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A glimmering light: reading, writing, mysticism and presence in the religious verse of John Donne

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Chapter 1

Preamble

Medieval Mysticism and ‘Reading to Experience’

Prepare Your Jaws!

Bernard of Clairvaux¹⁰

The procedures in which I am interested sprung from a reading attitude which aimed to move from an exposure to God’s works – Scripture, the Incarnation and Creation itself – to the experiencing of God’s actual presence as those works’ indwelling author. Mystical in that its goal was the attainment of actual divine presence,¹¹ this procedure was also empirical in that it was the mystics’ sensory experience that facilitated their meditative ascent. Such positive, or more properly *cataphatic*,¹² mystical approaches developed throughout the Middle Ages in contra-distinction to a contrasting set of negative or *apophatic* procedures that were also largely pioneered in monastic settings. While cataphatic mysticism has been the subject of more recent historical study (particularly in the wake of Carline Bynum Walker’s work, to which I turn to at points throughout), it is apophatic practices which have come to dominate popular conceptions of mystical thought, with the influence of John of the Cross, the interest of authors such as Heidegger and Derrida, and perceived similarities with transcendental meditation all serving to stimulate theological, philosophical and more general interest.¹³ Entirely eschewing the empirical to focus wholly upon the otherness of the

¹⁰ “*Parate fauces*”; taken from the opening section of the first of Bernard of Clairvaux’s eighty six sermons on the *Song of Songs*. The translation is from Robertson’s *Lectio Divina* (180).

¹¹ Multiple definitions of Christian mysticism exist, but most are anchored in the notion of a direct experience of divine presence. See, for example, the broader definition of *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*.

¹² While the term ‘cataphatic’ is ancient Greek in origin and was known in the period, it was not necessarily used by these meditative writers themselves, many of whom were less philosophically rigorous than their apophatic counterparts. As such, it does not explicitly feature in the texts substantively discussed in this thesis, even though all of these texts could now be un-controversially described as being broadly within the cataphatic tradition.

¹³ This bias is illustrated by the presence of ‘apophatic’ as a headword in the most recent editions of the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* and the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, as well as in the

divine, the adherents of apophatic mysticism also aimed for a direct encounter with God, yet sought this encounter by stripping away the evident world and focusing on God via a process of negation.¹⁴ Whereas apophatic mysticism was thus negative in that it rejected the efficacy of the known and sought God wholly through this rejection, cataphatic mysticism was positive in that it built upon the known in its efforts to reach divinity. A major cataphatic mode of reaching that divinity was a mode of reading: the so-called *lectio divina*.

(i.) *Lectio Divina*

Recent studies of cataphatic practice in the early modern period (discussed in more detail below), have typically sprung from discussions of late-medieval affectivity. The precise strain of cataphatic mysticism which interests me in this thesis, however, revolves around experience, rather than physicality, and has been most commonly discussed in the context of monastic *lectio divina* or ‘divine reading’.¹⁵ Aiming to encounter, albeit fleetingly, the presence of the *Word* in the here and now of their own reading experience, the practitioners of *lectio divina* sought – in the enigmatic words of the fifth-century monk John Cassian – to glimpse “the face of Scripture” (qtd. Robertson 85) within their reading practice. This goal, as the influential twentieth-century theologian Henri de Lubac makes clear, involved viewing scriptural texts to be not only divinely inspired, but also divinely sustained:

[Scripture] is not merely divinely guaranteed. It is divinely true. The Spirit did not merely dictate it. The Spirit immured himself in it, as it were. He lives in it. His breath animates it still.

Encyclopaedia Britannica. Such general curiosity has been rarer in respect to cataphatic mysticism, which, outside of the monastic circles where it was first practised and codified, is now predominantly treated as a historical phenomenon. It is covered in none of the reference sources above, featuring only in the *Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Middle Ages*, whose article it shares with a discussion of apophatic meditation.

¹⁴ Names most frequently associated with this procedure are Pseudo-Dionysius, Meister Eckhart and John of the Cross (McGinn 2017 267-269). Truly elucidating this process briefly is hard – the aim was to somehow transcend earthly conceptions through their negation. Focusing on what God was not was thought somehow capable of awarding a glimpse of the divine in terms which would transcend human imagining.

¹⁵ Most influential in respect to this thesis have been Duncan Robertson’s *Lectio Divina: the medieval experience of reading* (2011) and Jean Leclercq’s classic survey of monasticism *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (first published 1957). The picture of medieval practice in this thesis also owes a great deal to works by Bernard McGinn, Gordon Rudy and Michelle Karnes.

(qtd. Robertson 38)¹⁶.

Understanding the vital force with which Scripture had been first issued to be both retained and available, readers read in the hope of capturing this illocutionary charge.

As Scripture's meaning was sought not in abstraction from but intrinsically within the experience of its reading, monks emphasised the repetitive vocalisation of biblical texts (*meditatio*). This process granted these texts both extension in time and a measure of physicality. Embodying reading in this way enabled the experiences and responses of the reading reader – both mental and physical – to assume a form of hermeneutic role whose aim was less to identify Scripture's meaning than to encounter that meaning in the moment of its reception. It is thus that Jean Leclercq,¹⁷ in his classic study *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (first published in French in 1957), frames such *meditatio* as aiming to “taste” Scripture:

To meditate is to attach oneself closely to the sentence being recited and weigh all its words in order to sound the depths of their full meaning. It means assimilating the content of a text by means of a kind of mastication which releases its full flavor. It means, as St. Augustine, St. Gregory, John of Fécamp and others say in an untranslatable expression, to taste it with the *palatum cordis* [with the palate of the heart].

(Leclercq 73)¹⁸

Vocalisation lent heft and form to a sentence, allowing it to be weighed, chewed, and, ultimately, savoured in order that a meditant might “sound the depths” of its full meaning. While the physicality of this description immediately invites metaphorical appreciation, such an interpretation risks neglecting the embodied nature of the practice described. The verbs ‘weigh’ and ‘sound’ are commonly used figuratively in the sense of ‘understand’, yet they here occur in the context of a physical process – the vocalised repetition of a text – rather than an exclusively mental act. Leclercq's

¹⁶ Henri De Lubac, one of the twentieth century's most prominent Catholic theologians, wrote as both a historian and a believer and an official: he was a cardinal. While, as his tense use suggests, he subscribed to the sentiment expressed and saw the tradition as continuing, the quote derives from his work on the monastic reading tradition from antiquity onwards and represents a view both ancient and thoroughly orthodox from both a theological and an historical position. I have preferred Robertson's translation to Seban's here (see also De Lubac 82), as it better preserves De Lubac's original tense usage in the final sentence: “Son souffle l'anime toujours” (1.128 of the original French edition).

¹⁷ The situation of Leclercq is in many ways similar to that of his contemporary De Lubac (see note 16); while he seeks to explicate *Lectio Divina* in *The Love of Learning*, as an ordained Benedictine monk he as often writes as if he himself were advocating, or even practising, such a procedure.

¹⁸ The square brackets represent Robertson's gloss from *Lectio Divina* (8). Leclercq's original French preserves the Latin unglossed.

mentions of “meaning” and the “content of a text” hint towards abstracted cognitive understanding, yet the context of physical recital holds out the prospect of preserving a more literal understanding of terms such as *taste*. Accordingly, though language related to meaning and measurement is deployed in the above passage, it is unclear precisely where any line between the literal and the figurative should be drawn. The search for “full meaning” that Leclercq describes is inextricably linked to a search for “full flavor”, with both searches pursued through the vocalised repetition of the text at hand.

This characteristic ambiguity runs unresolved through many works on, and in, the monastic reading tradition,¹⁹ and echoes the recently much discussed proximity of the physical and the mental in the medieval period. The heart, the organ mentioned by Leclercq above, was commonly held in the period to act as both the seat of the affections and the intellect, and, as such, tasting with its palate could naturally stimulate both.²⁰ Through their reading, monks sought an experience in which the physical and intellectual were integrated, and it is thus neither straight-forward nor appropriate to strictly delineate this experience’s parts. Merging and blurring boundaries that are now seen as more distinct, monastic reading was inherently, and simultaneously, concerned with both the physical and the intellectual.

Given the importance of *meditatio*, scriptural performance and scriptural reception were elements of the same mystical reading activity, whose wider exegetical goal was not the abstraction of meaning from the text read, but rather the tasting of that text in the here and now of the reader’s own reading experience. The ambiguous colliding of differing meanings and modes of apprehension that such tasting fostered was entirely inalienable from the reading experience of *lectio divina*, and any attempt to definitively unpack ‘tasting’ as a metaphor is therefore beside the point. It is not a structural relationship between words that is at hand, but the fully integrated experience of those words as read *in situ*. Leclercq, who saw himself to be writing within the tradition he adumbrates,²¹ uses the term *palatum cordis* in the above quotation in a way which is highly symptomatic of these wider aims and methods: his description of this faculty as “untranslatable” is immediately – if inadvertently – challenged by his English translator’s subsequent gloss: “the palate of the heart”

¹⁹ See also De Lubac, Robertson and Bernard McGinn’s *The Growth of Mysticism*.

²⁰ See Manning, ‘Sacred Heart and Secular Brain’.

²¹ *The Love of Learning* was first given as a series of lectures to young monks, with Leclercq speaking from his position as a distinguished Benedictine.

(Robertson 8). The predicament of this allegedly untranslatable, yet evidently translated, phrase gestures towards precisely what is at stake in such reading. While, as Robertson proves, Augustine's Latin can be construed in English, it is not re-construal (the ability to preserve meaning across different languages) that is of importance to Leclercq, who refrains from translating the Church Fathers not because he is incapable of doing so, but because he has no wish to further estrange his readers from his divinely animated target texts.²² It is not a structural relationship between words – or, in this case, between words in different languages – that is relevant in *lectio divina*, but the relationship between words and their initial, intensely vital, inscription. The medieval meditant's interest lay not with a linguistic system, but with Scripture's illocutionary force: the question asked was neither what words *mean in general*, nor what those words *had once meant*, but what *those words continue to fully mean by virtue of what they had once meant*.

(ii.) The Understanding of Personhood Involved in Cataphatic Practice

The medieval belief in the efficacy of cataphatic meditative practice was strongly wedded to a deeply pre-Cartesian understanding of both the world and the human person. The breadth of the medieval period makes the characterisation of a single detailed paradigm impossible, yet, if there is a dichotomy running through the material upon which this thesis is based, it is derived from a separation between God and man – instigated by the Fall – not an elementary distinction between body and soul. It is true that all orthodox Christian positions in the Middle-Ages were in some sense dualist, yet the manner of dualism implied – particularly in monastic contexts – perfectly mapped neither Neo-Platonic models nor a Cartesian division of body and mind. This is neither to deny Neo-Platonic influence, nor to deny that man was seen as possessing both material and immaterial parts – for the Christian, man was clearly an amalgam of both body and soul – but simply to stress that these parts were not necessarily situated at a fundamental remove.

From the late twelfth century onwards, the proximity of body and soul was given a theoretical basis by the re-discovery of Aristotle in the Christian west and the subsequent reassessment of Greek thought that took place in scholastic circles.

²² Robertson has nothing to say about his added gloss, which is not repeated in Leclercq's original French. I would suggest that either Robertson, or his editor, felt unable to assume the reader's knowledge of Latin upon which Leclercq implicitly relies.

Aquinas' project of reconciling Aristotelianism with Christianity led to a more definitive rejection of Platonism and the subsequent adoption of *hylomorphism*: the notion that all substances consist of two indivisible components, matter and form. In contrast to more Neo-Platonic metaphysics, such Aristotelian substance ontology denied the existence of form outside of matter and maintained that qualities inhered within substances themselves, not within a separate supra-corporeal realm. The effect of this understanding upon conceptions of the human person was to closely bind man's parts and award the soul, in Aquinas' words, a "borderline"²³ position between spiritual and material existence. This view remained dualistic in so far as it stipulated the existence of the material and the immaterial, but ultimately offered a unitive account of man's being. Characterising this picture, Fiona Somerset has recently described the affections, bodily sensation and the soul as being "deeply mutually enmeshed" (294) throughout the later Middle Ages and further suggests that even in those authors who created taxonomies dividing these aspects, their functioning remained "radically interactive" (294). It is this interactivity that allows the overlapping of bodily, intellectual and affective elements within a procedure whose focus upon divine presence ensured its mystical status.

The relevance to meditative reading of this more integrated conception of personhood becomes explicit in the notion of spiritual sensing, an idea which suggested that the divine could be 'sensed' in a way that bore some manner of relation to sensing as conventionally understood. The spiritual senses, which are directly equitable with the *palatum cordis* mentioned by Leclercq above, were subject to varying conceptions throughout the period and their subsequent understanding has also varied. While some framed the link between spiritual and physical sensing as primarily one of analogy,²⁴ many authorities – I go on to discuss Bernard of Clairvaux at more length below – were much more explicit in maintaining that man possessed a single unified sensorium which did not clearly delimitate physicality and spirituality. Under such integrated accounts, the difference between physical and spiritual sensing

²³ This terminology comes directly from Aquinas' *Disputed Questions on the Soul* as quoted in Kretzmann (136).

²⁴ This would appear to be the case in Origen's deeply Neo-Platonic understanding, for example. Origen's work survives in a piecemeal fashion, however, and deciphering his thought on the matter has caused some debate among his interpreters. Gordon Rudy, in *Mystical Language of Sensation in the Later Middle Ages* (17-32), emphasises Origen's Neo-Platonism and sees the relationship between the two sensoriums to be broadly analogical; Mark McInroy, in his essay 'Origen of Alexandria', is more inclined to believe, counter Rudy, that Origen's use of spiritual sensation is more literal in character and bears a closer relationship to the other senses.

was more a matter of extent than essence, with the period's integrated understanding of personhood allowing the enacting of Paul's dictum relating to the Godhead's accessibility via "the things that are made" (Rom 1:20). Man, it was claimed, could sense the divine in a manner that was at once mystical *and* specifically human. It is such spiritual sensing that is at work in the detection of presence throughout this thesis.

(iii.) The Importance of Bernard of Clairvaux

The practical manifestations of *lectio divina* are hard to trace. As a mode of reading rather than writing, the practice did not necessarily create a paper trail, and its status as an essentially mystical procedure gravely problematised any presentation of its results. Notions such as the tasting of the divine are not obviously amenable to being presented analytically and any attempt to record such experiences would create texts which were themselves estranged from the originary divine authorship that the process sought – an issue to which I return throughout this thesis.

There is, however, a broad critical consensus that *lectio divina*'s clearest, and perhaps also superlative, exposition is to be found in Bernard of Clairvaux's twelfth-century sermons on the *Song of Songs*.²⁵ In these texts, which were produced over a period of years, Bernard offers an in-progress reading to his audience that reflects both the possibilities and idiosyncrasies of monastic practice and exemplifies the way in which the notion of experience could encompass physicality and affect as well as intellectual cognition. As Gordon Rudy observes, for Bernard: "the sensory language of the *Song* is not simply to be explained away"; it is not language "that actually refers to the intellect", but should rather be seen as an attempt to break down barriers between the physical and the spiritual (45-46). The period's integrative conceptions of personhood thus find particular expression in Bernard: "comingled" in a "close union" body and soul form "one being" ("The Three Cominglings" 108-112), which Bernard goes on to directly link with the detection of the divine. As Rudy insists, Bernard "does not sharply divide [the human person's] spiritual and bodily aspects. His concept of the human person has dualist elements, but it is in many respects integral: the human person who loves, knows, and achieves union with God is a unified individual, soul and

²⁵ The importance of Bernard's sermons on the *Song* is broadly acknowledged, particularly by Leclercq, who devoted much of his life to the Saint's exposition; also see Robertson.

body” (45). Taking this position to its logical conclusion, Bernard goes as far as to exclude the soul working alone from any role in the perception of God, a prohibition which he saw as persisting even after bodily death with the beatific vision being controversially withheld until the re-integration of man’s parts at the end of time. In *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity*, Caroline Walker Bynum acknowledges the somewhat controversial nature of this view, but, citing his sermons for the feast of All Saints, is categorical: “[for Bernard] Souls cannot receive the beatific vision until they regain their bodies at the end of time” (164). The manner of argument cited by Bynum resurfaces in Bernard’s first sermon on *The Song*, which explicitly lauds the body’s capabilities in respect to the perception of the divine: “only through the body does the way, the ascent to the life of blessedness, lie open to us” (“Sermon 5”, Evans 226). Spiritual sensing in Bernard is thus a faculty named on account of its target rather than its nature. The detection of God involves not, as in Origen, a separate sensorium existing in a purely analogical relationship to those of the body (see note 24 above), but conventional senses being pushed to their limits in a quest for the divine.²⁶

That Bernard’s lauding of sensory perception occurs in a work which sought to teach monks how to read demonstrates the integrated nature of *lectio divina*. Alongside conventional interpretative tools, such as linguistic knowledge and Biblical cross-reference, Bernard’s conception of personhood allows him to advocate the use of what he terms the “book of experience” while reading (“Sermon 3” Evans 221). This “book of experience” is conceived as a constantly evolving, and entirely personal, hermeneutical source which enables the reader to involve his or her own emotional responses and sensations in a search for the divine. Entering *The Song*, Bernard adopts the position of the Bride, and exegetically utilises his own real-time reading experience in an attempt to taste the book’s in-dwelling authorship. Actively seeking God’s active involvement in this way, Bernard’s aim was not to ascertain the divine’s description – he is not primarily interested in what the text is about – but was instead concerned with the divine’s manifestation, an indwelling presence which, as the quote at the head of this introduction makes clear, was to be experienced rather than understood.

²⁶ My position on Bernard here is present in Gordon Rudy’s above mentioned work, but is also visible in Bynum’s *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity*, and is broadly supported by McGinn, in his recent essay ‘Late Medieval Mystics’ (2011), which stresses the difficulty of drawing any clear division between “bodily sensing” and “the inner activation of a set of purely spiritual senses” (192) in Bernard’s work. While McGinn is coy about ultimately classifying Bernard’s views, he explicitly characterises Bernard as a “forerunner” (191) of later mystics whom he sees as unambiguously experiencing the divine physically.

It is principally through Bernard's work that I engage with the monastic tradition in this thesis. The strength of my focus reflects a number of broadly linked factors. Though his work was thoroughly imbued with the spirit of monasticism, Bernard still exerted a profound pull on the seventeenth-century Church of England, and, more particularly, had a demonstrable – if under-investigated – influence on Donne's own theological positioning (Donne's surviving sermons refer to Bernard on 136 separate occasions).²⁷ This influence upon both Donne and his period more widely is discussed further below and is returned to throughout this thesis. My focus on Bernard also reflects, moreover, upon his role as an innovator whose devotional practices and example saw the production of works that were themselves envisaged as being cataphatically read. As discussed in Chapter Three, Bernard, and those who followed his example, produced texts which ultimately brought *lectio divina* into vernacular contexts. Attempting to institute their readers into real-time Gospel narratives, these texts inspired both medieval Passion poetry and the so called 'meditative lives' of Christ, a genre whose immense popularity persisted within the religious mainstream into the mid-seventeenth century. Bernard's work represents, therefore, both a millennium of accreted monastic practice, and an opening that took experiential reading practices into the less explicitly institutional settings that shaped cataphatic mystical thought into the Reformation and beyond.

A corollary effect of my emphasis on Bernard is that less space is devoted in this thesis to a number of other Christian figures – particularly (pseudo) Dionysus and Augustine – who are more typically referenced in studies of both mystical thought and John Donne.²⁸ It is not my intention to suggest that these figures were in any way peripheral. Dionysus' work was central to a renewal of interest in apophatic mysticism from the twelfth century onwards, with his work having had a demonstrable influence on John of the Cross – who has dominated more recent discussions of Christian mysticism. Augustine's importance to Christian theology cannot be overstated, and his specific influence on Donne has been a topic of keen interest.²⁹ It is the experience of cataphatic mystical reading upon which this thesis focuses, however, and it is thus to

²⁷ See Reeves' index. Specific allusion is made to Bernard's classic of mystical reading, *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, to which I refer throughout this thesis (see for example 3:318).

²⁸ It is to negative theology and Dionysus that the advocates of a more 'mystical' Donne have tended to turn. Regina Mara Schwartz explicitly discusses Dionysus' influence on Donne (103) and David Marno's concept of intransitive meditative attention (10) is deeply evocative of apophatic thought.

²⁹ See particularly Katrin Ettenhuber's *Donne's Augustine: Renaissance Cultures of Interpretation* and David Marno's *Death Be not Proud*.

Bernard not Augustine to whom I constantly refer throughout. Emphasising factors which are either less pronounced or absent in Augustine, materiality in Bernard's work is surrounded with a positivity that both feeds into, and stems from, his experiential emphasis. More phenomenological than neo-Platonic, Bernard integrates the intellectual and the physical in a manner to which Augustine never quite aspires.³⁰ Including himself in his own hermeneutic circle, Bernard emphasises that the experience of the divine in which he is interested is not to be separated from the person who has read. *The Song of Songs*, he stresses, is a work in which he, as reader, is intimately involved. It is the affinities which I see between this distinct reading attitude and Donne's verse that fuel this thesis.

Early Seventeenth-Century Meditation and 'Reading for Knowledge'

Before highlighting the persistence of monastic reading practices in the early seventeenth century, it is helpful to address a contrasting set of religious currents that have typically been more prevalent in discussions of Donne's religious verse. Introducing these currents here enables me to be precise about what exactly I am – and am not – talking about in what follows, and also helps elucidate instances where Donne's practice deviates from that of his monastic forebears. While this thesis stresses an essential continuity with medieval practice, I do not wish to suggest that the devotional trends more commonly associated with Donne are either illusory or irrelevant. It is 'reading to experience' that forms my central interest in this thesis, yet early seventeenth-century Christians were increasingly 'reading for knowledge' in devotional contexts. This distinction turns on the attitude taken towards textual usage. Those who read to experience saw reading's value to be intrinsic to its pursuit; reading for knowledge, however, viewed reading instrumentally, with value residing not in the experience of reading but in the message that reading conveyed. The growing

³⁰ In his intellectual biography of Bernard, Leclercq contends that the Abbot of Clairvaux's understanding of the human person was Biblical rather than Neo-Platonic (78), a distinction which seems designed to separate him from Augustine and those other early Christian sources (Dionysius and Origen, for example) who leaned heavily on Greek sources. Precisely pinning down differences between Bernard and Augustine is not my purpose here. I see any clash between the two, however, to play out at the level of tone rather than doctrine. Bernard lifts much of the negative language surrounding the body that permeates Augustine's work, as each emphasises a different aspect of Pauline theology: while Bernard looks to Paul's declaration that things unseen could be deduced from things seen (Rom. 1:20), Augustine is more inclined to point out that we necessarily saw the things of the world "as through a glass darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12).

importance of this fundamentally differing aim entails that Donne, to some extent, was forced to react to its precepts. It also entails, however, that subsequent critics have tended to emphasise its relevance at the expense of other factors in their readings of Donne's verse.

As I discuss below and throughout this thesis, my division between reading to experience and reading for knowledge does not explicitly follow the wider Reformation fault line between Catholicism and Protestantism. In the particular context of early seventeenth-century England, moreover, it is even hard to map where areas of difference and similarity lie. Many aspects of doctrine, and the terms used in their discussion, were fluid at the time, with Anthony Milton suggesting that the period presents "innumerable problems of definition for the historian" (10). Although it is not my aim to explicitly engage in debates over characterisation and terminology – I am not seeking to pronounce on the confessional identity of either Donne or his reading practices – it is impossible to entirely skirt issues of denominational labelling. Throughout what follows I have tried to frame my discussion broadly, making use of the term 'reformed'³¹ or, where necessary, 'Protestant'.³² In discussing the other side of the Reformation divide, I have tried to follow early seventeenth-century English usage and refer to the 'Church of Rome'. Entirely avoiding the term Catholic has proven difficult, however,³³ particularly in discussion of other authors who themselves make use of the term.³⁴ Other terms such as Lutheran, Calvinist, Puritan and Conformist are used only occasionally and in defined contexts.

(i.) Reading and Learning

Religious reform, scriptural translation and increasing literacy in the period all had an unavoidable impact upon textual consumption. Reformed doctrine had largely

³¹ Reformed thought was not monolithic and in reflection I have not capitalised. I use the term to describe positions which are, in modern parlance, non-Catholic.

³² Protestant is somewhat anachronistic in terms of the earlier seventeenth century (Milton 378-379 & Ryrie 4-5) – a reason why I have preferred reformed – but its usage by other writers and wider recognition in modern use makes it all but impossible to ignore. Both Milton and Ryrie use the term on the grounds of practicality.

³³ 'Catholic' with its suggestion of linkage to the early Church was a term claimed by many distinct denominations (Milton 1 & 378-379). I have used the term only where its use by other authors demands, or where it is clear that I am discussing it in its later modern sense.

³⁴ Similarly, in my discussion of Louis Martz and those who have commented upon his work, I have used the term Counter-Reformation.

removed institutional means of salvation, placing instead an onus on the individual believer's cultivation of a relationship with God. In the eyes of Luther, these changes required "an indissoluble connection between evangelical Christendom and education" (Schilling 373) which found its clearest expression in his call for universal literacy.³⁵ In England the established church acknowledged a similar need³⁶, with the prayer book and a series of approved sermons being designed to provide the newly reformed mainstream church with first-hand knowledge of its faith.³⁷ Documenting the manifestations of this growing movement for education, Alec Ryrie argues that "the didactic aspect of printed prayer – and indeed public prayer – became one of its dominant functions in this period" (223), a situation which he frames as "a dramatic reversal of the pre-Reformation pattern" (223). The Latin mass could not didactically engage with its overwhelmingly vernacular audience, as attendees were expected to partake rather than understand. This shift in prayer's function is most dramatically illustrated in Luther, who explicitly called for the funding of universal education through the suspension of monastic practices such as "indulgences, requiem masses, fraternities and more such swindles" (qtd. Schilling 373). Systems which had previously fostered involvement thus made way for a new, more strongly knowledge-based, form of worship.

In line with such institutional changes, Reformation England saw a dramatic increase – Ryrie speaks of a "torrent" (219) – in the production of pious works that directly sought to assist the lay reception of Scripture. While pre-Reformation commentaries had been monastic affairs that layered the text itself with further prayer,

³⁵ Luther's *To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany that they Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* is seen as the key document pushing for this change (see Schilling's discussion 371).

³⁶ See Ryrie's discussion of the importance that religious reform placed on education in *Being Protestant* ('Literacy and Learning' 259-270).

³⁷ Determining precisely the point from which we can speak of a 'newly reformed Church' is perilous. Though the legislative underpinning of the established Church was Present from 1559 (the Act of Supremacy and the Act of Uniformity), as Collinson maintains, such centralised political steps did not immediately translate into change: "the Protestantization of a nation accustomed to the old ways and beliefs, had in 1559 hardly begun" ("English Reformation" 5). As Elizabeth's rule continued into the 1570s, however, what Collinson describes as "the political clout and patronage of of the Protestant elite" began to effect more concrete change as "Protestantism began to make significant headway in the localities, and in hearts and minds" (6). Questions over the extent and character of the established Church can still be raised after this date – the rise of so called avant-garde conformism under James' rule is a case in point (Milton 8-9) – yet with the ratification of the *Thirty-nine articles of Religion* by Queen and Parliament in 1571 it becomes more or less possible to trace the lines of a distinctively reformed Church whose "institutional customs and practices" would become "normative for centuries to come" (Kirby 68).

observation and Biblical cross-reference, Reformation works were often more openly didactic. Rather than elucidating Scripture for its concurrent reading, these texts sought its summation through the use of explanatory paraphrase. Works such as *The Doctrine of the Bible*, one of early seventeenth-century England's most popular texts³⁸, distilled Scripture in its entirety into a simpler and much more nakedly comprehensible form. The 1,533 verses of *Genesis*, for example, were condensed into eleven short pages, which – using a catechismal question and answer format – sought to inform the reader of the book's most salient content. The differences between this approach and monastic experiential reading are stark. While Cassian, for example, had called upon the devotee to read the Psalms in order to glimpse “the face of God” (see above), *The Doctrine* approaches this same material in a stridently doctrinal mode. Opening with the question: “What is the generall doctrine of the Psalms?” (65), it proceeds to neatly summarise the Psalter almost entirely without recourse to direct quotation.³⁹ While monks had sought Scripture's *taste*, the reformed Christians that formed the audience for works such as *The Doctrine* read principally to *know*.

(ii.) The Idea of a Distinctively Protestant Meditation

The growth of didactic reading links well with the idea that the period gave birth to its own, specifically Protestant strain of devotional activity. Barbara Lewalski's *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth Century Religious Lyric* influentially argues that it is a distinctive, and distinctively reformed, species of meditation which finds expression in the verse of Donne and his contemporaries. While this meditative scheme – like the kinds of medieval practice which interest me in this thesis – was largely based on the reading of Scripture, Lewalski draws a clear division between seventeenth-century practice and its antecedents. A dichotomy is posited between a newer reformed set of *applicative* practices and an older, and essentially traditional, *participative* model. For Lewalski, someone who participates in Scripture:

imagines a scene vividly, as if it were taking place in his presence, analyses the subject, and stirs up emotions appropriate to the scene or event or personal spiritual condition. The typical Protestant procedure

³⁸ *The Doctrine* ran through more than twenty five editions between 1604 and 1640, and was far from alone in offering such material (see Ryrie 277).

³⁹ It is impossible to know precisely what Bernard would have made of such an attitude, but it is worth reflecting on his advice in respect to the *Song of Songs*: “Only he who sings it hears it, and he to whom it is sung” (‘Sermon 1’ Evans 215)

is very nearly the reverse: instead of the application of the self to the subject, it calls for the application of the subject to the self – indeed for the subject’s location in the self.

(*Protestant Poetics* 149)

The central distinction in this shift is not between involvement and non-involvement – both procedures were strongly concerned with the meditant reader – but rather lies in the idea that while participation mobilises the reader in regard to the text, application utilises the text in regard to the reader. For Lewalski, Protestant meditative activity was abstractive; its aim was to ascertain what a scriptural text meant, and then to understand how this meaning was of consequence to the meditants themselves. Accordingly, while the Middle Ages had sought to engage with Scripture on an experiential level, for Lewalski the meditative exercises of a new generation of Christians were increasingly shaped by a desire for self-knowledge. The Bible was still felt to be personally addressed, yet its message was to be deduced through a cognitive meditative process. Reading itself thus became increasingly instrumental, with persisting relevance replacing indwelling presence as the procedure’s ultimate goal.

The drawing of a distinction between application and participation does not coincide with any particular movement away from affectivity, even though Lewalski herself seems at points to characterise it in this way with her claim that Protestant application “did not stimulate the senses” (149). ‘Applying the subject to the self’, to paraphrase Lewalski, could be expected to launch a raft of affective responses, and there is ample documentary evidence that such responses were both welcomed and cultivated across the reformed spectrum.⁴⁰ The distinction I draw between ‘reading to experience’ and ‘reading for knowledge’ is similarly not one between the affections and the intellect. Under an applicative or knowledge-based paradigm, emotion could feature as a fitting reaction to a biblical message that had been applied to the self. A clear example is my discussion in Chapter Three of weeping in connection to Christ’s Passion. Bishop Hall disavows any suggestion of co-suffering with Christ, but does advocate weeping to his congregation in terms of their own sin and culpability. An

⁴⁰ See particularly Ryrle on “Cultivating the Affections” (*Being Protestant* 17-20) and Susan Karant-Nunn’s *The Reformation of Feeling*, which, though broadly documenting a move away from physicality in German reformed religion (see particularly her concluding remarks about the heart in reformed contexts (250)), presents neither Lutheran nor Calvinist congregations as wholly turning away from the affections. Her discussion of the use of dramatic and emotive Passion meditations by both Luther himself (79) and his followers (83-89) provides concrete examples of the continuance of notably affective practices.

identical sentiment is outlined by Karant-Nunn in a series of Lutheran divines, who made use of an almost identical language. Compassion was admonished, but the presence of self-accusation entailed that the process did not become emotionally sterile (246). Where the medieval reading tradition differs from this approach is in its treatment of emotion as an intrinsic part of an experience that sought God within its own boundaries.⁴¹ *An applicative approach saw a cognitive state trigger an affective response; participative reading, however, did not stagger the cognitive and the affective, with both being valued as parts of a single presence seeking event.*

The emphasis on devotional pluralism found in more recent historical studies (discussed below) has tended to nuance conceptions of the Reformation in England in ways which have called the stridency of Lewalski's terminology and categories into doubt. For many critics, however, this nuance has not necessarily discredited Lewalski's basic view, which has been subsequently recast as a direction of travel that is only partially taken up by the period's poets. Particularly prevalent among those who have written on Donne, this understanding involves an acceptance of Lewalski's shift, but produces readings which place specific texts only falteringly within the movement away from participation. Michael Schoenfeldt's "'That Spectacle of too much weight': The Poetics of Sacrifice in Donne, Herbert, and Milton" (2000) and Regina Mara Schwartz's *Sacramental Poetics At the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (2008) both adopt variations of this view. Lewalski's wider turn against meditative participation is accepted, but the completeness and strength of Donne's own support for this move is questioned, as Schoenfeldt and Schwartz document the ways in which his verse deals with a set of contrasting imperatives. Engagement with these ideas will be central to my argument in this thesis.

(iii.) The *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola and the Separation of Meditation from Mysticism

⁴¹ Meditative participation is not Lewalski's focus, and she thus devotes little space to its elucidation. While it is ceremonial participation – rather than monastic reading – which she takes to be at its heart, the reading procedures I go on to discuss are clearly implicated, particularly the re-creation and inhabiting of biblical scenes (150). There are clear grounds, therefore, to associate Lewalski's contrast between 'meditative application' and 'meditative participation' with my contrast between 'reading for knowledge' and 'reading to experience'. Lewalski picks out her contrast principally in terms of a shift from the physical to the mental. While I do not follow this position – as argued above, medieval practice integrated physical and intellectual concern – Lewalski also documents a shift away from immersive reading towards a more abstractive form of practice (149-150). I see this second shift to capture precisely the kind of movement I am trying to describe.

Critics arguing against the influence of a distinctively Protestant meditative practice on seventeenth-century verse have rarely done so with the intention of explicitly pressing the role of earlier devotional procedures. Typically, in fact, such arguments have also focussed upon meditative innovation and charted the influence of distinctly Counter-Reformation practices on seventeenth-century devotion. Though long established in early modern studies – Louis Martz’s foundational *The Poetry of Meditation* was published in 1956 – this view still retains real currency, and, at points in what follows, I discuss works by Helen Brooks (1995, 2000), R.V. Young (2000), Francesca Knox Bugliani (2011) and David Marno (2016), all of whom argue for the influence of Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* in England.

The specific practice around which this interest has centred is the imaginative re-enactment of Gospel scenes, a procedure which – as I discuss at length in Chapter Three – also stood at the heart of Bernardine *lectio divina*.⁴² That these practices are medieval in origin has been broadly acknowledged by advocates of Counter-Reformation influence, but such acknowledgement has been consistently phrased with the caveat that these practices only reached seventeenth-century verse via the mediation of Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*. The relevance of this claim to my investigation lies in the way in which Ignatius’ work fundamentally changes the role of such practices: Jesuit influence, this argument runs, serves to reframe scriptural re-enactment away from a quest for presence, and towards a programme of self-examination. Meditating in the Jesuit mold involved the envisaging of one’s self alongside Christ, yet this was done less to experience the Incarnation than to effect genuine personal change.

The essential aim of such meditants was the (re)alignment of the tripartite soul: the *understanding*, which processed the scene, and the *memory*, which conjured it, were brought into line with the *will*, which would itself be directed towards Christ through the correct performance of the procedure at hand. Aligning the soul in this way made the meditant “one with Christ” (Rom 6:5) and accordingly allowed for a deepening of the spiritual life that was seen to be of fundamental benefit to the meditant. Aiming to “Conquer oneself and regulate one’s life” (*Exercises* 11), meditants

⁴² The exception here is David Marno’s work which highlights Ignatius’ cultivation of ‘holy attention’ against a wider tradition of intransitive attention, rather than the re-creation of biblical scenes. What interests Marno is not an attentiveness *to* something (the life of Christ for example), but a more fundamental openness to the divine, which prepared the believer to be filled with God. Marno’s interests mean that his work does not track the cataphatic path I follow in this thesis.

took their place at the foot of the cross, first to participate but ultimately to learn. Participation was advocated through the ancient practice of emotionally responding to Scripture, yet – in the eyes of the sources discussed in this thesis – such participation was designed to deepen an involvement which aimed for intellectual, rather than experiential, goals.

Though advocates of Jesuit and Protestant meditation are arguing from opposing sides of the Reformation divide, there are real areas of similarity in both approaches. This is particularly clear in the work of Martz's more recent interpreters, who have argued less vehemently against Lewalski's work and are much more open to notions of shared origins.⁴³ Francesca Bugliani, for example, reads Ignatian analysis in terms deeply redolent of Protestant application (87) and Helen Brooks explicitly draws connections between the devotional approaches of Ignatius' early followers and the *Alumbrados* (an heretical Spanish mystical movement that has often been linked to Lutheranism and Protestant meditative practice).⁴⁴ The focus on self-analysis and mental development pressed by both Reformation and Counter-Reformation meditative schemes – as well as the period's already mentioned emphasis upon didacticism – suggests that rather than identifying points of confessional division, Marts and Lewalski's respective arguments express a degree of devotional overlap. This manner of argument is fundamental to David Marno's work, which, bemoans the tendency to read Donne in purely confessional terms: "If in Marts's *Poetry of Meditation* Donne and his contemporaries appear as exercitants of Catholic spiritual meditations, in Lewalski's *Protestant Poetics* they are often reduced to spokespeople for Protestant doctrine" (31). Describing this situation as "unfortunate" he traces a path between these two writers to focus on devotional and cognitive practices that could be equally pursued under either a Catholic or Protestant paradigm.

In marking out an intellectual meditative trend in England, those who have argued for the prominence of Reformation and Counter-Reformation meditative practices have in effect separated meditation – defined as devotional self-analysis – from mysticism – defined as a quest for divine presence. This is particularly clear in Marts, who is explicit about the non-mystical nature of seventeenth-century poetry and

⁴³ Marts and Lewalski both to some extent pitched their work polemically against each other (see for example Marts's 'Meditation as Poetic Strategy: Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric by Barbara Kiefer Lewalski' and Lewalski's introduction to *Protestant Poetics*).

⁴⁴ See Brooks' "'When I would not I change in vows, and in devotion': Donne's 'Vexations' and the Ignatian Meditative Model" and McGinn *Mysticism in the Golden Age of Spain 1500-1650* (46-47, 66).

draws a distinction between the Ignatian approach, as defined above, and contemplation as a fundamentally apophatic mystical practice involving the pursuit of divine presence. Martz's understanding here – as he acknowledges in the introduction to *The Poetry of Meditation* – owes a great deal to sixteenth-century Spanish mysticism, and particularly the rigorous definitions of John of the Cross, who codified apophatic practice in ways which dominated Catholic conceptions of the subject in later centuries (McGinn 2017 238). It should be noted, however, that Martz is relying upon the pre-existence of a definitional clarity which he himself elsewhere admits was largely absent in the period (13-14). The terms 'meditation' and 'contemplation' predated Spanish mysticism and were often used interchangeably in both the medieval and early modern periods, with McGinn describing usage, even in the seventeenth century, as "porous" (2016 226). Though some figures undoubtedly drew typologies – Guigo II's influential *The Ladder of the Monk's* for example – these typologies often saw meditation and contemplation as related aspects of what was essentially the same practice⁴⁵, with contemplatives understood to be meditating, and successful meditants taken to be involved in contemplation. This situation is further attested to by the synonymous usage of 'meditation' and 'contemplation' in a number of the medieval works which I go on to discuss in the body of this thesis.⁴⁶

Though the notion of an intellectually oriented meditation is questioned in many of the sources that I discuss, there remains a reluctance amongst the critics with whom I engage in this thesis to explicitly dub Donne a mystical poet. I see this reluctance as emanating from the more or less exclusive association of mysticism with apophatic practice that Martz expresses. Felicia Wright McDuffie, for example, keenly pushes for the importance of the corporeal to Donne, yet is explicit in offering a clear denial of his mystical status: "suspicious of traditional mystical experience and of the private revelations of the spiritualists of his day" Donne, she stresses, believed "that God revealed himself openly, through clear and material means" (150)⁴⁷ For McDuffie,

⁴⁵ *Meditatio* and *contemplatio* formed, alongside *lectio* and *oratio*, the four stages of *lectio divina*. Such division does not necessarily prevent these stages from being treated independently, yet, in practice they are hard to separate and a number of influential sources within the period clearly treated them as being synonymous.

⁴⁶ Nicholas Love's hugely popular English translation of the Bonaventuran *Vitae Christi* – a key text in my second and third chapters – illustrates this trend in its interchangeable use of both terms in its prefatory material (see, for example, 10-16).

⁴⁷ David Marno also issues an outright denial (200), but his discussion of intransitive attention (not attention *to* something – which would be cataphatic – but a more general receptiveness that hopes to be filled by the divine) brings Donne into the vicinity of apophatic theology. There are some partial exceptions to this practice. Regina Mara Schwartz does not argue for the mysticism of Donne's religious

it would appear, “clear and material means” preclude discussion of “traditional mystical experience” and, thus, while her wider argument is to press the efficacy of the material in the sacred realm, this efficacy is not taken by her to be mystical in character. Focussing on distinctly cataphatic mystical practice, I strongly dispute this conclusion in connection to Donne. Though Donne may not fit everyone’s conception of what a mystical poet should be, it is his relation to mystical practices that is at issue throughout this thesis.

Devotional Plurality and the Continuing Possibility of Mystical Reading in Seventeenth-Century England

Recent historical studies of England in the Reformation period have highlighted continuity as well as change, and particularly emphasised diversity within the reformed and Roman positions⁴⁸. In the context of these studies, I see little justification for the imposition of a strict barrier at the Reformation which would divide the two reading approaches which I have set out above. While change was undeniably afoot in the period, such change did not, of itself, preclude experiential reading in devotional contexts.

Neither Calvin nor Luther saw their rejections of Rome as blanket disavowals of tradition, with both lionising earlier figures who they saw as echoing their own theological emphasis.⁴⁹ This tendency to look back to an earlier Church was also evident in early seventeenth-century England, which openly worked to promote extra-Biblical authority: as Lancelot Andrewes preached before the King in 1613, the English

verse, but, citing Bernard, describes his secular works in “quasi-mystical” terms (89); she makes no links with *lectio divina*, however, and her understanding of mysticism – similarly to Marno’s – is more apophatic in nature. Bernard McGinn’s 2016 *Mysticism in the Reformation*, discusses the English seventeenth-century religious poets as explicitly mystical (223), but it is notable that the sources he references wrote exclusively in the first half of the twentieth century (Itrat Husain (1948) and Helen White (1936)). In his conclusion, and in specific relation to Donne, McGinn partially rows back on his previous affirmation, maintaining that while Donne may be a mystical poet, he remains a “troubling figure” who is “too complex” to fit in a conventionally mystical “straight-jacket” (228).

⁴⁸ The basic historical picture against which this thesis has been written is expressed in Eamon Duffy’s *The Stripping of the Altars* (1992) and Patrick Collinson’s *The Reformation* (2006). In connection to the precise period in which Donne wrote, I have also taken much from Anthony Milton’s *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought 1600-1640* (1996), which focuses in detail on Donne’s active years in the early seventeenth century. In specific relation to the history of religious practice, I refer throughout to Alec Ryrie’s *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (2013), Deborah Kuller Shuger’s *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance* (1990). Both these works support the picture of continuity and change to be found in Duffy, Collinson and Milton.

⁴⁹ For McGinn, Luther “never lost his respect for Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bernard and some other monastic mystics” (McGinn 2015 55); he goes on to also discuss Calvin’s ‘respect’ (56) for Bernard and Augustine.

Church was founded upon “One canon reduced to writing by God himself, two testaments, three creeds, four general councils, five centuries, and the series of Fathers in that period” (qtd. Shuger 15). Andrewes’ expression, which actively embraces large amounts of traditional teaching, was entirely uncontroversial⁵⁰ and, by 1613, represented a well-established opinion which dated back to John Jewel’s 1561 defence of the Elizabethan settlement.⁵¹

Though the expressions of support above are largely restricted to the early (pre-medieval) church, what Jewel describes as “ancient purity” (116) was enthusiastically added to by successive writers who expanded the boundaries of acceptability to include a wide range of medieval figures. This movement culminates in Richard Field’s 1606 *Of The Church*, which claims an unbroken continuity between the Church of England and the original teachings of Christ. Field maintains that throughout the patristic and medieval periods, the western church had held a broad legitimacy. During this time, however, it had been engaged in a constant internal battle with heretical papist forces that represented an existential, although often covert, threat to its entire legitimacy. The Reformation, Field argued, equated to a rejection not of the western Church, but merely of the heretical faction which it had hitherto harboured, with the remaining Church of Rome only taking the definitive step towards error with the council of Trent.

Field’s theory accordingly envisaged the Church of England as collecting the baton of Catholicism – discarded by the post-Tridentine Church of Rome – from its medieval and ancient forebears and claiming an unbroken line of descent through Luther and the Middle Ages back to the earliest days of Christianity. Popular and influential in itself (Milton 286-295), Field’s work was not alone in proposing unbroken continuity, with George Carleton, Bishop of Chichester and Chaplain to the Future King Charles, developing an essentially identical lineage in his *Directions to Know the True Church*, and William Crashaw – father of Richard – claiming in *A Manuall for True Catholikes* that much of the medieval church was of a basically reformed character (see Milton 288). These lineages created a large amount of space

⁵⁰ See Milton’s *Catholic and Reformed* 14-15 for a discussion of the Puritan Andrew Willet’s exhortation of patristic study and for a wider discussion of the issues surrounding the discussion of the Church of England’s roots (270-321).

⁵¹ See the *Defence of the Church of Englande*. Jewel, a notable theologian as well as a Bishop during the reign of Elizabeth, was particularly associated with arguments for continuity by his issuing of an influential challenge in 1559 to any Roman Catholic who could prove that the Church of England contradicted writings of the Church fathers (see Craig’s *ODNB* article).

for early seventeenth-century writers to make use of Pre-Reformation material, even where this material lay outside of Andrewes' first "five centuries".

The early seventeenth-century reception of Bernard of Clairvaux reflects the picture above. Twenty-four separate editions of Bernard's work were openly published in England in the period,⁵² and the scale of his influence is evident from John Panke's 1618 *Collectanea*, which conducts its argument for the conformity of the English Church solely through translations of the Saint's work.⁵³ Later sources than Bernard also held their sway in the period, and a number of late-medieval monastic works still found wide audiences. Thomas à Kempis' fifteenth century *The Imitation of Christ*, for example – a work deeply embedded in the practices of imaginative meditation – is described by Ryrie as having crossed "the Reformation barrier as if it did not exist" (Ryrie 288), and Joseph Hall's hugely influential *The Arte of Divine Meditation* (1605), begins with a statement of debt to a "namelesse monke" (The Epistle Dedicatory),⁵⁴ whom Hall cites as his primary inspiration. The devotional climate that allowed for this plurality is perhaps best captured in Alec Ryrie's more quantitative study of the period's devotional publishing. Demonstrating the many instances of overlap – and the general availability and acceptance of notionally Catholic works in the England – Ryrie is emphatic in concluding that: "Early Modern British Protestants had, for want of a better word, Catholic tastes in devotional writing" (284).

In line with the overlapping of devotional sources, there are clear suggestions that the intellectual structures which had supported the development of *lectio divina* survived, and, in some cases, even flourished within the Church establishment. Mainstream reformed theology continued to treat Scripture as something alive that would be able to physically move its readers and early Protestants lacked neither physical response nor affective passion in their devotional activities.⁵⁵ These traits were also explicitly connected to instances of devotional reading. The bishop Lewis Bayley, for example, was clear: "The books of the Bible are not 'matters of Historicall discourse', but Letters or Epistles sent downe from God out of heaven unto thee... Reade them... as if God himselfe stood by, & spake these words unto thee" (qtd. Ryrie 279). Bayley's argument here, of itself, does not directly conflate reading and presence.

⁵² *Early English Books Online* lists 24 works attributed to Bernard as appearing between 1550 and 1650.

⁵³ Panke's only other source in this work is Gregory the Great.

⁵⁴ This figure has been identified as Jan Mombaer (also known as Jean Monbaer and Mauburnus) whose *Rosetum* first appeared in 1494 (Huntley 26).

⁵⁵ See Ryrie on the cultivation of the affections in Protestant contexts (17-27).

His “as if” adds ambiguity, and indeed Lewalski’s applicative meditative scheme also saw Scripture as being personally addressed. What Bayley illustrates, however, is the sense in which the act of scriptural reading retained a sacred character. While texts such as *The Doctrine* were being read for the extrinsic knowledge that they offered, there is clear evidence that for many the reading moment itself retained a potential importance.

The particular influence of Bernard was also strong in this area, with Lancelot Andrewes directly citing the saint in the context of his own reading procedures. In echo of Bernard, and *lectio divina* more widely, Scripture, Andrewes insists, is alive and should, accordingly, be read, not for its distillable essence, but for the plenitude of its meaning. As Deborah Kruller-Shuger argues in *Habits of Renaissance Thought* (47-63), exegesis for Andrewes is “not a question of finding the meaning but the fullness of meaning”, a “mystical density of signification” which was to be secured “non-analytically” (53). Andrewes’ procedure, which is documented extensively in many of his surviving sermons, is consequently that of George Herbert’s speaker in “The Holy Scriptures” whose stated concern in reading is less the discernment of evident structure (15-22) than to “suck ev’ry letter” to extract its “hon[e]y gain” (2). Texts for Andrewes and Herbert were not to be interrogated with pre-existing questions, but sampled experientially with a view to their ‘taste’.

For Shuger, this reading practice could be found even in what she styles as the Church’s more rationalist wing, with Richard Hooker – a normally reliable advocate for reason – ultimately arguing that man “trusts in God despite the evidence and believes ‘against all reason,’ because he ‘tastes’ God’s goodness and falls in love” (Shuger 43). This ultimately phenomenological hermeneutic, which strongly emphasises a devotee’s experience of the divine, echoes that of *lectio divina*, and is, again, particularly reminiscent of Bernard’s demand that it is experience, not knowledge, that must be engaged in a quest for God’s presence. It is this precise manner of engagement that I see in all the verse that forms the focus of my following chapters. Picking up on various facets of cataphatic reading, Donne both advocates and challenges a set of practices, which, though ancient in origin, still featured strongly in early seventeenth-century England.