to be pursued for its own sake. Edwards the student, however, encountered in plants and animals, physics or optics, the face of God.”<sup>22</sup> In short, Edwards’ default theological positioning, one that was established early on in his contemplative life, would now be considered to be expressive of a theological cum Christological aestheticism.<sup>23</sup> That is, his writings and proclamations contain repeated stress on the beauty of God’s holiness constantly expressed within creation and coextensive with a life of redemption in Christ. This emphasis is a gifting in continuity with, though not fully constituent of, the redemptive operations of the Holy Trinity in relation to the Christian Church. Namely, the saving gift to humanity of Godself, offered through the Son and sealed through adoption by the Holy Spirit.

Such a closeness between the created order and the gift of salvation offered to humanity at home within it is admittedly highly nuanced, yet it remains an important subtlety upon which Edwards’ theological edifice rests. Stephen R. Holmes, author of *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, highlights the difficulty of such reasoning stating, “[Edwards draws] a distinction between love in general, which is God’s disposition to love, and a love in a strict sense, which presupposes an object to be loved.”<sup>24</sup>

For Edwards, the specific object of God’s love is his Son and by extension the Church that bears his name, in and through the unifying love of the Holy Spirit. Creation is reflective of Christ’s gloriousness and beauty within a typological framework, but it is not the relational or saving end of God’s creative activity.<sup>25</sup> In other terms, creation surely witnesses to the face of God yet only

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<sup>22</sup> *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, xiii.

<sup>23</sup> This is a term used and established in theological parlance by Han Urs von Balthasar, most particularly in his 7 Volume work, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982-1989).

<sup>24</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 48.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

through the typological lens of Incarnation and Christ's redemptive purposes. "Therefore," concludes Holmes, "the created order exists for God to make known His will concerning salvation and perdition; this it does by mass of typological relationships with the higher spiritual reality."<sup>26</sup> Hence, by virtue of the reconciling ministry of the Holy Spirit, the ontological gap between Creator and creation is ultimately bridged. The intimate knowing of God, which of itself is an active participation within the Godhead, is totally dependent upon being found "close" with Christ, the restorer of true human nature in relation to both earth and heaven.<sup>27</sup> Flesh and blood, that is human experience or reason cannot achieve this spiritual knowing or sense in a natural state of independence from God, Edwards consistently argued. The mutual and binding love of the Father and Son is gratuitously given from a relational state beyond human availability, reckoning or control. In his 1730's sermon, "The Spirit of the True Saints Is a Spirit of Divine Love," Edwards makes this point clear:

'Tis something above the nature of the creature. 'Tis above the angelic nature, and this love is the most excellent thing in heaven itself, yea, 'tis that which makes it heaven. We never can conceive how excellent it is till we view it in the fountain of it—in the eternal love of the Father and Son.<sup>28</sup>

Despite an arguably typological relationship existing between the divinely expressive realms of creation and redemption, Divine beauty or in Edwards' repeated words, "God's gloriousness" remains for him a distinct and attractive category of revelation.<sup>29</sup> In the context of human dependence upon this Divine self-giving, Edwards wrote, "Our having all of God, shows the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 90. For a necessary, yet not incompatible contrast, see, Sang Hyun Lee, "God's Relation to the World" in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, 59-71. Lee provocatively states, "The created world, then, is the framework in and through which God adds to God's own being... what God does in the world matters to God. In this sense, the world matters and is important to God." [59]

<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "The Spirit of the True Saints is a Spirit of Divine Love," in *The Glory and Honor of God: Volume 2 of the Previously Unpublished Sermons of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Michael D. McMullen (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 307. He writes earlier in the lengthy sermon / tract: "But that love wherein the divine nature doth primarily consist is in the infinite love between the Father and the Son. 'Tis chiefly God is love. 'Tis thus principally that God may be said to be a pure and holy act. The nature of God is all in act and 'tis act in self. 'Tis all an holy energy consisting in that infinite flame of pure love and holy delight that there is from all eternity between the Father and the Son immensely loving and delighting and rejoicing in each other." 306. Into this holy energy (love) the believer is enjoined through the unifying mission of the Holy Spirit. It therefore cannot, in Edwards' professed thinking, be a state of being sought and achieved from the human side of things.

<sup>29</sup> Kyle C. Strobel, "The Beauty of Christ: Edwards and Balthasar on Theological Aesthetics," in *The Ecumenical Edwards: Jonathan Edwards and the Theologians*, ed., Kyle C. Strobel, (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 109.

fullness of his power and grace: our having all *through* him, shows the fullness of his merit and worthiness; and our having all *in* him demonstrates the fullness of beauty, love and happiness.”<sup>30</sup>

Such concentrated focus on divinely expressed and incorporating beauty was obviously not an abstracted theological premise for Edwards. In his thinking, the historically grounded redemptive economy of the Trinity was real, *given* and integral to how a Christian should practically live. For as Christ is attractively beautiful in grace and goodness, so should humanity be. And through the preaching and teaching of this grace received by an awakening to faith in Christ, Edwards exhorted not only its reception but an equally grateful participation in the life of the Holy Trinity<sup>31</sup>—such a regenerated state of the human condition being an affective and willing embodiment of God’s love to the world.

By way of conclusion to this introductory section, the historian and biographer, George Marsden well describes Edwards’ aesthetic hermeneutical key:

A “blazing beauty” at the centre of the universe and this is a personal experience. Any true encounter with such personified beauty is transforming. It draws our highest love to it. It captures our most fundamental affections. Our will, driven by our affections or loves, is transformed to love what God loves. Hence beauty is the source of fervent action based on love to God and all God’s creatures. Beauty is not a personal refuge from the machinery of modernity. A deadening instrumentalism. Not an escape but a basis for a way of life that is both practical and exhilarating.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, “Sermons and Discourses 1730-1733,” vol. 17, ed. Mark Valeri, “God glorified in Man’s Dependence,” (1731), 211. Colourfully echoing this participation motif in his “Discourse on the Trinity,” *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 21, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), Edwards writes, “All our good is of God the Father; ‘tis all through God the Son; and all is in the Holy Ghost, as he is himself all our good. God is himself the portion and the purchased inheritance of his people. Thus, God is the Alpha and Omega in this affair of redemption.” 137.

<sup>31</sup> “Now the sum of God’s temper or disposition is love, for he is infinite love; and as I observed before, there is no distinction to be made between habit and act, between temper or disposition and exercise. This is the divine disposition or nature that we are made partakers of (2 Peter 1: 4); for our partaking or communion with God consists in the communion or partaking of the Holy Ghost.” *WJE* 21:122. It should be noted that the partaking of divine nature was not equivalent to partaking of divine essence. It is a relational, spiritual unification, not substantive.

<sup>32</sup> George M. Marsden, “Jonathan Edwards in the Twenty-First Century,” in *Edwards at 300: Essays on the Tercentenary of His Birth*, edited by Harry S. Stout, Kenneth Minkema, & Caleb J. D. Maskell (New York: University Press of America, 2005), 163.

#### 4.4 A sweet conjunction through which to enter and dwell

With the above contextual and theological considerations in mind, I will now turn towards Jonathan Edwards' own account of his conversion during his late teens. As mentioned, this theologically stylised recollection / redaction recorded in his "Personal Narrative," was written in late 1740, some nineteen years after the described events. Debatably, the narrative's doxological form and confessional content is expressive of many of his key theological premises. As a foundational event in time, it continued to act upon him over time, remaining an important constant of theory (*theoria*)<sup>33</sup> and unfolding life experience. I believe it to be true that such a synergy of thought and affectivity energised his awakening preaching and writings, not purely in distinctively doctrinal terms, but in affective and practical expressions of Christian faith. Without a familiarity of the converting and indwelling presence of the Spirit (and subsequent reawakening's), discussion in and around his major work on the affections would make little or no sense. Edwards writes not simply as an observant theoretician, as intelligent as he may have been. What follows is testament to a willing recipient and participant within the operations of a surprising grace.

Edwards' father, Timothy, was a celebrated Puritan clergyman who throughout his only son's boyhood was stationed in East Windsor, Connecticut. His maternal grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, was known as the Pope of Northampton, Massachusetts, serving the second most influential church outside of Boston. Not surprisingly, certain social and psychological pressures

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<sup>33</sup> *Theoria* here as understood as it was in the shaping of Eastern patristic theological confession. Unlike the English derivative 'theory,' the Greeks understood *theoria* (from the verb, *theorein*) "to see." In other words, it can denote an *ecstatic* convergence of interior sight with exterior perception. Edwards' usage well fits this description. See, Louis Roberts, *The Theological Aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 120-22. "Gregory of Nyssa, for example, followed the Greek notion of the contemplative life as an asceticism of virtue in pursuit of perfection – an integral wholeness, a humanness, and not just moral impeccability – which issues in *theoria*..." Seeing God" meant for Gregory actual participation in the divine life." 121-22. See also, Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1978): "This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see him. But one must always, by looking at what he can see, rekindle his desire to see more. Thus, no limit would interrupt growth in the ascent to God, since no limit to the Good can be found nor is the increasing of desire for the Good brought to an end because it is satisfied." 116.

existed for the young Jonathan to follow in their influential, ministerial footsteps.<sup>34</sup> And though being dutiful in study and prayer whilst attending his father's church, Edwards earnestly prayed for an abiding new sense of God's gloriousness in his heart, this being in part the puritan ideal for authentic conversion. Indeed, it was the requisite needed for firsthand knowledge of God from which to preach and teach. Too often in his impressionable youth, both conviction and spiritual affections directed towards God wore off, causing Edwards to yearn for something more longstanding and substantive; a faith dependent upon the permanent indwelling of the Spirit and not upon mere human endeavour.<sup>35</sup>

Surprisingly to him, the new spiritual sense he so desired came in relatively simple, non-structured ways. In his burgeoning thought and experience, the Holy Spirit seemed to be at liberty to transcend established patterns, that is, tried and true morphologies for salvation. This eventual gifting of participatory grace in God became for the young Edwards a reality that shook not only his theological worldview but modified his own pastoral practices in contrast to puritan norms.<sup>36</sup>

Evidence for the above assertion was Edwards' revivalist preaching from 1733 onwards that sought to trust the free operations of the Spirit—the surprising work of God—to move and convert at God's will and pleasure and not simply in accord with zealous conformity and or rational design. In such an unpredictable context, Edwards ultimately needed to defend himself against charges of disorder and intense, though ultimately transient expressions of religious devotion.<sup>37</sup> *Religious Affections* is in part a major work of such defence although it was framed in positive, near-empirical assertions.

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<sup>34</sup> Predictably, there existed a certain complexity, if not dysfunction, within the Edwards lineage. See, Crisp and Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards*, 17-20. Most notably, "His father's perfectionism gave Edwards a taste for the impracticality high standards that he demanded of himself and, to some extent, of those around him in later life." 18.

<sup>35</sup> "Personal Narrative," 282.

<sup>36</sup> For a comprehensive discussion on these faith and order matters within New England puritanism at this time before the first awakening of 1734, see Rhys S. Bezzant, *Jonathan Edwards and the Church*, 33-39.

<sup>37</sup> See, volume 4 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. C.C Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972): "The Great Awakening," 56-65, and more particularly, "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the conversion of Many Hundred

With reference to his own recollected<sup>38</sup> account of conversion, its stirrings to fruition began through a devotional reading of a scriptural text (1 Timothy 1:17, KJV) wherein the doxology, “*Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God.*” spoke personally to him:

Never any words of Scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought with myself, how excellent a Being that was; and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God... and be as it were swallowed up in him... a new sort of affection. But it never came into my thought, that there was anything spiritual, or of a saving nature in this.<sup>39</sup>

Reading between the lines of the fuller narrative, Jonathan’s influential father appeared not to be enamoured with his son’s quasi-mystical “new sense of the glory of God” account. It seemed for him to take short cuts around sequential and rigorous steps of redemption—a culminated conviction of sins (progressively getting to the heart of the matter), a searching, evangelical humiliation of repentance, and a final graced assurance in light of Christ’s atoning, representative death. Each one of these confirmed steps was based on the honoured directives of Puritan divines such as Thomas Hooker and others.<sup>40</sup>

Significantly, Edwards’ use and application of the term sense was innovative in salvific formulations and description. Unlike his Puritan forebears, his textual use of the word meant more than religious feelings or sentiment. These were, in more traditional constructs, transitory and often untrustworthy. Also, in subtle contrast to the influential philosopher and physician John

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Souls in Northampton and Neighbouring Towns and Villages of the County of Hampshire, in the Province of Massachusetts Bay in New England,” 144-211.

<sup>38</sup> A consensus of opinion would suggest that the “Personal Narrative” was never intended for publication during Edwards’ lifetime. This important consideration lends weight to a non-didactic or self-aggrandizing intent. However, the tension of when it was written in relation to that had transpired since the time of his conversion does remain.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 284. The phrase, “swallowed up in him,” captures in many ways, Edwards understanding of justification by faith and gives experiential impetus to a life of sanctification. Such was his growing desire for relational, albeit submissive, union that this ever-transformative hope in Christ, coloured all other theological considerations. Accordingly, for the mature Edwards, imputation of Christ’s righteousness is not a legal transaction but a gift of the incorporating and reconciling Spirit, awakened by preaching the relational and beautifying excellence of Christ. In the words of Robert Jenson, “It is what Protestant scholasticism (Calvin) called “the mystical union,” the mutual indwelling of Christ and the soul, that makes the imputation meet... Faith is the believer’s act of reception.” From, “Christology,” in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, 74-5.

<sup>40</sup> See, Iain H. Murray, “Thomas Hooker and the Doctrine of Conversion,” in *Banner of Truth Magazine*, Issue 195, December 1979, 19-29. The Puritans, by in large, understood the need for thoroughness and time in the converting process, so as to guarantee a longevity, thus virtuousness of faith. Conviction of sin and the process of repentance could ill afford to be rushed. As writes Murray, “Hooker would certainly have been appalled at the speed and ease with which evangelicals today claim to be sure that others have been converted!” 52. See also, Mark Valeri, “Preface to the Period,” in *WJE* 17:7-13.

Locke, Edwards did not understand sense to be self-contained perceptions of human experience but a renewed state of being given by virtue of divine encounter. Religiously speaking, he desired a meeting place between his own rebellious human will and the infused, transformative light and love of God.

Edwards thus further adapted a meaning for sense from the influential British philosophical school of the moral sense, so that it then became a spiritual sense that carried within it, “an innate awareness of moral qualities such as beauty or virtue.”<sup>41</sup> These he understood as qualities of relational vision that engaged and motivated the human will in demonstrably freeing ways.<sup>42</sup> Deeper than passing feelings, more extensive than cognition and regenerative of the human soul over the long term, a sense of God’s gloriousness according to Edwards’ repeated usage, is correlative to “a closing of the dispositions and inclinations of the heart with Jesus Christ.”<sup>43</sup>

As will be further elucidated via the sermon under discussion in the next chapter, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” Edwards contrasted the purely rational (notional and inert) sense of God to a given, operative and spiritual sense of God:

... he that is spiritually enlightened truly apprehends and sees it or has a sense of it. He don’t merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of God’s gloriousness in his heart. There is not only a speculative judging that God is gracious, but a sense of how amiable God is upon that account; or a sense of beauty of this divine attribute.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>42</sup> See, “Freedom of the Will,” (1754), in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, 192-222. Seeking to counter the seeming (Lockean) personality or even direct agency of the human will, Edwards states, “To be free is the property of an agent, who is possessed of powers and faculties, as much as to be cunning, valiant, bountiful or zealous. But these qualities are the properties of men or persons; and not the properties of properties.” 204 The significance of such a statement in the context of this thesis is to emphasise the saving agency of God as Trinity acting redemptively upon the person, thus motivating the will unto/into active states of relational goodness.

<sup>43</sup> “The Spirit of the True Saints is a Spirit of Divine Love,” 315.

<sup>44</sup> *WJE* 17:413.

## 4.5 To love the emanating God of majesty and meekness

With these important hermeneutical and contextual considerations in mind, I turn now to Edwards' longer and more definitive conversion narrative wherein he received a new sense of God, as previously described, and the engaged religious affections become an active synergy for renewed being:

Not long after I first began to experience these things, I gave an account to my father, of some things that had passed in my mind. I was pretty much affected by the discourse we had together. And when the discourse was ended, I walked abroad alone, in a solitary place in my father's pasture, for contemplation. And as I was walking there and looked up on the sky and the clouds; there came into my mind, a sweet sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God that I know not how to express. I seemed to see them both in a sweet conjunction: majesty and meekness joined together: it was a sweet and gentle holy majesty, and also a majestic meekness; an awful sweetness; a high, and great, and holy gentleness... God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; 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 to greatly fix my mind... singing forth with a low voice, my contemplations of the Creator and Redeemer. And scarce anything, among all the works of nature, was so sweet to me as thunder and lightning. Formerly, nothing had been so terrible to me... I [now] felt God at the first appearance of a thunderstorm.<sup>45</sup>

In the lived tradition<sup>46</sup> and practice of Christian mysticism, the conscious beholding of God's partial yet intensely revealed Form is often described in similar awe-struck, rapturous and unitive terms.<sup>47</sup> For the grateful receiver, this is a surprising harmonisation of heaven and earth—God and humanity—accessible only by way of adoption of an unresolvable, yet accessible paradox.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> "Personal Narrative," 284-285.

<sup>46</sup> By "lived" I mean a unitive experience of the Divine in this time and place; that is, at home in the created order. Mysticism need not imply a spiritual experience divorced from or ambivalent towards the material or humanly sensible. The monastic movements at their best are mystical in both form and function.

<sup>47</sup> For a thorough survey of mystical origins, see Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981). "(Mysticism) can be characterized as a search for and experience of immediacy with God. The mystic is not content to know *about* God, he (sic) longs for union with God." xv. See also, Harvey D. Egan, *Soundings in the Mystical Tradition*. Summarising Bernard McGinn, an authoritative voice on Christian mysticism, Egan writes, "Christian mysticism... is a way of life, a process, and not a series of transient experiences. Transformation is another of Christian mysticism's salient features: God-consciousness transforms one's heart, mind, and life. The encounter with the God of love changes the sinful, broken person into someone healed, enlightened, and transformed." xix

<sup>48</sup> The coincidence of seeming opposites being, in the thought of T.S. Eliot (as master of poetic paradox), a "third point of departure." In other words, a creation of greater fullness and possibility into which to enjoin oneself. In relation to Incarnation – the (eternal) Word became (mortal) flesh, making for an abiding place in the Father's love. Fullness and spaciousness are key indicators of saving grace.

By any measure, Edwards' "Personal Narrative" is consistent with this description. His stated mindful experience of the sweet conjunctions (a dialectic) of the revealing aspects of Divine transcendence and immanence remains compellingly simple within his extended poetics. It therefore resists definitive or easy systemisation, yet it also lends important weight to his conclusions that the shape of the expressed affection is analogous to that first perceived in the mind. That is, there exists a symmetry and proportion within his poetic expressions—his expressive character, no less—that remains entirely consistent with the beauty and goodness of the Divine first revealed to him. For Edwards, this is the major test of authentic religious (spiritual) affections in that they express a lively congruence between an inclined mind and an inclined will. Or, as John E. Smith succinctly states, "Edwards' basic insight about the affections is that they consist in a *unity* of an idea and a felt response."<sup>49</sup>

However, such a lyricism need not leave impressions of romanticism so far as a working theology and the life of Christian discipleship is concerned. The Rudolf Otto principle of *Mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, that is, a Mystery before which a human being trembles whilst still drawn by fascination certainly applies here for the young Edwards.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, his metaphorically rich yet fear-inducing sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," preached in 1741 at the height of the second Awakening is perhaps evidence of the Otto principle—beauty *and* terror. Spiritual affections born of infused grace and holy fear imaginatively stirred Edwards the preacher, and whilst a seeming imbalance exists within the notorious text that he is often negatively caricatured by, he arguably remains true to the breadth of his affective responses generated by the insolvable paradox of God's majesty and equally revealed meekness.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> John E. Smith, "Religious Affections" and the "Sense of the Heart" in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, 105.

<sup>50</sup> See, Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923).

<sup>51</sup> Or perhaps as the duty research librarian at Northampton, Massachusetts once suggested to me about this particular sermon preached at the induction of a colleague at a neighbouring town within Connecticut Valley, "What is not widely known is that Mr. Edwards had a bad week leading up to that Sunday evening."

Significantly also, a theological dualism that is often a by-product of needed certainties in the first half of life is not evident here in the testimony a person so relatively young.<sup>52</sup> In his writing, seeming irreconcilable opposites flow into sublime conjunctions. For Edwards, at least in his mature years, the subject matter of God was too incomprehensible and evanescent to accommodate propositional certitudes.<sup>53</sup> However, like many of the Hebrew prophets, the imperative to speak and write out of the glimpsed and harmonising vision of divine excellency remained untameable.<sup>54</sup>

“I seemed to see them both (God’s majesty and grace) in a sweet conjunction... it was a sweet and gentle holy majesty, and also a majestic meekness...” For Edwards, this paradoxical self-communication of the divine nature became the sensed prism of beauty through which he began to see all things pertaining to the redeeming operations of the Godhead and through which he viewed the fruitful possibilities of everyday Christian life. Participation within the Deity (through Christ and in the Spirit), that is, in saving and close relation to the created order, logically meant a little by little (Lt. *paulatim*) harmonisation in the participating believer; an unfolding life of mirrored charitable and evangelical beauty (Isaiah 52:7). With Mary Magdalene in mind, perhaps to give the unnamed woman a name, Edwards wrote eloquently:

Now it is out of such a heart as this that all truly holy affections do flow. Christian affections are like Mary’s precious ointment that she poured on Christ’s head that filled the whole house with a sweet odour. That was poured out of an alabaster box; so gracious affections flow out to Christ

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<sup>52</sup> See, Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), “Dualistic thinking is the well-practiced pattern of knowing most things by comparison.” 146. See also, Parker Palmer, *The Promise of Paradox: A Celebration of Contradictions in the Christian Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980).

<sup>53</sup> *WJE* 21:134: “(But)... I don’t to pretend fully to explain how these things are, and I am sensible a hundred other objections may be made, and puzzling doubts and questions raised, that I can’t solve. I am far from pretending to explain the Trinity so as to render it no longer a mystery... I don’t pretend to explain the Trinity, but in time, with reason, may [be] led to say something further of it than has wont to be said, though there are still left many things pertaining to it incomprehensible.” An interesting comparison is to that of Saint Augustine introducing to his readers his major work, *De Trinitate*: “In this way let us set out on Charity Street together... This covenant, both prudent and pious, I would wish to enter into the sight of the Lord our God with all who read what I write, and with respect to all my writings, especially such as these where we are seeking the unity of the three, of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. For nowhere else is a mistake more dangerous, or the search more laborious, or discovery more advantageous.” Saint Augustine, *On the Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), 68.

<sup>54</sup> Excellency or beauty in this experiential and theological context is for Edwards a term of relation, not substance. Excellency of being stems from the consent and pleasure of being-in-relation.

out of pure heart. That was poured out of a broken box; till the box was broken the ointment could not flow, nor diffuse its odour: so gracious affections flow out of a broken heart.<sup>55</sup>

#### 4.6 A mystic way of being?

The explication of Edwards' seminal conversion experience relates directly to the primary concern of this thesis, namely, the stirring of the spiritual affections into a disposed life in and through Christ for the very sake of the expressive beauty of Church's ministry to the world. And in this vocational sense, the paradox of Divine revelation is not merely an interesting category of metaphysics but an existential entry point into a qualitative life of deepening, dispositional grace.<sup>56</sup> On this point, Crisp and Strobel are clear: "The longing of the creature is fulfilled ultimately in God, who is beauty itself, and therefore every aspect of the Christian life—worship, mission and theology—should be beautiful and beautifying."<sup>57</sup>

As intimated previously, it was Edwards' first-hand and mindful sense of divine self-communication that he readily applied to the representative person of Jesus Christ. In the sermon, "The Excellency of Christ"<sup>58</sup> preached in 1738, one year before the writing of the "Personal Narrative," he stated, "In the person of Christ do meet together, infinite majesty, and transcendent *meekness*." He then went on to compile a list of admirable conjunctions of diverse excellencies, e.g., lion and lamb, love to God and grace to sinners, infinite dignity and infinite condescension, victim and saviour. By way of pastoral application, Edwards then invited an affective, participatory response:

Let what has been said, be improved to induce you to love the Lord Jesus Christ and choose him for your friend and portion. And there is such an admirable meeting of diverse excellencies in Christ, so there is everything in him to render him of your love and choice, and to win and engage

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<sup>55</sup> *WJE* 2:339-40.

<sup>56</sup> See, Sean M. Gilbert, *Coming Home to the Triune Mystery of God: Paths to Liturgical and Faith Renewal*. Master of Arts Thesis, Andover-Newton Theological School, 1995.

<sup>57</sup> Crisp and Strobel, 66.

<sup>58</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "The Excellency of Christ," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 19, *Sermons and Discourses 1734-1738*, ed. M.X. Lesser (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 563-594.

it. Whosoever there is, or can be, that is desirable to be in a friend, is in Christ, and that to the highest degree that can be desired.

And also:

And how do his condescension and compassions endear his majesty, power and dominion, and render these attributes pleasant, that would otherwise be only terrible! Would you not desire that your friend, though great and honourable, should be of such condescension and grace, and so to have the way opened to free access to him, that his exaltation above you might not hinder your free enjoyment of his friendship?<sup>59</sup>

In the germane words of Capps and Wright, “In the mystic way, reality is neither seized nor deciphered. Nor can it be committed to ideational formulation... It is engaged by being loved. And in being loved, it is also given an interior place.”<sup>60</sup> This affected and affective nature of expressive faith was certainly true to Edwards’ own unfolding spiritual experience and it shaped his willing proclamation of the Christian gospel. Repetitively familiar with Paul’s theologizing in Romans 5:5b, “...God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us,” the pressing reality of God’s glory filled his soul without seeming coercion. And as he then clearly understood it, his Christian vocation was to be a relational vessel of the self-same, surprisingly given mercy.

In these transformative moments Jonathan Edwards was, in the thought of Jesuit scholar Bernard Lonergan, grasped by ultimate concern. Significantly, though, in relation to Lonergan’s carefully explicated definitions of human conversion—intellectual, moral and religious—he goes on to say that such conversion is not based ultimately in virtuous action but in a radically receptive consent to transformative Being. In other words, spiritual disposition is everything:

Religious conversion... is other-worldly falling in love. It is total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations. But it is such a surrender, not as an act, but as a *dynamic state that is prior to and principle of subsequent acts*. It is revealed in retrospect as an

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 588-589.

<sup>60</sup> Walter Capps and Wendy Wright, *Silent Fire— An Invitation to Western Mysticism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 1. I am not suggesting that Jonathan Edwards was a mystic in the broadest sense of the word. However, his conversion experience and particularly his theological emphasis on a unitive pneumatology, suggests a reliance upon a pronounced level of graced (spirited) operations that extends well beyond natural human endeavours in the knowledge of God. See, Robert W. Caldwell III, *Communion in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit as the Bond of Union in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 9.

undertow of existential consciousness, as a fated acceptance of a vocation to holiness, as perhaps an increasing simplicity and passivity in prayer.<sup>61</sup>

Finally, and fully in keeping with the reconciling graces at play in the personal narrative, Edwards' diffused fear of the primal forces of thunder and lightning was a concrete sign of divine grace operative within his life. One cannot underestimate the impact of such a fundamental dispositional shift from fear to a trusting wonderment in the lived context of any human being. Gratuitous love as an ennobling affect in contrast to fear as a debilitating or even shaming affect, opens the human mind to renewed possibility, particularly in terms of vocation and service to others (1 John 4: 16b-17).

Receptivity to the multifaceted operations of grace became a primary organising principle for what Edwards considered to be the truly fruitful Christian life—one lived in close relation to the Holy Trinity of expressive love.<sup>62</sup> In his keen observation, the divine love incarnated in Christ and happily extended to all believers (John 1:10-13, Romans 5:5) was the motivating force of human love and service within an economy of Divine self-giving that is both incorporating and befriending.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 240-1. Emphasis added. He adds, "Holiness abounds in truth (cognitive transcendence) and moral goodness (moral transcendence), but it has a distinct dimension of its own. It is other-worldly fulfilment, joy, peace, bliss. In Christian experience these are the fruits of being in love with a mysterious, uncomprehended God." [242] See also, Raymond Moloney, "Conversion and Spirituality," in *The Way*, 43/4 (October 2004), 123-134: "Values may be true or false. In so far as they are true, they are grounded in the truly good, and they draw a person out of self-interest into a process of becoming capable of authentic love. Going beyond self in authentic love is the culmination of self-transcendence, and when what is achieved in a stable fashion one falls in love... for Lonergan, the summit of the interior life consists in what he calls 'the dynamic state of being in love with God.'" 127.

<sup>62</sup> Amongst contemporary Jonathan Edwards scholars there exists a broad agreement about this assertion. Certainly, Edwards' *Discourse on the Trinity* (c. 1730, though not published in his lifetime), and despite its relative brevity, is testimony to how central the beatific "seeing" of God in triune, saving relation to the world is to all facets and disciplines of the Christian life. See, Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards' Theology: A Reinterpretation* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013): "The Trinity, as the fountain, gives shape to all theology so that the beatific thread formed in his doctrine is woven throughout the whole until it finds its perfection in consummation. Edwards's theology, in this sense is cyclical. Everything moves from God and everything returns to him in judgement." 5 See also, Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): "The Trinity was fundamental to Edwards's most distinctive theological theme, the divine beauty, for 'true, spiritual original beauty' consists in a 'mutual propensity and affection of the heart,' whose prototype is the Trinity—the supreme harmony of all." [193]

<sup>63</sup> "In Edwards's Trinitarian reflections, love replaces power as the primary divine attribute, setting the relationship between God and humanity in a much larger frame: God is not only a "glorious being infinitely superior," but also One who desired to be "familiarily conversed with and enjoyed. The source and *raison d'être* for the creation and redemption of humanity are the eternal love and harmony of the Godhead, and the ultimate goal of the work of redemption is the saints' joyful participation in the

For attuned modern theological ears this theologising may well have a familiar ring to it. However, in Jonathan Edwards' social contexts of the growing stress on enlightened empiricism, coupled with the cultural / political rise of Deism in its growing emphasis on self-reliance, and before the *salvific* threat of Arminianism that promoted Christian charity to the seeming exclusion of God's initiating grace, Edwards' hybrid fusion of Western and Eastern theologies (and current philosophical, biological and scientific theories) was a remarkable feat of experimental, pastoral theology.<sup>64</sup> At a relatively early age Edwards proved to be theologically and intellectually dextrous, well read, wise and imaginative, thus remained true to his second resolution of intentional "inventiveness and contrivance."

In sum, for all his theological convolutions and, at times, an over bearing sense of clerical authority,<sup>65</sup> at stake for Jonathan Edwards within pastoral contexts was a unifying, and beautifying vision of the Triunity in close and loving relation to itself and yet eternally (and "happily") self-diffusive of that love. Consequently, divine relation, not impersonal essence, and spiritual sensory

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overflowing harmony of the divine life." Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 6.

<sup>64</sup> Edwards arguably embodies an innovative yet ambidextrous mixture of the Christian West (Augustine - Calvin) and the Christian East (Athanasius - Cappadocian Fathers) so far as pneumatology existing within a Trinitarian confession. And whilst remaining faithful to the western emphasis of the Spirit as the unifying "bond of love" between the Father and Son (Richard of St. Victor, d.1173), who is sent as the saving Gift of gathering love by the Father *and the Son (filioque)*, Edwards nevertheless captures something of the mutual differences or redemptive "honours" at play within the Godhead; the resultant salvific dynamism or trajectory of personal, social and ecological transformation or making (*theopoiesis/theosis*), born of the indwelling Spirit. This emphasis is akin to a uniquely Eastern pneumatology, in that the Spirit is by no means subordinate to the Father and the Son, thus the perichoretic or radically mutual interpenetration of persons is maintained. In his own words: "The Spirit of God so dwells in the hearts of the saints, that he is there, as a seed or spring of life, exerts and communicates himself, in this his sweet and divine nature, making the soul a partaker of God's beauty and Christ's joy, so that the saint has truly fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, in thus having communion or participation with the Holy Ghost." *WJE* 2:201. See also, Crisp and Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards* 147-154, on the important question of Edwards's reformed understanding of *theosis* that promises participation within the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), but not within the transcendent mystery of divine essence. In relation to this point they write, "... the general orientation of Western accounts, particularly all Reformed accounts of *theosis*, is on partaking in the Sonship of the Son which therefore articulates the relational side of the spectrum. Christian depictions of *theosis* can never entail "becoming God," if this is understood as partaking in the divine essence. Rather, Christian *theosis* is a sharing by grace what is Christ's by nature." 149. Ironically, perhaps, this is precisely the Eastern confession, articulated most clearly by Athanasius and the Cappadocians.

<sup>65</sup> Though outside the perimeters of this discussion, the decision of the Northampton congregational church to dismiss Edwards after some twenty years of service, was indicative of how the gap between relational theology and relational, situational practice can become irreconcilable. Accordingly, Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, perceptively comments, "The love and society of the Trinity became an unrealizable blueprint for Edward's church in Northampton, and the loving community of the Trinity was transmuted into harsh pastoral moralism. As Edwards's pastoral practice shows, the paradigm of the beautiful society of the Trinity—*The Supreme Harmony of All*—can serve to condemn social failures and exclude those deemed unworthy. It does not necessarily foster sacramental openness to gracious human community." 188.

participation, not unthinking imitation, were the unique hallmarks of Edwards' soteriological and ecclesial vision. Accordingly, he wrote:

God's Spirit, of his love, doth but as it were come and dwell in our hearts and act there as a vital principle, and we become the living temples of the Holy Ghost; and when men are regenerated and sanctified, God pours forth his Spirit upon them, and they have fellowship or, which is the same thing, are made partakers with the Father and the Son of their good, i.e., of their love, joy and beauty.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, awakened and exercised spiritual affections conceived by Edwards as divine apprehensions of the mind and inclined expressions of the heart and will were both receptors and conduits of grace. However, it is even to a fuller description of spiritual affections I will now turn.

#### 4.7 The spiritually affected life

As I have been suggesting throughout this chapter, Jonathan Edwards was an experimental pastor and theologian. By that I mean that he pushed the known boundaries of puritan and Calvinistic thought. Edwards stated that genuine Christian belief (doctrine) acted to engage and progressively shape the Christian life within Spirit-directed paths of holiness and virtue, or via a favourite idiom, in graciousness. For him, the Christian life was one of regeneration unto renovation, that is, a radical conversion of disposition before and within the moral excellency and beauty of God. This gifting enabled and encouraged a communal process of virtuous growth into Christ through the sanctifying agency of the Holy Spirit.<sup>67</sup>

The spiritual essence of the Christian faith, therefore, was held to engage deeper levels of human capacity than reason, social conformity or ethic.<sup>68</sup> Its redemptive purpose was to facilitate

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<sup>66</sup> WJE 21:124.

<sup>67</sup> See, Richard B. Steele, *"Gracious Affection" and "True Virtue" According to Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley* (Metuchen, N.J. & London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1994), ix-xi.

<sup>68</sup> Writing at the time of the Enlightenment, both Edwards and Wesley were somewhat out of step with movements toward Deism, not to mention the philosophical power of Descartes', "I think, therefore I am." Constant was the two reformers battle to show that theological emphasis on the central place of a graciously affected heart and a holy desirous will did not mean a bypassing of sound reason or rationality. In Sang Hyun Lee's estimation, "But to unite and close with Christ is not just to consent to Christ affectionately without understanding. We learn from *Religious Affections* that by the term "heart" Edwards means the affectionate response of the understanding mind." WJE 21:66.

reorientation of human desire, thus redirect a previously rebellious will towards that of God's holy and perfect will. For Edwards, such a gifting for life was none other than God's grace reaching down to the bottom of the heart or in more descriptive terms, the Holy Spirit exerting its saving influence upon the latent potentiality of human affections.

At a vocational level, Edwards was called to administer the word and sacraments for the flourishing of God's people in this life and within a spiritual trajectory toward the next.<sup>69</sup> In his reasoning, then, the pastoral theology espoused was geared toward what he considered to be his and his flock's incremental transformation into holiness. Indeed, theology was never intended to be frivolous speculation about the things of God or even an ethical manifesto for the good ordering of puritan society. The Christian life was a participation in God's overflowing life of saving goodness and grace. This in a nutshell was his contextual uniqueness in the midst of the rise of deism and the growing enlightenment stress on human reason, and also his theological blueprint for ongoing reform.

#### **4.8 Religious Affections in context**

The treatise, *Religious Affections*, first published in 1746, is a mature and reflective summary of what Edwards considered to be the expressive substances of true religion in contrast to prevailing practices and advocacy of false religion. And whilst not a polemical piece *per se*, the ecclesial and social context for its writing was certainly charged with claims and counter claims of biblical truth and reason. In sum, Edwards was seeking a demanding middle ground between the Boston rationalists personified by the influential figure of Charles Chauncy who was quick to label the

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<sup>69</sup> See, Rhys S. Bezzant, *Jonathan Edwards and the Church*, 121-4, 191-7. See also, Gerald R. McDermott, "Directing Souls: What Pastors Today Can Learn from Edward's Ministry," *Jonathan Edwards for the Church: The Ministry and the Means of Grace* (Garden City: EP Books, 2015), 29-48.

awakenings as mere commotions and the spiritual revivalists who expressed little patience for Edwards' rigour of doctrinal propriety and discernment of spirit.

Indeed, the term religion is an important point of reference employed by Edwards throughout the treatise, though unlike contemporary usage, it does not equate to entrenched patterns of unthinking human habit. By way of contrast, and at best, it represented intentional faith trajectories and practices inclined towards God and the wellbeing of society. Edwards' scholar, Kyle Strobel states, "The term, for Edwards, denoted our whole posture, life and devotion to God in Christ. In light of this, religion might be closest to what we might today refer to as the Christian life, Christian spirituality, or spiritual formation."<sup>70</sup> And even more pointedly, John E. Smith who wrote the Introduction to the 1959 volume or *Religious Affections* asserted, "... religious faith is... a love of God that kindles in believers the affections of joy, hope, trust, and peace."<sup>71</sup>

*Religious Affections* was written in retrospective light of the Connecticut Valley spiritual awakenings of the mid 1730's and the early 1740's and, in part, as a reasoned answer to the critical claims of their religious irrationality and / or excessive religious emotionality. As such, the treatise reads at times like a scientific journal, for in the writing, Edwards weighed and sifted contrasting data at his disposal, eventually delineating between twelve "distinguishable signs of truly gracious and holy affections."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Kyle Strobel, ed. *Charity and its Fruits: Living in the Light of God's Love* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2012), 30.

<sup>71</sup> John E. Smith, "Religious Affections and the 'Sense of the Heart'" in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, 103. Correspondingly in 1959 Smith wrote at the height of the Billy Graham style evangelisation: "Religion is genuine and has power only when rooted in a love that does not contemplate its own advantage. Religion becomes false at just the point when we attempt to make it into a device for solving problems. Faith does indeed move mountains, but only when it is informed by a love pure and unmixed, such as Edwards described in his fourth sign. Love of this kind overcomes the evil desires of the heart and proves itself in the Christian life, but if it is held forth as a panacea for all ills or as something to be used by an individual or a society to achieve benefits, its divine character is lost... Edwards' calm word in the midst of "much noise about religion" is that religion must not be lifeless and it must be something more than doctrine or good conduct. True piety shows itself in the affections and in the fruits of the Spirit, but these must be put to the test so that we may know the gold coin from the counterfeit. To the revivalist in our own time Edwards has a sobering word, one that is best expressed by biblical paraphrase: "Test the affections and see if they are of God, for many false affections have gone out into the earth." *WJE* 2: 51-2.

<sup>72</sup> Critically, Edwards took into account the excesses he had witnessed, particularly in relation to the need of humility within Christian leadership.

### a) The pivotal role of the Holy Spirit in the affective Christian life

Not surprisingly, Edwards' comprehensive list of descriptors began with the initiating and sustaining role of the Holy Spirit within the Christian life. They are spiritual affections, no less, despite his contextual use of the adjective, religious. In this way, Jonathan Edwards offers the modern reader something of a surprise as to how intimately expressive he understood the revelation of holy transcendence to be.<sup>73</sup> And by virtue of his definition of religious affections of the mind as, "the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul,"<sup>74</sup> it is clear that a vigorous and sensible inclination toward the effusive mystery and beauty of the Godhead, is in essence, the essential faith disposition unto godliness (1 Timothy 4:7b-8). In other words, this open stance represents an ongoing renovation of being before and within the relational beauty and wonder God. It is not simply an exercising of the human intellect and will in the cause of religious or social imperatives.<sup>75</sup>

Given his historical and social context, Edwards' pastoral and ecclesial project of faith awakening was in major part a rigorous counter to the rising cultural tide of Anglican Arminianism.<sup>76</sup> He saw his pastoral charge as one of promoting the purity of the Christian gospel amidst the easily rendered fabric of faith communities. Accordingly, he sought to affirm a relational dependence upon the initiating and sustaining ministry of the Spirit, to which the first of his distinguishing signs of religious affections directly points: "Affections that are truly spiritual and gracious do arise from those influences and operations on the heart, which are spiritual, supernatural and divine."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> See, William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 1-17.

<sup>74</sup> *WJE* 2:96.

<sup>75</sup> The influence of the Enlightenment is considerable in such a confessional context, given that it sought to rehabilitate human nature (away from the damning verdict of Calvinism) in terms of an integral natural benevolence, yet for Edwards, this stance was seemingly unconnected to Benevolence itself. Religious exemplary practice, in the way of Abelard became the focus for many in terms of what truly constituted the Christian life.

<sup>76</sup> Bezzant, *Jonathan Edwards and the Church*, 65-66.

<sup>77</sup> *WJE* 2:197.

As an important backdrop to the above theological assertion, Edwards was a reformed theologian influenced by the early church fathers<sup>78</sup> and Calvin, although little of Calvin's teaching is overt within his own.<sup>79</sup> He was also a Congregationalist pastor shaped, as mentioned previously, by the doctrines and spiritual orderings of the Puritan tradition.<sup>80</sup> Consequently, he assumed the total incapacity of humanity to save itself from its finite and wilfully rebellious state. However, for Edwards, such an incomplete state of being did not imply a forensic or legal separation from God, but a self-deprivation of God's emanating and ennobling glory.<sup>81</sup>

Akin to Calvin's standpoint, human depravity, for Edwards, was a dispositional term of non-consensual being in relation to God, others and self, not simply a judgement on specific human action or non-action.<sup>82</sup> Sin was self-inflicted and willed blindness before one's divine origin within the authoring, redeeming and sanctifying life of the Triune God. As a consequence, there exists a dullness of the human mind and, most significantly, a powerlessness of the human will as creative agent<sup>83</sup> to move to places of genuine love and freedom because of the distortion and

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<sup>78</sup> In the context of these two chapters on Edwards, the well-known theological assertion of St. Irenaeus (*Against the Heresies*, 4.20. 5f.) is pertinent: "For the human person does not see God by his own powers, but when God pleases, he is seen by men and women—by whom he wills, and when he wills, and as he wills. For God is powerful in all things, having been seen at that [earlier] time indeed, prophetically through the Spirit, and seen, too, adoptively through the Son; and he shall also be seen paternally in the kingdom of heaven... For as those who see the light are within the light, and partake of its brilliancy; even so, those who see God are in God, and receive of his splendour... It is not possible to life apart from life, and the means of life is found in fellowship with God; but fellowship with God is to know God, and to enjoy his goodness... Thus, therefore, was God revealed; for God the Father is shown forth from all these [operations], the Spirit indeed working, and the Son ministering, while the Father was approving, and human salvation being accomplished." As quoted by, Brian E. Daley, "A mystery to share in: The trinitarian perspective of the new Catechism," *Communio* 21, (Fall, 1994): 415.

<sup>79</sup> In fact, Edwards distanced himself from Calvin, maintaining his own theological integrity of mind: "... yet I should not take it at all amiss, to be called a Calvinist for distinction's sake: though I utterly disclaim a dependence on Calvin, or believing the doctrines which I hold, because he believed and taught them; and cannot justly be charged with believing in everything just as he taught." From, "A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of the Will, Which Is Supposed to Be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame," (1754) in Smith, Stout & Minkema, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, 193.

<sup>80</sup> In particular, "The Savoy Declaration of Faith" (1658), as included in, *Witness of Faith: Historic Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia*, edited by Michael Owen (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1984), 121-168.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, IX:III, "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto." 133.

<sup>82</sup> "Propensity" and "Inclination" are similar words that Edwards uses to express the same non-relational principle: "The proposition laid down being proved, the consequence of it remains to be made out, viz. that the mind of man has a *natural tendency* or propensity to that event... and that this is a *corrupt* or *depraved* propensity." "Original Sin" (1758), in, John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout and Kenneth P. Minkema, editors, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, 227.

<sup>83</sup> Edwards states in his famous treatise, *Freedom of the Will*, "For the will itself (in response to the Arminian and Lockean position) is not an agent that has a will: the power of choosing, itself, has not a power of choosing. That which has the power of volition or choice is the man or the soul, and not the power of volition itself. And he that has the liberty of doing according to his

diminishment of soul, from where volition stems.<sup>84</sup> Sin, therefore, is but a headlong fall into a carnal state of alienated or wrongly positioned being. It is deathly because it is a conscious aversion of gaze from the loving gaze and beauty of God. Indeed, according to Edwards:

When man sinned, and broke God's Covenant, and fell under his curse, these superior principles (the spiritual image of God *imago Dei* and man's righteousness and true holiness) left his heart: for indeed God then left him... the Holy Spirit, the divine inhabitant, forsook the house.<sup>85</sup>

For Edwards, then, God's fecundity of wisdom (the understanding of Christ) and grace (the power to will in the Spirit) stands in stark contrast to what he comprehended to be the aridity of the rebellious human soul.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, moral exertion, reasoned behaviour, intellectual insight, all increasingly valued within the enlightened and Deistic world of the Eighteenth Century could not, according to Edwards, attain in and of themselves communion with God. Any imitation of Christ that Edwards encouraged, therefore, arose from *within* the relational (perichoretic) nature of God based not on mechanical function or sheer will power but upon Spirit-induced participation within the mutually indwelling and coinherent life of Divine being.<sup>87</sup> For instance, he writes:

The Father understands because the Son, who is the divine understanding, is in him. The Father loves because the Holy Ghost is in him. So the Son loves because the Holy Spirit is in him and proceeds from him. So the Holy Ghost... understands because the Son, the divine idea is in him. Understanding may be predicated of this love, because it is the love of understanding, both objectively and subjectively.<sup>88</sup>

Accordingly for Edwards, the initiative and power to redeem humanity from its deprived state logically had to emanate from the spiritual realm of God given that it is the gift of the Spirit who

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will, is the agent or doer who is possessed of the will; and not the will which he is possessed of." In, John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout and Kenneth P. Minkema, editors, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, 204.

<sup>84</sup> See, Matthew Myer Boulton, *Life in God: John Calvin, Practical Formation, and the Future of Protestant Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2011), 91-95. See also, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2:2:27. Speaking of the teaching of Paul in Romans about the incapacity of human goodness without a spiritual regeneration, Calvin states emphatically, "But the Spirit comes, not from nature, but from regeneration." 287.

<sup>85</sup> *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 3, "Original Sin", ed. Clyde A. Holbrook (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 233-234.

<sup>86</sup> Significantly, Edwards did not conceive of this condition in an individual sense but saw Adam as a truly representative figure in being terms. "Thus, in Edwards's view, God does not treat individuals *one at a time*, but deals with *humankind as a whole*." "Editors Introduction," *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, xxviii.

<sup>87</sup> See, Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation*, 149-76.

<sup>88</sup> *WJE* 21:133.

ultimately restores and unifies.<sup>89</sup> Secondly, it needs to be supernatural in nature<sup>90</sup> in order for a genuine transformation of human incapacity into a growing spiritual capacity to occur. And thirdly, only divinity could offer the depth and breadth of redemptive love needed for return / remanation unto glory, that is, unto and into the eternally relational and qualitative life of God.<sup>91</sup>

In sum, the saving procession of God the Holy Spirit from God the Father and God the Son is not an animating or automated force *per se* but a self-revealing and infusing influence of divine beauty and holiness operating on the human heart for its awakening unto God.<sup>92</sup> Thereby, the Spirit is a restorer of a truly gracious disposition and holy shaper of human affections—a non-violent and non-coerced renovation of humanity’s sinful nature through the emanating and remanating missions of redemptive Love (Romans 5:5b).<sup>93</sup> Edwards states in his *Treatise on Grace*:

True saving grace is no other than the very love of God; i.e., God in one of the persons of the Trinity, uniting Himself to the soul of a creature as a vital principle, dwelling there and exerting Himself by the faculties of the soul of man in His own proper nature... They, the saints, are not only partakers of a nature that may in some sense be called divine, because ‘tis conformed to the nature of God; but the very deity does, in some sense, dwell in them.<sup>94</sup>

And even more specifically in his dissertation, “God’s Ultimate End is But One”:

In the creature’s knowing, esteeming, loving, rejoicing in, and praising God, the glory of God is both exhibited and acknowledged; his fullness is received and returned. Here is both an *emanation* and *remanation*. The refulgence shines upon and into the creature and is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come back to God, and are something of God, and are refunded back to their original. So that the whole is *of* God, and *in* God, and *to* God; and God is the beginning, the middle and end in this affair.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Redemption is “the thing purchased” by Christ’s atoning death and resurrection.

<sup>90</sup> Edwards’s use and deliberate choice of language is very often polemic in ways we may not first appreciate. In this context, “supernatural” is a direct counter of Deist and Arminian influences that placed human agency and effort in a far more central place within the salvation equation.

<sup>91</sup> Edwards was obviously influenced by Plato and others in this regard, yet also deeply steeped in the biblical / eschatological stress on ‘return’ unto God, e.g. Luke 15:11-24, so far as saving grace was concerned. The consummation of all things was an underlying theological theme shaping much else. Such consummation was understood to be a personal re-unification of all things unto God as a Triunity of persons. See, Strobel *Jonathan Edwards’s Theology: A Reinterpretation*, 1-20.

<sup>92</sup> One is here reminded of T.S. Eliot’s graphic metaphor for the saving work of the Crucified in ‘East Coker,’ “The wounded surgeon plies the steel that questions that questions the distempered part.” T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, (New York: HBJ, 1973), 29.

<sup>93</sup> Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards Theology Reinterpreted*, 13.

<sup>94</sup> *WJE* 21:194.

<sup>95</sup> *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8, *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 531. Emphasis here is Edwards’.

## b) Grace, gratitude and self-forgetfulness

Due to space and subject matter constraints, it is not my intention to comment on all twelve signs of fruitful religious affections as described and delineated by Edwards. However, the second sign is an important corollary to the first in that it creates a synergy or, in metaphorical terms, more fully completes a grace and gratitude circle.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, so far as the scope and topic of this thesis is concerned, the second sign is greatly instructive in relation to a foundational disposition for contemporary practices of Christian ministry. It states:

The first objective ground of gracious affections is the transcendently excellent and amiable nature of divine things, as they are in themselves, and not any conceived relation they bear to self, or self-interest.<sup>97</sup>

Here Edwards as Protestant reformer throws down a theological and ecclesial gauntlet, so to speak, again promoting a unitive, participatory vision, whereby the love of God, neighbour and self are consciously framed in non-self-interested, transactional or marketable terms. Divine love and being is its own end and intrinsic purpose—it cannot be purchased, nor can it be earned. Rather, it can only be received gladly by a mindfully inclined, opened, thus regenerated heart. As the naturally effusive gift of the Godhead, the Spirit is to be welcomed, enjoyed and generously shared.<sup>98</sup>

By emphasizing a spirited and gratuitous human response to the divine giver, Edwards invites from his readers and listeners a faith-experience of unfolding relational trust and discipleship. He knows too well the propensity to publicly perform spiritual gymnastics in the name of Christ. Even worse

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<sup>96</sup> See, B.A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991). Also, from the pen of Karl Barth, as quoted by Don E. Saliers in, *The Soul in Paraphrase: Prayer and the Religious Affections*, (Akron, Ohio: OSL Publications, 2011), “Grace and gratitude belong together like heaven and earth. Grace evokes gratitude like the voice of an echo.” 43.

<sup>97</sup> *WJE* 2:240.

<sup>98</sup> In remarkably similar sentiment there is evidence that Edwards—like Calvin—had read Saint Bernard of Clairvaux the monastic reformer is his famous work, “On Loving God” (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995), wrote, “Love pertains to the will, it is not a transaction; it cannot acquire or be acquired by a pact. Moving us freely, it makes us spontaneous. True love is content with itself; it has its reward, the object of its love... True love merits its reward, it does not seek it.” 20.

in his estimation are utilitarian practices whereby the gift of saving grace is seen as a commodity to exploit and sell not a self-giving to reciprocate. In this context he pointedly writes:

They whose affection to God is founded first on his profitableness to them, their affection begins at the wrong end; they regard God only for the utmost limit of the steam of divine good, where it touches them, and reaches their interest; and have no respect to that infinite glory of God's nature, which is the original good, and the true fountain of good, the first fountain of all loveliness of every kind, and so the first foundation of all true love."<sup>99</sup>

In substantive ways, the above quotation summarises Edwards' unique theological and pastoral stance. For it offers a reasoned critique of consumer-based, "practical atheism," i.e., a religious façade that may be impressive in scope yet spiritually impoverished by virtue of a discernible lack of charity and its fruits.<sup>100</sup> In Edwards' reckoning, the redeeming grace of God is not a commodity to peddle in the religious market place, as though it might be an elixir or salve. Rather, Divine love, which is no less than the third person of the Holy Trinity, is given and received for its own harmonising sake. The practice of evangelical preaching is thereby not an emotive or rational sales pitch but a first-hand, sensible witness to God's reconciling and expressive heart.

### **c) Ten more spiritual affections**

This foundational and non-transactional responsive sign paves the way for the ten that follow, each one in Edwards' schema progressively consistent with Christian faith dispositions and practices inclined toward initiating and saving graces of the Trinity. In turn, spiritual and gracious affections:

1. Are founded on the loveliness and moral Excellency of divine things [the beauty of holiness].
2. Arise from the mind's enlightenment, rightly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine things.
3. Are attended with a reasonable and spiritual conviction of the judgement, of the reality and certainty of divine things.
4. Are attended with an evangelical humiliation.

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<sup>99</sup> *WJE* 2:243.

<sup>100</sup> The title of a sermon Edwards preached in 1730 in which he warned his congregation about the neglect of private and corporate spiritual disciplines. In effect, a believer could go through the motions of the faith without really engaging the Author and object of it. *WJE* 17:47 ff.

5. Are attended with a change (ontological) of nature; a conversion from sin, that being a direction of will toward God.
6. Naturally beget and promote such a spirit of love, meekness, quietness, forgiveness and mercy, as appeared in Christ.
7. Soften the heart and are attended and followed with a Christian tenderness of spirit.
8. Possess a beautiful symmetry and proportion; that is they are steady, durable and modulated, not flashy, episodic and or wild.
9. The higher they are raised, the more the spiritual appetite and longing of soul after spiritual attainments is increased.
10. Express their fruitfulness through charitable Christian practice.<sup>101</sup>

Even a cursory glance of the above listing would note the theological stress Edwards places on the Christ-like relational dispositions toward God and world and, by logical extension, how vital such affective expressions of being are in relation to fruitful practices of Christian ministry. Perhaps to the disquiet of a modern Christian reader, there is no mention of missional or ministry tasks as an *actus primus*, such is Edwards' confidence in the fruit bearing quality of God's received and harmonising grace. In his reckoning, effective ministry in Christ's name is a given if apprehensions of mind and the synergism of an inclined will remain by virtue of spiritual practices such as prayer, common worship and regular immersion in the Scriptures. In fact, his descriptions of the nature of Christian practice are listed as the final sign of spiritual and gracious affections, though significantly, it is the longest and most exhortative section within the whole treatise.<sup>102</sup> In short, Edwards' focus on an espoused and rigorous theology does not translate into short cuts so far as the communal practice of the Christian life is concerned.

#### **4.9 The marks of the Christian leader**

I have shown that Edwards as a pastoral theologian took seriously the active life of Christian discipleship. However, like Bernard, it was his prioritising of the authoring, redeeming and sanctifying operations of God in relation to the capacities of the human heart that made him so

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<sup>101</sup> WJE: 2:253-461.

<sup>102</sup> WJE 2: 383-461.

distinctive and arguably prophetic across changing cultural periods and social divides. Pointedly for Christian leadership down through the ages, he writes:

The true saint, when under great spiritual affections, from the fullness of his heart, is ready to be speaking much of God, and his glorious perfections and works, and of the beauty and amiableness of Christ, and the glorious things of the gospel; but hypocrites, in their high affections, talk more of the discovery, than they do of the thing discovered; they are full of talk about great things they have met with, the wonderful discoveries they have had, how sure they are of the love of God to them, how safe their condition is, and how they shall go to heaven, etc.<sup>103</sup>

Derived from the above full listing, two other relevant marks of his extensive thought on religious affections will now be highlighted. In essence they point towards potentially relevant, contemporary applications of Christian ministry practice. I will offer some broad-brush strokes in that regard, pointers toward more specific and analytical comments in the concluding chapter.

#### **a) Exercising the explorative mind**

First, Edwards closely aligns the affections with the enlightened and apprehending mind (Fourth Sign).<sup>104</sup> For all his rhetorical and contextual concerns about notional faith and an ecclesial propensity towards “ratiocination,” he does not dismiss the God-given capacity to think rigorously and clearly in close relation to affective responses. However, this capacity of mind is to be exercised within the transformative and supernaturally given light and love of the God. Knowledge in this context is birthed and encouraged by Divine love. By any standard, he himself was a towering intellect, persuasive also in other disciplines such as philosophy, of which he still is considered an important eighteenth-century voice of colonial America.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>105</sup> Given that Edwards’ beginning point with the affections arguably transcends a religious perspective, dealing with human observation in general, his famous treatise, *Freedom of the Will* (1754) is considered to be a landmark philosophical point of departure from a hyper Calvinist causal ordering of the universe or, more pointedly, from an Arminian non-determinism (libertarianism). See, Hugh J. McCann, “Edwards on Free Will” in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, ed. by, Paul Helm & Oliver D. Crisp (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2003), 27-44. See also a more sympathetic reading of the treatise by Allen C. Guelzo, “Freedom of the Will,” in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, 115-129: “To use a modern classification, Edwards was a *compatibilist*: liberty and necessity are compatible with each other. But all the same, it was a compatibilism in which necessity clearly played the dominant role and liberty served to explain necessity’s operations.” 126.

His emphasis on the progressive reorientation—regeneration—of mind remains an important consideration when contemplating the relationship between spiritual affections and present-day pastoral ministry. In contradistinction to common clerical assumptions and social caricatures, the rigour of embodied and constantly renewed thought remained an imperative of Christian discipleship for Edwards as it does for many recent writers on Christian practice.<sup>106</sup> As one often accused of being anti-rationalist, that is by virtue of the demonstrably spirited Connecticut Valley awakenings, one of Edwards' favourite phrases at play within various theological defences was, "Tis reasonable / rational." Furthermore, with regard to the needed integration between the mind and heart, he famously stated:

As on the one hand, there must be light in the understanding, as well as an affected fervent heart, where there is heat without light, there can be nothing divine or heavenly in the heart; so on the other hand, where there is a kind of light without heat, a head stored with notions and speculations, with a cold and unaffected heart, there can be nothing divine in that light, that knowledge is no true spiritual knowledge of divine things.<sup>107</sup>

True spiritual knowledge of divine things was never a magical option or easy pathway for Edwards. Rather, it meant a consensual will, opened and encouraged by repeated encounters with God's light bearing grace. These characterised and further shaped his spiritual life. I have already referred to his habitual and copious jottings that made up the now published volumes of the *Miscellanies* yet there was also the legendary amounts of time he used to spend in his study, praying, reading and writing.<sup>108</sup> And whilst such a focus on individualised spiritual practice—to the

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<sup>106</sup> See, James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* 47: "...we need a non-reductionist understanding of human persons as embodied agents of desire or love... the point is to emphasize that the way we inhabit the world is not primarily as thinkers, or even believers, but as more affective, embodied creatures who make our way in the world by feeling our way around it. Like the blind men pictured in Rembrandt's sketches, for the most part we make our way in the world with hands outstretched, in an almost tactile groping with our bodies. One might say that in our everyday... we don't lead with our head, so to speak; we lead with our hearts and hands."

<sup>107</sup> *WJE* 2:120. See also, Donald Saliers, *The Soul in Paraphrase: Prayer and the Religious Affections*, 8: "For Edwards, as with Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas and most post-modern theologians, the very nature of religious affections necessarily involves the intellect. The object of faith is understood and known in and through teachings assimilated in the heart... Edwards argues that faith is constituted by a new disposition of the heart which orders all the powers of emotion, perception, will and understanding. The affected heart and the intellect are not opposed in true faith; nor are they finally two kinds of capacities which are joined by an act of will."

<sup>108</sup> Marsden, *A Life*, 133: "Edwards usually rose at four or five in the morning in order to spend thirteen hours in his study... The discipline was part of a constant, heroic effort to make his life a type of Christ."

seeming lack of care of family and congregants—appears to have been even contextually excessive and open to congregational disquiet, the figurative, yet integrative principle of “light and heat,” retains both an invitation and imperative for the present day practitioner.

In an era when pastoral ministry is regularly reduced to and defined by culturally attuned leadership models and expectations, or by strict orthodoxy of belief or organisational system theories—each potentially to the diminishment of pastoral imagination and serious reflection on the spiritual life—a dryness of soul can result in lethargy, abuse towards self and others, disillusionment and even burnout.<sup>109</sup> I have witnessed this aridity of spirit in colleagues to the point of depression, resignation and even renunciation of the Christian faith. I have also experienced it personally whilst being a congregational minister; viz. a soul-weariness (*acedia*), which is a well-documented spiritual malady within the Christian tradition.<sup>110</sup>

Nothing within the ongoing life of faith communities, I would suggest, is as discordant and disillusioning than a soulless or self-interested pastor who does not have the capacity to hold the sacred on behalf of others because they have neglected to nurture such a transformative beholding within their own religious experience.<sup>111</sup> In the salient words of Gregory the Great (540-604), “No one ventures to teach any art without having learned it after deep thought. With what

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<sup>109</sup> “Burnout” in this context is more about a fractured inner division of role and person, not simply overwork as it is often assumed. In the personal experience and reckonings of Parker Palmer, these are “false connections” that cannot be sustained over time. The divide between role (*persona*) and human soul will simply grow until there is a natural breaking point. That is both a moment of invitation and terror in relation to the discovery of the true and authentic self. See, Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 13-29.

<sup>110</sup> See, Kathleen Norris, *Acedia and Me: A Marriage, Monks, and Writer's Life*, (London: Penguin Books, 2008).

<sup>111</sup> A phrase used by an ex-member of the Uniting Church in the course of a conversation about a mutually known UCA Minister of the Word. One of the major reasons why this man left his local church and joined a non-faith based spiritual group, was due to what he perceived to be the minister's inability to “hold the sacred.” By this he meant a propensity to go so far into issues of faith and then prematurely withdraw by means of sacrilegious humour or with cynicism. This was particularly acute in the celebrations of the sacraments. In more theological parlance, and here I am drawing on the “*theologia ascendens, ascensiones in corde*” wisdom of Origen of Alexandria, “God renews his promises in order to show you also ought to renew yourself. He does not remain with the things that are old, nor should you remain an ‘old man’ (cf. Romans 6:6)... For what good is it to you if God renews his promises and you are not renewed and if he speaks “from heaven’ and you listen from the earth?” From, *Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*, ed. Hans Urs Von Balthasar, trans. Robert J. Daly, S.J. (Washington DC: The Catholic University Press of America, 1984), 186-7. In other words, the continued awakening to the renewing power of grace is pivotal to any vocational office within the Christian Church, for the sake of a healthy and workable Body of Christ.

rashness, then, would the pastoral office be undertaken by the unfit, seeing that the government of souls is the art of arts!”<sup>112</sup>

### **b) Exercising a humility of heart**

Secondly, and similar in tone to the above, it is the imbued mark of Christ’s humility that characterises true and lasting Christian character, particularly in leadership contexts. In this relationally connected context, an evangelical humiliation denotes an opened capacity of godly desire and will for the sharing of God’s love and grace, perhaps best summarised by the series of sermons entitled, *Charity and its Fruits*.<sup>113</sup>

Significantly, such emphasis on Christ’s humility does not suggest negation or humiliation of persons in his service. Like many reformers before and after him, Edwards understood that *restorative* grace only becomes operative through conscious human relinquishment of control and influence, not greater self-justifying effort. Indeed, his whole theological / pastoral project was predicated on the radically open reception of the resurrecting or remanating graces of Christ, uncompromised by self-promoting or speculative practices. He writes:

Christ is full of grace, and Christians all receive of his fullness, and grace for grace: i.e. there is grace in Christians answering to grace in Christ, such an answerableness as there is between the wax and the seal: there is character for character: such kind of graces, such a spirit and temper, the same things that belong to Christ’s character, belong to theirs.<sup>114</sup>

In relation to contemporary Christian ministry practice, this underlying theological premise of Christ’s willing self-emptying *kenosis* (Philippians 2:1-11, cf. John 1:1-14) is borne in many of the incarnational characteristics of the truly gracious affections that Edwards lists. Of particular note, and significantly attuned to the Beatitudes of Jesus (Mathew 5:1-11, cf. Luke 6:20-22) is the

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<sup>112</sup> Gregory the Great, “The Book of Pastoral Rule,” 1.1 as included in, Philip L. Culbertson & Arthur Bradford Shippee, editors, *The Pastor: Readings from the Patristic Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 197.

<sup>113</sup> The title of a series of fifteen sermons based in and around 1 Corinthians 13 that Edwards preached throughout 1738 at Northampton (though published nearly a hundred years after his death) and now included in *WJE* 8. See also, Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits: Living in the Light of God’s Love*, ed. Kyle Strobel.

<sup>114</sup> *WJE* 2:347.

begetting and embodiment of love, meekness, quietness, forgiveness and mercy.<sup>115</sup> As a pivotal pastoral disposition in the writings of both Bernard and Edwards, humility will be further discussed in Chapter Seven.

In many respects, this is a predictable list of Christian dispositional virtues on one level, yet it remains striking, even arguably jarring so far as contemporary characterisations and even aspirations of ecclesial leadership are concerned. By this I mean, the persona of the self-assured, goal setting and vision-casting pastor is nowhere to be found within this leadership inventory. Indeed, in his latter writings, Edwards is constantly suspicious of any self-promoting or religiously vainglorious behaviours, particularly within those who are leaders of the Christian community:

(And) this may be laid down as an infallible thing, that the person who is apt to think that he (sic), as compared with others, is a very eminent saint, much distinguished in Christian experience, in whom this is a first thought, that rises of itself, and naturally offers itself; he is certainly mistaken; he is no eminent saint; but under great prevailing's of a proud and self-righteous spirit.<sup>116</sup>

I will now conclude this chapter in light of the above insightful and challenging comments. As patterned previously in the Bernard chapters, I will now move from the more general to the specific as I consider the text and implications of a singular, yet seminal sermon of Jonathan Edwards from the late summer of 1733—on the eve of the first New England awakening—“A Divine and Supernatural Light.”

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 344-5.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

*Christian doctrines function pastorally when a theologian unearths the divine pedagogy in order to engage the reader or listener in considering that life with the triune God facilitates dignity and excellence.*

**Ellen Charry**<sup>1</sup>

*... the divine light is not the convictions that “natural men” have of their sin; these are no more than the Spirit acting upon the mind of the “natural man”— common grace— while in special grace the Spirit acts in the mind of the saint. For Edwards it is the crucial difference between assisting natural principles and infusing new principles.*

**John E. Smith**<sup>2</sup>

*’Tis more excellent than any other human learning; ’tis far more excellent, than all the knowledge of the greatest philosophers, or statesmen. Yea, the least glimpse of the glory of God in the face of Christ doth more exalt and ennoble the soul, than all the knowledge of those that have the greatest speculative understanding in divinity, without grace... knowledge of God himself.*

**Jonathan Edwards**<sup>3</sup>

## Chapter Five

### **“A Divine and Supernatural Light”: Theological & Pastoral Implications**

#### **5.1 Introduction and trajectory of the chapter**

In the previous chapter I sought to demonstrate that Jonathan Edwards was an eclectic and integrative thinker who was thoroughly shaped by his awakened sensibilities of God’s grace. I also indicated that I have found this to be an attractive quality of character and pastoral disposition, so far as potential applicability to contemporary Christian pastoral ministry is concerned. It will be the aim of this chapter to build further upon that foundational sketch with specific focus on, and a potential application of, his germinal 1734 sermon, “A Divine and Supernatural Light.”

I will do that by first locating Edwards in the cultural and pastoral practice of preaching. Then I will outline something of the historical and theological context of the sermon in question before

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 18.

<sup>2</sup> John E. Smith, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 2: 106-7.

<sup>3</sup> *WJE* 17: 424.

expounding its salient theological, even visually apprehended assertions. In summary, these are the illuminating, beholding and benevolent nature of grace gifted in the Holy Spirit and the participatory, thus responsive spiritual capacity of the affections. Through all these various categorisations I will be seeking to address the thesis question at hand, either directly or by raising key issues to be discussed more fully in the final two chapters. Again, that question is: *Are spiritual affections, as defined and attested to across a breadth of the Christian tradition, still of vital importance to pastoral ministries in contemporary contexts?*

## **5.2 Edwards in the pulpit**

Nowhere was Jonathan Edwards more at home in himself as theologian and pastor than in the pulpit—that enduring, yet peculiar place of Christian proclamation and exhortation. In fact, preaching for Edwards was his primary vocational responsibility. In any given Sunday worship service, lasting up to two hours, his sermons could stretch for an hour and a half. And like all commissioned ministers of the Christian gospel (variously named across Reformed denominations), it was a charism and calling recognised and received within a covenantal agreement. In other words, Edwards’ practice of preaching was intrinsic to his pastoral identity, not merely a functional derivative of it.<sup>4</sup>

Understood from such a relational perspective, preaching was also held to be reciprocal means of regenerative grace. By this I mean that the preached word in Edwards’ working theology issued from the graced and affected centre of the preacher, to be correspondingly received and responded to at the graced and affective centre of the listener. In short, it was an intentional

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, when the pastoral covenant with Edwards was terminated by the Northampton church in June 1750 where he had been senior pastor for 21 years, and notwithstanding his national and international reputation, Edwards had no choice but to eventually leave town and find another pastorate.

pastoral act offered in the service and hope of a deepening of faith in Christ through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

The above consideration seeks to locate Edwards' practice of preaching and teaching primarily within his pastorate of Northampton, Massachusetts.<sup>5</sup> That his influence and reputation spread throughout New England and even across the Atlantic to England, should not mask this important contextual consideration. And although over time he was made aware of wider audience attraction to his written texts, Edwards arguably never lost sight of his localised, covenantal charge.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, unlike his famous contemporaries, the Wesley brothers and the peripatetic evangelist George Whitfield, the "Sage of Northampton" did not travel beyond the North Eastern seaboard of the now named United States of America.<sup>7</sup>

Given that the focus of this thesis is on the spiritually affected pastoral disposition, it is important to emphasise the vocational grounding and culturally defining context Edwards worked within.

Thoughts expressed through his sermons were conditioned and formed within evolving, relational and contextual experience on broad fronts.<sup>8</sup> On a week to week basis they arose from the mundane and real. Put another way, his sermons were not delivered as abstract thoughts or carried by emotional sentiment, though for the contemporary reader it initially may not appear that way.<sup>9</sup> That the sermon under discussion in this chapter, "A Divine and Supernatural Light

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<sup>5</sup> I include teaching and lecturing here due to the very nature of puritan preaching practice. The "Doctrine" segment of Edward's tri-part construction was often the lengthiest and most detailed. *A Divine and Supernatural Light* is highly representative of such a pattern. See, *WJE* 17:3-44, "A Preface to the Period," Mark Valeri. See also, Wilson H. Kimnach, "The Sermons: Concept and Execution," in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, 243-257.

<sup>6</sup> This is particularly evident when that pastoral charge was finally terminated. His farewell sermon to the Northampton congregation in June 1750 is notable for its teaching around covenantal responsibilities (and judgements) between ministers and the people entrusted to their care. See, "A Farewell Sermon Preached at the First Precinct in Northampton, After the People's Public Rejection of the Their Minister... on June 22, 1750," in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards*, 212-241.

<sup>7</sup> Crisp and Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards*, 35.

<sup>8</sup> M. Valeri, "A Preface to the Period," suggests in relation to Edwards' contextual preaching, "His promotion of and writings about the revival movement in the late 1730s and 1740s made him famous; but the evangelical theology that underpinned his more celebrated works emerged from the period 1730-1733, when he established himself as Northampton's pastor." *WJE* 17:44.

<sup>9</sup> As a keynote speaker at the 2015, *Jonathan Edwards Congress*, August 24-28, Melbourne, Australia, Ken Minkema, Executive Editor of the Works of Jonathan Edwards, Yale, USA, presented the paper, "Texts within texts: The stuff of sermons," in which he emphasised the highly contextualised nature of Edwards' weekly preaching. Central to his argument were the writing material Edwards' sermons were written on: "Prayer bids, marriage bans, letters, printed materials, financial documents, and other recycled

(Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, shown to both a Scriptural and Rational Doctrine)”, continues to be held as one of Edwards’ most defining pieces of theological and pastoral expression, is not only testament to his theologically reflective skills but to a vocational ability to respond pastorally and connect affectively with the world around him.<sup>10</sup>

### 5.3 The advent of “A Divine and Supernatural Light”

“A Divine and Supernatural Light” was preached in Northampton in the August of 1734.

Interestingly, and in light of the above introductory comments, the Boston published version which was circulated later that same year began with a Preface penned by Edwards to his Northampton congregants, seeking their understanding of its written extension beyond the pastorate and reassuring them that, “... I was prevailed with to do it, and gratify others, and from an aim at promoting the interest of religion, and the good of souls, [more] than by any thought I had in honour that I should get by it.”<sup>11</sup>

What remains substantive about “A Divine and Supernatural Light” is its appearance on the cusp of the first religious awakening in the Connecticut Valley and its longevity of influence, notably, if not curiously, within the current late-modern period of western ecclesial history.<sup>12</sup> The sermon’s significant theological—*pneumatological*—insight and hopeful application became an appealing entry point into faith for the unconverted and an encouraging vision of renewal for the already

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scraps from here and there: all went into the making of sermons, literally and intellectually. These items are revealing on several levels...they provide rare details about the sermons in which they are incorporated and give us a unique glimpse into the many circles of discourse and activity—personal, familial, local, regional, provincial, even international—that informed and shaped Edwards’ preaching.” *Congress Handbook*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> The secular historian Perry Miller, who began a revival of interest in Edwards when he published the biography, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Sloane & Associates, 1949), suggested that “A Divine and Supernatural Light” represented a succinct summary of Edwards’ entire theological project.

<sup>11</sup> *WJE*, 17:425.

<sup>12</sup> As has been suggested elsewhere in this project, the rise of interest in Edwards surely corresponds with the disillusionment with the impact of modernism upon theology. Edwards sought to theologise out of transformative experience. Simplistically, perhaps, he did not seek to impose theological or dogmatic strictures upon experience.

churched. It is refreshingly free of concrete moral exhortations and dogmatic strictures yet rich in theological metaphor, thus imaginative possibility.<sup>13</sup>

## 5.4 Affected sight and speech

Edwards, to his enduring credit, brought a dynamism of theological and aesthetic synergism into play within his sermonising craft. The demanding life of holiness as often stressed by puritan preachers was, in Edwards' mind, commensurate to a vivid apprehension of God's redemptive, thus expressive beauty. This beauty when fully seen and received, was in essence, an infused grace that was the affective catalyst within the contemplative life of holiness. In a paper given at the Jonathan Edwards Congress, Melbourne, August 2015, the influential Edwards scholar Kyle Strobel, underscored the reformer's highly visual theology, "Seeing God is seeing God gazing at us."<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, in the paper's synopsis Strobel notes, "Within the gaze the creature is seen and known, and within that same gaze is able to see and know God as they see and know themselves."<sup>15</sup> This transformative beholding of the Trinity then becomes the very substance of the spiritually affected life. This is not a notional or speculative knowledge *about* God, but rather an intimate knowing *of* God based on sensible and self-authenticating sight. As Strobel suggests, "... as the elect behold God in Christ, their knowledge is affectionate—it causes love, joy, and happiness to emanate to Christ through the Spirit uniting them to Christ."<sup>16</sup>

Strobel's interpretative point could easily be lost in considerations about Edwards' theology and the practice of pastoral ministry. For even when discussing Bernard's more overt stress on

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<sup>10</sup> On the role of metaphor in poetics and theology, Eugene Peterson is a credible contemporary voice. See, *Image: Art. Faith. Mystery*, Volume 62, <https://imagejournal.org/article/conversation-eugene-peterson/> viewed 16/04/2018, "An Interview with Eugene Peterson by Luci Shaw": "Most of existence is invisible and inaudible. How do we make a connection with this huge world? By metaphor. The Bible is lavish with metaphor, but metaphors can very easily become clichés. The poet is a defence against clichés."

<sup>14</sup> Personal notes of Strobel's presentation.

<sup>15</sup> Kyle Strobel, "Being seen and being Known: Jonathan Edwards's theological anthropology," an unpublished paper given at the Jonathan Edwards Congress, Melbourne, August 2015. *Congress Handbook*, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Crisp and Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards*, 186-187.

contemplation, the focus can quickly move to what the believer is needing to do [well] in contemplative practice, rather than what he or she is continually invited to see, in order to more fully receive. For Edwards, then, to allow the gaze of God to be fixed upon the tarnished yet receptive human heart and mind, is to be loved into consensual being. Affective engagement with God's grace is therefore not a determined action of the will. Rather, it is a conscious yielding. Indeed, it is a believing almost against belief that love could be so gratuitous and thoroughly embracing of the broken, alienated human condition.

As is evident from even a cursory reading of "A Divine and Supernatural Light," Edwards' careful phrasing and creative use of both metaphor and simile mirrored his own astonishment and gratitude before the God of grace and glory. In this context, the theo-poetical analysis of Hans Urs von Balthasar is instructive to this and a later discussion around pastoral inclinations towards artistic expression, mindful that his assertion is drawn from patristic thought and practice:

... the Fathers regarded beauty as a transcendental and did theology accordingly. This presumption left a most profound imprint on the manner and content of their theologising, since a theology of beauty may only be elaborated in a beautiful manner. The particular nature of one's subject matter must be reflected first of all in the particular nature of one's method.<sup>17</sup>

In like manner for Edwards, to preach about the love of God, revealed in Christ and given freely in the Holy Spirit, was to express a vital congruence of disposition and oral expression within the proclamation itself. Therefore, Edwards, like Bernard of Clairvaux, was not an aesthetic theologian by functional category only. Rather, his profuse writings of all size and variety, mirrored a discernible manner of beauty or symmetry of proportion that he believed to be true to the God he spoke and wrote passionately about. Again, like Bernard, Edwards was demonstrably artistic within his vocation of preaching, thus arguably an artist in his own literary right.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol I: Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 38.

<sup>18</sup> This is not a proposition I can recall seeing stated elsewhere. It is my perception of his writings and an affirmation of them.

## 5.5 Pathways towards spiritual awakening

The New England Awakenings that began in the Connecticut Valley in December of 1734, ebbing and flowing into what is now known as the Great Awakening of 1740-43, pivoted, in Edwards' considered estimation, upon "the surprising work of God," who operated freely beyond natural human abilities or coercion.<sup>19</sup> Predictably, given his theological emphasis on the provenance of God's grace and his dispositional concern for humility, Edwards down played his own highly competent and persuasive pastoral agency. However, he did take heart and even marvel at the impact of a series of sermons that he preached around awakening themes, such as "Justification by Faith Alone" (November, 1734), "Pressing into the Kingdom of God" (February, 1735), "Ruth's Resolution" (April, 1735), but to name a few.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Edwards' appeal to a fundamentally gracious encounter of the Divine, connected well with the common human yearning for benevolence and embrace, particularly within a broader social and cultural mix of harsh living conditions, tenuous life prospects and religious strictures.<sup>21</sup>

In light of the above discussion on Edwards and preaching *per se*, I will now undertake an analysis of key, innovative theological components of "A Divine and Supernatural Light," keeping before the reader what I broadly perceive to be faith and social applications. However, it is important to sketch initially an ecclesial and social context for the sermon itself.

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<sup>19</sup> See, *WJE* 4:19-25.

<sup>20</sup> See, *WJE* 19: 305 f.

<sup>21</sup> That is not to say that Edwards' own religious expectations were not burdensome or that the awakenings were not without excess and destructive extremism. Nevertheless, though his social and cultural context is markedly different to our own, both personal and pastoral experience would suggest that such an amalgam of rigorous theological thought and aesthetics orientated towards the transcendent, still opens the way towards renovated Christian faith dispositions, in and through the harmonising ministry of the Holy Spirit.

## 5.6 Formative social, ecclesial & theological contexts

### a) The puritan covenant

In 1728 at the relatively youthful age of 25, Jonathan Edwards became the senior pastor of the Northampton church. This followed the unexpected death of his maternal grandfather, Solomon Stoddard. Next to the Commonwealth's capital city of Boston, Northampton—a vital trading centre on the busy Connecticut River— was a seat of religious influence. Unlike Boston, however, its history of revivalism and evangelical piety increasingly put it at odds with a growing and fashionable stress on a non-Trinitarian Deism, coupled with an imported Anglican-led Arminian movement. Each of these movements were generational and sub-cultural reactions to the inherited mono-cultural, federal and highly doctrinaire puritanism of the still relatively young New England.<sup>22</sup>

At play for Edwards amidst this budding social and ecclesial confluence was the progressive health of the national covenant that, as Harry S. Stout argues, was a puritan assumption and aspiration inculcated within the otherwise sophisticatedly-minded Jonathan Edwards.<sup>23</sup> Namely, since the puritan founding of New England, which was held to have occurred under the guidance and sovereignty God, it sought to nurture and maintain the self-identity as being a peculiar nation in the way of Israel.<sup>24</sup> As such its priests and prophets kept close tab on the spiritual wellbeing of the nation, giving prophetic report to the pleasure or displeasure of the Divine with his people through sermons on the Day of Thanksgiving and on fast Sundays. Stout cites instances of natural disaster, e.g., a large earthquake in 1726 and impending (terror-inducing) threats of a frontier war

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<sup>22</sup> For a breadth of historical and social overview, see, Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 114-149.

<sup>23</sup> Harry S. Stout, "The Puritans and Edwards" in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, 274-291.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

with the French and Native Americans in the 1740's and 50's, as catalysts for such localised and urgent prophetic utterance.

Edwards clearly employed the covenant language and related theological assumptions also. It was a religious conditioning that goes some way to explain his unrelenting desire for renewal, particularly on often stated levels of civility, obedience to authority and harmonising virtues. Therefore, his wasn't simply an evangelical call on an individualistic level, as it is often caricatured to be. His renewing message had far broader, indeed, national implications; his "light on the hill" rhetoric arguably closely aligned to the nascent doctrine of manifold destiny. In 1737, three years after the preaching of "A Divine and Supernatural Light", he proclaimed:

We have been greatly distinguished by God as a covenant people. God has distinguished us by making known his covenant to us. We have been in a very clear manner a land of light... the land of our forefathers has been a land of such light... You are a people that have been distinguished of God as a covenant people for a long time and have been distinguished in the means that God has used with you.<sup>25</sup>

### **b) An educated British colonist**

Within a broader religious and social context suggestive of normative renewing expressions of covenantal faith akin to Israel (Hosea 14:1), Edwards also needed to come to grips with a fast changing and expanding pastorate. Culturally and educationally, he had grown up within a privileged class grouping.<sup>26</sup> Critically, he considered himself to be a loyal British subject of the Crown with certain gender-given rights. On this interpretive point, George Marsden comments:

Eighteenth century Britons viewed their world as monarchical and controlled by hierarchies of personal relationships. On both these counts, their assumptions were almost opposite to those of most Westerners today, who tend to think of society as in principle egalitarian and in fact controlled by impersonal forces. Eighteenth-century British-American society depended on patriarchy.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Sermon on 2 Chronicles 23:16, March 1737," as quoted by Stout, 280.

<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, when Edwards was dismissed from the Northampton pastorate in June of 1750, by and large, the upper to middle class remained his most loyal supporters. See, Jennifer Reagan McCleery, "A Profile of the Northampton Minority," in *Jonathan Edwards Studies* vol. 7, no. 1 (2017).

<sup>27</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 3.

Economically and socially this meant for Edwards a given kinship with the landed gentry of Northampton, which in turn gave rise to his voiced concerns about political agitations and immoral—“envious”—behaviours of the growing mercantile classes. By virtue of lucrative opportunities made possible by the trade route of the Connecticut River and its fertile surrounds, they began to challenge the social, political and economic status quo.<sup>28</sup> Such social disquiet inevitably created a distancing of the local legislature from direct governance, thus ready protection of the Crown from the French and Native Americans which potentially put the puritan experiment of religious self-determination and covenantal calling at grave risk.<sup>29</sup>

### **c) A self-proclaimed reformer**

In light of these social undercurrents and political repositioning, and spiritually afire with his own “close” with the God of Jesus Christ, as early as 1730 Edwards publicly presented himself as a religious reformer. Even at such a relatively young age, he felt the ready cure to the rising tide of heterodoxy<sup>30</sup> and immoral behaviour was a spiritual revival orchestrated by the regenerating and sanctifying Spirit of God. In a sermon, “The Dangers of Decline,” preached on a Commonwealth election day in mid-1730, he implored his listeners to allow the Spirit to come and revive their first love of God. He provocatively went on to say:

If men are cold in religion, their hearts will be warm about something else; if virtue and holiness be not pursued, vice and wickedness will. When a people grow cold and unconcerned about the things of religion, injustice and fraud, and oppression will grow. There will be an increase of a spirit of sensuality; licentiousness will increase amongst young people.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For a thorough description and analysis of this period, particularly the changing social and economic landscape of Northampton and the Connecticut Valley during Edwards’ early tenure, see Mark Valeri’s “Preface to the Period,” *WJE* 17:17-28.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, “The Dangers of Decline,” 88.

<sup>30</sup> In or around 1730, Edwards preached the sermon, “Practical Atheism.” In it he suggested that only the genuine practice of religion, not mere religious observances, advanced the fruitful life of faith. See, *WJE* Vol. 17: 47-58. In his sights was the growing Arminian reading of Christianity, which in Edwards’ mind, placed a great fear and doubt in the minds of previously secure Christians: “Many who looked on themselves as in a Christian condition, seemed to be awakened by it (Arminianism), with fear that God was about to withdraw from the land, and that we should be given up to heterodoxy and corrupt principles; and that their opportunity for obtaining salvation would be past.” *WJE* 4:148.

<sup>31</sup> *WJE* 17:92.

On a broader and more influential front, Edwards adapted a 1730 Northampton sermon that he presented a year later in the form of a polished lecture given at the behest of an eminent Boston clergy gathering. “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence” was his first published work and became the theological and literary foundation on which “A Divine and Supernatural Light” would later rest. As an intelligent and articulate counter to both Arminian and Deist precepts and so-named godless practices, Edwards restated not only humanity’s restorative need of God’s self-initiated and freely given grace yet did so within a reinvigorated Trinitarian framework of belief.

To the amazement of many who listened to Edwards that day or read the text later, his was a doxological and missional vision of God offered in strikingly theological and soteriological terms.<sup>32</sup> In short, the young pastor presented an existential expression of a considered yet experimental Calvinism. For Edwards’ expressed trinitarian theology was principally a personal apprehension of the saving, gathering God rather than a prosaic apologetic for a highly doctrinal or morally stringent Christian life.<sup>33</sup>

#### **d) Trinity re-framed**

Significantly at the time of writing and re-editing of “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” Edwards was working on workbook drafts of his posthumously published *Discourse on the Trinity*.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, over numerous years this expanding draft became a source book for a number of his most significant writings, included “A Divine and Supernatural Light” and his famous treatise on the *Religious Affections*.<sup>35</sup> This is not surprising, given how pivotal his consensual vision of the

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<sup>32</sup> To begin to understand Edwards’ theology is to appreciate how much he relies on *seeing* or sensing the gloriousness of God. Therefore, his theological prose leans heavily upon apprehension and is not merely reliant upon a pure rationality or logic of thought.

<sup>33</sup> “What is striking about Jonathan Edwards’ writing on the Trinity is that there is none of [this] bifurcation between the doctrine of the Trinity and the Christian life of faith and practice. Everything Edwards wrote about the Trinity expresses the intertwining connectedness of the Trinity and the Christian’s experience of God as the Creator, Saviour, and Sanctifier, and thus between the immanent and the economic Trinity.” Sang Hyun Lee, *WJE* 21:3.

<sup>34</sup> *WJE*, 21: 113-152.

<sup>35</sup> Amy Plantinga Pauw, “The Trinity” in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, 45.

Triune God became for every aspect of what he considered to be a truly virtuous and fruitful Christian life.<sup>36</sup>

Edwards defined the Holy Trinity in life-giving (*vivificatum*), relational terms, into which the believer was invited to be and further become, i.e., by virtue of consent to the regenerating and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, his theological / doxological underpinnings represented a radical re-appropriation of how an otherwise dry and obligatory Reformed doctrine of dependence might have been received. Edwards said exuberantly in relation to the saving economy of the Godhead:

So much as the dependence of the creature is on God, so much the greater does the creature's emptiness in himself appear to be: and so much greater must the fullness of the being who supplies him. Our having all *of* God, shows the fullness of his power and grace: our having all *through* him, shows the fullness of his merit and worthiness: and our having all *in* him demonstrates the fullness of beauty, love and happiness.

And he continued:

And the redeemed by reason of the greatness of their dependence on God, han't only so much the greater occasion, but obligation to contemplate and acknowledge the glory and fullness of God. How unreasonable and ungrateful would we be, if we did not acknowledge that sufficiency and glory, that we do absolutely, immediately and universally depend upon?<sup>37</sup>

The theological apprehension of God in wondrous, grateful and participatory language alleviated for many at that time the pressure of an imposed and dissonant experience of Christianity. By virtue of Edwards' proclamation of a self-communicating God of grace who could not contradict his effusive nature and stand back from the natural created order (the Deism of Newton) or was in no way reliant upon human effort to procure salvific ends (the Arminian stance), his preaching and teaching helped to create an inviting way into the Christian faith. That is, in much the same way as

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<sup>36</sup> For a concise and excellent summary of this harmonising and excellent principle within God and the Christian life, see, Richard R. Niebuhr, "Being and Consent" in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, 34-43. "Edwards' definition of true virtue is, then, *benevolence to being in general*. It is consent, propensity and union of heart to being in general, which is immediately exercised in a general good will... True virtue is love toward being in general." 41.

<sup>37</sup> *WJE* 1: 211.

with all the great faith reformers who for the sake of what they consider to be the very heart of the matter, defied doctrinal constraints and conformist demands of religious institutionalism.<sup>38</sup>

In sum, Edwards was seeking to return the given joy of God's redemptive presence to the beliefs and integral social practices of the Christian faith. And he did this by repositioning its expression of being within the Triune God's communicative gift of Selfhood, in Christ and through the deifying agency of the Holy Spirit. This theological and doxological emphasis then became the necessary foundation upon which all other considerations in relation to the Christian life and knowledge were framed. The definitive sermon, "A Divine and Supernatural Light" is a clear example of this re-positioning of theology to an affective and creatively responsive life, and so to both its content and application I now turn.

### **5.7 "A single, remarkable effort."**

In his short introduction to this particular sermon, editor of Volume 17, of the *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Mark Valeri succinctly states, "In "A Divine and Supernatural Light", Edwards condensed much of a decade of preaching, rumination, and private writing on the nature of spiritual knowledge into a single, remarkable effort."<sup>39</sup> What is also evident, is that the outstanding literary effort continued to reverberate within Edwards' preaching and various forms of writing until the end of his life. The theological convictions advanced and pastoral urgings offered, acted as a figurative golden thread to which Edwards as theologian / pastor repeatedly returned, weaving the same filament of confessional faith into many other sermons and treatises.

"A Divine and Supernatural Light" was, in some respects, a polemical piece addressing what he understood to be the rationalistic dangers inherent within Arminianism and the seductive nature

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<sup>38</sup> For example, Jesus of Nazareth, Paul of Tarsus, Julian of Norwich, Hildegard, Luther and even Australia's Mary Mackillop.

<sup>39</sup> Mark Valeri, Introduction to "A Divine and Supernatural Light," *WJE* 17:405.

of an emerging Deism within a broader culture shaped by rapidly advancing scientific enquiry. However, the sermon is also a demonstrably positivist expression of Christian doctrine, predominately reformed, yet also revealing gleanings from other sources of the Christian tradition.<sup>40</sup> It is, in sum, both an articulate and dextrous witness to God's illuminating, thus life renewing grace that by virtue of the Holy Spirit is implanted in the receptive soul for its progressive transformation into the very nature and harmonising "excellency" of Jesus Christ.

## 5.8 An overview of the sermon's content

### a) The need of special grace to truly know God

Following his usual homiletic pattern, Edwards' used a single scriptural text to base the sermon upon. In this particular instance, the responsive words of Jesus to Peter, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven..." (Matthew 16:17 KJV) provide a workable platform for Edwards to move seamlessly into the dominating subheading of "Doctrine" and then into a brief and concluding "Improvement" or application. According to Wilson Kimnach, this intentional sense of movement in Edwards' preaching style and form, represented a "grand march down from the mountain: from Holy Writ to abstract principles to personal values and actions...from the eternal to the temporal to the existential moment."<sup>41</sup> This will be a descending or grounding principle I will return to later in this chapter.

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<sup>40</sup> As already mentioned, Edwards' reading of the Christian tradition was extensive, though not explicitly cited. His well-known prejudice against all things Rome and "popery" was not necessarily reflective in his otherwise reliance of both catholic and orthodox theological reformers. Soundings of Irenaeus, St. Augustine, Origen, Richard of St. Victor and St. Bernard of Clairvaux (another major voice in this thesis) echo throughout his works, if only in surprising, yet recognisable fragments. A relatively obscure or perhaps coincidental case in point is that of the once controversial, Origen of Alexandria. Writing about the relationship between 'Work from Nature and Work from God,' the Alexandrine states, "... For the natural law can offer help and provide insight... for example with regard to equity between people, or even for getting a sense of God's existence. But who could sense by natural means that Christ is the Son of God." From, *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, ed. Hans Urs von Balthasar, trans. Robert J. Daly, S.J., 2000. This statement of Origen could well be a summary of Edwards' basic premise in "A Divine and Supernatural Light."

<sup>41</sup> Wilson H. Kimnach, "The Sermons: Concept and Execution," in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, 244.

Edwards' definitive theological premise, constructed around the recorded words of Jesus, is clear: There is a vitally needed spiritual knowledge, expressive of an intimate relation to God and God's kingdom that is unattainable from a humanly constructed vantage point. In short, it is not within mortal human capacity—"flesh and blood"—to acquire such knowledge in its transcendent fullness. For at core this knowledge cannot be seized or claimed. Rather, it is God's self-communicating, transcendent glory and logically can only be revealed in and through God's own mediating presence.

Indeed, the infusive spiritual gifting of divine and supernatural light finds Peter "blessed," this being in Edwards' enthusiastic estimation a regenerated state of being and consent (happiness) that previously did not, and could not, exist by natural means. Imaginatively expanding the words and sentiments of Jesus from the chosen text, Edwards states, "This is such knowledge as my Father which [is] in heaven only can give. It is too high and excellent to be communicated by such means as other knowledge is. Thou art blessed, that though knowest that which God alone can teach thee."<sup>42</sup>

#### **b) The conveyance of special grace in and through Holy Spirit**

From this limited, though convenient scriptural reference point, Edwards goes on to explicate a complex, yet eloquently framed doctrine in light of which the Christian life can be renewed, nurtured and strengthened. He states this in terms of: "There is such a thing as a spiritual and divine light, immediately imparted to the soul by God, of a different nature from any that is obtained by natural means."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *WJE* 17:409.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 410.

What is noticeable here is that the newly professed knowledge of God, i.e., Peter's apprehension of Jesus being "the Messiah, the Son of God," now becomes in Edwards' doctrinal terms a "supernatural and divine light immediately imparted to the soul." Although clearly representing a hermeneutical principle reflective of his own era and theological premises, what follows is an integrative complexity of theological reflection. That is, one notable for its interplay of scripture, theology, philosophy, psychology, religious experience and cultural awareness. In other words, Edwards expresses a conscious integration of thought and experience that in the reckoning of practical theologians of the twenty-first century, creates open and dynamic environments for emerging or ever-renewing narratives.<sup>44</sup> This was certainly true in Edwards' case and for many within the circles of his influence.

Theologically speaking, when Edwards explicated the above-stated doctrine, he ventured into the more speculative realms of pneumatology, and more particularly into the vexed interpretive worlds of what is common grace and what special grace might look and feel like. Yet, seeking to emphasise the incapacity of human rationality to attain or promote a personal divine knowledge—a knowing that ultimately can only be communicated via the inclined will—Edwards makes an audacious case for a gifted spiritual unification with God in Christ. This is not a knowledge merely about God, making for various forms of hearsay or second-hand faith, but a knowledge sparked by intimate relational encounter; one that is initiated and sustained by God's self-revelation, making for a Christian life full to overflowing with God's relational grace, beauty and truth. And importantly within the writings of Edwards, the gifting of spiritual union is not constituted in divine essence but by means of a renewed relational nature, born of the Holy Spirit, and sustained in and through devotion to the incarnated, crucified and risen Christ.

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<sup>44</sup> This is a concept championed by Kenneth Pohly, in *Transforming the Rough Places: The Ministry of Supervision* [second edition] (Franklin, Tennessee: Providence House Publishers, 2001), 162-66.

### c) The promise of participation in God's relational being

By purposely delineating common graces from the supernatural light of grace, Edwards makes some remarkably bold and contextually far-reaching assertions.<sup>45</sup> Of most significance is the hope and promise of a saving participation in God's relational nature. In sum, this represents a consensual enjoinder to God's incandescent way of being, thus a deliberate departure from the dulled stance of the resistant [human] being. And as such, it is a spirited movement beyond notional and fixed system of beliefs, towards a deep sense of God's gloriousness and beauty in the heart which establishes a dynamism for a life of desirous, growing faith.

Therefore, the finite can bear the infinite in Edwards' reckoning because the Triune God is understood to be pure relation and not simply a pure act, that is, incorporating, dispositional love which of itself cannot be violent or coercive.<sup>46</sup> In this regard, Edwards states:

The Spirit of God... may indeed act upon the mind of a natural man; but he acts in the mind of a saint as an indwelling vital principle. He acts upon the mind of an unregenerate person as an extrinsic occasional agent; for in acting upon them he doth not unite himself to them... but he unites himself with the mind of a saint, takes him for his temple, actuates and influences him as a new, supernatural principle of life and action. There is this difference: that the Spirit of God in acting *in* the soul of a godly man, exerts and communicates himself there in his own proper nature.<sup>47</sup>

Edwards immediately goes on to suggest from this point that such a "supernatural" communication of the indwelling Spirit does not take place in the realms or flights of human

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<sup>45</sup> Although a survey of the Catholic (Augustine / Thomistic) confessed sense of continuity between nature and grace in comparison to the Protestant / Reformed more discontinuous position (one that serves to protect the sovereign freedom of God and which Edwards reflects in part), lies outside the textual scope of this discussion, it does provide an important backdrop to the potential application he is seeking to make. For not only does it have bearing on the doctrine of justification, but it is particularly important so far as the life of sanctification is concerned, that is, how the Spirit works to nurture and maintain the indwelling relationship through the seeing mind and thus the affections and will. In short, how does Edwards avoid a violence to the human will that the concept of supernatural grace commonly conveys? For an excellent summary of this dilemma, see, Sang Hyun Lee, "Grace and Justification by Faith Alone," in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, 130-136. With regards something of a resolving summary of Edwards' position, Lee writes, "The Holy Spirit is "united" to the powers of the regenerate by acting in and through, not from outside, the natural powers of the regenerate." 135 This is known as a form of compatibilism, whereby the Holy Spirit does not act outside or beyond its given nature of unifying love in relation to the believer. In Edwards own language, "... the Holy Spirit is given and infused into the hearts of men only under this general law, viz, that it shall remain there and put forth acts after the manner of an abiding, natural, vital principle of action, or a seed remaining in us." *WJE* 18:157.

<sup>46</sup> *WJE* 2:25.

<sup>47</sup> *WJE* 17:411.

imagination. That would be just as inadequate and prone to distortion as locating faith in the purely rational realm. Rather, the saving gift that the divine and mystical light brings to bear on the receptive soul is a real and lasting apprehension of God's tangible beauty, truth and love—each in accord with the witness of the Scriptures—for the sake of demonstrable and lasting change in this world, into the next. Such a gratuitous and self-communicative light, therefore, is visceral, substantial in both reason and sense and verifiable by virtue of the dispositional changes wrought in the receiver. In the incisive words of John E. Smith:

The central point... remains: The Spirit brings about a change *as a whole*. It will not do to single out a change in some special feature of the self. But if there is a change in the heart, we may expect it to be manifested in every aspect of the self; regeneration affects the total self and all its (virtuous) powers... What is remarkable or unexpected has no special religious significance. The mark of the divine takes us to another dimension altogether. Grace is a matter not of wizardry but of regeneration; Edwards was no enthusiast.<sup>48</sup>

#### **d) Conformity to the mind and heart of Christ**

The above observation of Smith is key to this thesis as a whole. My repeated case that spiritually attuned affections are vital to the shape and fruitful capacity of the pastoral disposition, need not imply anything magical, dualistic, elitist or even spectacular. To Edwards' unique way of thinking, true and affective religion is an inclined and willing conformity to Christ's own dispositional virtue of relational excellence, humility and courage. This means in practice a loyalty to Christ's chosen path of self-giving unto death and a reconciling love (John 12:23-26, John 14:25-26, Philippians 2:5) through the sending and empowering of the Spirit.

Therefore, this is no self-willed or self-generated life of religious imitation. And whilst Edwards did use the phrase *imitatio Dei*, he understood it to be the daily mirroring of God's relational being from *within* the state of consensual and regenerative being, not from a non-participatory position beyond consensual being. Clearly for Edwards, the Christian faith is born of, and sustained by, the

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<sup>48</sup> WJE 2:26-7.

unifying Spirit of love, power and restorative beauty who unites the believer to the self-giving Christ. Accordingly, Strobel states of Edwards' theological positioning:

True religious affection entails knowledge (understanding) of God and love (willing) to God. This knowledge is not merely speculative (i.e., "notional") but entails apprehension by the sense of the heart. This dual aspect of the soul in understanding (reception) and willing (inclination) mirrors the inner life of God and is the actualisation of the twofold image of God in the regenerate believer.<sup>49</sup>

The Christian life and its various expressions of ministry might then be expressed as a participatory form of *Christopraxis*; a term coined by the contemporary reformed theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, who conceived all facets of discipleship as being cruciform in both shape and contingent being.<sup>50</sup>

Similar to the religious experience of Jesus expressed in the Gospel of John (17:3-5), following Christ is first grounded in a real sense and apprehension of divine excellency, and buoyed by the implicit joy of being spiritually formed in and through Christ's own heart and mind (Hebrews 12:2; Philippians 2:1-11; Romans 12:1-2).

It is at this juncture that Edwards' sermon leaves a defining mark, directly challenging those who might accuse him of overt religious emotionalism. For while he stresses the receptive and expressive place of the human heart in all things Christian, it is the mind that apprehends the converting and illuminating idea, conveying the reality of God's gloriousness to the deeper recesses of soul. As such, received divine knowledge is not based on a passing feeling or on irrationalities, as his critics, such as the Boston rationalists would often contend. "The mind," he states in "A Divine and Supernatural Light", "having a sensibleness of the excellency of divine objects, dwells upon them with delight; and the powers of the soul are more awakened."<sup>51</sup> In this

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<sup>49</sup> Crisp & Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards*, 184-185.

<sup>50</sup> "Christopraxis" being an active term of theologically inclined and practiced discipleship first coined by Jürgen Moltmann in, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, (London: SCM Press, 1991). "The guideline of this Christopraxis was, and still is, the messianic interpretation of the Torah in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. But this praxis too is not the application of a theory about Christ. It is a way of life, a way in which people learn who Jesus is, learn it with all their senses, acting and suffering in work and prayer. To know Jesus does not simply mean learning the facts of Christological dogma. It means learning to know him in the praxis of discipleship... Christology emerges from Christian living and leads into Christian living." 43.

<sup>51</sup> *WJE* 17:415. See also, Sang Hyon Lee, *WJE* 21:66: "Edwards writes that, "... the heart must close with the new covenant by dependence upon it, and by love and desire." [423]. "But to unite and close with Christ is not just to consent to Christ affectionately without understanding. We learn from *Religious Affections* that by the term "heart" Edwards means the affectionate response of the understanding mind."

context, Robert Caldwell, author of *Communion in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit as the Bond of Union in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, comments:

While a “sense of the heart” is located in the heart, affections and will, this sense derives its sensibleness from the properties found in the rational idea. Thus, we can say that for Edwards head and heart are equal and necessary partners in the affair of sensible knowledge, though there is an identifiable priority and order of the former over the latter.<sup>52</sup>

The spiritual path of renewal that Edwards advocated, and by extension, the most fruitful way of Christian service and leadership, is keenly attentive and sensible to that which is beyond its natural and sinfully diminished capacities. Indeed, a derivative, consensual wisdom may well be a better phrase to use here. In any event, “A Divine and Supernatural Light” both models and extrapolates a needed congruence between rigorous, integrative thought and what Edwards describes as an openness to be “taught by the Spirit of God.” As he says elsewhere, “The heart cannot be set upon an object of which there is no idea in the understanding.”<sup>53</sup>

Utilising Lockean logic, whereby formative knowledge cannot be blithely received from an exterior source but is ultimately contingent upon personal sense and perception, Edwards often used Locke’s well-known analogy of honey and the human sense of taste. However, Edwards being the creative integrator of philosophical and theological ideas that he was, adapted the analogy for the sake of his own particular pastoral and theological purposes. In short, he used the sweetness of honey and redirected the illustrative point towards the receptive and consenting relation of being to the relational Being of God. Edwards says in the midst of “A Divine and Supernatural Light” and here I quote him at length, given the seminal nature of these considerations:

Thus, there is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgement that honey is sweet and having a sense of its sweetness. A man may have the former, that knows not how honey tastes; but a man can’t have that latter, unless he has an idea of the taste of honey in his mind. So, there is a difference between believing that a person is beautiful and having a sense of his beauty. The former may be obtained from hearsay, but the

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<sup>52</sup> Robert W. Caldwell III, *Communion in the Spirit*, 147.

<sup>53</sup> As quoted by Gerald R. McDermott, “Jonathan Edwards on the Affections and the Spirit,” in *The Spirit, the Affections and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Dale M. Coulter and Amos Yong (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 282.

latter only by seeing the countenance. There is a wide difference between mere speculative, rational judging anything to be excellent, and having a sense of its sweetness and beauty. The former rests only in the head, speculation only is concerned in it; but the heart is concerned with the latter. When the heart is sensible of the beauty and amiableness of a thing, it necessarily feels pleasure in the apprehension. It is implied in a person's being heartily sensible of the loveliness of a thing, that the idea of it is sweet and pleasant to his soul; which is a far different thing from having a rational opinion that it is excellent.<sup>54</sup>

So, importantly for Edwards is that a deeply sensed apprehension of, and affective engagement with, the light, thus affect, of God's Spirit, is the core transformative experience of a saving faith.<sup>55</sup>

In other words, the Christian life, including a call to ministry in Christ's name, is far more than a purely notional experience of God, based in and around cognitive perceptions or systematised beliefs. It is also more than a serious commitment to religious ethical ideals. Rather, and simultaneously within the justifying embrace of God, the Christian life is predicated upon the evolving conversion of mind and heart by means of the self-communicative nature of "divine beauty and amiableness" (Romans 5:5). It is a love given happily, therefore, or a divine *ecstasis* to be gratefully received, thus freely expressed via creative and joyful practice.

Therefore, participation in the Holy Trinity by means of the Holy Spirit, is not only an invitation to an individual life of continued growth into the way and being of Christ, it is the basis of all processional (missional) endeavours in Christ's redemptive name. Hence Edwards states in the midst of "God Glorified in Man's Dependence":

These the redeemed have all their inherent good in God... They are made excellent by a communication of God's excellency: God puts his own beauty, i.e. his beautiful likeness, upon their souls. They are made "partakers of the divine nature," of moral image of God (II Peter 1:14). The saints are beautiful and blessed by a communication of God's holiness and joy as the moon and planets are bright by the sun's light. The saint hath spiritual joy and pleasure by a kind of effusion of God on the soul. In these things the redeemed have communion with God; that is, they partake with him and of him.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> WJE 17:414.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 415.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 208.

### e) Appeals to scripture and rationality

In Edwards' time and ecclesial context, such a broad religious vision and its corresponding poetic expression was novel by any standard. His preaching took Christian belief and practice into realms of aesthetic and affective experience, while simultaneously displaying an impressive breadth of doctrinal, philosophical and cultural sophistication that was not easily refuted (or perhaps well understood). Also, his familiarity with the breadth of the Christian tradition was remarkable for his time, as was his working knowledge of the Christian Bible as a whole.

As was a common practice for Edwards in the midst of sermons, "A Divine and Supernatural Light" is replete with lengthy scriptural and rational defences of the stated doctrine around the immediate and special impartation of divine light to the believer's mind.<sup>57</sup> Yet these defences are highly instructive statements for my purpose, indicative of the positive and hopeful theological premises that Edwards worked and lived from. They are, therefore, potentially helpful for the contemporary practitioner to consider.

Significantly, with regard to scriptural underpinning of his stated doctrine, Edwards gravitated towards a uniquely Johannine way of speaking about the true knowledge of God. Central to what might be described as an intimacy of given relation, Edwards cites the text of John 17:3 KJV, "And this is eternal life, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Of this verse, Edwards comments, "This knowledge, or sight of God in Christ, can't be a mere speculative knowledge; because it is spoken of as a seeing and knowing, wherein they differ from the ungodly."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 417-423.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 417.

A scripturally based epistemology based on the glorious light of a relational love internal to the Trinity and happily emanated to the world through Christ, in the Spirit, was not a common interpretive use of the bible in Edwards' time and place. However, this unique hermeneutic which was certainly congruent to his converting religious experience, explains Edwards' ready critique of rational or speculative biblical belief. It is something akin to that of the voice of Jesus, also recorded in the Gospel of John, when he says to a gathering of hostile Jewish leaders, "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life." (John 5:39-40).

In arguably a similar vein to the Johannine Jesus, Edwards revered the received Christian texts, yet saw them positing more than a myriad of religious propositions to master so as to zealously propound to others. In Edwards' nuanced thinking, a regenerated mind and affected heart *in* Christ gave rise to renewed perceptions *of* Christ as revealed in the God authored and ordained canon. Or, in simpler terms, one needed to read the Scriptures with spiritually affected eyes, not seek to mine them for religious information or self-promoting propaganda. As Robert E. Brown, one of the few scholars who has sought to further understand Edwards' nuanced understanding and use of the Christian Bible, suggests:

As the preeminent form of God's communication to humanity, the Bible possesses all of the aesthetic qualities that emanate from God's being: beauty, excellence, harmony, proportionality etcetera. It does not just speak of these qualities or communicate information about them through ideas; rather it literally possesses them.

And further:

Conversion (for Edwards) was not just a change of mind but a reconstitution of the soul and its affections. It should come as no surprise, then, that the divine characteristics of the Bible, its excellence and majesty, should require a renewed capacity of perception in order to be appreciated. (Quoting Edwards) "There is that disposition of the mind, that...sweetly corresponds and harmonizes with the expressions of God's word...as one instrument of music of itself to another in harmony and accord ("Misc." 126, 13:290)."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Robert E. Brown, "The Bible," in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, 93. See also, Doug Sweeny, "Jonathan Edwards on the character of scripture and its readers," a paper given at the Jonathan Edwards Congress, Melbourne 2015. From the paper's synopsis, "Edwards believed deep in his bones that the Bible was divine. He also judged correlatively, that the people best

Though read somewhat differently to Bernard, Jonathan Edwards nevertheless shared a similar understanding of the Bible's usage in the regenerating paths of the Christian life. In sum, it was not an end in itself or an object of worship but a sacred vehicle of Christ's invitational and converting voice. Scriptural truth and grace, for Edwards, needed to closely coincide with the indwelling truth and grace imparted by the Holy Spirit. It did not simply exist on a page or in a book.

Seemingly just as important for Edwards in terms of an apologetic base for his proposed doctrine in "A Divine and Supernatural Light" was the rationality of it. "'Tis rational," is a repeated rhetorical refrain throughout his three-point defence of the special grace of divine light; one made consciously to counter any charge of destabilising religious emotionality or theological determinism from both Deist and Arminian viewpoints.

And at this juncture, Edwards reminds his listeners—and future readers—that God's method of communication need not conform to human norms or expectations. Indeed, transcendence logically of and in itself, is so "exceedingly different," containing such a fullness of excellency, wisdom, holiness, majesty and other divine perfections, "that the word of men, yea the wisest of men, should appear mean and base in comparison of it."<sup>60</sup> Due to such an obvious difference between God and humanity, Edwards then states that such divine glory will naturally be veiled to the eye of the wicked, given that sin clearly blinds those already within "secular matters," so how could they possibly begin to see God's beauty and excellence?<sup>61</sup>

Finally, by way of a highly rational and nuanced argument, Edwards supports the free gifting and immediacy of divine light, again in terms of humanity's incapacity to lay hold of something that is

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equipped to understand its scope and teachings and interpret them for others were the one with "the mind of Christ." *Jonathan Edwards Congress Handbook*, 8.

<sup>60</sup> *WJE* 17:420.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.

ontologically and spiritually well beyond it. Importantly he does not deny that human reason or “ratiocination” is a vital participant in the apprehension and propagation of truth, but that these cognitive capacities simply fall short in the apprehension and full reception of converting grace. He states:

It is out of reason’s province to perceive the beauty or loveliness of anything: such a perception don’t belong to that faculty. Reason’s work is to perceive truth, and not excellency. ‘Tis not ratiocination that gives men the perception of the beauty of amiableness of a countenance; though it may be many ways indirectly an advantage to it; yet ‘tis no more reason that immediately perceives it, than is reason that perceives the sweetness of honey: it depends on the sense of the heart. Reason may determine that a countenance is beautiful to others; it may determine that honey is sweet to others; but it will never give me a perception of its sweetness.<sup>62</sup>

**f) “Improvement” (claiming the existential moment)**

Edwards’ summary of “A Divine and Supernatural Light” or its “Improvement” is succinct, though theologically dense. He obviously expected much of his listeners and readers. And ironically so given the cognitive capacity needed to engage or remember most things fully at such a late stage in the delivery process. Significantly though, he begins his conclusion by stating, “This doctrine may lead us to reflect on the goodness of God.”<sup>63</sup> As indicated earlier in this chapter, the journey down the mountain for Edwards is a progressive movement beyond the abstract into the existential. For the goodness of God in this textual sense is not simply a conceptual or ethical value. Rather, like God’s expressive beauty and truth, it is an enfolding theological category of Being in saving relation, not via speculative thought. Therefore, goodness is a quality of God’s being to happily participate within. And by virtue of such a vitalising participation, one’s relational disposition is constantly changed and charged by divine goodness.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 422.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 423.

## 5.9 Affectivity as the substance of the Christian life

Across all written and spoken forms of Edwards' theological reflection, he held out the hope that all might experience a relationship with the God of goodness and illuminating light. The saving, enfolding mystery of the Trinity was consistently both the subject and object of both his preaching and teaching. Indeed, as most recent commentators have suggested, it was his chief organising theological principle;<sup>64</sup> "principle" being the operative word here because it implies more than an idea but points toward a core transformative reality. Congruently then, as he begins to sketch out his improvement towards the end of the sermon, Edwards asks a question of his community and readership about self-examination, that being, "whether the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, hath shined into us...?" And if that not be the present case, all are "earnestly" exhorted to seek it in the present moment. Edwards was a theologically astute evangelist. His congregants had substantive reasons, by virtue of thoroughness of argument, to respond or not to respond.

It is within his four concluding considerations of the above summary points that Edwards mirrors his own familiarity with, and continued desire for, affective response. He does this by artistically employing a persuasive aesthetic and urgency of religious language. It is as if the existential moment has now fully arrived, to land the sermon within the potentiality of his ultimate subject matter; the drawing and vivifying nature of the divine and supernatural light, which is no less than the revealed glory of the Godhead in the present moment, time and space, calling all who will listen to places of repentance and new life.

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<sup>64</sup> For example, Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards Theology: A Reinterpretation*, 3-5. "... Jonathan Edwards' theology is fundamentally Trinitarian. Edwards' account of the Trinity is the anchor, or in his words, the *fountain* of all that is." 4.

To quote without comment from the first consideration:

Yea, the glimpse of the glory of God in the face of Christ doth more exalt and ennoble the soul, than all the knowledge of those that have the greatest speculative knowledge understanding in divinity, without grace.<sup>65</sup>

And from the second:

This spiritual light is the dawning of the light of glory in the heart. There is nothing so powerful as this to support persons in affliction, and to give the mind peace and brightness, in this stormy and dark world.<sup>66</sup>

From the third:

This light, and this only, will bring the soul to a saving close with Christ. It conforms the heart to the gospel, mortifies its enmity and opposition against the scheme of salvation therein revealed: it causes the heart to embrace the joy tidings and entirely to adhere to, and acquiesce in the revelation of Christ as our saviour; it causes the whole soul to accord and symphonise with it, admitting it with entire credit and respect, cleaving to it with full inclination and affection.<sup>67</sup>

And finally, from the fourth:

But this light, as it reaches to the bottom of the heart, and changes the nature, so it will effectively dispose to a universal obedience... It draws forth the heart in sincere love to God, which is the only principle of a true, gracious and universal obedience.<sup>68</sup>

By means of any thoughtful analysis, the language of Jonathan Edwards' preaching at this juncture is striking in its appeal to faith in a God of visible and holy grace by way of openly disposed affections. For in Edwards' terms, this is the relational light of reunification, that is, the healing of fractured, unattuned and fractious being. It is consolation within pain and suffering, renewed vocational purpose, and the love of God as life's gift and guide for creative being.

Critically for the modern reader and the pastoral minister, the challenge of Edwards' theological position lies in the sovereign freedom of God to be operative within the world by means of a special, redemptive grace. And whilst not dependent upon common graces of existence, this apprehended God of Edwards is not destructive or dismissive of them either. For in the preacher's

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 424.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.,424-5.

estimation, human finitude, embraced within the self-offering of God's goodness, truth and beauty, is able to bear the infinite by being moved by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Such a participatory paradox, then, becomes the very creative energy and hope (*telos*) of the Christian life itself. And if it be that way for the Christian life, it has ready implications for the pastoral disposition of Christian ministry. This I will raise in more specific terms in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

"A Divine and Supernatural Light" was a renewing word of proclamation for a particular time and place. However, its proven ability to transcend either, by virtue of its clarity of theological vision via the inviting possibility of Edwards' affected vision and language, is testimony to the gravitas of his own ongoing converting experiences. It is also stark evidence of his considerable capacities to communicate evangelical imperatives for the sake of a spiritual flourishing of the individual and faith communities as a whole.

Nevertheless, "A Divine and Supernatural Light" and other sermons like it in the Edwards canon do not offer a blueprint for modern day revivals or a ready-made ecclesial program to implement. Rather, both his sermon's strength and its 'foolishness' rests upon a trust in the invisible God as the perpetual giver of visible, discernible graces. For as the author of salvation, it is also God who will draw all things to a grand and final consummation. That is not to suggest that human cooperation and participation in grace's extension to the world is not a vital sub-plot within the whole redemption narrative, however it is to theologially [re]state unapologetically as to where the originating love for life flows from and to whom it returns complete. Then, as now, such a pivotal element of the Christian faith—God as author *and* completion—was readily blurred or lost in the harried desire to make God's kingdom come, that is, with or without God's spiritual presence and carefully discerned guidance. I believe this is a timely word for those presently

engaged in pastoral practice and who seek to reflect in their own being, the goodness and countenance of Christ.

In his *Treatise on Grace* written sometime between 1739 and 1743, and published posthumously,<sup>69</sup> Edwards gave fuller attention than he was able to do in “A Divine and Supernatural Light” to the special light of grace that is given freely and is to have immediate, transformative effect upon the human soul. Grace in this salvific context is once more posited as the third person of the Holy Trinity by Edwards, not simply another natural or impersonal force within human experience. Therefore, such a gifting and revelation of God begs a wonder and reverence, an “evangelical humiliation” and a grateful dependency. Poignantly and again pastorally, Edwards makes a case for the primacy of grace in all things religious, most specifically in thought and practice. With the following summarising quotation, I will conclude this chapter before moving on to the next. There I will seek to bring the theological and pastoral worlds of Bernard and Edwards’ closer together for the sake of a remarkably shared vision of both faith and the salvific potentialities of pastoral ministry:

Therefore, it follows that saving grace in the heart, can’t be produced in man by mere exercise of what perfections he has in him already, though never much assisted by moral suasion, and never so much assisted in the exercise of his natural principles, unless there be something more than all this, viz an *immediate infusion or operation of the Divine Being* upon the soul. Grace must be the immediate work of God, and properly a production of his almighty power on the soul.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> See, “Treatise on Grace,” an introduction to the full treatise by Sang Hyun Lee in *WJE* 21:149-152.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 165. Emphasis added.

*To love as Christ loved, to walk in the way laid out for the disciples in the gospel, is to enter into the dynamic giving and receiving of infinite love that are the very core of God's being, revealed to us in Christ and shared with us in the gift of the Spirit. It is to walk toward the Father with Christ, as sons and daughters, and to be part of the community of love his Spirit has formed in the church. For that reason, it is only in Christlike love that the mystery of God's transcendent being is made open to us, as goal and as invitation.*

**Brian E. Daley, SJ**<sup>1</sup>

*The Christian life begins with love. It also ends with love, so far as it has an end as human life in time. There is nothing that we can or must do as a Christian, or to become a Christian, prior to love. Even faith does not anticipate love. As we come to faith, we begin to love.*

**Karl Barth**<sup>2</sup>

*Perhaps in no area of theology is it more important to keep in mind that in trinitarian theology that the 'object' upon which we reflect is another 'subject' or 'self', namely the God who relentlessly pursues us to become partners in communion. God who is Love chooses to be known by love, thus theological knowledge is personal knowledge. Theological knowledge is as much a matter of 'being grasped by' God as 'grasping' God, of 'being conceived by' God as 'conceiving' God.*

**Catherine Mowry LaCugna**<sup>3</sup>

## Chapter Six

### **Bernard and Edwards in Conversation with Contemporary Expressions of Theology and Pastoral Practice**

#### **6.1 Introduction and trajectory of the chapter into the next**

As indicated previously, significant theological and pastoral principles arising from the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux and Jonathan Edwards will find an applicable focus in what I am describing as six key dispositions for affective pastoral ministry. That listing and those considerations will be the content of the final chapter. What immediately follows is a precursory discussion that will act as a foundation for interpretation and argument. This chapter will begin with the identification of a seminal and binding thread in the pastoral theologising of each reformer.

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<sup>1</sup> Brian E. Daley, SJ, "Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus on the Trinity" in, *The Holy Trinity in the Life of the Church* ed. Khaled Anatolios (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 99.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, 2.18.2, 371.

<sup>3</sup> Catherine LaCugna, *God For Us*, 332.

In short, both Bernard and Edwards emphasize the gift of participation (2 Peter 1:4) within the relational nature of God through the unifying operation of the Spirit (Romans 5:5)—the One who both creates and sustains a pastoral disposition of receptive, desirous and participatory faith. This affectively-charged stance toward God and the world in contrast to present skills-based/imitative models of western theology and ministry education has, I will contend, both the capacity and relational energy to create flourishing environments by virtue of a radicalised trust in God as the primary agent (Shepherd) of Christian ministry. Into this discussion, I will introduce two contemporary schools of practical theology that, whilst divergent in terms of emphasis on human and divine agency, remain dependent upon Trinitarian expressions of spirituality for the sake of pastoral vitality and competence.

Given the theological stress of Bernard and Edwards on God's gracious and interpersonal being, the concluding chapter will seek to outline six key attending forms of affected pastoral disposition that mirror, at least in analogous form, the redemptively expressive Triune nature of God. These responsive and potentially redeeming stances are: Humility, Spiritual Longing, Deep Listening, A Wise and Discerning Bearing, Artistic Inclinations and Movements of Compassion.

By way of contrast to recent literature on the practice of Christian ministry, the spirituality of being in Christ (Gk. *en Christou*) and working within the call to pastoral ministry is both my starting and ending point.<sup>4</sup> Through the complementary lenses of Bernard, Edwards and the New Testament, I will present a working understanding of Christian ministry which is not defined immediately by specific actions (skill sets) or even virtuous behaviours, important as these surely are. Rather, my greater interest lies with an intentional way of being in community that is

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<sup>4</sup> Obviously, there are notable exceptions to the rule, Douglas Purnell's, *Being in Ministry: Honestly, Openly, and Deeply* (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF & STOCK, 2010) is but one. In his introduction he writes, "Whether as a priest or a layperson, in the ordinary experiences of life, we are not alone. It requires courage to "be" in the face of existential anxiety, and a priestly person more than most is required to enter life's toughest places with the people given to his or her care. In these tough places the priestly person discerns and mediates in some way the blessing of God." xxi.

characterised by a receptive and trusting stance towards the saving grace of God; a way of being in word, deed and relation of those very same, dynamic graces.

Central to such a focused emphasis on pastoral disposition is the embrace of God (Luke 15:20) that is radicalising in its personal and vocational impact. In broader terms, experiences of merciful love have the capacity to undermine rigid self-reliant and anxious self-justifying stances (Luke 18: 9-14), moving the will from entrenched positions of self-preservation which are often injurious to others to places of conscious vulnerability that are open, creative and self-giving. Paradoxically, it is within and through repeated divestments of personal determination and control that the vivifying forces of divine love (*affectus*) give rise to levels of fruitful self-offering perhaps previously unimagined in terms of longevity and communal benefit. A short reflection on prayer by Thomas Merton illustrates the shaping quality of spiritual relinquishment:

The great thing in prayer is not to pray but go directly to God... forget yourself. Enter into the prayer of Jesus. Let him pray in you. The best way to pray is: *stop*. Let prayer pray within you, whether you know it or not.<sup>5</sup>

However, before I make further inroads into the stated trajectories of these final chapters, two hermeneutical considerations are in need of naming and outlining—the role of a polemic at large within this thesis and the principles of historical interpretation when considering contemporary application.

## 6.2 Polemic

Due to Bernard and Edwards' intensity of theological and pastoral conviction, each demonstrated a propensity toward polemical expression. In fact, it is as if each enjoyed the opportunity to define

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Pocket Thomas Merton* ed. Robert Inchausti (Boston: New Seeds, 2005), 84-85. Another voice from the mystical tradition who is regularly mentioned in relation to spiritual relinquishment (emptiness) is Meister Eckhart (1260-1328). Paraphrased recently, his focal point is very clear: "My life is like a page on which so much is already written: hurts and joys and the tumble of fears and uncertainties. What You want of me, God, is that I clean the slate, emptying it of all this to make room for the freedom of nothingness where alone You, my God, have room to grow." See, Jon M. Sweeny & Mark S. Burrows, translators, *Meister Eckhart's Book of Heart: Meditations for the Restless Soul* (Charlottesville: Hampton Roads Publishing, 2017), 14.

their theological position via the sharp critique of others. This approach was often effective by virtue of their own rhetorical brilliance, though frequently erroneous in terms of their willing caricature of both person and position. For example, Bernard's written and highly critical evaluation of an otherwise devout and thoughtful Abelard, whilst admittedly seeking to be protective of the Church from the fractious ways of heresy, was nevertheless a needless assassination of character from an entrenched yet unconscious position of ecclesial power and prestige.<sup>6</sup>

Polemic is not my overriding intent, yet it does reside as an energising component of this thesis. Simply stated, to make a claim for the "still vital importance of spiritually affective pastoral practice" is logically to suggest a present deficiency of spiritually affective practice—a perspective that is clear by what I have already written and will expand further upon within this chapter. Pointedly, though, I do recognise personal contradictions and many omissions within my vocational practice so that any polemic offered is not merely an exercise in blame or criticism. Rather, I write out of an expressed hope for more congruent and fruitful possibilities, i.e. for all who seriously engage the pastoral calling, myself included. For in the end, I am advocating a more intentionally vulnerable exposure to and awareness of divine love for the sake of ecclesial and pastoral reform. I am not suggesting a tried and true blueprint for such reform.

Finally, I readily admit that there exists a certain idealism in my writing since many Christians have lived faithfully and affectively with only selective glimpses of divine glory and love throughout their lives. Gregory of Nyssa, St. John of the Cross and Mother Theresa of Calcutta are living examples of this reality, cum mystery of unsated desire and symbolic of a determination to keep on praying for grace in the world and themselves irrespective of feeling or situation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> G. R. Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 115-123.

<sup>7</sup> See, Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses* trans. Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 111-120. "This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see him. But one must always, by looking at what they can

### 6.3 Principle not specifics

Each reformer's unique theological confession and pastoral circumstance ought to serve as a sign of caution within such a discussion as this. Bernard's and Edwards' respective time and place within human history coincide with complex issues such as language, culture, assumed world views, limitation of scientific knowledge, prejudices, and foibles, which make specific application from their writings questionable at best and academically irresponsible at worst. However, not unlike reading any authoritative text from past ages, applicable principles of thought can be carefully gleaned and explicated.

Specifically, in this context, both the abbot's and revivalist preacher's contemplative stance in perceiving the beautiful means and healing ends of God coupled with artistic ways of communicating what they saw and heard in their experience, can, I contend, credibly interface with what is presently true to pastoral ministries and religious experience. Furthermore, Bernard and Edwards' spiritually attuned pastoral principles, I believe, are good grist for the ever-turning mill of theological reflection in relation to the desired hope for imaginative and fruitful ministry practices in current, complex social environments.

That said, neither man is beyond reproach as an individual, a Christian leader or a writer. In Edwards' case, such as the previously mentioned wilful fencing the communion table at Northampton or preaching a fear (near panic) inducing sermon is indicative of the pastoral disposition in constant need of expanding grace! However, like many influential Christian thinkers that have not remained true to their own espoused high ideals and public persona, viz. John Wesley, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Thomas Merton et al, they have remained credible figures within

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see, rekindle their desire to see more." 116. See also, Harvey D. Egan, *Soundings in the Christian Mystical Tradition*, "John of the Cross," 250-256.

the Christian tradition because of their substantive body of reflective and honest thought. Thus, they are deserving of careful interpretation and wise application.<sup>8</sup>

## 6.4 Common threads in Bernard of Clairvaux and Jonathan Edwards

As noted recurrently in previous chapters, Bernard and Edwards wrote and preached from deeply affected, thus well-examined faith perspectives. Each in their own unique context assumed that the initiating and converting nature of God's grace underpinned intelligible theology and that a consenting disposition before the God of love engaged a desire for spiritual wisdom and vocational fidelity. Theology for both reformers was not an end in itself. Rather, it was pastorally conceived, written, taught and preached to encourage a similar inclination of affective being in those to whom they offered pastoral ministry.

### a) Form

As I have shown through the writings of each reformer, the Christian Gospel was more than a scripted message about divine love. It was even more than what Bernard and Edwards sought to embody given each's propensity toward firm opinion and damaging behaviour. More to the point for this particular study, each man pastorally communicated the *affectus* of divine love (*agape/amor/delectio*) within striking forms of congruent, creative expression. Energised by the affecting experience of grace, their distinctive forms of preaching and writing sought to reflect the aesthetically redemptive form or Form they experienced God to be.<sup>9</sup> Their various expressions of pastoral perspective, therefore, were based on a radical sense of expectant, self-emptying

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<sup>8</sup> The four men named each had history and issues with sexual transgression. Consensual as some relationships may have been, the relational dynamic nevertheless reflected a power imbalance largely due to their elevated spiritual or theological standings. Thomas Merton is perhaps the most candid about his own culpabilities i.e., his "inconsistency," "imprudence," and "frivolity" through his now published personal journals, however the reader is left wondering what long-term impact his behaviour had upon the unnamed ("M"), much younger woman in question. See, Thomas Merton, *Learning to Love: The Journals of Thomas Merton* vol. 6, ed. Christine M. Bochen (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), 215.

<sup>9</sup> The farmer / poet, Wendell Berry expresses this as the poet's intention and hope that he, "May live a while with light, shaking / In high leaves, or delayed / In halts of song, submit to making / The shape of what is made." From, *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*, 1981, I, 35.

(Philippians 2:5-8), not self-sufficiency or a self-aggrandisement. Not surprisingly, Hans Urs von Balthasar uses a lyrical tenor to explain this core principle of a vocationally expressive faith:

Faith in the full Christian sense can be nothing other than this: to make the whole man (sic) a space that responds to the divine content. Faith attunes man to this sound; it confers on man the ability to react precisely to this divine experiment, preparing him to be a violin that receives just this touch of the bow, to serve as material for just this house to be built, to provide the rhyme for just this verse being composed. This was the reaction already envisaged when the Covenant was made on Sinai: "Be holy, because I am holy."<sup>10</sup>

### **b) The experience of relational, triune grace**

At the core of Bernard and Edward's religious experience and vocational expression was the saving, restoring activity of the God. Theirs was obviously a not a god bound by philosophical rules or conceptual constraint. As theologians with specific charisms and pastoral intent, the truth of the Christian gospel was validated by incarnational, tangible graces. Goodness was expressive of an ennobling, restorative love. And indeed, as I have sought to demonstrate through the writings of each reformer, the awe and beauty of the Triune Mystery was by no means a theological abstraction nor an inaccessible doctrine to subscribe to mindlessly. Rather, in their writing and proclamation, relationally communicable beauty was constituent of the manner in which God's personhood extends grace to the world; that is, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, through the enfolding love and wisdom of the Son, and to the honour and originating glory of the Father. Such a redemptive embrace and resultant beatifying vision—of which each reformer knew by contemplative experience—was the creative ground of their vocational energies and, ideally, the embodied disposition and pattern of communication within their own pastoral and missional charges.

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<sup>10</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. 1. Seeing the Form*, 220.

I believe it is equally true to say of Edwards and Bernard, then, by means of their soteriological emphasis on participation within the relationally dispositional nature of God's love and holiness<sup>11</sup> that the Christian life in general and vocational practice in particular is a call to countenance, however dimly or brightly, the divine reality of "being as communion."<sup>12</sup> For significantly in the context of pastoral ministry practice, a disposition spiritually open towards the Trinity's beauty of relation is always potentially harmonising, reconciling and healing in its communicative nature. And because it is continually reshaped by the dynamic of divine, ecstatic love, its communicative nature will not be passive or self-inclined. Therefore, the received beauty of God is relationally expressive, not philosophically or morally static. God is not a lofty and complex idea to protect. For both pastoral reformers, God is a present and simple reality to live continuously into close relation.

In sum, divine beauty is simultaneously an infusive and effusive love as is declared by the celebrated Italian poet, Dante, that not only spins individual desire and the will (*velle*) but is experienced to be the very same love which wondrously "moves the sun and the other stars" (*l'Amor che move il sole e l'altre stele*).<sup>13</sup>

## 6.5 A beauty of relation as compared to the function of relation

In light of the above discussion, I believe it is reasonable to suggest that the redemptive life of the Christian is, by gift of spiritual / mystical union (*unio*) or engrafting,<sup>14</sup> reflective of the radiance of

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<sup>11</sup> The emphasis here is upon the economy of God's saving grace, not upon God's essence *in se*. Neither reformer would deny the existence of the intrinsic beauty of God (*in se*) but would want to argue that what is intrinsic is eternally and naturally expressive, thus knowable as self-revelation to humankind. It is the extrinsic beauty that ultimately captures the human heart and positively shapes the affections.

<sup>12</sup> See, John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion; Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1993), 83-89. "If God's being is by nature relational, and if it can be signified by the word "substance," can we not then conclude almost inevitably that, given the ultimate character of God's being for all ontology, substance, inasmuch as it signifies the ultimate character of being, can be conceived only as communion?" 84.

<sup>13</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, 33.143-145, 667.

<sup>14</sup> This is an important word in a sacramental context for John Calvin. See, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2 ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), Book 4.17.33. "But its (the Eucharist's) dignity is wonderfully enough commended when we hold that it is a help whereby we may be engrafted into Christ's body, or, engrafted, may grow more and more together with

divine and joyful communion (Hebrews 1:3). Or to put it another way, beauty in relating is the primal state of the affective and, by extension, creative way of Christian being (Psalm 133). It need not be considered an optional extra or beyond one's mortal grasp. For a spiritually unified sensibility, born and sustained by enfolding grace, has a certain theological normalcy and pastoral veracity that Bernard and Edwards knew well. Indeed, it was foundational to all their theologising, whether it be of a more systematic or practical nature. The personal and/or communal experience of an infused healing grace gave rise to all else, including theological reflection and the missional shape of an effusive Christian life.

It is my present contention that such a graced premise of the Christian life is not well understood or practiced in the late modern era. Close human experience of God, unlike Bernard's pressing and living text in continual need of study,<sup>15</sup> remains subject to suspicion (given its tendency towards emotional or moral extremism) and is therefore not seriously considered to be a reliable or verifiable source of theological knowledge. Due to this rationalist or immanent bias (malaise) of Western culture and academy, and what theologian Eberhard Jüngel has called the cultural "placelessness of God,"<sup>16</sup> theology and the bible are regularly explicated in second or third person by means of careful textual analysis that, according to its authors, should ideally result in an informed vision of faith to try and live by.<sup>17</sup> In this schema, experience of a surprising and perhaps subverting grace, viz. the "deep" incarnational nature God revealed squarely within the immanent

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him, until he perfectly joins us with him in the heavenly life." 1407-1408. See also, Matthew Myer Boulton, *Life in God: John Calvin, Practical Formation, and the Future of Protestant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Press, 2011), 180-187.

<sup>15</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, I, 3.1.1, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 3-4.

<sup>17</sup> With regards a present contextual example, see, Geoff Thompson, *A Genuinely Theological Church: Ministry, Theology and the Uniting Church* (Melbourne: Uniting Academic Press, 2018): "Theology is the church's ongoing historically-shaped, critical, imaginative and constructive reflection on the biblical witness to early Christianity's puzzling proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth as Israel's suffering Messiah and the world's reconciling Lord." 10. The complete absence of (trustworthy and doxologically responsive) personal experience of God listed in this and further parts of Thompson's definition, is disquieting for the lack of experiential, transcendent grace as a potential teacher and guide within the Christian life. In short, God is the object of human theologising rather than its defining and shaping subject.

frame,<sup>18</sup> is often filtered by an overriding need to be theologically objective and socially unembarrassed, thus remain academically credible.

So far as theological ministry training is concerned within a regulatory Australian higher educational system—and upon which theological institutions have become dependent for accreditation and funding—ideals of pragmatic function and goal, namely task, contract, skillsets, competence, teaching separate from research practices (“teaching specialists”), competition, measurable outcomes, and “job ready” graduates, now tend to dominate tertiary language and shape educational processes.<sup>19</sup> As a direct result of societal pressures toward causal efficiencies,<sup>20</sup> a theological rationale which posits God’s operative grace as still being foundational to a relationally orientated and wise pastoral character, readily becomes a secondary, if not unmeasurable consideration. In its place is a faster-paced trajectory of ministry training which includes the figurative creation of a “toolbox” of innovative and effective ministry implements fashioned to be used in the immediate term. Either that, or within teaching schedules there is simply not the time to focus on the often hidden, yet still vital, curriculum of theological education and formational training.<sup>21</sup> And while I am not proposing any easy resolution, I am seeking to name a tension or divide that will only increase in the midst of the social marginalisation of the Christian Church and its higher educational institutions. That said, this reality may also be a

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<sup>18</sup> See, Denis Edwards, *Partaking of God*, 58-64. Guided by Athanasius’ theological insistence upon the concrete reality of God’s willing condescension into flesh and blood (John 1:14), Edwards [et al] suggests that this Triune energy and transcendent presence extends to the whole of the created order. He proposes, “... in the unique incarnation of the Word in Jesus of Nazareth, God embraces our wider humanity, and the wider community of life on Earth, and the whole evolutionary universe of which we are a part.” 59. Arguably, this is not pantheism by another name but a radicalisation (return to the centre) of the doctrine of Incarnation.

<sup>19</sup> ABC, Adelaide 891 (David Bevan) Radio interview with Flinders University Vice-Chancellor, Professor Colin Stirling, 19/10/18. Stirling was defending the retrenchment of a long-standing humanities professor who was well known for his research-based teaching methods, particularly amongst post-graduate students. His repeated line of argument for the needed employment of “teaching specialist’s” over and against research orientated teachers was based on the “exciting” prospect of new methods of “skills-based” teaching in our “fast-changing” world.

<sup>20</sup> This being indicative of what Charles Taylor describes as the secular age, whereby “disenchantment” (the loss of final causation) gives rise to the veneration of efficient / immanent causation. See, James K.A. Smith, *How (Not) to be Secular*, 42.

<sup>21</sup> See, *Learning and Teaching Theology: Some Ways Ahead*, editors Les Ball & James R. Harrison (Northcote: Morning Star Publishing, 2014). Integrated models of teaching and learning are underscored in this collection of conference papers. “Deep personal learning” for the sake of adaptability and imaginative ministry practice, is a constant theme throughout. It is recognised that curriculum and teacher proficiency can only go so far. More to the point is the quality of the learning environment, in that it provides consciously fertile (transformational) space for needed connections of faith and life to be made. Theology is not simply a cognitive exercise, therefore. By its very nature, it can and does need to address issues of soul. 59-69.

needed catalyst for their renewal of educational, spiritual and communal life, albeit in modest, missionally specific contexts.<sup>22</sup>

So, whilst a skills-based learning trajectory currently undertaken by sections of the Christian Church for the sake of greater levels of effective practice does have contextual or compliance merit, the incremental formation of human beings in a loving and virtuously ordered<sup>23</sup> disposition before God (Psalm 131) is habitually assumed to have little educational or missional application.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, when posited as a foundational aspect of and for pastoral practice, the contemplative stance assumed and encouraged by the evangelically motivated Bernard and Edwards is still largely considered to be a posture of disengaged passivity. It seems something more always needs to be achieved for God, whether or not such envisioned goals be reflective of God's own dispositional being of saving love. Consequently, in such anxiously driven environments, theology as a discipline—and under justifiable pressure to reclaim its missional heart—has tended to yield to restless and abstract imperatives of the now clichéd notion of the *missio Dei*.<sup>25</sup> By this I mean that influential schools and large personalities of missiology have become eager—though not

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<sup>22</sup> See, Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning* (Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2014). Shaw's particular context was the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Lebanon. He writes of its remaking of curriculum and reshaping pedagogy, 2000-2005: "The curriculum began with the basic premise that genuine formation of faithful men and women takes place only when multidimensional learning is intentionally designed and incorporated through a balanced embrace of the cognitive, affective and behavioural learning domains. Consequently, the curriculum has taken seriously the need to bring integration between academic excellence, personal formation and growth, and the development of leadership skills and qualities." 4.

<sup>23</sup> See, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986): "Disposition, literally translated, means "being set out in order", "the ordering of parts", "being in a particular state or order". It is something existential and personal... It is orientated to the Word manifested in being, to the light which shines through life, to revelation and the summons which, in grace, it addresses to us." 119-120.

<sup>24</sup> Though not writing from a religiously contemplative stance, the oft-quoted philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre, does make the distinction between "exterior" and "internal" goods that pertain to virtuous (lasting) practice or not. Those which are purely exterior, he suggests, "...are therefore characteristically objects of competition in which there must be losers as well as winners. Internal goods are indeed the outcome of competition to excel, but it is characteristic of them that their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice. So, when Turner transformed the seascape in a painting or W.G. Grace advanced the art of batting in cricket in a quite new way their achievement enriched the whole relevant community." From, Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2007), 190-191.

<sup>25</sup> See, Geoff Thompson, *A Genuinely Theological Church*, 29-32.

necessarily prudent—substitutes for an otherwise theologically attentive and reflective basis for the Church’s missional life.<sup>26</sup>

## 6.6 A contemplative basis for contemporary pastoral practice

For the above considerations, I am proposing that a vital link still exists between contemplatively engaged spiritual affections and effectual pastoral practice in contemporary environments. In this regard, the writings of Bernard and Edwards are rich sources of theological and pastoral insight, with each implicitly challenging the perennial proclivity towards ecclesial functionality at the expense of a defining trust in, and pastoral embodiment of, divine agency. And, by virtue of strategic focus on human agency, the existential reception and celebration of grace is inadvertently minimised within the faith formation of the pastor.<sup>27</sup> In sum, the two pastoral reformers insistence upon a primary agency of the Spirit in and through all pastoral activity, is confronting by virtue of its biblical and theological legitimacy. Such a restated primacy is liberating in terms of personal identity within vocational expression.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Although the dictum of ‘participation in the *missio Dei*’ that arose from the ground breaking work of David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), is commonly rehearsed in missiological discussions, much appears to be assumed about the need and urgency of the Church’s mission with secondary attention, even a legitimization of practice, given over to the Trinitarian nature of God from whom redemptive love processes. On the question of a consciously contemplative theology that is, in contrast to more systematic expressions of the same, I am aware that such a stance has not been all that common (this is changing), though it is certainly not without significant precedent. The majority of the Patristic shepherds understood and pastorally practiced theology in prayerful, visionary and explorative ways. The rise of scholasticism, for all its due clarity of thought, tended to move away from its worship and community base into the academy, and this has been its major weakness. Also, in the Protestant tradition, a need for doctrinal purity has also unintentionally separated an overly defined subject—theology—from its greater (mysterious) object—*God*. Within a semi-recent catholic context, in a letter sent to Hans Urs von Balthasar by Thomas Merton in late 1964, the Trappist monk expressed his gratitude for the writing and publishing of *The Glory (Herrlichkeit) of the Lord; A Theological Aesthetics* vol. 1. He wrote, “Really I am most grateful, as this is exactly what I have been looking for: a truly contemplative theology, for which we have been starved for so many centuries... I am so grateful to you for daring to launch out into this *fruito* [enjoyment] and *intellectus* [understanding].” Thomas Merton, *The School of Charity: Letters on Religious Renewal and Spiritual Direction*, ed. Brother Patrick Hart (New York: HBJ Book, 1990), 241.

<sup>27</sup> Here I am again reminded of Bernard’s injunction to church leaders in Sermon 18: “If you are mean (a criminal) to yourself, to whom will you be good?”

<sup>28</sup> In novel form, two helpful examples readily come to mind, those being Fr. M. Le Cure, in Georges Bernanos’ *The Diary of a Country Priest* (London: HarperCollins Religious, 1977) and Pastor John Ames, in Marilynne Robinson’s, *Gilead* (New York: Picador, 2004). Each ministered from interior places of simplicity and humility predicated on the all-pervading nature of God’s grace. Fr. Le Cure’s final words after personal long-suffering, “Grace is... everywhere.” has become synonymous with a more contemplative approach to Christian life and service, i.e., seeing God at work in all and through all and seeking to help others to see what they can see. See also, Andrew Root, *The Pastor in Secular Age*, 273-281. In these final pages—and via the pastoral example of Eugene Peterson—Root grounds the pastoral vocation in teaching others to pray. In the context of the preceding chapters, the author locates prayer as the dispositional place of release from the constrictive immanent frame or malaise, so as to see again transcendence operative redemptively in our midst. Accordingly he writes: “A more faithful—and realistic—option is simply, but profoundly, teach people to pray, so that instead of buying up their immanent attentions, we can together as a community take on

As has also been shown, both Bernard and Edwards sought a middle though demanding path between perceived extremes of either overly rational or emotive platforms for Christian thought and practice. Each excess or imbalance, in their view, was demonstrative of a lack of contemplative and consensual orientation towards the Tri-unity of love. By logical extension, then, such inconsistency resulted in a deficiency of the love and wisdom needed for the fruitful service of God's people. For both Bernard and Edwards, grace first needed to be wedded to the human soul, transforming both will and action in conformity to the relational nature of God, before it could become a ready pronouncement or enactment of religious knowledge. In other words, grace cannot be speculated about carelessly or celebrated superficially. It needs to be ingested, thus embodied, the spiritual fruit of which is then clearly discernible (Matthew 7:16).

Contemplation, or "complacency" in the Edwards lexicon, properly understood within this vocational context, is a yielding, generative place of listening for the personalised and commissioning Word (John 20:16). It is a repeated learning to be loved into the affective and liberated service of others. Consequently, a contemplative, receptive stance, far from being sequestered unto itself as the wrongly presumed dichotomy between the active and reflective life suggests, can actually be a catalyst for the grace of God to be even more evident to the world.

Thomas Merton neatly summarises this conviction, which is generic to both Bernard and Edwards, and is, I believe, foundational to the practice of Christianity in whatever expressive or missional form:

Hence the aim of meditation, in the context of Christian faith, is not to arrive at an objective and scientific knowledge about God but come to know him through the realization that our very being is being penetrated with his knowledge and love for us. Our knowledge of God is paradoxically a knowledge not of him as the object of our scrutiny, but of ourselves as utterly dependent on his saving and merciful knowledge of us. It is in proportion as we are known to him that we find our real being and identity in Christ. We know him in and through ourselves in so far as his truth is the source of our being and his merciful love is the very heart of our life and existence. We have no other reason for being, except to be loved by him as our Creator and Redeemer, and to love him

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a broader purview that is open to see the divine action coming in and through the encounter of persons in ministry. To be a pastor, then, is simply to be one who prays and teaches others to do the same." 274.

(*affectus mentis*) in return (*affectus operis*). There is no true knowledge of God that does not imply a profound grasp and an intimate personal acceptance of this profound relationship.<sup>29</sup>

Merton's emphasis on God's saving and merciful knowledge of us acts as a corrective to present ecclesial addictions to efficiency, strategic self-reliance and missional productivity, each seemingly (and strangely) disconnected from the language and experience of responsive love. This arguably reflects a present state of divided personal and communal being because, in the identifying words of Michael Leunig, "We cannot hear our heart's truth and thus we have betrayed and belittled ourselves and pledged madness to our children. With skill and pride we have made for ourselves an unhappy society. God be with us. Amen."<sup>30</sup> From the inside, the Christian Church often looks and feels very much like that, too. Spontaneous and abiding expressions of joy based on a loved and purposeful identity, is waning under the stress of what Edwards aptly described as a diligent "practical atheism."<sup>31</sup>

Interestingly, Edwards' use of the above provocative term originated as a critical response to his perceived threat of an articulated Arminianism. In our present context, this atheism, so called, is often fuelled by the anxiety of the Christian Church's tenuous future even as its particular brand of faith expression is often practiced confidently and, at times, arrogantly in the name of God.<sup>32</sup>

Parker Palmer makes this same point when he states, "This kind of [motivating] love does not

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 83.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Leunig, *A Common Prayer* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1991).

<sup>31</sup> *WJE* 17:200-216: "Let us be exhorted to exalt God alone, and to ascribe to him all the glory of redemption. Let us endeavour to obtain, and to increase in, a sensibleness of our great dependence on God... Man is naturally exceeding prone to be exalting himself, and depending on his own power and goodness, as though he were he from whom he must expect happiness, and to have respect to enjoyments alien from God and his Spirit, as those in which in happiness is to be found." 214. Also, *WJE* 17: 45-56.

<sup>32</sup> In a personal journal entry from 1961, Thomas Merton colourfully, yet not inaccurately, described such anxious forms of church behaviour in these terms: "There are men dedicated to God whose lives are full of restlessness and who have no real desire to be alone. They admit that exterior solitude is good, in theory, but they insist that it is far better to preserve interior solitude while living in the midst of others. In practice, their lives are devoured by activities and strangled with attachments. Interior solitude is impossible for them. They fear it. They do everything to escape it. What is worse, they try to draw everyone else into activities as senseless and devouring as their own. They are great promoters of useless work. They love to organize meetings and banquets and conferences and lectures. They print circulars, write letters, talk for hours on the telephone in order that they may gather a hundred people together in a large room where they will fill the air with smoke a make a great deal of noise and roar at one another and clap their hands and stagger home at last patting one another on the back with the assurance that they have all done great things to spread the Kingdom of God." *Turning Toward the World: The Journals of Thomas Merton* vol. 4, 1960-1963, ed. Victor A. Kramer (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 143.

reflect the “functional atheism” we sometimes practice—saying pious words about God’s presence in our lives but believing, on the contrary, that nothing good is going to happen unless we make it happen.”<sup>33</sup>

## **6.7 Conversing with different emphases in the contemporary world of practical theology**

Substantive sections of this chapter and the next draw together theological convictions of Bernard and Jonathan Edwards that are pertinent to the topic and its thesis question regarding the importance of spiritual affections to the posture of pastoral ministry. I have sought to create a foundation of thought for the sake of an intelligible and congruent application within specific aspects of a pastoral disposition. However, it is also my intention to open that conversation up further with reference to a number of contemporary authors, initially from two emphases or “schools” of practical theology, each being North American in origin.

### **a) Andrew Root and “Christopraxis”**

Definitions of practical theology vary subtly depending on whether the stress is placed on divine or human initiative and agency in the practices of pastoral ministry. Whereas the Craig Dykstra school of thought majors on faith and spiritual development, education, virtuous and creative practice, Andrew Root, notwithstanding the need for virtuous and caring human action, has sought to restate the prevenient ministering action of God within and through a receptive, creative state of human “nothingness.”<sup>34</sup> Nothingness, specifically within a practical theology

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<sup>33</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: JosseyBass, 1999), 64. See also, Michael Casey, *Balaam’s Donkey: Random Ruminations for Every Day of the Year* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2018): “We have been formed by this scientific culture, and so we expect that effects will inevitably follow causes. We transpose these assumptions into the spiritual life and presume that appropriate effects will follow once their causes are in place. We think that if we do the right things, right results will follow automatically. We are baffled when we hear that bad things happen to good people.” 307-308.

<sup>34</sup> See, Andrew Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 53-83. Root’s survey reflects his own leaning toward the initiating action of God which translated into a definition of practical theology paraphrased from James Loder. It reads, “Practical Theology is the generative problematic of divine and human action.” He then goes onto suggest that it is in the event of [pastoral] ministry, “that these apparently incongruent forms of reality are fused.” ix. See also, *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* eds. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand

context of the cross (*theologica crucis*), encourages a continual practice of relinquishment which for Root is the necessary and defining Christopraxis of all pastoral expression. “Love,” he writes, “is always in the motion of ministry; it is always the act of going to others to embrace their nothingness.”<sup>35</sup>

Root’s practiced-based notion of “nothingness” is provocative in a positive and even potent contextual understanding of the word. He equates a faith-responsive nothingness with the “foolishness of the cross” (1 Corinthians 2:18-31), which, within a Christological context, is not a hapless passivity in face of evil but a courageous facing of all that is anti-love (deathly) in the world; the redemptive capacity to absorb rampant hatred within the holding love of God, coupled with an abiding trust in Love’s ability to overcome, reconcile and rise anew.

Framed in such a dispositional and relational way, the cross of Christ is less a dramatic event of cosmic transaction (a ransom to the devil or a propitiation of God’s wrath) as a patient embodiment of abiding and deeply transformational love. In short, its powerlessness, so called, is its redemptive power to change. John Caputo, author of *The Weakness of God* argues this persuasively when he writes in light of Paul’s theology of the cross:

The perverse core of Christianity lies in it being a weak force. The weak force of God is embodied in the broken body on the cross, which has thereby been broken loose from being and broken out upon the open plane of the powerless of God. The power of God is not a pagan violence, brute power, or vulgar magic; it is the power of powerlessness, the power of the call, the power of protest that rises up from innocent suffering and calls out against it, the power that says *no* to unjust suffering, and finally the power to suffer-with (*sym-pathos*) innocent suffering, which is perhaps the central Christian symbol.<sup>36</sup>

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Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008). The influential North American Dykstra and Bass school of thought seek to avoid an abstractionism—or perhaps any notion of ‘mysticism’—of theology and practice. Their justifiable (cultural?) concern, therefore, rests in an integral demonstrability of discipleship, of which pastoral ministry is a key shaper and mover within the Christian Church as a whole. Thus, character, practical wisdom, virtue, formation, ethics, spiritual disciplines etc., are duly emphasised; their particular pendulum of thought, then, swinging toward the examined way of human action in the service of the Christian gospel. Accordingly, they write, “The church’s ministers are called to embrace this [Christ’s abundant life in and for the world] way of life and also to lead particular communities of faith to live it in their own situations. To do this, pastors and other ecclesial ministers must be educated and formed in ways of knowing, perceiving, relating and acting that enable such leadership.” 1.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew Root, *Christopraxis*, 133.

<sup>36</sup> John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of Event* (Bloomington, Illinois: Indiana University Press, 2006), 43. See also, Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2001 edition). Moltmann’s “mystical” understanding of the cross event similarly rejects transactional (Anselmic) theologies, yet also passive (Abelardian) theologies that have tended to surround it. He writes, “By claiming that God was on the side of the godless, he

Therefore, nothingness, as an organising pastoral principle, is not a resigned void. Rather, it is active openness towards impossible possibility in terms of a reliance upon an operative grace in the immanent frame and non-attachment to outcome. Its contemporary provocation, then, lies in its conscious inclination towards the possibility of God's saving activity in and through the self-emptying, self-limiting love prior to any predetermined or skilled human agency. Without the inhabitation of that redemptive quality of love, active ministry in Christ's name is a misnomer (John 15:5).

By positing a practical theology within the rigour of biblical and theological interpretation, Root displays a breadth of thought not always evident in contemporary writings geared more towards pastoral practice. His conclusions, though, run the risk of misinterpretation, particularly the perception that he minimises the importance of human action when, in fact, well trained and reflective pastoral agency will always be an imperative so far as the practice of Christian ministry is concerned. In an era of exposed and legally punished clergy misconduct, professional and ethical standards need to be taught and re-taught. Within my own teaching role, I have willingly introduced, clarified and discussed my own denomination's *Ministry Code of Ethics* with ministry students and practitioners. This I have done alongside offering an overarching theological rationale of faith and unity within the Body of Christ.<sup>37</sup>

However, like Root, I would contend that practical theology can provide far more than necessary frameworks for professional practices and ethically principled behaviour. In sum, practical theology need not simply be a clarifying resource for positive and appropriate expressions of

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incited the devout against him and was cast out into the godlessness of Golgotha. The more the mysticism of the cross, the less it can accept Jesus as an example of patience and submission to fate. The more it recognises his active suffering, the less it can make him the archetype of its own weakness." 47.

<sup>37</sup> See, "Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for Ministers in the Uniting Church in Australia (whether in approved Placements or not)" in, *Basis of Union, Constitution & Regulations 2018* (Adelaide: UCA Assembly / MediaCom, 2018). In particular, "This Code is to be applied within the faith and unity of the church as described in the Basis of Union." 1.

pastoral function, or what Root disparagingly describes as an *imitatio Christi*.<sup>38</sup> Rather, it can be, by symbolic means of baptismal immersion and Eucharistic enjoining, a practiced participation in the ongoing ministry of Christ, in and through the unifying power of the Holy Spirit. That is, it can be a *participatio Christi*.<sup>39</sup>

My own conviction is that that pastoral ministry is the ministry of the crucified and risen Christ in which ministers of the gospel participate by ways and means of the Holy Spirit.<sup>40</sup> I fully acknowledge the necessary meeting place of divine action within human action and vice versa. However, in the end I believe it is a defining, interrelated question of disposition, relation and generativity—from where and from whom will ministry practice ultimately derive its affective form and abiding fruitfulness?

#### **b) Andrew Purves and Michael Gorman on cruciform ministry practice**

The question above is addressed by pastoral theologian Andrew Purves in his popularised book, *The Crucifixion of Ministry*. In it, he argues similarly to Root, that it is God, revealed in Christ and operative through the Spirit who is the prime actor in Christian ministry, contrary to both common practice and assumed belief. He writes:

Is ministry something we do, or is ministry something Jesus does? The answer, of course, is *Yes*. We have a ministry, but it is derivative. It depends in every way upon the continuing ministry of Jesus. His ministry is in the present tense. This is the good news. He is not Lord in name only, but also in act, and not only in past act, but in present and future act. Ministry is a theological act.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Root, 72-73. Interestingly, the monk Thomas a Kempis' (ca. 1380-1471) spiritual classic, *Of the Imitation of Christ (De Imitatione Christi)*, trans. Abbot Justin McCann (New York: Mentor Books, 1959), has been one of the widest published and read tracts in the history of western Christendom. As such, its title has become synonymous with a problematic way of Christian being, so that in the words of his translator, Justin McCann, "The *Imitation*—which today would much better be called *The Following* of Christ because "imitate" has an apish connotation, whereas "follower" is an admirer seeking to assimilate the virtues of his leader..."vi.

<sup>39</sup> Root, 72-73.

<sup>40</sup> The stress on "means" is borrowed from Eugene Peterson's, *The Jesus Way* (Colorado Springs: Hodder, 2009). His first chapter, entitled, "The Purification of Means" is insightful in relation to the seduction of culture. He states, "And the means? In one word, Jesus. Jesus, pure and simple. If we want to *participate*, participate in the end, the salvation, the kingdom of God, we must do it in the way that is appropriate to that end. We follow Jesus...We cannot pick and choose ways and means more to our liking. 7.

<sup>41</sup> Andrew Purves, *The Crucifixion of Ministry: Surrendering our Ambitions to the Service of Christ* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2007), 52. Purves provocative thesis that ministry kills ("crucifies") in regard to ego, need for recognition and power etc. Resurrection, thus freedom, is only found via abiding in Christ who is the true vine, the true and good shepherd.

Purves' appeal to consciously return Christ to the centre of the pastoral vocational life by virtue of a relational and yielding union and not simply a sense of right practice, echoes much of what I have argued so far. For him, the Who and not the how of ministry is what ultimately shapes its potentially redemptive form.<sup>42</sup> This in itself begs the question of a pastoral—cruciform—disposition.

Similar to Purves in tone yet more erudite in content, New Testament scholar Michael Gorman understands the Christian life and all ensuing forms of Christian ministry to be an inhabitation of the “cruciform God.”<sup>43</sup> Basing his theological premise on Philippians 2:5-11 which he names as the “master story” of Paul, Gorman argues that Paul’s prior statement, “Cultivate this mindset—this way of thinking, acting, and feeling—in your community, which is in fact a community in Christ Jesus,”<sup>44</sup> is a spiritual alignment not only to the incarnated Jesus Christ on designated mission from God, but is actually a “missional theosis,” in that the self-emptying (*kenosis*) singularly displayed by Christ is both integral and vital to the missional life of the Trinity as a whole. He states:

For Paul, to be one with Christ is to be one with God; to be like Christ is to be like God; to be in Christ is to be in God. At the very least, this means that for Paul cruciformity—conformity to the crucified Christ—is really theiformity, or theosis... Paul’s famous phrase “in Christ” is his shorthand for “in God/in Christ/in the Spirit.” That is, his christocentricity is really an implicit Trinitarianism.<sup>45</sup>

Purves and Gorman’s corresponding Christological / Trinitarian emphases plainly suggest that genuine acts of human ministry and mission have their effusive impetus through the divine

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>43</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), 117. Gorman’s translation of the text is perhaps most telling when he equally translates the first part of Philippians 2:6, “who *although* he was in the form of God” as, “and indeed *because* of being in the form of God.” This in effect broadens the theological scope of participation, thus emphasising the trinitarian nature of the condescending and ascending redemptive grace of the eternal Word who is simultaneously Jesus the Christ.

<sup>45</sup> Gorman, *Inhabiting the Crucified God*, 4. In this context Gorman quotes Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 37: “In worlds such as ours and Paul’s where power is manifested in self-assertion, acquisition and domination, Christ reveals that God’s power, indeed the triune nature, is made known to the world in the act of self-emptying. Self-emptying is not so much a single act as the fundamental disposition of the eternal relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit. The incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus become the decisive revelation to us of that “self-emptying” that eternally characterizes the triune life of God.”

inhabitation of redeeming love. And by virtue of this relational and grace-dependent framework of Christian experience, they argue that individuals and faith communities *become* the Christian gospel, they do not simply perform it. In other words, expressive faith is the inhabitation of Christ the Word in mutual relation to the Father and Spirit and is therefore cruciform in both disposition and volition. In this vital sense, ministry practice is first defined and practiced by its willing participation in the missional God of love, not merely by the imperative of ecclesial task or designated function. And in this dispositional [re]ordering, ministry practice is understood to be an integral part of the salvific processes of theosis, not only a facsimile of it. To this end Gorman then writes, "Theosis is transformative participation in the kenotic, cruciform character of God through Spirit-enabled conformity to the incarnate, crucified and resurrected / glorified Christ."<sup>46</sup>

## 6.8 The Holy Trinity and pastoral disposition

What is most noticeable about Bernard and Edward's repeated reference to the Holy Trinity is that they do not reduce God to a theological construct or a social, ethical blueprint. Such is their lived experience of the Tri-unity that each assumes the life-ordering principle of God's relational being in communion to each other and the world rather than seeking to codify or classify the divine mystery too definitively. In simpler terms, Christian belief is formed through the repeated sanctifying experience of the Triune grace, not by virtue of a systematization of its affects.<sup>47</sup> And so, for the two reformers, the invocation of the Trinity's infusive/effusive love and not its theological dissection is what finally counts so far as vitalising faith is concerned. Faith, therefore,

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 162. In his more recent work, *Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), Gorman fills this definition out with a more general and historical based description: "The fundamental theological axiom of theosis is the formulation by church fathers such as Irenaeus and Athanasius that God (or Christ) out of his great love, became what we are so that we might become what God (or Christ) is... As a spiritual theology, theosis is predicated as well on the Pauline and Johannine experience of Christ's indwelling." 15.

<sup>47</sup> This is particularly true within the Gospel of John. See, Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1999): "John uses several different grammatical constructions of the verb "to believe," each with particular theological overtones. Thirty-six times the writer uses a construction not found elsewhere in Greek literature (*pisteuein eis*) followed by a noun in the accusative case, meaning literally, "to believe into." Although it is usually translated "believe in", it is not equivalent to simply giving credence to someone... John's... special accusative construction is a dynamic expression in which the evangelist tries to capture the progressive entrance of the believer into the life of Jesus." 52.

is primarily a receptive and consenting disposition before God and within God for the sake of faithful, spirited Christian practice. It is not a cognitive belief system, per se. By way of significant contrast, the life of *pistis* (faith) is “co-crucifixion” and “co-resurrection” in Christ, through the Spirit to the glory of God the Father.<sup>48</sup>

A case in point is Edwards’ scholarly *Discourse on the Trinity* wherein his writing is so animated by doxology that his prose is constantly reflective of wonderment and praise for the God of redemptive love. For Edwards, it is the divine enfolding of the opened, longing human heart, not a precision of thought or attention to action, which most definitively shapes the spirited life of love and service:

Now the sum of God’s temper or disposition is love, for he is infinite love; and as I observed before, here is no distinction to be made between habit (*habitas*) and act, between temper or disposition or exercise. This is the divine disposition or nature that we are made partakers of (2 Peter 1:4); for our partaking or communion with God consists in the communion or partaking of the Holy Ghost.<sup>49</sup>

Of particular significance in the above quote is the integrative stress Edwards places on the divine disposition of love and the relational action of love. Yet even prior to this necessary integration is the primacy of God’s dispositional being of redemptive love into which the Christian is baptised and is called to freely express. Edwards, like Bernard, does not begin with an imperative or ethic of love but seeks to affirm the affective, relational platform on which the virtuous exercise of Christian love can securely rest, namely, the Triune Being of God. In his treatise, *The Nature of True Virtue*, Edwards writes, “True virtue most essentially consists in benevolence to Being in

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<sup>48</sup> Commenting on Galatians 2:19-21 “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me by giving himself for me,” the New Testament scholar Douglas Campbell strikes a resonate chord with both Bernard and Edwards when he states: “... this is no mere *imitatio Christi!* for “God is not asking [believers]... to imitate Christ—perhaps an impossible task—so much as to *inhabit or indwell him.*” As quoted by, Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, 71.

<sup>49</sup> *WJE* 21:122.

general. Or perhaps to speak more accurately, it is that consent, propensity and union of heart to Being in general, that is immediately exercised in a general good will.”<sup>50</sup>

### a) Kathleen Cahalan

By way of contrast to this theological premise and ordering, Kathleen A. Cahalan’s highly regarded primer, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry*, is worthy of consideration. Given the experiential and theological emphases of Bernard and Edwards, Cahalan concludes with a chapter entitled, “The Practice of the Trinity,” largely attributed to the ground-breaking work of Catherine LaCugna.<sup>51</sup> It is by no means a juxtaposition to the preceding chapters, yet it is something of a surprise, given the book’s praxis-orientated, even mechanised tone and content with regard the need of practice (and even more practice). Before this culminating chapter and with a due economy of words, Cahalan details what disciple-shaped ministry practice looks like around the pithy definition: “Ministry is the vocation of leading disciples in the life of discipleship for the sake of God’s mission in the world.”<sup>52</sup>

Following this definition, Cahalan enters into a prudent Christological reflection within which she identifies Jesus’ six key areas of accessible ministry practice: teaching, preaching, care, prayer and worship, social mercy and justice, leadership and administration.<sup>53</sup> Then out of a brief but incisive Gospel survey, she builds a case for ministry being innately a verb, that is, constitutively concrete practices aligned to the enacted ministry of Jesus. In order to avoid any misreading that ministry is a humanly created agency, she does stress its spiritually embodied nature and a propensity towards its own corruptibility<sup>54</sup> and, most importantly, ministry’s needful groundings in spiritual

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<sup>50</sup> *WJE* 8:540.

<sup>51</sup> Kathleen A. Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry*, 149-171.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 50. A more detailed definition can be found on page 55.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-97.

<sup>54</sup> As one who teaches ministry practice, this section, p.110-113, is tremendously valuable in terms of its non-naivety about the ego-centric propensity of human nature.

disciplines for the sake of fruitful practice.<sup>55</sup> However, her language is remarkably impersonal and careful, seemingly void of any sense of expressive, soulful or relational *being*, either in the embodiment or action of the ministry practice itself.<sup>56</sup>

### **b) The non-procurement of grace**

By way of a considered response to Cahalan in light of the theological premises of Bernard and Edwards, I would suggest that faith practices or spiritual disciplines,<sup>57</sup> however integral to life and the ministry of Christ they may be, are not causative in and of themselves. That meaning, a so-called “orthopraxis,” however reflectively rigorous or prayerfully imitative, cannot guaranteed the procurement of God’s grace. Indeed, with the contemporary stress on competencies, practical training, strategized outcomes and benchmarking, one could be forgiven for thinking that even in theological institutions, the redemptive activity of God, otherwise happily discussed in theology classes and biblical studies, is minimally factored into educational or training processes. Practical theology, at least in my working experience, regularly displays an ironic lack of experiential theology in that the key points of educational reference are often action-reflection focused with a view to practice-ready graduates. Far less attention is given over to the subtle movements and discernment of Spirit within the same trajectory of learning.

Andrew Root’s theological critique of Cahalan and the influential school of practical theology that she represents is, I sense in part, a convenient caricature of her position.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, his

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 99-117. The Dykstra / Bass school has described spiritual practices as the “inhabitations of spirit.” It is for me, and I suspect Andrew Root, both a convincing and troubling definition due to questions of the Spirit’s independence from, or dependence on, human agency.

<sup>56</sup> For example, Cahalan is prepared to quote John Cassian in relation to human pride being rooted in the disposition of “vainglory” and yet quickly seeks to externalise the condition purely within the realms of corruptible practices. It is as if practice is the sole lens to look through in any theological discussion and everything in the Christian life is measured by it. Act seems to trump any prior sense of being in relation.

<sup>57</sup> See, Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*, second edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) & *Practicing our Faith*, sec. edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

<sup>58</sup> For example, Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith* plainly states, “The practices and disciplines are a means of grace, not tasks to accomplish or instructions to follow in order to grow in the life of faith. To do the latter would be to engage in the practices “according to the flesh” rather than “in the Spirit.” Instead, these practices and disciplines are gifts to the community, by means of which God may use the community to establish and sustain all people in the new life given in the Spirit.” 45-46.

underlying Christopraxis principle is of vital importance to the underlying argument and direction of this thesis. Beginning from an experiential, even observable proposition that God is in Christ, continually reconciling the world to himself through the grace of the Spirit, Root describes Cahalan and the aligned Dykstra / Bass school of practical theology as “Pseudo Neo-Aristotelian Practical Theology.”<sup>59</sup> He also argues that this neo-Aristotelian trend within practical theology, well-framed and intentioned as it may be, subtly remains impermeable to the self-emptying way of graced encounter with the God of Jesus Christ who continues to come in surprising fullness despite human agency, not because of due diligence within it.<sup>60</sup> He therefore states:

The praxis of God, Christopraxis, stands in opposition to the actuality-to possibility framework by asserting that all divine action encounters humanity not in the actuality of human beings or structures but in the possibility of God’s ministry as being as becoming. Then, because God’s being is becoming, we encounter God never as a frozen actuality but as possibility, as the one who transforms our nothingness into life, who takes what is dead and makes it alive.<sup>61</sup>

### **c) Expressive being in Christ**

By Neo-Aristotelian, Root means the practice of *imitatio Christi* not a *participatio Christi*, the latter being his Christopraxis (and I would argue Bernard and Edwards’ biblical, theological and pastoral) frame of reference. Consequentially, Root, in distinct contrast to Cahalan, defines Christian ministry as, “...the shape of God’s very act and being, coming to us as a concrete and lived reality.”<sup>62</sup> To his way of reckoning, God is the primary agent and Shepherd of ministry and ministers / pastors of Christ are invited to inhabit God’s seeming foolish agency of self-emptying in order to live out of God’s impossible-possibility of resurrected love.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, they do not need

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<sup>59</sup> Root, *Christopraxis*, 67.

<sup>60</sup> John Swinton’s working definition of practical theology as that which is, “... dedicated to enabling the faithful performance of the gospel and to exploring and taking seriously the complex dynamics of the human encounter with God,” certainly leans in this direction of initiated divine encounter, too. See, John Swinton and Harriot Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 11. One might also recall the wonderful witticism of C.S. Lewis in regard to his own surprising encounter with the divine affect of joy: “All this was given me without asking, even without consent.” *Surprised by Joy* (London: William Collins, 2016).

<sup>61</sup> Andrew Root, *Christopraxis*, 141.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, xiii.

<sup>63</sup> Olivier Clement, in his commentary of patristic texts, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: New City Press, 2014), writes, “The *kenosis* of the Son reveals the mystery of God who is Love. This gift of life is an extension of a mysterious exchange at the heart of the Deity. In God himself the One does not exclude the Other, it includes it. The Unity of God is so complete, so rich, that it is not solitude enclosed in itself, but rather a fullness of communion. And thereby, the source of all communion.” 58. Making

to construct or further their own means, which is his criticism of neo-Aristotelian theories of practice, wherein, “Practice is the human-constructed vehicle that brings God’s presence.”<sup>64</sup>

Root has a valid point, I believe, although he tends to sell Cahalan short in light of her concluding chapter on Trinity that is grounded, to a large extent, in the working ideals of spiritual formation. For what is clear at the book’s conclusion for Cahalan is that spiritual alignment and a pastoral, missional engagement has its beginning and end in the redemptive ministry and mystery of the Holy Trinity. However, it is arguable that she does not express the emphasis of spiritual union intrinsic to Bernard, Edwards and LaCugna (Roman 5:5, 2 Peter 1:4, 1 Cor. 3:18, John 15:4-6) or Gorman’s and Root’s stress on *participatio Christi*. Rather, Cahalan adopts an imitative and virtuous practice modelling of the redemptive actions of God.<sup>65</sup> Accordingly she writes in summation:

The relational understanding of the Trinity points to the *communal and social basis* for God’s practice. God embraces time and history through the incarnation of Jesus as well as through the Spirit who gives birth to the church and blesses its members with charisms. Jesus is God’s embodied practice, one whose practice is not marred by corruptibility, but is the full embrace of practice-in-relationship. The Spirit continues this embodiment in historical communities of tradition. We might say that God’s practice of creating, renewing and redeeming all of life is divine spiritual practice.<sup>66</sup>

Cahalan’s repeated usage of “practice” in relation to the saving activity of the triune God is, I contend, indicative of the theologically deficient starting point that Root names as Neo-Aristotelian. In this paradigm of divine / human efficiency, the mutual—thus dispositional—relationality of the Trinity is veiled. In other words, the creative dynamism of affective relation

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conscious room for otherness as an act of consensual love is a paradoxical and counter-intuitive disposition. It is though, the way of the cross, the archetypal symbol of Christianity and its primary way of being in relation.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>65</sup> In this respect, Cahalan echoes the influential trinitarian thinking of Miroslav Volf expressed through his work, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). This is not a mystical reading of the Trinity, *per se*. Rather, the mutual, affective, communal patterning and characteristic of each divine person gives rise to a unitive—redemptive—freedom of expression, thus making Trinity a paradigm for movement beyond consumerism and the “privatisation of decision” in both church and society. He writes, “The symmetrical reciprocity of the relations of the Trinitarian persons finds its correspondence in the image of the church in which *all* members serve one another with their specific gifts of the Spirit in imitation of the Lord and through the power of the Father. Like the divine persons, they all stand in a relation of giving and receiving.” 219.

<sup>66</sup> Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry*, 163. Emphasis added.

is largely lost to prescribed or practical outcome. Her concern for orthopraxis, one that is understandable due to the current pressures the Western Christian Church faces in terms of its ethical credibility and social relevance within secular environments, stands in significant contrast to the theological *priori* of Bernard and Edwards. As has been shown, their trinitarian experience of the Christian faith was not passive or detached in its confessional stance. Rather, its radical sense of openness and trust within the ever-shepherding love of God was their pastoral energy and pervasive joy.

## 6.9 Living Trinitarian faith by means of participation

The trinitarian conclusion to Cahalan's work on Christian ministry practice mirrors a number of contemporary systematic treatments of Trinity where the doctrine acts as a summary of the more tangible—individual—operations of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is logical at one level but it has tended to keep the visual beauty and relational dynamism of the doctrine hidden from view by adopting and promoting a more culturally functional, imitational or aspirational approach.<sup>67</sup> And whilst such a philosophical / theological framework retains a validity for the sake of needed ethical base, it can rob the practice of pastoral ministry of an aesthetic, harmonising quality, thereby tempering love's spontaneity and salvific reach.<sup>68</sup> The summative rendering of God to functionality or redemptive practice ("Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier"), arguably reduces the affective joy and beauty of God's indwelling and liberating presence.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Christian doctrine is innately what Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) calls "aretegenic," that is, "the virtue-shaping function of the divine pedagogy of theological treatises." 19. This still seems one step removed from an aesthetic, hence contemplative doctrine of Trinity or Incarnation, but it does take it out of the purely cognitive or moral realms of belief.

<sup>68</sup> According to L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), "Christian ministry lived faithfully and well, is beautiful. This is as true for congregations as it is for pastors who lead them. It is beautiful to experience or observe the joy, grace, love, mercy, justice, and power that shines forth as people praise God in singing, as they offer hospitality and draw into new life those who have been outsiders, as they pray fervently for one another and for the pains of the community as well as the world, as they learn Scripture and Christian doctrine with one another, as they offer and receive forgiveness, as they resist injustice and foster justice, as they witness to the abundance of the Triune God in their vocations and the world." 7.

<sup>69</sup> The above consideration is particularly relevant in the current liturgical and homiletic climate. In my own continuing pastoral and worshipping experience, *Trinity Sunday*—the Sunday after Pentecost in the Common Revised Lectionary—is often regarded as

### a) Catherine LaCugna

“Living trinitarian faith,” LaCugna states in *God For Us*, “means living God’s life: living from and for God, from and for others.”<sup>70</sup> Defined in such a co-inherent, invitational and participatory manner, lived trinitarian faith need not be conceived as specific to particular ministry practices nor expressive of an imitative adherence to social or virtue-based theological designs. Rather, it is a state of renewed being in abiding communion with Jesus Christ, gifted through the power of the Holy Spirit and lived to the glory of God, the Author of life.

At Catherine LaCugna’s funeral in 1997, the homily given on the day concluded with a commissioning that she had offered to graduand ministry students at the University of Notre Dame only a year earlier. Fully aware of her terminal illness, LaCugna had then said, “*Stay in Christ, and all your desires will be good. Stay in Christ and the Holy Spirit will enable you to become Christ to others and to see others as Christ. Stay in Christ and none of us will ever be without one another. Stay in Christ.*”<sup>71</sup>

Intentionally echoing the substance of John 15, LaCugna had encouraged her students to remain in a desirous and affective relationship with Christ for the very sake of their daily practices of Christian ministry. And by doing so, she was not dismissive of the graduands’ practical learning for ministry, nor was she suggesting an easier or religiously magical route to take. Instead, she was encouraging them to first ground their training and ministry practice within God’s expressive disposition of self-giving love; a love that finds renewed possibility within expectant places of seeming hopelessness, her own journey and battle with cancer highly symbolic of that.

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a theological abstraction or experienced as a meaningless exercise of impossible metaphysics by minister and congregation alike. Whereas, within the Christian (Creedal) tradition, Trinity *is* the confessional nature and expressive being of the Christian God. By this I mean, the Triunity of God is not an optional attribute or imaginative metaphor amongst others, as it is God’s relational, hence communicative substance of being, redemptively at work or play in the world.

<sup>70</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 400.

<sup>71</sup> Kathleen Cannon O.P., *Funeral Homily for Catherine Mowry LaCugna* May 7, 1997, Unpublished. LaCugna died in her mid- 40’s after a lengthy battle with breast cancer.

During a summer intensive course on the “Mystery of the Triune God” with LaCugna in 1994, my theological world was shaken one morning when she matter-of-factly asserted, “Trinitarian life is not just the life of God. It is our life as well.”<sup>72</sup> It was a charged moment of meaning and potentiality in which I recognised the need for change in my relationship to God, others and even myself. In sum, it was a matter of seeking to grow further into the gifting of divine love, not at the expense of good pastoral practice, but for the very sake of it. Hers was an invitation to a deeper communion in God from where all truly fruitful ministry practice could flow.

## 6.10 Conclusion

The above considerations have sought to identify significant contrasts between the relationally ordering principles<sup>73</sup> continuously at play in both Bernard and Edwards’ writings with contemporary articulations of practical theology that display an overly cognitive and exemplar form. In this they arguably remain abstracted from reality due to their functional nature, that is, not fully participatory in both theological and liturgical terms.

The Christian life and resultant dispositional forms of pastoral ministry, as I have sought to define them via the insights of Bernard and Edwards, most fruitfully arise from an affected knowledge that one is beloved by God. This dynamic of knowing through being known thus becomes the formational basis of pastoral vocations in the Christian Church. As such, pastoral ministry is foremost an expression of gracious being, that is, the active mirroring of God’s gracious and dynamic relationality. Therefore, it need not be reduced to quantifiable “practices,” however virtuous. In such a praxis-based modelling, God is unwittingly reduced to mere redemptive *activity* so that the intrinsically communal being of God is relegated to an existential category of

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<sup>72</sup> Class Notes, Boston College, July 5, 1994.

<sup>73</sup> “Principle” is in this context taking its meaning from the Latin *principium* or the Greek *arche*. According to Paul Ramsey, editor of *WJE* 8, in Edwards, “The word “principle” means a source or a beginning or spring of disposition and action. But it also means the direction, shape, or contours of human hearts and lives.” 16.

“placelessness.” That is, replaced in large part by heavy reliance on human agency and ecclesial ideology. Writing into this theologically, thus missionally deficient context, the Jesuit patristic scholar and pastor, Brian Daley pointedly states:

If the Church’s regular preaching and catechetical instruction are not centrally and consistently concerned with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in relationships to each other and to us, they cease to be “about God” or about the gospel at all, and end by being simply about us, or about our ideas. The result maybe rationalism or moralism, academic theology in its ancient or post-modern form, or it may simply be a set of breezy comments about the good or bad news of the day, but it will not be the Good News of the risen Christ. Only in the context of a sense of God’s trinitarian reality, his participated life, revealed in human history as the mystery of salvation, does our sense of the Church’s mission and inner nature have a chance to move beyond competing ideologies and show us the way to real community of grace.<sup>74</sup>

Daley’s theological and pastoral insight acts a helpful segue into the final chapter. In it, I will address what I consider to be six key pastoral dispositions dependent upon— and expressive of— a gifted participation within what he describes as the “real community of grace,” that is, the eternally expressive life and love of God.

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<sup>74</sup> Brian E. Daley, SJ, “A mystery to share in: The Trinitarian perspective of the new Catechism,” 436.

*Look in and see him looking out.  
He is not always quiet, but there have been times  
when happiness has to come to him, unasked,  
like the stillness on the water  
that holds the evening clear while it subsides  
—and he let go what he was not.*

**Wendell Berry**<sup>1</sup>

*The church today has widely lost and all but forgotten the experience of glory which lies at the heart of Christianity.*

**Amos Wilder**<sup>2</sup>

*Not self-justification, which means the use of domination and force, but justification by grace, and therefore service, should govern the Christian community. Once a man has experienced the mercy of God in his life he will henceforth aspire only to serve. The proud throne of the judge no longer allures him; he wants to be down below with the lowly and the needy, because that is where God found him. “Mind not high things but condescend to men of low estate.”*

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**<sup>3</sup>

## Chapter Seven

### The Importance of Spiritual Affections to Pastoral Ministry – Six Key Dispositions

#### 7.1 Introduction: a gift of tears

Jamberoo Abbey is a Benedictine Monastery situated mid-way up a forested hill overlooking the Kiama (NSW) coastline and fertile hinterland. In accord with Benedict’s Rule, hospitality is intrinsic to the community’s daily expression of the prayerful, working life: “Let all guests who come be received as Christ would be, because He will say, I was a stranger, and you took me in. And let due honour be shown to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith, and to pilgrims.”<sup>4</sup>

While a guest at Jamberoo on a writing retreat editing early drafts of this chapter, I walked to the chapel numerous times each day to pray with the sisters. However, when participating in the daily

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<sup>1</sup> Wendell Berry, *Window Poems 5* (Emeryville, California: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Amos Wilder, *Theopoetic: Theology and Religious Imagination* (Lima, Ohio: Academic Renewal Press, 2001), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1954), 94.

<sup>4</sup> Gasquet, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, LIII, 42.

Mass for the first time, I was feeling unsure about its protocols and liturgical forms. I need not have worried, for following a period of silence after the gospel reading, a sister, whose name I later learned was Therese, caught my attention by walking toward me, bowing before the centrally hung figure of the glorified Christ on her way.<sup>5</sup> Her face, eyes and modest smile caught the radiance of the early morning light reflecting what I can only describe as a godly or 'Christic' countenance. Bending close to me, Therese made a simple invitational gesture with her hands to go and stand near the priest in order to receive the Eucharist.

In that fleeting moment of encounter, she was the presence of Christ's grace and truth to me, as I was perhaps a reminder of Christ to her.<sup>6</sup> Something then broke open within me by means of that ordinary yet tender exchange. For what some in the mystical tradition describe as the "gift of tears" arose without prior warning.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, what I would describe in the same wording of Bernard as the 'wounding of love' found its way into a deep source of anxiety and left a healing mark. I was welcome. I was honoured. I was embraced. I was, despite all my convoluted religious strivings and repeated failings, beloved of God.

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<sup>5</sup> This is an intentionally Johannine Christ, meaning that, though on a cross his hands are not nailed but modestly extended in a form of blessing to humanity and God. Within the structure is also the symbol of the tomb in which the consecrated host is regularly placed.

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, this personal experience was not repeated in such intensity again during the week, although Therese continued the practice throughout.

<sup>7</sup> See, <https://www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly/Story/TabId/2672/ArtMID/13567/ArticleID/20471/Receiving-the-gift-of-tears.aspx> Viewed 19/11/2018: "In a homily at Casa Santa Marta on April 2, 2013, the pope (Francis) spoke of "the gift of tears as a charism often attributed to the saints," and he encouraged those present to weep like Mary Magdalene did at Christ's tomb. "All of us have felt joy, sadness and sorrow in our lives, [but] have we wept during the darkest moment? Have we had that gift of tears that prepare the eyes to look, to see the Lord?" he asked. "We, too, can ask the Lord for the gift of tears. It is a beautiful grace ... to weep praying for everything: for what is good, for our sins, for graces, for joy itself. ... [It] prepares us to see Jesus." With the phrase, "the gift tears," which he has used many times since, Pope Francis is referring to passages in St. Ignatius' spiritual diary, in which he describes having an overwhelming sense of the consolation of God. The saint often became tearful while celebrating Mass because he was overcome by the beauty of the worship and the profundity of God's love. His tears arose from his relationship with God, which was deeply intimate. "For Pope Francis, the gift of tears is similarly an experience of God's grace—an overwhelming experience of being cared for and loved by the One who has created us and called us to himself," said theologian and author Tim Muldoon. "It's a coming-to-awareness of the profundity of that love that floods one's emotions and leaves a personable only to express that sense of flood through tears. It is an experience of excess, rooted in neither intellect nor emotion, but rather deep, preconscious conviction of the presence of the Holy One. It is a mystical experience, in the sense of being hidden or secret (*mystikos* in Greek) from one's clear understanding." See, also, *On the Song of Songs*, III, 56.III.7, 93.

Perhaps even more significantly for this concluding chapter, Therese's simplicity of expressive love within a daily and perhaps rostered practice of ministry was the gravitas of its affective impact. Her transparency of motive, that is, a lack of self-consciousness in the way, means and being of Christ, communicated a truth and beauty of the Christian gospel in a manner that myriads of words and holy gestures never could. In sum, Therese's reverential disposition in and towards the Holy Trinity,<sup>8</sup> visible to me in that fleeting moment, is greatly instructive to the ordering of emphasis so far as learning the art of pastoral being and practice is concerned. Without giving prior and continuing attention to the pastoral disposition, conceived and shaped in the holy love of God, ministry in Christ's name may be little more than a self-service; that is, the presentation of humility and care on the surface whilst being, in reality, a veiling of self-centredness and/or unexamined psychological needs.

Both Bernard and Edwards knew these proclivities of spiritual immaturity and self-absorption only too well. They were alive within themselves yet also active in the religious communities they sought to lead. And while their regular acerbic comments about the injurious nature of hubris and related self-infatuations—a spiritual malaise in all ages<sup>9</sup>—are perhaps confronting to read and listen to, they nevertheless shed light on the competitive restlessness of the current day, whereby pastoral impact and celebrated influence often takes precedence over graced capacities and a humble willingness of soul, such as that of Therese.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The Benedictine practice of liturgical prayer is repeatedly Trinitarian in its form and bodily responses. For example, at the conclusion of each sung or recited psalm, the following ascription is offered while standing and initially bowing: "Glory be to the Father, and the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end, Amen!"

<sup>9</sup> See, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: HarperOne, 1954), 90-91. Bonhoeffer insightfully concludes his introduction to "Ministry" by stating succinctly, "Self-justification and judging others go together, as justification by grace and serving others go together." 91.

<sup>10</sup> Father M. Le Cure in Georges Bernanos' *The Diary of a Country Priest* still stands as a subversive corrective, I believe, to the anxiety laden practices we see played out today, even in the name of God's mission to the world.

That said, I do sense that even Bernard and Edwards's critical pastoral concern for the Christian Church conveys a potentially redemptive trajectory of the human condition in relation to God, others and self. For each in his own unique way invites a reconsideration of the proactive role of converting grace operative at the desirous, thus affective realms of the human psyche. And it is not surprising that each reformer addresses the power of God's love in relation to a constant, little-by-little refinement or attunement of spiritual disposition. In such a way, Bernard and Edwards faithfully echo Jesus in his insistence that it is what comes from within a human being that ultimately determines what is embodied, spoken and enacted in life (Mark 7:20, Matthew 15:11). It is to this realm of affected, attuned and spiritually expressive disposition within the way and being of Christ, I now turn through a series of six 'vignettes'

## 7.2 Humility

Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit (Gk. *ptochoi to pneumati*), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:2-3) Though the dehumanising reality of poverty is arguably spiritualised by the gospel writer,<sup>11</sup> the first beatitude of Jesus is of self-defining gravitas within Bernard's Benedictine / Cistercian monasticism.<sup>12</sup> This emphasis is also consistent with the preaching and writing of Jonathan Edwards. Spiritual poverty, or what Edwards names as evangelical humiliation, is the result of a contrite and honest recognition of how little love exists in the human heart in comparison to the expanding vastness and givenness of divine grace.<sup>13</sup> Within a still sinful, yet grateful and dependent state of being, humility is therefore the beginning (and ending) point of the Christian life. Indeed, in terms of affective sensibility and

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<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromily, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1985), 971.

<sup>12</sup> Bonowitz, *Saint Bernard's Three-Course Banquet*, 30-42.

<sup>13</sup> *WJE* 2:311, 324: "And as grace increases, the field opens more and more to a distant view, till the soul is swallowed up with the vastness of the object, and the person is astonished to think how much it becomes him to love this God, and this glorious Redeemer, that has so loved man, and how little he does love. And so the more he apprehends, the more the smallness of his grace and love appears strange and wonderful: and therefore is more ready to think that others are beyond him. For wondering at the littleness of his own grace, he can scarcely believe that so strange a things happens to other saints: 'tis amazing to him."

latent creative capacity, humility is the core disposition through which all else within the Christian faith is filtered then flows.<sup>14</sup>

The North American Presbyterian pastor Eugene Peterson captured this notion of receptive, “wise poverty” within the seasonal rhythms of the beech tree. This was for Peterson a metaphorical, yet grounded way into an otherwise paradoxical subject matter, namely, that spiritual emptiness is the necessary precursor and receptacle for rising ripeness, and that millimetre growth towards heaven remains the authentic way of a grounded, grateful and fruitful trajectory of faith.<sup>15</sup>

The Lucky Poor (*“Blessed are the Poor in Spirit”*)

*A beech tree in winter, white  
Intricacies unconcealed  
Against sky blue and billowed  
Clouds, carries in its emptiness  
Ripeness: sap ready to rise  
On signal, buds alert to burst  
To leaf. And then after a season  
Of summer a lean ring to remember  
The lush fulfilled promises.  
Empty again in wise poverty  
That lets the reaching branches stretch  
A millimetre more towards heaven,  
The bole expands ever so slightly  
And push roots into the firm  
Foundation, luck to be leafless:  
Deciduous reminder to let it go.<sup>16</sup>*

In a rare footnote within Jonathan Edwards’ treatise on *Religious Affections* (1746), the by-now mature pastor offers the following aside about what he and other well-known voices within the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., “This [a free renunciation of humanity’s own glory] is a great and most essential thing in true religion. The whole frame of the gospel, and everything appertaining to the new Covenant, and all God’s dispensations towards fallen men, are calculated to bring to pass this effect in the hearts of men. They that are destitute of this, have no true religion, whatever profession they make and how high soever their religious affections may be.” 312.

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, Edwards both translates and quotes Martin Luther in this context of forward movement (renewed apprehension). And even more significantly in this quotation is Luther’s authoritative citation of Bernard: “So is the life of a Christian, that he that has begun, seems to himself to have nothing; but strives and presses forward that he may apprehend... For indeed nothing is more pernicious to a believer, than that presumption, that he has already apprehended, and has no further need of seeking. Hence also many fall back, and pine away in spiritual security and slothfulness. So Bernard says, “To stand still in God’s way, is to go back... We reach after heaven but are not in heaven.” Ibid., 323.

<sup>16</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, “The Lucky Poor” in *Holy Luck* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 3. Peterson’s protestant theologian contemporary, Stanley Hauerwas expresses something similar in prose when he writes: “And humility is a habitual disposition that depends on gratitude for the lives we have been given. For that reason, at least for Christians, is a virtue that must inform all other virtues.” From, *The Character of Virtue: Letters to a Godson* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 146.

Christian tradition consider to be the essential and gracious nature of humility as it pertains to the practice of “true” Christianity:

Calvin in his *Institutes...* says, “I was always exceedingly pleased with that saying of Chrysostom, “The foundation of our philosophy is humility,” and yet more pleased with that of Augustine, “as,” says he, “the rhetorician, being asked, what was the first thing in the rules of eloquence, he answered, “pronunciation”; what was the second, “pronunciation”; what was the third, still he answered, “pronunciation.” So, if you should ask me concerning the precepts of the Christian religion, I would answer, firstly, secondly, and thirdly, and forever, humility.””<sup>17</sup>

Correspondingly, Bernard and the monastic tradition in which he played a shaping role, ranks the disposition of humility—a vulnerable state of consensual and expectant emptiness—as the “mother and mistress” of all Christian virtue. Within the sermon “On the Lord’s Nativity,” Bernard suggests that humility is, “the foundation and the guardian of all virtues.”<sup>18</sup> Not that he contends that humility is the work of human invention or intention. Instead, it is the receptive and active state of Christ’s human and divine being and, as such, a gift of the Spirit to grow in greater conformity toward. Thus, humility is an open stance created and sustained by means of spiritual encounter with the One in whose fullness of humility humanity is embraced and potentially transformed. In a later pseudo-Bernadine treatise on the “State of the Virtues,” the writer surmises, “Thus the good of humility exceeds the merits of all the virtues. If humility is not present, the other virtues will not be able to be praiseworthy, but if humility is present, the other virtues with humility will advance.”<sup>19</sup>

For both Bernard and Edwards, then, humility is an opened disposition of heart and mind created and formed by the *Gestalt* of enfolding and ennobling grace (Psalm 131).<sup>20</sup> It is not conceived by means of human philosophising nor born of well-intentioned human agency. In biblical form, it is

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<sup>17</sup> *WJE* 2:314-315.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, “The Fountains of the Saviour,” in *Sermons of St. Bernard on Advent and Christmas* (Nabu Public Domain Reprints, 1909), 102.

<sup>19</sup> *Three Pseudo-Bernadine Works* trans. Catena Scholarium (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2018), 91.

<sup>20</sup> St. Benedict saw in this text the opposite of self-exaltation which he taught was a form of pride. Like humility, exaltation was also a gift of God, yet it is only given through the resting and trusting state of humility. In fact, exaltation is descent and humility ascent on the ladder of faith. See, Gasquet, *The Rule*, chapter VII, 12-16.

the reaching faith question of the psalmist before the expansiveness of divine mystery: “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, / the moon and the stars that you have established; / what are human beings that you are mindful of them, / mortals (of the ground) that you care for them?”<sup>21</sup>

Expressed in such poetic form, the humility of the Christian faith is confessed to be a relational state of transformed being born and sustained by means of gracious encounter with Christ, the living Word (of expressive and embodied humility). It is therefore not simply a moral or imitative virtue. By way of important contrast, Christian humility is ultimately a received gift of relational union with the crucified and risen Christ, therefore cruciform in shape and tenor. As Andre Louf, a French Trappist monk and writer of the late twentieth century, has stated:

It is not a question of the *virtue* of humility but rather the *state* of humility, that is in the original sense of the Greek word *tapeinosis*—the state of abasement or in Latin: *humilitas* / *humus*—the condition in which one finds oneself flatly on the ground. A state which is absolutely indispensable in order that a virtue (in Greek we could call this *tapeinophrosune*) might be born. Indeed, Saint Bernard has observed: *sine humilitione, nulla humilitas* (lit. without humiliation there is no humility)—that is, without concrete abasement, there can be no humility.<sup>22</sup>

Echoing the earlier thought of Edwards regarding the comparative smallness of human loves and graces, I would suggest that the near-overwhelming mystery of God’s triune nature, into which the Christian is attracted and enjoined, offers sharp and healing relief to the inwardly coiled nature of human concern. Accordingly, in the words of the monastic writer Michael Casey, humility is the

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<sup>21</sup> Psalm 8:3-4.

<sup>22</sup> Andre Louf, *The Way of Humility* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2007), 10. In the midst of his argument, Louf gently critiques the Aristotelean “inculturation” within the influential thinking of St. Thomas Aquinas. Not surprisingly, he cites Bonaventure as arguing against such a willing adoptionism. Louf writes, “In his (Bonaventure’s) view, it would be perfectly foolish to retrieve the notion of Christian humility from the vantage point of human reason. Humility can only be understood in the context of Jesus Christ. And he went on to say that if only our ears would cease to listen to this so-called magnanimity which poses such a threat to humility, we would see that true magnanimity is humility!” As quoted by Louf, *The Way of Humility*, 9. Similarly, in the same context, Louf quotes Augustine, who in the persuasive philosophical force of Epicureanism, Stoicism and Platonism, argued strongly that, “humility comes from elsewhere, from the One who, being the Most High, wished to empty himself for us.” 7. The contemporary North American protestant theologian, Stanley Hauerwas, echoes this sentiment when he writes, “Augustine observed that the Platonists couldn’t comprehend how God could become one of us to free us from our sin. But this ultimate expression of God’s great humility is at the heart of what we believe as Christians. This means that who we are and what we believe are inseparable. We don’t first believe and then become humbled; on the contrary, humility is the way we come to believe in Christ. That is why humility is such a central virtue for Christians.” *The Character of Virtue*, 147.

fruit of a “radical conversion of heart, and signals a deep, inner conformity with Christ.”<sup>23</sup> Such a conversion and relational compliance finds its genesis and energies in the grace of Christ’s forgiveness. The protestant reformer and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer concurred: “Only he who lives by the forgiveness of his sin in Jesus Christ will rightly think little of himself. He will know that his own wisdom reached the end of its tether when Jesus forgave him.”<sup>24</sup>

Defined in such a way and context, humility is contingent upon spiritual encounter at the level of the affections through which a relational capacity deepens in its lived intensity of trust and creative dependency; that is, in relation to God and to others. In this, I am suggesting that such an inhabited quality of humility within pastoral contexts will increasingly encourage the exploration of faith and a shared grace. And by doing so, the need to be right, competitive, combative, honoured, religiously certain or even publicly noticed will gradually fade. For Edwards in particular, a pastoral pride that masquerades as spiritual humility remains a chief enemy of ecclesial health and wellbeing. Sharply he comments:

The nature of many high religious affections, and great discoveries (as they are called) in many persons that I have been acquainted with, is to hide and cover over the corruption of their hearts, and to make it seem to them as if all their sin was gone, and to leave them without complaints of any hateful evil left in them... 'Tis darkness that hides men’s pollution and deformity; but light let into the heart discovers it... especially that penetrating, all-searching light of God’s holiness and glory.<sup>25</sup>

A consensual inclination to God’s love—a cooperative work of the Spirit in both Bernard and Edwards’ estimation—is key to an unfolding life of humility. In experiential faith terms, it is the desire for the Holy Spirit to infuse the soul unimpeded by the resistance of pride and the fear of vulnerability, even to a point of seeming nothingness. Yet paradoxically, this *le point vierge* or, “This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty,” as Thomas Merton suggests, is actually

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Casey, *A Guide to Living in the Truth: Saint Benedict’s Teaching on Humility*, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 95.

<sup>25</sup> *WJE* 2:327.

the gateway into a life of personal authenticity, thus genuinely embodied service to the world.<sup>26</sup> In sum, it is the emergence of true selfhood within a willing return to God, through Christ, in the power and unity of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, such humble broken heartedness is potentially a liberation into generous expressions of love from the hold of grasping sin. Considering the actions of the unnamed woman<sup>27</sup> who anoints Jesus' head in Mark 14:3-9, Edwards muses:

A truly Christian love, either to God or men, is a humble broken-hearted love. The desires of the saints, however earnest, are humble desires: their hope is an (sic) humble hope; and their joy, even when it is unspeakable, and full of glory, is a humble, broken-hearted joy, and leaves the Christian more poor in spirit, and more like a little child, and more disposed to a universal lowliness of behaviour.<sup>28</sup>

Understandably, then, and particularly within present western cultures notable for the assumed telos of personal standing and professional objectives, such a path of relational displacement (Matthew 20:16, John 13:8-9, Philippians 2:5) is not easily accessed in a spiritual sense nor roundly encouraged.<sup>29</sup> Pastorally speaking, and particularly when there is great pressure arising from within to reverse the Church's social decline and influence, the demanding path of humility envisaged by Jesus, Bernard and Edwards (to name but a few), is costly, perhaps to the point of obscurity and even ridicule from those seeking more culturally orientated paths of power and influence.<sup>30</sup> However, when considering spiritually affected pastoral practice, the relational quality of humility sketched in outline here—that is, one created, formed and sustained by God's eternal vastness and graced-mystery in relation to human finitude—remains a quintessential state of being to nurture and trust.

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Doubleday Publishing, 1989), 158.

<sup>27</sup> She is assumed by Edwards to be Mary Magdalen.

<sup>28</sup> *WJE* 2:339-340.

<sup>29</sup> "Displacement" being the preferred word in this context for Andres Purves. He writes, in somewhat non-nuanced tones, "Exploring these issues will bring us to the difficult awareness that our ministries must be displaced by the ministry of Jesus. Displacement is more than relinquishment. Displacement is not an invitation to let Jesus take over by letting him in on our territory. Rather, we must be bumped aside firmly, perhaps mortifyingly. Otherwise we will never let go of our grip on our ministries... Displacement literally means the death of our ministries. All that we think we *should* do and *can* do and *are doing* in ministry must be put to death. Why? Because too often our ministries are in the way. Even when we conduct them from the best spiritual, therapeutic and moral motives, they are not redemptive. Only the ministry of Jesus is redemptive." 13.

<sup>30</sup> In the nativity sermon, "On the Place, the Time, and Other Circumstances," Bernard writes, "You that would follow Christ do in like manner imitate his example. Hide the gifts and graces you have received. Love to be unknown. Let the mouths of others praise you, but keep your own lips closed." *Sermons of St. Bernard on Advent and Christmas*, 118.

In summation, humility is often what is first noticed—or seen to be absent—within a presenting pastoral disposition. At its paradoxical best, it is a visibility expressed within a non-visibility. Due to a simplicity of being and transparency of motive, Christ’s converting truth and holding grace are given the space and freedom to minister in their affecting potentiality. Humility in this pastoral context is, therefore, not something to put on or act out. Rather, it arises from a graced sense of personal identity and purpose in Christ. And in that liberated existential state, there is nothing to prove or self-justify within the actions of Christian ministry.<sup>31</sup> In fact, ministry becomes a conscious pointing beyond oneself towards the redeeming being of Christ in the power and love of the Holy Spirit. As Jonathan Edwards said in relation to the devotion of the woman with the ready jar or perfume, humility is a broken-hearted *expression* of love.<sup>32</sup> And as Bernard states in relation to the Word and himself, such returning love needfully awakens and wounds, transforming deeply entrenched pride and independence into a renewed desire for compassionate service in Christ’s name and way:

You ask then how I knew he was present, when his ways can in no way be traced? He is life and power, and as soon as he entered in, he awakens my slumbering soul; he stirs and pierces my heart, for before it was hard as stone, and diseased. So he has begun to pluck out and destroy, to build up and to plant, to water dry places and illuminate dark ones; to open what was closed, to warm what was cold; to make the crooked straight and the rough places smooth, so that my soul may bless the Lord, and all that is within me may praise his holy name.<sup>33</sup>

Bernard’s final note of doxology is as instructive as it may be edifying. For within it, one hears and senses the in-relation nature of humility that contrasts significantly with in-virtue notions of humility which underpin current discussion around pastoral orthopraxis. As I have previously argued in Chapter Six, that distinction does not represent a dismissal of virtuous

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<sup>31</sup> Louf, *The Way of Humility*, quotes Isaac the Syrian from the 7<sup>th</sup> century: “Anyone who is truly humble need never seek out humility since it will be in him almost naturally... That person will receive it within himself like a grace that goes beyond creation and nature and will think of himself in his own estimation as a sinner and as one who is contemptuous. That person will live within all spiritual realities; he will possess the wisdom of all creation but he will know with certainty that he is nothing. In his heart he is humble without doing anything about it or in any way forcing himself.” 48.

<sup>32</sup> *WJE* 2:339-340.

<sup>33</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, IV, 74.II.6, 91.

pastoral practice. Rather it invites a re-ordering of priority, and a pressing one at that so far as the future health and vitality of the Christian Church and its pastoral leadership is concerned.

### 7.3 Spiritual Longing

Within the context of communal Christian practice, the liturgical theologian Don Saliers underscores the existential significance of invocation to the beginning of any given worship service.<sup>34</sup> His anthropological assumption, not unlike that of Augustine and Bernard, is that the common yet fluid human experience of divine transcendence is essentially one of absence and presence. “Perhaps,” he suggests, “the pathos of human existence *is* the question of God’s absence and presence.”<sup>35</sup>

For Saliers, therefore, the use of invocatory prayer is not a mechanical or rote reminder to God of the human need of the Spirit. Rather, it is the honest acknowledgement of its own spiritual incongruity and lack; i.e., its restless sense of relational incompleteness, thus alienation from God, neighbour and self. Consequently, the invocation of Spirit—arising out of the ‘evangelical humiliation’ described above—is a yearning for growing wholeness towards and within the final consummation of all things in God, viz. the Kingdom of God. Accordingly, Saliers states:

It is precisely the power of God’s Holy Spirit that animates both the calling upon God and the efficacy of the church’s prayer... From this point, light may be shed upon the very possibility of authentic worship in “spirit and truth.” ... *epiclesis* cannot be confined to a single subunit of liturgical prayer; it is the necessary character of all authentic prayer in the name of Jesus.<sup>36</sup>

Saliers’ eschatological point about a broader need and application of *epiclesis* has resonance within Bernard and Edwards and, I sense, an immediate implication so far as pastoral disposition and act is concerned. Like the inhaling and exhaling of breath, the infusion and effusion of Spirit

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<sup>34</sup> Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 108.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 110. The *epiclesis* (a calling down of the Spirit) is most often associated with spiritual infusion the Eucharistic bread and wine, so that, “they may be for us, the body and blood of Christ.” (*Uniting in Worship* 2, 179.)

that Bernard envisaged in “The Two Operations of the Spirit” is integral to the vocational life and expressed in the being of the Christian disciple. It is not something religiously performed or magically incanted, in other words. It is simply the imminently expressed desire for restored relational standing and wholeness.

In Cistercian practice, pre-dawn Vigils traditionally begin with the thrice repeated, “O Lord, open my lips / and my mouth shall declare your praise.” Similarly, other services of the Hours, commence with the cantor led, sung echo of Psalm 69:2: “O God, come to my assistance. O Lord, make haste to help me.” Indicative of these invocations is the cry of willing dependence arising from the humbled and expectant heart. And as noted earlier through the reflections of John Cassian, the monastic life turns on this desirous and reaching disposition of prayer. In direct relation to the repeated recitation of Psalm 69:2, Cassian writes:

It is not without good reason that this verse has been chosen from the whole of Scripture as a device. It carries within it all the feelings of which human nature is capable. It can be adapted to every condition and can be usefully deployed against every temptation. It carries within it a cry of help to God in face of every danger. It expresses the humility of a pious confession...This is the voice filled with the ardour of love and of charity. This is the terrified cry of someone who sees the snares of the enemy, the cry of someone besieged day and night and exclaiming that he cannot escape unless his protector comes to the rescue.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly for Edwards, contemplation of the Holy Trinity is the desire to see, hear and taste more of God’s transformative love within daily experience. As his influential sermon / lecture of 1730/1 suggests, God is glorified in humanity’s confessed dependence. Correspondingly though, humanity is glorified by God’s relational goodness by virtue of such dependence. “The redeemed have all,” he states—and by all, he clearly means participation with the relational fullness of God in Godself.<sup>38</sup> For the pastoral minister of Christ, it is therefore a question of regularly and deliberately

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<sup>37</sup> John Cassian, *Conferences*, 10.10, 133.

<sup>38</sup> *God Glorified in Man’s Dependence*, WJE 17:203: “’Tis of God that the redeemed do receive all their true excellency, wisdom and holiness; and that two ways, viz. as the Holy Ghost by whom these things are immediately wrought is from God, proceeds from him, and is sent by him; and also as the Holy Ghost himself is God, by whose operation and indwelling, and knowledge of God and divine things, and a holy disposition, and all grace is conferred and upheld.”

placing oneself in a state of conscious vulnerability, on the well trafficked road of spiritual grace in order to be filled and upheld in the shepherding means and way of Christ.<sup>39</sup>

Invocation of the Spirit in the name of Jesus, then, is not a formula to be perfunctorily recited in order to achieve certain ends. By way of significant contrast, it is the consent to be loved and to love well within the relation and blessing of God.<sup>40</sup> Employing a similar elegant metaphor to Bernard in “The Two Operations of the Spirit,” the New England pastor suggests in the first of his 15-sermon series, *Charity and its Fruits*:

If your heart is full of love, it will find vent; you will find or make ways enough to express your love in deeds. When a fountain abounds in water, it will send forth streams. Consider that as a principle of love is the main principle in the heart of a real Christian, so the labour of love is the main business of the Christian life.”<sup>41</sup>

Translated into more applicable terms, a longing disposition in pastoral contexts is a continual, though integral practice of invocation (*epiclesis*) for the sake divine love’s processional and converting freedom. That then is an expressed yearning for the Word of truth and the Spirit of grace to permeate the pastoral disposition in order for it to increasingly become a spiritually affective presence to and for others. Noteworthy in this invocatory framework, then, is a primary focus on genuine spiritual encounter within the forming mind, heart and will of the pastor (Romans 12:2) for the well-being of those she or he has been called to serve.

In Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s classic *Life Together*, which arose out of his experience of intentional Christian community at Finkenwalde, the then young German pastor stresses the grounding truth

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<sup>39</sup> See, Eugene Peterson, *The Gift: Reflections on Christian Ministry* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1995): “I know it takes time to develop a life of prayer: set-aside, disciplined, deliberate time. It isn’t accomplished on the run... In order to pray I have to be paying more attention to God than what people are saying to me; to God than to my clamouring ego. Usually, for that to happen there must be a deliberate withdrawal from the noise of the day, a disciplined detachment from the insatiable self.” 20.

<sup>40</sup> See, Dane C. Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life: Alive to the Beauty of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014): “Edwards’s greatest contribution to the church’s understanding of prayer in the Christian life is not, however, the more philosophical issue of how divine sovereignty coheres with our responsibility. His enduring legacy with regard to prayer is his lifting up of the beauty of God, drawing us to pray indirectly, with a special focus on God’s unfettered delight in showering his people with gifts—the greatest of which is himself.” 115.

<sup>41</sup> *WJE* 8:148.

of devotion to Christ (through the Spirit), in contrast to shallow and egocentric emotionality. And whilst the latter displays may appear to be evidence of the Spirit's invocation, it is, in Bonhoeffer's considered opinion, nothing but a human "wish / pipe dream" (German. *Wunschtraum*). With pastoral leadership clearly in mind, he states strongly, "God hates visionary dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realised by God, by others, and by himself." 42

By way of consequential contrast in Bonhoeffer's thinking, a Christian community pastorally led so as to be more thoroughly formed in the Spirit willingly invokes—and submits to—the truth and binding reality of the Word of God. Therefore, the well-being of the whole, and not just the needy desires of the select few, is of eternal importance. Indeed, this is the evangelically reflective nature of the confessing Christian Church in counter-distinction to forms of purely humanistic and, in his pressing context, demonic political institutionalism.<sup>43</sup> Intentionally creating something of a rhetorical dualism between the self-diffusing divine Spirit and inflated human spirit, Bonhoeffer thus writes:

In the community of the Spirit the Word of God alone rules; in human community of spirit there rules, along with the Word, the man who is furnished with exceptional powers, experience, and magical, suggestive capacities. There God's Word alone is binding; here, besides the Word, men bind others to themselves. There all power, honour and dominion are surrendered to the Holy Spirit; here spheres of power and influence of a personal nature are sought and cultivated. 44

By way of summary, a constant yearning for the Spirit's coming or return—much like the proleptic tension of, "Your kingdom come..."—[con]forms personal disposition over time; that is, the unifying substance and promise of *epiclesis* becomes further embodied and mirrored in expressive the pastoral being. In Bernard's thinking, such spiritually orientated desire for relational union, "...enlightens our human minds, roots our affections on God, and imparts to us the

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<sup>42</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 27.

<sup>43</sup> See, Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 228-262.

<sup>44</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 32.

incomprehensible and invisible things of God.”<sup>45</sup> Framed in these distinctly relational and identity-shaping terms, the practice of invocatory prayer represents a repeated reorientation of the affections for love’s sake, given that it is the Spirit who draws us further into the benevolence and will of God (Romans 8:26-27). Such a spiritual reformation is thus considered to be impossible by means of human effort or agency, however innovative or strenuous. On this vital and, I believe, accessibly concluding point, the Calvin scholar Matthew Boulton writes:

... even “our very being,” as Calvin puts it in the *Institution’s* opening paragraph, “is nothing but subsistence in the one God” (I.I.I). Quoting Bernard of Clairvaux, Calvin sums up his position this way: “We, I say, are but in the heart of God. We are, but by his dignifying of us, not by our own dignity” (3.2.25). We do not live alone, or on our own power. We live in God—and so our freedom, our good work, our dignity, our salvation can only take place in and by God’s grace.<sup>46</sup>

## 7.4 Listening with the ear of the heart

Speaking contextually into the communal exercise of Christian faith, the writer of the Letter of James exhorts his readers by saying, “You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.” (James 1:19) Intrinsic to his pastoral appeal is the hope that, “we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures,” that is, a growing embodiment of Christ that arises out an attentive listening to, and for, God’s word of truth (James 1:18).

As has already been shown, Bernard of Clairvaux and Jonathan Edwards equally assumed that attentive spiritual practices were key elements within the Christian life of discipleship. For Bernard and the monastic tradition as a whole, this meant a deep listening to and with the heart for the converting and consoling voice of Christ within set-aside periods of silence.<sup>47</sup> For Edwards,

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<sup>45</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, IV, 74.I.2, 86. John Calvin, *Institutes* 3.20.2, 851, is instructive and consistent within this regard, also. When writing of the necessity of prayer, he states, “Words fail to explain how necessary prayer is... Surely with good reason the Heavenly Father affirms that the only stronghold of safety is in calling upon his name. By doing so we invoke the presence both his providence... and of his power... and of his goodness...; and, in short, it is by prayer that we call to him to reveal himself present to us. Hence comes an extraordinary peace and repose to our consciences.”

<sup>46</sup> Boulton, *Life in God*, 148.

<sup>47</sup> The opening sentence of St. Benedict’s Rule is regularly cited in relation to the essential monastic disposition for learning and holiness: “Listen, my child. I want you to place the ear of your heart on the solid ground of the Master’s wisdom (what I received,

contemplation frequently implied a renewed breadth of vision, thus an affective sensing of Christ, often in experiential terms of divine beauty and sin-illuminating light.<sup>48</sup> Such was their visceral experience of hearing, feeling, sensing, seeing, tasting and even smelling the life-giving Word, it would have been incomprehensible to either reformer that the contemplation of God would not be valued and regularly practiced by all Christians, particularly those called into pastoral leadership. For each in their own rhetorical manner, regularly posed the question: Without a personal familiarity of the transforming ways of Christ's truth and grace, how can acts of pastoral ministry carry any lasting intensity of affect? Perhaps Bernard is the more succinct of the two in this first be filled principle as evidenced in the already quoted, yet highly memorable line: "Help me out of your abundance if you have it; if not, then spare yourself the trouble."<sup>49</sup>

The disposition of contemplative listening, therefore, is the intentional making (*poiesis*) of expectant, emptied space into which, as the influential poet Mary Oliver suggests, "... another voice may speak"<sup>50</sup> when we are alone with God as well as when we relate to others. Within the Christian life, and by extension, pastoral ministry, a conscious inclination towards grace consists in what Edwards calls a, "closing with Christ,"<sup>51</sup> a spiritual union with the Father through the excellent convergent being and nature of the Son.<sup>52</sup> It is therefore a listening in, so to speak, a knowledge of divine love and its intentionality, not by hearsay or presumption, but by invited and entrusted relation. Such a place of belonging, therefore, can broaden and change tightly held

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I'm passing on to you)." From, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Rule of Saint Benedict: A Contemporary Paraphrase* (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>48</sup> Strobel, "The Beauty of Christ: Edwards and Balthasar," 92.

<sup>49</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, I, 18.11.4, 136.

<sup>50</sup> Mary Oliver, "Praying" in *Thirst* (Boston: Beacon Books, 2006), 37.

<sup>51</sup> *WJE* 19:583: "Let the consideration of this wonderful meeting of diverse excellencies in Christ induce you to accept of him, and close with him as your Saviour. As all manner of excellencies meet in him, so there are concurring in him all manner of arguments and motives, to move you to choose him for your Saviour, and everything that tends to encourage poor sinners to come and put their trust in him: his fullness and self-sufficiency as a Saviour, graciously appear in that variety of excellencies that have been spoken of."

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 594: "Christ has brought it to pass, that those the Father has given him, should be brought into the household of God; that he, and his Father, and his people, should be as it were one society, one family; that the church should be as it were admitted into the society of the blessed Trinity."

perspectives. In Bonhoeffer's near-humorous estimation, "The Ministry of Holding One's Tongue" is actually the beginning of pastoral wisdom. It follows, then, that the making of empty space for attentive listening is a pastoral imperative, given the perpetual, perhaps even grinding, nature of weekly preaching, worship leading, teaching and pastoral care. By this I mean, the myriad of publicly uttered words remains perpetually in need of shaping and refining by the grace of being known and loved by name within the receptive spaces of contemplative prayer. No technique or strategy, I believe, can duplicate the dynamism of such gratuitous and humbling encounter which, ironically, and as I will show under the next subheading, is solid basis for all creative vocational expression.<sup>53</sup> For pastoral identity in this attentive framework is not persona or role driven. Instead, and indeed foremost, identity remains a gift of pure being in close relation to expressive Being. In the clear thought and experience of the contemplative Roman Catholic theologian, von Balthasar:

...we cannot lift it (a self-concept) out of the word of God and take it home with us. We are only true so long as we are in him, so long as we are branches of the vine, allowing ourselves to be shaped and governed by sovereignly free life. He alone can tell us what, in truth, we are; one word sufficed for Mary Magdalene, blinded with tears at the tomb: "Mary!" This personal name, uttered by the lips of him who is eternal life, is a person's true concept. In it the believer is given his true 'I' in God on the basis of pure grace and the forgiveness of sins; but it comes with all the compelling force of a love which, of its very nature, demands and appropriates everything. Nothing in man can be understood apart from this love.<sup>54</sup>

Implicit in the above quote lies a respectful critique of Protestant thought and practice that remains pertinent to this thesis. Well informed and appreciative of Karl Barth's emphasis on the revealed Word of God, Balthasar nevertheless cautions against Barth's decisive stress on faith's cognitive response(s), which, whilst arising from direct encounter and decision, can readily

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<sup>53</sup> See, Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Creative Ministry* (New York: Image Books, 1978): "For many individuals professional training means power. But the minister, who takes off his clothes to wash the feet of his friends, is powerless, and his (sic.) training and formation are meant to enable him to face his own weakness without fear and make it available to others. It is exactly this creative weakness that gives the ministry its momentum." 113.

<sup>54</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 26.

become abstracted from affective, whole being experience in relation to God, thus, humanly disconnected in dispositional form.<sup>55</sup>

Practically speaking, this means that even though a pastor / minister may lack an inner spiritual vitality and health, an external “faith-purity” is maintained. In other words, a faith community under the direct influence of highly cognitive and/or visionary, driven leadership could repress the ambivalent state of its own yearning heart for relational connection and adopt a crusading certitude of biblical and theological “orthodoxy.”<sup>56</sup> For example, a minister might verbally promote inclusivity with an “all are welcome” type hospitality, yet place scripture-based restrictions on the full involvement of some within the community. Or, church leaders may enforce a rigidly formal or overly casual practice of Holy Communion (such as omitting the *epiclesis*), thereby preventing worshippers from the relational depth of encounter to which the sacrament points. Or, the practice of intercessory prayers might resemble a shopping list of requests rather than giving voice to the yearning, open stance of a congregation humbly trusting in the God before whom they bow. By way of conclusion to this discussion on the attentive posture of listening, the contemplation of God need not be understood in obligatory or functional terms. For the way of attentive practice is ultimately a spiritual trajectory; a movement deeper into the relationally orientated heart and

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<sup>55</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 141. The Jesuit von Balthasar also raises questions about a protestant ecclesiology that is more functional than ontic in its nature, and thereby potentially limited in its relational and sacramental dependence upon the God of the Christian Church. He also implicitly questions the veracity of a gracious Word that is not continuous with created nature (c.f. Thomas Aquinas), thus given from outside common human experience. In this context, Thomas Merton’s well known critique of Barth (each died on the same day in November, 1968), commonly referred to as, “Karl Barth’s Dream” is worth quoting in part here: “Each day, for years, Barth played Mozart every morning before going to work on his dogma: unconsciously seeking to awaken, perhaps, the hidden sophianic Mozart in himself, the central wisdom that comes in tune with the divine and cosmic music and is saved by love, yes, even by *eros*. While the other, theological self, seemingly more concerned with love, grasps at a more stern, more cerebral *agape*: a love that, after all, is not in our own heart but *only in God* and revealed only to our head... Fear not, Karl Barth! Trust in divine mercy. Though you have grown up to be a theologian, Christ remains a child in you. Your books (and mine) matter less than we might think! There is in us a Mozart who will be our salvation.” *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 11-12.

<sup>56</sup> See, Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I am a missional, evangelical, post/protestant, liberal/conservative, mystical/poetic, biblical, charismatic/contemplative, fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, catholic, green, incarnational, depressed- yet hopeful, emergent, unfinished Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). See also, Peter Rollins, *The Idolatry of God: Breaking the Addiction to Certainty and Satisfaction* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2012).

mind of Christ, who by confession of the Christian Church, is God's converting Word. This principle is strongly affirmed von Balthasar when he states:

We do not build the kingdom of God on earth by our own efforts (however assisted by grace); the most we can do, through genuine prayer, is to make as much room as possible, in ourselves and in the world, for the kingdom of God, so that its energies can go to work... it is impossible to put forward the contemplation of Jesus Christ and the Church in a convincing manner unless we ourselves participate in it.<sup>57</sup>

Conceived and practiced as a "a making room", the affective nature of contemplation further shapes disposition in ways and being of Christ and is thus integral to fruitful expressions of pastoral ministry. In this way von Balthasar echoes Bernard and Edwards in their theological and pastoral emphases that consensual participation in the grace and goodness of God is constitutive of gracious and fruitful ministry practices.

## **7.5 A wise and discerning bearing**

The descriptive phrase "a non-anxious presence" has more recently become an affirmation of pastoral character. This is particularly so in ecclesial environments displaying disunity or decline. The posture of thoughtful and/or prayerful calm can act as reassuring beacon of faith, hope and unity for the sake of faith's continuity despite all circumstantial evidence to the contrary.

Bernard's injunction, "First be filled, then control the outpouring," is indicative of such a receptive and reflexive stance.

In *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, the 1982 landmark "Faith and Order Paper" of the World Council of Churches, clerical ministry is defined in terms of assembling and building up the Body of Christ by "proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, by celebrating the sacraments, and by guiding the life of the community in its worship, its mission and its caring ministry."<sup>58</sup> In its own

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<sup>57</sup> Balthasar, *Prayer*, 105.

<sup>58</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper no.111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 22.

commentary on the text, *BEM* then states, “The ordained ministry fulfils these functions in a representative way, providing the focus for the unity of the life and witness of the community.”<sup>59</sup>

It is the phrase “focus for the unity” that I want to further explore in relation to a wise and discerning pastoral bearing, irrespective of ordination rites and vows.

As has been repeatedly shown, both Bernard and Edwards understood the Christian life to be the gift of participation in the enfolding love of God, through Christ, in the power and unity of the Holy Spirit. To be spiritually unified in Christ’s human and divine nature, therefore, is to transcend normal categories of distinction that might otherwise lead to potential stances of indifference or hostility (Galatians 2:13-14). His peace is the spiritually appropriated gift of his broken yet glorified embodiment of reconciliation (John 17:1-5), for such is the purposeful nature and calling of the Body of Christ on earth as well (1 Corinthians 12:27, Colossians 1:17-23).<sup>60</sup>

In this theologically defining light, the limitation of *imitatio Christi* is again highlighted, particularly within the context of any form of pastoral leadership. For significantly, Christ’s peace needs to be first entered into and appropriated before it can be offered to others within life’s complex realities. Boldly put, Christ’s peace and unity are not simply an ethical imperative or a Christian ideal to pursue. But by virtue of the cross and resurrection of Christ, they are a given; a full immersion into the reconciling power of God’s grace ever operative within the world, bringing forth life out of what was considered to be dead. As Bonhoeffer so eloquently wrote in *Life Together*, “In Christian brotherhood everything depends upon its being clear from the beginning, first, that Christian brotherhood is not an ideal, but a divine reality. Second, that Christian brotherhood is a spiritual and not a psychic reality.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> See also, *The Basis of Union*, paragraph 3, 22.

<sup>61</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 26.

Long before Bernard and Edwards drew on this participatory (non-transactional or judicial) understanding of Christ's self-giving, the Eastern bishop, Gregory of Nyssa (335-394) wrote in relation to the reconciling nature of the cross of Christ: "In shape it is divided into four parts in such a way that the four arms converge in the middle. Now He who was extended upon it... is the one who binds all things to himself and makes them one. Through himself he brings the diverse natures of existing things into one accord and harmony."<sup>62</sup> As a direct consequence of this arresting Christological premise, cruciform ministry in Christ's name and Spirit can be practiced as a located focus of Christ's expressive unity; that being the given ability to hold distinction or difference in creative tension. It is the in-spirited calling to be a reconciling and wise presence, and to display an active degree of spiritual discernment in keeping with, and attuned to, the mind and heart of Christ himself (John 14:12, 16:12-14).

The practice of wisdom and discernment posited within a primary biblical and spiritual framework contrasts with the Bass and Dykstra school of practical theology as outlined earlier. The subtle differences that exist between a pastoral ontology and pastoral function are most clearly expressed in a self-defining point of entry— affective relation to Christ is either entirely sufficient for the practice of his ministry in the world, or it is viewed as only partially sufficient, simply the foundation upon which a wise and discerning praxis must be further built. In this contemporary, professionalised context, Aristotle's term of *phronesis* (a practical expression of wisdom) is used frequently in literature associated with Bass and Dykstra and defined in terms of a growing "embodiment" of wisdom which is accumulated over time by virtue of self-entrustment to a "participation in the life of faith and to the everyday work of ministry."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, "Address on Religious Instruction" in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, 311.

<sup>63</sup> Christian Scharen, "Learning Ministry Over Time: Embodying Practical Wisdom" in *For Life Abundant*, ed. Bass & Dykstra, 267. Scharen goes on to say, "... by the phrase "embodied learning" I do not mean body *versus* mind, but body-mind, a holistic understanding of one sense-perceiving organism acting in the world. Such knowledge is more like what Aristotle called *phronesis*— practical wisdom—in which one does "quickly" the "right thing, in the right way, and at the right time."

While the accessible framework of *phronesis* potentially strengthens the consistency of wise and effective pastoral practice, it arguably falls short of the relational harmony, hence beauty of community leadership envisaged by Bernard and Edwards. A wise pastoral embodiment garnered by means of accumulation over time doesn't necessarily equate to a wise, discerning disposition that is formed incrementally by means of conscious displacement—a pastoral bearing which is consistently drawn into, and reliant upon, the disarming, vulnerable and radically self-emptying love of Christ (John 12:24).

In his substantive book, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love*, the Cambridge (UK) scholar David Ford also grounds the theology and practice of wisdom in a very different language to that of the Bass and Dykstra school. In fact, it is a theological premise similar to that of Bernard and Edwards:

It might be termed a “theology of desire and discernment” in its attempt to unite in a God-centred discourse the love of wisdom and wise loving. It is also a “theology of learning in the Spirit” in its combination of pedagogical thrust with an attempt to be alert to the ways God continually opens up texts, situation and people to newness of understanding and life. This learning is dialogical and collegial, located in theological communities understood as “schools of desire and wisdom”. Above all, the schooling is in loving God for God's sake, resulting in a theology which seeks a wisdom of worship, prayer and discerning desire that is committed to God and the Kingdom of God.<sup>64</sup>

Like the polemic of Andrew Root noted earlier, Ford makes room for the surprising, redemptive and daily operations of God. A calling to Christian ministry, therefore, is a desire to discern and cooperate with the operative Spirit and not predetermined courses of action by means of practical or even virtuous human process. And although such distinctions may initially seem precious or overstated, Ford's penultimate chapter on Jean Vanier's leadership of the L'Arche world-wide communities for the disabled and, more specifically, Vanier's mature commentary on the Gospel of John, underscores how a radically opened stance before the strange ways of God's grace is foundational to a fruitful life of Christian vocation.

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<sup>64</sup> David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3-4.

Christianity in Vanier's mind is not a human construct. As a communal, cooperative response to the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ, it is an ongoing, healing movement of the Holy Spirit.<sup>65</sup> Correspondingly so, L'Arche is not primarily a missional or even an ethical "project." Rather, the disruptive and affecting cry of the marginalised—similar to the cry of Wisdom in the market place (Prov. 8:1-21)—became for Vanier the universal cry for mutual, reconciling love that can only be sourced and satisfied by the seeming folly yet profound wisdom of Christ's cross (1 Corinthians 1:20-25).<sup>66</sup> In Vanier's own lived experience, his planned and organised world of constructed ideas necessarily yielded to a life-changing encounter of unpredictable and affecting love in the persons of Raphael, Phillippe and Dany. He personally reflects:

I wrote a doctoral thesis on Aristotelian ethics, and I embarked on a teaching career. Once again, I found myself in a world where weakness, ignorance, and incompetence were things to be shunned—efficiency was everything. Then... I discovered people who were weak, people with mental handicaps. I was moved by the vast world of poverty, weakness, and fragility... I moved from the world of theories and ideas about human beings in order to discover what it really means to be human.<sup>67</sup>

Explicit in Vanier's reflective thought lies the paradox of what he considers to be wisdom's true source and expressive content. For without a genuine vulnerability to grace, that is, a receptivity to the gift of divine love within one's own places of brokenness and seeming death, there can be no subsequent expression of genuine wisdom. Nor, for that matter, can there be a corresponding sense of discernment as to where the will of God might be further leading. God's gratuitous, and perhaps even non-efficient love, therefore, is the substance of a wise and discerning disposition, which of itself is a substantial gift of life-giving grace to others.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> See, Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth* (Homebush: St Paul Publications, 1979): "Jesus has promised to us the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, to infuse us with this new energy, this strength, this quality of heart which will make it possible for us truly to welcome the other – even our enemy – as he or she is... Learning to love takes a lifetime, because the Holy Spirit must penetrate even the smallest corners of our being, all the places where there are fears, defences, and envy." 24.

<sup>66</sup> Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, 369.

<sup>67</sup> Jean Vanier, *Essential Writings* (New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 29. See also, Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998). Vanier's experiential anthropology begins with the desirous, reaching state of being, not a cognitive or theoretical state. E.g., his first two chapters are concerned with "Loneliness" and "Belonging."

<sup>68</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez's celebrated commentary, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (New York: Orbis Books 1987) consistently frames the gift of wisdom in such "disinterested" terms. He writes, "Only when we have come to realize that God's love is freely bestowed, do we enter fully and definitively into the presence of the God of faith... God's love, like all true love, operates in a world not of cause and effect but of freedom and gratuitousness. That is how persons successfully encounter one

Furthermore, such a non-mechanical quality of love creates and sustains an expectancy of spirit, thus a non-anxious adaptability within life's repeated ambiguity of circumstance. And so, as far as pastoral ministry is concerned, a discerning wisdom born of incarnated, adaptive love, teaches a certain detachment, at least from any sense of fixed, sure or needed outcome. As Ford concludes clearly, echoing St. Bernard's third and fourth degrees of love, "The richest wisdom has been found in God's love for creation for its own sake and a responsive human love of God for God's sake and of other people for their own sake."<sup>69</sup>

An all-too brief reference to Vanier's commentary on the Gospel of John will nevertheless be an appropriate point of concluding this particular section. Written in devotional, poetic-prose, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John* is Vanier's personal and communal testimony to the primacy of affecting love within the unfolding Christian life of discipleship. For Vanier, Christian faith is a mystical life, no less, in that it is utterly dependent upon the unifying work of the Spirit and the dignifying love of the Son. "This 'life' is the very life of God," he writes, "which Jesus came to give us through a new birth and growth in the Holy Spirit. It is a life of friendship with Jesus that brings us out of self-centredness to a centredness in God and in others and into a new knowledge of God."<sup>70</sup>

Vanier's stress on a centredness in God is entirely consistent with Bernard and Edwards' concern for a spiritually affective knowledge, imbuing and shaping the expressive life of faith. More than a theological slogan, then, it represents a way of gracious and wise being in close relation to Otherness and others, which Jean Vanier himself models unselfconsciously. He proved himself to be trustworthy on a global scale by virtue of his transparency of spirit and is considered to be

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another in a complete and unconditional way: without payment of any kind of charges and without externally imposed obligations that pressure them into meeting the expectations of the other." 87-88.

<sup>69</sup> Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, 380. He immediately goes on to say, "Wise living before this God involves a faith that above all acknowledges being desired and loved by God, like Jesus at his baptism, and that in response desires and loves God." See, Bernard, *On Loving God*, 28-29.

<sup>70</sup> Jean Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 11.

discerningly wise by virtue of an enduring trust in the promptings of Spirit. Prior to any word he speaks or pastoral action he undertakes, his own “closing with Christ” is discernible in and through his simplicity and beauty of countenance. This is the essence of a pastoral disposition inclined towards the love of Christ, congruently and courageously expressed through the unifying mission of the Holy Spirit.

## 7.6 Artistic Inclination

As noted previously, evidence of Bernard’s and Edwards’ inclination towards artistic expression resides not simply through their stated interests in aesthetics *per se*, but through the oral and written forms of pastoral expression each reformer happily employed. I noted in Chapter Two that the Cistercian scholar, Jean Leclercq, described Bernard primarily as an artist. In this startling summation of the Saint (from an ecclesial point of view), the oft quoted assertion of visual artist and commentator, Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), holds true to a figure such as Bernard. In the midst of the impressionism revolution, Kandinsky wrote, “The artist must have something to say, for mastery over form is not his goal but rather the adapting of form to its inner meaning.”<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, the creation of a spiritual atmosphere as compared to the mere reinforcement of materialism can be described as the genuine expression of prophetic character.<sup>72</sup> In short—and this is certainly true to “Dr. Mellifluous”—the always-in-potential new world is not offered by the artist propositionally or ideologically. Rather, through the expressive being of the artist, in awed

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<sup>71</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. M.T.H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1977), 54. This (prosaic) thought well correspond to the mature poetry of Rainer Rilke addressed to the mythical god of music and poetry, Orpheus: “Song, as you teach us, is not a grasping, not a seeking for some final consummation. To sing is to be...Truly to sing takes another kind of breath. A breath in the void. A shudder in God. A wind.” Joanna Macy & Anita Burrows, ed. and trans. *A Year with Rilke: Daily Readings from the Best of Rainer Maria Rilke* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 16.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

and humble relation to Transcendence or Form, new and hopeful expressions of being are intrinsic to the creative forms employed.<sup>73</sup>

This prophetic principle is also discernible in Jonathan Edwards, particularly when he moves beyond the density of theological prose and *paints* for the listener and reader the relational love at the heart of divine mystery. In my considered opinion, it is then that his words invite an existential faith response by imaginatively locating the mystery of God in present times and spaces.<sup>74</sup> His conversion recollection, as quoted and commented upon in Chapter Four, is testimony to this keen sense of aesthetic seeing, particularly through his repeated literary usage of various convergences with each conveying the relational, excellent and honouring beauty of his divine subject matter, namely “The Father, Son and Holy Ghost” who, as Being in communion, is not an end in Oneself but the eternally expressive and drawing power of redemptive love.<sup>75</sup>

Resonant with the above considerations, the relatively contemporary theologian Clyde Kilby, has insightfully noted:

The great artist is not so much concerned to create other worlds of form as much to invest given forms with eternally new significance. His (sic) creation is re-creation. It is the second-rate artist who, finding himself incapable of genuine creativity, strives to invent forms and moves not toward true originality but mere eccentricity.<sup>76</sup>

Again, what Kilby clearly identifies at the outset of his statement is certainly true to Bernard and Edwards. As has been shown, their unique theological and pastoral projects, so to speak, were consciously God centred and attuned, offered with expectancy in the hope of spiritual renewal. By

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<sup>73</sup> Mark S. Burrows, “Learning to see”: Rilke’s *Sonnets to Orpheus* as prophetic vision. Unpublished Conference Paper, 2017. Quoting Sonnet 2.12 “Give yourself to change...” or “Will metamorphosis...”, Burrows then writes of the artist’s vocation as, “... the work of “pouring ourselves forth,” as if we ourselves are a “source” of change.” 5.

<sup>74</sup> This being consistent with the poet, Jane Hirshfield’s working definition of art: “Art’s desire is not to convey the already established but to transform the life that takes place within its presence.” Jane Hirshfield, *Ten Windows: How Great Poems Transform the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 33.

<sup>75</sup> *WJE* 21:135.

<sup>76</sup> Clyde S. Kilby, *The Arts and Christian Imagination: Essays on Art, Literature, and Aesthetics* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2016), 55.

virtue of those affective inclinations, their various forms of pastoral expression were, in essence, spiritually creative. I believe, therefore, that such a reforming / reframing principle is equally applicable to the contemporary practitioner of Christian ministry. That simply means that an originality of pastoral expression is ultimately contingent upon abiding relation in and with divine love. In the context of Christian ministry practice, this well describes the Triune God of processional and redeeming grace.

By way of distinct contrast, a second-rate artist, according to Kilby's definition, can feel the restless need to experiment beyond original and vitalising relation, creating works in their own finite and ego-centric image. And while in the estimation of Edwards such pastoral marvels may initially burst into view like a shining "comet," or in Bernard, initially resemble a gushing "canal," they soon fade or run dry (depending on the initial metaphor) due to a lack of genuine relation within the God of sustaining and joyous love (John 15:9-11). They are, in sum, immature expressions of pastoral vanity yet often confidently finagled in the name of God. This all-too-common conundrum becomes even more complex when faith communities under such leadership are not equipped to discern the discordant human realities unfolding before and around them. Well-grounded pastoral supervision, ecclesial accountabilities and spiritual direction are imperatives in such an ecclesial context.

Demonstrably, this is a non-vulnerable posture in relation to God and thus, by definition, a non-artistic disposition towards and within the pastoral vocation. For it is my contention that authentic artistic expression in pastoral mode is fuelled and guided by spiritually renovated affections. It is not simply an air of talent, passion or cleverness. Rather, an artistic disposition in pastoral mode is foremost a relational fidelity born in the liberation of grace. It is not a capacity for ready performance or personal aggrandisement. It is, as Kandinsky contends, the difficult road of

consistently facilitating a spiritual atmosphere within the predominating social context of materiality in which faith maturity can progressively take place.

Considered within this theological framework, pastoral artistic expression can be characterised as a spiritual co-making—a *poiesis*.<sup>77</sup> It works with God-given materiality, arranging it in substance and form in order that the art itself represents the graced experience and perspective of the artist. Therefore, I contend that theological artistic expression does not simply convey a pleasurable or interesting idea about a subject such as beauty. It is a fully engaged means of creating a harmonising bond among humans in an otherwise fractured world, “joining them together in the same feelings and indispensable for the life and progress toward well-being of individuals and of humanity.”<sup>78</sup> In other words, faith-filled expressions of art flow from the longing of the heart and mind—desire attuned to the hope for the ultimate reconciliation of all things, that is, the longed-for Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:9-19).

Importantly, then, when considering the potential relationship between an artistic disposition and fruitful Christian ministry practice, it can be suggested that genuinely harmonising and empathic energies readily arise from the creative nature of the Holy Spirit. This was certainly a theological assumption of Bernard and Edwards. For them both, God’s desire for participatory and reciprocated love attracts and stirs the human spirit in ways of intense originality and artistic purpose. As Bernard suggests later in his *On the Song of Songs* series, “Grace restores me to myself, freely justified... for where the Spirit is, there is liberty.”<sup>79</sup> There is a lively paradox here: that originality (in Christ, the creative and wise Word) defined in this way is not a form of slavish

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<sup>77</sup> Greek in origin and from which the English noun poetry is derived, the verb *poiesis* is of such dynamism, that its creative action is to transform the “world of the god’s making,” thus *continue* it. Considered in a Christian theological light, in contrast to a purely philosophical one, art is not simply of an individually expressive value as it has been practiced, politicised and socialised in contemporary Western economies, religious cultures notwithstanding. Artistic expression in prayerful relation to the Divine always has the potential to inspire socially imaginative, constructive, virtuous and hopeful behaviours.

<sup>78</sup> See James KA Smith, “Redeeming the Affections,” in *The Spirit, the Affections and the Christian Tradition*, 50.

<sup>79</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, IV, 67.VI.10, 14.

imitation, much like a rote learning. Instead, it is a radically opened potentiality of expressive being, unlimited in scope by given virtue of God's fathomless depth of imaginative and compassionate Being.

In the carefully articulated writing of von Balthasar, true artistic expression is born of a vulnerability (*Gefährdetheit*) before transcendence.<sup>80</sup> Consequently, it bears the distinctive marks of awe and relational surrender to God's piercing and enfolding love. Paradoxically, though, this graced state of deep-seated receptivity gives rise to courageous expressions of redemptive creativity. And like Bernard before him, von Balthasar personifies the paragon of responsive *affectus* in the figure of Mary, the trusting and willing bearer of the Word (*logos*). Of her, von Balthasar writes:

To faith, God is Trinity, an interior fruitfulness that pours itself out. In Christ's hypostatic union, it pours itself out into creation which had been prepared for just this. Made ready by Christ's grace for Christ's grace, moreover, creation reaches its epitome in Mary's bridal motherhood. This is the centre from which every aspect of the Church and of Christianity must be interpreted... God's plan for the world is the 'glorification' and 'transformation' of nature in its *servanthood* (*Dienstbarkeit*).<sup>81</sup>

Parallel to the theological perspective of von Balthasar, though from a different place of culture, religious experience and practice, the philosopher and later-in-life theologian Simone Weil argued for the principled place of a progressive de-creation within artistic process and personhood. For her, that meant the deliberate de-personalism of the artist was needed in order that the human ego can consciously yield to an initiating, self-revealing Love.<sup>82</sup> In her own experience as a prominent philosophical writer and justice activist, Weil's conversion to the self-emptying way and

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<sup>80</sup> See, Anne M. Carpenter, *Theo – Poetics: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Risk of Art and Being* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2015), 20-22. Carpenter defines von Balthasar's notion of vulnerability in terms of an, "analogous surrender: the artistic surrender to the aesthetic, and the religious surrender to God." 21. Most significantly for Part 2 of this current chapter, is that the meeting place of such a vulnerability lies squarely within the human person. It is not an idea or a mere ideal.

<sup>81</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. 1. Seeing the Form*, 107.

<sup>82</sup> See, Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 67-82. See also, Weil, "Human Personality," in *An Anthology* trans. Sian Miles (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), 69-98: "The person in man (sic) is a thing in distress; it feels cold and is always looking for warm shelter... That is why it was not in popular circles that the philosophy of personalism originated and developed, but among writers, for whom it is part of their profession to have or hope to acquire a name and a reputation." 79.

being of Christ happened surprisingly through the memorisation of George Herbert's poem, "Love" [III], in 1938, only five years before her death. With its opening lines being, "Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back, guilty of dust and sin," Weil subsequently commented in a letter to a friend, "I used to think I was merely reciting it as a beautiful poem, but without my knowing it the recitation had the virtue of a prayer. It was during one of these recitations that, as I told you, Christ himself came down and took possession of me."<sup>83</sup>

Spiritual attentiveness to affecting graces—named as attunement in von Balthasar's writings<sup>84</sup>—is central, I suggest, to faithful creative practices, including those of pastoral ministry. Indeed, for Weil, "Attention animated by desire is the whole foundation of religious practices. That is why no system of morality can take their place."<sup>85</sup> Citing the artistic examples of Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Shakespeare and Racine, she states elsewhere, "Real genius is nothing else but the supernatural virtue of humility in the domain of thought."<sup>86</sup> Therefore, such a quality of receptive and expressive being demands a divestment of inflated social prestige in order to point beyond oneself to the drawing and overflowing nature of Otherness;<sup>87</sup> the divine disposition notable for its core relationality of justice, truth and beauty, viz. enfolding love.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> As quoted by Sian Miles in, *An Anthology*, 35.

<sup>84</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. 1. Seeing the Form*, "Faith in the full Christian sense can be nothing other than this: to make the whole man a space that responds to the divine content. Faith attunes man to this sound; it confers on man the ability to react precisely to this divine experiment, preparing him to be a violin that receives just this touch of the bow, to serve as material for just this house to be built, to provide the rhyme for just this verse being composed. This was the reaction already envisaged when the Covenant was made on Sinai: "Be holy, because I am holy." 21.

<sup>85</sup> Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, "The Love of Religious Practices," 129.

<sup>86</sup> Simone Weil, "Human Personality," 87.

<sup>87</sup> The Italian medieval poet Dante Alighieri, a religious artist von Balthasar admired, captures something of this demanding art-faith synergy in *Purgatorio*, the second book of *The Divine Comedy (la divina comedia)*. Pointedly, he does so, not only for his envisaged readers to heed, but importantly Dante numbered himself (as an already established and celebrated artist) as one needing to learn from what he saw and heard; most notably through the testimony of the famed manuscript illuminator, Oderisi, who, stationed on the Terrace of Pride, is bent low by the heavy vice of elitist, self-reliance expressed as, "...the great desire of supremacy my heart was intent on (*per lo gran disio de l'eccellenza ove mio core intese*)."<sup>87</sup> See, Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Purgatorio*, edited and translated by Robert M. Durling, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), Canto XI. 85, 177. Durling makes the point in an Additional Note that Dante as pilgrim acts as a model to and for others: "In order to see and speak with Oderisi, the pilgrim must bend equally low... As he listens to Oderisi's account of the futility of artistic pride, his own pride is chastened... this occurs when he is bent over and to that extent sharing the penance." 607. The point here being that religious art in its many forms, often seeking to express a meeting place between transcendence and immanence, can easily lose its modesty and vocational way or its faithful innocence by virtue of the forgetfulness of, or blindness toward, eternally revealing love.

<sup>88</sup> In "Human Personality," Weil writes, "Thanks to an eternal and providential decree, everything produced by man in every sphere, when he is ruled by the spirit of justice and truth, is endowed with the radiance of beauty... Beauty is the supreme mystery of the world." 92.

The relevance of the above discussion to my thesis topic and question lies in the redemptively creative nature of divine love. To be united to the originating love of God, in Christ, through the Spirit, is to share— at the level of the affections—the same desire for harmonising and *healing* graces to be extended broadly and thereby enjoyed. Happiness and enjoyment in the somewhat startling thought of Edwards, is the defining mark of the Holy Trinity’s interior and emanating life of communal love; it is a perfect energy constituent of “divine love, complacency and joy.”<sup>89</sup> It logically follows, then, that the Christian life in general and pastoral ministry in particular will be predisposed towards the energising art and discipline of re-creation.

By way of summary, artistic inclination within the context of pastoral ministry, nurtures the desire for imaginative and potentially healing rearrangements of what *already* exists within the created and wondrous order of things. This redemptive principle is clearly expressed in the words of Vinita Hampton Wright, a Christian teacher of creative writing:

In a general sense, every human being is creative. The trait is not always flashy. Often it is not called by its true name. But when you take the stuff of life and rearrange it so that it matters, so that it does good things, you’re acting creatively. At those times when you are breaking a sweat to make life work better, you are most like the God who created you. You don’t have to come up with a new idea in order to be creative. All you have to do is find an old idea and apply it to a new moment or group of people, a new problem or situation.<sup>90</sup>

Significantly for this thesis, when Hampton Wright underscores the principle of creative rearrangement, she—like many others I have quoted in this section—is encouraging a working alignment to the ever-creative Spirit and not a vain or “flashy” desire to try and create something out of nothing. Whereas the relationally attentive and dependent path retains a

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<sup>89</sup> *WJE* 21:113.

<sup>90</sup> Vinita Hampton Wright, *The Soul Tells a Story: Engaging Creativity with Spirituality in the Writing Life* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 17. I believe it true to suggest that either a certain hubris or paralysis exists around the life of creativity due to a working assumption that it means a ‘creation out of nothing.’ In a theological framework, such ‘creativity’—*fiat*—is ultimately the domain and imperative of the transcendent God. It need not be the misdirected desire of humanity, nor need it be a barrier to a participatory life in God. See, Bruce Ellis Benson, *Liturgy as a Way of Life: Embodying the Arts in Christian Worship*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013): “In creating human beings, the Triune Creator says “let us” and sets in motion a reality of continual alteration. Yet, unlike God—who creates *ex nihilo*— we create as “improvisers,” out of something. However, if God does not simply set reality in motion but is constantly involved in that reality, then God is an “improviser” too. In *that* sense, we are improvisers in God’s image.” 26.

vision of the common good, the path of self-reliance can readily lead to a sterile sense of self-promotion.

## 7.7 Movements of divine compassion

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return and your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most-High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be sympathetic / merciful / compassionate (*oiktirmones*)<sup>91</sup> as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back (Luke 6:35-38).

Jesus' well-known teaching locates the needed compassion to be authentic to Christian leaders and faith communities, in and with the creative being of God. Indeed, it names the relational nature of God in close relation to Godself and towards the universe of God's making. Compassion, therefore, is part of God's very being made tangible and evident through relationship. It is not a divine attribute nor an impersonal essence to describe God neatly, such as omnipotence or omniscience. Compassion is a particular expressiveness of God's salvific love, specifically within Christian theology, it is the relational and kenotic nature of the Incarnation:<sup>92</sup> "And the Word became flesh and lived among us... full of grace and truth." (John 1:14).<sup>93</sup>

The startling gift of divine solidarity evident in the above biblical quotation is suggestive not only of a functional capacity to co-suffer with humanity but a relational desire to enter fully into the

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<sup>91</sup> In this Lukan context, *oiktirmon* is, broadly speaking, a divine mercy that serves as an admonishment to the behaviour and wellbeing of Christian community. Importantly, it is clearly understood that its relational source is God and not a humanly constructed virtue. See, R. Bultmann, "*oiktiro*" in, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 680.

<sup>92</sup> Bernard addressed Christ's self-emptying (*kenosis*) in terms of, "For that emptying was neither simple gesture nor a limited one; but he emptied himself even to the assuming of human nature, even to accepting death, death on a cross. Who is there that can adequately gauge the greatness of the humility, gentleness, self-surrender, revealed by the Lord of majesty in assuming human nature, in accepting the punishment of death, the shame of the cross?" *On the Song of Songs*, I, 11.III.7, 74.

<sup>93</sup> The theologian, Monika Hellwig, *Jesus: The Compassion of God* (Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983) states, "The Compassion of God, like the Word and Life and the Light, refers to "activity" in God. That is to say it enables us to imagine the one God in dynamic ways. Moreover, it pictures God in "activity" that relates God to the creation and to creatures as well as to the redemption of the human race and its history. It identifies Jesus with that outreach into creation which makes God present in it, participant in it, entering into the human experience in solidarity with human suffering, history and destiny. It is a way of saying that in the person of Jesus, God truly enters into creation, into the human dilemma in all its tragic dimensions. And all of these implications seem to be facets of the traditional Christology." 123.

depths of fissured human experience for the sake of its healing through the sacrificial and reconciling love of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).<sup>94</sup> Both Bernard's and Edwards' pastoral theologies turn on the redemptive dynamic of incarnational presence and empathic saving action. For Bernard, the attending Word is, amongst other things, a lover and physician of the soul and a medicine "strong and pungent, testing the mind and the heart."<sup>95</sup> Within a similar theological premise of befriending love, Edwards paints an "admirable" conjunctural portrait of the condescending Christ, stating:

His condescension is great enough to become their (sinful creatures) friend: 'tis great enough to become their companion, to unite their souls to him in spiritual marriage: 'tis great enough to take their nature upon him, to become one of them, that he may be one with them: yea, it is great enough to abase himself yet lower for them, even to expose himself to shame and spitting; yea, to yield up himself to an ignominious death for them.<sup>96</sup>

Within the expressed thought of each reformer, therefore, Christ's co-suffering love (Latin, *misericordia*) is a gift to receive and share generously within community. However, clearly this is by means of spiritual union with the crucified, risen One who has joyfully shown the compassionate way for his disciples to follow (Hebrews 12:1-2). More specifically still, it is a willingness to enter prayerfully into Christ's unfolding biblical narrative and participate in both his death and resurrection through the lived context of one's own alienated and mortal life. So, at this vital juncture of decision making, the gospel of Christ is not formulaic—a religious idea or concept to subscribe to. Rather, it is profoundly existential in the raw terms of relational choice and life

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<sup>94</sup> See, Elizabeth Johnson, *Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril* (Maryknol, NY: Orbis Books, 2018). In her chapter, "God of All Flesh: Deep Incarnation," Johnson pushes beyond an exclusively anthropological focus for the incarnation when she states, "Deep incarnation understands John's gospel to be saying that the *sarx* that the Word of God not only weds Jesus Christ to other human beings in the human species; it also reaches beyond us to join the incarnate one to the whole evolving biological world of living creatures and the cosmic dust of which they are composed." 186.

<sup>95</sup> *On the Song of Songs*, I, 3.1.2, 17-18. Here, in an early sermon within the *On Song of Song* series, Bernard writes, "Prostrate yourself on the ground, take hold of his (the Word's) feet, soothe them with kisses, sprinkle them with your tears so wash not them but yourself. Thus, you will become one of the "flock of shorn ewes as they come up from the washing." But even then you may not dare to lift up a face suffused with shame and grief, until you hear the sentence: "Your sins are forgiven," to be followed by the summons: "Awake, awake, captive daughter of Zion, awake, shake off the dust."

<sup>96</sup> *WJE* 19:566.

trajectory. As the Lutheran martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer plainly wrote, “There are only two ways possible of encountering Jesus: We must die or we must put Jesus to death.”<sup>97</sup>

Being moved by God’s compassion, then, is a willing bearing of the paschal mystery of Christ within one’s own vulnerabilities—a Christopraxis or a cruciformity. Stated either way, it is a deepened capacity to extend that same grace within pastoral practice.<sup>98</sup> Logically, this assumes a working knowledge of personal suffering and the progressive healing of wounds by the ever-attending grace of God who is enfleshed (Gk. *sarx egeneto*) in Christ and given freely through the Spirit. As such, a pastoral compassion arises from repeated inner movements of God’s reconciling and forgiving love within the ambiguous and sinful context of one’s own life. From that place of encounter, the pastor of Christ is then able to give freely of her or himself out of sheer mercy for and understanding of the vexed human condition. The pastor of Christ is also a damaged and flawed human being yet one whom God constantly addresses by a first and endeared name.<sup>99</sup>

Bonhoeffer is again a clear voice in this regard:

When God was merciful, when He revealed Jesus Christ to us as our Brother, when he won our hearts by His love, this was the beginning of our instruction in divine love. When God was merciful to us, we learned to be merciful with our brethren. When we received forgiveness instead of judgement, we, too, were made ready to forgive our brethren. What God did to us, we then owed others. The more we received, the more we were able to give; and the more meagre our brotherly

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<sup>97</sup> As quoted by Gerald Fagin, SJ, in *Putting on the Heart of Christ*, 159.

<sup>98</sup> I do not mean an over-confidence, rather a certain trust in vital connecting points of common human experience. Viz. suffering, mistake making, “dumb things” etc. Henri Nouwen’s classic text, *The Wounded Healer* (New York; Images Books, 1972): “Through compassion we also sense our hope for forgiveness in our friend’s eyes and our hatred in their bitter mouths. When they kill, we know that we could have done it; when they give life, we know that we can do the same. For a compassionate person nothing human is alien: no joy and no sorrow, no way of living and no way of dying.” [41]

<sup>99</sup> See, Sean M. Gilbert, *Coming Home to the Triune Mystery of God*, 88-92. While the substance of this personal narrative is not essential to this thesis, the principle of pastoral self-knowledge within the healing love of Christ, is otherwise pivotal. Unacknowledged woundedness in pastoral practice is a sure recipe for a shared and divisive woundedness. Acknowledged woundedness in the healing spirit of Christ, is the beginning of compassionate, restorative practice. I wrote, following a personal narrative of surprising healing, “... not only could I see the tangible figure of Christ in the midst of my deepest pain, I noticed that his divine countenance was also mine. In other words, by encountering the loving presence of Jesus Christ at the centre of my being, I beheld myself as I truly am; the moment of self-discovery—in Christ—a profound and much needed experience of self-love and acceptance. My sense of abandonment, self-contempt and inner loneliness had been shared and understood. The journey homeward had come by way of a critical and inner intersection of divine embrace and healing. Saint Augustine’s lyrical words of confession very nearly say it all for me: “Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within... You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put flight to my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours... Alas, “Lord have mercy upon me” (Ps. 30:10), wretch that I am. See, I do not hide my wounds. You are the physician; I am the patient. You are pitiful, I am the object of pity.” (Confessions, X. xxii.38, 201-02).

love, the less were we living by God's mercy and love. Thus, God himself taught us to meet one another as God had met us in Christ.<sup>100</sup>

Consequently, divine compassion cannot be imitated from a safe distance. Indeed, it cannot be put on and off as is a jacket or hat but is constituent of being clothed in Christ (Colossians 3:9-12). Therefore, Christian compassion is the stirring of the deepest human affections and the expansion of soul by virtue of divine mercy's embrace. Indeed, it is a mercy that finds the practitioner lovable and wholly worthwhile as a person prior to any act of practical or proficient service in Christ's name. This is its radicalising and gifted nature. And this is why it is imprudent to leap to so-called compassionate practice without first taking stock of more intrinsic, motivating realities. For to live in the mercy of God, sings the poet Denise Levertov is, "To float, upheld / as salt water / would hold you, / once you dared."<sup>101</sup> And similarly muses the contemporary hymn writer, Thomas Troeger, "Acceptance of the matchless gift is gift enough to give; the very act will shake and shift the way we love and live."<sup>102</sup>

In 1982, three North American catholic priests wrote and published, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*.<sup>103</sup> The book proved to be something of a catalyst for renewed thought regarding the pastoral practice of compassion while simultaneously triggering fresh biblical and theological enquiry into the constituent and expressive nature of God in Christ.<sup>104</sup> Importantly for this study, the pastoral framing of compassion by Nouwen, McNeill and Morrison critically sought to resist the corresponding rise of clerical professionalism active at their time of writing. However, the authors expressed their concern not by disparaging further practical education of priests,

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<sup>100</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 24-25.

<sup>101</sup> Denise Levertov, *The Stream and the Sapphire*, 31.

<sup>102</sup> "A Spendthrift Lover" in *Together in Song: Australian Hymn Book II* (Melbourne: HarperCollins, 1999), [# 676].

<sup>103</sup> Henri Nouwen, Donald McNeill & Douglas Morrison, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* (New York: Image Books, 1983).

<sup>104</sup> Monika Hellwig's *Jesus; The Compassion of God* (1983) is one example, yet also the rise of metaphorical and feminist theologies that employed compassion as a core relational constituency of God (in contrast to monarchical and exclusivist maleness) began to be written around this time also. E.g., Sally McFague's, *Models of God* (1987) & Elizabeth Johnson's, *She Who Is* (1993).

ministers and pastors, but by maintaining and deepening a Eucharistic sense of vocational union with the processional God of compassionate love.<sup>105</sup>

Using the Apostle Paul as a significant example of one moved by God's compassion, the three priests explore his gracious opening salutation to the Christian community at Philippi when he writes, "It is right for me to think this way about you all, because you hold me in your heart... for God is my witness, how I long for you with the compassion (*splangchna* lit. bowels) of Christ Jesus."<sup>106</sup> The authors then comment:

The mystery is that Paul loves God's people with a divine intimacy. His compassion is thus much more than mere sentiment or emotional attachment. It is the expression of his new being in Christ. In Christ, Paul has become capable of the all-embracing and deeply moving compassion of God... This reveals to us the great mystery of Paul's ministry. He touched people with God's compassion, a compassion so deep and so full that it could not fail to bear fruit. This is also the mystery of our new way of being together. It has become possible to be together in compassion because we have been given a share in God's compassion.<sup>107</sup>

In light of the above quotation it is reasonable to suggest that the pastoral expression of Christ's compassion is predicated on the intimate knowing of Christ through his deeply felt, present compassion. An experiential knowing, then, which as both Bernard and Edwards like to remind their listeners and readers, pulls faith back from the heady realms of speculation, notionalism and spiritless practice into the relational and unitive spheres of soul, gratitude, spirit and abundance of love. For noticeably, Christianity in its origins (thus, most authentically expressed through its relational nature), is a mystical way of being within the world. That is, it unapologetically finds its

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<sup>105</sup> See, Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, particularly his chapter on compassion. There he writes somewhat prophetically, "But the danger is that instead of becoming free to let the spirit grow, the future minister may entangle himself (sic) in the complications of his own assumed competence and use his specialism as an excuse to avoid the much more difficult task of being compassionate. The task of the Christian leader is to bring out the best in man and to lead him forward to a more human community; the danger is that his skilful diagnostic eye will become more an eye for distant and detailed analysis than the eye of a compassionate partner... More training and structure are just as necessary as more bread for the hungry. But just as bread given without love can bring war instead of peace, professionalism without compassion will turn forgiveness into a gimmick, and the kingdom to come into a blindfold." 42.

<sup>106</sup> According to H. Köster, "*Splanchnon*" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, "Only the noun occurs in Paul, and he uses it not merely to express emotions but as a very forceful term to signify an expression of the total personality at the deepest level... In context then, *splanchna* denotes Christian affection and *oiktirmoi* Christian sympathy. Both are essential elements in all Christian dealings. A unique phrase occurs in Phil. 1:8; the reference is to the love or affection which, gripping and moving the whole personality, is possibly only in Christ; the genitive "of Christ" denotes the author." 1068.

<sup>107</sup> Nouwen, McNeill & Morrison, 20.

energy, shape, meaning and mission of love from its spiritual source—God (John 4:24-26). Jean-Claude Barreau, in his preface to Clement's *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, puts it both succinctly and contextually: "Christianity is in the first place an Oriental religion, and it is a mystical religion."

The above assertions sound strange today, in an age when it is generally assumed that to be a Christian means to lead a good life.<sup>108</sup> The twist then is that even human expressions of compassion do not preclude a spiritual centre and source and, in that synergy of relational union, the transcendence of Mystery is at home in the intimacy of immanence.<sup>109</sup> The finite can bear the infinite because God is a pure relational, thus incarnated act of love and compassion.<sup>110</sup>

Like all five preceding pastoral dispositions already considered in this chapter, compassion is a prayerful attunement of being to Christ through the indwelling of Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). And as such, it is the ever-encouraging Spirit of Christ who remains the hope and energy within the pastoral calling. Indeed, a non-spirited, non-affected disposition for Christian ministry is a contradiction in terms. Moreover, any reductionism of Spirit or a disproportionate reliance on human agency, however practical and well intentioned, will lead to a lack of noticeable Christian identity and possible dysfunction within the Body of Christ. For in that imbalanced state it cannot remain true to itself or its missional calling without its self-authenticating head, Jesus Christ

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<sup>108</sup> Clement, 7.

<sup>109</sup> See, Sean M. Gilbert, *Coming Home to the Triune Mystery of God*. I write, "...God's otherness or "sovereignty" is not simply a metaphysical given that first needs to be protected by all theological and philosophical means available. Nor is it something that comes down to us as does a bolt of lightning from "on high." The love so historically and biblically evident in the Father's sending of the Son into the world, in the Son's undying compassion, and in the Spirit's continual giving of grace, should never be impotently described as a "disinterested love" (that is, without a qualification of the term), as so often it has been in traditionally male dominated clerical and theological circles. Given that within God lies the very fullness and source of love, it surely follows then, that agape (*caritas*), is both coloured and shaped by *amor* (a burning desire for union at the level of the affections) and *dilectio* (friendship or the harmony of agreement at a more cognitive level). 83-84.

<sup>110</sup> Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* vol. III (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), the renowned theologian of the Holy Spirit, offers some pertinent words of summation on this point: "What is particularly striking is that God is presented in the biblical revelation both as transcendent and immanent, both as beyond and above everything and with us and for us, in other words, as given and handed over to us." 137.

(Colossians 1:18-20), who in the affective language of Bernard and Edwards, is also the Church's beating heart of love, goodness and grace.<sup>111</sup>

## 7.8 Conclusion

I began this chapter by recalling the “gift of tears” that arose within me due to the pastoral bearing of Sister Therese. On many levels it would be unfair to rest the final paragraphs of this thesis on her shoulders. That is not my intent. However, to answer my own research question in light of all I have presented and argued so far, *Are spiritual affections, as defined and attested to across a breadth of the Christian tradition, still of vital importance to pastoral ministries in contemporary contexts*, I am further convinced by the beauty and strength of Therese's disposition to respond with a definitive “yes.” Spiritual affections intentionally inclined toward, thus expressive of, the Triune God of grace and mercy remain of vital ecclesial and missional significance. They represent the Church's core (heart) business of remaining within and attuned to the self-giving love of Christ. Therefore, such a pastoral pointing-beyond-oneself to the Source of all love and goodness cannot be neglected in favour of religious efficiencies without due impoverishment of Spirit, that is, a self-deprivation of God's reconciling and healing grace.

Employing the language and metaphorical imagery of John 15, Therese's abiding relationship with Christ was both the tenor and content of the hospitality offered in his name. In fact, the context of the Catholic Mass—a historically contested yet archetypal symbol of God's enfolding love—added to the significance of the moments described. For not only was I invited to the “table of the Lord,”

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<sup>111</sup> See also, *The Basis of Union* 1992 edition: “The Church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord over its own life; it also confesses that Jesus is Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity. God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself.” 22.

but through the fidelity and congruence of Therese's pastoral movements, I knew that I fully belonged around it. Her unspoken gesturing towards an inhabited sacred space was indicative of how the unconditional embrace of love encounters and slakes the deepest thirst within the human spirit.

Metaphorically speaking, this unbidden grace, at least in my reflective reading, has been the "thread" that the Wallace Stevens' poem employed at the outset of this thesis adjures its readers to hold doggedly on to—despite life's inevitable sufferings and misunderstandings. As I have sought to show within these preceding pages, a golden thread of grace has extended across the length of the Christian tradition through various pastoral voices and their influential ministries. However, in current social and ecclesial contexts notable for the dominance of causal efficiencies and imperatives directed towards even greater human capacities, that same thread of *graced* meaning, identity and purpose in Christ, runs the risk of unnecessarily being relinquished.

From the outset of this thesis, and most particularly through the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux and Jonathan Edwards, I have sought to posit the seat of the affections as the epicentre of primal and responsive human existence. When aligned in consensual relation to God, spiritual affections have been shown to be constituent of movements of divine love creatively expressed to the world. I have also argued that whilst thinking, emotional and virtuous responses are also integral to faith and life experience, they are not the primary *loci* of the operative and encountering Spirit. Fruitful pastoral ministry demands more than rational thought, clear strategy and an accumulative skills base. Its cruciform shape first needs to exist within the receptive heart as an integrated and responsive indwelling of divine grace (Luke 6:45). Critically, and in keeping with the ever-unfolding nature of the Triune God, this infused pastoral capacity is movement based and *telos* orientated. It is an intentional trajectory toward the longed-for Kingdom (Luke 11:2), in which all divided worlds are healed by the all-embracing divine presence.

Therefore, without a spiritual engagement of the affections, the Christian faith and pastoral vocations associated with its expression, are stationary or spiritually *static*; that is, they are often stuck in familiar and repetitive grooves of religious certitudes. Edwards expresses a similar conviction when he writes:

Take away all love and hatred, all hope and fear, all anger, zeal, and affectionate desire, and the world would be in great measure motionless and dead; there would be no such thing as activity amongst mankind, or any earnest pursuit whatsoever... And as in worldly things worldly affections are very much the spring of men's (sic) motion and action; so in religious matters the spring of their actions is very much religious affection; he that has doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection, never is engaged in the business of religion.<sup>112</sup>

While the Hebrew / Christian Scriptures consistently locate the “heart” as the place of spiritual encounter, conversion, desire and volition (e.g., Psalm 119: 7, 10, 11, 34), such a vital principle of faith can be difficult to experience and apply consistently, especially within the confining stresses of contemporary, secular life. Andre Louf makes this observational point clearly, when he suggests:

The heart is something that lies much deeper within us, the innermost core of our being, the root of our existence or, conversely, our summit, what the French mystics call ‘the very peak of the soul’ (‘la fine pointe de l’ame’ or ‘cime de l’esprit’). In our everyday life our heart is usually concealed. It hardly reaches the surface of our consciousness. We much prefer to stay put in our outward senses, in our impressions and feelings, in all that attracts and repels us. And should we opt to live at a deeper level of our personal being, then we usually land up in abstraction: we reflect, we combine, we compare, we draw logical conclusions. But all this time our heart will be asleep—not beating yet to the rhythm of the Spirit.<sup>113</sup>

Louf’s analysis is as challenging as I sense it is accurate. To live attuned to the “rhythm of the Spirit” demands a way of facing the often-harsh nature of reality by remaining consciously open to it. For as I have sought to show, truly creative faith responses are born of grace’s healing embrace within a ready and confessed emptiness (Luke 15: 17-19), not from positions of self-reliance, denial or self-assurance. Even more significantly for this research project, it is both the

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<sup>112</sup> *WJE* 2:101.

<sup>113</sup> Andre Louf, *Teach Us to Pray: Learning a Little About God*, Trans. Hubert Hoskins (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1974), 18.

anthropological and theological premise of Bernard and Edwards, for whom the weighted glory of God is demonstrably revealed in humanity's grateful and desirous state of (utter) dependency.<sup>114</sup>

For Jonathan Edwards, this is a consensual state of being in mirrored, "close" relation to the glorious and beautifying nature of the Holy Trinity. And for Bernard of Clairvaux, such a state of relational dependence is a "consummation" of love through the desirous seeking of the present and even absent Word. Pointedly for both pastoral reformers, then, faith is not the acquisition or consumption of divine love—yet another product to transact and utilise in the human marketplace. Nor is it simply a religious imitation of Jesus the Christ. By way of instructive contrast, divine love is, for Bernard and Edwards, the privileged gift of a participatory life orientated toward a redemptive end for the whole of creation.

Consequently, the present invitation and accompanying challenge is to both live and pastor from what is ostensibly a counter-intuitive reading of reality. That is, from a faith standpoint which perceives life's material reality to be charged to overflowing with the Spirit of God. Or to cite the poet Wendell Berry in this context, "There are no unsacred places; there are only sacred places and desecrated places."<sup>115</sup> Admittedly, as Berry is suggesting, human beings in a Western context are not easily persuaded to notice and value such "deep down things," or move beyond the immanent frame, even before tangible evidences of grace and divine providence (John 1:10-11).<sup>116</sup>

Yet arguably, the autonomy of the Holy Spirit is constantly active and invitational of potential

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<sup>114</sup> Here echoing St. Irenaeus' (c. 130-198) famous dictum in full context: "And for this reason did the Word become the dispenser of the paternal grace for the benefit of men, for whom He made such great dispensations, revealing God indeed to men, but presenting man to God, and preserving at the same time the invisibility of the Father, lest man should at any time become a despiser of God, and that he should always possess something towards which he might advance; but, on the other hand, revealing God to men through many dispensations, lest man, falling away from God altogether, should cease to exist. *For the glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God.* For if the manifestation of God which is made by means of the creation, affords life to all living in the earth, much more does that revelation of the Father which comes through the Word, give life to those who see God (emphasis mine)." "Against Heresies," Book 4.20.7, in *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1. trans. A. Roberts & W. J. Rambaut (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012). See also, Denis Edwards, *Christian Understandings of Creation: The Historical Trajectory* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 21-43.

<sup>115</sup> Wendell Berry, "How to be a Poet (to remind myself)," *Poetry Magazine*, January 2001.

<sup>116</sup> A well-known phrase of Gerrard Manly Hopkins in the poem, "God's Grandeur." See, Gerald Manley Hopkins, *Poems Selected by John Stammers* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 31.

shifts in unimaginative or superficial patterns of human thought and behaviour. Always nudging and inviting, spiritual affect needs only an opened heart in order to be noticed and potentially infused. To quote Jean-Pierre de Caussade: “If we open our mouths they will be filled. The divine activity permeates the whole universe, it pervades every creature... it goes before them, and it follows them; all they have to do is to let the waves bear them on.”<sup>117</sup>

That is why, when considered theologically and within pastoral frameworks, the swelling nature of divine love is still of vital importance to those who are called to, and active within, pastoral ministries constituted by Christ’s shepherding name. For his self-proclaimed way, truth and life (Lat. *via, veri et vita* – John 14:6)—contrary to a common dogmatic reading—always invite fuller immersion into God’s merciful and missional expression of relational Being. Only from that graced centre can authentic and fruitful ministry arise (John 15:5b) and go the full journey, so to speak. Accordingly, a faith pilgrimage with Christ in the Spirit implies a gradual displacement of egocentricity and a deepening of humility (*sine humilitate, nulla humilitas*).<sup>118</sup> Within such an incremental, yet spirited trajectory of transformation (*theosis*), the spiritual fruit of trust, dependence and compassionate service is given the space to grow and flourish, even within socially dismissive or resistant places of the human spirit.

In the above context, Karl Rahner, the Vatican II “theologian of grace,” is a pertinent, summarising voice. In 1971 he famously wrote, “The devout Christian of the future will either be a “mystic,” one who has experienced “something,” or he will cease to be anything at all.”<sup>119</sup> Significantly, Rahner, like Bernard and Edwards before him, was not endorsing supernatural or an ‘out of body’ religious

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<sup>117</sup> Jean-Pierre de Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2008), 7.

<sup>118</sup> Or as Michael Casey more colourfully suggested through Bernard’s turn of phrase, “*deificatum via defecatum*,” i.e., growing up into God by means of getting rid of the shit.

<sup>119</sup> As quoted by Harvey D. Egan, “The Mystical Theology of Karl Rahner,” in *The Way*, 52/2 (April 2013), 43-62. Egan goes on to say, “Because God offers nothing less than God’s very own self to everyone, the human person is, to Rahner’s way of thinking, *homo mysticus*, mystical man. This relationship stamps all personal experiences with at least an implicit, yet primordial, experience of God.” 43-44.

experience. Rather he was advocating a discernible depth of participation in and with God through grateful consent to grace. This is an embodied expression of Christian mysticism, then, which is both transformational and grounding in terms of the human disposition. Indeed, it gives rise to generous expressions of grace and truth lived in accord with those of Jesus the Christ.<sup>120</sup>

Ironically, perhaps, such focus upon nurturing lives in the Spirit may result in less time and energy being given over to the Christian Church as an institution because more attention is paid to the quality and reach of discipleship. However painful this structural dismantling of the Church may be, it might also prove to be an unshackling of vocational creativity within cynical and jaded environments. Freed from institutional expectation and competing ideologies, pastoral ministry may well be in a position to conform more fully to the adaptive heart and mind of Christ. From that ever-renewing centre of being, it can then be better disposed to participate in the eternal exchange of redeeming love that is the Holy Trinity with us and for us.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: A Research Journal: July – December 2015.

#### Monday, July 27

At home, finishing notes taken on the 12 signs of Spiritual Affections (JE) and struck deeply—also in light of some stuff on Aquinas, Luther and Calvin—that this faith thing is no child’s play. By that I mean, what I am embarking on here is no simple *or vain* exercise of academic enquiry. The very nature of the subject matter demands an existential response from me. To be sure, I am being continually put in potentially converting places. I expected that on one level, but it has been a surprise on another.

I have always known myself to be attracted to aesthetic formulations and have been to get away with a certain lyricism and wonderment of eye. This is different. To speak truly of the spiritual affections as they relate to ministry begs a certain knowing and a deepening desire to know more of their attunement and practice. So, yes, a certain trembling—re the academic demands and rigours but on a more fundamental level, at the audacity to try and comment on such things that seem beyond my willing grasp at times. These theologians actually meant what they were saying and prayed it might be so.

#### Tuesday, 28 July 2015

Not a bad day to be reading around “Evangelical Humiliation” (sixth sign in E’s 12); The framing process continues in an ad hoc yet strangely ordered way. I think my introduction will soon have some real substance and I now have some focus about the art—“proportion and symmetry”—of ministry practice itself.

The attraction to humility and ministry practice is no accident. Psalm 131 sings yet again, not only in St. Benedict but also in JE. Some classic quotes about falsehood and feigned humility. The signs are there to be read if we choose to read them. On the positive side of things, simplicity and vibrancy, uncluttered with ego, the purpose and energy for ministry coming not from obligations, grandiosity or / and anxiety, but from the apprehension / attraction of Christ himself. The entry point is humility of perspective and experience, I believe. Always, ever.

JE's summation of the Sixth Sign—and parts in between—is sublime, if not poetic:

Now it is out of such a [gracious, humble] heart as this, that all truly holy affections do flow. Christian affections are like Mary's precious ointment, that she poured on Christ's head, that filled the whole house with a sweet odour. That was poured out of an alabaster box; so gracious affections flow out to Christ out of a pure heart. That was poured out of a broken box; till the box was broken the ointment could not flow, nor diffuse its odour: so gracious affections flow out of a broken heart...A truly Christian love, either to God or men, is a humble broken-hearted love. The desires of the saints, however earnest, are humble desires: their hope is an (sic) humble hope; and their joy, even when it is unspeakable, and full of glory, is a humble, broken-hearted joy, and leaves the Christian poorer in spirit, and more like a little child, and more disposed to an universal lowliness of behaviour. [JE, 2, 339-40]

Defining broken-hearted is not so easy. Humiliation seems so dramatic and yet who can deny that a good dose of stripping to naked flesh is not needed so far as genuine formation is concerned? All pretensions of goodness, giftedness, "election," specialness need to be removed as might barnacles be removed from a ship's hull. They halt the flow. They tend to take over the show by virtue of their ugliness.

### **Wednesday, 29 July 2015**

A frustrating but revealing day. (Heading back into work is not the way to go). Anyway, I see a great link in Bernard and Edwards around the call to love God in Godself for Godself. Bernard's third stage of love which I think is accessible, and particularly for people in leadership and who intent about formational processes:

God is not loved without a reward, although he should be loved without regard for one. True charity cannot be worthless, still, as 'it does not seek its own advantage,' it cannot be termed mercenary. Love pertains to the will, it is not a transaction; it cannot acquire or be acquired by a

pact. Moving us freely, it makes us spontaneous. True love is content with itself; it has its reward, the object of its love...true love merits its reward, it does not seek it. [OLG, 20]

### **Sunday, 2 August 2015**

Reading and noting *Religious Affections* as I have been doing so in recent days has been a profitable exercise. In terms of getting into Edwards' head and soul, his repetitions, insistences, polemics, and above all his beatific vision, makes his practical understanding of the affections, particularly in relation to the ministry of Christ, more accessible, if not admirable. I aim to do the same with his *Treatise on the Trinity*. I trust it also a mature work, which is really important to this exercise. Surely Trinity lies at the heart of his work, as I suspect the same for Bernard.

I feel a certain leading in this time; counter intuitive and consciously not anxious. I must trust this movement, imprecise as it may first appear. To get into these two saints heads and hearts is central to all else, in that I can then write with a certain freedom born of knowing, if not intuition.

### **Monday, 3 August 2015**

I have finished *Religious Affections*. It creates such a firm and fertile theological platform to reflect upon the art of Christian Ministry. The linkages are great if not too abundant. How Edwards could pull this all together, I am not exactly sure. Genius, I guess. It is hard to believe, but until today I had not quite got the distinction between general and spiritual affections in his title and in my reading. It makes a huge difference as to how I will introduce the topic.

Edwards' preoccupation with true and false is understandable but a tad annoying. The lack of grey at times and the sharp distinctions don't quite ring true to an ambiguous reality, but it is the NT pattern. Every time there seems to be genuineness it soon comes under attack from a "higher" affection base. It seems we are not always content with almost a hidden humility, if not presence.

Apart from the 12 signs, the short chapter “Concerning the Nature of the Affections, and their importance to Religion,” is a must for future classes of mine, particularly *Liturgy and Worship*. The affective base is everything in that context.

### **Wednesday, 5 August 2015**

Hunting around my older files—I had a hunch—I came upon notes and a presentation paper of Edwards that is all very helpful; Good fruit of my 2000 Sabbatical (nothing is lost). It is always interesting to read earlier work and expression. In some ways it looks and feels tighter and I even seem to know more back then than what I do now.

Certainly, Edwards’ emphasis on the indwelling of God as Spirit, is so important to this project. The positioning is so important to artistic notions and expressions of Christian ministry. The sermon, *The Divine and Supernatural Light*, is key:

This light, and this only, has its fruit in a universal holiness of life. No merely notional or speculative understanding of the doctrines of religion, will ever bring to this. But this light, as it reaches the bottom of the heart, and changes the nature, so it will effectually dispose to a universal obedience... It draws forth the heart in a sincere love to God, which is the only principle of a true, gracious and universal obedience.<sup>1</sup>

So, in many ways spiritual affectivity is another name for a life lived in the Spirit—consciously, prayerfully, continually. What I do know, is that for ministry to be fruit bearing—in proportion and with due symmetry—it needs to maintain a radical receptiveness to such light and grace at the very “bottom of the heart.” Very often that is not the explored or creatively expressed part of our being. In fact, unexplored and somewhat toxic.

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<sup>1</sup> *A Divine and Supernatural Light*, Sermon preached in 1734. It is considered by Perry Miller to be Edwards’ summary of belief. Despite the emphasis on the practice of holiness here and particularly in *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, Edwards tends to be a little short on specific, contextual examples and long on the assumption that the renewed human states of godliness or Christ-likeness are all encompassing and therefore sufficient. To a modern reader it is a little strange and appears somewhat similar to the naïve proposition that conversion will ultimately take care of systemic injustices or social sin. For a very helpful discussion on this area of Edwards’ thought, particularly his preaching at Northampton, see, “Preface to the Period,” *Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733*, ed. Mark Valeri, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 17ff.

I am seeing P. today. This is a very much a part of the above. I do want to make this project an object and expression of my prayer and hopefully a transforming heart.

Later: He was very helpful and encouraging, particularly in the area of congruity between content and the writer. The project also needs to be an (ministry) expression of affection and a clear indication of the artistic nature of it. Much anxiety to let go of.

### **Sunday, 9 August 2015**

I may or could have written this:

But I don't pretend fully to explain how these things are, and I am sensible a hundred other objections may be made, and puzzling doubts and questions raised, that I can't solve. I am far from pretending to explaining the Trinity so as to render it no longer a mystery. I think it to be the highest and deepest of all divine mysteries still, notwithstanding anything that I have said or conceived about it. I don't pretend to explain the Trinity, but in time, with reason, may [be] led to say something further of it that won't to be said, though there are still many things pertaining to it incomprehensible." JE, 21, 134. *Discourse on the Trinity*.

This echoes Augustine's Preface to his work on Trinity and the tone of just about everyone who has written something of substance concerning the faith confession of Trinity. Humility of perspective, wonderment about the subject matter itself. Always a matter of praise if not adoration, never speculation for its own sake. Re the Trinity (God) he goes on, then:

They are equal in honour besides the honour which is common to 'em all, viz. that they are all God; each has his peculiar honour in the society or family. They are equal not only in essence. The Father's honour is that he, as it were, the author of perfect and infinite wisdom. The Son's honour is that he is that perfect and divine wisdom itself, the excellency of which is from whence arises the honour being the author and generator of it. The honour of the Father and the Son is that they are infinitely excellent, or that from them infinite excellency proceeds. But the honour of the Holy Ghost is equal, for he is that divine excellency and beauty itself. 'Tis the honour of the Father and the Son that they are infinitely holy and are the fountain of holiness; but the honour of the Holy Ghost is that he is that holiness itself. [JE, 21, 135]

The highlighted emphasis, which is the pneumatological emphasis, in Edwards, goes to the heart of his theological vision. Spirit = affect. Spirit = the sanctifying, "beautifying" presence and *action* of a holy God wrought upon the soul and spirit of the saint. That is, exerting a transformative beauty through the affections. Gracious affections, therefore, so far as a pastoral ministry

practices are concerned, need be expressed with due proportion and symmetry. Life's paradoxes do need to be held firmly yet gently, ambiguity and complexity also need to be lived and acknowledged with due grace and forbearance. And not simply as concepts or inklings but as lived experience. He remains amazing to read. And to think I knew nothing of him when I wrote my Master's thesis!

### **Monday, 10 August 2015**

Edwards *Treatise on Grace* is both stunning re logic or reason and controversial. The spiritual man (sic) is gifted with the *nature* of the Holy Spirit, thus the participation within the Godhead. The natural man might well be animated by the Spirit but does not share in the Divine nature and is thus devoid of the Holy (sanctifying) Spirit. This is quite true to the orthodox perspective to which A. has had some dealings of late. Navigating this path is difficult. Moltmann made it clear that the creedal confession re the *Lord, the Giver of Life* has a broader application, yet then again, life in such a particular context may well be life in Christ, through the Spirit.

### **Thursday, 13 August 2015**

Well, a very productive writing day, albeit a graduate research presentation: *The Promise and Perplexity of Jonathan Edwards's Pneumatology*, that is, in relation to the first sign of Gracious and Holy Affections. I obviously know a little about the subject matter now, so could write almost fluently with only occasional referencing. That felt good, although I still know that I am not writing the thesis proper. It will be there in the mix, however. It is an important component in the Edwards chapter that is for sure. A "pneumatological Trinitarianism" whatever that means.

### **Monday, 17 August 2015**

I have pretty-well finished my Research Hour paper and need to move on. I have actually been dipping into Bernard via a commentary on his *On the Steps of Humility and Pride*. Again, such a

common thread re *humilitas*. It is refreshing to read after Edwards, but I will certainly get back to him next week in Melbourne and before, no doubt. The reception of grace is not dependent upon anything; grace is grace, however in order to keep receiving abundance, ego needs to diminish and perhaps this is the ladder metaphor in the Treatise. Edwards says as much, too. As apprehension of grace increases, awareness of one's own limitations and sin also increases. Indeed, there is far less aggrandisement and a deeper level of simplicity, one would hope. It was a good day. I worked solidly and gladly. The joy of this experience is starting to emerge. It needs too! It will be such a limited period of time. Some free writing from today that I enjoyed. It is raw but honest:

And here I am reminded of the fictional main character in George Bernanos' classic novel, *The Diary of a Country Priest*.<sup>2</sup> His final and oft quoted words, "Grace is...everywhere," suggestive of his high apprehension of God's redemptive love, yet this is so powerfully juxtaposed by his relative hiddenness and non-notoriety of person. The French priest figure continues to impress upon me because akin to Henri Nouwen, who described his latter-life journey toward the L'Arche Community House in Toronto as the "path to obscurity,"<sup>3</sup> Edwards posits a similar course of discipleship within the practice of ministry; that is, humility is not the end of renovation in the Spirit, but the very way of it. Ego, the enemy of true regeneration, simply has no place in this unfolding journey.

## **Tuesday, 18 August 2015**

One wonders at times if this is an academic exercise or a converting one. The source or primary material is not only interesting, it is vital. It takes me to real places in and around the thesis, most particularly with family. Perhaps this is my monastery, but I don't think I qualify as an Abbot. I am too bloody self-centred and prejudicial. All one can do is to cry for mercy and help in the project called life:

We suffer the neighbour's plight together with the neighbour. What has happened is that our affectus has been stretched to include the other. But evidently unless this affectus emerges in the first place through the encounter with oneself in humility, there would be nothing to stretch.  
Bernard Bonowitz, 50.

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<sup>2</sup> George Bernanos, *The Diary of a Country Priest* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1977 edition).

<sup>3</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak: A Spiritual Journey*, (London: DLT, 1988).

## **Trinitarian Theology of Bernard.**

All members involved in saving grace. Christ as Wisdom [Logos] of God = Reason (Conviction of [self] Truth – Humility of Perspective created) Humility = Doorway to Communion, God, Others and Self. Spirit as Love of God = Will (Converter, Renovator). Father as Source of God = Contemplation (Return, completeness).

The mission of the Spirit consists in his being poured as love into the hearts of those who have come to humbly believe. Into the heart, Saint Bernard would say, means into the will. Because just as the Logos, Divine Truth, unites himself with our reason so the HS, who is love, Divine Love, unites himself with our will. The will is the faculty receptive and responsive to divine charity and so this is our second union...Prior to the coming of the Spirit, the will broods over itself (Luther), limits itself to itself. Instead of saying, "I love because I love," as in the famous saying of St. Bernard, it says, "I love myself because I love myself." The will is bent back onto itself. Bernard Bonowitz [83]

HS as *tenderiser* of will. Inclination outward instead of inward. A complete reorientation of being and disposition.

## **Thursday, 20 August 2015**

Subsequent to the other day, this material has immediate pastoral significance, if not humanising influence. Yesterday morning's reading was directly applicable to seeing P. over lunch. Bernard's work on humility and pride, particularly in relation to a coming home to the inner resources of the self (person) was apt and pertinent. Bernard's (the two) wisdom around this key area of spirituality and psychological is of no small importance to ministry practice as an art form.

## **Karen Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth*:**

She says the neurotic abandons the realistic grasp on himself, and once that happens, he oscillates between what she calls self-inflation, which in order to function has to include contempt of others, and self-deflation, which is doubt, contempt about oneself. She says that it is a terrible condemnation because one lives painfully passing back and forth between attempts to make oneself seem tremendous and the inevitable recoil, and the recoil is a very deep doubt about whether you are worth anything at all. Because the person has become uncentred. If we are centred in ourselves, she says, we are simply in our aligned orbit. There is a self-sameness to it, there is a healthy consistency to it, which is lost once we've abandoned who we are for some vision of glory. For her, glory is the goal of the neurotic. [107]

## **Saturday, 22 August 2015**

I am ready to head to Melbourne. It has been four weeks of reading and writing and I am (almost) desperate for some input beyond my own spheres of knowledge or influence. I am also ready for some real solitude, albeit in a hotel room...

Bernard has been the refreshment I needed. The central place of *affectio* in the Cistercian tradition is encouraging, but as always, highly nuanced. I mean, there is nothing magical about the affections, as if they may be a key to a locked safe or a hidden doorway to room full of treasure. One traverses in the knowledge that they can be oriented toward God or away from God; either way, the shaping and the forming is everything. Michael Casey is right in that the power is really in rightly orientated desire but via the inclined and engaged affections. Still, it is the sensibility of the affections—the place of deep knowing—that remains the attraction for me; an emotional intelligence, so to speak, but much more than that. A spiritual intelligence, and incarnational disposition. It was how Jesus stood up to so much religious and cultural disorientation, if not, dysfunction. He had an informed and formed centre. He was affectively real.

## **Monday, 24 August 2015**

Back in Melbourne and back at the top of Bourke Street at my coffee shop. Registration for the Edwards Congress this morning but a leisurely time before then. Fascinating people; a guy from the US who has lived and taught in Poland for 33 years. He is a Bonhoeffer scholar. Then a retired Professor of History (English/Australian) who taught in Idaho for 12 years...

There exists here a propensity to lift Edwards from history in an exercise of extrapolation rather than reading him as a contextual, individual product of day and age, not to mention his unique, political and social environment.

Thankfully we were rescued by Ken Minkema from Yale. "Texts within the texts" was an insightful and imaginative way to pour some cold water on creating idols of a figure like Edwards. He stressed his dismissal from Northampton as part of the paradox and, I suspect, the folly of blind trust because he was a successful revivalist. And yes, revisionism according to our constructs and needs. I thanked him in a stumbling fashion, and he got the Andover Newton link. He has obviously worked with the Trask Library a lot. Bebbington and Strobel tomorrow as well as some good parallel sessions.

### **Tuesday, 25 August 2015**

Some remarkable presentations today, most notably, Kyle Strobel. His knowledge of Edwards and most things reformed, is intimidating. I mean, how do these academics not only read all this stuff but retain it too? And then there was Professor David Bebbington! The ease of his delivery and the breadth of his knowledge was truly astounding; a classic English academic and Oxford Don type.

Strobel addressed the "seeing God and being known in God's seeing (gazing upon) of us." And whilst the word gaze was used many times over, there was no reference to *The Song of Songs* where I would have thought that Edwards drew some inspiration or at least borrowed metaphors. I asked a question that effect but that was not understood, I don't think. Maybe the accent.

### **Wednesday, 26 August 2015**

I really enjoyed this morning's program. Just one Keynote. Doug Sweeny from Chicago spoke on Edwards and his approach to the scriptures. It certainly was not a defence of divine inspiration, rather a description of Edwards interpretative key; that being furthering one's love of God by a deep listening for the voice of Christ in the reading. Of course, this is made more complex by other assumptions but in the end, it is a mixture of literal and spiritual. Like Bernard, as I have noticed,

Edwards is soaked in the scriptural allusions and metaphors and spiritual principles. These find their way into his texts almost seamlessly. Doug spoke about when first going to Yale, reading the KJV in order to pick many of these up his editing work with regard his project on the *Miscellanies*. I then spoke briefly to Kyle Strobel. I am very impressed with his mind and impressed that he seeking to get an ecumenical perspective on Edwards at present. He got the Cistercian link, and Bernard in particular, within Reformed theology in general. He commented that compared to the monastic / catholic tradition and the likes of St John of the Cross / Teresa of Avila, Edwards is “flat.” I think by that he means that his description of the regenerated / renovated life almost give the impression that it is a continual, consistent ascent without taking seriously the dark nights and the backwards steps or “backsliding” that is often so condemned out of hand that are part of that same sanctifying, even purgatorial experience and who doesn’t know that experientially? Maybe, like Dante, the Edwards pilgrim continues on to that beatific vision and ideally leaves others in difficult places instead of remaining within some himself. Surely this also part of the *Song*, that is, the coming and going of Presence, a keen sense of dereliction and painful absence, not to mention the possibility of violation and seeming neglect.

In short, a good morning in this context because the Yale contingent or influence make it very clear that Edwards cannot be the answer to everything and that he got things wrong. Sweeny made the pertinent point that whilst Edwards was strong on Divinity, he is demonstrably weak on humanity within his biblical hermeneutic.

#### **Thursday, 27 August 2015**

I have finished here which is good feeling. And whilst there has been some excellent input, the culture around the Edwards industry, much like the Merton Industry, is troubling. I hear someone like Gerald McDermott give a reasonable and educated paper and then read his stuff in a popularised book on Edwards and discover a conservatism that is shocking to some degree—not

only exclusively male pronouns for God but exclusively male pronouns for ministers/pastors. And then there is the attraction for these guys to church discipline in the tone of Edwards's disastrous expulsion from Northampton. I reckon only Strobel and Minkema looked and felt different, yet then again, I don't know because the academic acumen—that was all too real for a plodder like me—seems to cloak what the pastoral practice might look like. I know I really appreciated the final "Parallel" I attended. Glen O'Brien from Sydney (UCA) did a thing on Wesley's use of Edwards and said some really pertinent things about theological hubris and bias in Wesley. He also began by saying just how blokey the Congress was, and that not one female presented. Indeed! What is it about Edwards that does not appeal to women? It must have something to do with his authoritative voice on so many issues, not least of which is his iron-fisted rule in word and action at many points. He is humble, I believe that to be so, but he is all too certain about God for his own or others good, I sense. His introduction to the *Treatise on the Trinity* notwithstanding.

So, much to consider. It is funny, but I feel more sceptical or uncertain about the use of Edwards as a result of this week. More to the point, I feel the need to be more careful about his use. That is, I need be more concerned with contextualisation for the sake of principle, instead of extrapolation to construct a principle. I am also swinging to the need to give greater attention to the art of Christian ministry, per se. That interface can ill afford to be token, or too weighted toward impressive theological modelling.

### **Monday, 31 August 2015**

A good writing day of sorts. The 2000-word paper has just about been gutted and re-written for my presentation in two weeks. I worry that this is not the chapter of the thesis, yet on the other hand, I am learning a great deal and that is the foundation I need.

I finished Rhys's book, *Jonathan Edwards and the Christian Church*, and was really impressed by it. As a re-modelled doctoral thesis, it does give me some confidence. He writes so well and with an

obvious love for his subject. That is so important at my stage of life. Importantly he suggested that Edwards offers a “modest” modelling for the contemporary church. That is remarkable in many ways for I am sure he is bigger fan than I am.

#### **Thursday, 3 September 2015**

I remember speaking to a guest presenter last week about the connections I make between Schleiermacher’s intuition and Edwards’ inclination. He didn’t get it really. For him, like Barth, Edwards begins with God and Schleiermacher (and the liberals) begins with human experience framed in philosophical if not cultural terms. It occurs to me that what looks like look an obvious distinction is really a whole—surely?! I mean, the theologising still stems from within the human realm. And then, who is the human being to speak so confidently for God and of God? It is a paradox, I guess. And by that, I mean it is not an either/or. Surely it is a composite picture of the one reality.

Edwards on *Original Sin* is almost humorous in today’s context, that is, post the holocaust (Moltmann). The certainties about sin are so privatised at some point and the certainties about where God exists in the complexity of human existence, stretches belief to breaking point. Hence, “When man sinned, and broke God’s Covenant, and fell under his curse, these superior principles (the spiritual image of God *imago Dei* and man’s righteousness and true holiness) left his heart: for indeed God then left him... the Holy Spirit, the divine inhabitant, forsook the house.”<sup>4</sup>

The dualism apparent simply doesn’t fly. How can it? And why divide the Spirit in half between Animator of existence and bearer of Divinity? I think it works as a logical philosophical and

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<sup>4</sup> “Original Sin,” 233-234.

theological model, but as a living and hopeful word that connects with lived experience. I think not.

#### **Thursday, 10 September 2015**

I will be glad when the Research Hour is done with. I have spent too much time on the paper, though as I have suggested, it is all good material for the chapter on Edwards. What will also be interesting is to gauge interest or connection re the “art” of ministry. My examples are fleeting, if not teasers. And then there is the Power Point. 39 slides, most of Edwards’ quotes!

I have bought tickets and accommodation for C’s Colloquium in mid-November. 6 hours, or so it seems, of full-on information. One wonders how that might result in the wanted formation emphasis. We will see. I do think the beauty question is a real and potentially fruitful one. 25 presenters, I suspect will make up the bulk of the crowd that comes. I could be wrong.

The Editors introduction to *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* is superb. Reading it last night made me grateful that I am taking the time to get into the head and heart of Edwards. He was a genius, there is no doubt about that. His Neo-Platonism, in particular, warms my heart.

#### **15 September 2015**

Far too much information to convey in one hour! I didn’t get through it all and some of my best (clearest) writing was left unheard. Oh well. I think it went okay. One would hope, though, that it is not simply my passion people went away with, nor Edwards’s fencing of the Communion Table. I do hope I communicated a sense of his attention to beauty and virtue, indeed the beauty of Christian virtue. C. said some very nice things by way of introduction. And it was great that Greg came.

WJE 8 arrived yesterday: *Ethical Writings*. It looks remarkable. “Charity and its Fruits” in particular; a series of sermons he preached on 1 Corinthians 13. Strobel’s Ecumenical volume also arrived – each at no small expense.

So, where to from here? That is a good question that I very soon need to answer.

### **Monday, 21 September 2015**

The time between these entries is troubling. Since the paper I have done too little of substance in the midst of many other pressing responsibilities.

Still, I have begun the Strobel volume<sup>5</sup> and found his chapter particularly helpful. In comparing von Balthasar to Edwards, there is a real sense of synergy. I love this descriptive quote about faith: “Faith is the light of God becoming luminous in man, for, in his triune intimacy, God is known only by God.”<sup>6</sup> Then (importantly), Strobel: “Faith is not the illumination of one’s mind concerning a fact about God, nor is it the unravelling of the divine mystery. Rather, faith is the illumination of a human person by God through God’s own self-giving. As such, “faith is a participation in the free self-disclosure of God’s interior life and light.”<sup>7</sup>

The implications for this (and of this) are huge, are they not? And I am sure this is what Bernard is always on about too. Faith is the resting in how God perceives or beholds us in divine, gratuitous love. And in a real and revolutionary sense, this is not a work but a sheer and utter gifting. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, God is actually pleased with what God sees. This is the “complacency” and yet this is also the benevolence, all in one movement of Spirit. It can only impact the exercising of ministry in freeing and fruitful ways.

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<sup>5</sup> Kyle C. Strobe, “The Beauty of Christ: Edwards and Balthasar on Theological Aesthetics.” *The Ecumenical Edwards: Jonathan Edwards and the Theologians*. ed. Kyle C. Strobel (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 92.

<sup>6</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Lieva-Merikakis (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 157. He continues, now turning to the example of Aquinas: “the light of faith remains for him a habituation, an assimilation, a participation in the vision of himself which God has... this could easily be said of Edwards as well.

**Wednesday, 23 September 2015**

I have decided to leave off Edwards at the end of this week but before doing that, write the Colloquium paper on Divine beauty. Without too much effort, I penned nearly 2000 words yesterday, so I guess something is alive and at work within me. Here is the topic and synopsis:

**Paying attention to Divine Beauty: *Jonathan Edwards, spiritual practices and the forming of affective disciples.***

Jonathan Edwards, the key figure in the New England “Awakenings” of the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century, makes much of proportion and symmetry within forming and gracious movements of the Christian life. Namely, a grateful response to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who he colourfully describes in terms of God’s Gift and Beauty, yet just as significantly, a lived response that is similarly expressive of ascetic and creative being.

Therefore, what might it mean to be about educating and forming disciples who, through spiritual practice, pay very close attention to sources and expression of divine beauty? How could mission then be framed and enacted in more sensate or artistic ways, without impractical or romantic (naïve) results?

Arguably the language of late modernity has shifted from a sure and certain prosaic to a poetic and searching basis. It seems ironic that a theologian / pastor of the Enlightenment era might have something important to say to us. However, by virtue of Edwards’ highly ‘ambidextrous’ mind and his foundational experience of Divine Beauty, he continues for many to be a catalyst of both thoughtful and affective discipleship in our own time and place.

There is something very real and true for me in this, and of course it dovetails nicely with my Master’s work on Trinity. Without sight of the divine mystery—a paradox in itself—there is no faith in a living, breathing sense. There will be copious information and opinion, but so much of that falls away before such an intense fire of mutual, consenting love.

The trick and project really, is to translate that seeing into artful, creative doing. It needs a language all of its own. What I do know, and what I think I will stress, is that it is light years removed from the “tyranny of should.”

Later in the day... it was a good day of writing. I think the paper can work for its context. Perhaps I need to be a little more specific re practices though. It felt good to write to an audience, not a panel of assessors. I still don’t know how I am going to do this!!

### **Sunday, 27 September 2015**

It is time to turn the Bernard Corner. Two months in the head and heart of Edwards is enough, and though I worry about coming back to him later in the piece, I think I will come back with a greater nuance than I presently have. After all, I do need to write a chapter that addresses the research question. Someone asked me the other night what the research question was; I had forgotten!

Funny as it might first sound, but Tim Winton's new *Island Home: a landscape memoir* is exactly the right segue out of the head of Edwards—he is predominantly a thinker for all his talk of heart, I mean, God always seems to be the third person, somehow—into the less clearly defined spirit of Bernard. That attractive mystique is life giving, somehow. Winton's final essay, "Paying Respect," is just the ticket. Reverence demands a certain letting go and I don't get the impression Edwards did much without an ultimate sense of control, despite all the rhetoric to the contrary. Sarah acted more in accord with the ideal.

### **Wednesday, 30 September 2015**

It is good to be back in Bernard and the gentler theology therein. No less demanding, but a more integrated sense of application for ministry's sake. *The Song of Songs* is key to this, particularly the recurring theme of presence and absence. This is certainly true to our experience, though I think Protestants struggle to admit as much. And then there is the Cistercian notion that God deliberately withdraws for the sake of our renewed desiring and seeking... Heavens, that is asking much so far as the Uniting Church is concerned. We have God on a string or rather, *our* God would never dream of being so cruel. But when the end game is holiness (wholeness) that changes the perspective a little. And when we are in touch with just how resistant our being is to the touch of grace, something has got to shake us deeply within, stir us up, strip us down.

In any event, it is good to be back. It is more spacious, somehow, if not realistic about life itself. Edwards seems so stuffed up, hemmed in at times, despite all the rhetoric about God. By his own admission near the end of his life he was sickly, cranky and melancholic. Why would he need to be that way, given all the talk of beauty and grace? Where was his own inner freedom? One gets the impression much was externalised or projected onto Sarah so that he didn't need to do any inner work at all. That is an overstatement, obviously, but with Bernard, what you read, is what Bernard knows to be true to his own practiced experience. Some further notes:

It is not the fact of feeling which requires scrutiny and discernment. What needs to be examined is, rather, the object of this tendency to love. Affect becomes disordinate to the extent that it attaches itself to an inappropriate object. This can happen easily, hence in Bernard's view, *the reorientation of the affect is a constant task*. It is a matter, not of violently suppressing a wandering affect, but of gently and intelligently redirecting its growth. [104, Casey]

#### **Thursday, 1 October 2015**

I am reading Bernard's *On the Song of Songs* right through, well at least that is the plan. Just finished 25 of 84 sermons in all. The opening 8 sermons are really interesting re Bernard's Pneumatology and then there is Sermon 18. For me, it is the jewel in the crown, so far as the thesis is concerned re Bernard: "The Two Operations of the Spirit." Funnily enough, I am drawn back to pneumatology, which like Edwards could be argued to be a Spirit-Christology, that is, the Spirit is the Trinity's interface with the world. I guess that has always been the case economically, though not theologically. There are so many red herrings in here as well; the Jewish question, angels, Code of 7's, Black as a sign of weakness that God would still use, etc., etc. Like any figure of history, his perspective is so culturally bound. Yet, right there in an otherwise strange mix, he nails certain timeless issues re the Christian life.

So, in Edwards we have complacency; in Bernard, infusion. In Edwards we have benevolence; in Bernard, effusion. Either way, it is a radical reliance on the spiritual birth and infilling—*the one thing necessary*—for the sake of service or ministry:

You too must learn to await this fullness before pouring out your gifts, do not try to be more generous than God... When he had first filled up the secret places, his teeming mercies billowed over; they poured upon the earth and drenched it, to multiply its riches. You must imitate this process. First be filled, and then control the outpouring. The charity that is benign and prudent does not flow outwards until it abounds within. 18.II.4.

### **Monday, 12 October 2015**

Well, back at the Airport, waiting for my flight to Melbourne and Tarrawarra Abbey. It has been a struggle to get here; my health – mind and body – is out of kilter. I am anxious about (too) many things. Still, the peppermint tea in the Qantas Lounge tastes good.

What do I do with all this? Well, practically, I do need to get thoroughly checked out next week. Secondly, I do need to re-find my bearings in God (love). I have lost my way of late. At least I feel pretty lost. Much of that is due, I think, to an irrational blurring of the future; a resignation of sorts to forces beyond my control. It is not a good place to be!

### **Tuesday, 13 October 2015**

Meeting this morning with Michael Casey was a Godsend. Remarkable also in light of the entry of October 1<sup>st</sup>. I was certainly a tad nervous with only a few scribbled questions. The first question he asked me was about my knowledge of languages—French and Latin. (If only!) Obviously, the texts he knows so well are not English translations. Not a bother, though. What he did suggest was that I might concentrate on one text with an overriding question to Bernard (Sermon 18, “The Two Operations of the Holy Spirit”—Infusion & Effusion which is in tune with Edwards’ ‘Emanation & Remanation’) with bridging comments to others. This will work well with Edwards too (“A Divine and Supernatural Light?”) and John 15; all parts of much larger wholes, instead of thinking (and feeling) that I need to be across the whole. I felt a great sense of direction and relief following. And then there was the timely aside from one of Bernard’s play on words which I didn’t know of: *deificatum via deficutum*, meaning the way to God is by “getting rid of the shit.” I asked him to define the shit and that was tremendously helpful. “Super-ego,” playing out expectations to

parents, playing out unrealistic expectations to self, all to the point of hiding true self. This formative path to God, he said, needs discipline or a framework for one's own Rule. It is not simply a monastic thing.

Re artistic expression. He quoted a concert pianist once being reviewed as being "workmanlike" which upset him to the core. So, what is the X factor? For Michael it is the ridding of shit, meaning a shining authenticity that has its basis in the unmerited (totally) favour of God. He said that it takes a long time—over half a life—to get through the shedding. I wonder why we don't listen to that wisdom more carefully. It is certainly not works orientated but demands an attentive intent that is not so easily procured as by religion as a marketable product. Rather, it is Christ in and through the Spirit.

#### **Thursday, 15 October 2015**

I am very thankful for the time and encouragement of Fr. Michael Casey. Re Sermon 18 and Bernard he simply said to write what I need to write, then "feed the chooks" later. This is wonderfully helpful. One could become paralysed by the fear, not so much of failure, but of judgement of intellect and method.

Bernard, he said, considered things very carefully and listed things quite intentionally. These were not simply rough and ready sermons that he preached sequentially. They were well worked and edited documents. So, for instance, the list below is based around causality in human experience, not poetic rhetoric. I certainly know that to be true by simply being here at Tarrawarra in the midst of the prayer. The monastery is like a workshop for faith and its practice.

Content of infusing work of the Spirit. Affections with content; practical consent or an open sensibility to reality. Ridding the dross of presumption.

1. Compunction of heart. Piercing sorrow for inveterate long-standing waywardness yet alleviated by,
2. Ointment of devotion or fervour of spirit. Joy and thanksgiving...
3. Medicine and labour of penance; fasting's, vigils, prayers. 'Putting yourself in the way of grace.'
4. Food of good works; works of charity, motivated by God's charity.
5. Zeal for prayer; drinking the wine that gladdens the heart. Spirit itself.
6. Contemplation of God. Leisure. "Sweat of labour drying.' Come aside for a while..."  
Breathe. Be. Let go. Be held. See and ponder. Absorb. Taste. Listen. You can do nothing.
7. God himself being love. The filling of human capacity with God. Practicing the presence of Love / God. Then we are qualified practitioners (effusive artisans).

Not much of this makes sense without the monastic dimension that is, a rule of faith to live by and pray within. In the midst of all that, it makes a whole lot good sense; creation of openings wherein God is allowed to come and affect one's life for the good.

### **Saturday, 17 October 2015**

Reading the final sermons of Bernard's, one is struck by the maturity of his thinking and writing, particularly in his understanding of the human soul in relationship to God. It is convincing, not simply through theological argument and verbal acumen, but because it rings true to experience; time and time again. What he recognises is that, whilst there is sin by virtue of the fall, the *imago Dei* can never be fully obliterated; that something within the human frame remains connected to its divine point of origin and that is located at the level and capacity of soul; beyond intellect and far deeper than mere emotion. It is the possible place of divine / human reunion, and importantly for me! it is where, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, the affections are stirred unto life towards God. Defining soul is not so easy, and in one sense, this all sounds pretty traditional. Well, yes, it is. But

it is organic, not conceptually systematic. It is relational—for love is the highest of all religious affections (Edwards too)—not overly cognitive. In the end, it is all about life, not religion *per se*.

Thus, the soul which lives according to the flesh (not inclined and sensitive toward the Word) is dead though it lives, for it would have been better for it never to have lived than to live in such a way. And it will never rise from that living death except through the Word of life, or rather through the Word which is life, both living and life-giving. 81.II.4.

### **2.30 pm (a letter to a few)**

Now sitting in the Melbourne Qantas Lounge, and this isn't even the Business Class section, where the wealthy, of who I am obviously a part, read free newspapers then carelessly abandon them, sip wine, scoff beer and nuts and enjoy other delicacies (mine at present is iced tea with some exotic flavour that Lipton have squeezed or dissolved in there). It perhaps goes without saying that this a good way removed from Tarrawarra Abbey with its timber chapel, used linen—guests are asked to remake the bed with patched sheets and non-matching pillowcases—and its close proximity to the created order. Here metal birds take to the sky, off streaked, patched concrete and only make thunderous noise; there are no teasing nuances, manures, song or any subtlety whatsoever! No discernible soul, in other words.

I have come away from my time away with a greater theological and experiential appreciation of soul. Bernard calls it, rightly, I think, immortal. Not in the Greek sense of separateness to body, like a balloon floating heavenwards when released from a still warm corpse. Rather residing squarely within the body, it is the existential link or interface with the divine. He is not so much interested in how it is constituted—for him the soul is a self-evident given, so why speculate about essence; more to the point is its relational function or open capacity for love.

In that context, soul is imperative to the vivifying and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. It is the place of remembrance, recognition, inclination, sensibility; leaning back (in) towards its

created origin (arche) in order to feel again the potential of union, rest, companionship, meaning and life-purpose.

*The Song of Songs*, therefore, is a pivotal text for the Christian Church to rediscover that at heart, the mystery of drawing, yearning (reciprocal) love, is not simply an aesthetic to wink at, but is the very energy needed for the Christian life in this complexity of time and place. And that the prayerful development of the soul in relation to divine presence or Grace, represents ecclesial core business, for without that grafted dimension, the Church is but an exterior; a façade, much like heritage buildings that get gutted yet retain an appearance of what was once an inner reality.

Interestingly Bernard, who often plays words off against each other, opposites included, suggests that the opposite of the growing affective life of the Christian is the defective, diminishing life of the sinner. It is not a pretty summation of endings. And logically, I think he is right. Not feeding the soul in divine, spiritual things is akin to conscious starvation over an extended period of time. And Tim Winton certainly gets that in relation to Australian culture at present; all the jingoistic hoopla but ultimately a desperate veiling of a deep and dangerous void of meaning, albeit an abandonment of love itself. Hedonism is a very poor alternative (he says chomping cashews and enjoying a beer for the first time in two weeks) for spiritual union with the Giver of Life.

I find it hopeful in Bernard's reading of anthropological, theological reality that one can still appeal to the vestige or spark of divine residue in the soul. Calvin and Edwards borrowed this obviously, though you would doubt that with so many of their followers proclaiming a total depravity or incapacity of soul; thankfully the true Reformers wrote and spoke about a dullness of sight, not complete blindness.

The question then remains, to what can we appeal so far as the Christian gospel is concerned? It certainly cannot be doctrinally based or pitched intellectually as it will only miss engaging the soul and the closely related will altogether. Its language is not systematic but artistically playful. Bernard's Sermons are testimony to that. Euphony is not simply a polished technique, it is truly reflective of his subject matter; the poetics, thus ambiguities of an unfolding divine / human love.

Conversely, any appeal to the gospel cannot be overly emotionally based; feelings are all-too easily manipulated in the zeal for religious results. The soul, as many writers have suggested, is somewhat shy and burrows deep underground when coercion of any form is at play. It gets the deceit (early) and will have no part of it.

No, unless we engage deeper things of mystery and soul; those things in life for which we truly desire and yearn for as human beings; unless we practice a spiritual recall in tandem with the Spirit, and unless we as messengers or "sentries" in Bernard's mind, live and speak from those soulful – life-giving - places, there remains little hope of the institutional church having any meaningful impact at all within the present configurations of Australian society.

Billy Joel knew something true to human experience. It is all about soul.

#### **Thursday, 22 October 2015**

After the intensity of last week, it is hard to get back into it. The "blog" received a number of responses, most notably for me, Fr. Denis Edwards (representing the Catholic tradition):

Dear Sean, I read your "ramblings" with a great deal of interest and with joy—it is wonderful to see you touching into this tradition so deeply. May you continue to be greatly blessed in your work and in your journey—Denis

This means a good deal to me. That it evoked some joy for Denis is a great plus.

And yes, touching the tradition deeply. I feel that is true, particularly so by entering into the daily prayer of Tarrawarra. That is the touching. That is its heart; the soul intentionally turned towards and sensible before the grace of God. This is spiritual affection. It is an openness, even a preparedness to be changed. It is a totally different experience to mastering a discipline, that is, if that doesn't include being mastered by the discipline. And yet the human soul is in a constant pattern of movement towards and movements away. I don't think there is a religious ideal or norm in this regard, however hard J. Edwards would press for one like his beloved Sarah's. There is simply the inclination to be nurtured; a devotion to lie within, even compunction and life many vicissitudes:

You will not pray aright, if in your prayers you seek anything but the Word or seek him for the sake of anything but the Word; for in him are all things. In him is healing for your wounds, help in your need, restoration for your faults, resources for your further growth; in him is all that men should ask or desire, all they need, all that will profit them. 86.I.4.

### **Monday, October 26, 2015**

...but theological wisdom is the repose of the soul in an embrace of love that attains to God beyond all understanding.

Merton's contrast of the theology of the early fathers (and Bernard), as compared to the rise of the scholastics, is really telling for the thesis; in short, the Christian life (and ministry) arises from an embrace of love, not from a construction of belief. And repose is critical to this movement of growing knowledge. In other words, will we allow ourselves to be repositioned by virtue of this gratuitous love? May it be that the strivings and strategies are for nought, if we do not allow God to love us for no other reason than to be loved? What does ministry in this light, look like, then? It is organic, to say the very least!

### **Tuesday, 27 October 2015**

The place of contemplation / prayer in relation to the affections is critical. That is the place where they are shaped and reshaped, namely before and in the love of God. This is not a program for renewal, a formulation of ideas that will then work, a step by step guide to prayer. If

contemplation is, in the end, the reception of God's loving gaze and the reciprocation of our own gratitude and devotion, then it is the very foundation for a fruitful faithful and artful ministry. As

Bernard says in *On Consideration*:

For this exalted contemplation and meditation, actuated and impelled by divine love...regulates the affections, directs the actions, cuts away all excesses, forms character, orders and ennobles life, and lastly...endows the understanding with a knowledge of things divine and human. It...distinguishes what is confused, collects what is scattered, discovers what is concealed, searches out what is true, examines what is probable, exposes what is false and deceptive. It...preordains what we have to do, so that nothing disordered may remain in the mind, nor anything requiring correction. It...finally...makes provision for adversity, and thus endures misfortune, as it were, without feeling it, of which the former is the part of prudence, and the latter the function of fortitude.

And also, according to the 1953 Papal Encyclical, *Doctor Mellifluus*:

Contemplation—perfect tranquillity of the mind—in which we enjoy the loving God by returning his love (gaze?), and by which we turn and direct ourselves and all we have to Him, does not reduce us to laziness, sloth and inertia, but awakens an assiduous, effective and active zeal that spurs us on to procure our own salvation and, with the help of God, that of others also.

True as this maybe, it is generally met with great resistance in the Christian Church. It is allowing the reality of God too much access. It is acknowledging a Presence that we cannot tame or control.

This is particular pertinent to modern day ministry practice which depends as much upon sanctified hubris as it does on anything else.

### **Friday, 30 October 2015**

Toward the end of my time in the Sermons on the *Canticle*. There is so much to be gleaned in this allegory because ironically it does ring true to experience. Particularly the absence and presence, coming and going emphasis.

The confession of the Bride, the adoration given utterance to, is by no means a presumption of (or on) divine essence. She is not the groom's equal ontologically; but by means of the growing union of wills stirred and continually created by the Spirit's gift and being of *caritas* (Romans 5:5), she cries spontaneously—something has grasped the depths of her soul in terms of an embrace of being, thus *an inclination of holy affections* and an embodied will toward the Lover of her soul.

This grateful leaning in is consistently met with the groom's leaning in, though there are coming's and going's, deliberately, designed, one would think to merely increase the desire for union. What is pivotal for this subject matter, is the ordering of love— affectus—beginning and ending with God.

The art of ministry, therefore, arises out of this living, primordial relationship, moved and shaped by the grace and truth of the Word that consistently comes to an open, yearning heart. At that point, it is no small thing to live within the dialectic of grace and truth. It demands a courage, not simply of conviction—as if somehow God was an ideology of a statement to adhere to—but of fidelity of heart, body and mind to the Holy Triunity; a fidelity (faith/trust) that continues to deepen by virtue of the graces received and the reciprocation of love; compunction before Devotion or following compunction. One cannot underestimate the great worth and beauty of the bride in this scheme of things, though One is eaten, and one eats, such is the depth of the union. So, helplessness / courage; dependency / initiative; receptivity / creativity. The paradox is unresolvable and thankfully so.

### **Sunday, 1 November 2015**

It is All Souls / Saints Day and how apt that I mark it here, given my reliance on three pretty remarkable souls in relation to Christ: St John, St Bernard and Jonathan Edwards. Merton is right, I think, in asserting the claim to sainthood comes by way of impact on others, not in terms of a personal sanctity or aura. This leaves room for the needed absurdity and limitations of the human being; a divine grace operative despite the improbable vehicle of glory.

## **Tuesday, 3 November 2015**

It occurred to me this morning that I can and should get on with reading the John text carefully, now that I have all but finished with Bernard for the moment. I am slowly but surely piecing this project together needing to retain a good deal of detail. The dovetails are there to be seen.

## **Sunday, 15 November 2015**

I gave my Merton presentation to Blackwood Uniting this evening. It certainly had a different feel to the one I gave at ELC back in October 2010 that had a progressive Christianity focus. In fact, Merton struggled to be centre stage at times because I kept wanting to talk about Monasticism and the Cistercian tradition. I probably really wanted to talk about Bernard.

There was a dearth of understanding about Catholicism and monasticism in Protestantism. And not only ignorance but unchallenged prejudice. Central to all this is the devaluing of contemplative prayer. "What good does it do?" As if everything has to have an efficiency or productive outcome, anyway. And then there is the formation question; maturity in Christ. "What does that look like?" "Isn't that instantaneous?" What have we been about in our tradition? What have ministers understood their role to be? Is it about growing the church or it is about facilitating the development of people into the ways and being of Christ? Which in the end is freedom from Mother Church, that is as a smothering or constraining institution?

In any event, it felt good to articulate my learning. I genuinely love engaging with a receptive group. This folk were pretty switched on. One woman described me as an "intellectual" following. That is not what I wanted to hear on one level.

## **Tuesday, 17 November 2015**

Today, I finished Charles Dumont's, *Pathway of Peace: Cistercian Wisdom According to Saint Bernard*. It was a remarkable read, in many ways, written with a love for Bernard and the

Cistercian tradition, yet without it being like a hagiography. In fact, it is written with the knowing of a monk who has lived the contemplative (monastic) life for many years. There exists gentleness yet not sentimentality. There is simply a love and hope that carries his prose, not to mention a breadth of knowledge that beggar's belief at times. He is a realist about human nature and not a theorist.

What he displays is a certain comprehension of his subject matter, not just a certain or even impressive knowing of it. He gets the *application*; he revels in the nuance. This is how I want to write and preach when I grow up. May there be a beauty, meaning deep comprehension, if not apprehension.

### **Wednesday, 18 November 2015**

Today is the FED Colloquium in Melbourne. I think I have a good paper to offer. In any event, I trust that I will give myself to the learning and sharing as well as I can. I am thankful for this opportunity. I am glad of the research.

### **Thursday, 19 November 2015**

Back in the artificiality yet comfort—protection—of the Melbourne Qantas Lounge.

Well, that was an experience. It was and is a good paper, yet not the environment to give it. I mean, Sunday school rooms with a data projector set up on 3 quarter size tables and chairs. Painted walls that dimmed the PP. I think I have been in the scholarly environment too long. That is, I expected people to track with me with the paper in hand. That worked to some degree with the exception of a Christian educator who took me to task about methodology, even accusing me of dissonance re subject and presentation, and presumably, person. Bloody hell. She would have been happy with a discussion about beauty, on her experiential terms, divorced from Edwards and any sense of theological reflection.

The dissonance stuff hurt, to the point of me wanting to stop. Thankfully other members of the group supported me in the process and spoke of how the paper had intersected with their own thinking and experience

### **Saturday, November 21, 2015**

Time is ebbing away. I run the risk of frittering, but I also see the semi-urgency of getting through John—now up to the 6<sup>th</sup> Chapter. There are so many connecting points. Obviously, Edwards and Bernard were soaked in the gospel's imagery, teaching—wisdom. "God is Spirit." I think this is the key or defining note so far. The Christian life, therefore, is an enjoining, a participation by virtue of its gifting. The Spirit, therefore, is the Christian's first port of call. "Third Article Theology," so called. That is a Spirit Christology and an emphasis on theosis / deification. Heavens, I have been on this vocation bandwagon for many a year, and gradually over time have seen its personal fruits. I think that is what was so cutting about the critique of my presentation on Wednesday afternoon just gone. It wasn't that material, per se, but the inference that it wasn't actually alive within me. The very vulnerable part of me knows that is true to some degree, for who can mirror such glory in any sense of fullness, yet then again, I am not without congruence of being and doing (*ev Xpistou*).

### **Monday, 23 November 2015**

Picking up Prue Shaw's, *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity* in Melbourne the other day was a wise, if not fortuitous move. I read it in a couple of days. What a work of art in itself. Here is someone who knows her material (Dante and his poem) so intimately that she leaves the reader wanting more insight and commentary. More than that for me, it was informative of artistic, faith processes. Art being *a making* in God's form; God being the "grandparent" of the art piece itself. The Trinitarian (3) structure of the *Commedia* is probably conscious, yet one wonders if some unconscious forces are at play also.

For me, 3 key elements of one theological reflective work are gradually—little by little—*(paulatim)* coming together, the biblical undergirding of John’s Gospel, crucial to the reflections and knowledge about Edwards and Bernard. I don’t think I could have planned this initially. I have had to let intuition and imagination to a lesser extent to have their way in terms of order and form. I wouldn’t call it a stumbling forward but certainly there is a good deal of unknowing in the process itself. A reaching forward, maybe. In any event, I take heart. I am no Dante and my thesis not a poem but under the influence of Spirit, I can only hope that its writing is congruous with the material and topic in question.

### **Tuesday, 24 November 2015**

Having finished Bernard’s *On Consideration*, his practical and theological advice to Pope Eugenius, is remarkable re the synthesis or integration of thought and virtue. Chapter 5 is some of the best musings about God I have ever come across, that is, the paradox of mystery, comprehension, simplicity and Trinity. His conclusion about “What is God?” is telling in terms of the highly affective base of the Divinity in terms of redemptive act(ions). In fact, it leaves little room for our gnashing of teeth about discipleship and the current state of the Christian Church. The way Bernard posits things, a prayerful disposition and an intentional seeking for this coming kingdom almost suggests a non-attachment to human endeavour or outcome—the places we usually start and finish. The following quote is amazing to me for God is the space between our planning and action. Do we dare reach out in our lack of faith to this transcendent power to change all things for the common good?

What is God? Omnipotent Will, Benevolent Power, Eternal Light, Immutable Reason, Sovereign Beatitude, He Who creates finite minds to participate in His bliss, Who *quickens their sensibility so that they may feel Him*, Who attracts their wills so they may desire Him, Who expands their hearts so they may have room to contain Him, Who justifies them so they may merit Him, Who inflames them with His zeal for His glory, Who fertilises them to bear fruit, Who directs them in the paths of equity, Who forms them to benevolence, Who causes them to walk in the ways of wisdom, Who strengthens them in virtue, visits them in consolation, enlightens them with the knowledge of truth, preserves them unto everlasting life, fills them with happiness, surrounds them with peace and security. 5:XI.

### **Wednesday, 25 November 2015**

Bernard speaks a theology in and out of human experience. Noting Dumont again today about human soul and Christ as the Word of truth that can awaken what is latent within us to a point of remembering our contingent, filial origins, I cast my mind back to that fateful day when just a teenager, picking up my step-mothers KJV (one given to her by Arthur Jackson on her first wedding day), and reading from the beginning of the Matthew. Then, as now, the OT, apart from the Psalms, Wisdom Literature and parts of Prophets, is not all that inviting. In any event, this is the written reflection that arose:

How did I know at age 12-14, that the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 5:38-42 was truth? For this surely was the experience I had in my bedroom at 273 Belmore Road, North Balwyn. What voice was this—deep calling to deep—that reminded me (my soul, in fact) of what was really true? Certainly, it was not factual truth or even a moral truth, though the ethical imperatives are unmistakable. It was sapience, an ancient wisdom born and carried forward in divine, enfleshed love. His words triggered a memory, deep and often elusive. It tugged at the sleeve of all human vocations, purpose and meaning; all still latently alive in the soul of yet such a young, conflicted and alienated lad.

And it was more than intuition! For it was the awakening voice of Christ (the Word) imbued in written form. Thus, to be frank, this was the beginning of a long and gradual journey toward genuine faith. It is no wonder, with just that little bit of humility of soul, a visitation did occur within the same bedroom deep into one holy and terrifying night. God doesn't need much openness or recall of soul to work with. An inkling, a "hint half guessed," that is all.

Such favour, then, is not based on merit or perhaps God feeling sorry for my abandoned sense of being, as I have often thought. No, it is perhaps a tad more pragmatic and random (graced) than that; the possible re-flowering of love in one small human being for the sake of other human beings, and perhaps some animals and the ground on which I walk. This deep sense of call is not based in achievement for God's sake, or one's own for that matter, but in an expressed, irrepressible truth. It is a calling or beckoning us outward; toward God certainly, but generously in God's time, a calling out of our original, truest selves. Whenever that forming process begins and courageously continues, we give our very best to the mission of God's love at play within the Cosmos. It is a recall toward Simplicity, that being in itself, is a life given over to the transformative power of truth, albeit beauty.

### **Tuesday, 1 December 2015**

Back to Melbourne for the ANZATFE Conference, with a paper, I hope, that will contribute well. It certainly isn't my doctoral research, but everything is related. Bernard's ideal of wisdom finds its way into its fabric.

Yesterday was a highlight, in that the key IMP student sent me their take on integrated learning. It is stunning, in many respects. For example:

At some point, I need unpacking and to let go of all the "right things" to rather listen for the truth that I believe is inherently part of all of us as people who are image bearers of God. Integrative Ministry Practice has reminded me that I am far simpler, yet also have the capacity to be more insightful than I dared ever believe. This insight is something I thought I gained through consuming vats of knowledge but was actually a part of me all along. And I feel inspired to foster this intuitive intelligence in myself.

Yes, it is all about soul. I will keep this journal posted as to how this paper goes today.

All went well; this time around there was an engaged time of discussion that lasted an hour. That was such a needed contrast to the Colloquium of only two short weeks ago. It rekindled a certain confidence but the following workshop leader, B. from Tabor, put my sharing to shame with some really integrative teaching practices.

#### **Thursday, 3 December 2015**

It is a good feeling to leave with, in that I have contributed well to the conference. A number of times keynote folk referred to my paper and perhaps even more significantly, my leadership of worship yesterday touched a nerve for some. K. from Dunedin, suggesting that it gave him confidence to present his material (he said he was up since 4am fussing over it), pointing to the theological veracity of the worship itself. I was greatly heartened by that. The practice of worship is exactly the place where we should be taking our cues for the practice of ministry.

Late yesterday afternoon I walked down to Ridley College and met up again with Rhys, the head of the Jonathan Edwards Centre. He had read my Colloquium paper and was quite taken with its pastoral application. He raised a really important point about the aesthetic "vision of God" in terms of its "cash value." I get this. What does it impact and change in real terms? May it not simply be an abstraction to get excited about and not a genuine point of engagement with love for

costly love's sake. He was wondering about the oral written vision of Edwards—huge when one considers Edwards' library of works—and do not the two correspond somehow?

Funny, I then got talking about Bernard's anthropology of soul. It was quite a moment of expressive clarity. I was glad about that. The notion of simplicity, and our return to it—from out of the dense forests of duplicity—is fundamental to the whole of the Christian life. *Deificatum via defecatum*. God bless Michael Casey for that line, though I didn't find it in the English of *On Consideration*.

## **Tuesday, 8 December 2015**

From Etienne Gilson's remarkable Synthesis of Bernard's Mystical Theology:

They (Bernard et al) fled from the world, but the strongest temptation that assailed the most detached amongst them all had been to become a man of letters; and he found ways to become a saint even when he succumbed. In spite of all his formidable asceticism St. Bernard was no puritan when it came to literature. The walls of his monastery were bare, but his style was not bare; nobody writes like William of S-T or Aelred of Rievaulx and just by chance. These Cistercians have renounced everything save the art of good writing; each and all of these hardy ascetics carried in his bosom a humanist who by no means wanted to die... In spite of all that, it remains nevertheless true to say that the Cistercians entertained no merely scholastic conception of the monastic life, but rather, on the other hand, a monastic conception of the scholastic life. [63]

I am sure Merton must have read this—surely! And I am sure it holds many a clue to effective / affective leadership in the contemporary Christian Church. Culture need not be despised or ignored, but gleaned for what is profitable, good and true to the cause of love in the world and within us as individuals. “Christian humanism” by another name; yet one that does not leave God in the margins, as it so often tends to do. If I have learned anything on this extended period of study, it is that: If one's accumulation of knowledge does not serve a formational objective—growing up into Christ and growing deeper within the wise ways of the Spirit—then it serves a dead end. For ego is deathly. It is curved in upon itself, despite clever rhetoric and even grandiose plans for the Church's mission. Unless there is well-layered bedrock of humility, the structure may

be grand for a little while, but it will eventually tumble down in its own inflated sense of importance.

The other critical aspect of this reflection is the beauty of expression that is implied here. One can minister artistically, learning along the way from others about mastering such an important craft. This is not an added luxury; good news can and must be conveyed with a certain aesthetic touch. The beauty that has touched one's own soul does need to be reflected in relationships with others, professional or non-professional.

### **Friday, 11 December 2015**

Well, the sojourn is over. I know I need a break from all things Edwards and Bernard. Readings and writings in John will continue as part of my devotional life. Already I have written nearly 10,000 words and I am only up to Chapter 11. It has been tremendously grounding and a platform for the real writing. I finished Gilson's book on Bernard yesterday. It is a masterpiece, no question about that. He concludes:

[God] who gives man back the lost likeness that he may give back the lost beatitude, and Who, while awaiting the day when the work shall be fully accomplished, gratuitously raises to like felicity souls whom the gift of charity has already made conformable to His nature—*Deus caritas est*—closely enough to enable them to taste even here below of the blessedness of his life. [152]

And a little earlier:

“Love is not a contract, it is an affection: *Affectus est, non contractus*. It is not a “contractus,” but an “amplexus” (an embrace). That is why, in virtue of its very nature, it can be neither empty handed nor mercenary.” [144]

It seems like a good summary of all I have been discovering these past four months. Theology, at least real theology, cannot simply be framed and offered beyond the loving embrace of God. *Deo caritas est*. Indeed, it needs to be expressive and invitational—in the one movement—of such holy encounter. This reality has pushed and prodded me, particularly following my time at Tarrawarra, back to the devotional life. In Bernard's scheme of things, toward the 3<sup>rd</sup> level of love,

wherein the sense of reward or transaction is lessened, and the spontaneity and honesty of love can actually flow. Who wants a theologian to be able to speak of divine mysteries and not be enflamed by them? Who needs a theologian who is not in the process of transformation, if not purgation, too? It would be all but wasted breath and *much ado about nothing*.

I could never have anticipated this unfolding / ripening but am glad for it. Even if there is no thesis, these months of reading, noting and writing, would still be worthwhile. Still, in God's time there will be a thesis, and it will be the better for this breadth of research and the more soulful place it has led me toward. I will also be a better teacher and mentor, and colleague; at least I pray so.

## Appendix 2. Holy Thursday (January 2000)

My waking moment was not out of the ordinary; sluggish certainly, yet not tardy as had been the day before. Curse this shaving. This is it! My one and only disposable is shot. No more of this drudgery whilst I am away in such a beard-friendly environment. That will be the oft-repeated excuse anyway.

I'm looking forward to Vigils and the silence beforehand. It is such an enchanting time of the day. I hope I can time it so as to walk up to the chapel by myself. A chance to re-gather diffuse thoughts, try and make sense of lingering dreams, and simply enjoy the crisp stillness without thought or care for another. I notice it's below freezing, unmistakably overcast and the possibility of Boston's first snow for over 300 days seems only moments away. "Please God, it would be great to see and feel it again. I'll know I am *really* back in New England!"

My mind wanders repeatedly during the responsive psalms. Will I stay on for *lectio divina*? I brought Bernard's sermons over with me, but more to the point I would love a cup of coffee freshly brewed in the kitchen. John would've got down there well before everyone else and seen to that. His shower promptly began at 5 am again, although today the alarm didn't keep going off as it did earlier in the week. Even so, his definitive footsteps almost make the genteel bell-ringer's task superfluous. Each morning we are well and truly shaken from our slumber.

Still no snow! Coffee is a better source of expectancy at present anyway. Back in my room, steaming mug at hand, St. Bernard seems far more readable. God's "kindly" presence, he suggests, something that is often illusive for me, is as close as my preparedness to offer honest confession; i.e., to name the unmentionable, to reach out to that within that still resists merciful touch. God, that is always a tough assignment. So much sublimated over time.

In Bernard's seductive poetics, though, the amiable God calmly and patiently waits outside the window of the human soul for its inhabitant to name their point of greatest need, peering in only when the "lattices" are opened in a spirit of dependency and trust. True to form at such a potentially transformative moment, yet quite unconsciously, I look up to see if it has finally begun to snow. Ah, the wooden blinds are still shut. Winding them open, a snowflake hurries by the window on its downward spiral. Soon after there is another and very quickly the sky seems to be falling in upon itself.

Returning to my rocking chair, the gentle irony of what I have just experienced suddenly dawns on me, evoking a humour-laden sigh. The kindly God behind the lattices! The smile of God, indeed the simple goodness of God, expressed in the beauty and wonder of snowfall. It is a calming and reassuring presence, one that immediately entices me to leave the warmth of my room and slowly make my way towards Lauds to re-join the community in the chapel. On the way, mouth wide open in vain attempts to catch swirling flakes, I happen to look around just to make sure no-one is watching, only to see another doing likewise. This wasn't my joy alone.

Again, how am I to concentrate on the prayer when so much is happening around me? The feature windows are like giant postcards, revealing bare-limbed trees now brushed delicately in white, whilst rustic buildings come alive to new, artistic perspectives. But then, there it is! Right in front of my nose in a moment of bold synchronicity, words from the psalms which say it all: *"Acclaim God, all the earth, sing psalms to the glory of his name, glorify him with your praises, say to God, "How awesome you are!"* Then reading ahead, intuitively anticipating more points of connection, I cannot contain my joy and point out near final verses of Psalm 147 to a startled neighbour intently listening to the cantor reciting its beginning. It reads: *"He sends his word to the earth, his command runs quickly, he spreads the snow like flax (as white as wool), strews hoarfrost like*

*ashes.*” When we finally arrive at these words, the whole chapel smiles knowingly in silence. It is a moment to savour and re-live many times over during the day.

Sitting alone afterwards, and at last quiet before the God I otherwise expend much energy talking about, a gift of cleansing tears is surprisingly given in a fashion not dissimilar to the falling snow; in its right season and without force. And for me they are a natural response to goodness undeserved yet gratefully received. I’m glad to be back Glastonbury. These days are the stuff of my centring, my healing.

Four short hours later I am back in the same seat, once more distracted from the Eucharistic setting by anxious thoughts about the reading I am to give at lunch. Will the shorter text about Gregory of Nyssa’s mystical and highly allegorical *Life of Moses*—this time preceded by my own profound historical and theological introduction—engage folk who are at the dinner table to eat food after all, and not necessarily to be carried away in spirit to Mt. Sinai via a seemingly crass and monotone Australian accent?

Totally unexpectedly, and thankfully breaking my increasingly self-absorbed train of thought, a strangely familiar figure walks past me to the other side of the choir stalls. Turning to the person sitting beside me, I ask if she knows the woman who just came in. Her reply, “I can’t say that I do,” triggers my own effused response, “I think I do.” Keeping an undecided eye on her without being too obvious, my doubting is put to rest when she smiles across at Mark, our retreat leader. It is Elsa, a kindred spirit who shared this unique retreat experience with me five years ago.

Well, what now? I can’t disrupt her prayer with my own need to be noticed. I’ll just sit tight and wait for the end of the service. She might not even recognise me anyway. At the reading of the gospel, however, our line of sight over the lectern intersects and I have to take a risk. I offer a smile of recognition, returned in kind by an expression of surprise and genuine delight that quickly causes me to avert my eyes. It is simply overwhelming. God’s kindly gaze through her own and

those tears again! It is just one of those days where beauty and goodness gets through a sturdy male defence and I am left undone by the miracle that is grace.

The service concludes with the wonderful words, "The Eucharist is over, go in peace," and we soon find and hug each other in the centre of the chapel as bemused folk make their way past. "It's so good to see you! What on earth are you doing here?" we repeat again and again, neither fully able to say anything of much coherence in reply.

Lunch and the Gregory reading completed (I needn't have worried. They are typically a polite bunch), with Elsa heading off to her near-by home through the fading light and deepening snow, I make mention to a curious Mark, again feeling somewhat foolish about tear-sodden eyes, "It has just been one of those days. Nothing extraordinary yet very special all the same." I sense he understands something of what I mean, as we head our separate ways into the renewed breathing space that is the afternoon's programme.

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