

## English Benedictine Congregation History Commission Conference 2013

### “A free spirit, a universal figure”?

#### Some aspects of Augustine Baker’s Monastic Spirituality

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Writing in his history of the English Benedictines from 1540–1688, David Lunn has noted that “it has become a part of the conventional wisdom” of the EBC that Augustine Baker is to be understood as the contemplative opponent of methodological, discursive prayer; one who, like a latter-day St. George, single-handedly rescued the distressed Dames of Cambrai from the Continental dragon of activist, Jesuit-inspired spiritual methodology.<sup>1</sup> Versions of this account are to be discovered, in whole or part, in several modern overviews of Baker’s work at Cambrai.<sup>2</sup> Even a popular presentation of Baker’s spirituality published as recently as 2010, that of Victor de Waal, contains echoes of the same mythology, with its imagery of Baker as a man of the “spiritual frontiers” who “sets himself firmly against the prevailing customs” of his contemporaries.<sup>3</sup>

Lunn points out that the relationship between enclosed, contemplative religious and the styles of spirituality inspired ultimately by the *devotio moderna* is much more complex than what he terms this “travesty of the truth” suggests; at the same time he draws attention to the fact that the mystical tradition was not absent from Ignatian spirituality, as the writings of Ignatius himself, and later Jesuit writers on contemplation (for example, Alvarez de Paz), demonstrate.<sup>4</sup> Baker’s own writings, and especially the reading lists he set down for the nuns of Cambrai, detailing and commenting on the extensive range of texts he had collected or composed for them, indicate clearly that Baker’s own position on such matters is far more subtle.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps equally widespread as the positioning of Baker in an over-simple fashion as an opponent of methodical prayer has been the view that, in this opposition, “he stands as the

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<sup>1</sup> Lunn, David. *The English Benedictines, 1540–1688, from Reformation to Revolution*. London: Burns and Oates, 1980. 206.

<sup>2</sup> Lunn cites two significant versions of this understanding of Baker’s project written by English monastics: those of J.C. Hedley (Hedley, John Cuthbert. *Evolution and Faith, with Other Essays*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1931. 185–89) and Felicitas Corrigan (*Benedictines of Stanbrook. In a Great Tradition: A Tribute to Dame Laurentia McLachlan*. London: John Murray, 1956. 24).

<sup>3</sup> De Waal, Victor. *Augustine Baker, Frontiers of the Spirit*. Oxford: SLG. 2010. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Lunn, *The English Benedictines*, 206.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the discussion in Rhodes, J.T. “Dom Augustine Baker’s Reading Lists.” *Downside Review* July 1993: 157–73.

final flowering of the pre-Reformation English mystical tradition”,<sup>6</sup> and that it is from this island’s spirituality that he draws his opposition to the mainland European tradition of prayer. On this account, Baker emerges as almost the spiritual godfather of UKIP. Even so careful a scholar as Columba Stewart is misled by the received reputation of Augustine Baker into identifying the fourteenth century English text *The Cloud of Unknowing* as the principal influence upon Baker’s spirituality.<sup>7</sup> As I shall suggest below, responsibility for establishing this position should probably be laid at the door of David Knowles,<sup>8</sup> and it is equally in need of re-examination.

David Lunn, to whose work on Baker’s historical context all students of this topic owe a debt, is guilty of perpetrating his own travesty of the truth when he involves himself in claims that Baker should be understood as one who promoted a spirituality which is, as he puts it, “anarchic”. In a purplish passage almost worthy of Knowles himself, Lunn eulogises Baker as “a free spirit, a universal figure, who belongs to all ages and all creeds”.<sup>9</sup> This is very close to historical fantasy. Baker, as we shall see, is very firmly grounded in the conventional landscape of post-Tridentine Catholic spirituality. He is in fact, in many respects, a somewhat backward-looking figure, especially if set alongside such of his contemporaries as Mary Ward. Why, then, have significantly distorted accounts of Baker’s attitudes enjoyed such widespread currency?

At least part of the reason for the particular shape taken by the Baker legend in its various forms has to do with the historical circumstances of English and Welsh Catholics, and particularly religious, during this period. A distinction can be drawn between the state of early modern Catholic spirituality in mainland Europe, and the situation to be found among the recusant English and Welsh Catholics. In this way, the peculiar position of the exiled English religious communities may be seen in its proper light. As Lunn has argued in another context, “a revival of mystical prayer among the English Roman Catholics did not come from the persecuted laity and hunted priests in England ... but from the religious communities founded, mainly in the Spanish Netherlands, by the English Catholic exiles”.<sup>10</sup> That is to say, the exiled English religious communities were in most respects better positioned to take part in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century revival of interest in mysticism across many parts of Europe than were the recusant Catholics of England and Wales. Against this background, it is at least suggestive that all of Augustine Baker’s spiritual and mystical writings were composed during the period of his continental exile from England.

Sr Teresa Higgins, a North American student of the English devotional texts of this period, comments on the popular image of Augustine Baker as “one revolting against the

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<sup>6</sup> Woodward, Michael, ed. *That Mysterious Man. Essays on Augustine Baker OSB*. Abergavenny: Three Peaks Press, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Stewart, Columba. *Prayer and Community. The Benedictine Tradition. Traditions of Christian Spirituality Series*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998. 39.

<sup>8</sup> Knowles, David. *The English Mystics*. London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1927.

<sup>9</sup> Lunn, *The English Benedictines*, 217.

<sup>10</sup> Lunn, David. “Augustine Baker (1575–1641) and the English Mystical Tradition.” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* XXVI.3 (July 1975): 268.

[spiritual] methodology of his day” that this is too simplistic a picture to be either accurate or useful.<sup>11</sup> She argues that Baker is better understood as among England’s first representatives of a type of spiritual writing increasingly common in sixteenth and early seventeenth century Catholic Europe, concerned above all with a renewed teaching of contemplative prayer. She writes:

Lanspergius and Blosius, who knew well the treatises of Ruysbroek, Suso, Tauler, and Herp, were concerned with teaching this contemplative prayer to others, helping them recognise states of prayer, suggesting practices, and, in fact, trying to lead them to the heights of mystical prayer.<sup>12</sup>

For Higgins, Baker is best understood within a widespread and living tradition of reading, writing, and contemplative prayer; albeit one which, in the course of the sixteenth century, had very largely passed England by. By contrast with the works produced in Catholic Europe, Higgins comments, “English books of devotion were a call to action, not to contemplation”.<sup>13</sup>

In her survey of the spirituality of Baker’s contemporaries, Higgins identifies a crucial dimension of the outlook of the recusant English and Welsh Catholics which differentiates them from the mainstream of their continental co-religionists. She finds them to have shared the pervasive early modern Catholic preoccupation with method in prayer, together with the widespread interest in analyses of inner states which, she points out, amounts to a new psychological awareness of the processes of prayer. But there remains the difference that in post-Reformation England “the contemplative aspects of the spiritual life were suddenly and completely subordinated to the utter necessity of defining and maintaining basic beliefs. It is this fact more than any other that differentiates the English Catholic scene from that of much of continental Europe.”<sup>14</sup>

She writes that recusant manuals of prayer and spiritual guides were “geared to the active life of the layman, were highly practical in design, and usually carried by implication or even explicit warning, a certain distrust of any form of contemplative prayer”.<sup>15</sup> It may therefore be said that in the early seventeenth century, not only an absence of contemplative writing, but an active hostility to contemplation, characterises the native English and Welsh Catholic scene. This fact is in strong contradistinction to the situation across much of the rest of Catholic Europe.

The point may be supported by reference to the work undertaken by the medievalist, Kent Emery on Baker’s English near-contemporary, William Fitch, known in religion as Benet of Canfield (1562-1611).<sup>16</sup> Like Baker, Canfield was a convert to Catholicism, a London trained lawyer, and a religious refugee in continental Europe, although, unlike Baker,

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<sup>11</sup> Higgins, Sister M. St. Teresa, C.S.J. “Augustine Baker.” Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1963. 90.

<sup>12</sup> Higgins, 86.

<sup>13</sup> Higgins, 85.

<sup>14</sup> Higgins, 69–105

<sup>15</sup> Higgins, 80

<sup>16</sup> Emery, Kent, Jr. “Benet of Canfield : Counter-Reformation Spirituality and Its Mediaeval Origins.” Thesis (PhD). Toronto: University of Toronto, 1976. Canadian theses on microfiche ; 36604.

Canfield became a Capuchin and made his permanent home in France. Emery points out that, once out of England, Canfield “benefitted from the preservation and wide dissemination of medieval contemplative works which accompanied Catholic reform everywhere on the continent, especially in France”.<sup>17</sup>

Emery contrasts the English scene, where the main concern was missionary, and contemplative literature scarce:

the preponderance of English Catholic literature during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, either translated or newly composed, was apologetic, controversial, devotional or meditational, designed to serve the needs of the domestic religious practice of the English lay remnant.<sup>18</sup>

Canfield’s own contribution to the development of the French school of mystical spirituality has been widely recognised, and receives high praise from the classic historian of French spirituality, Henri Bremond: “Master of the masters themselves, of Berulle, Madame Acarie, Marie de Beauvillier and many others, he, in my opinion, more than anyone else gave our religious renaissance this clearly mystical character”.<sup>19</sup> In the present context, it is noteworthy that Canfield, whose subtle analyses of the psychology of prayer also draw comment from Bremond,<sup>20</sup> was among the half dozen favourite authors to whom Baker himself again and again returns, and whose texts he was concerned to promote among the Cambrai nuns.

Higgins writes that Baker’s own treatises “bear undeniable witness that the interest in method, the new psychological awareness of prayer as an experience, and the paucity of contemporary contemplative treatises were in the background of his thinking”.<sup>21</sup> Her persuasive contention is that Baker represents not a final flowering of the pre-Reformation English tradition, but rather one of the first attempts from within the English recusant community to incorporate into a renewed and, effectively, updated practice of contemplative writing the “detailed, methodical, highly practical, yet liberating, instructions” for mystical prayer now becoming widespread in post-Tridentine Europe, instructions “adapted to a generation well versed in formal method”.<sup>22</sup> That is to say, Baker is attempting in an English monastic context to do what many continental theologians of spirituality had already undertaken. Under the guidance of writers of the continental Catholic mainstream he writes about contemplative prayer in a manner wholly of his time, but not wholly in keeping with the outlook of his fellow English and Welsh recusant Catholics.

John Clark, writing in 2004, notes that Baker “is often included among the ‘English Mystics’. But in fact, while he is deeply appreciative of the pre-dissolution English

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<sup>17</sup> Emery, Kent, Jr. *Renaissance Dialectic and Renaissance Piety*, Benet of Canfield’s ‘Rule of Perfection’. A Translation and a Study. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*. Binghamton, New York: Medieval and renaissance texts and studies, 1987. 17.

<sup>18</sup> Emery, *Renaissance Dialectic and Renaissance Piety*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Bremond, Henri. *A Literary History of Religious Thought in France from the Wars of Religion Down to Our Own Times*, Volume 2, the Coming of Mysticism (1590–1620). London: SPCK, 1930. 115.

<sup>20</sup> Bremond, 117.

<sup>21</sup> Higgins, 81.

<sup>22</sup> Higgins, 86.

contemplative tradition, the key writers for his spiritual formation belong rather to mainland Europe”.<sup>23</sup> The view that Baker is best understood as the inheritor and perpetuator of the fourteenth century English mystical tradition is probably the result of the work of David Knowles, who included a chapter on Baker at the end of his two popular introductions to medieval English spirituality.<sup>24</sup> In fact, apart from his occasional use of the writings of the sixteenth century Bridgettine, William Bonde, Baker’s use of the English mystics is confined to *The Cloud* and Walter Hilton.

Like Higgins, Clark argues that Baker, whose initial formation as a monk was at Santa Justina in Padua, and who was then professed into the Cassinese (Italian) Benedictine Congregation, and later ordained priest in Reims, is a man of the mainland European Catholic tradition and not the exclusive heir of an English medieval spirituality.<sup>25</sup> Even Baker’s most significant debt to the fourteenth century English mystics, his use of *The Cloud of Unknowing* as the basis for the partly autobiographical commentary he wrote in 1629 called the *Secretum Sive Mysticum*, may be said to be founded upon his high regard for the writings of his contemporaries Canfield and de Barbanson,<sup>26</sup> and his desire to show that *The Cloud* teaches the same doctrine as the two Capuchin mystics.

In other words, it is Baker’s desire to show the connections and continuities between the pre-dissolution English tradition and the early modern spirituality of the renewed Catholic Church in mainland Europe that is the driving force here, not some attempt to re-inhabit the English past. Indeed, in her recent study, Victoria Van Hying has advanced the provocative argument that it may be as a result of Baker’s own literary activities that the category “English Mystics” came into being as a way of characterising certain fourteenth century English texts.<sup>27</sup>

Baker’s project, therefore, has more to do with the reconnection of English monastic spirituality with the European Catholic mainstream (of which the Ignatian tradition, while a very significant element, is far from being the only element) than it has to do with a clash between Benedictine and Jesuit spiritualities, or a revival of the pre-Reformation English mystical tradition. How, then, are we to locate Baker within that European Catholic mainstream?

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<sup>23</sup> Clark, John. “Augustine Baker, O.S.B. Towards a Reassessment.” *Studies in Spirituality* 14 (2004): 220.

<sup>24</sup> In his earlier writings, for example, *The English Mystics* (London, Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1927), Knowles views Baker as ‘one of a group of remarkable men who gave distinction to the rebirth of the English Benedictine Congregation’ (p. 151), stating that ‘it is precisely because Father Baker, both in study and practice, went behind his contemporaries to the old English mystics, that he is so valuable’ (p. 151). Today, this position appears unsustainably hagiographical. The later Knowles, revisiting the same territory in his 1961 book, *The English Mystical Tradition*, although still associating Baker firmly with the 14th century English tradition is more inclined to question Baker’s teaching.

<sup>25</sup> Clark, John. “Father Augustine Baker’s *Secretum*: Sources and Affinities.” *That Mysterious Man. Essays on Augustine Baker OSB*. Ed. Michael Woodward. Abergavenny: Three Peaks Press, 2001. 123–35.

<sup>26</sup> Clark, *Secretum*, Introduction and Notes, 23.

<sup>27</sup> Van Hying, Victoria. “Augustine Baker Mystic-Maker: Three Modes of Self-Authorisation.” Unpublished MSt dissertation. Oxford, 2008. I am grateful to the author for allowing me access to this text.

The student of the spirituality of early modern Europe must reckon with the fact that the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, “witnessed seismic transformations on the European continent in all the major areas of human concern: politics, economics, culture and religion”.<sup>28</sup> This same early modern period was the context for an unusually rich and extensive outpouring of spiritual writings. Perhaps as a consequence, few modern studies exist which offer a confident overview of the many facets of the spirituality of this period. Jordan Aumann, offering a survey chapter on the topic, suggests that “merely to list the writings and their authors would comprise a large volume”.<sup>29</sup> Higgins considers that the cross-currents and unpredictable tides of spirituality during this period defy easy categorization. “If there is a pattern, it is that of the kaleidoscope”, she writes.<sup>30</sup> The classic study of Cagnet, with greater restraint, speaks of the “very diversified appearance” of the spirituality of this period.<sup>31</sup> Even the precise terminology to be applied to the period in question is itself a matter of controversy: the terms post-Tridentine, post-reformation, counter-reformation, Catholic reform, early modern and baroque are variously deployed by writers who have explored aspects of the period in question. It is in part as a consequence of this complex backcloth that the work of Augustine Baker has proven so difficult appropriately to contextualise.

Perhaps the most influential perspective upon an understanding of Catholic spirituality in the early modern period for scholars writing in the later decades of the twentieth century has been the work of H. Outram Evennett.<sup>32</sup> Evennett’s account of the direction of the spirituality of this period is summed up by David Luebke in the following paragraph. For Evennett the period witnesses:

a departure from the contemplative mysticism of the late Middle Ages; a turn towards more rigorous and self-disciplined meditation and prayer; a greater emphasis on zealous, worldly activism in the form of charity and labour of the salvation of souls; a revival of the sacraments, especially confession and communion; and even a kind of individualism.<sup>33</sup>

Evennett’s thesis contains many persuasive components, and possesses above all the virtue of offering a coherent picture of a period which can sometimes appear baffling in its complexity. The summary cited also demonstrates the extent to which it is Evennett’s account of early modern Catholicism which lies behind the image not infrequently painted of the background to Baker’s work at Cambrai. But Evennett’s account of post-Tridentine spirituality, which positions some aspects of the Ignatian tradition at its centre, has to be regarded as incomplete, and in some important respects, inaccurate.

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<sup>28</sup> Thompson, William M, ed. *Berulle and the French School: Selected Writings*. New York: Paulist Press, 1989. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Aumann, Jordan. *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1985. 178.

<sup>30</sup> Higgins, 78.

<sup>31</sup> Cagnet, Louis. *Post-Reformation Spirituality*. Trans. P J Hepburne-Scott. Faith and Fact Books: 41. London: Burns & Oates, 1959. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Evennett, H. Outram. *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation*. Ed. John Bossy. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1968.

<sup>33</sup> Luebke, David M, ed. *The Counter-Reformation. The Essential Readings*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999. 47.

Evennett finds that the systematization of the meditative form of mental prayer becomes in this period “one of the cornerstones of the new and reinvigorated spirituality” of the Counter-Reformation.<sup>34</sup> This does indeed appear to be the case, although, as Evennett himself allows, the development and use of methodical mental prayer predates the Counter-Reformation period, seeming to originate from the fourteenth century onwards.<sup>35</sup> Within this development, however, Evennett fails to register the growing psychological sophistication which, as we have already noted, writers such as Higgins identify as one of the defining qualities of the early modern period.<sup>36</sup>

Evennett writes that there is in this period a “departure from the contemplative mysticism of the late Middle Ages”, and that this is replaced by an “intensive and exclusive concentration on formal discursive meditation with its mental efforts, and on the principle of activity and struggle - of which the Jesuits were the supreme and the extreme champions”. He suggests that as a consequence contemplative spirituality was rendered merely a “running undertone of dissatisfaction”.<sup>37</sup> This is surely too strong a claim. Almost the entirety of the French school of mystical spirituality, which would reach its zenith in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is sidelined by such a view, as is the golden age of Spanish mysticism, and much Italian spirituality. In fairness to Evennett, it should be allowed that there are many passages of complaint in Baker’s own treatises about the situation of Catholics in England which closely parallel Evennett’s analysis of early modern spirituality. But Baker is very specifically commenting on the English Catholic scene, which, as we have noted above, is a special case.

Offering an alternative account of post-reformation Catholic spirituality, Louis Dupré writes:

A surprising feature of “modern” Christian spirituality is its continuity with the past. The same models (the soul as image of God inhabited by a divine presence), the same influences (mainly Neoplatonic) that directed late medieval piety still determine the devotion of the modern age.<sup>38</sup>

Dupré is far from being alone in making this point. Cagnet’s classic study of post-reformation spirituality spends four of its five chapters directly addressing the mystical movements of early modern Europe, which he sees as a manifestation of this set of continuities.<sup>39</sup> Dupré goes on to speak of a “flowering of mystical movements” at this time across early modern Europe, and both authors are at pains to detail strong continuities with the medieval past where such movements find their roots.

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<sup>34</sup> Evennett, 55.

<sup>35</sup> Cagnet, 10.

<sup>36</sup> Higgins, 78–79.

<sup>37</sup> Evennett, 62.

<sup>38</sup> Dupré, Louis, Don E. Saliers, and John Meyendorff, eds. *Christian Spirituality III: Post-Reformation and Modern*. London: SCM Press, 1989. Vol. 18 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*. xiii.

<sup>39</sup> Cagnet, Louis. *Post-Reformation Spirituality*. Trans. P J Hepburne-Scott. Faith and Fact Books: 41. London: Burns & Oates, 1959.

Writing specifically about Augustine Baker, Clark identifies significant continuities with the medieval past in Baker's reading practices, and in the range of authors whom he most significantly promotes to his students at Cambrai. Among the mainland European writers who form the bulk of Baker's spiritual reading, it is the quintet of Tauler, Harphius, Blossius, Canfield and de Barbanson whom he finds to be the most significant influences upon Baker's work.<sup>40</sup> Clark writes that Baker's preferred reading reveals that his spirituality "has partial roots in the apophatic theology of the fifth century pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite as this had been translated within the Latin theological tradition".<sup>41</sup> Clark locates Baker's outlook precisely within one of the principal areas of continuity between the mystical movements of the medieval period and the world of early modern Catholicism, the affective apophatic mysticism of the pseudo-Dionysian tradition.

At the same time, Baker's preoccupation with spiritual texts and their value in developing a fruitful interior life in many ways parallels that to be found among the first practitioners of the affective spirituality known as the *devotio moderna*; and later developed widely by those influenced by their outlook. In fact, Baker's work may be said to reflect two movements of continuity from the late medieval period through into the early modern, one stemming from the *devotio moderna*; the other having to do with continuing influence of the pseudo-Dionysian mystical tradition. The connections between these two complementary streams of spirituality, as well as their presence within the outlook of Augustine Baker, may be illustrated here by an examination of some of those authors with whom we know Baker's work to be connected because he himself tells us so.

We know from Baker's biographer and associate, Leander Prichard, that a significant early influence upon Baker's spiritual life had come from the writings of "Johannes Lanspergius, the Carthusian". Prichard writes:

And now the reading of those books (being indeed of the higher strain of spirituality) made him see where he had lost himselfe, and was a strong invitation for him to returne again *ad priora opera* [...] One of those books was *Speculum Perfectionis*, a Latin Book [...] It was indeed written in the originall by Johannes Lanspergius, the Carthusian, and is to be found among his works.<sup>42</sup>

This is the same Lanspergius to whose text *The Epistle of Jesus Christ to a faithful soul* Baker himself makes reference in his *Catalogue*, the set of readings lists he composed for the Cambrai nuns,<sup>43</sup> suggesting that of the Lanspergius text they should read "All. This is good for a rawe beginner".<sup>44</sup> Lanspergius' book is placed by Baker at the very head of the *Catalogue*, a fact which, when coupled with Prichard's witness, suggests both his familiarity

<sup>40</sup> Clark, "Towards a Reassessment," 221.

<sup>41</sup> Clark, *Secretum*, Introduction and Notes, 21.

<sup>42</sup> Prichard, Leander. "The Second Treatise Concerning the Life and Writings of the Venerable Father, F. Augustin Baker, Preist of the Holy Order of S. Benet, Congregationis Anglicanae. Written by the Reverend Father, F. Leander Pritchard, Who Had Bin His Socio for Severall Years." *Memorials of Father Augustine Baker and Other Documents Relating to the English Benedictines*. Ed. Justin McCann and Hugh Connolly. London: Catholic Record Society, 1933. 101.

<sup>43</sup> On this see: Rhodes, J.T. "Dom Augustine Baker's Reading Lists." *Downside Review* July 1993: 157-73.

<sup>44</sup> Baker, *Directions* H, 82.

with that author's works and his belief that they would be of benefit to those of his students who found themselves, as he had once found himself, at the very beginning of the spiritual path.

Johannes Gerecht, a sixteenth century Carthusian known to posterity as Lanspergius from his birthplace of Landsberg in Bavaria, lived from about 1489 to 1539. Lanspergius worked, for the most part, in the Charterhouse of St. Barbara in Cologne, with a short spell as prior of the Charterhouse in Vogelsang near Juliers. The monks of the Cologne Charterhouse strove to maintain a living connection with the mystical writers of the medieval period, both through their activity as copyists and through their spiritual practices; indeed, it is to the literary efforts of the Cologne Carthusians that we owe the survival of many of the texts of the Flemish and Rhineland mystics. At the same time, the Cologne house was the inheritor of much that had come from the *devotio moderna*, most notably its traditions of textual reflection and strongly affective, individual piety.

In keeping with the outlook of the *devotio*, Lanspergius seeks to promote a revival in personal spirituality, believing that “the most effective way of countering the spread of Protestantism was to revive the Church by giving the faithful a really fervent spiritual life”.<sup>45</sup> Thus he places a stress upon individual ascetical discipline, and the development of the practice of interior prayer. Lanspergius promotes the superiority of the affective mysticism of the will over any other mode of spirituality, and it was towards the promotion of this form of inner devotion with its focus upon the person of Christ that the majority of his writings were directed. In these respects he is the inheritor of the outlook of the *devotio*, whose “piety tended towards interior experience and ascribed great importance to individual psychological states”.<sup>46</sup> Pierre Pourrat found that Lanspergius' work “reminds us of the *Imitation [of Christ]*”.<sup>47</sup> Cognet echoes this sentiment.<sup>48</sup> It is surely no accident that Baker includes among his list of “other treatises of my making” a short series of texts by Thomas à Kempis, each of which invites its reader to practice the same affective interior focus upon the person and work of Christ, springing from the heart, that is to be found in Lanspergius.

The major part of Lanspergius' writings are his sermons (three of the five volumes of his collected works), but he also wrote spiritual treatises and letters of direction. The work which Baker promotes to the nuns at Cambrai is the final section of a longer work, the *Alloquia Jesu Christi ad quamvis animam fidelem*, a lengthy exhortation to a renewal of the spiritual life with an emphatically practical point of view, laying stress upon forms of prayer, meditations and ascetical instructions. The final section of Lanspergius' *Alloquia Jesu Christi*, entitled *Epistola Salvatoris ad quandam animam fidelem*, was often printed separately from the rest of the treatise and became the best known of Lanspergius' writings. It is this final part, the *Epistola*, translated into English by the Earl of Arundel, that Baker is commending in the reading list.

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<sup>45</sup> Cognet, 17.

<sup>46</sup> Cognet, 14.

<sup>47</sup> Pourrat, P. *Christian Spirituality in the Middle Ages*. London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd, 1927. 316.

<sup>48</sup> note:Cognet, 18.

The significance of Baker's use of Lanspergius, along with his evident interest in other writers of the *devotio* such as à Kempis, has to do with his personal commitment to a form of interior spirituality rooted in their affective and voluntarist piety. But it is important to note in this context that it was from precisely this same root in the *devotio* that the formal "scheme of meditation" or "method of prayer" takes its origin, arriving, via such influential works as the fifteenth century *Scala meditatoria* of Johann Wessel Gansfort, to its most developed form in the sixteenth century *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius. So the affective piety taught by Baker, far from being at odds with the spiritual climate of his age, is deeply rooted in the devotional practices familiar to a well-read Catholic of the time.

A second entry in Baker's *Catalogue* can assist us in further understanding the interconnections between the various currents in early modern Catholic spirituality, and in appreciating why it is so difficult to make absolute determinations about the borders between schools of spirituality.

In the *Catalogue* Baker lists several pre-dissolution English texts that have found their way to the library at Cambrai. Among them are texts that are well known today, such as the anonymous *Cloud of Unknowing* and the *Scala Perfectionis* of Walter Hilton, as well as texts now unknown to all save scholars of medieval literature, such as Richard Whitford's *Tonne or Pipe of Perfection*, a work explicitly written for a monastic audience. But Baker also has a copy of one of the few new works of devotion published by an English Catholic during the brief Catholic restoration in England under Mary Tudor. This is the text Baker calls "The Way to Perfection, by Doctor Perin".<sup>49</sup>

In 1557 William Peryn, a Dominican friar of St Bartholomew's, Smithfield, published in English a book entitled *Spirituell Exercyses*, and it is this book of which Baker possessed a copy at Cambrai. According to his note in the *Catalogue*, he wished the nuns to make use of "All" of Peryn's text.<sup>50</sup> Such a note indicates Baker's full approval of an author, and his belief that a work will further the spiritual lives of his contemplative students.

Peryn's text was, for the most part, a translation and adaptation of the *Exercitia Theologicae Mysticae* (1543) by Nicholas Van Ess, a Flemish priest who had worked in and around the University of Cologne. Van Ess was well acquainted with and influenced by the spirituality of the Charterhouse of St. Barbara in Cologne, of which we have seen that Lanspergius had been an influential member. But in addition to his acquaintance with that tradition of spirituality, Van Ess had undergone the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius under the direction of one of the earliest Jesuits, Peter Favre.<sup>51</sup> This experience profoundly affected Van Ess, and his book is deeply influenced by Ignatian approaches to prayer. In the person of Van Ess, whose work forms the substance of Peryn's book, we can see the intermingling of the rising Ignatian tradition with the continuing practices and outlook of the *devotio* and the mystical movements of the later medieval period, cherished by the Carthusians of Cologne.

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<sup>49</sup> Baker, *Directions* H, 83.

<sup>50</sup> Baker, *Directions* H, 83.

<sup>51</sup> Wizeman, William. *The Theology and Spirituality of Mary Tudor's Church*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006. 210.

Peryn's *Spirituell Exercises* are, however, not simply Ignatian in origin: as well as his exposure to Spanish counter-reformation practices, Peryn was himself influenced by the late medieval Flemish mystical tradition, and in his adaptation of Van Ess specifically makes use of the teachings of "ye godly father henry harp".<sup>52</sup> "Harp" is the fifteenth century Flemish Franciscan, Hendrick Herp, known to Baker as Harphius, whose influence upon Baker was perhaps more determinative than that of any other single writer, and whose role as a conduit between the Rhineland mystics and the spirituality of early modern Catholicism is of considerable significance. From the Flemish mystic's affective spirituality Peryn borrows both his stress upon an ascesis of personal abnegation as a preparation for an affective relationship with Christ, and his use of "aspirations" or short affective exclamatory prayers.<sup>53</sup> Both of these dimensions of Harphius' teaching are of central importance to the spirituality of Augustine Baker.

In Peryn's work we discover the simultaneous influence of the two currents of spirituality operating in the works of Augustine Baker: the later forms of the *devotio moderna*, mediated through the growing late-medieval and early-modern fascination with mental prayer, now developed by Ignatius into the *Spiritual Exercises*, and the continuing impact of the Rhineland and Flemish mystics mediated through the writings of Hendrick Herp.

Herp, a Flemish Franciscan of the Observance, was born around 1400 near s'Hertogenbosch, probably in the village of Erp. He died in Mechelen in 1477.<sup>54</sup> As widely read and well known in his own day, and through into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as he is forgotten today, Harphius is a pivotal figure for the spirituality of Augustine Baker.

In his early years, Harphius was associated with the *devotio moderna* as a member of the Brethren of the Common Life, but ultimately elected to throw in his lot with the new Observant Franciscan movement. Harphius is the writer through whom the tradition of the mystics of the Rhinelands and the Low Countries as mediated by Ruysbroeck received its widest dissemination. Kent Emery notes that a sixteenth century prior of the Cologne Charterhouse, Gerard Kalckbrenner, wrote "that if one were to remove from Harphius what he had borrowed from Ruysbroeck, there would be little left".<sup>55</sup> But his originality lies in the fact that Harphius interprets Ruysbroeck's speculative mysticism as an affective mysticism, and in doing so he makes use of an affective interpretation of pseudo-Dionysus, especially that of the thirteenth century Carthusian, Hugh of Balma.

In a recent essay on the affective Dionysian tradition, Boyd Taylor Coolman notes that at the core of this medieval mystical tradition there is to be found an "interpolation of

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<sup>52</sup> Peryn, *Spirituell Exercyses*. Cited in Wizeman, 210.

<sup>53</sup> Wizeman, 210.

<sup>54</sup> Short, William. "Hendrick Herp: The Mirror of Perfection or Directory of Contemplation." *Franciscan Studies* 64 (2006): 408.

<sup>55</sup> Emery, Kent, Jr. "The Carthusians: Intermediaries for the Teaching of John Ruysbroeck During the Period of Early Reform and in the Counter-Reformation." *Miscellanea Cartusiensia*, 4. Ed. James Hogg. Vol. 43. *Analecta Cartusiana*. Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Americanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1979. 117.

love over knowledge” in the relationship between humanity and God.<sup>56</sup> In this “profound medieval intuition about affect and intellect” it is the affective mode of humanity’s access to God which emerges as the dominant thread, and at the risk of distorting the original sense of pseudo-Dionysius’ text, becomes the accepted manner of reading the *Mystical Theology*. Coolman notes that what is at stake here is “a conviction regarding how human beings are most basically constituted and how they relate most fundamentally to God”.<sup>57</sup>

Baker makes reference to Harphius at many points in his treatises, as well as translating significant portions from his works, and recommending him in the *Catalogue*. It is from Harphius especially that Baker draws his teaching on the affective prayer of aspirations. Stephanus Axters argues that Harphius’ theory of aspirations, “repeated acts of faith and love, which he makes the nerve centre of the interior life, is all his own”,<sup>58</sup> although there are affinities and sources for this manner of prayer in Hugh of Balma. And it is from Harphius that Baker inherits this mode of prayer, which he too makes central to his teaching about contemplation.

Not only in respect of his attitudes towards contemplative prayer is Baker to be situated firmly within the spiritual landscape of early modern European Catholicism, he also takes as given the attitudes towards religious life, and specifically Benedictine monastic life, characteristic of the post-Tridentine Catholic church. Thus, when Baker speaks of the “spirituall course” to be pursued by his students, he assumes a view of monastic spirituality which is not as immediately present to the minds of modern readers as it would have been to his original audience, since he takes for granted a pattern of development in holiness which has now been very largely forgotten.

Fundamental to the dynamics of the Catholicism of this period is what amounts to a two-tier account of the church, which held that while the divine call to holiness of life applied to all baptised Christians, only those in the religious state were called to perfection in holiness. Thus, the seventeenth century doctrine held that vowed religious, uniquely, make the pursuit of perfection the centre of their lives. By their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, founded upon the evangelical counsels of the gospel, vowed religious are specially graced to live out a form of life that is both stable and permanent, and which places the pursuit of perfection in holiness at its core. Scholastic theologians taught that the various modes of the religious life to be found in the Church could be understood as exemplifying the different means of attaining this ideal of vowed perfection: for example, the religious life might be solitary or communal, active or contemplative, priestly or lay.<sup>59</sup> It was the common outlook of the time that the Benedictine monastic ideal was one of perfection achieved *via* an ascesis of life ordered towards contemplative prayer.

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<sup>56</sup> Coolman, Boyd Taylor. “The Medieval Affective Dionysian Tradition.” *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*. Sarah Coakley and Charles M Strang. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009. 85.

<sup>57</sup> Coolman, 86.

<sup>58</sup> Axters, Stephanus. *The Spirituality of the Old Low Countries*. London: Blackfriars, 1954. 52.

<sup>59</sup> For a helpful overview of the spirituality of early modern monasticism, see: Pereira, Jose, and Robert Fastiggi. *The Mystical Theology of the Catholic Reformation. An Overview of Baroque Spirituality*. Lanham, MD: University press of America, 2006.

Baker unhesitatingly adopts such a perspective throughout his writings for the nuns of Cambrai. For example, at the beginning of *Directions D* he writes, of monastics: “The end wch they are to aime at, is the perfect loue of God. The means for the attaining to that end are prayer & mortification”.<sup>60</sup> He will return to this simple foundational statement throughout *Directions for Contemplation*, and across the full range of his treatises for the nuns. “The way to the perfect love of God (wch is spirituall perfection)”, he writes, “is by prayer & mortification prosecuted”.<sup>61</sup>

Writing in *Directions F*, Baker offers the following more developed account of the purpose of monastic life, which he frames as an answer to a direct question from a Cambrai novice (whom he describes as “one of the children”):

Being asked by one of the children (preparinge herselfe to be clothed) a question that was not childish, wch was “What am I” (saith he) “to aime at by vndertakinge a state of religion?”, I answered her as followeth, viz.:

Whereas at this present, through corruption of nature caused by originall sinne & your owne evill customes & habits, you are full of selfe-loue, wholly regardinge & louing yourselfe, & in all that you doe or forbear do only or at least chiefly intend your owne commodities & ends, & not the loue and honour of God wch you ought only to regard & intend, now all your endeauours & labours must be for a reformation of your soule in this poynt for the effecting whereof the state of religion is a wonderfull great helpe, & therefore is tearmed the schoole of vertues, & to my present purpose I may tearme it the shopp or workinge-howse wherein vertues are exercised in their best perfection. And therefore in this estate of religion (whereof you meane to make a probation), you are by the exercises of prayer & mortification (both wch wherein they do consist I haue wth subdiuisions of them shewed you in the beginninge of the first part of this treatise) to labour for the abandoninge out of your soule all selfe-loue, & in lew of it to bringe in the deuine loue, whose property & perfection is only to loue God & intend him & his honour in all that you do or forbear. <sup>62</sup>

We should note here that Baker takes for granted as a simple given this understanding of monastic life, its implied anthropology, its theology of grace, and of human striving towards perfection. He neither argues for it, nor questions it. For Baker, as for most Catholics of his time, the religious life is simply a given of Christian existence, and entry into it is entry into a structured state of life whose aims and methods, as he demonstrates here, can be clearly stated.

In Baker’s statement we can see the conventional theological anthropology of the early modern Catholic church, which involves a foundational account of man’s alienation from God through original sin and the need for a process of conversion to God through both the recognition of the “corruption of nature” and a deliberate striving to place “the loue and

<sup>60</sup> Baker, Augustine. *Directions for Contemplation: Book D*. Ed. John Clark. *Analecta Carthusiana*. Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1999. 8.

<sup>61</sup> Baker, *Directions D*, 47.

<sup>62</sup> Baker, Augustine. *Directions for Contemplation: Book F*. Ed. John Clark. *Analecta Carthusiana*. Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1999. 10–11.

honour of God” at the centre of one’s life. Baker pictures the soul turning to the religious state finding the monastery “a wonderful great helpe” to the achievement of the intended “reformation of soule”, for in the monastery there exists the potential for a perfect co-operation of divine grace with human response. The monastic life is both a “wonderful great helpe” to the soul in effecting an internal reformation, and the “shopp or workinge-howse” where a discipline of virtue is brought about, as the appropriate human response to divine grace.

When Baker moves on to outline the “exercises” proper to the “estate of religion” we encounter, again in a highly condensed form, the working out of an understanding of monastic detachment from the world: “the abandoninge out of your soule all selfe-loue, & in lew of it to bringe in the deuine loue”. Here, as is often the case in a monastic spirituality of this period, the intensely monastery-based rhythm of life and spiritual practice seems effectively to “limit the realisation of Christian ideals to the monastery”.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, so completely has this “limiting” occurred here that the whole of Baker’s account of participation in the passion of Christ and prayer as the fulfilment of the spiritual life are presented as “internal” to the individual aspirant to contemplation, and are addressed by Baker almost as a parenthetical cross-reference back to an earlier section in the treatise: “exercises of prayer & mortification (both wch wherein they do consist I haue wth subdiuisions of them shewed you in the beginninge of the first part of this treatise)”.

Finally, in this set piece account for novices, Baker returns to the themes of God’s grace and man’s response, before finishing with a clear statement of the fact that the ultimate aim of all forms of religious life is perfection, which it will be noted is described as a relationship between God and the individual which takes places “in the soule”:

And this is not the worke of one day only or of one yeare, but it stands vpon the industry of the party wth the helpe of the deuine grace [...] And to haue this deuine loue perfectly in the soule is perfection, wch all religious are to aime at.<sup>64</sup>

The language Baker employs here reveals the extent to which he takes for granted the fact that, in the context of monastic contemplative life, Christian ideals are pursued “internally” (i.e. within the individual soul). Explicitly addressing this point in his treatise *Admittance*, Baker writes: “A contemplatiue spirit doth chiefly, yea wholly, regarde ye interior, doeng alle things according to ye interior & for ye good therof”.<sup>65</sup> He writes in another context of his disciple, Gertrude More, that “all the difficultie was for her entrie and getting into her interior, and for to learne how she should leade an internall life”.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Pereira, and Fastiggi, 77.

<sup>64</sup> Baker, Augustine. *Directions for Contemplation: Book F*. Ed. John Clark. *Analecta Carthusiana*. Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1999. 10–11.

<sup>65</sup> Baker, Augustine. *Admittance; Bonilla; Ricerius*. Ed. John Clark. *Analecta Cartusiana*. Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 2011. 106.

<sup>66</sup> Baker, Augustine. *The Life and Death of Dame Gertrude More*, Edited from All the Known Manuscripts. Ed. Ben Wekking. *Analecta Cartusiana*. Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 2002. 20.

The theme of monastic detachment has been carried to a specific extreme in the spirituality of the early modern Catholic Church, so that the perfection towards which Baker points his followers, achieved by “exercises of prayer and mortification”, is understood as primarily located within the interior landscape of the individual soul. This point, implicit in the account I have already offered of the context within which we are to approach Baker’s monastic spirituality, becomes quite explicit in his teaching on the monastic life itself. David Knowles, writing in 1961, is correct to state that

... for [Fr Baker] mental prayer is the centre and test of all. Neither in his own practice nor in his teaching does he neglect or belittle the sacraments, or the liturgy, as sources of sanctification, but he is insistent that the monk must be a man of interior prayer, and that only so far as he is a man of prayer, or needs help to make him a man of prayer, are other things of value.<sup>67</sup>

My concern here has been to suggest that this perspective is wholly characteristic of Baker’s context in the early modern Catholic Church. If Baker is, as David Lunn claims, a “universal figure”, then this must be because of the manner in which he exemplifies the outlooks and attitudes of his own era, not because he is understood as in some sense a free-spirited Baker *contra mundum*, standing out alone against prevailing orthodoxies.

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<sup>67</sup> Knowles, David. *The English Mystical Tradition*. London: Burns & Oates, 1961. 181.