QUEEN’S UNIVERSITY

WALKING WITH GOD THROUGH NATURE:
AN EXAMINATION OF JOHN FLAVEL’S BEHAVIOURAL INSTRUCTIONS
ON MATTERS RELATED TO CHRISTIAN PIETY

A RESEARCH ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGY OF
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Preface

How did a Master of Theological Studies student come to write a research essay on someone as obscure as John Flavel? Initially this project began as an investigation into how people in New England were socialized to perform Great Awakening ecstatic behaviours. When I learnt how diverse these ecstatic behaviours were in practice, I searched for a standard by which I could separate certain behaviours that I believed were connected to the event and behaviours that predated the event. When I had started this project, I had never heard of the name Flavel; however, as I searched for Reformed Puritan literature on the topic of private ecstatic experiences, his teachings struck me as particularly instructive with regards to pastoral technique. I wanted to understand whether his advice could actually help Christians learn methods for encountering God. The fruits of this investigation are presented here.

Throughout the past five years in which I have written this research essay, I have been given a great deal of support from many persons. I know that many of these people will remain anonymous; however, I would like to acknowledge several individuals who have been particularly instrumental in this project’s success. Despite having no academic background from which to understand the significance of this essay, both of my parents have graciously put up with my daily invasion of their dining room table while accommodating piles of books beside my chair. My gratefulness to them extends beyond words. Amongst my friends who have stuck with me all these years, I would like to thank Rev. Stephen Brown, my best friend since high school, for all the days he spent listening to my fears and frustrations. He never let me give up and his words of encouragement provided me with a great deal of energy throughout this project. Also, I
am indebted to the support of my advisor, Dr. John Young, who has provided me with insight and direction throughout the last five years. It is only thanks to his patience that this paper has taken its final form.

Most of all, I must thank my heavenly Father for sending the Holy Spirit to delight me with the heartfelt presence of my Lord Jesus Christ during prayer and meditation. The reality of these experiences—so similar to those described by Flavel—gave me the courage to push onwards in writing this paper when I lost sight of my end-goal so many times.
Abstract

John Flavel was a Reformed Puritan of the seventeenth-century who wrote a series of devotional guides that offered instructions drawn from Christian mystical traditions on how to improve religious activities as a means of ecstatically encountering God. Evaluating the efficacy of these instructions from a scientifically-based behavioural perspective, this study has found that Flavel’s techniques were likely helpful to his readers in facilitating socially normative ecstatic experiences through ordinary Christian practice. Furthermore, discovering that Flavel promoted the use of these techniques for engaging with ecological materials in the wilderness and country-side, this essay proposes that Flavel introduced his readers to effectual manners that could help them ecstatically encounter God during the practice of meditational nature-based walks.
Introduction

The life of Enoch is called his walking with God, Gen. v. 24. O sweet and pleasant walk! all pleasure, all joys are in that walk with God.¹

In his overview of seventeenth-century Reformed Puritanism piety, Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe claims that “devotional manuals” in this period began to replace the instructive “functions of the spiritual director of Roman Catholic monastic devotion.”²

Having written devotional literature on a variety of topics, John Flavel contributed to the maintenance and evolution of Reformed Puritan piety by providing his readers with scientifically effectual instructions on how to facilitate ecstatic encounters with God during both traditional and innovative nature-based Christian “ordinances.”³


a brief introduction to both Flavel and the nature of mystical piety in Reformed Puritanism, this essay will split into two chapters covering major aspects of Flavel’s teachings on ecstatic spirituality. The first of these chapters deals with the subject of Flavel’s traditional teachings on how to find ecstatic experiences through common “ordinances” inside the Church.  

been “efficacious” in helping people to achieve these experiential goals.5 Building on this foundation, the second chapter of this essay shows how Flavel conceived of nature-based meditational “walks” as instructional “ordinances” capable of providing ecstatic encounters with God through creative applications of “allegory” (see Miller 1953, 404) and “metaphor.”6 Discovering that Flavel taught his readers to employ the same techniques for engaging nature as he had promoted for use in worship and ordinary devotion, this essay arrives at a set of identifiable ritualistic behaviours that may have helped persons to experientially and reliably encounter God in both domestic and ecological settings.7


7 Flavel, Husbandry Spiritualized, 9-15, 22-24, 269-270, 275-276, 283-284; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 247, 253, 261, 263-264; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 12-17, 54-58, 89, 91, 94.
Introducing Flavel

Although Flavel (1627-1691) is not a common name in Christian History texts, his vast corpus of theological texts were influential in Reformed Puritan thought and practice for many years. Following a brief period of study and transitional ministry appointments, in 1656 Flavel became the pastor of a charge in Dartmouth, England. Due to his Reformed Puritan leanings, Flavel was stripped of his pulpit after the 1662 “Act of Uniformity”; however, he continued to preach in “secret” while working on several literary projects that eventually became “bestsellers” in both the seventeenth and

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9 Cosby, Suffering & Sovereignty: John Flavel and the Puritans on Affective Providence, 3-4; Embry, Keeper of the Great Seal of Heaven: Sealing of the Spirit in the Life and Thought of John Flavel, 17-18.

10 Cosby, Suffering & Sovereignty: John Flavel and the Puritans on Affective Providence, 4; Embry, Keeper of the Great Seal of Heaven: Sealing of the Spirit in the Life and Thought of John Flavel, 18; Yuille, The Inner Sanctum of Puritan Piety: John Flavel’s Doctrine of Mystical Union with Christ, 2.
eighteenth-centuries. Most known for composing such pious works as *A Saint Indeed* and *Husbandry Spiritualized*, Flavel’s skill primarily lay in teaching people about how to have “sensible” contact with God in both domestic and ecological activities, the latter of which has rightly earned him the title “master at the art of spiritualizing the creatures.” Written in an intelligent and approachable manner that scholars believe was attractive across the social spectrum, Flavel’s devotional materials were widely read by Christians hoping to enliven their piety. While his impact was certainly made amongst the laity, Flavel’s works were also endorsed by academically-minded persons such as Isaac Watts, Cotton Mather, George Whitefield and, the figure known as “America’s greatest theologian,” Jonathan Edwards. Furthermore, due to the extent that his


15 The descriptive phrase of “America’s greatest theologian” was taken from George R. Marsden’s biography on Jonathan Edwards. George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 369. Edwards, in particular, not only read Flavel’s *England’s Duty* at a young age, but is known both to have cited Flavel extensively in his *Religious Affections* and to have been theologically inspired by Flavel’s *Husbandry Spiritualized* when composing his “typology.” Parker, “Proselytisation and Apocalypticism in the British Atlantic World – The Theology of John Flavel,” 228-
writings were distributed and referenced during the 1740s, some brave historians—viz., Adam Embry and, especially, Nathan Thomas Parker—have even suggested that the Great Awakening was in part a “revival” of “Flavelian” theologies surrounding the Holy Spirit and “Christian conversion.”

Yet despite the value in studying the impact of Flavel’s theology, it is the “efficacy” of Flavel’s writings in helping people ecstatically encounter God that warrants the attention of this particular paper.

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17 Flavel, Husbandry Spiritualized, 9-15, 22, 24, 269-270, 271-272, 275-276, 283-284; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 12-17, 54-58, 89, 91, 94; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 239-244, 247, 253, 254, 261, 263-264;
Flavel’s books have a history of appealing to the emotions in order to lead people to God. For example, citing a second-hand testimonial from Flavel’s “bookseller,” Andrew Cambers claims that an event in which a seventeenth-century patron accredited *A Saint Indeed* with saving his “soul” marked “a remarkable providential instance of a book effecting conversion in ways only rarely found in the historical record.” Furthermore, Parker’s analysis of “marginalia” in Flavel’s works reveals the degree to which “his readers . . . were very much affected by . . .” his allusions toward experiencing “the joys and delights of knowing and being known by God”. Considering Hambrick-Stowe’s theory that Reformed Puritans taught themselves piety through “devotional manuals,” it makes sense to investigate whether such books actually provided “efficacious” behavioural techniques for facilitating ecstatic experiences. Furthermore, with so much scholarship devoted to studying the origins of ecstatic ecological spirituality in Edwards’ writings (e.g., his “Personal Narrative”), there is likely value in determining whether the

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19 For the testimonial from Flavel’s “bookseller,” see *Life of the Rev. John Flavel*, 45. For the quotation discussed, see Cambers, *Godly Reading*, 200-201. See also Parker “Proselytisation and Apocalypticism in the British Atlantic World - The Theology of John Flavel,” 215-216.


books that inspired his theology may have been capable of providing instructions on how to find God in nature. Therefore, taking into account both Flavel’s reputation in bringing people to emotional encounters with the divine and his relationship to ecological spirituality, his writings constitute an apt basis for studying the practical usefulness of literature related to Reformed Puritan mystical piety.

On Reformed Puritan Mystical Piety

Throughout much of Christian history people have reported sensationalist ecstatic experiences of God (e.g., “light of Mount Tabor,” a “heart-felt” experience of Christ etc.) as an advanced form of private spirituality; amongst these mystical activities are


23 Life of the Rev. John Flavel, 45; Cambers, Godly Reading, 200-201; Parker “Proselytisation and Apocalypticism in the British Atlantic World - The Theology of John Flavel,” 215-216, 281-283; Lane, Ravished by Beauty, 102; Miller, Images and Shadows of Divine Things by Jonathan Edwards, 13-14; Stoughton, History of Religion in England from the Opening of the Long Parliament to 1850, 404; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 89-91; Flavel, Husbandry Spiritualized, 14-15, 22, 74-76; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 240;

included a particular subset of behaviours related to the subject of “interiority.”

As one of the most prevalent forms of “mysticism” found around the world, “interiority” is defined by theologian Auguste Sabatier as “the movement of the soul putting itself into personal relation and contact with the mysterious power whose presence it feels before it is able to give a name.”

According to Jean Gerson, “[t]he saints use various names to describe these interior forms of experimental knowledge of God . . . [t]hey speak of contemplation, ecstasy, rapture, liquefaction, transformation, union, exultation.”

In other words, elaborating on “numinous experience[s]” of the contemplative individual, “interiority” is the branch of Christian “mysticism” that searches for God as a...
communicable inhabitant within oneself.\textsuperscript{28} While the subject of Protestant “mysticism” was formerly an issue of considerable scholarly dispute in the academy,\textsuperscript{29} it is no longer a secret that the subject of Reformed Puritan “interiority” has considerable historical roots\textsuperscript{30} in both medieval Roman Catholic\textsuperscript{31} and Protestant sources.\textsuperscript{32} Indeed, beginning


\textsuperscript{31} Referring to the subject of prayer and “meditation,” Bernard of Clairvaux wrote about the “manifestation” of “sweet communion with God” that “takes place in the interior when God himself is pleased to visit the soul that seeks him [sic], provided it is committed to seeking him [sic] with all its desire and love.” Bernard of Clairvaux, “Selected Sermons from On the Song of Songs,” 130-131, see also 132-133, 138. Writing about “[m]editation,” Thomas à Kempis said “devote yourself to those that are within, and you will see the Kingdom of God come unto you . . . . Christ will come to you offering His consolation, if you prepare a fit dwelling for Him in your heart, wherein He takes delight, and all from within. His visits with the inward man are frequent, His communion sweet and full of consolation, His peace great, and His intimacy wonderful indeed.” Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, 42. Similarly, on a “treatise” primarily involving “divine contemplation,” Jean Gerson claimed that “[t]he saints use various names to describe these interior forms of experimental knowledge of God . . . . [t]hey speak of contemplation, ecstasy, rapture, liquefaction, transformation, union, excultation. They talk of a jubilation beyond the spirit . . . of tasting God, of embracing the bridegroom . . . .” Gerson, “On Mystical Theology: The First and Speculative Treatise,” 262, 267, see also 266. See also Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 25-29, 36, 38-39.

\textsuperscript{32} Writing “on prayer,” Calvin stated that “we say that believers ought to feel firmly assured . . . . no man can well perceive the power of faith, without at the same time feeling it in his heart . . . . The value and necessity of that assurance for which we contend is learned chiefly from prayer.” Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, 3.20.12. Furthermore, quoting Matthew 6:6, Calvin advised Christians to “seek a place of retirement which might enable us to turn all our thoughts inwards and enter deeply into our hearts, promising that God would hold converse with the feelings of our mind, of which the body ought to be the
with the publication of Charles Hambrick-Stowe’s *The Practice of Piety*, the past thirty years have witnessed a number of historians who have taken an interest in studying the Reformed Puritan phenomenon that Tom Schwanda recently termed “contemplative-mystical piety.”

Being concerned principally with discussing the merits and technique of “internal religion,” Flavel’s writings belong to this school of spirituality. As with any organized “social institution,” Reformed Puritan “contemplative-mystical piety” contained a number of rules and regulations that were held in common by all persons who subscribed to its associated sub-culture. Therefore, before attempting to analyze

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35 For information on the characteristics of social institutions, see Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of A Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990 [1967]), 6-8, 10-12, 24. See also Schwanda, “Soul Recreation,” iii, 22-23, 27-28, 46; Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, 30-34, 38-39, 42-43, 44-45, 47, 50, 51-53, 93-95, 156-157; William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, temple.” Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.29; Matthew 6:6. Echoing Calvin by citing Matthew 6:6, New England Puritan Thomas Shepard wrote “[t]here is a secret inward life . . . which none knows but himself and the Lord; and this an ineffable communion with God, vision of God, delight in God, etc.” Thomas Shepard, “The Parable of the Ten Virgins Unfolded” in *The Works of Thomas Shepard, First Pastor of the First Church, Cambridge, Mass.*, vol. 2 (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1853), 35 https://books.google.ca/books?id=XE3xP-pLMM4C (accessed on 17 April 2015). Richard Baxter claimed that “[t]he Christian knows by experience now, that his most immediate joys are his sweetest joys; which have least of man, and are most directly from the Spirit. That is one reason, I conceive, why Christians who are much in secret prayer and meditation, are men of greatest life; because they are nearer the well head, and have all more immediately from God himself.” Baxter, *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest*, 38-39. Similarly, Isaac Ambrose wrote that “certainly this feeling, this experimental looking on Jesus, is that my text aims at; it is not a swimming knowledge of Christ, but an hearty feeling of Christ's inward workings; it is not heady notions of Christ, but hearty motions towards Christ, that are implied in inward looking” Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 19, see also 499, 602. Finally, Flavel exclaimed “O did we but know what other Christians have felt and tasted [in duty], we would not have such staggering thoughts about invisible things! but the secret comforts of religion are, and ought to be for the most part inclosed [sic] things. Religion lays not all open; the Christian life is a hidden life.” Flavel, *England’s Duty*, 261, see also 235.
Flavel’s traditional teachings and innovations on the topic of mystical piety, it will be prudent to momentarily discuss what scholars already know about the social regulations attached to seeking God in this manner.  

In order to present Flavel’s brand of mystical piety properly, it is necessary to illustrate several aspects of seventeenth-century Reformed Puritan spirituality that were strictly enforced by his society. First, mystical piety in Flavel’s culture always required Biblical precedent. According to Hambrick-Stowe, “Puritans rejected liturgical traditions, no matter how venerable, that had no discernible basis in the Bible, replacing them with worship and devotional practices seen as more soundly scriptural.”

Nevertheless, as other authors have noted, Reformed Puritans were highly receptive to

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medieval works that utilized the Song of Songs to convey principles of mystical piety. Second, as a possible consequence of having such “sensual” origins, Reformed Puritan mystical piety had an “experiential” character. Contact with God during pious activities often had an ecstatic dimension to it. Like other Reformed Puritans in his society, Flavel used the term “communion with God” to describe “sensible” divine ecstasy. In addition, scholars such as Belden C. Lane, W. Clark Gilpin and Tom Schwanda have noticed how Reformed Puritans embraced “nature” as a means of enhancing their devotional activities by “celebrating God as Creator.”

Third, aligning with the general disposition of Reformed Puritan society, mystical piety was, in the words of Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 28-29, 36, 189-190; Lane, Ravished by Beauty, 99-100, 101, 102-103, 106-107, 112-114, 138-141; Brauer, “Types of Puritan Piety,” 54-56.

Commenting on the “experiential note” found in both “conversion experience[s]” and “piety,” James Fulton Maclear asserted that there were “deep emotional longings for personal encounter and direct communion with God . . . at the very heart of Puritan faith.” Maclear, “‘The Heart of New England Rent’: The Mystical Element in Early Puritan History,” 623; Lane, Ravished by Beauty, 98, 99-100, 101, 102-103, 106-107, 112-114, 138-141; Catherine A. Brekus, “Writing as a Protestant Practice: Devotional Diaries in New England,” in Practicing Protestants: Histories of Christian Life in America, 1630-1965 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 20-22, 30; McLoughlin, Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform, 41-42; Brauer, “Types of Puritan Piety,” 54-56.

Note that the term “union with Christ” was often used in Reformed Puritan society to refer to the bond shared between Christians and God that was, according to Flavel, “necessary” for “communion with God.” Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 239-240, 246; Ambrose, Looking Unto Jesus, 498-499; Ambrose, Media, 1-2, 22-23; Baxter, The Saint’s Everlasting Rest, 38-39; Baxter, “Converse with God in Solitude,” 307-308; Rous, “The Mystical Marriage,” 696, 730.

Lane, Ravished By Beauty, 102-104, 116-117, 122-123, 179-182; Gilpin, “‘Inward, Sweet Delight in God’: Solitude in the Career of Jonathan Edwards,” 525-528; Schwanda, “Soul Recreation: Spiritual Marriage and Ravishment in the Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Isaac Ambrose,” 109, 112-114, 118, 156-157; Flavel, Husbandry Spiritualized, 9-12, 14-15; Ambrose, Media, 49-50, 133, 134; Baxter, The Saint’s Everlasting Rest, 244-247.
Stowe, “orderly.”  Ecstatic experiences were expected to only occur during “ordinances”—rituals that Reformed Puritans believed were mandated by the Bible—and, at that, only under the right conditions.  Common Reformed Puritan “ordinances” included “public ordinances” such as “hearing,” “the sacraments” and “public prayer,” and “secret ordinances” such as “secret prayer,” “meditation” and “reading”; however, Hambrick-Stowe has shown that Reformed Puritans disagreed on the exact number of “ordinances” that were instituted by God.  Interestingly, despite having a restricted view on when and where God would manifest His or Her presence, Reformed Puritans were remarkably optimistic on the “efficacy” of all “ordinances” to act as “mediums” of “numinous experience”, the opinion that God created “ordinances” for the express

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44 For details on the manner in which Reformed Puritan society was organized, see; McLoughlin, Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform, 40-41, 42-43. See also Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 38-39, 45, 93, 95-96, 189-190; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 238, 239-240; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 91; Ambrose, Media, 22-23, 24, 25, 26; Baxter, “Converse with God in Solitude,” 304-306; Baxter, The Saint’s Everlasting Rest, 213.

45 Flavel echoes this sentiment by saying “I do not say that men [sic] may have communion with God in this world without duties, it is a delusion of Satan to think so; but this is what I say, communion with God consistith not in the mere performance of duties. Communion and duties of religion are two things, separable one from the other.” Flavel, England’s Duty, 238. See also Cosby, Suffering & Sovereignty: John Flavel and the Puritans on Afflictive Providence, 126-127; Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 38-39, 45, 93, 95-96, 189-190; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 238, 239-240, 247, 253, 261; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 91; Ambrose, Media, 22-23, 24, 25, 26; Baxter, “Converse with God in Solitude,” 304-306; Baxter, The Saint’s Everlasting Rest, 213.

46 For a list of ordinances as described by a seventeenth-century Reformed Puritan author, see Ambrose, Media, 26-27. See also Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 93-94, 104-105, 110-11, 116-117, 123-125, 156-159, 161-164, 175-179; Flavel, England’s Duty, 240, 244, 247.

47 Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 93-94.

purpose of ecstatic engagement with His or Her people was not uncommon amongst Flavel and his peers.⁴⁹ Fourth, since ecstatic “assurance” was often seen as a gift given exclusively to the “elect,” the subject of mystical piety was directed primarily, if not solely, towards “regenerate” Reformed Puritans who had chosen to accept God’s “grace” through “faith” in the “redemption” offered by Christ.⁵⁰ In other words, the subject of Reformed Puritan mystical piety was intended to be studied by persons who had already received substantial “socialization” in the ethos of the Reformed Puritan tradition.⁵¹ Fifth, as a rule, mystical piety was centered upon the activity and will of the Holy Spirit.⁵² Since Reformed Puritans believed that the Holy Spirit had a will of His or Her own, it made sense to theologians in this culture that God could freely choose to withhold ecstatic blessings for a variety of reasons;⁵³ simply performing ritual “ordinances”


correctly would not guarantee that God would make His or Her presence known.\textsuperscript{54}

Finally, although no one could force or “conjure” God to appear during religious activities, Reformed Puritans believed that certain pious “techniques” could help facilitate “numinous experiences” when implemented during established “ordinances.”\textsuperscript{55}

Shown by J. Stephen Yuille to have played a major role in Flavel’s transmission of mystical piety, these “techniques” of “interiority”—which will be discussed later in greater detail—are categorized in this essay under the title of “interior contemplative efforts.”\textsuperscript{56}

As an agent operating in this cultural scheme, Flavel made contributions to the greater collective of Reformed Puritan mystical piety by providing pastoral advice on both traditional and innovative spiritual topics. Since Flavel was primarily interested in the salvation of the human soul, scholars such as Adam Embry and Brian H. Cosby have taken notice of how Flavel frequently taught on such matters as the role of the Holy Spirit in providing ecstatic “assurance” to regenerate Christians and the value of undergoing “self-examination” to ensure that one has this “assurance” before death.\textsuperscript{57} Seemingly this


\textsuperscript{57} Embry writes that “[l]ike other Puritans, Flavel frequently preached on the need for believers to have assurance of their salvation. He believed that the conscious sealing of the Spirit, an event subsequent to
desire to care for both the eternal and psychological well-being of persons serves as one of the primary reasons that historians who study Flavel frequently comment on how his theological writings exude a strong “pastoral” dimension.\textsuperscript{58} Reflecting on this academic trend, Nathan Thomas Parker claims that “[w]hat makes Flavel worth careful study and attractive as a subject of investigation is that he combined the best features of all the ‘great’ Puritans, in a sense distinguishing himself as a most balanced minister.”\textsuperscript{59} In fact, not only does comparing Flavel to Reformed Puritan authors such as Richard Baxter, Isaac Ambrose and Francis Rous show his firm grasp of mystical piety taught during his era, much of Flavel’s advice aligns well with medieval theologians that were respected by Reformed Puritans such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas à Kempis.\textsuperscript{60} Perhaps one may even argue that by offering pragmatic advice in alignment with historically recognizable theological knowledge, Flavel has become a strong candidate for examining

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58 Cosby, \textit{Suffering & Sovereignty: John Flavel and the Puritans on Afflictive Providence}, 9, 109, 114-115, 117; Embry, \textit{Keeper of the Great Seal of Heaven: Sealing of the Spirit in the Life and Thought of John Flavel}, 2, 4-7, 8-9, 24, 46-47; Parker, “Proselytisation and Apocalypticism in the British Atlantic World - The Theology of John Flavel,” 25; Yuille, \textit{The Inner Sanctum of Piety: John Flavel’s Doctrine of Mystical Union with Christ}, 2-3

59 Parker, “Proselytisation and Apocalypticism in the British Atlantic World - The Theology of John Flavel,” 25.

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the “ritual behaviours” associated with mainstream piety in seventeenth-century Reformed Puritan culture. Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that Flavel just maintained the status quo of his peers. Through tracing seventeenth-century intellectual developments on the use of ecological philosophy, Lane has demonstrated Flavel’s role in teaching persons how to learn about God by situating themselves within the “natural world.” Likewise, writing on the value of Flavel’s nature-based *Husbandry Spiritualized* in helping persons attain desirable “ecstatic” experiences of “comfort” by “psychological discharge,” Perry Miller proposed that the “technique” offered in the work was a “viable method for stimulating a flow of emotional juices . . .” Among the contents offered in *Husbandry Spiritualized* are instructions related to a series of nature-based meditational “walks” that Flavel considered “ordinances” for meeting God

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ecstatically. Discovering that Flavel described some of these “walks” as though he was utilizing the traditional advice that he promoted for finding God at church or in prayer, this essay argues that Flavel introduced new behavioural elements into Reformed Puritan mystical piety that his readers may have used to facilitate ecstatic manifestations of God’s presence in ecological settings. As such, in an effort to show how Flavel built new ecological dimensions on the foundation of traditional mystical piety, this paper is divided into two main chapters that independently deal with both of these matters.

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Chapter 1: Flavel’s Traditional Teachings on Mystical Piety

Drawing on the wealth of information left by his pious forebears, Flavel established his core teachings on “interior” mystical piety in relative alignment with earlier Christian tradition.68 As with works written by other authors in Reformed Puritan society, many of Flavel’s writings were intended to help people recognize and find ecstatic experiences of God’s presence in common “ordinances.”69 From the perspective of Flavel and likeminded Reformed Puritans, if people were not experiencing “sensible” contact with God in their religious activities, it could only mean that either God had chosen to remain hidden (a sign that possibly indicated an unregenerate state or the presence of sin in one’s life) or that such persons were not performing religious exercises in the correct manner.70 While the former could not be corrected without serious soul searching coupled with intervention of the Holy Spirit, Reformed Puritans believed that the latter could be remedied by taking certain supplemental steps during the performance of religious activities.71 Not only do such supplemental steps have historical significance

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in the sense that they illustrate how Reformed Puritans were taught to behave ritually during the seventeenth-century, their capacities to shift perception may have helped engineer a new strain of experiential piety when Flavel incorporated his selection of them into nature-based meditational “walks.”\textsuperscript{72} As such, in an effort to confirm whether Flavel’s advice on this matter held “functional” and “efficacious” value to readers who sought ecstatic experiences in their devotional activities, this chapter will conduct a historical social scientific analysis on effects of the time-honoured “interior contemplative efforts” that Flavel highlighted in his works.\textsuperscript{73} Accordingly, the following discussion on Flavel’s traditional instructions on “interiority” will be divided into three main sections: namely, the “end” (Flavel uses this word) to which religious activities enhanced by “interior contemplative efforts” were directed (i.e., the nature of “numinous experience” in Flavel’s Reformed Puritan sub-culture), the specific methods Flavel promoted to achieve this “end” (i.e., the actual directions employed as “interior contemplative efforts” that Flavel highlighted in his works).\textsuperscript{73}


contemplative efforts”) and an exploration of whether such methods could realistically help persons encounter this “end” in various traditional religious activities.\textsuperscript{74}

\textit{Understanding “Numinous Experience” in Reformed Puritan Culture}

The pious sub-culture of Reformed Puritanism to which Flavel belonged had the belief that established religious activities (i.e., “ordinances”) were capable, even ordained for the purpose, of facilitating ecstatic sensations of God’s presence to regenerate Christians (i.e., God’s “elect”).\textsuperscript{75} Hoping to establish some cultural measure by which Flavel’s advice could be both “hypothetically” and historically evaluated, this section will briefly attempt to determine the nature of divine ecstasy that was considered normative in Flavel’s sub-culture of Reformed Puritan society.\textsuperscript{76} By drawing on Rudolf Otto’s category of “numinous experience” (phrasing adopted from Roy A. Rappaport) to categorize ecstasy found across a variety of Reformed Puritan writings, this section intends briefly to illustrate and analyze the ecstatic expectations that Flavel and his like-


See also Joel Rudinow, Vincent E. Barry and Mark Letteri, \textit{Invitation to Critical Thinking}, 1st Canadian edition (Toronto: Thomson, 2008), 244-252.
minded contemporaries instilled in their readers. Following a brief exploration of how the difficulties inherent in discussing Christian ecstasy may be overcome through “phenomenological” approaches to studying religion, it will be possible to show that ecstatic experiences in Reformed Puritan culture were generally recognized as being non-revelatory, “sensible” on a pneuma-physiological scale and “pleasant” (i.e., safe and pleasurable). Concluding with a discussion on why Flavel and his Reformed Puritan contemporaries believed that these particular ecstatic experiences were representative of contact with God, this section theorizes Reformed Puritans favoured sensations of “comfort” that were capable of providing “assurance” of salvation by evidencing God’s personable love to practitioners in an immediate fashion.


Taking a “phenomenological” approach to studying ecstasy in Reformed Puritan culture, this section hopes to overcome some of the problems that are normally inherent in discussing the nature of God’s presence in Christian theology. Due to the fact that Reformed Puritans in Flavel’s sub-culture followed medieval mystics—and by consequence Pseudo-Dionysius—in considering God’s presence to be “ineffable,” authors of spiritual works could not specify what they expected their readers to encounter during “interior contemplative efforts” without running the risk of heretically describing God’s “essence.” Nevertheless, Reformed Puritans—much like their medieval


81 According to McGinn, “[t]he ways in which this special form of encounter with God have been understood are multiple. One thing that all Christian mystics have agreed on is that the experience in itself defies conceptualization and verbalization, in part or in whole.” McGinn, The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century, xvii. Echoing this sentiment, Flavel asks the reader in England’s Duty whether “there are not times, even in this life, wherein the saints do feel that which no words can express?” Flavel, England’s Duty, 223. It is noteworthy that the Eastern Orthodox Church struggled over the limitations of language that can be used to describe the sensations associated with the presence of God already in the fourteenth-century during a “controversy” involving “hesychasm.” Meyendorff, St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality, 81, 84, 85-86, 88, 102-103, 107,113, 116, 118-119 121, 122-123. Under the teachings of “hesychast mysticism,” people can come into a sensationalist physiological experience of God through an “interior” “psycho-physical method of prayer”; however, for at least one Western Church theologian (i.e., “Barlaam”), the language used to describe this phenomenon came too close to describing God’s “essence.” Meyendorff, St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality, 84-86, 102-103, 107, 109, 118-119, 121. As a result, the Eastern Orthodox Church has traditionally taught that in mystical activities, people come to understand God’s radiant “energies” rather than God’s “essence.” Meyendorff, St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality, 118-119, 122-123. See also Andrew Louth, “Deification,” in The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality, ed., Philip Sheldrake (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013 [2005]), 229-230; David Perrin, “Ecstasy,” in The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality, ed., Philip Sheldrake (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013 [2005]), 263-264; John Chryssavgis, “Orthodox Spirituality,” in The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality, ed., Philip Sheldrake (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013 [2005]), 474-475; Sheldrake, “Senses, Spiritual,” 573; Pseudo-Dionysius, “Mytical Theology” in
predecessors—left contextual and metaphoric clues in their writings that could help historians determine some of the characteristics of “numinous experience” that were normative to at least some Christians living in the seventeenth-century.\(^8\) Being written on the basis of collective experiences drawn from centuries of religious practice, these clues consist of the ecstatic “phenomena” that were encountered when people applied “interior contemplative efforts” to certain religious activities in the past.\(^9\) In contextually examining such phenomena independent of theological constraints, this essay proposes that “numinous experiences” in Flavel’s Reformed Puritan sub-culture were non-revelatory, pneuma-physiological and pleasant.\(^9\)


\(9\) Allen states that the “phenomenology of religion emphasize[s] the need to become aware of one's presuppositions, suspend one's value judgments, and accurately describe and interpret the meaning of phenomena as phenomena” Allen, “Phenomenology of Religion,” 205. See also Pike, Mystic Union, 76-80; Fulton, “‘Taste and See that the Lord is Sweet’ (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West,”; Bernard of Clairvaux, “Sermons on the Song of Songs,” 130-135; Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, 42; Gerson, “The Mountain of Contemplation,” 107; Gerson, “On Mystical Theology: The First and Speculative Treatise,” 267; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 238, 239, 260-261; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 91; Ambrose, Looking Unto Jesus, 17-18, 19, 36, 499; Rous, “Mystical Marriage,” 709-710, 726-727; Baxter, Saint’s Everlasting Rest, 38-39, 196-198; Otto, The Idea of the Holy, 13-14, 16-17, 18-19.

On occasion Reformed Puritans vaguely described cultural expectations on God’s presence by outlining, in the terminology employed by anthropologist Mary Douglas, the subtle conditions that separate “experiences” into those that are situationally “ambiguous” (i.e., potentially divine) from those that are contextually “anomalous” (i.e., not divine; possibly “dangerous”). The most significant of these conditions concerned the place of religious revelation during moments of ecstasy. William G. McLoughlin writes that “[t]he Puritan longed for mystical wonder and the beauty of communion with God’s Spirit and at the same time checked himself [sic] against visions, arguing that God gave man [sic] reason in order to distinguish truth from hallucination.” Indeed, Marilyn J. Westerkamp joins McLoughlin in arguing that by claiming to hear God’s “voice” on a personal basis, Anne Hutchinson—a woman condemned by Reformed Puritans in seventeenth-century New England—violated the culture’s revelatory norms by suggesting the existence of extra-Biblical sources for divine inspiration. It is noteworthy that Flavel made similar evaluations on the nature of theologically appropriate ecstasy. Although Flavel refused to discredit the possibility that God

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87 Upon claiming that she was “following the voice of the Holy Spirit,” Anne Hutchinson—a seventeenth-century Puritan “mystic”—was convicted as a heretic by a group of “New England clergy . . . [who] did not believe in direct revelation.” Marilyn J. Westerkamp, “Anne Hutchinson, Sectarian Mysticism, and the Puritan Order,” *Church History* 59, no. 4 (December 1990), 489-490 http://www.jstor.org/stable/3169144 (accessed on 16 October 2014). McLoughlin expresses a similar view by claiming that Anne Hutchinson was “banished . . . for losing her balance” on matters of “the head and the heart . . .” McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, 41-42.

occasionally gave mental revelations in the form of something can be seen with the
“bodily eye,” he was of the opinion that these experiences are not common and that in
general Christians should distrust any “apparitions” that convey divine knowledge lest
they be “evil” “spirits” in disguise. Similarly, citing Gerson’s treatise “On
Distinguishing True From False Revelations,” Flavel told his readers to treat “oraculous
voices” as though they were “satanic delusions . . .” In the Bibliocentric culture of
Reformed Puritanism, any religious behaviour that threatened the Bible’s place as the
sole source of divine “revelation” had crossed the line from “ambiguous” to
“anomalous”; to promote forms of ecstasy that could incite such heresy—as “the
Quakers” painfully discovered—was tantamount to divine treason. In particular,
bearing in mind that Reformed Puritans strictly sought to preserve the social order of
Biblical interpretation, it seems unlikely that Reformed Puritans would have tolerated
“hallucinatory” ecstatic phenomena (e.g., what Nelson Pike calls “rapture”) that may

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89 Interestingly, to prove this point, Flavel cites a misquotation by Gerson that highlights the dangers
Gerson: Early Works, trans., Brian Patrick McGuire [The Classics of Western Spirituality] (New York:
Paulist Press, 1998), 339, 339n13, 457n13; Flavel, Pneumatologia, 237, see also 207-209.


91 Hambrick-Stowe claims that “[i]f ever a people were, Puritans were people of the Book. The new order
they created, and the world view that undergirded it, was meticulously scriptural in nature. Puritans
rejected liturgical traditions, no matter how venerable, that had no discernible basis in the Bible . . .”
Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety; 51, 95. It is noteworthy that Ambrose also wrote against ecstatic
“revelations” that opposed scripture. Isaac Ambrose, War with Devils: Ministration of, and Communion
with Angels (Glasgow: Joseph Galbraith and Company, 1769), 266-268, 270-271. See also McLoughlin,
Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform, 41-43; Douglas, Purity and Danger, 46-47, 48-49; Flavel, England’s
Duty, 223, 260 see also 236, 240, 246, 260-261; Ambrose, Looking Unto Jesus, 19; Rous “Mystical
Marriage,” 725.

92 McLoughlin, Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform, 41-43; David S. Lovejoy, Religious Enthusiasm in the
New World: Heresy to Revolution (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 111-113, 120; Maclear,
“The Heart of New England Rent’: The Mystical Element in Early Puritan History,” 627-628, 634-635;
Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 51.
arise when “discursive logic” is temporarily dislodged. Instead, keeping “reason” in check, Reformed Puritans in Flavel’s sub-culture promoted a subdued, “low-arousal” form of “ecstasy” that manifested as pneuma-physiological sensations.

Taking inspiration from literature written on the “spiritual senses,” Reformed Puritans described their “numinous experiences” in a manner that this paper identifies as pneuma-physiological sensations. In what may be interpreted as either efforts to avoid allegations of “pantheism” or imitations of Pseudo-Dionysius, medieval Christians described non-mental “numinous experiences” using a set of “spiritual senses” that paralleled the “bodily” senses (see Pike 1992, 44-48). Inheriting the theological underpinnings of this medieval system (see Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 28-29, 36), Reformed Puritans frequently referred to their “inward” “numinous experiences” as “felt”

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sensations belonging to a pneuma-physiological order. For instance, Francis Rous proclaimed that “if with light and joy, the soul do feel, that the Spirit of Christ, by spiritual heat, power and love have wrought a powerful and fruitful holiness in her [sic], let her [sic] know that Christ Jesus himself [sic] hath been with her [sic].”

Similarly, writing on the topic of the “inward eye,” Isaac Ambrose said that “certainly this feeling, this experimental looking on Jesus, is that my text aims at; it is not a swimming knowledge of Christ, but an hearty feeling of Christ's inward workings; it is not heady notions of Christ, but hearty motions towards Christ, that are implied in this inward looking.”

Continuing this tradition of using pneuma-physiological sensations to describe the “felt presence of God,” Flavel wrote about “[c]ommunion with Christ . . . [as] real, sure and sensible . . .” Refusing to allow persons to mistake his theological position as promoting some kind of imaginative “fancy” of the mind, Flavel wrote strongly on the physiological aspects of the “spiritual senses” that might “be felt and tasted in this world . . .” In fact, the physiological themes in Flavel’s writings on


98 Rous, “Mystical Marriage,” 725.

99 Ambrose, Looking Unto Jesus, 18-19.

100 The terminology of “communion” to describe a “felt” divine encounter is well established in both medieval and Reformed Puritan mystical literature. Kempis, Imitation of Christ, 42, 50; Gerson, “On Mystical Theology: The First and Speculative Treatise,” 262, 266-267; Ambrose, Looking Unto Jesus, 17, 19, 32, 502-503; Bernard of Clairvaux, “Sermons from On the Song of Songs,” 130-131, 132, 134; Baxter, Saint’s Everlasting Rest, 38-39, 190, 197, 202; Flavel, England’s Duty, 223, 236, 237, 240-244, 246, 253, 261. See also Pike, Mystic Union, 49, 66-69, 76-78, 79-80; Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 38-39, 93-95, 156, 157, 189-190; Lane, Ravished by Beauty, 24, 98, 103-105. For quoted material, see especially Flavel, England’s Duty, 223, 236, 246.

101 Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 246, 260-261; Flavel, Pneumatologia, 209-212.
mysticism are so prominent that in one work he anecdotally referred to the “ordinary”
effects of experiencing God’s presence as being observable through evidences of “trance”
such as feeling “faint” or even having a bloody nose.\textsuperscript{102} As such, although this essay
cannot definitively determine what Flavel and his contemporaries experienced as
“numinous,” there is overwhelming support that the experience involved non-imaginary
physiological sensations that were capable of being interpreted as originating from a
spiritual source.\textsuperscript{103} In particular, by examining the context in which these pneuma-
physiological sensations were described, it seems likely that they were of a “pleasant”
and “safe” variety.\textsuperscript{104}

By examining the manner in which Reformed Puritans in Flavel’s sub-culture
described divine “ecstasy,” it would appear that the experience involved sensations of
“safety” and “pleasure.”\textsuperscript{105} There are at least three reasons why scholars should accept
this hypothesis. First, Reformed Puritans admitted they found the ecstatic experience to be “pleasurable” in their writings.\textsuperscript{106} In addition to describing such “pleasant”

\textsuperscript{102} Flavel, \textit{Pneumatologia}, 209-212.


experiences as "refreshment," "ease," "joy" or "comfort," Flavel and his contemporaries followed in the footsteps of their medieval forebears by likening "numinous experience" to a type of "heaven on earth" (see Baxter, Gerson) or the application of soothing "ointment" to the skin (see Bernard of Clairvaux, Rous). Second, recognizing George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s observation that “metaphors” function by means of “neuronal activation occurring simultaneously in two separate parts of the brain . . . ,” there is some evidence in the metaphoric vocabulary employed by Reformed Puritans that reveals the ecstatic experiences affiliated with such “metaphors” were associated with pleasant and safe sensations. Specifically, just as Rachel Fulton and Pike found that medieval ecstatic metaphors of “marriage,” “nursery” and


Flavel used both of these comparisons in his writings. Flavel, England’s Duty, 221, 222, 223, 260-261. Following in the footsteps of persons such as Gerson, Baxter became especially dedicated to pursuing the topic of how divine ecstasy is a type of “heaven.” Baxter, “Converse with God in Solitude,” 305; Gerson, “The Mountain of Contemplation,” 93, Baxter, The Saint’s Everlasting Rest, 5-6, 36-39, 190-191, 196-197. Use of the illustration of “ointment” to describe ecstasy may have started with Bernard of Clairvaux who uses it to describe God as being “like a physician . . . .” Bernard of Clairvaux, “Sermons on the Song of Songs,” 133-132. See also Ambrose, Looking Unto Jesus, 7-8, 17-18; Rous, “Mystical Marriage,” 729; Otto, The Idea of the Holy, 5-7; Rappaport, Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity, 380.

According to the findings of neuroscience discussed by Lakoff and Johnson, “metaphors” are encoded in the human “brain” when “neurons” connected between “two experiences occur at once”; this means that when a person reads a “metaphor,” the “neurons” connected to the “experience” that the metaphor utilizes are engaged in the “brain.” George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) 255-259. See also Flavel, Husbandsry Spiritualized, 75; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 56-57, 91, 94; Flavel, England’s Duty, 225, 236, 244, 247, 254-256, 260, 261; Rous, “Mystical Marriage”, 687, 692-693 [note these pages are numbered 702-699 in this edition], 703, 706-707, 711-712, 717-718, 724, 730, 733; Baxter, Saints Everlasting Rest, 38-39, 190-191, 195-196, 197, 198, 199; Ambrose, Looking Unto Jesus, 18, 26, 28, 34, 35, 36, 298-299, 498-499. For more information on Puritan “metaphors,” see Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 28-29, 189-190; Lane, “Puritan Spirituality,” 519; Lane, Ravished by Beauty, 99-100, 112-113.
“sweetness” triggered physiological sensations of “pleasure,” “intimacy,” “comfort” and “excitement,” the results of this paper’s metaphoric analysis (see Appendix A) reveal that common imagery employed by Flavel and his colleagues to describe ecstatic encounters (i.e., sugary, sexual and “warmth” experiences) were capable of resonating on a cognitive level by eliciting physiological sensations associated with both “safety” and “pleasure.” Finally, bearing in mind that scientists have recently discovered that “dopamine” is released in the brain when people “physiologically” respond to “music” (i.e., have involuntary “chills”), Flavel’s dismissal of positive feelings that arise while listening to “the skilful [sic] touch of a rare musical instrument . . . ” lends credibility to the supposition that ecstatic sensations in his culture were similar to those that are “survival” oriented and “pleasurable.” In other words, religious activities in Reformed

110 For a similar discussion involving Edwards’ use of “sweetness” metaphors, see Erdt, Jonathan Edwards: Art and the Sense of the Heart, 2, 10-11, 14-15, 20, 32-33, 35, 42. It is noteworthy that Schwanda reached a similar conclusion with regards to Ambrose’s choice of vocabulary. See Schwanda, “Soul Recreation: Spiritual Marriage and Ravishment in the Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Isaac Ambrose,” 114-115, 120-121. Fulton, “‘Taste and See that the Lord is Sweet’ (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West,” 170, 172-176, 178-180, 182-184, 185, 186, 190, 191, 193, 195-197, 200, 201-202, 203; Pike, Mystic Union, 76-80; Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, 5, 141-143, 144-145, 255-259; Flavel, Husbandry Spiritualized, 75; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 56-57, 91, 94; Flavel, England’s Duty, 225, 236, 244, 247, 254-256, 260, 261; Rous, “Mystical Marriage”, 687, 692-693 [note these pages are numbered 702-699 in this edition], 703, 706-707, 711-712, 717-718, 724, 730, 733; Baxter, Saints Everlasting Rest, 38-39, 190-191, 195-196, 197, 198, 199; Ambrose, Looking Unto Jesus, 18, 26, 28, 34, 35, 36, 298-299, 498-499. For more information on Puritan “metaphors,” see Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 28-29, 189-190; Lane, “Puritan Spirituality,” 519; Lane, Ravished by Beauty, 99-100, 112-113.

111 One chemical that the human brain associates with “pleasure” and “survival” is “dopamine”; this chemical is released by the brain to help people do activities that are beneficial to the body (e.g., eat food, have sex, etc.). Neil R. Carlson, Physiology of Behavior, 8th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2004), 445, 446-447, 448, 449, 576; Valorie N. Salimpoor, Mitchel Benovoy, Kevin Larcher, Alain Dagher and Robert J. Zatorre, “Anatomically Distinct Dopamine Release During Anticipation and Experience of Peak Emotion to Music,” Nature Neuroscience 14, no. 2 (February 2011), 257, 261 http://www.zlab.mcgill.ca/docs/salimpoor_2011_nn.pdf (accessed on 11 June 2015). In a relatively recent neurological study, scientists discovered that people who have a “physiological” response to “music” produce “dopamine” in the brain while listening to such music. Salimpoor, Benovoy, Larcher, Dagher and Zatorre, “Anatomically Distinct Dopamine Release During Anticipation and Experience of Peak Emotion to Music,” 257, 260-262. Since Flavel specifically cautions against recognizing sensations discovered while listening to music as valid “numinous experiences” on the basis of such experiences could arise through “natural way[s] . . . [or] exterior motives, in the duties of religion,” it seems likely that Flavel
Puritan culture were intended to facilitate non-revelatory, pneuma-physiological sensations of a safe and pleasant variety.\textsuperscript{112}

Why did Reformed Puritans believe that God manifested His or Her presence in a non-revelatory, pneuma-physiological, safe and pleasant fashion?\textsuperscript{113} Although it is true that this interpretation of God’s presence had Biblical roots in medieval interpretation of the \textit{Song of Songs}, it must be understood that Reformed Puritans chose to retain this element amidst their many revisions to tradition.\textsuperscript{114} It would appear that Reformed Puritans in Flavel’s sub-culture maintained this view as it seemed to fit well with their ideas of what it meant to be among God’s “elect.”\textsuperscript{115} As Reformed Puritans perceived experienced similar sensations through listening to music as he found through “interior contemplative efforts.” Flavel, \textit{England’s Duty}, 238-239; Rappaport, \textit{Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity}, 380; Otto, \textit{The Idea of the Holy}, 5-11. Furthermore, as Flavel’s experience as a pastor led him to believe that it is a “common” misconception of the laity to believe that such experiences are indicative of God’s presence, it seems reasonable to suspect that people in Flavel’s culture generally encountered ecstatic sensations through “interior contemplative efforts” as being relatively similar to sensations that arose while listening to “music.” Flavel, \textit{England’s Duty}, 238-239. As such, there is neurological evidence that supports the view that the physiological “numinous” sensations in Reformed Puritan culture pertaining to “interior contemplative efforts” were of the pleasant, safe variety; perhaps they even involved the release of dopamine.” Flavel, \textit{England’s Duty}, 238-239; Rappaport, \textit{Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity}, 380; Otto, \textit{The Idea of the Holy}, 5-11. Salimpoor, Benovoy, Larcher, Dagher and Zatorre, “Anatomically Distinct Dopamine Release During Anticipation and Experience of Peak Emotion to Music,” 257, 260-262.


God as someone (i.e., a living Being) capable of having “intimate” relationships with humans, it is possible that ritually elicited pleasant and safe pneuma-physiological sensations acquired divine recognition in this culture because they resonated with how people felt when they united with their loved ones in ordinary life. As shown by Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary’s testing of “the belongingness hypothesis,” humans are seemingly programmed to respond emotionally in predictable ways depending on whether they see themselves as “belonging” with other persons: emotional stress (e.g., “anxiety”) forms when persons are unsure about their “bonds” with others while “joy” surfaces when persons celebrate their common fellowship. In Flavel's Reformed Puritan theology, God was understood to be a supremely “sovereign” Being who acts as both a parental “friend” to the saved “elect” and a stalwart “judge” to the unrepentant damned. Accordingly, it made sense to Reformed Puritans that by seriously reflecting upon God’s immediate presence during religious activities, unrepentant or unregenerate


[i]n the form of the conversion experience . . . at the very heart of Puritan faith . . .”\textsuperscript{122}

Unfortunately, as Flavel explained, the memories and benefits of such ecstatic experiences were expected to fade with time as people engaged in sin;\textsuperscript{123} they therefore needed to be continually renewed.\textsuperscript{124} As such, just as cultural anthropologist Anthony Wallace claims that the effects of “ritual learning” must “periodically” undergo “maintenance,” Reformed Puritans sought “consolation” and “assurance” of their salvation by searching for pleasant and safe sensations of a divine nature.\textsuperscript{125}

Understanding the social thirst for such mystical encounters, Flavel and his contemporaries promoted the use of techniques that this paper has termed “interior contemplative efforts” as a means of improving awareness during religious activities so that even the most subtle physiological sensations could acquire “numinous” meaning for Christian practitioners.\textsuperscript{126}

\textit{Traditional Directions Given by Flavel on Interior Contemplative Efforts}

According to Hambrick-Stowe, “[t]he Puritan mind perceived a fundamental difference between religion that affirmed the primacy of piety and experience and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{122} For a similar position, see Hambrick-Stowe, \textit{The Practice of Piety}, 45. Maclear, “‘The Heart of the New England Rent’: The Mystical Element in Early Puritan History,” 621-622, 623.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Flavel, \textit{England’s Duty}, 234.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Flavel, \textit{England’s Duty}, 234.
\end{itemize}
religion that emphasized liturgical forms.”127 Hoping to help people ecstatically encounter God in religious activities, Reformed Puritans such as Flavel advocated the use of “interior contemplative efforts” to enliven how “ordinances” were performed.128 In simple terms, “interior contemplative efforts” are behaviours that some Christians use to help facilitate “internal” ecstatic “numinous experiences” (Rappaport 1999, 380) through pre-established religious activities (i.e., they are supplements to rituals as opposed to standalone rituals).129 Following a brief overview of how these monastery-born practices came to be used by Protestant laity in rituals ranging from the Lord’s Supper to meditation, it will be possible to show how Flavel decided that there were universally-applicable “interior contemplative efforts” that could enhance all “ordinances.”130

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127 Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 43.

128 It is noteworthy that Yuille recognized Flavel’s promotion of these ritual-enhancing techniques in an earlier study. Yuille, The Inner Sanctum of Puritan Piety: John Flavel’s Doctrine of Mystical Union with Christ, 95-96. See also Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 54-55, 56, 58, 89, 91; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 239-240, 247, 253, 254, 256, 261, 263-264; Baxter, “Converse with God in Solitude,” 304-305; Ambrose, Media, 22, 132-133, 220-221, 223-224; Ambrose, Looking Unto Jesus, 8, 17, 18-19, 36, 499, 502; Rous, “The Mystical Marriage,” 687, 703, 706, 708-709, 711-713, 717, 730, 732; Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 30-34, 43.


comparatively analyzing two lists of “interior contemplative efforts” provided by Flavel, this study claims that Flavel taught his readers to employ at least four primary techniques during the practice of religious “duties.”

Discovering that these Flavelian “interior contemplative efforts” were traceable throughout centuries of Christian spiritual writings, this section draws on social scientific theory to determine how such advice may have helped persons encounter ecstatic experiences of God through their devotional practices.

In Christian historical literature, “interior contemplative efforts” have often been described in the format of a “ladder” or “mountain” path where they served as routes that may be used to find ecstatic experiences of God as persons approach the metaphorical summit of “contemplative life.”

Having roots in the cloistered experiences of medieval ascetics and “desert” dwellers, “interior contemplative efforts” have traditionally been advocated to enhance the performance of “secret exercises”

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(Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 136) such as solitary “prayer” and “meditation.” For instance, believing that the *Song of Songs* described the pleasant sensations of God’s ecstatic presence, Bernard of Clairvaux wrote a series of sermons on the Biblical book containing, amongst other topics, “interior contemplative efforts” that could be applied during solitary prayer. As time passed, select groups associated with the “devotio moderna” movement have, since at least the fifteenth-century, developed “interior contemplative efforts” as a means of helping people encounter ecstatic “numinous experiences” within pre-existing corporate or private ecclesiastical activities. For example, during the middle ages, priests endorsed a form of lay “piety” involving “interior contemplative efforts” during prayers recited while looking upon the

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135 Bernard of Clairvaux, “Sermons on the *Song of Songs,*” 30-34, 43, 130-135, 137-139, 243; Chidester, *Christianity: A Global History*, 313-314

Similarly, although individual prayers were no longer recited during church services after the Protestant Reformation, Reformed pastors recommended that lay persons approach sermons—“auditory” rituals believed by Protestants to help facilitate “numinous experiences”—through concentrative behaviours that are similar to “interior contemplative efforts” used in former times. Given such an illustrious history, it is perhaps unsurprising that “interior contemplative efforts” would be valued by Reformed Puritans during the seventeenth-century “Pietism” movement. In a study that compared Reformed Puritan writings on piety to Roman Catholic writings of a similar nature, Hambrick-Stowe discovered that Reformed Puritans strongly valued a number of

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“techniques” (see footnote) that could be used to enhance common “ordinances.”
Moreover, Hambrick-Stowe discovered that it was relatively normal for Reformed
Puritans to use “classic” Roman Catholic “works” written by Bernard of Clairvaux or
Thomas à Kempis in their religious devotions. Building on these foundations,
Reformed Puritans such as Flavel wrote about “interior contemplative efforts” in spiritual
handbooks addressed to seventeenth-century lay readers.

Providing lists of “interior contemplative efforts” in spiritual handbooks, Flavel
and his colleagues continued the tradition of providing mystical enhancements to
established religious activities. Usually Reformed Puritans who wrote on the subject
of piety agreed that the purpose of “interior contemplative efforts” was to avoid making
“ordinances” into “formality”—i.e., absentminded routine that God supposedly refused to
entertain during devotions. For instance, using the metaphor of a ship capable of
“ferry[ing]” people across a great divide to their destination as a means of discussing the

140 According to Hambrick-Stowe, such “techniques” included: “use of imagination and senses in . . .
composition of place,” preliminary “confession of sin” prior to religious activities, “preparatory
meditations for the Lord’s Supper,” “meditation [during . . . the act of partaking [during communion]”
and adoption of various “physical posture[s].” Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 3-5, 28, 29-36, 38-39,
93-95.

141 Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 28, 36.

142 Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 28, 36, 49, 50; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 54-55, 56, 58, 89, 91;
Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 239-240, 247, 253, 254, 256, 261, 263-264; Baxter, “Converse with God in
Solitude,” 304-305; Ambrose, Media, 22, 132-133, 220-221, 223-224; Ambrose, Looking Unto Jesus, 8,

143 For an alternative view on this subject see Yuille, The Inner Sanctum of Puritan Piety: John Flavel’s
Doctrine of Mystical Union with Christ, 95-96. Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 28, 36, 49, 50;
Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 54-55, 56, 58, 89, 91; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 239-240, 247, 253, 254, 256,
261, 263-264; Baxter, “Converse with God in Solitude,” 304-305; Ambrose, Media, 22, 132-133, 220-221,
223-224; Ambrose, Looking Unto Jesus, 8, 17, 18-19, 36, 499, 502; Rous, “The Mystical Marriage,” 687,
703, 706, 708-709, 711-713, 717, 730, 732.

144 Rous, “The Mystical Marriage,” 709-710; Baxter, Saint’s Everlasting Rest, 91, 208-209, 210-215;
Ambrose, Media, 22, 23-24, 25; Ambrose, Looking Unto Jesus, 8, 19; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 54, 86, 89,
role that Reformed Puritans believed was played by established “ordinances,” Flavel explained that “interior contemplative efforts” were riggings that prepared the “boat” for the wind of the Holy Spirit to blow with power unto “sensible communion” with God.\(^{145}\)

Similarly, taking “human converse” to be the model by which persons learn to “converse with God,” Baxter presented “interior contemplative efforts” as a form of etiquette that should be employed during “directives and ordinances.”\(^{146}\) Yet while there was substantial agreement that religious activities were more effective at helping people encounter ecstatic experiences of God when they were practiced with “interior contemplative efforts,” Reformed Puritans were less harmonized when specifying the mechanics or variety of usable techniques.\(^{147}\) As such, whereas some Reformed Puritans (e.g., Ambrose) tailored their “interior contemplative efforts” for specific “ordinances,” other Reformed Puritans (e.g., Baxter) offered general advice meant to be used across all “duties.”\(^{148}\)

Falling into the latter camp, Flavel provided lists of “interior contemplative efforts” that may be comparatively examined to determine how he hoped his readers would behave during religious activities.\(^{149}\)

In comparatively analyzing the traditional “interior contemplative efforts” described by Flavel, it will be possible to show the prevailing behavioural patterns that

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\(^{146}\) Baxter, “Converse with God in Solitude,” 304-305.


lay under his theological advice. As is seemingly typical among “ritual” behaviours that facilitate ecstatic experiences on individualistic bases, Flavel’s traditional directions were primarily centered around helping his followers pursue both mental states capable of emotionally realizing divine favour and sensual vigilance to aid in perceiving God’s presence thereby. Possibly taking inspiration from medieval “ascent” literature (see for example Gerson’s “stairway of contemplation”), Flavel offered at least two summaries of what he believed to be “interior contemplative efforts.” Among the various techniques offered in A Saint Indeed, Flavel provided his clearest overview of traditional “interior contemplative efforts” by telling his readers to:

O study your hearts, watch your hearts . . . turn in upon yourselves; get into your closets, and now resolve to dwell there . . . . Reader, methinks I should prevail with thee: all I beg for is but this, that thou wouldst step a little oftener to talk with God, and thine own heart; that thou wouldst keep a more true and faithful account of thy thoughts and affections; that thou wouldst but seriously demand of thine own heart, at least every

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150 Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 12-17, 54-58, 89, 91, 94; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 254, 261, 263-264.


152 Presentations of “interior contemplative efforts” may be located in other works by Flavel such as Husbandry Spiritualized, Sacramental Meditations and, to a lesser extent, An Exposition on the Shorter Assemblies’ Cathechism; however, the listings in these texts were found to deviate very little from the information presented here while adding considerable complexity to the manner in which such data could be presented to the reader. Flavel, Husbandry Spiritualized, 43-49, 51-55, 62, 75, 78-81; Flavel, Sacramental Meditations, v-vi, 1-2, 5-6, 18-19, 21-22, 24, 32-34 (especially), 40-41 (especially), 51, 53, 54-56 (especially), 148-149, 165-168, especially 32-34, 40-41, 54-56; John Flavell, An Exposition of the Assemblies Catechism, 168, 170, 173-176, 178, 196, 199-201, 202-204, especially 170. “To come to the fruit of the contemplative life and to its height” says Gerson, “one should have a stairway with three main parts. These can be called humble penitence [i.e., destroying the distractions of “worldly love”], secrecy of place and silence, and strong perseverance” Gerson, “The Mountain of Contemplation,” 88, 89, 92. For information on “ascent” literature, see Egan, “Ascent,” 128-129. See also Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 89; Flavel, England’s Duty, 256, 261.
evening, O my heart where hast thou been today? . . . by this means you shall far better understand the things of God . . . you shall not only have a more clear, but a more sweet perception and gust of them.  

Similarly, in addition to advising his reader to “get thee into thy closet . . .” and “[m]ake communion with God the very level and aim of your souls in all your approaches to him,” Flavel suggested in *England’s Duty* that:

[t]here are five things which usually keep . . . [Christians] poor and low as to spiritual joys and comforts. (1.) The incumbrances of the world, which divert them from, or distract them in their duties of communion with God . . . they have little time for heavenly employments . . . (2.) A spirit of morality creeping into the duties of religion, impoverishes the spirit thereof . . . Religion cannot thrive under formality . . . (3.) The business of temptations pestering the minds of many Christians . . . (4.) Heart-apostasy, inward decays of our first love . . . (5.) In a word, spiritual pride impoverishes our comforts . . .

Between these two quotes it is possible to outline at least four traditional “interior contemplative efforts” passed through medieval and Reformed Puritan thought that Flavel consistently believed were useful for facilitating an ecstatic encounter with God: the establishment of interactive mindsets (e.g., “talk with God”; avoid “heart-apostasy”), the use of concentration (e.g., “seriously demand of thine own heart”);

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153 Flavel, *A Saint Indeed*, 54-56, 58, 89, quote from 89.


avoid “formality”), the advantage of controlled environments to remove worldly distractions (i.e., “get into your closets”; avoid “pestering” thoughts) and the importance of patient perseverance (i.e., “resolve to dwell there”; “step a little oftener”; take “time for heavenly employments”). It is notable that such “interior contemplative efforts” are similar to those discovered by Yuille in his earlier summary of this topic. By exploring each of these “interior contemplative efforts” in greater detail, it will be possible to show that such practices were primarily a means of assisting interpretation of impending stimuli and heightening a person’s ability to pay attention to the task at hand during various Christian rituals.

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157 It is noteworthy that where physical privacy is unavailable or unwarranted, medieval and Reformed Puritan mystical theologians such as Flavel generally instructed their readers to establish a kind of private mindset (e.g., Rous wrote about “the chamber of thy soul”; Flavel told his readers to “set a guard upon thy senses”). Bernard of Clairvaux, “Sermons on the Song of Songs,” 131, 242-243; Gerson, “The Mountain of Contemplation,” 88, 95-97; Gerson, “On Mystical Theology: The Second and Practical Treatise,” 314-317; Kempis, Imitation of Christ, 26, 28-29; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 55, 89; Flavel, England’s Duty, 254, 261; Flavel, Touchstone of Sincerity, 346; Baxter, Saint’s Everlasting Rest, 38-39, 228; Baxter, “Converse with God in Solitude,” 279-280, 305-306, 311; Ambrose, Looking Unto Jesus, 8; Ambrose, Media, 132, 133; Rous, “Mystical Marriage,” 703, 712, 732-733.


159 Yuille, The Inner Sanctum of Puritan Piety: John Flavel’s Doctrine of Mystical Union with Christ, 95-96.
Developing Interactive Mindsets

Building tension through the expectation of “sensible communion” with God, Reformed Puritans who constructed interactive mindsets during established Christian rituals became sensitive to biological changes that occurred during such activities.\(^{160}\)

Recall that for Flavel, as with his medieval and Reformed Puritan predecessors, “interior contemplative efforts” were primarily aids used to help Christians interact with God during various religious exercises.\(^{161}\) In keeping with this goal, medieval and Reformed Puritans commonly agreed that establishing an interactive mindset during religious activity was crucial to successfully encountering a “numinous experience” through such activity.\(^{162}\)

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\(^{162}\) There are a number of instances where Reformed Puritans wrote about the necessity of having an interactive mindset during religious activities in order ecstatically to experience God. “[L]et us consider wherein this heavenly privilege of communion with God doth consist,” said Flavel to his readers, “and more generally it will be found to lie in a spiritual correspondency betwixt Christ and the soul. God lets forth influences upon our souls, and we by the assistance of his Spirit, make returns again unto God . . . We cry to God, and God answers that cry by the incomes of spiritual graces upon the soul . . .” Flavel, *England’s Duty*, 240. As such, Flavel recommended that his readers “[m]ake communion with God the very level and aim of your souls in all your approaches to him in the ordinances and duties of religion . . . beg and plead hard with him for the manifestations of his love, and further communications of his grace.” Flavel, *England’s Duty*, 263. Similarly, Ambrose wrote that “[t]he Saints look up on Duties (the Word, Sacraments, Prayers, &c.) as Bridges to give them a Passage to God, as Boats to carry them into the Bosom of Christ, as Means to bring them into more intimate Communion with their heavenly Father, and therefore they are so much taken with them. When they go to the Word, they go as one goes to hear news of a
God and individual religious participants, Flavel told his readers to make “preparation” for religious activities by taking “a few minutes” to consider what it means consciously to “meet God in duty...”\(^{163}\) Indeed, warning that it is difficult to notice sensations of God’s presence when the “heart” is not fully engaged in the task of encountering God, Flavel detailed the necessity for hopeful mystics to “approach” God with both “excited” and emotional willingness to participate fully in the activity at hand.\(^{164}\) As such, from a practical perspective it would appear that Flavel encouraged his readers to adopt an interactive attitude of *anticipatory mental engagement* in the midst of their pious practices.\(^{165}\) In *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation*, psychologist David Huron claims that “anticipation” or “suspense” causes persons to experience heightened biological sensitivity (i.e., “alert[ness],” “perceptual preparation”) as an evolutionary by-product of survival.\(^{166}\) If people become increasingly “sensitive” under conditions of “anticipation,” then perhaps developing an interactive mindset during prayer and meditation could heighten the probability that practitioners would notice a Friend; when they go to pray, they go to talk with a Friend; when they go to read, they go to read a Letter from a Friend; when they go to receive, they go to sup with a Friend... the Saints meet with Christ in Duties, and therefore they cannot but find great treasure.” Ambrose, *Media*, 22. Furthermore, in addition to declaring that “all divine dispensations and ordinances are designed to assist our converse with God,” Baxter told his readers to “be but heartily willing to be friends to God, and that God should be your chiefest friend, and you may be sure that it is so indeed... and then how delightfully may you converse with God.” Baxter, “Converse with God in Solitude,” 304, 307, see also 269-270, 305, 306, 309, 314. For additional examples, see Bernard of Clairvaux, “Sermons on the *Song of Songs*,” 130-131, 132-133; Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, 50; Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 17, 18; Rous, “Mystical Marriage,” 709-710; Flavel, *A Saint Indeed*, 54-55, 89. See also Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, 380; Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 5-11.


\(^{166}\) Huron, *Sweet Anticipation*, 2, 3-4, 5, 6, 9-10, 11.
physiological sensation that could be interpreted as a “numinous experience” during such activities.\textsuperscript{167} Certainly this would explain why T. M. Luhrmann, Howard Nusbaum and Ronald Thisted noticed in their field research that Evangelical Christians who had a “proclivity to absorption” and desire to “sense” God were more likely to “report internal sensory experiences with sharper mental-imagery and . . . sensory overrides.”\textsuperscript{168} Indeed, considering Marjorie Schuman’s observation on how “passive awareness” appears to be a salient feature across many “meditation practices,” it is unsurprising to find methods of heightening physiological sensitivity amongst the “interior contemplative efforts” emphasized by Reformed Puritans.\textsuperscript{169} In other words, beyond simply being a pious attitude towards practicing Christianity, pursuing an interactive mindset during Christian rituals could actually help persons find ecstatic sensations of God’s presence through improving latent physiological “awareness” by means of “anticipation.”\textsuperscript{170}


\textsuperscript{169} According to Marjorie Schuman, “common to all meditation practices and, it would seem, encompassing the variety of experiences that occur during meditation is the goal of \textit{passive awareness}—a state in which the mind becomes still and consciousness transcends thought. \textit{Awareness} describes the focus of attention on the present moment, being with whatever one is experiencing in the here and now; \textit{passive} emphasizes that there is nothing one need \textit{do} in order to experience in this way, merely be receptive and allow the experience to happen.” Shuman, “The Psychophysiological Model of Meditation and Altered States of Consciousness: A Critical Review,” 334-337. See also Flavel, \textit{England’s Duty}, 237-238, 239-240; Flavel, \textit{A Saint Indeed}, 54-55, 56, 58; Flavel, \textit{Touchstone of Sincerity}, 348.

Use of Concentration

Paralleling the development of an interactive mindset, another traditional way that Reformed Puritans such as Flavel promoted focus in Christian rituals was by having their readers use the “interior contemplative effort” of “concentration.” Widely recognized as one of the primary methods that religions employ for becoming aware of ecstatic sensations, the technique of “concentration” has strong roots in Christian mystical practices such as “penitence” and “meditation.” Due to the manner in which “experiences” derived from “meditation” appear to be, in the words of Schuman, “reflection[s] of the state[s] of consciousness in which they occur,” it seems probable one way “concentration” can help persons encounter “numinous experiences” in “rituals” is through “framing.” According to Douglas, “ritual focuses attention by framing; it enlivens the memory and links the present with the relevant past. In all this it aids perception. Or rather, it changes perception because it changes the selective

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principles.”

In other words, by creating particular “perception[s]” through which persons may filter their “experiences,” Douglas claims that “framing” both enhances “focus” on certain matters of interest and “primes” interpretation *a la* religious recollection. With such benefits it is perhaps unsurprising to hear Flavel claim “[t]hat which loses all our comforts in ordinances and more secret duties, is the indisposedness of the heart: a Christian whose heart is in a good *frame*, gets the start of all others that come with him in that duty” (emphasis is mine). Flavel believed that the key to entering into such “frame[s]” lay in concentrative “preparation.” Indeed, recognizing how the adoption of particular religious “frame[s]” may help persons encounter God during religious activities, Flavel “primed” his readers’ theological perceptions by having them implement two concentrative techniques: namely, (1) taking a moment to remove distractible subject content from the conscious mind and (2) using imagination to adopt humble “abasement” and “awe” in the presence of God’s “*majestas*.”

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Before engaging in religious activities, Flavel imitated his Christian forebears in advising his readers to take a moment to clear the mind of off-topic subject material. In particular, Flavel advised his readers to clear their minds by performing two concentrative steps. First, believing that a “guilty” conscience may flood the mind with unwanted thoughts that are incompatible with recognizing God’s supportive presence, Flavel imitated prior theologians in telling his readers to begin their search for mystical experiences by repenting of past sins and, subsequently, applying strict life reformation (i.e., what Flavel and Baxter call “keeping the heart”) to prevent such sins from reoccurring. Second, lest concerns of a non-religious nature interfere with the mystical process of drawing nearer to God, Flavel told his readers to both let go of any worldly thoughts prior to engaging in religious activities and to “set a guard upon thy senses” capable of filtering out worldly matters in the immediate environment. Due to how these two “interior contemplative efforts” were intended to take place before “duty,”


Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 12-14, 15-17, 54-55, 91; Flavel, England’s Duty, 261, 234.

Compare Flavel’s position with that which is held by Gerson and Baxter. Baxter, “Converse with God in Solitude,” 307-308; Baxter, The Saint’s Everlasting Rest, 190, 202-203, 228-229; Gerson, “The Mountain of Contemplation,” 89-90. See also Flavel, England’s Duty, 234; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 12-14, 15, 91.

Flavel, Baxter and Ambrose called such advice “preparation of the heart.” In telling his readers to perform these two steps, Flavel and his colleagues hoped to restrain certain ideas from entering into a suitable “frame” of mind for devotion. While Flavel may have had theological motivations surrounding this “prayer frame,” could such advice also help persons enter into “numinous experiences” from a behavioural perspective? This paper believes so. In theory, by removing secular thought from the conscious mind, persons may have been less likely to attribute certain atypical physiological effects as having natural origin. Similarly, by taking the mind off trivial matters, persons may have been able to devote further mental resources to maintain an active mindfulness (i.e., “consciousness”) of God that Otto calls “creature-feeling.” Indeed, due to the prominence of this later point in Flavel’s writings, this paper wishes to expand upon the manners in which persons were encouraged to incite such “creature-feeling” during religious activities.

In asking his readers to imagine God’s “majestas” and “awefulness,” Flavel “primed” the “creature-feeling” emotions of “tremendum” (e.g., “abasement” and “awe”)

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183 Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 15-17, 54-55; Ambrose, Media, 220-223, 246-247; Baxter, The Saint’s Everlasting Rest, 228-229.

184 Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 15-17, 54-55, 56-57; Baxter, The Saint’s Everlasting Rest, 228-229.


186 Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 54-55; Schuman, “Psychophysiological Model of Meditation and Altered States of Consciousness,” 334-335, 336-337; Douglas, Purity and Danger, 78-79.

187 Flavel used the phrase “setting the Lord always before us” to describe this mentality. Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 15-17, 54-55, 56, 58. See also Flavel, England’s Duty, 239-240, 240-244, 255; Otto, The Idea of the Holy, 8-10.

188 Otto, The Idea of the Holy, 8-10; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 15-17, 54-55, 56, 58; Flavel, England’s Duty, 240-244, 255, 261, 264.
into the mental consciousnesses of his readers. A reoccurring feature of Christian mysticism involves the struggle between retaining the “humility” needed to engage God amidst temptations of “pride” that threaten to undo spiritual progress. Finding agreement with this tradition, Flavel encouraged his readers to adopt practices designed to induce “abasement” and “awe” before God. For example, drawing upon his readers’ imaginative capabilities, Flavel “framed” religious activities as “performances” occurring in the magisterial “presence chamber” of God to induce mental states of “humility” amongst his audience. Similarly, advising his readers to reflect upon such issues as God’s “immense greatness,” the “holiness of God,” the “mercy of God,” “the veracity . . . of God” and “the anger . . . of God,” Flavel deliberately ensured that the “tremendum” affiliated emotions of “abasement,” “admiration,” “dependence,” “humiliation” and “restlessness” were actively recollected in the minds of his readers during

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“meditation." In other words, through “framing” religious activities as actions that required strong “humility,” Flavel had his readers enter into emotions of debasement that are associated with the “indeterminate” social “state” that cultural anthropologist Victor Turner identified as “liminality.” Thanks to the effects of “cognitive priming” such advice may have helped persons interpret and even obtain socially acceptable “numinous experiences.” In recent years psychologists have shown that “priming” certain ideas and emotions in the minds of religiously minded persons has a significant impact on how people immediately “perceive” and respond to matters of religious concern. Working under the presumption that such findings in cognitive science may explain how people attain mental conditions suitable for the acquiescence and comprehension of “numinous experience[s]” in “religious activities,” this paper proposes that persons who are

“primed” to emotions that are identifiable as “creature feeling[s]” will, at least in the short term, likely both “perceive” attendant physiological experiences in a religious manner and shape mental constructions under the influences of theological “memory.”

It is worth noting that such psychological theorizing aligns well with Wallace’s early research into “cognitive synthesis” that occurs during “ritual” periods of “liminality.”

In other words, while the “priming” of religious “humility” may have had little direct impact in exciting the kind of pleasant ecstatic “numinous experiences” that Reformed Puritans desired (i.e., “abasement” is not typically “pleasant”), it could—as Otto seemingly suspected—make persons more “conscious” of the divine in such a way that narrowed their interpretations of impending stimuli that were capable of exciting enjoyable ecstatic emotional states (e.g., “fascinans” stimulated by examples of divine “love”; “communitas” stimulated by temporary fulfillment of social oneness; see Appendix B). This paper will return to this theory later. In any case, for now it is


sufficient to note that readers following Flavel’s “interior contemplative efforts” likely had adopted a mentality capable of helping them “focus” upon and interpret future sensations in a theologically significant manner.\textsuperscript{200}

**Locating Controlled Environments**

Another traditional way that Reformed Puritans such as Flavel helped persons find ecstatic sensations was by promoting the use of controlled environments in which to practice or prepare for religious activities.\textsuperscript{201} Of all the techniques offered in Judeo-Christian mysticism, the pursuit of withdrawn (often solitary) settings to find God is one of the oldest, richest and most prevalent behavioural themes in the tradition.\textsuperscript{202}

Repeatedly making calls for his readers to “sequester” themselves either before or during religious activities, Flavel saw removal from “world[ly]” others as important for the creation of “sacred place[s].”\textsuperscript{203} This advice may have helped persons take notice of God’s ecstatic presence by both closing them off from obstacles that inhibit devotion and


familiarizing them with the atmosphere of “solemn” worship. Utilizing the research findings of cultural anthropologists and historians who study “sacred place[s],” it will be possible to show how such advice may have been “efficacious” in helping persons enter into “numinous experiences.”

Having an acute comprehension of how “sacred places” help people recognize God’s presence, Flavel directed his readers toward entering controlled environments for religious “ordinances.” “Sacredness as an attribute is not absolute,” says cultural anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, “it is brought into play by the nature of particular situations.” One of these “particular situations” involves being caught on the “liminal” “threshold” existing, in Turner’s language, “betwixt and between” ordinary and extraordinary states of reality. Specifically, since “ambiguous” dimensions of “liminality” often establish socially acceptable grounds for permitting unusual behaviour, religious societies tend to designate certain areas, times and persons as “liminal” to allow communication with the divine. Entering into “liminal” environments by symbolically

204 Smith, Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown, 54-55; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 54-55, 89; Flavel, Touchstone of Sincerity, 309-310, 346, 348; Flavel, Sacramental Meditations, 52-53, 54; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 247, 254.


206 Smith, Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown, 54-55; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 54-55, 89; Flavel, Touchstone of Sincerity, 309-310, 346, 348; Flavel, Sacramental Meditations, 52-53, 54; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 247, 254.

207 Gennep, The Rites of Passage, 12.

208 Turner, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure, 94-95, 97; Gennep, The Rites of Passage, 12, 15-17, 18-21.

becoming “separated from the world,” Reformed Puritans were able to transform their “secular” environments into temporary “sacred place[s]” capable of facilitating communication with God. The most visibly obvious of these “sacred place[s]” involved small gatherings of like-minded Christians in homes or churches for worship meetings; however, taking inspiration from the teachings of Jesus found in the book of Matthew, the act of isolating oneself from other humans became another method through which Reformed Puritans could establish temporary “sacred place[s].” Within the boundaries of similar “marked-off space[s],” cultural anthropologist Jonathan Z. Smith claims that “nothing is accidental [and] . . . everything, at least potentially, is of [religious] significance.” In other words, as long as religious participants remained inside their defined “sacred place[s],” doctrinal ideas or bodily sensations could more easily be categorized as having a “numinous” dimension. Flavel recommended both the “closet and sanctuary” as suitable locations for engaging in “ordinances.”


213 Smith, Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown, 54.


Flavel boldly claimed that it is in the physical “closet”—differentiated from Flavel’s “innermost closet of . . . [the] soul”—that readers should expect “that ease which thou seekest in vain elsewhere, will there be found, or no where.” In a practical sense, if persons could not manage to categorize their sensations as “numinous” in the controlled “sacred place” of the “closet” or “sanctuary,” Flavel knew that they would be unlikely to do so in a “profane” environment that had no such contextual aid. As such, with what appears to be intuitive pastoral sense on the value of “sacred place[s]” in helping people identify divine interactions, Flavel taught persons that clearing a space for engaging in religious activities was helpful for locating God’s ecstatic presence. Of course, Flavel knew that even in a controlled environment, his readers would still be exposed to a variety of sensations that society would not qualify as “numinous.” For this reason, Flavel promoted seeking controlled spaces for religious devotion that were both closed to the “world” as a means of helping his readers avoid “distractions” and “solemn” to assist in aligning his readers with the atmosphere of worship.

216 Flavel, Touchstone of Sincerity, 346; Flavel, England’s Duty, 247, 254.

217 Use of the word “profane” here is in alignment with Mircea Eliade’s claim “that the sacred and religious life are the opposite of the profane and secular life.” Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1958), 1. Flavel, Touchstone of Sincerity, 346; Flavel, England’s Duty, 247, 254; Smith, Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown, 54-55; Otto, The Idea of the Holy, 5-7.

218 Smith, Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown, 54-55; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 54-55, 89; Flavel, Touchstone of Sincerity, 309-310, 346, 348; Flavel, Sacramental Meditations, 52-53, 54; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 247, 254.


220 Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 54-55, 89; Flavel, England’s Duty, 254, 261.
Siding with historical Christians who have instructed their disciples to pursue “solitary” environments during religious activities as a means of avoiding “distractions,” Flavel told his readers to “come out of the crowds of business, and clamours of the world, and retire yourselves . . .”221 Such advice should not be interpreted as a promoting a state of “sensory deprivation.”222 Perhaps the reclusive hermitage cell or desert dwelling may have somewhat blocked out human senses; however, fields, forests and chapels—all of which were both promoted by Gerson and used sporadically since Biblical times as suitable locations for encountering God—could not have been effective at creating conditions devoid of sound, sight, touch or smell.223 Just as houseflies trapped in a


222 Due to the fact that there is some evidence to support that persons who are left in “isolation tanks” undergo mental conditions similar to those found during “altered states of consciousness,” it has become common for scholars of religion to claim that solitude is pursued during “meditation” for the sake of “sensory deprivation” as though blocking human senses can somehow create ecstatic experiences. Wallace, Religion: An Anthropological View, 55-56; Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle, The Psychology of Religious Behaviour, Belief & Experience, 88, 90, 95; Shuman, “Psychophysiological Model of Meditation,” 333, 365-366, 367. Giving a “cautionary note” on the limitations of sensory deprivation research, Ralph W. Hood and Ronald J. Morris warned researchers that “[i]t would be naive to assume that the tank experience itself uniquely ‘produces’ a religious experience. What the tank situation allows is simply another appropriate setting—of quiet isolation—for the religiously oriented person, attuned to ‘inner world phenomena,’ to attend to such phenomena with a cognitive framework making them both recognizable and meaningful” Ralph W. Hood and Ronald J. Morris, “Sensory Isolation and the Differential Elicitation of Religious Imagery in Intrinsic and Extrinsic Persons,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 20, no. 3 (Sept. 1981), 263-264, 272 http://www.jstor.org/stable/1385548 (accessed on 22 December 2015).

church sanctuary may agitate devote listeners during sermons, the domestic “closet” frequently promoted by Flavel for prayer and meditation could scarcely have blocked out the cries of playing children or smells of dinner cooking on the stove.\textsuperscript{224} As such, if it was virtually impossible for Reformed Puritans to escape exterior stimuli, why bother asking people to separate themselves from “incumbrances” before devotion?\textsuperscript{225} Smith claims that “a sacred place is a place of clarification . . . . where, as in all forms of communication, static and noise (i.e., the accidental) are decreased so that the exchange of information can be increased.”\textsuperscript{226} By choosing to stay within a “closet,” church or equivalent closed space during the entirety of an “ordinance,” Flavel believed that Reformed Puritans could cut off unpredictable stimuli (e.g., “distractions”) that were capable of interfering with ecstatic “communion.”\textsuperscript{227} Since there was less opportunity for

\textsuperscript{224} Indeed, with such accessible sensations found in normal domestic settings, it is no surprise that Flavel, Ambrose and Baxter were comfortable with promoting ecological environments for solitary religious activities. Flavel, \textit{Husbandry Spiritualized}, 9-10, 14, 22; Ambrose, \textit{Media}, 49, 132-133; Baxter, “Converse with God in Solitude,” 281-282, 311. See also Ambrose, \textit{Looking Unto Jesus}, 499; Baxter, \textit{The Saint’s Everlasting Rest}, 38-39, 213; Flavel, \textit{A Saint Indeed}, 89; Flavel, \textit{England’s Duty}, 244, 254. See also Hambrick-Stowe, \textit{The Practice of Piety}, 156.

\textsuperscript{225} Flavel, \textit{England’s Duty}, 254, 261; Flavel, \textit{A Saint Indeed}, 54-55, 89.

\textsuperscript{226} Smith, \textit{Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown}, 54.

\textsuperscript{227} In \textit{Sacramental Meditations}, Flavel states that during religious activities, “[t]here's danger enough from within, you need not open another door from without. This natural corruption is too active in it self, if there be no irritation by any external occasion . . . . The Arabian Proverb is as instructive as it is mystical; shut the Windows that the House may be light . . . . If anywhere, let us go to our closets, to our knees, to the Ordinances of God; yea . . . . if we cannot be free from evil there, it's vain to expect it elsewhere in this world.” Flavel, \textit{Sacramental Meditations}, 52-53. Flavel, \textit{A Saint Indeed}, 54-55, 89, 91; Flavel, \textit{England’s
encountering unforeseen nonreligious stimuli (i.e., material capable of awakening “profane” sensations) in a closed environment than in an open environment, persons who utilized such advice could more easily attribute changes in physiology to movements of the Holy Spirit. As such, these efforts may have produced “efficacious” results of ecstatic experience by instilling confidence in the interpretive efforts of “ordinance” practitioners.

In asking his readers to embrace the “solemn” properties of “sacred place[s]” prior to engaging in devotion, Flavel had his readers “habituate” or “adapt” their senses in a way that may have helped such practitioners recognize divine ecstasy.

“Habituation” is the process of learning to ignore unimportant “stimuli” through exposure

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Duty, 254, 261; Flavel, Touchstone of Sincerity, 346, 348; Smith, Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown, 54-55.

Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 45, 95; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 240, 254, 261; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 54-55, 89, 91; Flavel, Sacramental Meditations, 52-53; Smith, Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown, 54-55; Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, 1.


to such “stimuli.”  Although it is difficult to tell when “habituation” became an established monastic practice, Gerson wrote on the benefits of this exercise for people hoping to meditate or pray in areas occupied by various aromas and sounds.

Elaborating on the value doing “solemn preparation” immediately prior to engaging in religious “duty,” Flavel told his readers to “[s]equester yourselves from all earthly employments . . . you cannot come reeking hot out of the world into God's presence, but you will find a tang of it in your duties: it is with the heart a few minutes since plunged in the world, now at the feet of God, just as with the sea after a storm, which still continues working, muddy and disquiet, though the wind be laid and storm over: thy heart must have time to settle.”

In other words, employing the metaphor of body heat to describe the kind of “habituation” needed to sense divine ecstasy, Flavel claimed that people who spend a few moments adjusting to a “liminal” environment prior to devotion may become

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231  Due to the fact that physiology goes beyond the writer’s expertise, this author confesses that the difference between “habituation” and “sensory adaptation” has been ignored in this section for the sake of simplicity; the author apologizes for any unnecessary confusion arising from this position. Rankin, Abrams, Barry, Bhatnagar, Clayton, Colombo, Coppola, Geyer, Glanzman, Marsland, McSweeney, Wilson, Wu, and Thompson, “Habitation Revisited: An Updated and Revised Description of the Behavioural Characteristics of Habituation,” 1-2, 4; Carlson, *Physiology of Behaviour*, 225-226; Kalat, *Biological Psychology*, 210-211, 409. Having declared the definitional reasoning taken by this essay, it should be noted that generalist positions on "habituation" have been taken by other, more specialized, scholars in the scientific field. Rompson and Spencer, “Habituation: A Model Phenomenon for the Study of Neuronal Substrates of Behaviour,” 17-18; Worden, “Auditory Habitation,” 110.

232  As Gerson explained “[y]ou will find some people whom every sound offends, while for others, a noisy place is no hindrance, and in fact an incentive. They like the murmuring of falling water, or the whispering of leaves flying about, the rich singing of the birds, the strident whistling of the wind, the clashing confusion of rivers or seas, or especially the sweet resonance of the church sounding forth with voices regulated by bells, organs, and singing choirs.” Gerson, “On Mystical Theology: The Second and Practical Treatise,” 315-316. Interestingly, Gerson claims that “[t]his for of withdrawl, which is very difficult and requires great perfection, can only be acquired through a long and patient process of habituation.” Gerson, “The Mountain of Contemplation,” 96. See also Rankin, Abrams, Barry, Bhatnagar, Clayton, Colombo, Coppola, Geyer, Glanzman, Marsland, McSweeney, Wilson, Wu, and Thompson, “Habitation Revisited: An Updated and Revised Description of the Behavioural Characteristics of Habituation,” 1-2, 4; Rompson and Spencer, “Habituation: A Model Phenomenon for the Study of Neuronal Substrates of Behaviour,” 17-18; Worden, “Auditory Habitation,” 110-114, 118.

suitably lukewarm (i.e., “habituated”) to notice God after engaging with the “hot” world. By exposing themselves to their controlled “sacred place[s]” before introducing new “sacred” “stimuli” (e.g., sounds associated with Bible readings, sermons, etc.), Flavel’s readers likely became accustomed to the sights, tastes, sounds and smells of their “closets” and churches in a way that could help them differentiate between usual and unusual (i.e., possibly divine) sensations during “ordinances.” As it appears that the pneuma-physiological sensations sought after by Reformed Puritans were associated with subtle bodily or emotional fluctuations, such “habituation” possibly assisted persons in identifying when an ecstatic event was occurring to them. Similarly, from an interpretational perspective, the practice of “habituation” may have helped Reformed Puritans stay focused on consuming “sacred” “stimuli” amidst normative external activity. Indeed, even a forest filled with a diversity of smells and sounds ceases to

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divert the attention of a person who has learnt how to meld him or herself into his or her setting; it is only the occasional unexpected snapping of a twig or song of a bird—arbitrary matters that can be discerned as a person sees fit—that disrupts a person’s concentration after having attained such a state of awareness. As such, in pursing the “interior contemplative effort” of seeking out controlled environments for conducting “ordinances,” Reformed Puritans became capable of recognizing God’s presence as something distinct from the “world” around them.238

Practicing Patient Perseverance

Finally, drawing on medieval teachings on meeting God through zealous devotion, Reformed Puritans such as Flavel taught persons to pursue religious activities with the “interior contemplative effort” of “patient perseverance.”239 During the medieval period mystical theologians Bernard of Clairvaux and Gerson claimed that ecstatic experiences of God may be provided by God to persons who diligently pursue religious activities with considerable attentive fervour.240 Generally finding agreement

238 Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 54-55, 89; Flavel, Touchstone of Sincerity, 309-310, 346; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 247, 254; Flavel, Sacramental Meditations, 52-53


240 In addition to listing “strong perseverance” as one of the “stages” necessary to the “contemplative life,” Gerson told his readers to “[b]low on the fire, give it life, do not give up on reading, meditating, and praying until the spark of devotion, however tenuous, emerges . . . . Stand firm and blow at it until the flame becomes stronger and thus purer. Finally, the most gentle and calm light, like that in a live coal, will overcome all the darkness of restless smoke.” Gerson, “The Mountain of Contemplation,” 88; Gerson, “On Mystical Theology: The Second and Practical Treatise,” 309. Likewise, Bernard of Clairvaux indicated that God “pays a visit in merciful love to the soul that prays often, even without intermission.” Bernard of Clairvaux, “Sermons on the Song of Songs,” 130-131. See also Gerson, “The Mountain of Contemplation,” 106-107, 108-109; Gerson, “On Mystical Theology: The Second and Practical Treatise,” 309, 323.
with this sentiment, Reformed Puritans such as Flavel commonly asked their readers to both set aside time during the day for private devotions and persevere in their activities regardless of failing to see results. Yet could Flavel’s recommendation that people “dig” for the “rich vein” of God’s presence actually help people encounter ecstatic experiences? In addition to providing consistent opportunities for people to do the concentrative techniques described earlier and encouragement to look past defeat, such advice may have helped persons enter into ecstatic experiences by simply increasing the time for a person to “savour”—i.e., mentally process—what was happening to his or her body. When people rush through activities they rarely have opportunity to notice

241 Having considerable confidence in God’s willingness to operate through rituals enhanced by the aforementioned “interior contemplative efforts,” Flavel called on his readers to “resolve to dwell” in “humble” performance of religious activities until they encountered “sensible communion” with God. Flavel, *A Saint Indeed*, 58, 89, 91; Flavel, *England’s Duty*, 234, 235, 240, 253, 261, 262, 263-264. [N]ever let me take my leave of a duty,” exclaimed Flavel, “until mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.” Flavel, *A Saint Indeed*, 58. Indeed, perhaps hoping to provide incentive to impatient practitioners, Flavel encouraged persons to “dig for golden ore [of divine contact] . . . till at last they hit upon the rich vein . . . . [that allows them to] dwell and abide there with delight and constancy.” Flavel, *A Saint Indeed*, 57.


242 Flavel, *A Saint Indeed*, 57.

everything going on around them; however, by taking time to “savour” sensations, it is possible to amplify the duration and “intensity” of experiences of “pleasure.” As such, if the “internal” sensations accessible to a practitioner during religious activities were of a subtle variety (as was seemingly typical in Reformed Puritan society, see above), it is possible that taking time to patiently pay attention to the task of the religious activity would heighten the probability that the person would recognize, interpret and take delight in what he or she believed to be ecstatic experiences. In other words, by engaging religious activities through the “interior contemplative effort” of patient perseverance, persons were more likely to notice the subtle changes in their physiology that could be indicative of “numinous experience” in Reformed Puritan culture.

**Bringing Flavel’s Traditional “Interior Contemplative Efforts” Together**

Having outlined Flavel’s advice on “interior contemplative efforts,” it is useful momentarily to consider how persons who incorporated such techniques may have

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245 Bryant, “Savouring Beliefs Inventory (SBI),” 176-177.


encountered experiences during religious activities. Presuming a person follows all of the “interior contemplative efforts” recommended by Flavel, he or she will be: in a heightened state of biological apprehension, “cognitively primed” in “liminal” emotions of “abasement” before God’s “majestas,” environmentally fine-tuned to normal sensations immediately present and readily capable of magnifying encountered sensations through “savouring.” In short, persons who applied Flavel’s “interior contemplative efforts” to their religious activities were both sensually vigilant to the unusual (i.e., in a state of alertness; attentive to any physiological changes) and emotionally “liminal” through debasement. Clearly these were not the effects of “numinous experience”


desired by Reformed Puritans; however, such preparations may have established the groundwork for an ecstatic event to occur in manner that would be noticeable and interpretable for participants in religious activities. As mentioned earlier, presuming that Flavel’s “interior contemplative efforts” were successful in driving persons to “humility” during religious activities, theoretically all that would be needed for creating noticeably blissful, “low-arousal” experiences were stimuli capable of reacting with the “liminal” emotions of debasement already “primed” to evoke pleasant emotionally ecstatic states; an element—perhaps instigated or impressed on the mind by the Holy Spirit—that when introduced to the consciousness under certain “cognitive” constraints had the potential of being interpreted in a manner that incited blissful “fascinans” or “communitas.” Known examples of such stimuli include either subject matter that can

110-114; House, Deyne and Zhong, “Too Impatient to Smell the Roses,” 1, 2, 6; Bryant, “Savouring Beliefs Inventory (SBI),” 176-177.


be momentarily interpreted as evidence of God’s love or participation in ideals of social “equality.” (see Appendix B). 254 Fortunately, such stimuli can easily be found in the types of religious activities in which Flavel expected his readers to apply “interior contemplative efforts.” 255

**Evaluating the Functionality of Flavel’s Traditional “Interior Contemplative Efforts”**

By showing that religious activities in Reformed Puritan culture were capable of moving persons to pleasant and safe sensations, it is possible to show that Flavel’s traditional directions on “interior contemplative efforts” were “efficacious” in helping his readers notice culturally appropriate “numinous” sensations during the regular course of Reformed Puritan devotion. 256 Specifically, this paper will evaluate Flavel’s traditional “interior contemplative efforts” by examining how they may have functioned in both ecclesiastical and domestic activities. 257

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Application of “Interior Contemplative Efforts” in Ecclesiastical Activities

Were “interior contemplative efforts” useful for detecting and interpreting “numinous experiences” during Reformed Puritan worship? The Reformed Puritan Church contained a number of ecclesiastical activities capable of helping to facilitate pleasant and safe sensations. For instance, by creating a sense of fellowship in which “the blurring of distinction between self and other . . .” became possible, participation in the Lord’s Supper could evoke the emotional state of “normative communitas.” Furthermore, if Stephen Richard Turley is correct in his Great Awakening sermon analysis, it is possible that some persons in Reformed Puritan culture encountered “normative communitas” through publically merging their “identities” with common experiences discussed within the message. In addition to these methods of eliciting “normative communitas,” Reformed Puritan worship services also contained a number of means through which the emotional state of “fascinans” could arise. In addressing


God for assistance or thanks, congregational prayers synthesized elements of *salvatio* and parental “*majestas*” to create conditions suitable for exciting “*fascinans*” on “the love of God.”263 Similarly, by repeatedly calling attention toward Christ’s willingness to bestow “grace” upon persons that God allowed to “hear,” Reformed Puritan pastors constructed sermons that brought forward imagery of God’s redeeming power and awesome love to excite “*fascinans*” amongst their congregants.264 As shown in Appendix B, both “normative *communitas*” and “*fascinans*” were capable of producing the variety of ecstasy that Reformed Puritans associated with divine presence.265 Hence, by making persons aware of theological matters and their surroundings, it is possible that Flavel’s “interior contemplative efforts” may have helped some persons experience the subtle encounters of ecstasy left by these emotional states.266 Having said this, since publically accessible ecclesiastical activities offer guided experiences of these emotional states, it is quite possible that Reformed Puritans were capable of discovering ecstatic sensations without resorting to the use of “interior contemplative efforts.”267 According to


Rappaport, “in communitarian ritual the . . . requisite to successful vision quest or meditation are regulated by the compelling characteristics of ritual itself, its tempos, its repetitiveness, its unison, its strangeness, that drive many, or even most participants from mundane consciousness into numinous experience.”

Therefore, unless Flavel’s readers were attending churches with either mundane pastors or unexcitable congregations, this paper believes that Flavel’s “interior contemplative efforts” likely had little effect on whether people encountered socially acceptable ecstatic experiences while participating in ecclesiastical activities.

Using “Interior Contemplative Efforts” During Solitary Domestic Religious Activities

Although it is doubtful that Flavel’s “interior contemplative efforts” had a strong impact on helping persons enter into “numinous experiences” during ecclesiastical rituals, they may have been significantly useful to persons during solitary domestic religious activities. Unlike ecclesiastical rituals, “solitary” religious activities require a considerably higher degree of personal attention to achieve ecstatic encounters. Not only is achieving an elevated emotional state through “communitas” virtually impossible in isolation, there are rarely circumstances in solitary settings where persons are guided

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271 Whereas “communitarian rituals” only require submission to the ethos of a group, Rappaport claims that “trained and disciplined individuals can achieve numinous states in meditation . . . [with] extraordinary spiritual sensitivity, or the special preparations and exertions . . .” Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, 380.
into elevated emotional states of “fascinans.” Instead, the crux of responsibility for exciting ecstatic emotional states in isolation lies principally on the individual and his or her willingness to find God through the activity. Fortunately, in what appears to be an effect of having had roots in monastic mysticism, it is in solitary religious practice that Flavel’s “interior contemplative efforts” seemed truly to help foster socially acceptable ecstatic experiences of God’s presence. Specifically, it is possible to identify two methods by which Flavel’s “interior contemplative efforts” helped persons enter into ecstatic experiences: namely, the manner in which they helped persons interpret stimuli encountered during religious activities and their use in highlighting sensations that would otherwise go unnoticed.

Narrowing interpretation of impending stimuli through self-imposed “liminal” constraints of debasement before God, persons who employed Flavel’s “interior contemplative efforts” were well prepared for entering into emotional states of

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“fascinans” through solitary religious activities. While isolated Reformed Puritan religious behaviour was predominantly “psychological” in nature, their solitary rituals were capable of introducing more stimuli to participants than may be readily apparent on the surface. Often these stimuli may be found in the textual content of the ritual. For instance, as Otto has alluded towards in his analysis of the Lord’s Prayer, common vocabulary used in Christian prayers—e.g., words reminiscent of divine favour such as “Father” or phrases involving “salvation”—had the potential to awaken “fascinans” on the topic of God’s love when Reformed Puritans reflected upon them from the perspective of having no intrinsic entitlement to such honour. Similarly, as is clear from the degree to which Reformed Puritans quoted scripture on the matter of how encountering “grace” leads persons to “heavenly delight,” it would appear that they believed the Bible contained a number of “salvation” passages that could be juxtaposed against a person’s own self-view of worthlessness to incite strong appreciation of God’s love (i.e., “fascinans”) to an undeserving humanity. Other stimuli had their origins in imaginative faculties. Although it was normal in Reformed Puritan culture to begin


277 Hambrick-Stowe claims that in Reformed Puritan culture, “[p]rayer was a human experience, described in psychological terms, though spiritual in nature.” Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, quote from 179, see also 156-157.


“meditation” by recalling a theological topic inspired from earlier “reading,” the subject matter encountered during the religious activity was often provoked by personal memories and experiences.\textsuperscript{281} As Reformed Puritans allowed their minds to wander across various religious topics of “providence,” they likely reacted towards recollected “imaginary stimuli” as though they were “‘real’ stimuli”;\textsuperscript{282} in this manner, “memories” capable of being interpreted as instances of divine “love” may have invoked “\textit{fascinans}” among persons who had momentarily adopted a stance of “humility” towards God.\textsuperscript{283} Therefore, by providing an interpretive framework that highlighted “self-abasement” in God’s presence, Flavel’s “interior contemplative efforts” were plausibly “efficacious” in helping persons encounter pleasant and safe sensations through “\textit{fascinans}” during solitary domestic religious activities (see Appendix B).\textsuperscript{284} Flavel’s traditional “interior contemplative efforts” were also useful in solitary religious activities as they helped people pay attention to physiological sensations that typically go unnoticed.\textsuperscript{285} Since emotions in solitary religious practice were drawn


\textsuperscript{285} Flavel, \textit{England’s Duty}, 236, 239-240, 254, 261; Flavel, \textit{A Saint Indeed}, 12-14, 15-17, 54-55, 58, 89, 91; Huron, \textit{Sweet Anticipation}, 2, 3-4, 5, 6, 9-10, 11; Shuman, “The Psychophysiological Model of Meditation
through a person’s own willingness to participate in his or her religious activities, it is quite possible that a high degree of variance would occur in regards to heights of emotional ecstasy obtained in this manner. As such, since the experiences encountered in this manner possibly had a range of “low-arousal” characteristics, they likely required some level of “absorption” to be noticed by participants. Fortunately, by using the sensory heightening techniques offered by Flavel, even the most subtle of these emotional changes could have been detected in the physiological conditions of their readers.

Summary of Flavel’s Traditional Teachings on Mystical Piety

Hence, to summarize thus far, Flavel offered his readers distinctive behavioural advice that may have helped them enter into ecstatic experiences that were seen as

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socially normative in his social circle.²⁸⁹ Hoping to help people enter into these non-revelatory, pleasant and safe pneuma-physiological sensations, Flavel recommended that persons approach Christian “ordinances” with “interactive mindsets,” “concentration,” “controlled environments” and “patient perseverance.”²⁹⁰ Having outlined the basic “efficacy” of this common core of “interior contemplative efforts” in solitary religious devotion, this paper is now in a proper position to show how Flavel expanded upon these techniques to develop and promote a series of teachings on the topic of nature-based meditational “walks.”²⁹¹


Chapter 2: The Forgotten Genius of Flavel’s Nature-Based Mysticism

In addition to providing teachable techniques that were helpful in facilitating “numinous experiences” during religious activities, Flavel drew on the theological foundations laid down by his predecessors on the topic that Lane calls “nature as a school of desire” or “colloquy with the creatures” to create a mystical practice of nature-based meditational “walks.”

The history of the Church has witnessed several attempts to integrate elements of the natural-world into Christian spirituality. Belonging to a group of Reformed Puritans who were intent on helping people recognize God’s teachings and presence in nature, Flavel wrote a well-received book on the topic of *Husbandry Spiritualized* that presented nature as a means for ecstatically finding God. Although most of the content in this book simply used the art of farming to illustrate

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theological concepts, several of the letters and meditations found at the introduction and conclusion of the work are illustrative of an innovative ecological form of spirituality seemingly developed or at least recovered by Flavel.²⁹⁶ Essentially treating interactions with nature as “sermons” or scriptures written by God, Flavel encouraged people to seek ecstatic experiences of God while they approached wildlife (i.e., plants, animals, ecological objects) to meditate during common strolls in the countryside.²⁹⁷ Illustrating the usefulness of this technique with several personal examples, Flavel provided the intellectual basis for encouraging his readers to engage behaviourally in a kind of nature-based piety.²⁹⁸

The Theological Foundations of Flavel’s Nature-Based Mysticism

To establish the historical context of Flavel’s innovations in ecological spirituality it will be useful to examine briefly how a nature-based piety tradition evolved within the Church at large. In particular, through discussing the development of nature-based spirituality both prior to and after the rise of Reformed Puritanism, it will be possible to show how early ideas on the role of nature in Christianity merged under the banner of


Reformed Puritanism to construct a unique piety that located “transcendent” experiences of God during the observation of the natural-world. Furthermore, by illustrating the way that other Reformed Puritans practiced these nature-based mystical innovations, this paper will set the stage for discussing Flavel’s role as a contributor and transmitter of nature-based piety.

At least two functional purposes of nature can be identified in Christian thought prior to the development of Reformed Puritanism: namely, the enhancement of the philosophical school that Lane calls “colloquy with the creatures” and the presentation of calming outdoor spaces for meditation. Shown by Lane to be traceable throughout Church History from Biblical times to the mystical writings of Bonaventure and John Calvin, “colloquy with the creatures” was a method that provided theological insights by encouraging persons to observe God’s creation as an avenue for learning about its creator. Likewise, having Biblical roots and a long history in the Church, the

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302 The value of “colloquy with the creatures” persisted well past the rediscovery of Aristotelianism natural-sciences. Lane, *Ravished By Beauty*, 180-181; Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought: From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 239, 241, 249-253; Chidester, *Christianity: A Global History*, 227. From the perspective of Bonaventure, there are “traces” of God’s character left on created works that may be discovered by “contemplation” on them. Bonaventure, *The Mind’s Road to God*, 15-16 [1.2], 17 [1.9-1.10], 19 [1.15], 20-21 [2.1-2.4], 22 [2.7-2.8], 24 [2.11-2.13]. Recognizing the value of such insights for learning about God, Calvin retained this element in the *Institutes*
“wilderness” has often been sought for isolation while searching for God. It is difficult to ascertain whether anyone had attempted to merge these two functions of nature prior to the Protestant Reformation; however, it is perhaps noteworthy that Gerson recommended that persons meditate in the wilderness as he believed that soothing nature-sounds might help certain people focus on God. In any case, during the seventeenth-century a set of Reformed Puritan writings emerged that offered a synthesis of these two purposes of nature to evoke a form of nature-based mystical piety.

Somewhat blending earlier traditions in response to new means of encountering the “wilderness” (viz., through pilgrimage and empirical science), seventeenth-century Reformed Puritans sought methods of integrating direct experience of the natural-world into their religious activities to enhance the ways that they encountered God. As an early proponent of this school of thought, Baxter wrote:

\* of the Christian Religion. Calvin, *Institutes of The Christian Religion*, 1.5.1-1.5.2; Lane, *Ravished By Beauty*, 68-69, 180-181. It is noteworthy that Lane believes that Reformed Puritans such as Baxter and Edwards were also affected by “colloquy with the creatures.” Lane, *Ravished By Beauty*, 180-181. See also Bernard of Clairvaux, “Letter CVI: To Magister Henry Murdach,” 353; Job 12:7-11, 36:26-37:23.


What a deal of the majesty of the great Creator doth shine in the face of this fabric of the world! Surely his works are great and admirable, sought out of them that have pleasure therein . . . . What excellency in every plant we see! in the beauty of flowers! in the nature, diversity, and use of herbs! in fruits, in roots, in minerals, and what not! but especially, if we look to the greater work: if we consider the whole body of this earth, and its creatures, and inhabitants; the ocean of waters, with its motions and dimensions, the variation of the seasons, and of the face of the earth . . . what wonderful excellency they contain . . . . When thou walkest forth in the evening, look upon the stars, in what number they bespangle the firmament; if in the day time, look up to the glorious sun; view the wide expanded heavens, and say to thyself, [w]hat glory is in the least of yonder stars! What a vast, what a resplendent body hath yonder moon, and every planet! What an inconceivable glory hath the sun! Why, all this is nothing to the glory of heaven. Yonder sun must there be laid aside as useless . . . [it] is but darkness to the lustre of my Father's house . . . . This whole earth is but my Father's footstool; this thunder is nothing to his dreadful voice; these winds are nothing to the breath of his mouth; so much wisdom and power as appear in these; so much and far more greatness, and goodness, and delight, shall I enjoy in the actual fruition of God.  

In this written piece where Baxter skilfully led the reader from “majestas” to “fascinans” by means of the created-world, there are three items to note regarding the author’s view on the role of nature in Christianity:  

1. aligning with earlier traditions on “colloquy with the creatures,” Baxter believed that the natural world could serve as an intellectual basis for theological reflection;  
2. employing the use of sight during strolls outdoors, Baxter claimed that meditation on these matters should be done in direct contact with the natural world;  
3. emphasizing the baseness of the world in comparison to the glory of God’s heavenly realm, Baxter showed that the goal of such nature-based meditation lay

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307 Baxter, *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest*, 244-245.


309 It is noteworthy that Lane already has made this point. Lane, *Ravished By Beauty*, 180-181; Baxter, *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest* 244-245.

310 Baxter, *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest*, 244-245.
in transcending nature *en route* to God.\(^{311}\) Similarly, Ambrose echoed Baxter in advising his readers that:

Occasional Meditation ariseth from such Things as God in his Providence offers to our Eyes, Ears, or Senses: Examples of this sort are infinite . . . [u]pon sight of the Morning-sky, meditate, That if one Sun make so bright a Morning, what a shining Morning will that be, which Christ the Sun of Righteousness shall appear, attended with all his bright Angels, Archangels, Cherubims, Seraphims, Bodies and Souls of Saints? When there shall be as many Suns on a Day, as there are Stars on a bright Winter's Night.\(^{312}\)

Again the writer leans toward meditating on empirical matters that are immediately sensible to the participant in an effort to drive the person towards imagining how dull the world is in comparison to the “*majestas*” of the heavenly realm.\(^{313}\) Indeed, it is striking how both authors focus on using the natural-world as a means of generating “*fascinans*” through means of comparative “transcendence.”\(^{314}\) Whereas Bonaventure sought to understand God by studying the intricacies of God’s created world, both Baxter and Ambrose emphasized that the primary use of meditating on nature lay with learning that God is grander than His or Her creation.\(^{315}\) Yet it should be noted that Ambrose’s piety did not entirely mirror that of Baxter. Specifically, Ambrose’s environmental “*praxis*” carried a distinctively “eremitical” flavour that, while unique amongst his Reformed

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\(^{311}\) It is notable that this form of “transcendence” fits well with David Cornick’s summary of “Reformed Spirituality.” Cornick, “Reformed Spirituality,” 533. See also Baxter, *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest*, 244-245.

\(^{312}\) Ambrose, *Media*, 133


Puritan peers, lent an aurora of credibility to the action of purposefully seeking out God in the wilderness.\textsuperscript{316}

Ambrose had a considerable impact on normalizing the action of going to the “wilderness” to meditate in Reformed Puritanism.\textsuperscript{317} Introducing Ambrose as “[l]ess known than Flavel, but somewhat akin to him in natural and spiritual tastes,” John Stoughton describes Ambrose’s “work[s]” as being “full of pleasant illustrations, drawn from scenes of nature amidst which he delighted to ramble, especially ‘the sweet woods of Widdicre’ on the banks of the Darwen, where in a little hut, to which he annually retired, this Puritan hermit, for the time, spent hour after hour in meditation and prayer.”\textsuperscript{318} Indeed, as Schwanda has shown through his unparalleled analysis of Ambrose’s pious writings, Ambrose had a strong propensity for retreating into “wilderness” regions to conduct religious activities.\textsuperscript{319} In the same vein of thought as Gerson, it would appear that Ambrose found motivation to worship God while listening to the sounds of “melodious birds” during his ventures into the wild.\textsuperscript{320} On these bases, Schwanda writes that Ambrose realized “that nature provided far more than just a setting

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\textsuperscript{319} Schwanda, “Soul Recreation: Spiritual Marriage and Ravishment in the Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Isaac Ambrose,” 156, 157; Ambrose, \textit{Media}, 49-50;

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for his retreat, it also served actually to encourage and inspire his experience of God.”

As such, in renewing earlier precedents for going to the “wilderness” to meditate and find God, Ambrose arranged elements of a nature-based piety in a manner that could allow persons more easily to designate certain encounters with nature as having spiritual significance. Hence, with the progression of Reformed Puritan thought moving towards wider acceptance of the natural-world as something that could be ventured into and integrated with meditational piety, it makes sense that going directly to ecological settings for sensual inspiration and theological interpretation emerged as a theme in Flavel’s *Husbandry Spiritualized*.

**Innovations in Flavel’s *Husbandry Spiritualized***

Written in the Reformed Puritan genre that Hambrick-Stowe calls “spiritualizing the creatures,” Flavel’s *Husbandry Spiritualized* made subtle changes to Reformed Puritan ecology-based meditation as a means of helping persons ecstatically experience God while interacting with the natural-world. Composed with inspiration from Baxter and Ambrose during Flavel’s self-imposed exile to the countryside after the British “Act of Uniformity” of 1662, *Husbandry Spiritualized* (1669) is a collection of teachings,

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322 Meyendorff, St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality, 5-6, 8, 11-12, 14; Hughes, *Church in Early Irish Society*, 12-14; Schwanda, “Soul Recreation: Spiritual Marriage and Ravishment in the Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Isaac Ambrose,” 156, 157; Gerson, “On Mystical Theology: The Second and Practical Treatise,” 314-316; Mark 1:12-13; 1 Kings 19:3-15


“poems” and “reflections” drawn from Flavel’s newfound environmental experiences that were intended to help farmers and landowners enrich their devotion to God through daily activities associated with agriculture.\textsuperscript{325} “May you but learn that lesson,” wrote Flavel in an introductory letter, “which is the general scope and design of this book, viz. How to walk with God from day to day, and make the several objects you behold, \textit{scalae et alae}, wings and ladders to mount your souls nearer to him, who is the centre of all blessed spirits.”\textsuperscript{326} In accordance with this particular agenda, the work did not shy away from using the agricultural work-ethic or patterns of the natural-world to convey established theological principles and practices (e.g., “interior contemplative efforts”) to its audience.\textsuperscript{327} Yet despite being mostly concerned with illustrating time-honoured theology and traditions, the work also contained a number of peripheral writings that utilized “colloquy with the creatures” to put forward a modified version of the meditational nature-based piety described above.\textsuperscript{328} Specifically, while earlier Reformed Puritan writings had encouraged persons to meditate on how God transcended nature to gain ecstatic experiences, Flavel’s \textit{Husbandry Spiritualized} developed a piety that, in addition to continuing this tradition, also endorsed finding ecstatic experiences of God.
through meditation of God’s imprints found in nature itself. To make this addition that would effectively restore Bonaventurian thought for the purpose of ecstatic nature-based mysticism, Flavel employed both theological and testimonial evidence in support of his position. In particular, the theological argument presented by Flavel primarily consisted of proving that persons who engage in “colloquy with the creatures” may incorporate “interior contemplative efforts” for “communion with God” as the practice carries the distinction of being a historically valid Biblical “ordinance.” Furthermore, as a means of demonstrating to his readers that such natural devotion could enrich their encounters with God, Flavel provided testimony on several “numinous experiences” that he discovered after applying “interior contemplative efforts” to his nature-based meditational “walks.”

Proving that Communications with Nature are Ordinances of God

Central to Flavel’s theological argument in support of finding ecstatic experiences of God through contact with nature was a claim that the act of doing “colloquy with the creatures” was a historically valid Biblical “ordinance.” Presenting this goal explicitly during a description of his nature-based reflections in “An Epistle to the Intelligent


Country Reader,” Flavel stated that “I must acknowledge, to the praise of God, that I have found some of those (which possibly some of my readers will call the slightest, and most trifling subjects of meditation) to be the ordinances for instruction, caution, and consolation to my own soul; yea, I have found such a degree of comfort in these things, that it has greatly tended to endear a country life to me (emphasis is mine).” In other words, finding the contemplative topic of “nature” to be mentally “stimulating,” Flavel argued that God instituted “colloquy with the creatures” for the same purposes of idea transmission normally attributed to sermons: namely, to lead persons to learn theology, engage dimensions of holiness and, through God’s help in the aforementioned, obtain ecstatic divine “comfort.” Such distinction is significant because it provides a rationale for employing behavioural techniques identifiable as “interior contemplative efforts” for ecstasy facilitation during nature-based “meditations.” Basically, if Flavel and his peers could reliably assert that all “ordinances” were created by God to be used in conjunction with “interior contemplative efforts” for the purpose of providing people with “sensible communion” of God’s “comforting” presence and if “colloquy with the creatures” was an “ordination” capable of providing intellectual stimuli akin to those

334 Flavel, Husbandsry Spiritualized, 22.

335 Flavel, Husbardsy Spiritualized, 22; Lane, Ravished by Beauty, 180; Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 45, 93, 95, 116-119; Cornick, “Reformed Spirituality,” 533-534. See also Ambrose, Media, 22; Flavel, England’s Duty, 233, 236, 244; Martin Bucer, Concerning the True Care of Souls, trans., Peter Beale (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009 [15??]), 69-70, 76-77, 79; Miller, The New England Mind, 404.

336 Flavel, Husbardsy Spiritualized, 9-15, 22; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 89, 91; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 240, 244, 254, 261.

experienced in sermons then it made logical sense to Flavel that “meditations” involving “colloquy with the creatures” could utilize “interior contemplative efforts” as a means of helping persons encounter and sense God’s ecstatic presence. Hence, by proving that “colloquy with the creatures” was an “ordinance,” Flavel could obtain a strong precedent for demonstrating that ecstatic contact with God may be achievable through the use of “interior contemplative efforts” during nature-based meditations in the ecological settings. Of course, before Flavel could demonstrate the practical elements of this thesis, he had to convince his readers that the act of “colloquy with the creatures” was an actual “ordinance.”

338 Lane, Ravished By Beauty, 180-181; Flavel, Husbandry Spiritualized, 9-15, 22; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 91; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 244, 247, 253; Ambrose, Media, 22, 26-27; Ambrose, Looking Unto Jesus, 498-499; Baxter, “Converse with God in Solitude,” 304-306; Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 45, 93, 95.

339 Such use of “interior contemplative efforts” may be considered an implicit argument by Flavel. While Flavel never stated this conclusion so explicitly in Husbandry Spiritualized, Joseph Caryl asserted in an introductory letter to the book that God provides “excellent help . . . to frame and wind up our hearts, for this profitable and delightful duty [of nature meditation].” Joseph Caryl, “To the Christian Reader” Husbandry Spiritualized by John Flavel in Husbandry Spiritualized; or the Heavenly Use of Earthly Things, in Which Husbandmen are Directed to an Excellent Improvement of their Common Employments. Whereunto are added, Occasional Meditations upon Birds, Beasts, Trees, Flowers, &c. Also The Touchstone of Sincerity, ed., J.A. Boswell (Middleton: J. A. Boswell, 1824) 17-18 https://books.google.ca/books?id=EFLTZdmPSTYC (accessed on 22 March 2015); Flavel, Husbandry Spiritualized, 9-15, 22. Furthermore, since Husbandry Spiritualized contains at least three introductory devotions related to teaching people how to use “interior contemplative efforts” (e.g., patient perseverance [44, 47, 49, 51-55, 62, 75, 78], concentration [45-46, 48. 78-81]) as a means of remedying “sleepy duties,” it is possible that Flavel either believed that the truth of this conclusion was sufficiently self-evident to the reader without requiring further explanation or that adding additional details to the matter would distort the synchrony of the work in other regards; this view is enhanced by the fact that Flavel used the word “meditation”—a readily identifiable “ordinance”—to describe the act of “colloquy with the creatures.” Flavel, Husbandry Spiritualized, 9-15, 22, 43-49, 51-55, 62, 75, 78-81, 263; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 15-16, 17-18, 54-56, 89, 91; Flavel, England’s Duty, 226, 227, 236, 240, 244, 247, 253; Lane, Ravished By Beauty, 180-181.

340 Flavel, Husbandry Spiritualized, 9-15, 22; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 240, 247, 253; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 91; Ambrose, Media, 22; Baxter, “Converse with God in Solitude,” 304-306; Lane, Ravished by Beauty, 180.

341 Lane, Ravished By Beauty, 180-181; Flavel, Husbandry Spiritualized, 14-15, 22; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 240, 247, 253; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 91; Ambrose, Media, 22, 23-26; Baxter, “Converse with God in Solitude,” 304-306.
Proving that “colloquy with the creatures” was an “ordinance” was a delicate matter in Reformed Puritan society. Since it was an unusual, perhaps even radical or idolatrous, idea in Flavel’s culture to use “interior contemplative efforts” to experience God ecstatically outside of activities known to have been performed during the ministry of Jesus Christ, the use of such techniques in nature-based meditational practices required demonstrating that God wanted people to engage in such activities as avenues for “communion.” Therefore, hoping to show that learning about God through nature was an “ordinance,” Flavel referred his readers to both Biblical exegeses and a rather obscure letter by Bernard of Clairvaux.


Due to the prominence of the Bible in Reformed Puritan society, Flavel’s nature-based piety needed proof of Biblical authority that God wanted people to look upon the created-world for divine teaching. Fortunately, in the two decades prior to Flavel’s authorship of *Husbandry Spiritualized*, at least two prominent authors had composed citable exegeses on Job 12:7-8—a passage that instructs the reader to “ask” created-beings for instruction—that were favourably aligned with this position. In his extensive commentary on the Book of Job, Joseph Caryl seemingly reinvented the second chapter of Bonaventure’s *Mind’s Road to God* by arguing that the passage illustrates how God had left traceable imprints of His or Her characteristic design on plants and animals during the creation of the world. Similarly, providing a theological basis for “spiritualizing the creatures,” Thomas Manton suggested that this passage from Job illustrates how persons can use “common objects” to assist “meditation . . . . by viewing the resemblance between them and spiritual matters . . . .” Blending these two ideas together to advance the notion that the natural-world can readily function as a source of knowledge about God for “meditation,” Flavel followed the example of Ralph Austen—whose *Spiritual Use of an Orchard* Flavel had previously endorsed as helpful for

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teaching persons “how to meete with Christ amongst the mirtle [sic] trees”—in highlighting the value of listening to the “creatures” through a juxtaposition of established devotional activities with nature-based reflection.\(^\text{350}\) For instance, in addition to claiming that “the irrational and inanimate, as well as rational creatures . . . preach unto man [sic] the wisdom, power, and goodness of God,” Flavel asserted that it will be:

> an excellent thing would it be for you, to make such holy improvements of all these earthly objects which daily occur to your senses, and cause them to proclaim and preach to you divine and heavenly mysteries . . . . [only sin] can deprive you of the benefits and comforts of those excellent sermons and divinity lectures, which the creatures here offer to preach and read to you. Content not yourselves . . . with that natural sweetness the creatures afford . . . but use them to those spiritual ends you are here directed, and they will yield you a sweetness far transcending that natural sweetness you ever relished in them; and indeed, you never use the creatures as their Lord's, til you come to see your Lord, in and by them (emphasis is mine).\(^\text{351}\)

Take notice of how Flavel’s argument here goes beyond simply learning about God through nature; these lessons carry a notion of sensual contact (e.g., sight) with God that goes above theological insight.\(^\text{352}\) Just as how reading scripture or listening to sermons

\(^\text{350}\) Ralph Austen was a Reformed Puritan who also drew upon Caryl’s interpretation of Job 12:7-8 to endorse learning from “the booke of nature” in addition to “the booke of scripture.” Ralph Austen, *The Spirituall Use of an Orchard, or Garden of Fruit-Trees: Set Forth in Divers Similitudes Between Natural and Spirituall Fruit-Trees, in their Natures, and Ordering, According to Scripture and Experience* (Oxford: Hen Hall, 1657), under “A Preface to the Reader” [146-148]
https://books.google.ca/books?id=fIZEAQAAAMAAJ (accessed on 15 October 2015); J. F. [John Flavel], “To My Deare Friend and Brother in the Lord Mr. R. Austine the Author of The Treatise of Fruit-Trees” in *The Spirituall Use of an Orchard, or Garden of Fruit-Trees: Set Forth in Divers Similitudes Between Natural and Spirituall Fruit-Trees, in their Natures, and Ordering, According to Scripture and Experience* by Ralph Austen, (Oxford: Hen Hall, 1657), [149-150]

\(^\text{351}\) It is likely that this passage was directly inspired by Caryl who stated that “[a]ll creatures have a teaching voyce, they read of divinity Lectures of Divine Providence” and that “[s]o many creatures as are in the world, so many preachers there are in the world, of the power and goodness of God.” Caryl, *An Exposition With Practicall Observations Continued Upon the Eleventh, Twelfth, Thirteenth and Fourteenth Chapters of the Book of Job*, 206, 211. Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 9, 14-15.

can provide persons with “numinous” experiences of supernatural “sweetness” and “comfort” (i.e., words indicating pleasant and safe ecstasy in Reformed Puritan culture; see Appendix A), Flavel argued that God’s “creatures” fulfill the role of divine messengers capable of relating ecstasy-inducing tidings to those who know how to listen properly.353 Indeed, arguing that the purpose of God’s creation is to reveal God, Flavel drew parallels between the use of both scripture and the natural-world as sources for having “communion with God.”354 Of course, while Biblical precedent was necessary for approving nature-based ecstatic practices in Reformed Puritan culture, the only way to ensure social acceptance of these activities was to demonstrate that they had historical precedent in ecclesiastical structure.355 Accordingly, referencing an ancient letter written by Bernard of Clairvaux, Flavel progressed to offer a version of Christian History where nature-based contemplation had held an esteemed position in the piety of the saints.356


354 It should be noted that these assertions were rather controversial; it was a radical claim in Reformed Puritan culture to level the Bible’s exclusive privilege as the only approved revelatory source capable of inspiring “numinous experience[s].” Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, 51-52; Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 14-15; Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 5-7; Rappaport, *Religion and Ritual in the Making of Humanity*, 380. As such, likely recognizing the potential that he had overstepped cultural boundaries in extolling nature to such an esteemed role, Flavel immediately “confess[ed]” following the aforementioned that “the discoveries of God in the word are far more excellent, clear, and powerful . . . [a]nd therein are the unsearchable riches of Christ, or rich discoveries of that grace that hath no footsteps in nature, as the apostle’s expression signifies . . .” Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 15. See also Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 14-15, 68; Flavel, *A Saint Indeed*, 90-91; Flavel, *England’s Duty*, 236, 239-240, 244.

355 This was especially needed due to the presence of literature in Reformed Puritan culture that condemned the “wilderness” as “chaos.” Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, 256-258; Lane, *Ravished By Beauty*, 36-37, 38. See also Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 9-15, 22.

In an attempt to prove that his new form of piety was an ancient devotional practice, Flavel constructed a heritage for ecstatic nature-based meditation by linking it to Bernard of Clairvaux—one of the few Roman Catholic theologians respected in the Reformed Church. Commenting on the difficulty of introducing new rituals into a culture, Bell claims that “[a] ritual that evokes no connection with any tradition is apt to be found anomalous, inauthentic, or unsatisfying by most people.” To provide nature-based piety with such a connection to the past, Flavel appears to have scoured medieval writings for some kind of proof that his ecological ecstatic experiences had ancient precedent. Indeed, citing an obscure letter written by Bernard of Clairvaux to Henry Murdach, Flavel wrote “believe me (saith contemplative Bernard) thou shalt find more in woods, than in a corner; stones and trees will teach thee what thou shalt not hear from learned doctors.” It is intriguing that Flavel would choose this particular passage to historically support his argument. From one perspective, by contrasting the dullness of the “closet” (i.e., the “corner”) with the vibrancy of the outside world, the passage imaginatively presents natural objects as better preachers than some educated pastors; perhaps one may venture to suggest that the ecological settings are shown to be just as

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reliable for worship as any church.\textsuperscript{362} Adversely, the citation does not source from a particularly well known work of Bernard of Clairvaux; only an expert on Bernardian mysticism could possibly have understood the significance, or even the location, of this quote in the seventeenth-century.\textsuperscript{363} Yet supposing that a scholar bothered to comb through Bernard’s tomes in pursuit of Flavel’s thought-process, he or she would encounter a description of wilderness-based “piety” taken “from one who has tried . . . [to] draw honey from the rock and oil from the hardest flint.”\textsuperscript{364} Hoping to inspire his friend to “taste . . . that bread with which Jerusalem is satisfied . . .” (i.e., Christ), the Abbot of Clairvaux wrote about his positive experiences in seeking “loaves . . . freshly drawn from the oven . . .” of God’s natural-world.\textsuperscript{365} In other words, Flavel’s inquisitive critics would discover that Bernard of Clairvaux had also endorsed finding sensationalist experiences of God by interacting with nature.\textsuperscript{366} Indeed, while Bernard of Clairvaux did not present the reader with a methodology for seeking out nature-based ecstatic experiences, he did seem to believe that by sharing such experiences with others he could convince them to undertake similar searches for themselves.\textsuperscript{367} Interestingly, in choosing to share his personal experiences from venturing out to mediate during “walks” through


the countryside, Flavel employed a similar method for transmitting his own ideas on
nature-based piety.  

A Behavioural Analysis of Flavel’s Ecological Meditations

Through examining how Flavel described his manner of approaching God while
walking amidst the wooded grooves and fields of the countryside, it will be become
apparent that he utilized “interior contemplative efforts” to search for ecstatic experiences
through direct encounters with the natural-world.  

Due to the manner in which in which Husbandry Spiritualized is organized, this analysis will first cover relevant
selections written in “An Epistle to the Intelligent Country Reader” followed by
gleanings taken from Flavel’s “Occasional Meditations.”  

Offering a synthesis of the suitable information presented in these documents, this paper hopes to present the
“ritualized” manner in which Flavel behaved during his nature-based meditational
walks.

Presenting the basic ritual structure that he employed for engaging God during
strolls in the countryside, Flavel’s “Epistle to the Intelligent Country Reader” introduced
how he incorporated “interior contemplative efforts” into ecology-based devotional
practices.  

Reflecting on time spent in “meditation” while wandering outside his

368 Flavel, Husbandry Spiritualized, 22, 269-270, 283-284; Bernard of Clairvaux, “Letter CVI: To
Magister Henry Murdach,” 352-353.

369 Flavel, Husbandry Spiritualized, 22, 269-270, 275-276, 283-284, 293-294; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 54-
56, 58, 89, 90-91; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 240, 244, 256, 261.


371 For a discussion on “ritualizing,” see Grimes, Beginnings in Ritual Studies, 60-62. Flavel, Husbandry

372 Flavel, Husbandry Spiritualized, 22; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 54-56, 58, 89-91; Flavel, England’s Duty,
236, 240, 244, 254, 261
“solitary country dwelling,” Flavel wrote “I hope none will envy me these innocent delights, which I made of my lonely walks, whereby the Lord sweetened my solitudes there.”\(^373\) A number of behavioural observations may be derived from this statement. By emphasizing the isolation present during his “lonely walks,” Flavel evoked the privacy of the “closet” used for secret devotions in Reformed Puritan society.\(^374\) Although Flavel’s meditations occurred in open fields, he established a closed “sacred place” on his “walks” by remaining hidden from the sight, sound and influence of other humans.\(^375\) Yet set against this isolation is a sense that Flavel occasionally met God as a companion along his route; it is in these divine interactions that Flavel claims to have been granted “sweetened” ecstasy to help remedy his feelings of social isolation.\(^376\) As such, weaving together the ecstatic benefits of establishing “controlled environments” and “interactive mindsets” during “walks” in the ecological settings, Flavel subtly drew the reader into learning how “interior contemplative efforts” might be used to encounter “numinous experience[s]” through direct meditation on teachings gleaned from the natural-world.\(^377\) Indeed, by choosing to reminisce on the manner in which he entered into ecstasy during

\(^{373}\) Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 22.


\(^{376}\) Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 22.


Documenting the devotional experiences that Flavel encountered during his walks in the countryside, “Occasional Meditations”—a series of reflections drawn from both domestic and ecological settings—show how Flavel interacted with natural-environments to find direct, ecstatic experiences of Christ. Trusting that God would highlight certain topics to devotees during meditational “walks” for “instruction,” Flavel’s basic methodology in drafting these meditations involved searching for some kind of “metaphorical” analogy in the natural-world that reminded him of a previously learned theological concept. Describing the playfulness of this technique, Miller stated that “Flavel's method was allegory turned inside out: instead of starting with abstract propositions . . ., he commenced from the outside, taking some observable fact . . . and by analyzing it as though it were already the given allegory, extracted from it the abstraction.” Flavel could do this because he saw his “walks” as having “ritual” significance as religious “ordinances.” Cultural Anthropologist Clifford Geertz once observed that “it is in ritual—that is, consecrated behaviour—that . . . the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn

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out to be the same world . . .”\textsuperscript{383} Using his imaginative capacities as a trained theologian to help him see the “world” in a particular concentrative “frame,” various observed stimuli in Flavel’s ecological environments took on supernatural meaning as Flavel toyed with their “performances” in his mind.\textsuperscript{384} Indeed, by showing how Flavel utilized “interior contemplative efforts” during these “meditations” to create conditions suitable for facilitating “sweet” ecstatic experiences, this paper will obtain proof that Flavel may have taught his readers certain behavioural methods for finding God through nature.\textsuperscript{385}

Containing first-hand testimony of how he conducted meditational “walks,” Flavel’s “Occasional Meditations” may be examined to reveal devotional techniques that his readers possibly learnt through reading such material.\textsuperscript{386} Specifically, with regards to Flavel’s manner of engaging ecological settings as a source for divine inspiration, four meditations emerge as particularly illustrative of the way that Flavel behaved and felt during his meditational “walks” in ecological settings: namely, his rescue of a “blackbird” from a “hawk,” his reflections on “two bird nests,” his considerations on a “worm” and his sight of a deer trying to escape a pack of hunting dogs.\textsuperscript{387} In pursuit of locating Flavel’s manner of ecstatically finding God through these nature-based walks,

\textsuperscript{383} Geertz, \textit{The Interpretation of Culture}, 112.


this paper will examine each of these meditations independently before offering some brief comparative thoughts. ⁴⁸⁸

**Remembering Christ’s Gift of Salvation by Rescuing a Distressed Bird**

During one of his “walks” in the countryside, Flavel found divine inspiration through helping a distressed bird that had obtained “sanctuary in a bush from a pursuing Hawk.” ⁴³⁸⁹ Recounting the incident, Flavel wrote that:

> When I saw how hardly the poor bird was put to it to save herself from her enemy, who hovered just over the bush in which she was fluttering and squeaking, I could not but hasten to relieve her, pity and succour being a debt due to the distressed, which, when I had done, the bird would not depart from the bush, though her enemy was gone. This act of kindness was abundantly repaid by this meditation, with which I returned to my walk. My soul, like this bird, was once distressed, pursued, yea, seized by Satan, who had certainly made a prey of it, had not Jesus Christ been a sanctuary to it in that hour of danger. How ready did I find him to receive my poor soul into his protection! Then he did he make good that sweet promise to my experience, ‘Those who come unto me, I will in no wise cast out’. . . . Blessed Jesus! how should I love and praise thee, glorify and admire thee, for that great salvation thou hast wrought for me? . . . . Would not this scared bird be flushed out of the bush that secured her, though I had chased away her enemy? And wilt thou, O my soul, ever be enticed or scared from Christ thy refuge? O let this for ever engage thee to keep close to Christ . . . ⁴³⁹⁰

Playfully engaging in childlike heroics on a rather trivial matter, Flavel momentarily interrupted his meditational “walk” to rescue a wild bird taking shelter from its predator in a shrub. ⁴³⁹¹ The event left a “numinous” impression on Flavel. ⁴³⁹² Imposing memories

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of his conversion experience onto the wild bird’s refusal to leave the bush, Flavel became elated by recalling the “sweet” feelings of internal security that had arisen through his decision to trust in the “grace” offered by Christ to save him from the “wrath” (i.e., “tremendum”) of God.\footnote{Flavel, \textit{Husbandry Spiritualized}, 269-270; Otto, \textit{The Idea of the Holy}, 12-13, 19-20; Hambrick-Stowe, \textit{The Practice of Piety}, 44-45; Melancthon, “Loci Communes Theologici,” 87-89, 92.} This transition from “action” to meditation during the context of Flavel’s ordained “walk” is reminiscent Geertz’s observation on “ritual.”\footnote{Flavel, \textit{Husbandry Spiritualized}, 22, 269-270; Geertz, \textit{The Interpretation of Cultures}, 112; Bell, \textit{Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions}, 76-77, 82.} Indeed, demonstrating extraordinary theological creativity in being able to synthesize theology with observed “reality,” Flavel managed see the permanence of his cosmic identity—manifested here as belonging to God through the Calvinist doctrine known as “perseverance of the saints”—reflected through a comparatively obscure situation in the natural-world.\footnote{Flavel, \textit{Husbandry Spiritualized}, 22, 269-270; Synod of Dortrecht, 	extit{Synod of Dort} (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library [1619]), 5.3 [24] http://www.ccel.org/ccel/anonymous/canonsfordort.pdf (accessed on 27 October 2015); Geertz, \textit{The Interpretation of Cultures}, 112.} In other words, by narrating the events of his “ritualized” stroll in this manner, Flavel presented the reader with a short description of the kind of “sweet” findings that he occasionally stumbled upon during his “lonely walks.”\footnote{Flavel, \textit{Husbandry Spiritualized}, 22, 269-270; Geertz, \textit{The Interpretation of Cultures}, 112; Bell, \textit{Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions}, 82.} Yet by illustrating the discovery of his meditation in a narrative format, Flavel also conveyed some of his devotional techniques to his readers.\footnote{Flavel, \textit{Husbandry Spiritualized}, 22, 269-270.}

By examining Flavel’s bird-rescue meditation from the perspective that he treated the activity as a religious “ordinance,” it is possible to identify the practice of at least
three of the “interior contemplative efforts” described earlier in this paper. First, showing evidence of having become mindful of the space in which he “walk[ed]” with God, Flavel’s detection of the bird struggling in fear indicates that he had become so “habituated” to his ecological surroundings that the noise of a distressed bird could be readily distinguished from the surrounding sounds of nature. Rather than ignoring interference in the natural-world or passively observing wildlife, Flavel immersed his senses in nature-based sensations to help him discover atypical experiences that God might draw to his attention for meditation. Second, although the text does not indicate whether Flavel had engaged in preparatory concentration prior to rescuing the bird, the thought process involved in constructing his meditation reveals adamant use of theological consideration during the exercise. Specifically, Flavel’s decision to implant Satanic imagery on the predatory “hawk” in his meditation seemingly allowed him to focus on the “dread[ful]” and dangerous “tremendum” of God’s judgement on vulnerable souls; this in turn brought Flavel into a state of “fascinans” by considering the manner in which Christ brought loving protection to him. Finally, and perhaps


401 Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 269-270.


most importantly, by explaining that he came across the bird during the time boundaries set by his “walk,” Flavel demonstrated employment of “patient perseverance” as a means of finding inspiration and ecstasy from God. Since coming across an animal in distress is a relatively uncommon experience, readers learnt that Flavel’s meditations on the natural-world were not pre-constructed; he simply made use of whatever caught his attention while walking outdoors. Perhaps Flavel’s efforts to interfere deliberately with the natural processes taking place may even be interpreted as a form of “savouring” ecology; they were a means of allowing him to notice minor details of the event for “reminiscing” upon later. These observations are significant because they show Flavel’s persistence in allowing nature to guide him into both worship and contact with God. Whereas Flavel’s contemporaries primarily sought to “transcend” nature as an intermediate step for completing an *a priori* meditation on the immense greatness of God, Flavel could not find inspiration for constructing a meditation until he had engaged his ecological surroundings sufficiently (i.e., by having compassion on the helpless bird); this means that Flavel needed to “walk” onwards with “patient perseverance” for God to

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404 Since Flavel “returned to . . . [his] walk” after rescuing the bird, the reader learns that the “walk” had been arbitrarily interrupted by the subject matter encountered. Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 22, 269-270;


406 Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 269; House, Deyne and Zhong, “Too Impatient to Smell the Roses,” 1, 2, 6; Bryant, “Savouring Beliefs Inventory (SBI),” 176-177.

407 Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 269; House, Deyne and Zhong, “Too Impatient to Smell the Roses,” 1, 2, 6; Bryant, “Savouring Beliefs Inventory (SBI),” 176-177.

408 Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 22, 269-270.

present an opportune observation to reflect upon.\textsuperscript{410} In other words, through reading Flavel’s text from a behavioural perspective, his reflection on nature is revealed to include a series of instructions primarily drawn from “interior contemplative efforts” that were capable of helping persons learn how to find God in ecological settings.\textsuperscript{411} Showcasing how nature-based “walks” may function as “ordinances” capable of drawing souls to God’s presence, Flavel’s meditation on rescuing a bird had the potential of inspiring new forms of ecological piety in the Church.\textsuperscript{412} Of course, one example of ecological spirituality is not sufficient for demonstrating the foundation of a new pious trend. Fortunately, the application of “interior contemplative efforts” to nature-based “walks” can be further demonstrated in Flavel’s other ecological observations.\textsuperscript{413}

**Finding God’s Providence in a Bird’s Nest**

In a similar vein of thought, Flavel saw reflections of God’s loving providence after applying “interior contemplative efforts” during meditation on the nesting habits of birds.\textsuperscript{414} After taking a moment to note several characteristics that he found “[u]pon the comparing of two birds nests,” Flavel summarily commented that:

\textit{[i]t is pretty to observe the structure and commodiousness of the habitation of these little architects . . . . [h]ow comfortably hath nature provided convenient habitations for the weak and tender young ones, who have warm lodging, and variety of provisions . . . . This trifling}

\textsuperscript{410} Flavel, \textit{Husbandry Spiritualized}, 22, 269-270; Flavel, \textit{A Saint Indeed}, 57, 58.

\textsuperscript{411} Flavel, \textit{Husbandry Spiritualized}, 22, 269-270; Flavel, \textit{A Saint Indeed}, 54-56, 57, 58, 89-91; Flavel, \textit{England’s Duty}, 254, 261, 263.

\textsuperscript{412} Flavel, \textit{Husbandry Spiritualized}, 9-10, 14-15, 22, 269-270.

\textsuperscript{413} Flavel, \textit{Husbandry Spiritualized}, 269-270, 271-272, 275-276, 283-284; Flavel, \textit{A Saint Indeed}, 54-56, 58, 89-91.

\textsuperscript{414} Flavel, \textit{Husbandry Spiritualized}, 22, 275-276; Flavel, \textit{A Saint Indeed}, 54-56, 58, 89-91; Flavel, \textit{England’s Duty}, 247, 261, 263.
object suggests to my thoughts a more excellent and serious contemplation, even the wonderful and unparalleled abasement of Jesus Christ, who form my sake voluntarily submitted himself to a more destitute and neglected state than these birds of the air . . . O melting consideration! that the glorious Son of God . . . should manifest himself in ‘flesh’ . . . never being possessed of a house in this world . . . stooping in this respect to a lower condition than the very birds of the air, and all this for enemies. O melting consideration! that the glorious Son of God . . . should manifest himself in ‘flesh’ . . . never being possessed of a house in this world . . . stooping in this respect to a lower condition than the very birds of the air, and all this for enemies. O let it work both admiration and thankfulness in my soul! my body is better accommodated than the body of my Lord . . .

Before deriving a theological lesson from the “two bird nests,” Flavel took a moment to patiently “savour” the details of the ecological stimuli in that lay in his immediate proximity. Again, seeing his meditational activity to as an “ordinance,” Flavel took advantage of the Geertzian capacity of “ritual” to blend “the world as lived and the world as imagined . . .” Allowing his mind to imagine how it may have felt to grow up as a bird in an ecological environment, Flavel decided that “bird nests” were comfortable homes for baby birds to dwell. Recalling that Jesus had spoken on the nesting habits of birds in comparison to the lack of respite given to “the Son of Man” (Matthew 8:20), Flavel considered the possibility that Christ had lived beneath the minimum standards of living that wild animals—let alone humans—can ordinarily expect to obtain in life. Humbled by the thought that God would suffer less comfort than himself for the sake of saving lesser humanity, Flavel underwent an experience of “melting” ecstasy through contemplating the “fascinans” of God’s love as displayed through the life of Jesus


416 House, Deyne and Zhong, “Too Impatient to Smell the Roses,” 1, 2, 6; Bryant, “Savouring Beliefs Inventory (SBI),” 176-177; Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 275-276; Flavel, *A Saint Indeed*, 12, 24, 58, 89, 91; Flavel, *England’s Duty*, 261, 263.


419 Flavel *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 275-276; Matthew 8:20.
In other words, the underlying behavioural structure of Flavel’s meditation on “two bird nests” involved the “interior contemplative efforts” of both “patient perseverance” and “concentration” toward becoming humbled before God. As such, by writing on his direct engagement with these “bird nests” to learn about God, Flavel demonstrated to his reader how one may find ecstatic experiences of God through treating nature-based meditational “walks” as “ordinances for instruction.”

Considerations on a Devoured Worm

On another occasion, Flavel found theological inspiration during time spent outdoors by watching an interaction take place between a “mole,” a “red robin” and a “worm.” Recording the event, Flavel wrote that:

> [o]bserving the mole working industriously beneath, and the bird watching so intently above, I made a stand to observe the issue, when, in a little time, the bird descends, and seizes upon a worm, which I perceived was crawling apace from the enemy blow that hunted her, but fell to the share of another, which, from above, watched for her. My thoughts presently suggested these meditations from that occasion. --Me thought this poor worm seemed to be the emblem of my poor soul, which is endangered by its own lusts of pride and covetousness, than this worm was by the mole and bird . . . . Again, I could not but observe the accidental benefit this poor harmless bird obtained by the labor of the mole, who, hunting intentionally for herself, unboroghed and ferreted out this worm for the bird, who possibly was hungry enough, and could not have been relieved for this time, but by the mole, the fruit of whose labor she now feeds upon . . . . Let it never encourage me to idleness, that God sometimes gives his people the fruit of other’s sweat; but if

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providence reduce me to necessity, and disable me from helping myself,  
I doubt not then, but it will provide instruments to do it.  

Being well acquainted with the habits of animals in his local environment—a fact that 
suggests possible situational immersion, Flavel noticed a peculiar interaction between 
different species during what appears to be one of his meditational “walks.”  

Deciding that the event was worth investigating, Flavel proceeded to “stand” awhile to watch the 
matter. After a period of time had passed, Flavel’s “patient perseverance” allowed him 
to see how animals living within an ecosystem can support or hinder each other.  

Once more Flavel used this opportunity to obtain a theological message by ritually merging 
“lived” and “imagined” experience. By imaginatively using the “worm” as a symbol 
for his “soul” under the constant threat of sin, Flavel’s initial reaction toward the events 
unfolding before him aligned well for an individual who purposefully approached 
“ordinances” with humble fear of God’s “majestas.”  

Similarly, finding an older, 
frailer version of himself reflected in the “red robin,” Flavel took solace in seeing how 
God had designed the world to help living creatures cope with their circumstances.  

Unfortunately, despite the fact that this example illustrates how Flavel used a number of  

“interior contemplative efforts” to enhance his observation of the natural-world, Flavel did not comment on how this meditation made him feel in this instance. As such, this analysis will refrain from concluding that this particular meditation resulted in an ecstatic experience of some kind.

Seeing Christ’s Suffering in a Deer Hunt

Finally, Flavel demonstrated his use of “interior contemplative efforts” in ecological settings through a meditation based on dogs hunting a deer. Recording this incident, Flavel wrote that:

[t]he full-mouthed cry of these dogs, which, from the morning have hunted this poor tired deer, which is now no longer able to stand before them, but is compassed round with them, who thirst for, and will presently suck her blood, brings to my thoughts the condition and state of Jesus Christ, in the days of his flesh, who was thus hunted from place to place by blood-thirsty enemies . . . . And canst thou expect, O my soul! to fare better than he did, or escape the rage of bloody men? Surely, if the Spirit of Christ dwell in thee, if his holiness have favored thee, these dogs will wind it, and give chase too; they go upon the scent of holiness still, and would hunt to destruction every one, in whom there is aliquid Christi, anything of Christ, if the gracious providence of the Lord did not sometimes rate them off; for it is no less a pleasure which some wicked ones take in hunting the people of God, than what Claudian the poet observes men use to take in hunting wild beasts . . . . Lord! should I with the hypocrite decline the profession and practice of holiness, to escape the rage of persecuting enemies, at what time they cease, my own conscience would begin to hunt me like a blood-hound: let me rather choose to be chased by men than God, to flee before pursuing enemies, than be dogged from day to day with a guilty conscience.


Providing the strongest example of Flavel’s use of wild ecology as a source of divine inspiration, the transposed imagery of Christ on the wild blood-drenched deer surrounding by savage domestic dogs most clearly dislodges Gilpin’s claim that Reformed Puritans in the seventeenth-century avoided writing on “solitary encounter with God” through “nature” unless it was “nature transformed by human agency…”434 By analogously describing innocent “wild beasts”—symbolic of pious Christians—as carrying a savoury smell (i.e., a lifestyle of “holiness”) capable of attracting murderous hunting “dogs”—symbolic of “wicked” humanity—into sinfully seeking “pleasure” through their destruction, Flavel presented his then-current thoughts on how “suffering” persecution is the natural course for Christians living in the world.435 While many of Flavel’s meditations explain how he spontaneously came across inspiration, in this instance Flavel provided little context for the event that had transpired.436 The reader does not know how Flavel came to see a hunting scene unfold; however, it appears likely that he came across the hunt while taking one of his meditational “walks” as his disdain toward the dogs’ success leaves an impression that he was against participating in the hunt himself.437 In any case, since the event was written in the present-tense, it seems that Flavel wanted the reader to believe that he was writing this meditation as the hunt

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434 Contrasting well with Gerson’s example that monastic Christians who pursue Christ are much like dedicated “hunting dogs” that “smell” and track down a deer, Flavel’s observation on his country stroll associated the domestic dog with the kind of human savagery that is opposed to finding traces of the divine in wilder, freer beings. Gerson, “The Mountain of Contemplation,” 85; Flavel, Husbandry Spiritualized, 283-284; Gilpin, “Inward, Sweet, Delight in God”: Solitude in the Career of Jonathan Edwards,” 527-528.

435 Finding “affliction” to be a common theme in Flavel’s writings, Brian H, Cosby has recently written a work on Flavel’s “theology of suffering.” Cosby, Suffering & Sovereignty, 1-6; Flavel, Husbandry Spiritualized, 22, 283-284.


437 Flavel, Husbandry Spiritualized, 22, 283-284.
took place. This is significant from a Geertzian perspective on “ritual” because during the composition of *Husbandry Spiritualized* Flavel saw himself becoming a deer fleeing dogs. It is worth noting that as Flavel penned his meditation on a deer hunt, he knew that the British authorities were possibly seeking his arrest for repeatedly breaking the “Act of Uniformity.” Driven to compare the agony of Christ with the masking of the “hypocrite,” Flavel questioned his strength to continue withstanding the temptation to hide silently in the countryside. Disgusted with his lack of resolve in the midst of difficulties, Flavel mentally established a “frame” of “humility” by admonishing his “soul” through active concentration. Recalling that the “seal” of “salvation” presented by the “Spirit of Christ” in his heart was a homing beacon to demonic forces, Flavel decided that suffering persecution in his current predicament was proof of God’s loving favour toward him. In this mindset, meditating on the deer in front of him brought Flavel to consider the “fascinans” of God’s “gracious providence.” As such, finding

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comfort in having a clear “conscience” with the God who chose to save his “soul,” Flavel closed his reflection with a prayer capable of reaffirming his devotion to the Christian ministry.\textsuperscript{445}

**Comparative Thoughts on “Occasional Meditations”**

As would be expected in a Reformed Puritan work that treated ecological observations as “ordinances for instruction,” a comparative behavioural analysis on selections from Flavel’s “Occasional Meditations” demonstrates the existence of devotional patterns that are in alignment with his traditional “interior contemplative efforts.”\textsuperscript{446} In all of the “meditations” presented above Flavel was determined to show that ecological stimuli were capable of communicating divine truths.\textsuperscript{447} In fact, refusing to begin his reflections with some prior concept of what to observe in nature, Flavel appears to have usually drafted his “meditations” in response to some chance encounter on his “walks.”\textsuperscript{448} Naturally, since Flavel could not predict when ecological systems would present inspiration, he needed to spend a lot of time waiting with “patient perseverance” for an inspirational event to take place.\textsuperscript{449} During these periods of silence, Flavel immersed himself in the atmosphere of his ecological settings.\textsuperscript{450} Whether he was

\textsuperscript{445} Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 284.


**Summary of Flavel’s Ecological Writings**

In treating meditational “walks” through ecological settings as “ordinances for instruction . . .” Flavel significantly contributed to the development of Reformed Puritan
piety. Expanding on the insights of “colloquy with the creatures” that were endorsed by his predecessors and contemporaries, Flavel taught his readers how to engage nature as a source for learning about and experiencing God. Although adding “colloquy with the creatures” as a new “ordinance” was potentially contentious, Flavel was able to support his use of ecology for meditational purposes through citing both contemporary Biblical interpretations and historical literature. Structuring this “ordinance” of nature-based meditational “walks” with traditional “interior contemplative efforts” such as undergoing “concentration,” seeking “controlled environments” and having “patient perseverance,” Flavel led his readers into pursuing ecstatic encounters with God through nature in the same way that he had encouraged them to pursue “numinous experiences” in more traditional “ordinances.” As such, in normalizing the use of “interior contemplative efforts” to enhance meditational “walks” through the wilderness, Flavel showed his contemporaries how “colloquy with the creatures” could function as an


“ordinance” capable of leading persons to learn about and even ecstatically experience God.\textsuperscript{459}

Discussion and Conclusion

Why is it significant that Flavel provided people with effectual advice in helping to facilitate ecstatic experiences of God? Learning that Flavel’s old devotional guides were capable of leading people to ecstatic “numinous experiences” is beneficial for at least two reasons. First, it helps improve the academy’s comprehension of why Reformed Puritans valued “secret exercises.” Second, such investigation may help historians understand how ecological Christian spirituality developed in North America.

If this essay is correct in its assertion that Flavel provided behaviourally “efficacious” advice for facilitating ecstatic experiences with God in solitary religious activities, then the aforementioned analysis may help scholars understand how “secret exercises” in Reformed Puritan culture were capable of enlivening the faith of the persons who practiced them. Although social scientific findings on “communitas”

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464 Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, 93, 94-95, 156-157; Flavel, *A Saint Indeed*, 12-17, 54-58, 89, 91, 94; Flavel, *England’s Duty*, 236, 239-244, 247, 253, 254, 261, 263-264; Flavel, *Touchstone of
shed light on the value of “communitarian ritual,” it is often much harder to understand why people engage in solitary religious activities as the methods and results of such practices are hidden from direct observation.\textsuperscript{465} Solitary religious experience was an important aspect of Reformed Puritan culture.\textsuperscript{466} Indeed, even in the midst of prominent “communitas” inspired ecstatic behaviour that took place during the eighteenth-century “Great Awakening,” people continued to value solitary religious experiences.\textsuperscript{467} While it remains unknown whether Flavel had any influence on these persons, the fact that his traditional advice appears to have been capable of helping to facilitate ecstatic experiences in private religious activities lends credibility to the hypothesis that Reformed Puritans who engaged in “secret exercises” discovered meaningful “numinous experiences” during their meditations and prayers.\textsuperscript{468}

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\textsuperscript{466} Hambrick-Stowe, \textit{The Practice of Piety}, 93, 94-95, 156-157, 189-190.


\textsuperscript{468} Flavel, \textit{A Saint Indeed}, 12-17, 54-58, 89, 91, 94; Flavel, \textit{England’s Duty}, 236, 239-244, 247, 253, 254, 261, 263-264; Flavel, \textit{Touchstone of Sincerity}, 346-348; Rappaport, \textit{Ritual and Religion in the Making of
The findings of this essay also may help scholars understand the way that ecological Christian spirituality arose in North America.\textsuperscript{469} Due to the manner that Edwards found “sweetness” while “walking alone in the woods . . .” or gazing upon nature, he has been understood as “an axis of change” (see Gilpin 2002, 527) towards seeing the “wilderness” affectionately in North American nature-based piety.\textsuperscript{470} Yet presuming Flavel was as popular in New England as scholars have contended, it is possible that this “axis of change” occurred earlier in this region of the world than the academy has suspected in the past.\textsuperscript{471} Perhaps it is time to compare Flavel’s teachings with the manner in which Edwards and other eighteenth-century individuals went out into ecological settings to meditate and find God.\textsuperscript{472} Aside from being influenced by natural features in his environment such as a “dark thick grove” or a “thick bunch of hazels,”

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\footnote{http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMuWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdfuGlsby9uYXZpZ2F0ZS5wD93amVvLy= (accessed on 23 February 2016); Samuel Hopkins [and Sarah Osborn], \textit{Memoirs of The Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn} (Catskill: N. Elliot, 1814), 67-68

David Brainerd often wrote about how he “walked into the woods and enjoyed a sweet season of meditation and prayer.” Likewise, commenting on the “sweetness” of God's assurance after the death of her son, Sarah Osborn wrote about going “out into the field and walked, where, with more secrecy and freedom, I could breathe out my soul to God.” Similarly, in her youth, Sarah Pierpont allegedly enjoyed to “wander” through ecological environments for “conversing” with God. Where did these people learn to engage wildlife and natural settings in these ways? Flavel’s *Husbandry Spiritualized* provides at least one point of access to ecological spirituality that all of these people may have accessed; however, further research is required to be sure that his influence extended to these people specifically.

In conclusion, this essay has attempted to prove that Flavel’s brand of Christian mystical piety was capable of providing effectual advice toward helping people facilitate ecstatic experiences of God in both traditional Christian practice and inventive ecological religious activities. The first chapter of this essay sought to understand how Flavel taught persons to seek mystical encounters with God during “ordinances.” Through a thorough analysis of the manner in which Reformed Puritans such as Flavel described

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474 Hopkins [and Osborn], *Memoirs of The Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn*, 67-68.


their ecstatic experiences, this essay has found that Flavel sought to help his readers encounter ecstatic pneuma-physiological sensations that were both safe and pleasant.\textsuperscript{479} Utilizing these sensations as a benchmark for comprehending the advice presented by Flavel on how to conduct church-governed rituals, this paper distilled four traditional “interior contemplative efforts” promoted by Flavel that could theoretically help persons encounter ecstatic experiences during established religious activities: namely, the pursuit of “divine interaction,” “concentration,” finding “controlled environments” and having “patient perseverance.”\textsuperscript{480} Evaluating the plausibility that these techniques could reasonably help persons enter into ecstatic sensations, this essay concluded that Flavel’s “interior contemplative efforts” would have been more effective in solitary religious activities than communal counterparts.\textsuperscript{481} The second chapter of this essay focused on how Flavel built upon this basic understanding of traditional mysticism to construct an innovative system of wilderness-based piety.\textsuperscript{482} After briefly exploring how his Christian forebears and peers had approached the wilderness before him, this paper showed how Flavel taught his readers to interact with nature.\textsuperscript{483} Justifying the use of “interior


\textsuperscript{480} Flavel, \textit{A Saint Indeed}, 12-17, 54-58, 89, 91, 94; Flavel, \textit{England’s Duty}, 236, 239-244, 247, 253, 254, 261, 263-264; Flavel, \textit{Touchstone of Sincerity}, 346-348.


contemplative efforts” during his “walks” by claiming that listening to nature was a Biblical “ordinance,” Flavel instructed his readers on how to find content suitable for inciting ecstatic experiences of God in the wilderness by sharing his personal reflections in *Husbandry Spiritualized.*

Due to the fact that such wilderness-based material could stimulate “fascinans” in the same manner as textual or “imaginary” stimuli in solitary religious activities, this essay concludes that Flavel's use of “interior contemplative efforts” during wilderness-based “walks” constituted a plausibly “efficacious” technique for facilitating socially acceptable ecstatic sensations of God’s love amongst his readers.

Therefore, in writing devotional works addressed to topics of spirituality and nature, it is reasonable to suggest that Flavel contributed to the thought and development of Reformed Puritan piety by providing reliable advice on how to encounter God ecstatically in both domestic and innovative ecological religious activities.

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Appendix A: Comparative Metaphoric Analysis

In an effort to convey to their readers a sense of the “the same consciousness” that meditative techniques could help facilitate, McGinn states that mystical theologians have traditionally used a “host of models, metaphors and symbols . . .” in their writings. Utilizing the comparative metaphoric analysis technique that has been employed by historians attempting to study the characteristics of ecstatic sensations found in the medieval period, there is a possibility that this paper will be able to determine the finer characteristics of “numinous experience” in Reformed Puritan culture.

Drawing on the close “neural” link between “cultural” formation and “metaphor” usage that has been discussed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, at least two scholars comparatively examined metaphors commonly used in medieval mystical writings in an attempt to discover which sensations persons living in the middle-ages would have associated with “numinous” ecstasy. Specifically, in her article “‘Taste and See that the Lord is Sweet’ (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West,” Rachel Fulton drew from evolutionary biology to suggest that the numerous sugary and sexual metaphors used to describe the presence of God throughout the middle-ages indicate that

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489 As “metaphors” acquire their “meanings” by triggering memory of “past experiences,” it is likely that common experiential trends found across multiple metaphors used within similar works are indicative of the experience that is being described by such a work. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 5, 141-143, 144-145, 255-257, 258. See also Pike, *Mystic Union*, 66-70, 73-74, 76-80; Fulton, “‘Taste and See that the Lord is Sweet’ (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West,” 176, 178-179, 180, 182-184, 192-193, 194-196, 200, 201.
ascetics living in this culture likely found ecstatic encounters with God to be sensual, “experiential,” (as opposed to “intellectually or spiritually sophisticated . . .”), “comforting,” “pleasurable,” intimate (e.g., it requires “incorporating into ourselves a substance . . .”) and somewhat “bodily.”

Similarly, in comparing “marriage” and “nursery” metaphors used in the medieval period from a performance perspective, Nelson Pike has suggested that the ecstatic sensations associated with God’s presence that were found in medieval culture involved pleasure, bodily contact, “emotion,” “excitement, passion, and involvement with another.” Utilizing the methodology that has been employed by these scholars, it may be possible to find characteristics of sensations that persons living in Reformed Puritan culture would have associated with “interior contemplative efforts.” Specifically, by comparatively examining the metaphors that were commonly used to describe the sensation of God’s presence in Reformed Puritan spiritual handbooks, this paper should be able to illustrate the kind of ecstasy that “interior contemplative efforts” were intended to facilitate.

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490 Fulton, “‘Taste and See that the Lord is Sweet’ (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West,” 170, 172-176, 178-180, 182-184, 185, 186, 190, 191, 193, 195-197, 200, 201-202, 203.

491 Pike, Mystic Union, 76-80.

492 Pike, Mystic Union, 66 , 76-80; Fulton, “‘Taste and See that the Lord is Sweet’ (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West,” 173-179, 180, 192-193; Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, 5, 141-145, 255-257, 258.

The metaphoric terminology employed by Reformed Puritan authors may be comparatively examined to determine what persons learning “interior contemplative efforts” would have considered to be normative “numinous experiences” during such activity. In an attempt to help their readers comprehend the sensations that could be obtained through the practice of “interior contemplative efforts,” Reformed Puritan authors (viz., Flavel, Ambrose, Baxter and Rous) used a variety of common and familiar experiential images located in the Song of Songs, Psalms and gospels to represent what they believed to be the sensation of God’s presence; such metaphors included the taste.


495 The Biblical origin of metaphors involving sugary and sexual imagery has been discussed by both Hambrick-Stowe and Fulton. Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety, 28-29, 189-190; Fulton, “‘Taste and See that the Lord is Sweet' (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West,” 181, 183-185, 186-187. Additionally, the warmth metaphor is easily located in parts of the Bible that discuss God’s presence being discovered in the midst of fire and warmth, e.g., Exodus 3:2-6; Leviticus 1:13; Luke 24:32. See also Flavel, Husbandsry Spiritualized, 75; Flavel, A Saint Indeed, 56-57, 91, 94; Flavel, England’s Duty, 236, 244, 247, 254-256, 260, 261; Rous, “Mystical Marriage”, 687, 692-693 [note these pages are numbered 702-699 in this edition], 703, 706-707, 711-712, 717-718, 724, 730, 733; Baxter, Saints Everlasting Rest,
of “wine” or “honey,” the heat of a warm bath or hot “coal[s],” and the passion of sexual touch (e.g., kissing, sexual intercourse with God as the penetrating partner). For the purposes of comparative analysis, it is possible to broadly divide such imagery into categories of sugary, “warmth” and sexual experiences.

Since all of these metaphors originated during the medieval period, it is perhaps unsurprising to find that many of the conclusions drawn by Fulton and Pike conform to a three-way comparative analysis between sugary, sexual and warmth metaphors. For

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496 Flavel described the “sweet” sensations of ecstatically encountering God through “interior contemplative efforts” as being similar to a taste of the “honey-comb,” a “hot bath,” or a “kiss from Christ in secret prayer. Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 75; Flavel, *A Saint Indeed*, 56–57, 91, 94; Flavel, *England’s Duty*, 236, 244, 247, 254–256, 260, 261. In addition to using some very explicit sexual imagery (e.g., kissing, physical arousal, ejaculation at orgasm by Christ), Rous discusses ecstasy found during “interior contemplative efforts” with the metaphors of heat, “sweetness” (e.g., “wine,” “honey”) and “light.” Rous, “Mystical Marriage”, 687, 692–693 [note these pages are numbered 702–699 in this edition], 703, 706–707, 711–712, 717–718, 724, 730, 733. Drawing from images of “candle” being lit or a “coal” drawn from the “altar,” it is with metaphors of heat that Baxter primarily discusses the presence of God during “interior contemplative efforts”; however, he occasionally refers to metaphors of “sweetness” as well. Baxter, *Saints Everlasting Rest*, 38–39, 190–191, 195–196, 197, 198, 199. Similarly, Ambrose writes of God’s presence being “sweet” (e.g., “honey,” “spices,” “flowers,” “wine”) and warm (e.g., “sunshine,” “coal”). Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 18, 26, 28, 34, 35, 36, 298–299, 498–499. For other discussions of this topic (especially sexual metaphors involving the relationship between God and the “soul”) see also Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, 28–29, 189–190; Lane, *Ravished by Beauty*, 99–100, 112–115, 138–141.

497 The manner in which these metaphors are compatible with each other is expressed by Fulton, who claims “that which is sweet will nourish and heal precisely because it is sweet; that is, warm and moist and, therefore, perfectly tempered to our human complexion. This is also, of course, why the Lord tastes sweet . . .” Fulton, “‘Taste and See that the Lord is Sweet’ (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West,” 200. See also Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized*, 75; Flavel, *A Saint Indeed*, 56–57, 91, 94; Flavel, *England’s Duty*, 236, 244, 247, 254–256, 260, 261; Rous, “Mystical Marriage”, 687, 692–693 [note these pages are numbered 702–699 in this edition], 703, 706–707, 711–712, 717–718, 724, 730, 733; Baxter, *Saints Everlasting Rest*, 38–39, 190–191, 195–196, 197, 198, 199; Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 18, 26, 28, 34, 35, 36, 298–299, 498–499.

instance, having origin in either taste or touch, it would appear that a trend existing between these three metaphors is that they are all connected with what the human body feels when it absorbs something into itself (e.g., consumption of food, transfer of heat, intake of semen or saliva, etc.); this not only confirms earlier propositions involving Reformed Puritan culture’s tendency to accept physiological sensations as indicative of “numinous experience” but also demonstrates the desire of Reformed Puritans to root encounters with God inwardly by drawing attention to how “marginal” aspects of the human body allow the bypassing of certain substances in what Douglas calls “boundary transgression.”

Similarly, aligning with the observations of Fulton and Pike, it is


noteworthy that all three metaphoric categories are associated with physiological
“pleasure.”⁵₀₁ Yet if these three metaphors are explored more thoroughly, it may be
suggested that they are all concerned with the kind of physiological “pleasure” that arises
when people are confronted with “safety.”⁵₀²

A brief comparative examination of the biological and behavioural processes that
humans typically undergo while encountering “sugary,” “sexual” and “warmth”
experiences in real life reveals that their accompanying metaphors may have resonated on
a cognitive level with pleasurable sensations of safety.⁵₀³ For instance, as Fulton noted in
her analysis, humans are fine-tuned to associate sugary experiences with “pleasure” as a

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⁵₀² It is noteworthy that Flavel considered ecstatic experiences of God to involve both “pleasure” and “safety.” Flavel, England’s Duty, 217, 258.

preventative measure against eating bitter poisonous plants;\textsuperscript{504} this means that encountering “sweetness” is intrinsically associated with a state of safety in the brain.\textsuperscript{505} Interestingly, despite the fact that modern society has learnt the dangers of consuming too much sugar, Fulton argues that in pre-medicinal times “sugar” was believed to function as a type of “medicine” due to such life giving principles.\textsuperscript{506} Similarly, due to its important role in evolution, being in the presence of a “sexual partner” is known to release the pleasurable chemical “dopamine” to tell the brain that the action is associated with human “survival.”\textsuperscript{507} Although it is a terrible and unfortunate reality that some people (principally women) who are made victims of rape or sexual abuse come to associate sexual experiences with danger and pain, it is also true that many people in healthy relationships believe that sexual “intimacy” represents the epitome of “trust” and “affection” between loving partners.\textsuperscript{508} Recognizing that all Reformed Puritan authors came from safe and privileged heterosexual “social location[s]” that allowed them to

\textsuperscript{504} Fulton, ““Taste and See that the Lord is Sweet’ (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West,” 185, 192, 195-196.

\textsuperscript{505} Fulton, ““Taste and See that the Lord is Sweet’ (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West,” 185, 192, 195-196; Carlson, \textit{Physiology of Behaviour}, 233; Kalat, \textit{Biological Psychology}, 187.

\textsuperscript{506} Fulton, ““Taste and See that the Lord is Sweet’ (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West,” 186, 195-196, 199, 200.


Likewise, despite the fact that “warmth” is a “relative” disposition depending on one’s current “temperature,” scientists have found that undergoing physiological “warm” experiences have “neural” connections with feelings “social warmth” and “survival”\footnote{Inagaki and Eisenberger, “Shared Neural Mechanisms Underlying Social Warmth and Physical Warmth,” 2272-2273, 2279; Rolls, Grabenhorst and Parris, ”Warm Pleasant Feelings in the Brain,” 1504, 1506, 1511-1512; Carlson, \textit{Physiology of Behaviour}, 225-226.}, it is possible that this association in the brain may be instilled through time spent by mammalian species in the safe wombs of their mothers.\footnote{Inagaki and Eisenberger, “Shared Neural Mechanisms Underlying Social Warmth and Physical Warmth,” 2272-2273, 2276, 2278-2279.} Perhaps bearing in mind the relatively cold climates in which Reformed Puritans tended to reside, it is easy to see how precious warmth can be to survival; one only needs to imagine the experience of stepping in from a London fog or a Boston blizzard to understand the degree to which a room heated by the stove correlates with safety and pleasure.\footnote{According to Neil R. Carlson, “[f]eelings of warmth and coolness are relative, not absolute (except at the extremes).” Carlson, \textit{Physiology of Behaviour}, 225-226.} In other words, all three metaphoric images employed by Reformed Puritans were capable of eliciting safe sensations.
In conclusion, based on the evidence provided in this appendix, it seems likely that Reformed Puritans encountered “sugary,” “sexual” and “warmth” metaphors of God’s “internal” presence as sensations of a physiological, pleasurable and safe nature.\textsuperscript{513}

Appendix B: A Short Treatise on how “Communitas” and the “Fascinans” of “Mysterium Tremendum” were Capable of Producing Physiological Sensations of a Safe and Pleasant Variety in Reformed Puritan Culture

It is likely that Reformed Puritan religious culture contained multiple avenues for encountering emotional states of “communitas” and of the “fascinans” of “mysterium tremendum” (see Chapter 1)\(^\text{514}\) The argument of this treatise is that confident Christians could encounter pleasant and safe sensations through either of these emotional states by virtue of triggering normative physiological responses to what Baumeister and Leary call “belongingness.”\(^\text{515}\)

Providing temporary allowances in which the typical rules governing society are suspended, it is generally recognized in the academy that religious rituals are capable of helping people enter into emotional states such as “communitas” and the collective known as “mysterium tremendum” (i.e., “awefulness [sic],” “majestas,” “energy,” and “fascinans”).\(^\text{516}\) Current research in cultural anthropology suggests that the experiential

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“abasement” (through “majestas”) to “bliss” (through “fascinans”).  Although neither concepts of “communitas” or the “fascinans” of “mysterium tremendum” are “intrinsically religious,” their effects on human beings are often encountered as “numinous” contact with the divine. In particular, this appendix exists to show that both “communitas” and the “fascinans” of “mysterium tremendum” were capable of invoking or orchestrating the kind of pleasant and safe “numinous experiences” that confident Reformed Puritans would have recognized as contact with God through the Holy Spirit (see Chapter 1 under Understanding “Numinous Experience” in Reformed Puritan Culture).

A Disclaimer on the Limitations of Studying Sensations

Before engaging in the following argument, it is perhaps useful to mention the limitations of studying religious sensations. Drawing comparisons between emotional sensations found between “art and ritual,” Rappaport claims that:

if emotion is in its nature not fully describable, how can anyone know if another feels as he or she does? It is likely that everyone responds emotionally to a particular object or event rather differently, for each person brings a uniquely

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conditioned emotional and rational constitution. What is important is that the work elicit a response of some sort. But the discursive significance of the work itself, and its place in the liturgical order may then impose tacitly or explicitly a common designation upon the varied responses of those experiencing it . . . . They are emotion-laden but nevertheless socially approved attitudes . . . . [capable of] guiding experience to particular objects of thought.524

In other words, since everyone encounters life through their own perspectives, it is unlikely that “communitas” or “fascinans” was capable of producing specific types of ecstatic “response[s]” that are universally accepted,525 however, as persons are socialized to comprehend their “experience[s]” through normative patterns, it may be possible to determine how persons interpreted familiar sensations arising through these emotional states as being religiously significant.526 The key here is finding the subtle underlying conditions that enable persons to link the sensations encountered in such “work[s]” to socially pre-determined emotional responses.527 Accordingly, this appendix will attempt to show that both “communitas” and “fascinans” were capable of acquainting persons with sensations that they likely had been “socialized” in particular contexts to comprehend as pleasant and safe.528


How Pleasant and Safe Sensations are Stimulated by Communitas

A brief overview of “communitas” will reveal that it is capable of leading persons into the kind of ecstatic experiences deemed appropriate by Reformed Puritans (see Chapter 1 under Understanding “Numinous Experience” in Reformed Puritan Culture). In particular, it is possible to illustrate how both “spontaneous communitas” and “normative communitas” are capable of leading persons to pleasant and safe physiological sensations.

In the words of Victor Turner, “spontaneous communitas” may be studied for its capacity to produce “a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person’s being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared.” Since “spontaneous communitas” tends to “arise unpredictably” through the formation of “egalitarian” groups that are capable of operating on the basis of “utopian formulations,” Turner argues that the “ecstasy” resulting from this emotional state may be experienced being as both “pleasurable” and associable with collective “responsibilities.” In other words, the “ecstasy” produced through “spontaneous communitas” is likely to be of the pleasant and safe variety that Reformed Puritans sought through religious activities. Unfortunately, prior to the Great Awakening, this study has not found any evidence that Reformed Puritans typically entered into states of “spontaneous communitas” as part of


their worship related activities. As such, it is more important to study how “normative communitas” was capable of helping persons encounter pleasant and safe sensations.

Due to the fact that “normative communitas” contains the elements of “spontaneous communitas” that are most valued by the “community,” it likely has the capacity to generate pleasant and safe sensations to those who encounter it. Since “spontaneous communitas” exists only temporarily, Turner claims that groups may occasionally make concerted efforts to modify it so that it fits “into a perduring social system . . .” For example, drawing on the “spontaneous communitas” led by Francis of Assisi in acting like a “poor stranger,” Turner illustrates that “normative communitas” gradually developed by codifying group “poverty” dimensions in the Franciscan “Rule.” Similarly, one may argue that the “spontaneous communitas” led by Jesus Christ in the Passover supper prior to his crucifixion has historically been transformed by Christians into the “normative communitas” generating ritual of the Lord’s Supper. In both of these cases the “ideological” elements of “harmony” and “comradeship” inspired by “spontaneous communitas” are structurally retained in transitioning to “normative


While it is unknown whether these less “charged” emotions can produce “alterations of consciousness,” they are capable of helping persons perceive themselves as belonging within a group. Indeed, since people tend to feel happy and most at ease when they see themselves as insiders to a “group,” it is quite likely that encountering “normative communitas” provided people with pleasant and safe pneumaphysiological sensations.

How Pleasant and Safe Sensations are Stimulated by “Fascinans”

Unlike the emotional state of “communitas,” there are no intrinsic “utopian” values to “mysterium tremendum” that guarantee it will be experienced in a pleasant and safe manner. In fact, Otto claims that depending on which “elements” of the “mysterium tremendum” persons dwell upon during religious activities, it is quite possible that persons will evoke a range of emotions including: “terror” (from “[t]he [e]lement of [a]wefulness [sic]”), “abasement” (from “[t]he [e]lement of ‘[o]verpoweringness’ or ‘majestas’”), “passion” (from “[t]he [e]lement of ‘[e]nergy’”) and “bliss” (from “[t]he [e]lement of [f]ascination” or “fascinans”). Although Otto has taken care to illustrate how all of these emotions may be located in Christian “mysticism,” this appendix is principally concerned with how “bliss” may have surfaced in Christian worship.

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through “fascinans” in Reformed Puritanism as sensations of a pleasant and safe variety.\textsuperscript{545}

Although there are many different ways that the “fascinans” (i.e., “fascination”) of “mysterium tremendum” can lead to such concepts as “love” and “beatitude,” Otto believes that Christianity is particularly strong at eliciting “bliss” surpassing ordinary “comfort” through “‘fascination’ of the experienced love of God.”\textsuperscript{546} Otto claims that in acknowledging God as “heavenly Father [sic],” Christianity offers an “overwhelming and daring paradox . . .”: namely, that the one who elicits “mystery and awe . . .” may also be a parent with “an eternal, benignant, gracious will . . .”\textsuperscript{547} Through reflection on the greatness of this divine parent’s loving “salvation” (i.e., what Otto believes to be the penultimate object of Christian “fascinans”) in light of “self-disvaluation” or “humility,” Otto suspects that Christians are capable of exciting pleasant “‘childhood’ feelings . . . which go beyond mere comfort of the soul, appeasement of conscience, or feeling of protectedness.”\textsuperscript{548} In other words, whenever a Christian in a state of “abasement” reaches a moment of “excitation” in religious activity where the “fascinans” of God’s awesomeness meets pre-existing confidence (i.e., what Otto calls “Faith” or “amor mysticus”) that this God loves him or her, it is possible that he or she will become sensationally enamoured by seeing himself or herself as a valued “child” or friend of God.\textsuperscript{549} Resonating with persons who have been socialized to associate such sensations


with experiences of loving intimacy, this notion of being in a parent-child or benefactor-friend relationship with God has the potential to elicit emotions of “belongingness” akin to those that may be brought forward through “normative communitas.” As such, it is possible that by evoking “fascinans” under the right conditions, Reformed Puritans confident in their “election[s]” (i.e., that they “belong” to God) may have entered into pleasant and safe pneuma-physiological sensations capable of being interpreted as “numinous experiences.”

Summary

Regardless of whether a Reformed Puritan “ritual” contained avenues to ecstatic sensations through either “communitas” or the “fascinans” of “mysterium tremendum,” it is possible that Christians confident in their relationships with God would have been capable of eliciting the kind of pleasant and safe pneuma-physiological sensations that the culture associated with “numinous experience.” It is suspected that the mental realization of either of these states may have helped trigger the biological processes necessary to undergo socially acceptable ecstatic experience in Reformed Puritan society.


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