“Such A World of Books”

Spiritual Reading in the Cambrai Treatises of Fr. Augustine Baker OSB

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD

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Abstract

This study seeks to explain the presence in the writings of Fr. Augustine Baker of two apparently contradictory views about the need for contemplative religious to read spiritual books as guides. In his Cambrai treatises Baker teaches the need for well-informed spiritual texts to guide the contemplative, but he also claims that books are unnecessary because an internal “divine call” can direct the aspirant.

The Cambrai treatises were written by Baker between 1627 and 1632 for the English nuns of Our Lady of Consolation, Cambrai, to supplement the inadequate library of that newly founded monastery. They comprise original compositions on aspects of prayer and monastic ascesis, translations of significant spiritual writers and collections of passages from a wide range of contemplative authors. After Baker’s death a rewritten systematic digest of his works entitled Sancta Sophia was published in 1657. For almost four hundred years this book has been taken to represent the spiritual teachings of Augustine Baker, and his work at Cambrai has been understood in the light of both its contents and its form of presentation.

However, Baker never set out to create an original conspectus of contemplative spirituality, but rather through both his writings and his teaching of the nuns of Cambrai to mediate to a newly established community of very young women those aspects of the tradition of apophatic affective prayer he judged most necessary to their flourishing. The publication in modern editions of Baker’s texts allows his original project to be seen in a new light.

Baker saw spiritual reading as in many respects foundational to the contemplative life, and hence the amount of effort he devoted to creating the treatises. He intended that the library he created for the Cambrai
community should furnish them, through their monastic practice of spiritual reading, with continuing guidance and spiritual formation after he was no longer personally on hand to assist them. But he also comes close to dismissing the value of religious books, teaching that God himself could guide the soul directly, and that spiritual texts, unless informed by this divine guidance, could be misleading or even harmful. Baker himself never resolved the potential tension between these two positions.

This study finds that Baker’s approach to spiritual reading is closely related to the practice of lectio spiritualis, in which both scriptural and other religious texts are read in order to generate interior affective motions of the soul. His spirituality is informed by the perspective of the affective Dionysian mystical tradition, which prioritises the interior faculty of the will over that of the intellect. Taken together, these two contexts account for, but do not resolve, the disjunction between the two aspects of Baker’s teaching on religious reading.
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Introduction

The Dumb Master

In 1628 Augustine Baker, a Welsh lawyer who had converted to Catholicism and had become an English Benedictine monk, completed the writing of a manuscript treatise on aspects of the contemplative life for the nuns of the recently founded community of Our Lady of Consolation at Cambrai, in what was then the Spanish Netherlands.\(^1\) The final paragraph of that treatise, *Directions for Contemplation: Book D*, reads as follows:

> If all the bookes in the world were burnt & lost, & that one had not any man to instruct him, yet if the soule will prosecute prayer, abstraction, & vndergoe necessary mortifications,oberuinge God & his call both interiory & exteriorly, & so forsakinge & renounsine heimselfe in spirit & body, hauinge God & his loue, will & honour for his finall intention, such a one would walke cleerly, securely, & arriue to an happy end, w\(^\text{th}\) God send vs all. Amen.\(^2\)

This passage stands at the very end of the book, and so the reader might suppose that it is intended to summarise what has gone before. But, rather than acting in this way, Baker’s paragraph establishes a problem for his reader by setting up a very strong dividing line between two sets of concerns which the earlier sections of his text have addressed. These are, on the one hand, religious books and spiritual

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guidance, and, on the other, the practices of “prayer, abstraction and ... mortification”. Here at the very end of the text, the former are effectively dismissed as unnecessary, while the latter are privileged in total disjunction from them as the way to “walke cleerly, securely, & arriue to an happy end”. As a consequence, the reader might well be left wishing to ask the author precisely how to “prosecute” these exercises, in the apparent absence of any guidance as to how to undertake them.

This disparagement of the value of books and human guides in the spiritual life creates a problem for Baker’s reader because in other contexts, far from dissociating these practices from one another and rejecting books and spiritual guidance, Baker intimately conjoins reading and guidance with the path of prayer and its attendant disciplines. Thus, for example, in his treatise The Life and Death of Dame Gertrude More (c.1635), Baker presents the following narrative vignette. In it he pictures himself using the written text as a vehicle of spiritual guidance in order to allow Dame Gertrude to begin the discovery of her own spiritual path:

... one daie [he] was reading to her and to another some things out of a booke [... and] our Virgin was somewhat struken with it, and suddenly said: O, O, that must be my way, I pray you (said she to him) lette me have that place translated into English. And so [he] did, and gave it to her, and she made great use of that doctrin, and continued her prayer with great profit.3

Here Dame Gertrude is depicted by Baker as discovering her spiritual course through the reading of a text and the ministry of a spiritual guide, and it is precisely as a result of the availability of these resources that she is able to “walke cleerly, securely, & arriue to an happy end”. In fact, Baker is at pains to emphasise throughout this work that it was only as a direct result of the guidance he was able to offer her that Dame Gertrude “continued her prayer with great profit”.

There is, at the very least, a tension between the positions taken up by Baker on the value of reading and its relationship to contemplative prayer in these two passages. While Directions D seems flatly to dismiss the usefulness of reading to the spiritual life, the Dame Gertrude More presents a straightforwardly positive picture of the dynamic between reading and prayer. Which of these approaches to reading as a dimension of the spiritual life are we to take as representing the view of Augustine Baker? Is the passage from Directions D to be read simply as an isolated rhetorical flourish, or does it articulate a recurrent theme in Baker’s work? Is the presentation of reading in Dame Gertrude More unusually positive, or does it represent the norm for Baker? Given that these two texts were written some years apart, does Baker’s position alter over time? Or, finally, if it should prove that both these perspectives are to be found alongside one another throughout Baker’s writings, what does this mean for an understanding of his teaching on this topic? It is from this curious disjunction in Baker’s presentation of the role of reading in the spiritual life that the present study arises, setting out to discover how this early modern Benedictine monk, himself the author of so extensive a corpus of spiritual texts that his output has been termed a very “world of books”, could apparently both cherish and disparage the role of religious reading within the contemplative monastic life, a way of living which appears always to have been mediated to him by way of books.

Ever since the seminal work of Jean Leclercq in 1957 on medieval monastic modes of religious reading, the role of reading in the life of prayer has been of increasing interest both to scholars and practitioners of Christian spirituality. The work of Brian Stock on the tradition of self-reflective religious reading has been particularly influential in this regard. The present study seeks to contribute to this ongoing conversation by examining the role of reading in the contemplative life of Augustine Baker, a Benedictine monk who contributed significantly to the formation of monastic spirituality in the early modern period. This examination is informed by a careful reading of Baker’s own writings as well as by the work of previous scholars who have explored the relationship between reading and contemplation in monastic context.

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5 Leclercq, Jean. The Love of Learning and the Desire for God. A Study of Monastic Culture. London: SPCK, 1961. For a broader consideration of the background to Leclercq’s work as well as his subsequent influence, see: Studzinski, Raymond. Reading to Live. The Evolving...
reading which he identifies as originating with Augustine of Hippo, and which is known after the thirteenth century as *lectio spiritualis*, has broadened this field of study and effected its overlap with the well-established field of literary studies of both secular and religious texts.  

The tradition of religious reading which has, arguably, been most widespread among Christians since early modern times is today usually simply designated as “spiritual” or “devotional” reading and involves the use of books of piety or manuals of devotion, such as those studied by Margaret R. Miles.\(^7\) Miles suggests that it is to this “self-help literature of the Christian West” that scholars should look - more than to works of theology, sermons, liturgical texts, religious art, drama or hymnology - to discover the most significant sources for a layperson’s training in Christianity: “the practices that translated Christian ideas, attitudes and values into lifestyle”\(^7\).

At the same time that the formal study of the ways in which religious readers, predominantly non-specialist lay readers, make use of spiritual texts has begun to emerge, there has been a recognition by students of the more specialist texts produced by those often termed “mystics” of what Bernard McGinn has called the “textually and theologically mediated nature of all Christian mysticism”.\(^8\)

McGinn argues that “rather than being something added on to mystical experience, mystical theory in most cases precedes and guides the mystic’s whole

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\(^8\) Miles, ix.

way of life”. For McGinn the Christian mystic is involved in what his student, Mark McIntosh, has called “a life-long spiritual journey – all the preparations for, and reflections upon which, comprise mysticism in its fullest sense”.

In other words, McIntosh and McGinn are concerned to stress both the crucial role played in the lives of Christian mystics by their reading of the texts of those who went before them, and the importance as an aspect of a mystic’s experience of God of the writing of those texts by which we are able to know of that experience. McGinn stresses, however, that “the actual practice of reading and instruction that was integral to the mystical tradition” is a “world rarely glimpsed” in the literature we have inherited from the Christian past.

Against this backcloth, the publication in modern editions of the little-known and previously unpublished writings of Augustine Baker take on a special significance. Baker’s books find their context in the early seventeenth century world of exiled English Catholic religious. Many of them were written to assist in the spiritual initiation of young nuns in the years Baker lived and worked at Cambrai (1624 to 1633) alongside the community of the newly founded English Benedictine monastery of Our Lady of Consolation; a community which exists to this day as Stanbrook Abbey. The Cambrai treatises offer an unusually direct witness to the role of religious reading among English monastics in the early modern period. Since Baker did not write with public distribution of his texts

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10 McGinn, Foundations, xiv.
12 McGinn, Bernard. “Mystical Handbooks of the Late Middle Ages: The Role of the Friars.” Paper presented to the Sewanee Medieval Colloquium of The University of the South, “Francis, Dominic, Their Orders and Their Tradition”, Sewanee, TN, 2008. 2. At the time of writing this paper is unpublished. The author is grateful to Professor McGinn for generously supplying a typescript of the conference paper.
13 Since 1997, John P.H. Clark has undertaken the editing of a series of Baker’s surviving manuscript treatises, and these have been published in the periodical Analecta Cartusiana (Universitat Salzburg, Austria). Clark’s work and its context within the history of Baker studies will be addressed in Chapter 1.
14 The phrase “Cambrai treatises” is a convenient and accurate designation for Baker’s literary output during the years he resided in the guesthouse at Cambrai. It distinguishes his writings during those years from the texts he later composed in Douai.
beyond the confines of the monastery walls as his primary aim, if anything the reverse, his monographs on aspects of contemplative spirituality allow the modern reader to explore the role of the written text among a group who self-consciously sought to form their lives exclusively as a spiritual journey towards God.

Baker’s extensive output of texts of monastic spirituality allow the student of spirituality to explore the religious practices associated with the book in a context within which books had become unusually important to their readers. As H.C. White has pointed out, “cut off as they were from many of the normal contacts which build up the spiritual context of human life, they [i.e. the exiled English recusant religious] not unnaturally made more of their books than most men” and worked “under the influence of that book world”.15 White urges that “especially is this true of Augustine Baker”.16

Thus it would seem, at first glance, that everything about Baker’s life and work might provide a very fully documented exemplification of McGinn’s observation about the role played in the mystical life by the reading and writing of mystical texts, and that the nature of Baker’s mysticism would in its turn be illuminated by McGinn’s insight. The reading and writing of spiritual books and, closely associated with it, the process of spiritual guidance, played a significant part, arguably the most significant of parts, in Baker’s own life as a monk. J.T. Rhodes has written: “... Baker turned to books to work out his own solution to religious truth [...] Books were always to be Baker’s primary resource and interest”.17 Rhodes is, in effect, echoing and reinforcing the views of Baker’s earliest biographer, his fellow monk and close associate Leander Prichard, who

16 White, 122.
writes in the context of his account of what has come to be known as Baker’s third conversion that Baker made spiritual progress as a result of:\textsuperscript{18}

... the gitting of information by reading of books. He thought that if he had bin conversant in true spirituall and mistick authers, he might well have known how he should have deported himselfe in the desolation which followed upon his former passive contemplation. And now the reading of those books (being indeed of the higher strain of spirituality) made him in part see where he lost himselfe, and was a strong invitation for him to return again ad priora opera.\textsuperscript{19}

Prichard emphasises, rather as Baker himself had written about Dame Gertrude, the extent to which Baker had needed and made use of the “higher strain of spirituality” to be found in the writings of “true spirituall and mistick authers”, and that without such writings he had struggled (and failed) to make progress in the life of prayer.

Generalising from his account of Baker’s experience, Prichard goes on to advocate the provision of good “spirituall books” as a necessity for anyone who proposes to enter upon “a contemplative course or life”. In fact, he states, if the would-be contemplative is obliged to choose between an ill-informed spiritual guide and a good book “the dumb master (\textit{viz.} a book) ... is to be chosen rather then the speaking or talking master”.\textsuperscript{20} It is apparent from Prichard’s coinage of this evocative expression for the role of the spiritual book that he regards the book as essentially a tool of formation and guidance for the aspirant to contemplation.

Such a perspective towards what Prichard terms “the dumb master” may also be seen to inform Augustine Baker’s own practice as a teacher of

\textsuperscript{18} For a brief overview of Baker’s “three attempts at the practice of internal prayer or contemplation” or “conversions” see: Wekking, Ben, ed. \textit{Augustine Baker. The Life and Death of Dame Gertrude More, Edited from All the Known Manuscripts}. Analecta Cartusiana. Salzburg, Austria: Institut fur Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universitat Salzburg, 2002. xix-xx.


\textsuperscript{20} Prichard, 102.
contemplative prayer. In the course of the decade during which he lived at Cambrai he describes himself as “driven” to the writing of original spiritual treatises for the nuns to read (because, he says, the books “usually ministered” to the nuns do not “supply ... their spirituall needs”), as well as translating and commenting upon others already available to them. In addition, Baker used his scholarly contacts in England to obtain such books as he could, suited to the enclosed and contemplative state of life of his students, as we know from his letter to Sir Robert Cotton, of June 1629:

And thereupon I am in their behalfe become an humble suitor vnto you, to bestowe on them such bookes as you please [...] conteigning contemplation Saints lives or other devotions. So extensive were Baker’s literary labours that after his death in 1641 his confrère, Serenus Cressy, would write that “it would almost seem incredible” that one man “should be able to compile such world of books” as Baker left “to the virtuous and devout religious dames of Cambray”. Significantly, not only did Baker’s work result in the many volumes of his own writings, but for years after Baker’s time there, the scriptorium of the Cambrai convent continued to play an important part in transmitting to posterity what are now regarded as the important texts of the fourteenth century English mystics, for example, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, *The Revelations of Divine Love*, and *The Scale of Perfection*. It is apparent that several, and perhaps all, of these texts were first

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brought to the attention of the nuns by Baker himself. In addition to their work in copying mystical texts from the past, the nuns of Cambrai generated what has been termed a notable literary “heritage of contemplative spiritual writing in prose and poetry”. Rediscovered by scholars and published in recent years, these texts are said by one modern editor to be “permeated by Dom Augustine Baker’s teachings and writings”. These hitherto neglected writings of the Benedictines of Cambrai are a significant additional witness to the extent to which the tradition of spirituality established by Baker among them became, as H.C. White suggests, “the culture of a whole group, articulate in a few members of special directorial and literary skill”.

When these various elements of Baker’s legacy are combined we are presented *prima facie* with an overwhelming case for understanding the “dumb master”, the book or written text employed as spiritual guide, as the central unifying feature in his spirituality and that of the “Cambrai School” influenced by him. Baker, we might wish to say, understands the role of the written text, the “dumb master”, as “preceding and guiding” (to borrow McGinn’s expression) both himself and his students, and so making the difference between “losing oneself” on the spiritual path (as Prichard puts it), and “understanding anie thing, that was necessarie [...] in a spirituall life” (as Baker has Dame Gertrude state in the *Dame Gertrude More*).

In spite of the importance he accords to the spiritual text, Baker’s commitment to the importance of reading and writing in the spiritual life is sometimes undercut within his own treatises, as is the case in the passage from

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26 Latz, 7.
27 White, 126.
28 Spearritt, 20.
Directions D cited earlier. While his dismissal of books is not always as absolute as it is there, we never have to look far to find Baker calling his own central activity into question. True, Baker is sometimes concerned less to dismiss all reading of books, than the reading of inappropriate books. Of these, the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius are the example to which he returns more than once, inviting his audience to beware “what corporall damage or pain they sustain by it, and namely in their heads, especially such as have weak heads”. He is also frequently moved to warn against inappropriate ways of reading what might otherwise be good books: “it may be an impediement vnto vs to stand ouer precisely to words”, he advises at one point in Directions D. Neither of these manoeuvres, however, is obviously incompatible with the use of books as a dimension of the spiritual life; indeed, to guide a student in what to read and how to read it is part of the use of religious books not a rejection of this practice.

But in other places, as for example here in his treatise Vox Clamantis in Deserto Animae, written towards the end of his time in Cambrai in 1632, Baker takes further his critique of the relationship between books (or other forms of merely human guidance) and contemplation, arguing that it is of the nature of an exclusively “internall and spirituall way” that it requires only an internal and spiritual teacher, i.e. God himself:

The way to contemplation being an internall and spirituall way, it must be acknowledged that the supreame spirit, wch is God, is the principall or onlie teacher of that waie. The soule her-selfe by reason of her naturall darknes is not able of her-selfe to finde it; much lesse is another man able to shew it her ...

Like the passage at the end of Directions D, this statement on Baker’s part

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31 Baker, Directions D, 15.
completely relativises any human activity as compared to the divine initiative, erecting a seemingly insuperable distinction between the “internall and spirituall” and the realm of reading and guidance.

It emerges, then, that any attempt to employ McGinn’s view that mystical texts precede and guide the mystic’s whole way of life, a way of life which is to be understood as itself textually mediated, as a tool for understanding the achievement of Augustine Baker is to some extent complicated by the presence within his texts of these two apparently incompatible perspectives. What does this complication mean for our understanding of Baker’s use of spiritual texts, and for an appreciation of his work as a whole? In order to explore Baker’s attitudes towards the “world of books” he read, wrote, translated and collected, with a view to understanding how this complication comes about and whether it permits of a resolution, this study will focus upon the books Baker wrote for the nuns of Cambrai between 1627 and 1633. These books were composed during the years when he lived and worked at the Cambrai convent, often using his time for conversations of spiritual guidance with the nuns, the majority of whom were young neophytes to the religious life. It is in these Cambrai texts that Baker is most preoccupied with the process of mystical formation, and the role of the religious book within that process, and it is for this reason that they will provide the focus for this study.33

But, before I turn directly to address the question of religious reading in Baker’s Cambrai texts, there is a significant preliminary obstacle to such a study which the student of Baker’s spirituality must consider. This is the fact that for most of the almost four hundred years since his death in 1641, anyone setting out to

33 Baker continued to write spiritual treatises after he was removed by his superiors from the Cambrai convent in 1633, and moved to the English Benedictine College of St Gregory’s at Douai where he lived until 1638. His writings from this period, however, are largely given over to a defense of his work at Cambrai against his critics. See: Lunn, David. The English Benedictines, 1540–1688, from Reformation to Revolution. London: Burns and Oates, 1980. 208–13. See also: Wecking, xv-xxvii.
explore the spiritual teachings of Augustine Baker would almost certainly have found him or herself in the odd position of reading a book which Baker did not write: namely, the book known as *Sancta Sophia* or *Holy Wisdom*.²⁴

As a consequence, the student wishing to pursue an understanding of our present topic, Baker’s teaching on the value of religious books, would have read a text substantially different from the *Directions D* passage which is quoted at the beginning of this section:

> Yea, I dare with all confidence pronounce, that if all spiritual books in the world were lost, and there were no external directors at all, yet if a soul (sufficiently instructed in the essential grounds of Catholic faith) that has a natural aptness, though otherwise never so simple and unlearned (being only thus far well instructed at first), will prosecute prayer and abstraction of life, and will resignedly undergo such necessary mortifications as God shall provide for her, observing God and his call exteriorly and interiorly, and so forsake herself, and propose Almighty God, His will, love, honour, for her final intention (which she will certainly do if she attend unto His inspirations), such a soul would walk clearly in perfect light, and with all possible security, and would not fail in due time to arrive at perfect contemplation. These are the two external means by which God teaches souls, discovering to them His will, to wit, instructors and books. And to these we might add another, to wit, laws and precepts of superiors (for God teaches also this way, and never commands contrarily). But of these we shall speak hereafter.²⁵

This passage is drawn from *Treatise I, Section 2, Chapter 3* of Serenus Cressy’s 1657 digest of Baker’s teaching, published as *Sancta Sophia, or Directions for the Prayer of Contemplation*. As we shall see in chapter 1, this is the book to which almost all students of Baker’s work have turned to discover his views and teaching. But, as I shall demonstrate, Cressy’s account of Baker’s teaching cannot be regarded as a reliable way to understand Baker’s own texts. The single example of


how Cressy has altered Baker which is set out above may stand here to anticipate many of the points which will be explored in more detail below.

It is apparent that this passage from *Sancta Sophia* has some relationship with the shorter passage from *Directions D* set out above, but it is also noticeable that Cressy has made extensive alterations to what Baker wrote. Although at one level we might describe Cressy’s rewriting as an ironing out of the wrinkles to be discovered in his original, the result of his literary housekeeping is a passage which, while it promises to speak “with all confidence”, is so hedged about with qualifications and parenthetical modifications that the reader could easily emerge from it genuinely unsure as to what its author intended to “pronounce” so boldly at its inception.

Cressy, we may suppose, has noticed the discrepancy between Baker’s usually positive evaluation of religious reading and his less frequent although vehement dismissals of its value, such as the final paragraph of *Directions D*, and has here chosen to soften the dismissal into what amounts to an emphatic rhetorical device, adding parenthetical explanations wholly missing from Baker’s original which effectively undermine the attack upon religious books in the main text by reintroducing the need for them in the parenthesis. Furthermore, it is evident that Cressy has sewn Baker’s conclusion to the treatise *Directions D* into a longer section of teaching in *Sancta Sophia*, and thus chosen to position a passage, which in Baker’s own text leaves the reader with more questions than answers, as a simple moment of transition towards the next substantive point of teaching, with which it is made to agree.

We shall see in more detail below that the creation of Cressy’s digest has skewed the process of reception of Augustine Baker’s teaching, and has led to the creation of a secondary literature purporting to represent studies of Baker but which is for the most part a set of commentaries upon Cressy’s systematically ordered book. As a consequence, the vast majority of secondary literature on
Augustine Baker in practice fails to engage with the extensive and potentially confusing “world of books” written by Baker and so simply does not address - for example - the kinds of questions highlighted earlier, generated by the differing value attached to religious reading in the various parts of Baker’s texts. This happens because the systematic digest represents a synoptic account of Baker’s work, with any appearance of development or divergence among Baker’s views carefully removed. The single most important cause of what I shall argue amounts to a misrepresentation of Baker in the secondary literature, and more broadly in the history of spirituality, is the existence of Cressy’s digest.

The structure of this study as a whole, therefore, is as follows.

Chapter 1 will prepare the ground for an approach to the Cambrai texts which does not rely upon Sancta Sophia and the tradition of spirituality associated with it as the context of interpretation for an understanding of Augustine Baker’s work. By first offering an overview of the relationship between Baker’s work and that of Cressy, and then outlining the recent history of Baker studies, this chapter will argue that:

(i) The posthumous creation of Sancta Sophia established a context of interpretation for the figure of Augustine Baker which has supported both a significant misunderstanding of his work, and the relative neglect of the texts he actually wrote.

(ii) Much secondary literature on Augustine Baker, even in the present day, views his work through the synoptic account found in Sancta Sophia, and is therefore less illuminating of Baker himself in his seventeenth century context than it is of the subsequent influence exercised by Cressy’s digest. Only subsequent to the editorial work of John Clark, beginning in 1997, has a secondary literature which addresses the work of Augustine Baker through the study of that author’s own texts begun to appear.

Chapter 2 offers an introductory survey of Baker’s work at Cambrai. It was here in the English Benedictine convent of Our Lady of Consolation that, from
1627 onwards, Baker wrote the Cambrai treatises. I follow the emerging consensus among contemporary scholars of Baker’s texts in finding that these treatises are an occasional series of pedagogic responses to the spiritual needs of a specific group of individuals, the nuns of Cambrai. However, I build upon this perspective to argue that Baker’s own writings, when freed from the perspective established by Cressy, should be contextualised among the collection of spiritual texts Baker either found already available in the library of Cambrai, or acquired in various ways for that library, rather than as the beginnings of a systematic synthesis intended for a wider public. Baker’s spirituality emerges, historically, as even more bookish than the secondary literature of Baker studies has supposed it to be.

I go on to locate Baker’s teachings not in relation to the pre-dissolution English spiritual tradition, as has sometimes been attempted, but within the later manifestations of the very broad stream of affective spirituality flowing from the later medieval into the early modern period, often termed the *devotio moderna*, and within this the renewed practice of affective apophatic contemplation, (also termed the affective Dionysian tradition) which is one of the several spiritual methods to be discovered within the landscape of mental prayer in the post-Tridentine Catholic Church. It was to build up the Cambrai convent’s range of written resources for accessing this tradition that Baker undertook his work of writing and translating. It will become evident in later chapters that Baker’s appropriation of this tradition of spirituality, with its emphatic prioritisation of the faculty of the will as the locus of the soul’s encounter with God and its corresponding disparagement of the understanding, has significant implications for his approach to religious reading, and plays its part in a fault line which runs through the body of his work.

Chapter 3 begins the exploration of Baker’s teachings on what he terms the “right use” of spiritual books as a significant dimension of his instructions for monastic neophytes in the path of contemplative prayer, a path which Baker regards as “mystic”. Baker, in common with many other early modern writers on
Catholic religious life, takes for granted that the “spirituall course” of those who enter monastic life will follow a well-established trajectory, which can be written down and taught to newcomers to assist their progress. This will be outlined as the context for his teaching about religious reading, as it has a significant bearing upon the functions he ascribes to the spiritual book within the religious life.

I will set out the range of perspectives on spiritual reading and its positive role in the monastic life explored by Baker in the Cambrai treatises. At one end of the scale the neophyte is, in effect, directed on her spiritual course by books, the spiritual book is the equivalent of a human director, and second only to the voice of God. At the other, there is a specific range of skills required to read spiritual texts with profit, and these should be the subject of instruction for beginners: “the right use of [spiritual books] is to be taught”.

The fault line in Baker’s teachings on the use of religious texts will begin to emerge as we encounter his regular reliance upon the book for guidance in the spiritual course and his simultaneous conviction that only “divin lights, and tracts, inspirations, or calls” can actually inspire a spiritual course.

Chapter 4 will develop this examination of Baker’s approach to the use of the spiritual text through a closer study of two of his most significant and most complete works, the Secretum, a book which he completed at Cambrai and the Life and Death of Dame Gertrude More, which was completed after he had moved to Douai but which is concerned in part to address Baker’s work at Cambrai through detailing the spiritual progress of his best known disciple among the Cambrai nuns.

37 Baker, Dame Gertrude More. 8.
In the Secretum we can observe Baker at work as commentator upon earlier spiritual texts, as the book presents itself as a companion to the fourteenth century English text, The Cloud of Unknowing. The Dame Gertrude More offers the reader an example of the sort of text Baker believes it is useful for his students to read to further their understanding of the contemplative life. He intends it to be “more imitable by others, more tending to edification of soules, and much more use in this present age” than are the books of certain other writers.40

Chapter 5 will argue that, although Baker invests great energies in advancing the cause of spiritual literacy among his students, throughout the Cambrai treatises he raises two distinct types of objections to the use of religious books in the contemplative life. The first set of objections are essentially a critique of a religious literature which is unsuitable for enclosed contemplative women, and is in practice a dimension of Baker’s promotion of the literature he regards as suited to their needs, which includes his own texts. But the more far-reaching critique, which is expressed in those statements of Baker which have provoked this study, reveals an unresolved difficulty in Baker’s spirituality. I shall suggest that it is possible to find the roots of that difficulty in two inherited perspectives which are at work in Baker’s texts: the outlook and practice of lectio spiritualis, and the prioritisation of the will over the intellect to be found in the affective Dionysian tradition of mystical writing.

The present study differs from previous studies of Augustine Baker in the following three respects.

First, this study benefits from the opportunity to make use of the original treatises of Augustine Baker, as a consequence of the editorial labours of John Clark. This is the first full-length treatment of an aspect of Baker’s spirituality which does not base its account of that spirituality largely upon Cressy’s 1657

40 Baker, Dame Gertrude More, 2.
digest. By contrast, most earlier studies of Baker’s spirituality assume the perspective established by *Sancta Sophia* as normative.

Second, this study seeks to situate Baker’s written teachings within the context of his concern to build up a reliable library of spiritual texts for that newly founded Benedictine community, rather than following the received account of Baker’s project as the drafting of a systematic account of the life of contemplative prayer for both a monastic and a wider public audience.

Thirdly, this study focuses upon Baker’s attitudes to and teaching about the role of written texts in the contemplative life, especially his understanding of the role played by spiritual reading in the path of mystical prayer. This approach stands in contrast to that of earlier studies, which have usually taken some aspect of Baker’s teaching (or, to be precise, the teachings of *Sancta Sophia*) on mystical prayer as their starting point. By so doing I aim both to illuminate the nature of Baker’s project in Cambrai, and to throw some light upon the uses of the religious book among English Benedictines during a period which had lost sight of classic monastic *lectio divina* of scripture.
Chapter 1

England May Now Her Saint-Sophia Boast
Baker, the Manuscript Treatises, and the Sancta Sophia Tradition

INTRODUCTION

For almost four centuries, Augustine Baker’s name and reputation in accounts of English spirituality have been very closely identified with Serenus Cressy’s 1657 digest of Baker’s texts, Sancta Sophia, or Holy Wisdom. Throughout this period the existence of reliable manuscript copies of Baker’s original treatises was known, but little direct attention was paid to them beyond the confines of the archives where they were stored. Only in 1997 did they begin to appear in reliably edited, modern print editions.

This chapter will argue that Baker’s project, as it unfolds in the Cambrai treatises, must be understood as distinct from that of Cressy; and that the received reputation of Augustine Baker himself among students of spirituality has suffered some significant distortion as the result of the creation of Sancta Sophia.

In Section 1 of the chapter I shall address the question of the relationship between Cressy’s work and that of Baker, seeking to demonstrate that the posthumous creation of Sancta Sophia established a context of interpretation for the figure of Augustine Baker which has supported both a significant misunderstanding of his work, and the relative neglect of the texts he actually wrote.

Section 2 of this chapter will consider the situation of the secondary literature of Baker studies. I shall first examine the five full-length academic studies of Augustine Baker undertaken in the late twentieth century in order to support my argument that the majority of secondary literature on Augustine Baker
has continued to understand his work through the synoptic account found in *Sancta Sophia*, and is therefore less illuminating of Baker himself in his seventeenth century context than it is of the subsequent influence exercised by Cressy’s digest.

I shall move on to introduce the emerging twenty-first century textual school of Baker studies, a small series of recent scholarly works which have come into being largely as a response to the pioneering work of John Clark in editing the Baker manuscripts for publication. I shall note that, as yet, there has been little use made of Baker’s treatises by students of spirituality and that the primary interest in the newly available Baker texts has come from the direction of literary studies.

This chapter will close by urging the view that the received reputation of Augustine Baker as the author of a systematic handbook of the mystical life must now be understood as almost wholly a posthumous construct. The secondary literature of Baker studies for the most part fails to engage with the texts Baker wrote, but stands as a remarkable monument to the enduring legacy of a “system” of spirituality which Baker did not create.

1. THE CONTINUING INFLUENCE OF *SANCTA SOPHIA* AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR THE STUDY OF BAKER’S WORK

A modern student of spirituality setting out to explore the work of Augustine Baker encounters an initial difficulty: namely, the fact that almost all scholarly presentations of Baker depend for their account of his work upon a book, *Sancta Sophia*, written not by Baker himself but by his Benedictine confrère Serenus Cressy more than ten years after Baker’s death.

The several dimensions of this difficulty may be illustrated here by turning to one modern account of Baker’s work. This is to be found in a recent and widely used historical survey of English spirituality, the thorough and scholarly work of
Gordon Mursell.\textsuperscript{1} My purpose in offering this example is not to suggest a failure on the part of Mursell, but rather to draw attention to a systemic difficulty which affects the secondary literature of Baker studies.

Mursell situates Baker’s writings within the context of exiled English Catholic religious life, and specifically that of work undertaken by or on behalf of Catholic women. He is aware that Baker produced what he terms “a number of works, some of which are only now appearing in modern editions”.\textsuperscript{2} Mursell then writes the following paragraph:

But his most famous work was \textit{Sancta Sophia} (Holy Wisdom), which is a compilation of his writings made by Fr. Serenus Cressy OSB, a monk of Douai. The question of how much Cressy altered Baker’s original teaching remains an open one; and in any case \textit{Holy Wisdom} itself is a long, repetitive and ill-organised work, giving us only second hand glimpse of Baker’s methods as a spiritual director of nuns. Even so, it remains an important text in its own right, reflecting Baker’s own spiritual maturity and the rich Catholic heritage, both European and English, on which he was able to draw.\textsuperscript{3}

Mursell next spends five pages describing, in some detail, the spiritual teachings of \textit{Sancta Sophia}, which he treats as unproblematically those of Augustine Baker.\textsuperscript{4} It is, therefore, Cressy’s synoptic reworking of Baker’s teachings that he is presenting, not Baker’s actual work.

Mursell’s account, partly as a consequence of its thoroughness, may be used to introduce the difficulties which the secondary literature of Baker studies presents to the student of spirituality. As we encounter them here, these are essentially four in number.

First and most importantly, \textit{Sancta Sophia}, the book by which Baker has come to be known to the history of spirituality, is a book which he did not write. Although concepts such as “author” or “editor” are today handled with some

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\textsuperscript{2} Mursell, 348. \\
\textsuperscript{3} Mursell, 349. \\
\textsuperscript{4} Mursell, 349–53.
\end{flushleft}
precision, the relationship between this book and Baker’s original writings remains, in the minds of most secondary authors, largely unresolved; hence perhaps the imprecision of Mursell’s term “compilation”, which could be taken in several senses, including that of an edition.

Next, since Baker’s own writings are for the most part unknown to many, perhaps most, scholars of spirituality, it is problematic for them to judge the extent to which Baker himself as a spiritual teacher may appropriately be understood exclusively through the witness of his most distinguished disciple. In a period when scholars have become acutely sensitised to the potential for both accidental and deliberate misrepresentation to enter secondary accounts, it nevertheless remains quite usual to discover treatments of Baker’s teachings, both scholarly and popular, based exclusively upon Cressy’s book with little to indicate that the two are not identical.

Thirdly, judgments passed on Sancta Sophia itself are widely varied, and these contrasting attitudes to Cressy’s book are regularly employed as characterisations of Baker. Mursell himself appears unclear whether he wishes to praise (“an important text in its own right”) or criticise (“second-hand glimpse”) the book which others have termed “... a classic of the interior life”,5 or “one of the most systematic and exhaustive treatises of the life of devotion to be found in the history of Catholic mysticism”.6 Whatever the view taken of Cressy’s achievement in Sancta Sophia, it is certainly less than helpful to discover this view transferred wholesale onto the work of Augustine Baker.

Finally, it is unclear how either “Baker’s own spiritual maturity” or the extent and nature of Baker’s relationship to other European and English Catholic writers, to which Mursell makes reference, can be adequately gauged by consulting

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a volume whose relationship to Baker’s work is said to remain an open question. As the brief example offered earlier of Cressy’s reworking of Baker’s text has made evident, at least some potential difficulties in Baker’s writings vanish from *Sancta Sophia*.

Nevertheless, as Mursell correctly states, *Sancta Sophia, or Directions for the Prayer of Contemplation*, first published in two volumes at Douai in 1657, and known in modern editions as *Holy Wisdom*, has been the primary vehicle by which Augustine Baker’s teaching has been transmitted and his reputation carried for almost four centuries. According to Anthony Low’s 1970 study of Baker, the book has “remained in continued use, first by Catholics and more recently by Anglicans, as a devotional guide”.

James Gaffney, who wrote on Baker in 1989, notes that

> What has chiefly preserved Augustine Baker’s memory to posterity is the volume *Holy Wisdom*, for which there has been a popular demand, understandably limited but impressively constant, over the more than three centuries from its first edition in 1657 to its latest in 1964.

If either author was writing today, he might further note that the focus of Baker’s received reputation upon his authorship of *Sancta Sophia* continues even into the age of the internet: for example, the on-line *Augustine Baker Homepage* begins by describing Baker as “Lawyer, Monk, Historian, Mystic”, before going on to identify him as “Author of *Sancta Sophia* or *Holy Wisdom*”, which it describes as “published by Cressy”. The page offers a hyperlink to an online edition of the book, and lists the dates of the various editions of *Sancta Sophia* subsequent to 1657. No mention is made of the modern editions of Baker’s own works.

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Given the all-pervasive influence upon Baker’s reputation of Cressy’s digest, it is initially disconcerting to discover that the fact that Baker did not write *Sancta Sophia* is stated clearly on the title page of the 1657 first edition of the book, and has appeared in most subsequent editions through to modern times. The book is described as “extracted out of” more than forty of Baker’s writings and “methodically digested” by Cressy, after Baker’s death. Although Low is absolutely correct to write that “historically this book [*Sancta Sophia*] has presented Baker to his readers”, he also inadvertently highlights the contemporary student’s difficulty with the literature of Baker studies when he goes on to claim that “Baker intended” *Sancta Sophia* to be used as a devotional guide: “Baker intended it for this purpose, much as Bunyan designed *Pilgrim’s Progress* ... for the instruction and comfort of the elect”. This misleading statement is wholly lacking in historical foundation. As we shall see below, even Serenus Cressy who created the digest volume was quite clear that Baker never intended to write any such treatise.

But it has proven all too easy for Baker’s work and Cressy’s digest to be simply elided together, with the consequence that much of the received reputation of Augustine Baker has to be judged a posthumous construct. This construct depends substantially upon readings of Serenus Cressy’s digest, and it is illuminating more of the use to which Baker’s teachings (as transmitted by others) were put in the years after his death than it is of Baker’s own work. It is difficult for the student of spirituality to be immediately confident that a secondary author, apparently writing about Augustine Baker, has ever actually read a text authored by Baker. The contemporary English Benedictine monk Anselm Cramer, who as archivist at Ampleforth Abbey is in a position to judge, has written that “very few people have read any of Baker’s writings”.

\[1^1\] Low, 9.
\[1^2\] Cramer, Anselm. “Baker’s Editors: Cressy to McCann.” *That Mysterious Man, Essays*
The creation of Cressy’s digest has had a double consequence for the historical image of Augustine Baker, and for the study of his work. On the one hand, *Sancta Sophia* can be said to have inflated Baker’s reputation into that of the author of a “masterpiece of systematic mystical theology”, and most discussion of Augustine Baker from the seventeenth century onwards has followed in the wake of the continuing impact of this book, which has been held to “present the essence of the spiritual teaching of Augustine Baker”. But, on the other hand, the existence of the digest has given rise to and been held to justify a lack of interest in examining Baker’s original writings, their purposes and context. This lack of interest is most clearly manifested in the failure, until very recently, to begin publication of these writings. As a consequence of the existence of Cressy’s book, Baker’s treatises have frequently been regarded as little more than rough drafts for *Sancta Sophia*, the purpose and dynamics of their actual composition have been largely ignored, and the work undertaken by Baker among the nuns of Cambrai has not been adequately studied.

With these considerations in mind, I suggest the need to formalise a clearer differentiation between two distinct areas of study, which are related but cannot be held to be one and the same. The first is the study of the work of Augustine Baker, 1575-1641, which needs to be recovered from behind the shadow of the *Sancta Sophia* tradition, and which has as its focus the texts Baker himself wrote. The second is an exploration of the tradition of spirituality established by Serenus Cressy’s 1657 digest, *Sancta Sophia*, which grows out of Baker’s work (and is thus

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usually, and potentially rather confusingly, termed “Bakerism”) but which should not be viewed as identical with it.

In order to support this position, the next section will review what is known of the process by which Cressy created *Sancta Sophia*. I will show that, contrary to the view expressed by Gordon Mursell and shared by many other writers on Baker, the “question of how much Cressy altered Baker’s original teaching” cannot be said wholly to remain “an open one”.\(^{16}\) It has in fact been examined by several scholars in the course of the twentieth century, whose published findings point clearly towards the conclusion that Cressy’s digest is not a reliable guide to Baker’s work.

1.1. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN *SANCTA SOPHIA* AND THE BAKER MANUSCRIPT TREATISES

Towards the end of Serenus Cressy’s account of the *Life of Father Augustine Baker*, a full-scale biography which he wrote to accompany the 1657 publication of *Sancta Sophia*, but which was in the event excluded from the book for want of space, Cressy offers a “Survey of Fr Baker’s spiritual writings”. Cressy is moved to exclaim that “it would almost seem incredible” that any one man should “compile such a world of books” as Baker left behind him at his death in 1641, the full total numbering in excess of one hundred.\(^{17}\)

Hugh Paulinus Cressy (1605-1674), who in religion took the name Serenus, was a 41 year old Anglican priest with an established ecclesiastical career behind him when he became a Roman Catholic in 1646. The former dean of Leighlin and canon of Windsor was never personally acquainted with Augustine Baker, who died in 1641 while Cressy was still an Anglican; although it is clear

\(^{16}\) Mursell, 349.

from Cressy’s *Exomologesis*, an *apologia* he wrote in 1647 defending his conversion, that he had already read some of Baker’s treatises at the time of his conversion. Cressy writes that “I found myself pressed to hasten my reconcilement to the Church because I thirsted to become capable of practising those heavenly instructions”, and goes on to say that his decision to reverse his previous view of religious life and to enter the noviciate at Douai was prompted by his recognition of the extent to which both that community and the “devout and perfectly religious Benedictine Dames” of Cambrai manifested in their lives the spirit of “the same author’s writings”.\(^\text{18}\)

Ten years later, and (as a result of the work involved in the composition of *Sancta Sophia*) perhaps more intimately familiar with Augustine Baker’s world of books than anyone would ever be again, Cressy reports in his survey of Baker’s spiritual writings, that of the manuscript texts he left to posterity a substantial proportion comprise “great volumes of translations and collections” from spiritual writers, of whom Johannes Tauler, Henry Suso and Ludovicus Blosius are mentioned by name, along with the *Vitae Patrum* and “other ancient spiritual fathers and authors, proper to confirm his doctrine”. Aside from these translations, and described by Cressy as deriving “rather from the abundance of his heart than the invention of his brain”, Baker’s original compositions are said to number “near fifty several treatises touching internal prayer and other duties of a contemplative life”.\(^\text{19}\)

Among these fifty treatises of Baker’s “own framing and invention”, Cressy distinguishes between two groups of texts, written by Baker at different times and in different monasteries, which Cressy finds also to be stylistically distinctive: “for first, some of them are positive instructions, magisterially delivered by way of


aphorisms, and such were generally all the treatises written by him at Cambrai”. These texts were for the most part the product of regular interactions between Baker and the nuns of Cambrai, and were created with the express purpose of assisting in their spiritual formation.

Cressy goes on: “Second, others are more discursive, in which he [Baker] either solidly proveth or earnestly enforceth some of the former doctrines, and these were afterwards for the most part written at Douai”. These texts, written by Baker after his enforced removal from Cambrai have been more recently characterised as “less calm in spirit, less anchored in reality, less sharpened and polished by the discipline of his former teaching sessions with the nuns”.

Concluding his survey of Baker’s writings, Cressy is at pains to emphasise that, prolific as Baker’s output was, he “never intended so much as to shadow out the monogram” (that is to say, the first draft or rough sketch) of the “entire body of spirituality” represented by Cressy’s own “methodical abridgement of the doctrine”, Sancta Sophia. In the published preface to the digest volume, Cressy makes the same point again, noting that Baker wrote his instructions about prayer and mystical practices for “a few contemplative persons”, and that it was for them “alone the Author intended them, without the least thought of having them communicated and exposed so generally”. A part of Cressy’s purpose in making these statements is to draw attention to “how laborious, painful and troublesome an employment” it has been for him to create the methodical digest; that is to say, it is a device that serves discretely to enlarge Cressy’s role as Baker’s abridger. Nevertheless, Cressy’s statement that Baker “never intended” even to sketch out

22 Lunn, The English Benedictines, 212.
such a methodical, synoptic and public abridgement of his doctrine points to the
fact that the book which “historically … has presented Baker to his readers”\textsuperscript{25} has a
more complex relationship with its supposed “author” than has frequently been
suggested, and is part of the answer both to the question of Cressy’s fidelity to
Baker’s teachings, and to the matter of why the treatises were not deemed suitable
for print publication by those who commissioned the writing of \textit{Sancta Sophia}.

Cressy’s digest is not infrequently described as an “edition” of Baker’s
works. It is not. In fact, anyone who looks at the 1657 title page of \textit{Sancta Sophia}
will see that Cressy himself never makes the claim to have created an edition of
Baker’s writings. Cressy describes the digest as “extracted out of more than forty
treatises written by the late Ven. Father Augustin Baker […] and methodically
digested by the R. F. Serenus Cressy”\textsuperscript{26}. A term becoming fashionable in English
intellectual circles at this time, “methodically digested” has perhaps more
obviously in common with the world of natural philosophy than that of mystical
theology, suggesting the model of knowledge as abstract, systematic and unitary
which had begun to take hold in many areas of European intellectual life by the
mid-seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{27} Although this cannot be what Cressy intends to
communicate by using the term, neither can it be supposed to carry the more
neutral sense of “edited by” which appears generally to have been ascribed to it by
many readers down the centuries.

In practice, “extracted out of” and “methodically digested” means that
Cressy devised the overall structure of \textit{Sancta Sophia}, by reordering and combining
selected sections from a series of more than forty disparate texts written by Baker
for a variety of distinct purposes into his own systematic presentation. Most of
Baker’s original material was omitted (“for he had reduced over a million words in

\textsuperscript{25} Low, 20.
\textsuperscript{26} Cressy, Serenus, \textit{Sancta Sophia}, Title Page.
\textsuperscript{27} Chambers, Douglas. The Reinvention of the World, English Writing 1650–1750.
the MSS to about 200,000”) or extensively abridged and re-written; in addition Cressy has supplied connecting sections of his own composition to hold the whole together.

There has yet to be a full-scale analysis of the literary relationship between Cressy’s digest and the “more than forty” Baker treatises which Cressy indicates he has employed as his sources. Writing in the Introduction to his 1964 edition of Holy Wisdom, Gerald Sitwell maintains that, while an examination of Cressy’s method of composition would certainly be of great interest (if only to specialists and scholars), it was the opinion of the pioneering Baker scholar Justin McCann that “to present the results of such an examination in the form of a text of Cressy’s work with a critical apparatus would be virtually impossible”. Clark, Baker’s twenty first century editor, writes that while McCann “… considered that it would be impossible to identify all the possible sources of Holy Wisdom; the present writer is rather more hopeful.” Clark’s work in editing the Baker treatises for publication has undoubtedly brought such a project closer to its inception.

For the present, however, there are only three very partial studies of the relationship between the Baker treatises and the sections based upon them in Sancta Sophia. The earliest, dating from 1941, is that of Justin McCann himself, who undertakes an examination of why the Baker treatises were never published (a topic to which I shall return below) and an account of the relationship between the treatises and Cressy’s work in Sancta Sophia. Writing in 1975, the historian David Lunn offers a literary and stylistic comparison of the Baker MSS and their corresponding sections in Sancta Sophia. James Gaffney, writing in 1989, but

29 Cressy, Serenus, Sancta Sophia, vii.
apparently unaware of Lunn’s earlier article, offers a list of “some of the more obvious correspondences between manuscript treatises and parts of Cressy’s compilation.”

McCann’s article contains a general survey of the relationship between Baker’s texts and Cressy’s digest, beginning with what he calls a “mathematical” comparison: *i.e.* “Sancta Sophia contains about two hundred thousand words, and at a rough estimate the treatises used by Fr Cressy contain altogether something over a million”; thus McCann writes that the “general scale of the reduction is one to five”. McCann employs the idea that certain teachings are central to Baker’s purposes, whereas others are peripheral, thereby allowing him to argue that Cressy has more adequately represented Baker’s central ideas than the mathematical analysis might suggest. His principal finding is:

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\text{[Sancta Sophia] is a digest or précis of the original treatises [...] in the nature of the case it can seldom reproduce Fr Baker’s sentences, still less his paragraphs. [...] There are, indeed, some passages in the book where Fr Cressy has kept very close to the original text; but even in such passages as these he has reshaped the original, giving it a final literary form which is his own.}
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McCann goes on to examine the manner in which Cressy has reworked two specific Baker treatises, relating the original treatise in some detail to its corresponding sections in *Sancta Sophia* and setting passages from both texts beside one another. He writes that: “Although the précis has seized most of the salient points, yet the treatise necessarily suffers by being compressed into a chapter.” Employing a distinction that I shall return to discuss in more detail below, McCann believes it possible to conclude that in spite of Cressy’s wholesale rewriting of Baker, “the substance of *Sancta Sophia* is Fr Baker’s, whereas the literary form is Fr Cressy’s”.  

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33 Gaffney, 23.
35 McCann, Justin, 360.
36 McCann, Justin, 360.
Gaffney’s examination of the relationship between the treatises and Cressy’s digest builds on the work of McCann, identifying twenty-five distinct texts by Baker which can be seen to lie behind the various sections of *Sancta Sophia*. Gaffney is at pains to emphasise that his short list is “by no means an exhaustive catalogue” of the relationship between *Sancta Sophia* and the treatises.37 Neither does he make any detailed attempt to determine the extent to which Cressy has faithfully represented Baker’s thought, although he notes that “to translate is always in some measure to betray”, going on to offer the significant observation:

> for a comprehensive study of Augustine Baker Cressy’s compendium has one grave disadvantage. Namely, the very character of such a work obliterates all evidence of development in Baker’s thought. Compendia inevitably impose a systematic order upon thoughts ...

Gaffney, however, sees no immediate likelihood of a “study of the manuscripts in the light of their chronology”, which would be the condition of examining the development of Baker’s thought.38

Gaffney’s examination of some of the sources used by Cressy leads him to conclude that “few pages in the printed book can be traced to exact counterparts in corresponding manuscripts. Cressy, then, paraphrased freely”.39 Nevertheless, following McCann, he terms *Sancta Sophia* a “thoroughly faithful and cordially readable digest of doctrine”.40 In terms of the formal literary relationship between Cressy’s work and that of Baker the two surveys are essentially agreed.

David Lunn is concerned to examine the structural and stylistic detail of Cressy’s use of Baker’s texts, arguing persuasively for the view that the role Cressy played in creating *Sancta Sophia* should not be regarded as that of editor. Lunn writes that “the book is precisely what Cressy said it was: not an edition, but a

37 Gaffney, 25.
38 Gaffney, 15.
40 Gaffney, 15.
**precis** or digest, in which not even a baker’s dozen of phrases are word for word the master’s own”.41

Lunn offers an overall survey of his conclusions. First, he points out, that in abbreviating Baker, Cressy has simply omitted from the digest volume entire treatises of Baker’s *oeuvre*. Much of this material consists in “biographical material, history, verses and collections from other spiritual authors”. Next, “Cressy also omitted large sections even from the relevant treatises, especially towards the end of each one, though these usually consisted of Baker’s repetitions, examples from the lives of the saints and quotations from other spiritual writers”.42 It may appear unimportant for Baker’s citations from other writers to be present in accounts of his writings, but removing Baker’s use of “other spiritual writers” is one of the crucial ways in which the *Sancta Sophia* tradition has reinterpreted Baker. As we shall see, he has come to be understood as the author of a mystical system, and students of spirituality have debated the originality or otherwise of that system. But Lunn’s observations here should alert us to the possibility that the original agenda of the Baker treatises is distinct from that of Cressy’s digest in at least this important respect, and perhaps in others.

Further evidence to this effect is to be discovered in Lunn’s next reported conclusions. The structure of the digest, set out in books, treatises, sections, chapters and numbered paragraphs, Lunn points out, is of Cressy’s devising. “Although, for the most part Baker’s MSS. contain no chapters or headings, in some of them a clear order is discernible, and this, too, has been rearranged in some cases, not always with the best result”.43 Even a modern edition, or a “selected readings” collection, is likely to establish a context of interpretation for the author in question. It seems inevitable that Cressy’s method as described by

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Lunn goes considerably further than this, and adds weight to the conclusion that the received reputation of Augustine Baker has been skewed by the creation of this digest.

Moving from the structural level of Cressy’s work, to examine his detailed treatment of any specific passage in Baker’s writings, Lunn tells us:

> each chapter in Cressy contains about four-fifths that are recognisable from Baker, but the final fifth is Cressy’s own. The same can be said when one analyses each paragraph, namely that Cressy made a fairly faithful precis of the master first and then added a few words of his own by way of explanation.\(^44\)

Lunn’s analysis offers detailed evidence that Cressy, for whatever reason, has effectively re-written the substance of Baker’s prose; not only setting it within a structure of his own devising, but extensively adding interpretative linking passages.

Lunn goes on to note that Cressy has, in addition, made significant modifications to Baker’s prose style, reshaping what he terms Baker’s “gothic quirkiness” into the more classical proportioned Drydenesque periods sometimes remarked upon as characteristic of the style of *Sancta Sophia*. Lunn writes, finally, that Cressy further removed all material written by Baker with any personal quality, vehemence or indeed humour, about it, leading to the markedly calm, dry and impersonal tone of the digest.\(^45\)

Lunn’s study highlights the extensive formal and stylistic divergences between Cressy’s digest and the texts Baker himself wrote, leading to his conclusion, a stronger one than those of McCann or Gaffney, that the existence of *Sancta Sophia* actually constitutes an obstacle to an authentic appreciation of Baker’s work.\(^46\)

\(^44\) Lunn, “Augustine Baker,” 274.


This rapid survey is very far from being a full account of the relationship between the writings of Augustine Baker and the volume that has become associated with his name. Nevertheless, it is sufficient to show that, at least from the 1941 publication of McCann’s study of that relationship, scholars have been in a position to know not only that Cressy made significant and substantial alterations to the literary form of Baker’s texts, but that these alterations go beyond the process of selection and arrangement of material usually associated with the creation of an “edition” or “compilation”. The process whereby Cressy created the digest of Baker’s texts involved a large scale re-interpretation of the material he worked upon, both at a structural level, and at the level of paragraph and even sentence structure.

Although Lunn argues for a different conclusion, both McCann and Gaffney are willing to allow that *Sancta Sophia* should be understood as a “thoroughly faithful and cordially readable digest of doctrine”, and that Cressy’s labours need not stand in the way of an understanding of Baker’s project. As the account from Mursell cited earlier of Baker’s place in English spirituality demonstrates, such a perspective continues to dominate presentations of Baker’s achievement.

It is difficult to think of another area of the scholarly study of literature in which a second-hand account of an author’s works could be unproblematically presented as an acceptable means of understanding that author when his original writings are extant. Why has this happened to Augustine Baker? Part of the answer is to be found in the distinction we have already encountered being employed by McCann and Gaffney between literary form and doctrinal substance to which discussions of spiritual texts appear to be especially vulnerable. The next section

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47 Gaffney, 15.
will argue that such a distinction, while it has often been applied to spiritual texts, is not sustainable.

1.2. THE CONTEMPLATIVE DOCTRINE AND THE TEXTUAL VEHICLE

From the time of its publication, Cressy’s work has generated a concern to assert that his book, in spite of its stylistic and structural divergence from Baker’s treatises, nevertheless remains in some more important sense faithful to what Baker had originally written. From the seventeenth century onwards a strong distinction has been drawn, therefore, between, on the one hand, the doctrine of contemplative prayer found in Baker’s writings, and, on the other, the literary vehicle which carried this doctrine, with the emphasis being placed on the doctrine viewed both as detachable from the literary form and as the more significant element.

In the Preface to *Sancta Sophia*, Cressy himself writes that “there is but one objection that can be made” to the process he has used to create the digest, “viz. that the said doctrine perhaps is not here faithfully delivered” and he is understandably at pains to rebut such an objection.48 One of the documents he prefaced to the text of his book is a commendatory letter from Dame Catherine Gascoigne, the Abbess of the Cambrai community for whom Baker had written many of his treatises, and herself a Bakerite of unimpeachable credentials. The letter praises “the great diligence you [i.e. Cressy] have used and the very much labour you have bestowed” in the creation of *Sancta Sophia*, and strongly promotes Cressy’s abridgement as “entirely conformable to his [Baker’s] writings”. Significantly, the Abbess writes “not any that hath read your book and is versed in the Author’s works, hath found any objections to make either of anything wanting or differing from him; but all acknowledge that you have most faithfully, clearly, and substantially delivered his doctrine”.49

Historically, this view of the relationship between Cressy’s work and that of Baker has prevailed, effectively driving a wedge between what Baker was writing about, the doctrinal substance, and the books that he actually wrote: as Justin McCann puts it, “the substance of Sancta Sophia is Fr Baker’s, whereas the literary form is Fr Cressy’s”. Clark, similarly notes that Cressy’s Sancta Sophia is “a masterpiece of distillation”, and finds that while “it is of the nature of the book that it should give a more rounded picture than the original treatises do” the abridgement is “faithful to Fr. Baker’s teaching”. Only Lunn has significantly challenged the consensus, judging Cressy to have indeed produced a “masterpiece of systematic mystical theology”, but for that very reason to have followed a route which he believes Baker himself would have “execrated, as being at least irrelevant, if not misleading and positively harmful”.

Lunn is surely correct to insist that “substance” and “literary form”, to borrow McCann’s terminology, the contemplative doctrine and the textual vehicle, are harder to tease apart than many readers of Sancta Sophia have supposed, and his challenge is useful in so far as it draws the attention of the contemporary student of spirituality back to that problematic distinction between literary form and doctrinal substance which historically has hovered like a hermeneutical cloud of unknowing between Baker’s own writings and Sancta Sophia as their public record.

For most types of writing coming to us from the past, contemporary literary and hermeneutical theory has made it clear that such a distinction is wholly unsustainable. Nevertheless, as the leading contemporary historian of Christian mysticism, Bernard McGinn, has shown, in the specific case of mystical texts a willingness to ignore the significance of literary form has tended to be re-enforced

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50 McCann, Justin, 360.
51 Clark, “Towards a Reassessment,” 210–11.
52 Lunn, The English Benedictines, 213.
rather than undermined by the theoretical perspectives operating through most of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{53}

Introducing the first volume of his magisterial history of Western Christian mysticism, \textit{The Presence of God}, McGinn draws attention to “an important misconception that has plagued the modern study of mysticism”.\textsuperscript{54} Mystical texts, he argues, have often been understood in terms of misleading models of a simple distinction between experience and understanding that do justice neither to the texts of the mystics nor to the complexities of the relations between experience and understanding that modern epistemological and cognitional theories have presented to us.\textsuperscript{55}

At its crudest, the distinction McGinn is describing would hold that there is, in some sense, a primordial, raw experience enjoyed by the mystic, which may at a later stage come to be understood within a system of confessional religious symbols, and then written down as conceptualised within that belief system. To paraphrase McGinn’s words, when this distinction is applied, mystical texts are viewed as some kind of epiphenomenon, they are a shell or covering that can be peeled off to reveal the “real” thing.

McGinn finds that the widespread belief that a raw mystical experience is in some sense primordial, while its written expression is secondary, can neither be sustained from an examination of mystical texts themselves nor be shown to be philosophically reputable. “The interactions between conscious acts and their symbolic and theoretical thematicizations are much more complex than this,” he writes, going on to argue that it is the careful examination of written texts that should occupy pride of place, rather than the misleading quest for a species of raw experience.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{54} McGinn, xiii.
\textsuperscript{55} McGinn, xiv.
\textsuperscript{56} McGinn, xiv.
One significant consequence for the study of spirituality of an inappropriate focus on “the highly ambiguous notion of mystical experience”, McGinn suggests, has been a failure to attend to the literary nature of spiritual texts, their styles of discourse, modes of organisation, uses of language, or patterns of imagery for example. The belief that “autobiographical mystical experience” is the subject to be studied “has blocked careful analysis of the special hermeneutics of mystical texts, which have usually been treated without attention to genre, audience, structure, and even the simplest procedures for elucidating the study of the text. Mystical masterpieces … have all too often been treated like phone books or airline schedules: handy sources for confirming what we already expect”.

McGinn’s argument reinforces the claim of literary and hermeneutical theory that to change the literary form of a text is, of necessity, to alter the meaning of the text. There is a fundamental flaw in any argument premised upon the notion of a neutral content which can be addressed, and potentially “repackaged”, independently of the literary form of the text. Leaving aside any question about deliberate reworking by Cressy of Baker’s position on sensitive doctrinal points, it cannot but be true that Cressy’s literary activity, in shaping a systematic digest, has changed the meaning of Baker’s work for posterity.

The fate of Baker’s treatises demonstrates that it is not necessary for a spiritual text to be what McGinn terms a “mystical masterpiece” for its literary form to be discarded as irrelevant to the study of its meaning; indeed, it may even be that the spiritual literature of the past is in particular danger of this treatment when it is deemed to be something less than a masterpiece, as has certainly been the case with Baker’s writings. Several divergent accounts exist of the circumstances surrounding the creation of *Sancta Sophia*, and its publication as the official record of the work of Augustine Baker. All accounts agree, however, in

57 McGinn, xiv.
their negative assessment of Baker’s qualities as a writer, and the consequent view that his treatises were simply unsuitable for publication. The next section will suggest that this perspective, when coupled with the strong distinction between form and content I have explored above, has powerfully influenced views of Augustine Baker, and held back attention to the manuscript treatises.

1.3. THE LITERARY EXPLANATION FOR THE CREATION OF SANCTA SOPHIA

The conventional explanation for the origins of Sancta Sophia is based upon issues of literary form and style, and may be conveniently summed up in the points made by Cressy himself in the dedicatory epistle printed at the beginning of his digest, addressed to “Our Most Rev. Father Laurence Reyner, President General of Our Holy Congregation”:

The pains herein taken will appear to be not very ordinary to any one that shall consider how difficult a matter it is out of such a world of Treatises (written upon particular subjects for the special necessities and use of certain devout persons, without any eye or design in the author of affording materials for an entire body of spirituality) to frame such a body not at all defective, and with parts not unproportionable.\(^58\)

The sheer bulk of Baker’s “world of Treatises”, their occasional nature, specialised subject matter and audience, and the absence from them of an overarching structure (“an entire body of spirituality”), as well as some species of stylistic deficiency (“parts not unproportionable”) in Baker’s writings, are all advanced here by Cressy as reasons why the creation of the digest has involved “pains” which were “not very ordinary”. These same factors, expressed in terms of deficiencies in Baker’s writings, have formed the basis for the conventional explanation of the creation of a digest rather than the publication of Baker’s works, and have been deployed in whole or part to defend the creation of Sancta Sophia repeatedly between 1657 and

the present day. The most significant modern example of this phenomenon is Justin McCann’s 1941 article, “Father Baker’s Tercentenary”, which was referred to in the previous section.59

In this short study, McCann makes use of the three hundredth anniversary of Baker’s death to explain “why none of Fr Baker’s original treatises has as yet been published”.

McCann’s account is broadly similar to that of Cressy. He writes: “Several causes have militated against the publication of Fr Baker’s treatises in the shape in which he left them, of which the chief are their form and style. A subsidiary cause, in the case of some of them, has been their length”.60

As regards the “form” of Baker’s texts, McCann states that Baker did not write with publication in mind, and his texts are not “cast in a form suitable for publication”. He opines that “the books are, in fact, constructed by the method of addition, rather than on a formal plan with beginning, middle and end, so that they tend to be invertebrate”.61 This is partly the result, in his view, of their having been composed on an occasional basis to meet the needs of the Cambrai nuns, rather than following any “strictly logical order”.

With regard to style, McCann declares that “Fr Baker was quite capable of a terse and direct English, which leaves nothing to be desired on the score of lucidity and effectiveness [...] But he was capable also of something very different, of a style which is characterised by long, loosely constructed, involved sentences, full of parenthetical qualifications”.62 McCann is inclined to blame Baker’s legal training for this stylistic deficiency.63

60 McCann, Justin, 356.
61 McCann, Justin, 357.
62 McCann, Justin, 358–9.
63 This view, first voiced by McCann, has been frequently echoed by other writers about Baker. It is difficult to see what weight should be attached to it, as it remains simply an opinion. Counter examples of legally trained spiritual writers, e.g. Benet of Canfield, appear to carry no weight with proponents of this account of Baker.
So, some three hundred years later, McCann is to be found arguing essentially the same case for the non-publication of Baker’s treatises that is found in Cressy: “To sum up in the most general terms, it may be said that the Cambray treatises are unsuitable for publication mainly on the score of their form, the Douay treatises on the score of their style”. In both cases, the model that Baker’s critic has in mind of what counts as publishable form and style would seem to be *Sancta Sophia*, or something very like it. Baker himself, although obviously admired by both Cressy and McCann, is found wanting in this regard. It may therefore be fairly stated that a major consequence of the creation and publication of *Sancta Sophia* has been the application of a “deficiency model” to Baker himself and to his original writings: they were simply not good enough to be published.

It is a very short step from such a deficiency account, to the view that Baker’s original treatises were failed attempts to write a book such as *Sancta Sophia* - a structured and systematic mystical handbook, intended to address a wide audience. In this sense, as Lunn was earlier quoted as suggesting, Cressy’s book stands in the way of a proper understanding of Baker. When viewed from the stately galleon that is Cressy’s “mystical masterpiece”, Baker’s own achievement more closely resembles a shipwreck.

1.4. CONCLUSION

The methodological introduction to James Gaffney’s 1989 study of Baker offers the following justification for choosing *Sancta Sophia* as its focus:

> Those who have thought themselves disciples of Augustine Baker have been and are the devoted readers of *Holy Wisdom*. It is for this reason that in the main perspective of the present study [...] the book will occupy the foreground and the manuscripts provide a background, rather than the other way about. Whether the title of such a study would better refer to the doctrine of “*Holy Wisdom*” than to that of “Augustine Baker” may be a valid question but it is

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64 McCann, Justin, 358.
Gaffney’s acknowledgement of the complexities of attempting to write about “Augustine Baker” helpfully highlights the concerns raised in the preceding sections of this study.

Like Gaffney, I wish to suggest that the “disciples of Augustine Baker” are better understood as the “devoted readers” of Cressy’s *Sancta Sophia*, but I wish to take this point further than Gaffney was prepared to do.

Many (although by no means all) of these readers have been aware of the existence of other Baker texts, and in a few cases have even read some of them; but all have chosen to privilege the digest volume, placing it in the “foreground” and thereby turning *Sancta Sophia* into the prism through which both scholarly and popular accounts of Augustine Baker have been refracted. Occasionally, as I have noted, this privileging of Cressy’s work tumbles over into straightforward historical misunderstanding, and Baker is imagined as having directly authored the text of *Sancta Sophia*. Such simple blunders are rare; but the notion that Baker was striving towards the creation of some form of systematic presentation of mystical doctrine appears the almost inevitable consequence of this manner of proceeding.

Next, I have argued that scholars have known since the publication of *Sancta Sophia* in 1657 that Baker was not the author of the book, and that in the course of the twentieth century, published analyses of the relationship between the texts of Baker’s writings and the Cressy digest have made evident the extent to which Baker’s project and that of Cressy diverge. It has nevertheless been the view of most students of English spirituality, as it is that of Gaffney, that this is not an issue of moment. Gaffney believes this to be the case because his object of study is the text that has “significantly influenced the tradition of English Catholic

66 Gaffney, 15.
spirituality”, i.e. Cressy’s book. But my suggestion is that neither Cressy’s work in creating Sancta Sophia, nor the continuing tradition of spirituality which has been built upon that achievement, nor the work undertaken by Baker which underlies both, can be adequately addressed if each is allowed simply to elide into the other. Because it has become “conventional” to do so, as Gaffney correctly suggests, does not also make him right to dismiss the desire to separate out these distinct areas of study.

Thirdly, I have been concerned to suggest that part of the reason for the lack of interest in publishing Baker’s original texts until very recently has been the conviction, evidenced here in Gaffney’s account as in other contexts, that Cressy’s digest can not only adequately stand for the teachings of Augustine Baker, but is even to be preferred to Baker’s own texts, simply because Baker was such a poor stylist. Gaffney writes: “Baker’s ideas and the key elements of his phraseology are faithfully transmitted by Holy Wisdom, while his ponderous syntax and endless reiterations are mercifully discarded”. In short, the argument can easily arrive at the absurd claim that Baker scholars are in fact better served by reading Cressy than they would be by reading Baker himself.

Some of the negative consequences for Baker studies of the perspectives examined in the first half of this chapter will be touched upon in the second half. I shall briefly survey the five full-length studies of Augustine Baker undertaken by scholars in the second half of the twentieth century, with the aim of demonstrating that much of the work undertaken in this period has reinforced Baker’s received reputation as the author of Sancta Sophia rather than enabling his actual achievement to emerge. Finally, I shall offer an account of the emergence of a new, more textually based, school of Baker studies at the beginning of the new century.

67 Gaffney, 15.
68 Gaffney, 15.
It is within this latest phase of Baker studies that I understand my own work to be situated.

2. THE SECONDARY LITERATURE OF BAKER STUDIES

It is not the intention of the present study to offer an account of the history of the *Sancta Sophia* tradition within English spirituality, or of the story of the Baker manuscripts. An outline of the former has been explored in the existing secondary literature, and will not be pursued here. The history of the Baker manuscripts would be useful to historians but is not, of itself, a topic within the study of spirituality.

Rather, I propose to survey the major studies of Baker undertaken in the second half of the twentieth century. This period is significant because it is subsequent to the pioneering manuscript work of Justin McCann, who from the 1920s through to the 1950s located and catalogued the majority of the Baker manuscripts now known to scholarship. As a consequence of this work, and especially after McCann’s 1941 article referred to above, all scholars have been in a position to know that *Sancta Sophia* is not an edition of Baker’s writings and have therefore faced the question of how to address this fact.

I shall then turn to address the present state of Baker studies, which largely arises from John Clark’s ongoing project for the publication of Baker’s treatises in modern editions.

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2.1. LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY ACADEMIC RESPONSES TO BAKER

There are five major academic responses to Baker written in the second half of the 20th century; *i.e.* subsequent to McCann’s publication of his work on the Baker manuscripts. Two of these are published books, and the remaining three are unpublished doctoral dissertations. Each of these will be briefly considered.

My principle of selection here has been to choose only full-scale academic studies of Baker, not essays or articles, and not devotional compilations. I adopt this approach in order to examine the outlook of recent scholars whose exclusive focus for a major study is Augustine Baker’s work, and who are in a position to know that he did not write *Sancta Sophia*.

2.2. SR. M. ST. TERESA HIGGINS, 1963

Sr. M. St. Teresa Higgins’ 1963 unpublished doctoral dissertation is entitled simply *Augustine Baker*. H Higgins’ work springs from the school of literary studies of early modern devotional texts pioneered in the United States by H.C. White, and benefits from a wide acquaintance with the devotional texts of the period. It is a misfortune for subsequent students of Augustine Baker that no aspect of Higgins’ work has ever been published, and as a consequence it has gone virtually unnoticed on this side of the Atlantic. It is known in the United States to Anthony Low, whose annotated bibliography somewhat misleadingly describes it simply as “a general study”.

Higgins’ dissertation is one of the most insightful studies of Baker to have been undertaken, and although now somewhat dated, it continues to repay attention more than forty years after it was written.

72 Low, 159.
Higgins offers a useful survey of the state of Baker studies in 1963, which discovers a growing scholarly interest in Baker’s place both in the history of mysticism and the literature of the seventeenth century.\(^{73}\) Aware of the work of Justin McCann, she notes that

> the definitive word on either Augustine Baker or his work cannot be spoken until some scholar ventures into the mine - or bottomless pit - of countless manuscripts scattered, until recently, all over England in both public and private libraries.\(^{74}\)

Higgins is fully appraised of the fact that Cressy has reshaped and paraphrased Baker, as well as the issue of his fidelity to Baker’s teaching: “though Cressy’s primary concern, in fact, appointed duty, was to set forth the substance of Father Baker’s teaching, it is known that at times he consciously or unconsciously modified it”.\(^{75}\) She nevertheless finds the task of studying Baker principally through the lens of *Sancta Sophia* more pressing than the task of manuscript editing and publication. In common with several other students of Baker, she notes the frankly contradictory assessments of both Baker’s achievement and of his character to be discovered in the secondary literature, but she stops short of considering the possibility that Cressy’s reinterpretation of Baker may have been a factor in bringing about this situation.\(^{76}\)

In this respect, although Higgins has read McCann’s work, she does not break new ground. The synoptic perspective of *Sancta Sophia* is allowed to stand. However, there is much that is original and valuable in her three substantial chapters, on “Contemporary Currents of Spirituality”, on “Baker’s Spiritual Direction of Women”, and on “Baker’s Doctrine of Liberty”, that make up the bulk of the study. Although Higgins is principally exploring the teachings of *Sancta*

\(^{73}\) Higgins, 1–21.
\(^{74}\) Higgins, 13.
\(^{75}\) Higgins, 13.
\(^{76}\) Higgins, 13–15.
Sophia, her work on each of these topics throws fresh light on those teachings and does succeed in suggesting new avenues for Baker studies.

Chapter 5, on “Baker’s Doctrine of Liberty” anticipates much that would be explored in greater detail by James Gaffney in his later study, which will be considered below. Recognising the potentially controversial nature of the topic she is exploring, Higgins is careful to note that it is wholly possible that Cressy has adjusted Baker’s substance as well as his style in this area: “the original treatises may dwell more but not less on the place of interior liberty within the spiritual life”.77 This is one of the first signs within Baker studies of a sense that Cressy and Baker are not necessarily to be understood as doctrinally synonymous.

Chapter 4, on Baker’s spiritual direction of women, is an early venture into a territory - the religious life of women in early modern Europe - that has subsequently proven fruitful for a range of contemporary scholars. Higgins argues for evidence of shrewd insight on Baker’s part into feminine psychology which she judges original to him.78 In this, as in several other areas of her study, it is unfortunate that she was unable to access a wider range of Baker texts and develop her arguments further.

Higgins’ survey chapter on “Contemporary Currents of Spirituality” is an insightful attempt to situate Baker within the complex landscape of early modern Catholic spirituality. By arguing for a reassessment of Baker’s supposed revolt “against the methodology of his day”,79 Higgins anticipates several of the themes of John Clark’s work, especially the perspectives set out in his major 2004 essay.80 She argues that, while it has been conventionally assumed by Baker scholars that he is to be interpreted as a final flowering of the English mystical tradition and an

77 Higgins, 180.
78 Higgins, 143.
79 Higgins, 90.
opponent of method in the spiritual life, it is more accurate to understand him within the broad sweep of contemplative methodology ultimately springing from the *Devotio Moderna*.

In this last respect, Higgins’ work again broke new ground and suggested ways forward for the future development of Baker studies. It is perhaps no exaggeration to suggest that, had Higgins’ thesis been published, the direction of Baker studies in the second half of the twentieth century might have been different, and publication of the Baker manuscripts might have happened more speedily. Higgins’ careful and well-informed study benefits from the fact that she is able to envisage the possibility that Cressy’s project may not be wholly identical with Baker’s; but remains ultimately unsatisfying in that she is never able to explore this possibility, and remains limited to hints and guesses as to how the synoptic perspective may have clouded an appreciation of Baker’s work.

2.3. ANTHONY LOW, 1970

Anthony Low’s 1970 study of Baker, which was published in the United States in the “Twayne’s English Authors Series”, continues the American tradition of reading Baker from the perspective of the study of devotional literature.\(^{81}\) Low explicitly acknowledges H. C. White’s pioneering work on devotional texts, and has encountered Higgins’ dissertation.

Low’s is the most ambitious of the studies considered here, seeking to offer a comprehensive study of Baker’s life, teachings and legacy. He also offers the fullest bibliography of Baker studies, both primary and secondary sources, to be assembled to that date: a bibliography which forms the basis for the later work of Michael Woodward.\(^{82}\) It is significant to note, however, that although Low knows

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McCann’s work he has not made use of any Baker manuscripts, and that of the twenty five entries in his list of “primary sources” (i.e. texts by Augustine Baker), twelve are editions of *Sancta Sophia*, or are reworkings of sections of *Sancta Sophia*.

It is characteristic of Low’s outlook that he sets out to discover in Baker “a significant, original contribution to mystical literature”. He locates this originality in three areas:

... his insistence on the precedence of will to understanding, and experience to learning, in contemplation and its approaches; his emphasis on inspiration and spiritual freedom; and his adherence to a via media of practicality in his approach to the mystical way and to asceticism.83

After a general introductory survey of “Baker as a mystic” it is these three topics that provide the substance of Low’s study. A useful final chapter, on “Baker’s Legacy”, follows the fortunes of Bakerism from the seventeenth through to the twentieth centuries.

Low’s book is a serious and thorough scholarly introduction to the works of a neglected seventeenth century English mystical author. But it suffers greatly from Low’s failure to differentiate clearly between Baker’s work and that of Cressy. He repeatedly describes Baker as the “author” of *Sancta Sophia*, and accepts almost without question the synoptic account of Baker’s teachings to be found there. Even in the one brief discussion of the Baker manuscripts to be found in the book, Low is concerned to stress the “uniformity of Baker’s mystical writing”, and to argue that the best way to study Baker is to trace his “key ideas” rather than examine the details of his texts.84 This is, in effect, an argument for why Cressy is to be preferred to Baker. Low is never able to break away from what is, in practice, the synoptic perspective created by the digest volume, *Sancta Sophia*, with the result that much of what he writes in this study is now of less use than it might have been

83 Low, 54.
84 Low, 54.
to Baker scholarship. Given that Low’s is the only single volume introduction to Augustine Baker’s work ever published, this is not an insignificant difficulty.

2.4. EDWARD BURTON ALCOTT, 1973

Edward Alcott’s unpublished doctoral dissertation is a comparison of the mystical teachings of Augustine Baker with those of Walter Hilton, written by a historian who wishes to discover whether the English Reformation destroyed traditional monastic ideals of mystic contemplation. Writing what is more explicitly a study in spirituality than in literature, Alcott is unaware of Higgins’ dissertation (and has not read H. C. White), although he knows the published work of Low. His bibliography of primary sources indicates that he has worked from the 1964 Sitwell edition of *Sancta Sophia*, published as *Holy Wisdom*, and is familiar with some of Justin McCann’s Baker publications, but not with any of the Baker manuscripts.

Alcott’s conclusion is that Baker was “isolated from the Catholic mystic revival on the Continent” and that when he “discovered pre-Reformation English works on mystical contemplation he devoted his life to preserving this tradition”. Seemingly persuaded by the monastic historian David Knowles’ inclusion of Baker in his two books on the English mystics, Alcott believes that “Baker indeed followed, preserved, and re-introduced the English mystical heritage to the ancient English Benedictine community”. In these conclusions, Alcott is perpetuating misleading views of Baker found in several early twentieth century accounts of his work. If Alcott had been able to read Higgins, who argues a more nuanced case for

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86 Alcott, 203.
88 Alcott, 204.
an alternative conclusion, namely Baker’s awareness of and location within the Continental Catholic mystical revival, he might have reached a more accurate conclusion on this point.\textsuperscript{89}

His complete dependence upon \textit{Sancta Sophia} for an appreciation of Baker’s work is, however, the single least satisfactory aspect of Alcott’s study. Alcott echoes, seemingly without an awareness of the difficulties presented by the statement, Low’s view of Baker’s “intentions” when he writes that “Baker’s major work, \textit{Sancta Sophia}, was intended as a devotional guide, much as Bunyan designed \textit{Pilgrim’s Progress} for religious instruction and comfort”.\textsuperscript{90} Although he is aware of the context of Baker’s work at Cambrai, and notes that Baker’s treatises were composed with a pedagogic purpose in mind, he is able to state of them that “the manuscripts tended to be somewhat repetitive and unorganised until they were later edited into his major work entitled \textit{Sancta Sophia}”.\textsuperscript{91}

Alcott’s subject, which is the relationship between the English monastic traditions of contemplation before and after the dissolution, is an interesting and important one. It is regrettable that, at least partly because of his exclusive use of \textit{Sancta Sophia} to represent the views of Augustine Baker, Alcott’s study (like that of Low) is less useful to students of Baker’s work than it might have been. Since Walter Hilton was among Baker’s favourite authors, this is especially the case.

2.5. JAMES GAFFNEY, 1989

Although James Gaffney’s 1989 book, “Augustine Baker’s Inner Light”, focuses upon the teachings of \textit{Sancta Sophia}, he employs a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between this text and the Baker manuscripts than several of the other scholars examined here.\textsuperscript{92} He has read not only McCann but
also Placid Spearitt’s important 1974 essay,\(^{93}\) to which I shall return below, and echoes his concern that “much the greater part of Baker’s writing remains unpublished [...] until this material is published and studied, no general account or assessment of Baker’s spiritual doctrine can be better than tentative”.\(^{94}\) Gaffney alone among authors of full-scale accounts of Baker allows that while *Sancta Sophia* has “preserved Augustine Baker’s memory to posterity”,\(^{95}\) it can be allowed as Baker’s book “only in a qualified sense. In fact, it was neither written by Baker as it stands nor composed of literal excerpts from his writings”.

As was noted earlier, Gaffney details the history of the creation of *Sancta Sophia* by Serenus Cressy, basing his account on that of McCann whom he quotes for his useful summary of Cressy’s manner of working. However, Gaffney is rightly dissatisfied with McCann’s confidently watertight separation of form from content, and points out that “no transposition of ideas from one idiom to another can be perfectly achieved - to translate is always in some measure to betray”. Gaffney further points out that the synoptic perspective of the one-volume digest “obliterates all evidence of development in Baker’s thought”.\(^{96}\)

In the last analysis, however, Gaffney finds that “what has significantly influenced the tradition of English Catholic spirituality has not been Baker’s little-read manuscripts but Cressy’s much-read book”, and that to be a Bakerite therefore means to be a devoted reader of *Sancta Sophia*.\(^{97}\) This conclusion is certainly true, but it obscures the point that Baker’s texts are a better source for an understanding of his teachings than is the admittedly more influential book written by his disciple.

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\(^{94}\) Gaffney, ii.

\(^{95}\) Gaffney, 14.

\(^{96}\) Gaffney, 15.

\(^{97}\) Gaffney, 15.
But it is this perspective which allows Gaffney to make use of *Sancta Sophia* as the focus for his analysis of Baker’s teachings.

Alone among the authors of the studies considered here, Gaffney has examined several Baker manuscripts, and in a significant chapter “Baker’s teaching on inspiration in other works” he examines Baker’s teaching “as far as possible in his own words”. Although in one respect this represents a significant step forward, Gaffney remains of the view that the Baker manuscripts provide only “background” evidence to the scholar, whose principle task is to examine the doctrines to be discovered in Cressy’s digest.

Gaffney’s study is the most theologically astute and methodologically thorough of those considered here. In many respects it should be regarded as a model monograph, and it remains the only book length scholarly study of a significant dimension of Augustine Baker’s teachings ever published. There is no escaping the fact, however, that it is essentially a study of *Sancta Sophia*, and effectively relegates the manuscripts to the position of preparatory sketches for that text.

2.6. DAVID JOHN POWER, 1991

Writing a doctoral study of the Christian anthropology of *Sancta Sophia* in 1991, Power (himself an English Benedictine monk) recognises explicitly that this text, which he always refers to as *Holy Wisdom*, “is the work of Fr Serenus Cressy OSB and is a digest drawn from the voluminous writings of Baker”. As regards the question of how a student should go about studying Augustine Baker, Power shares McCann’s perspective: “despite Cressy’s editorial hand the content is Baker’s and the book can be taken as summing up Baker’s spiritual teaching”.99

98 Gaffney, 57.
99 Power, 13.
To some extent Power’s outlook can be understood as the consequence of a decision to approach *Sancta Sophia* as a work representative of a specific tradition of Christian spiritual teaching, which it is his aim to critique from the perspective of a Vatican II theological anthropology. This is a fully legitimate strategy. Nevertheless, Power states that Cressy’s volume is “a handbook of the spiritual life which presents the teachings of the English Benedictine Augustine Baker”,100 and does assume throughout the dissertation that he is dealing with the views and attitudes of Baker, unproblematically transmitted by Cressy’s “editorial hand”.

At points, Power’s study comes close to recognising the possibility that *Sancta Sophia* should be examined in its own right, as a text arising from Baker’s work although not identical with that work. But for Power, as for many before him, “Baker” has become the name of the tradition associated with *Sancta Sophia*: “as an English Benedictine, I have been trained in a tradition that has been nourished on the spirituality of Baker”.101 he writes, meaning by this the heritage of Cressy’s work in *Sancta Sophia*. Thus he never quite arrives at the view that Cressy’s synoptic digest may not be an adequate account of “the spirituality of Baker”, or that the tradition built upon *Sancta Sophia* should be examined in its own right.

### 2.7. CONCLUSION

Each of these studies shares to a greater or lesser degree the awareness, voiced particularly by Higgins, that the failure to publish the Baker manuscripts stands in the way of the study of Baker’s work.102 However, each scholar has both a slightly different grasp of this knowledge, and makes a different use of it. Importantly for my argument here, none of them is ultimately able to escape the synoptic outlook generated by *Sancta Sophia*.

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100 Power, 11.
101 Power, 11.
102 Higgins, 13.
Higgins, perhaps because of her background in the study of devotional literature, is able to place certain of the themes of *Sancta Sophia* within an appropriate context and offers a genuinely insightful analysis of the spirituality of the period. Although she recognises that there may be greater variety of perspectives within the original Baker texts than have been apparent to posterity from Cressy’s digest, and thereby allows of the possibility that scholars should differentiate between Baker and Cressy, she is unable to pursue this insight.

Low is similarly concerned to examine key ideas in Baker; but on the use of sources he believes it possible to assert the “uniformity of Baker’s mystical writing”, and sees no pressing need to differentiate strongly between Baker’s work and that of Cressy. In fact, such is his association of the two that he is even led to refer to Baker as the author of the digest volume several times.

Alcott holds the least sophisticated view on this point, stating simply that “the manuscripts tended to be somewhat repetitive and unorganised until they were later edited into his major work entitled *Sancta Sophia*”, which he proceeds to handle as unproblematically representative of Baker’s work.

Gaffney is more aware of the issues, but by finding that “what has significantly influenced the tradition of English Catholic spirituality has not been Baker’s little-read manuscripts but Cressy’s much-read book”, he is able to justify a study of Baker which, while being one of the first actually to study several Baker manuscripts, still goes on to use *Sancta Sophia* as its focus and guide.

Power, like Gaffney, is interested in the text that has helped to shape Catholic spirituality; but on *Sancta Sophia*’s relationship to Baker he shares the McCann perspective: “despite Cressy’s editorial hand the content is Baker’s and the book can be taken as summing up Baker’s spiritual teaching”.

Thus I conclude that, for most of the twentieth century, the status of *Sancta Sophia* as a summary of Baker’s teachings was not effectively challenged. Even an awareness of the existence of Baker’s texts as distinct documents, never written
with the digest volume in mind, and the dawning sense that the digest may not accurately represent the project unfolding in the manuscripts, has not prevented the authors of these studies from placing Cressy’s volume at the centre of their work on Augustine Baker.

3. THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY TEXTUAL SCHOOL

David Power’s 1991 dissertation, surveyed above, proposes a division of Baker secondary literature into four categories: (i) the apologetic, which Power sees as concerned to defend controversial elements of Baker’s teaching; (ii) discussions of various aspects of Baker’s mystical theology; (iii) “an approach that is carefully and cautiously textual and which tends to focus on the MSS”; and (iv) an approach that is primarily historical.103

I would argue that Power’s first two categories include the majority of studies undertaken in this field to date, especially accounts of Augustine Baker’s spirituality, and that the bulk of these have been - like Power’s own work - studies of Sancta Sophia or the tradition flowing from it. Power puts aside the third type of study, the “cautiously textual” (by which he intends the work of McCann or of Spearritt) as of no interest for the study he intends to undertake on Sancta Sophia, but from the point of view of the present study it is from this area that the most significant initiatives have emerged in recent years.

The pioneer of studies of Baker which are “cautiously textual and which tend to focus on the MSS”, or as it perhaps should be expressed, studies which actually address the work of Augustine Baker as opposed to that of Serenus Cressy, is Justin McCann. Born in 1882, McCann was a monk of the English Benedictine community of St Lawrence, at Ampleforth Abbey.104 McCann has been described

103 Power, 50.
as the “one great Baker scholar of the twentieth century”, and it is upon his almost forty years of labour among the Baker manuscripts that the achievements of what may be termed the textual school of Baker studies are founded. McCann’s work is helpfully summarised by Placid Spearritt, who was in many respects its inheritor:

McCann published editions of the *Cloud* with excerpts of Baker’s commentary, Baker’s autobiographical writings, and the versions of his life by Cressy, Salvin and Prichard. But his most important work was the preparation of a descriptive register of Baker’s treatises and the extant MSS. This list was brought up to date in an article that appeared shortly before his death in 1959 by which time McCann had located two hundred MSS in seventeen English or continental libraries.

As was noted earlier, it is also to McCann’s careful scholarship that we owe the first attempt to compare the work of Augustine Baker with that of Serenus Cressy in any detail. This short but seminal study is only one of the numerous articles on aspects of the Baker manuscripts which McCann published over a period from 1921 to 1959.

McCann’s later Ampleforth confrère, Placid Spearritt, continued McCann’s work of cataloguing manuscripts, as well as pursuing (fruitlessly, as it turned out) the Baker autograph manuscripts, which were lost in France at the time of the expulsion in 1794. His researches are among the first to note the importance for the study of the spirituality of what he terms the “Cambrai school” of manuscript texts, centred upon the monastery of Our Lady of Consolation, where Baker did his best work. Spearritt draws attention to the work both of Augustine Baker and of the nuns and monks who preserved Baker’s heritage, in the transmission of mediaeval English spiritual texts.

105 Spearritt, “The Survival of Medieval Spirituality.”
106 Spearritt, “The Survival of Medieval Spirituality.”
107 McCann, Justin.
Most significantly, however, Spearritt is the first scholar ever to make a serious call for the creation of a critical edition of the Baker ascetical corpus. Writing in 1974 he states that “the time is ripe for a critical edition of the ascetical works of Fr Baker to be taken in hand”\textsuperscript{109}. Spearritt shows himself to be fully aware of the difficulties attached to such an undertaking, and he took an initiative towards its facilitation by creating a microform edition of the complete Baker texts, based upon what he judged to be the best extant manuscript copy of each treatise. Spearritt placed one copy of the complete microform edition in the library of the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies at St Michael’s College, University of Toronto, and a second in the archive of his own monastery, in Yorkshire. It was his hope that this microform edition might enable a team of scholars to work towards the creation of a critical edition of the entire body of Baker’s works, under a co-ordinating general editor.

He advances three major reasons in favour of usefulness of such a Baker edition. First, “it would help sort out the survival of the texts and teaching of at least five of the great mediaeval English spiritual works”; second, it would facilitate the exploration of the spiritual literature generated by exiled recusant communities; and third, he argued that the study of English literature in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had for too long neglected the writings of Catholics in exile. In each of these arguments, Spearritt was ahead of his time, and much subsequent scholarship has indeed focused upon the areas he argues were in need of attention. Spearritt notes in passing that \textit{Sancta Sophia} is “not an adequate source” for studying Baker, although it may be said to meet the needs of the “merely devout, unscholarly reader”.\textsuperscript{110} Therefore, despite it not being one of Spearritt’s three formal reasons summarised above, a fourth should be added,

which Spearritt suggests without ever quite stating: the impossibility of adequately studying Baker himself without scholarly access to his texts.

The Baker edition, however, was not forthcoming from Spearritt’s initiative in 1974. It would be more than twenty years later that the first of John Clark’s edition of Baker’s treatises would be published.\(^{111}\)

3.1. JOHN CLARK

It is to John Clark that contemporary students of Augustine Baker owe the first ever editing and publication of a series of volumes of Baker’s original writings.\(^{112}\) An Anglican priest and scholar, Clark’s interest in the study of the mediaeval English mystics, and especially the *Cloud of Unknowing*, eventually led him, via Baker’s own commentary on the *Cloud* (which he wrote for the nuns of Cambrai and entitled the *Secretum*), to begin the long neglected task of preparing the surviving Baker treatises for publication in modern editions. Clark’s editions of Baker will form the basis of this study, and the full extent of his work in publishing Baker’s books will be addressed in the next chapter.

In addition to his tireless work in the editing of Baker’s manuscripts and seeing to their print publication, Clark has offered scholars a series of short essays or studies of Baker’s work, arising from his work on original texts.

In his earliest Baker essay, dating from 1995, Clark anticipates his edition of Baker’s *Secretum* with an essay which would form the basis for his later one volume study and commentary on the same text.\(^{113}\) In 2001 he explored the same

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\(^{112}\) Brief biographical notes, and appreciation of Clark’s work can be discovered in: Hogg, James, ed. “Stand up to Godwards”: Essays in Mystical and Monastic Theology in Honour of the Reverend John Clark on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday. Salzburg, Austria: Institut für anglistik und amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 2002.

theme further in a short essay on the sources of Baker’s ideas in the *Secretum*,\(^{114}\) and in 2003 he published that commentary.\(^{115}\) His 2004 essay in the journal, “Studies in Spirituality”, is invaluable for its contextualising of Baker among the writers of continental counter reformation spiritual texts.\(^{116}\) A conference paper, to be published in 2012, explores the chronology of the Baker treatises, an issue which has been impossible effectively to address without access to those texts.\(^{117}\)

The key points for students of Baker’s spirituality which emerge from Clark’s work may be summarised as follows.

First, Clark’s work on Baker’s texts builds on the scholarly foundations of Justin McCann and Placid Spearritt’s manuscript researches, by creating a series of published editions of Baker’s original treatises based upon the best available manuscripts of each text. Scholars are now able to read a wide selection of Baker’s texts without the necessity of visiting sometimes widely dispersed archival collections. This has allowed the more variegated landscape of Baker’s own writings to begin to emerge from behind the long shadow cast by Cressy’s synoptic digest. Without doubt, Clark’s work in this area will remain his enduring legacy to the study of English spirituality.

Secondly, Clark’s characteristically modest paper on the chronology of Baker’s writings is important for an understanding of that topic, and, while it remains incomplete (and, ironically in this context, unpublished), it is the first modern attempt to build on McCann’s work in this area. As I have argued throughout this chapter, the literature of Baker studies does not well serve the


\(^{116}\) Clark, “Towards a Reassessment.”

\(^{117}\) Clark, John. “Towards a Chronology of Father Augustine Baker’s Writings.” Paper presented at Fr Augustine Baker Symposium. Douai Abbey, Leominster, 2009. At the time of writing, this paper remains unpublished. The author is grateful to Dr Clark and to Abbot Geoffrey Scott of Douai Abbey for the provision of a pre-publication copy of the text.
student of Baker’s work, and the absence of such a chronology is a barrier to anyone seeking to understand the developing shape of Baker’s project. McCann’s 1933 alphabetical list of Baker’s treatises, appended to his edition of the Salvin and Cressy lives has been, until now, the only available source of such information. Further manuscripts have been located subsequent to this list, and as Clark himself writes, “adjustment and refinement may be offered on some points”.  

A chronology of the treatises allows the student of Baker’s writings to witness some of the interplay between translation, compilation and composition which has previously been hidden by the systematic presentation of Baker’s spirituality.

Thirdly, Clark’s wide acquaintance with Baker’s own writings and with the sources he has drawn upon enables him to offer the most informed opinion to date about the sources and affinities of Baker’s work. Crucially for the future of studies of Baker’s spirituality, Clark has consistently argued that while Baker has frequently been contextualised among the English mystics “the key writers for his spiritual formation belong rather to mainland Europe”. In this respect, Clark’s publications will point future Baker scholars in the direction of new avenues of research.

3.2. EMERGING RESPONSES TO CLARK’S BAKER EDITIONS

Clark’s ongoing project in publishing Baker’s original treatises has begun to generate a series of responses which may be usefully grouped together as a twenty first century textual school of Baker studies. The unifying factor which defines the approach of these studies is that they work directly from Baker’s treatises, no longer operating within the synoptic perspective established by Sancta Sophia, and consequently approach Augustine Baker’s work from a variety of viewpoints.

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118 Clark, “Chronology,” 3.
119 Clark, “Towards a Reassessment,” 220.
In 2001 Michael Woodward edited a series of essays arising from a conference on Baker studies held the previous year in Abergavenny.\textsuperscript{120} This is an uneven collection of studies, the best of which represent the new textually based approach to Augustine Baker, but several of which retain a version of what I have termed the synoptic perspective. The collection nevertheless reflects the shifting terrain of Baker studies, and a number of the essays are deeply informed by a reading of John Clark’s Baker editions. It is fair to observe, however, that the collection demonstrates the absence of a widely shared agreement about the relative status of Baker’s and Cressy’s work. As a consequence, it is sometimes unclear that all the contributors are actually addressing the same subject.

Perhaps the most important of the studies of Augustine Baker detailed here is Ben Wekking’s 2002 edition of Baker’s treatise, \textit{The Life and Death of Dame Gertrude More}.\textsuperscript{121} Baker’s biography of his disciple, Gertrude More, had been edited once before, by Weld-Blundell in 1910. In the Preface to his own book Wekking notes:

\begin{quote}
  The manuscripts of this biography were not printed before 1910 when Dom Benedict Weld-Blundell OSB edited the work under the title \textit{The Inner Life of Dame Gertrude More}. Comparing the Baker manuscripts with Weld-Blundell’s edition one soon realises that the two differ too much. It is evident that Weld-Blundell’s work is not a faithful representation of what Baker wrote.\textsuperscript{122}
\end{quote}

Wekking’s edition is of value, not only for the excellence of his editorial work, but also for his comprehensive introduction to the volume, which offers a study of Baker’s teachings in the text, as well as an account of the editorial method adopted in assembling the volume.


\textsuperscript{121} Wekking, Ben, ed. \textit{Augustine Baker. The Life and Death of Dame Gertrude More. Edited from All the Known Manuscripts}. Analecta Cartusiana. Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 2002.

\textsuperscript{122} Wekking, v.
The mediaevalist Elisabeth Dutton has explored the relationship between Augustine Baker’s work in Cambrai, and the manuscript history of Julian of Norwich’s *Revelation*. This is a theme which has been emerging in studies of Baker manuscripts since 1964, when H.W. Owen began to publish a series of articles arising from his rediscovery of a previously unrecognised Baker manuscript in the library of St Joseph’s College, Upholland. Owen’s discovery of a Baker manuscript which included a previously unknown text of Julian of Norwich, together with his subsequent work on the authorship of that text, has led to the view stated by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh:

... we owe the preservation of the long text [of the *Revelation*] to the piety and learning of Augustine Baker and his spiritual school among the exiled English Benedictine monks and nuns in the Low Countries and France.

In this branch of scholarly investigation, much hinges upon the role it is supposed Baker played in the history of the preservation of the Julian text. It is only fair to observe that the evidence for his involvement is very slight, and almost wholly circumstantial.

Dutton’s 2005 article argues that, since “the majority of extant *Revelation* manuscripts” were produced in the seventeenth century, “Baker’s writings may inform an understanding of their reading context”. She is concerned to ask how Baker’s work in Cambrai shaped the nuns understanding of divine revelation. It is her view that a parenthetical manuscript comment possibly authored by Baker aims to clarify the text for the reader, but does so at the expense of the “force and

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123 Dutton, Elisabeth. “Augustine Baker and Two Manuscripts of Julian of Norwich’s ‘Revelation of Love’.” *Notes and Queries* 52.3 (Sept 2005): 329–37


"subtlety" of the original text.\textsuperscript{127} The article is perhaps more illuminating of the manuscript history of the Julian text than it is of Baker’s reading strategies during his time at Cambrai. Dutton’s assessment of Baker’s “blatant ... desire to manipulate his audience’s appreciation of a text”, drawn from her reading of his *Secretum*, is accurate, although she does not develop her analysis of why Baker might have worked in this way.\textsuperscript{128} Her later, 2008, study of divergencies between manuscripts of the Long Text of Julian’s *Revelation* again supposes the hand of Baker at work. Here she spends more time assessing the possible motives for the selection and arrangement of material which may be the work of Baker, identifying his interest “not in academic knowledge but in mystical ‘knowing’”, and opposition to “frequent scrupulous examinations of conscience” as the key driving forces behind his editorial work.\textsuperscript{129} Dutton’s reading of Baker is accurate and thoughtful, but his supposed role in the process of transmission of the Julian text remains speculation.

In 2007, the present author delivered a conference paper on “Spiritual Reading in Augustine Baker”, arguing that

> a distinctive feature of Augustine Baker’s spirituality is its very *bookishness*. The shape of the spirituality that his earliest students took to calling “Fr. Baker’s Way” is to be discovered within the world of books that Baker read, recommended, commented upon and began to compose [at Cambrai].\textsuperscript{130}

The central argument of this paper, that Baker’s work at Cambrai has been misrepresented to history by the creation of Serenus Cressy’s digest, is developed more fully in the present study.

In an unpublished Master of Studies dissertation written at Oxford in 2008, Victoria Van Hyning delineates the suggestive possibility that Baker’s writings

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
“may be the first to develop the concepts of mysticism and the ‘mistike-author’”. Van Hyning is interested in exploring Baker’s “modes of self-authorisation” as a teacher of contemplation, and discovers them in three areas: his bringing together of English pre-reformation with later English and continental writers; his use of personal experiences of contemplative prayer as exempla for his readers; and his depiction of Dame Gertrude More’s reading and writing practices as foundational to her spirituality in his treatise *The Life and Death of Dame Gertrude More*.

Van Hyning’s work enjoys the distinction of being a significant study of Augustine Baker written from the perspective of Baker’s original treatises, with no role allotted to *Sancta Sophia* as a point of reference. Baker manuscripts, and the editions of Clark and Wekking are cited in her bibliography of primary sources. *Sancta Sophia* is cited in her general bibliography of printed primary works, with Serenus Cressy identified as its author.

Van Hyning and Elisabeth Dutton have collaborated more recently on a 2009 conference paper, as yet unpublished, in which they address “Augustine Baker and the Mediaeval Mystics Canon”. Here the notion of self-authorisation is expanded into the important idea that

Baker, in gathering texts and forming reading lists for the Cambrai nuns, was purposefully building a canon in the sense of designating useful works that he felt his readership needed in order to achieve mystical union with God.

As in Van Hyning’s earlier work, the primary concern of this paper is with concepts of authorial self-authorisation on Baker’s part. Important as this idea has proven to be in a number of contexts in the study of spiritual authors, my sense is that it is the relationship between Baker’s understanding of prayer, of the divine

call, and of the spiritual text that is in need of investigation rather than his approach to self-authorisation.

4. CONCLUSION

In 1933 Justin McCann published a recently rediscovered text, a personal memoir of Augustine Baker by Peter Salvin, an English monk and contemporary of Baker. Salvin’s *Life of the Venerable Father, Father Augustine Baker* written in 1646 and described by McCann as “an appreciation rather than a biography”, is useful to the student of Baker’s work in a number of ways. Since the *Life* is presented as an account of Salvin’s own encounters either with Baker himself or with Baker’s teachings or disciples, and offers Salvin’s account of the impact these had on his own spiritual life, the book is especially valuable for the witness it offers to the reception of Baker’s work among his monastic contemporaries. There is an obvious hagiographical motive at work in the text, and it offers evidence in support of the view that, in the years immediately following Baker’s death, he was held in high esteem by many of his peers, who may even have attempted to generate a movement seeking his canonisation.134

Early in the text, Salvin recounts his first meeting with Augustine Baker in 1630, going on to spend five succinct pages recounting Baker’s spiritual doctrine as he was taught it on that occasion: “this was the substance, as I take it, of that most venerable Father’s advice to me upon my resolution to be religious”.135 It seems highly likely that Salvin has constructed this discourse on the basis of much more than one brief meeting with Baker, and that he chooses to locate his summary of Baker’s teaching in the important context of his embarking upon the religious

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life as much for symbolic as for historical purposes. In a similar fashion, the striking section toward the end of the *Life* in which Salvin places an account of Baker’s approach to spiritual direction on the lips of a “missionary priest in England, a disciple of Fr Baker’s”\(^{136}\) is to be understood as summarising Salvin’s view of Baker’s own practice, no doubt gathered from a variety of sources. It is not impossible that Salvin’s figure of the unnamed “missionary priest” is once again a portrait of Baker himself.

Although the *Life* has been available to scholars since 1933, very little use has been made of the book for examining the reception of Baker’s teaching among his monastic contemporaries. I suggest that Salvin’s summaries of the “substance ... of that most venerable Father’s advice” constitute important evidence for the emergence after Baker’s death of abbreviated accounts of his teaching on prayer and the spiritual life, and that such accounts are part of the context for understanding the most significant of those summaries, the book called *Sancta Sophia*.

I have suggested in this chapter that the received reputation of Augustine Baker as the author of a systematic handbook of the mystical life must now be understood very largely as a posthumous construct. In Salvin’s *Life* the creation of such a construct, modelled upon the person and teaching of Augustine Baker, may be seen rather more obviously in process than has been the case with Cressy’s digest, perhaps because the Salvin text does not arrive heralded by almost four hundred years of devotional attention and practice, or by a set of scholarly confusions over its status vis-à-vis the work of Augustine Baker. Nevertheless, it remains the case that Salvin’s abbreviated digest of Baker’s teachings has received little attention from Baker scholars, except as a minor witness to the details of Baker’s life, in a way not dissimilar to that in which the Baker treatises have been

\(^{136}\) Salvin, 41.
addressed. My purpose in introducing Salvin’s *Life* at this point is, therefore, to underline and illustrate the fundamental argument of this introductory chapter.

First, I have argued that *Sancta Sophia* has created for Baker a reputation as the author of what Lunn terms a “masterpiece of systematic mystical theology”,

137 as Baker’s original body of work has been elided by posterity into that of Cressy. As a consequence, neither has Baker’s own project been appropriately understood, nor the true status of Cressy’s digest adequately addressed. My suggestion is, that like the much briefer summary passages in Salvin’s *Life*, Cressy’s digest should be seen as representing evidence of the reception of Augustine Baker’s teachings, and the uses to which they were being put, in the period immediately following his death in 1641. In the case of *Sancta Sophia*, a strong argument exists for exploring the uses made of Baker’s work by the officials of the English Congregation to generate a text which, at several points in the history of the English Benedictines has been understood to constitute “the deliberate, permanent, official expression of the spirit of the Congregation”.

138 But, as I have attempted to show, the continued willingness of students of spirituality to describe *Sancta Sophia* simply as Augustine Baker’s “most famous work”

139 has not facilitated such a study, even though the evidence that this description was less than the full truth has been available to scholars for some time.

Second, I have argued that the existence of the digest has supported a lack of interest in examining Baker’s original writings, their purposes and context. The synoptic perspective established by *Sancta Sophia* has misled many into supposing that in some sense Baker was striving towards the creation of such a text; and given the inaccessibility until very recently and the complexity of working with the Baker


139 Mursell, 349.
manuscripts, it has seemed to many better that the digest be allowed to stand as representative of his achievement. Even after the pioneering work of Justin McCann in bringing the continued existence of Baker’s manuscript treatises to the attention of scholars, those treatises continued to be regarded as little more than rough drafts for *Sancta Sophia* for the better part of fifty years of twentieth century scholarship. As has emerged above, it has only been in the twenty first century that scholars have begun to turn their attentions to the authentic texts of this seventeenth century monastic teacher.
The previous chapter has argued that Augustine Baker’s work among the nuns in Cambrai has been misleadingly presented to posterity, in very large part because of the writing of *Sancta Sophia*, as a process which was in some sense intended to culminate in the creation of a self-contained, systematic handbook of mystical spirituality. Much subsequent discussion of Baker’s work has focused as its proper subject upon the merits or demerits of this mystical system, which has been characterised as opposed to “method” in prayer, and sometimes identified as the final flowering of the fourteenth century English mystical tradition. As a consequence the actual texts created by Baker at Cambrai have received less attention than were their due.

Building upon the perspectives established in chapter 1, the present chapter proposes an alternative model of Baker’s work at Cambrai, offers a different approach to his context in early modern Catholic spirituality, and sketches out an overview of the chronology of Baker’s writings at Cambrai.

Section 1 will propose that, when understood in their original context, Baker’s Cambrai treatises are essentially a series of pedagogic responses to the spiritual needs of a specific group of individuals, occasioned both by Baker’s recognition of personal issues arising in his students, and by the broader purpose of furnishing the Cambrai community with an appropriately stocked library of mystical texts. They are to be understood in relation both to his oral teachings and his spiritual direction of the nuns of Cambrai, and also to the collection of spiritual
texts Baker either found already available in the library of Cambrai, or acquired in various ways for that library.

Because it is difficult to appreciate Baker’s approach to the reading of spiritual texts in the religious life without understanding something of his broader context in the history of spirituality, Section 2 will consider the background to Baker’s writings in the spirituality of early modern Catholicism, arguing first that it is inaccurate to understand Baker, as he has often been presented, as straightforwardly opposed to the evolving seventeenth century practice of methodical mental prayer, or as a throwback to the English fourteenth century. I shall argue that he is rather among the earliest English exponents of a specific methodical form of prayer, the renewed practice of affective apophatic contemplation, or affective Dionysianism, which is one of the several spiritual methods to be discovered within the landscape of mental prayer in the post-Tridentine Catholic Church. I shall suggest that this tradition of spirituality has a bearing upon the fault line running through Baker’s attitudes towards spiritual reading which concerns us here.

Finally, in Section 3, I will offer an introductory chronological survey of the texts written by Baker between 1627 and 1632, the treatises he created for the nuns of Cambrai. Very little work has as yet been undertaken by scholars to assist a reader of Baker’s texts in understanding their mutual relationship, or where they should be situated within the years he spent in Cambrai. This survey provides an overview of the texts whose presentation of the process of reading within the spiritual life will then be explored in greater detail in the following chapters.

1. BAKER’S PROJECT IN CAMBRAI

Throughout the Cambrai treatises Baker situates his own spiritual teaching within a reading of a much wider range of texts from the mystical tradition, most of them the product of sixteenth or seventeenth century mainland European writers,
coupled with his personal explication of those texts. As the earliest commentator upon Baker’s writings, his fellow English monk Leander Jones, writes in 1630: “the author referreth the Dames, his scholars, to his larger explication by word of mouth, & to his practice, in whch he also settled them, (both whch cannot be known but by those who know the author)”,¹ i.e. Baker’s writings are to be understood first and foremost within the context of his teaching and example while working among the nuns, an example which we know to have involved the provision of texts and guidance in how to read them. During his Cambrai years Baker furnished the nuns with an extensive collection of English translations he made of a wide range of spiritual texts, as well as recommending the reading of spiritual books he obtained from a variety of sources for their use. Such texts are referenced throughout his original writings.

Clark states an emerging consensus among recent scholars of Baker’s original writings:

Fr. Baker’s writing was done in response to particular needs [...] he wrote nothing until he became director to the nuns at Cambrai, and then his writings are treatises directed towards their formation and development [...] These treatises were not written with a view to printing, nor did he aim to present a conspectus of the total range of possibilities in the spiritual life.²

This present study follows this perspective in holding that Baker’s texts were indeed occasional, and the previous chapter has been concerned to argue for the need to approach the achievement of Augustine Baker from exactly this direction rather than through the distorting lens occasioned by Serenus Cressy’s work. However, the consensus position fails fully to take into account the context of Baker’s original treatises within his parallel work of translation and collection of a wide range of spiritual texts for the nuns, his extensive lists of reading materials

compiled for them, and - most especially - the preoccupation to be discovered in his own treatises with the inculcation of an appropriate approach to spiritual reading among his students. In other words, Baker’s texts, while occasional and emerging in response to the spiritual needs of his students, were also intended by their author to be read in the context of the wider range of spiritual books he had assembled, and aim to shape the reading methods adopted by his students. Thus, while he never aimed to build his own system of spirituality, or, as Clark puts it, to “present a conspectus” of his own devising, Baker did believe that the whole body of composed, collected and translated texts he was assembling for the nuns would broaden and deepen their appreciation of the paths of the mystic life, and would support their spiritual lives once he was no longer in a position to undertake this task personally. He says as much, perhaps somewhat portentously, in his short treatise *Concerning the Librarie of this Howse*:

The time will come (said Thaulerius, as it were propheticallie) that soules will desire and seeke to have spirituall guids and directors, and will be able to find none, and it maie proove to be the case of this howse and well as of other howses, and how usefull will good booke be then?³

Although Baker was not striving either towards establishing a mystical system, or sketching out a contemplative handbook, he was building a library.

By examining a seventeenth century account of Baker’s work at Cambrai as well as two of Baker’s own texts the following sections will seek to support this position.

1.1. **DAME CHRISTINA BRENT: DISCOURSE CONCERNING FATHER BAKER’S DOCTRINE, 1675**

A near contemporary of Baker and nun of Our Lady of Consolation,

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Cambrai, Dame Christina Brent, writing in 1675 offers the following account of Baker’s work for her community:

The way wch he taught was the mysticke way, wch desiring to establish more in the howse he procured verie manie of the booke of mysticke authors, & such as he found by chance heer, he recommended more to the reading & practise of the nuns.

Dame Christina’s account describes the role Baker played for the Cambrai community in focusing the attention of the nuns upon what she terms “the books of mysticke authors”. She goes on to list specifically Blosius, Tauler, Harphius, Suso, Hilton, and de Barbanson, whom we shall discover to have been of particular importance to Baker, (as well as “diuerse others too manie to be mencioned”). She sees these texts as having an important relationship to his teaching. For her, Baker’s “instructions”, or teaching of “the misticke way”, are intimately associated with the “reading and practice” of these authors.

Dame Christina’s concern in this short text, originally a conference she delivered to the Cambrai community as its Abbess, is to argue that Augustine Baker’s purpose in teaching the Cambrai nuns was not the invention of a new spiritual system of his own. She writes that she “cannot but mervaille, & that not wthout some resentment” that such a view continues to circulate over forty years after Baker left Cambrai. Rather, to “benefit by his instructions” was to be brought into a tradition of reading and spiritual practice, which Dame Christina terms “mysticke”, of which she understands Baker to be a conduit and not in any sense an originator. It seems that Dame Christina understands Baker’s teachings to have a

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5 Brent, 96.

6 Brent, 97.
close relationship with mystical texts largely drawn from the European Catholic mainstream.\textsuperscript{7}

Dame Christina goes on to argue that the controversies, or the “great mistakes” as she terms them, which came to surround some aspects of Baker’s teaching, arose precisely from a failure to recognise the importance within his spirituality of those “authors both auncient & modern whom he [Baker] followed & w\textsuperscript{th} whom he concurred”. She is at pains to suggest that it was only as a result of a simple ignorance of the facts that anyone ever spoke of “Fr Baker’s way or course” as a “new manner of deuotion”, an original system of spirituality. She writes: “it seems to me that this had both its beginning and progress from ignorance”, going on to compare such a misapprehension with the mistakenly sectarian views of St Paul’s Corinthian converts in claiming, “I am Paul’s, I am Apollo’s”.\textsuperscript{8}

This little known account of Baker’s work, coming from a leading member of the community on whose behalf Baker undertook much of his spiritual writing, urges an alternative model for understanding the context in which we should read Baker’s texts. For Dame Christina, Baker’s primary context is one of the reading and practice of the “misticke authors” much more than it is that of the writer of a series of texts, and certainly not the originator of a mystical system. In fact, she makes surprisingly little mention of Baker’s work as an author, speaking of him rather as one who “had given instructions in this our house of Cambray”.\textsuperscript{9} When Baker’s own writings are mentioned, they are referred to as “the manuscript books and papers of very Rev. Fr. Baker, given to any of the Religious”,\textsuperscript{10} a phrase which itself echoes the image of Baker as one who “had given instructions” to the nuns. For Dame Christina, in order for this process of spiritual guidance to be

\textsuperscript{7} Brent, 96.
\textsuperscript{8} Brent, 97.
\textsuperscript{9} Brent, 96.
\textsuperscript{10} Brent, 98.
appropriately understood it must be set within the reading context already touched upon: “verie manie of the bookes of mysticke authors [...] recommended more to the reading & practice of the nunns”.

Margaret Truran, a modern nun of Our Lady of Consolation, now Stanbrook Abbey, offers a complementary perspective to that of Dame Christina. Truran is unusual among Baker scholars in working exclusively from his original writings. These lead her towards a conclusion very similar to that of her seventeenth century forebear. Writing on the needs Baker was trying to meet in his work at Cambrai, she judges that he “did not set out to supply a systematic, authoritative guide to the practice of the contemplative or religious life [...] but provided a response to actual situations and difficulties”.

Her assessment is that the answer to understanding the nature of Baker’s project “lies with the nuns themselves”, in the sense that it was the specific issues he encountered in his direction of the spiritual life of these particular women that gave rise to the work he undertook. Her suggestive essay seeks to connect elements of Baker’s Cambrai texts to events in the life of the young community at Cambrai (for example the influx of novices in 1625-26, or the appointment as Abbess in 1629 of Baker’s devoted disciple, Dame Catherine Gascoigne). Thus far she essentially follows what I have termed the consensus position. But in conclusion she writes that Baker provided for the spiritual needs of the Cambrai nuns a teaching that has endured for almost four hundred years, built up a fine library of contemplative reading material that included his own prolific literary output, [and] drew up reading lists to guide the nuns.

Significantly, Truran ultimately situates Baker’s writings within precisely the same

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context of “contemplative reading material” to which Dame Christina’s words from four hundred years earlier drew attention.

In summary: her Discourse reveals that Christina Brent, who lived among the first generation of Baker’s disciples, understands his written works as:

(i) intended to be set within and to illuminate a wider range of printed and manuscript spiritual texts, which both Baker and his students were familiar with;

(ii) specifically created for the use of the group of women Baker knew and taught; and,

(iii) closely associated with his oral instructions.

1.2. THE APOLOGIE OF FATHER BAKER FOR ALL HIS WORKS, 1629

As a consequence of some form of opposition to his work that surfaced in 1629, quite possibly from among those Cambrai nuns who were unhappy with what he taught, Baker wrote a text which is of great value to an appreciation of his project. Baker’s Apologie was written at Cambrai, most probably early in the year, and was addressed to the General Chapter of the English Congregation which met in that year.\(^{14}\) The full title of the work is The Apologie of Father Baker for all his workes, wherein are certeine poyns worthy of consideration by such priuate persons as would censure these his writings.\(^{15}\)

Its value to us now lies partly in the opportunity it affords to hear Baker describe his project in Cambrai as he wished it to be understood. My argument here will be that Baker’s perspective in the Apologie coincides in many respects with the outlook that we have encountered in the previous section.


In his *Apologie*, Baker proceeds as in a number of other treatises by way of a series of numbered points, in this case fourteen in total. I shall not attempt here a consideration of the treatise in its entirety, but simply indicate the points made by Baker which touch upon his understanding of the work he had undertaken among the Cambrai nuns.

Baker’s central contention is that his treatises are not written with a wide, or as he puts it “publicke”, readership in mind, but are very specifically, indeed exclusively, for the use of a particular group of readers: *i.e.* the nuns of Cambrai. He writes that “my writings are not (nor are they worthy to be), publicke for the world [...] but for a few certein priuate persons, & so are not wth in the common case of bookes”.¹⁶ This preoccupation with the distinction between texts that are “priuate” and those that are “publicke” runs throughout the treatise. It is deployed by Baker to express his view that his work both addresses a different audience and is concerned with different subject matter from that of the generality of spiritual texts.

Baker insists that the specific circumstances and character of his audience are close to the heart of his project. A “publicke” audience would consist in “all sorts of spiritts”, and it has not been his intention to address them. Thus he contrasts his work with that of a “publicke writer”: “These writers most of all regard the persons for whom they wrote, being all sorts of spiritts, and so doe I, regardinge the particularities of those spirits for whom in perticular I write. These publicke writers accommodated themselues to all; I to a few”.¹⁷ Baker repeats this claim to be addressing only the nuns of Cambrai in a number of ways throughout the *Apologie*; it is the first of a series of claims to what might be termed a form of “specialisation” that he will make for his own undertaking.

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There is a very strong disjunction in Baker’s text between the state of life of enclosed, contemplative religious, and any other Christian vocation, including that of other religious. Baker says, of the “state and condition of those for whom I write”, that they are: “not only of a contenplatiue order, but through their straight inclosure, elongation from the world, freedome from studies, (for w[ch their sex is improper), & other solicitudes that are much distractiue [...] drawinge next to a meere eremiticall estate”\(^{18}\). His intended audience, then, is not only a specific set of people, it is a group of women who live a largely solitary life very close to that of hermits. Specialists in contemplation, we might say.

Baker holds to a firm conviction not only about the practical difference between the state of life of his audience and that of others, even other religious, but also about its status or value: “The liues of these persons [...] in soule are as different, yea as farre excelling those that are not retired, (allbeit they be religious), as is heauen distant from the earth, & is higher then it”\(^{19}\). For Baker, the specialisation of the audience’s way of life is associated with the specialisation of the texts written for them, and just as they are separated from “the world”, so should the writings created for them be kept away from inappropriate readers.

Baker advises caution regarding access to his texts, warning the nuns:

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\text{... that you doe not deliver them forth to any other without good consideration & consultation amonge you [...] If you deliver them forth indiscretely, you will prooue vnwise: If you reserve them discreetly, or deliuer them forth discreetlie, you will be of the number of the wise & not of the foolish virgins.}^{20}
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Such an understanding of the enclosed, contemplative state of life is, by modern standards, elitist. Even in the seventeenth century context in which Baker is writing, it is arguably backward looking. But it is close to the heart of his self-

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presentation here in the *Apologie*, and is consistent with the position he takes up elsewhere.

When Baker addresses the second sense in which his texts are “priuate”, namely that his subject matter is not that of “publicke” books, we discover much of the same dynamic at work. Baker writes:

... in the instructions that serve for the spirit, there are many things that are not fit to be expressed in writings that go publicke to the world; yea, they would be scandalous, or at least very inconvenient, being matters of the spirit w\(^{th}\) the worlde is not capable of ...\(^{21}\)

The specialist audience requires a correspondingly specialised subject matter, which Baker presents as inappropriate for the general reader. He believes that his own writings should be understood as

supplieinge what other writers could not prudentlie doe in their publicke writings [...] Some of their doings I have expounded no otherwise then they meant, yet perhaps somewhat further then they thought good to expresse; some things w\(^{th}\) at all they could not w\(^{th}\) prudence sette down, but passed over w\(^{th}\) silence, I (my case beinge otherwise), haue been bold, (& that not w\(^{th}\)out necessitie), to vtter vnto you ...\(^{22}\)

Significantly, Baker presents himself as offering “farther supply or addition” to the public writings: “And indeed my writings in effect are but such supplies, additions, & accommodations.”\(^{23}\) This is a very suggestive description by Baker of his writings. It appears to support the view that Baker wishes his own books to be understood as forming a part, albeit an important part, of the total collection of spiritual texts he has assembled for the use of his students.

Baker’s defence of his work, as represented by the *Apologie*, echoes and develops the points we have encountered earlier. Baker presents his writings as in a close relationship with his oral teachings, and both of these as specifically ordered towards the needs of the enclosed nuns of Cambrai. Indeed, he is fierce in his opposition to the notion that they might be read by other audiences. He believes


that many of the written texts on spiritual matters generally available in his day are inadequate to the needs of his specialist students, and even the best of them are in need of explication or supplement.

In a telling phrase he characterises his own project as that of “an experienced guide that can tell them more than bookes doe, or can teach them how to vnderstand & make right vse of booke”. In other words, Baker explicitly identifies his project as one in which his instructions, whether written or spoken, are intended to supplement an existing range of spiritual texts, and contain guidance on how to read those books. His own books, as we have seen, he describes as “supplies, additions, & accommodations”, a series of supplements to the wider collection of texts which he intends to be understood as their actual context.

1.3. A CATALOGUE OF SUCH ENGLISH BOOKES AS ARE IN THIS HOUSE, MOST HELPING TOWARD CONTEMPLATION, 1628

At the end of his treatise, Directions for Contemplation: Book H, Baker provides a number of appendices; on the recitation of the breviary, on the hearing of mass, and a reading list entitled A Catalogue of such English bookes as are in this house, most helping toward contemplation. Baker’s modern editor, Clark, comments that it is wholly appropriate for these texts to be attached to Baker’s four volume work on contemplation,

... since the recitation of the Office, the hearing of Mass, and spiritual reading are essential elements of the religious life, apart from which all the antecedent directions for contemplation would be of no avail.

Clark considers the version of the Catalogue which is to be found in the Baker

\[\text{Baker, Anchor, Apologie, Summary, 62.} \]
\[\text{Baker, Directions H, ix.} \]
manuscript in the Osborn Collection at Yale University to be the best of the surviving lists, and tells us that the reading list as presented at the end of his edition of Book H is a transcription of this text. The Catalogue, like the previous two texts, is of value here because of the light it throws upon Baker’s own understanding of his project at Cambrai.

Among those who have worked on Baker’s texts, only Rhodes has attached particular importance to his reading lists. In her short 1993 study of the Catalogue Rhodes makes use of this text to promote her view that in his writings for the nuns Baker’s “teaching was dominated by texts rather than experientially based”. As we shall see in later chapters, this distinction is not as clear as Rhodes wishes it to be, not least because it is precisely the criterion of “experience” which Baker prizes above all in the authors whose writings he commends to his students. Nevertheless, Rhodes does a great service to Baker scholarship by identifying the texts listed by Baker by their conventional titles, according to the standard short-title catalogue for the period, and by drawing attention to the potential value of this short text to an understanding of Baker’s work. For the purposes of this study, it is precisely the prominence and use of texts in Baker’s spirituality which is the point at issue, and the Catalogue is a direct witness to Baker guiding his students in their use of spiritual books.

The main section of the Catalogue contains some thirty-six named books, representing the work of many central figures of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century movements of Catholic spirituality in Spain, Italy, France, the Low Countries and Germany, as well as a small selection of pre-dissolution English texts. The main reading list is then followed by a shorter series of subsidiary book lists, whose contents Baker describes variously as “of less use” or

“tending more to helpe for praier”, or which are collections of saints’ lives or “Bookes in the French tongue”. In most cases the sources of the books Baker lists are unknown. Aside from his own compositions or translations, some books he clearly found already in the Cambrai convent when he arrived, others he has acquired over time by means it is now perhaps impossible to discover. His letter to Sir Robert Cotton offers our only evidence of one method: namely, begging. Latz, however, is on very unsure ground when she confidently asserts that

While spiritual director of the English Benedictine Convent at Cambrai ... [Baker] frequently crossed the Channel back and forth to England, disguised as an antiquarian and surreptitiously bringing back books from his voyages.

This engaging image of Baker as a Scarlet Pimpernel of the mystic book trade is, unfortunately, pure historical fantasy; although it does present the intriguing question of how one might disguise oneself as an antiquarian. There is absolutely no evidence of Baker having made such “voyages”. It may be that Latz has misunderstood Baker’s letter to Cotton, taking “the bearer” of the letter, referred to by Baker in the text, to be Baker himself.

I wish to draw attention here to three aspects of the Catalogue which support the argument of the present study.

The first of these is the fact that throughout the reading lists Baker provides annotations and instructions, commenting briefly on the texts he lists, indicating which sections, for example, provide “good matter for you”, or which are not to be read. The very first words of the Catalogue are indicative of the type of document Baker has written: “Where I saie ‘All’ I meane that the whole booke is to be read ouer. Wher I onlie expresse some particuler places or chapters of the booke, there I meane that so much is to be read and not the rest”. In these and

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29 Baker, Directions H, 85–89.
30 Latz, 27.
31 Baker, Directions H, 82.
32 Baker, Directions H, 82.
other such annotations we may find support for the view that Baker intends to guide the reader of written texts by his own work.

An example would be Baker’s treatment here of Blosius, the sixteenth century Benedictine Abbot of Liessies, and one of his favourite spiritual authors. Blosius’ texts (“written hand, bound in 7 generall bookes”) are strongly commended to the nuns, but whereas several sections of his works are picked out for particular mention, largely because they are addressing ascetical and contemplative issues, Blosius’ controversial works written to attack the Protestant heresies “are not for yr use”. Baker adds: “Allso his Psigogogie (w ch is in the 3d booke) will be but little or nothing for yr use”.33

The Rule of Perfection of Benet of Canfield, a text which Baker always refers to as “The Will of God”, possibly because this is its central theme and organising principle, is treated in some detail. For example, the reader is told: “The 2d Book is of Contemplation; and therefore is not proper but for such as are comme to or neere vnto Contemplation. In the First Booke, regarde especiallie the 18th chap’. In the 2d Booke, the choice or election of God, w ch is in the 134th page”.34

The reader is conscious throughout the Catalogue that this is not a neutral library list. Baker consciously intends to shepherd his students to those texts, or those sections of texts which will profit them; equally, he warns against whole sections of texts which he regards as unsuited to their spiritual path.

Secondly, while Baker’s Apologie, surveyed in the previous section, argued for the specialised, indeed localised, nature of his writings at Cambrai, the Catalogue in several details illuminates the same point in a highly personal way, as we discover the members of the Cambrai community individually named by Baker as currently reading or associated with a particular text at the time he was writing.

33 Baker, Directions H, 82.
34 Baker, Directions H, 83.
Speaking of a text of Louis of Granada, Baker notes that “there are two [copies] in the house, videlz. D. Agnes hath one, and Sister Martha another”.\textsuperscript{35} The works of Francis de Sales available at Cambrai include “Enterteinments, in written hande, translated by D. Potentiana a religious of this house”.\textsuperscript{36} Luis de Molina, a Jesuit spiritual writer, appears to have attracted the attentions of one of Baker’s students: “this booke, Sister Martha hath it”.\textsuperscript{37} Meanwhile Dame Gertrude More is said to be reading “a little manuscript intituled: Certein Brief Instructions”.\textsuperscript{38} (Neither Rhodes nor Clark has been able to identify this last text, which, given its title, may well be extracted from a longer work and impossible now to specify with any certainty).

Finding the members of the Cambrai community, Augustine Baker’s students, mentioned by name among the listings of the books he commends to them for their use makes very apparent the occasional nature of much of Baker’s spiritual writing. The \textit{Catalogue} underlines very directly the textually based quality in Baker’s work, and how localised it is in the Cambrai monastery. The fact that this text is not understood by its author as being among the “writings that goe publicke to the world”\textsuperscript{39} could hardly be plainer.

Thirdly, and finally, I have argued above that Baker understood his own treatises as written to be set within and to illuminate a wider range of printed and manuscript spiritual texts. In the \textit{Catalogue} we discover precisely such a treatment by Baker of his own treatises, several of which are listed among the texts he enumerates as available for the religious of Cambrai.

Baker includes several of his own works, notably the three treatises which now compose \textit{A Spirituall Treatise Called ... A,B,C} within the main list of works

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\textsuperscript{35} Baker, \textit{Directions H}, 83.
\textsuperscript{36} Baker, \textit{Directions H}, 84 This translation was subsequently published at Douai in 1632. See Truran, Margaret. “True Christian Amazons?” \textit{Downside Review} 115 (July 1997): 162:.
\textsuperscript{37} Baker, \textit{Directions H}, 85.
\textsuperscript{38} Baker, \textit{Directions H}, 85.
\textsuperscript{39} Baker, \textit{Anchor, Apologie, Summary}, 62.
“most helping toward contemplation”, although he says nothing about their authorship. He describes the contents of Book C, for example, as follows:

22. The Book C in written hand. It containeth a treatise, how one shall behave himself in offices or employments; in the later part of which treatise there are Collections out of diverse authors, showing the great commodity, yea and the necessity of mental prayer. Also there are in that book certain Collections by which it will appear how that the Spiritual Exercises delivered by the Jesuits are not proper nor convenient for a contemplative estate, which is the profession of the house. Further there is showed the excellence of the exercise of the will in mental prayer. There is also a treatise of the soul, which will not be but for such of the house as I have expounded it unto.\(^\text{40}\)

This short paragraph brings together many of Baker’s central concerns, not only in the Catalogue but throughout the Cambrai texts: it is itself composed of several sub-treatises, partly a set of “Collections” from other writers, it focuses upon the exercises which are “proper ... for a contemplative estate”, and warns against practices which are unhelpful, it stresses the “exercise of the will in mental prayer”; also it exemplifies Baker’s use of his own texts in his teaching of the nuns. Finally, but most significantly here, it is itself set within a context established by the Catalogue as a whole, that of the entire range of texts Baker is commending to his audience.

A separate sub-list, “Some Treatises in written hande of my translating or making” identifies more than twenty texts of Baker’s own works, but notably mixes together, once again, translations and collections from older sources with Baker’s original compositions.\(^\text{41}\)

Throughout the Catalogue, then, mention of Baker’s own texts is to be discovered interspersed with details of books by other spiritual writers, while the whole reading list is annotated by Baker with advice to the reader about how best to use the books it identifies as available in the convent.

\(^\text{40}\) Baker, Directions H, 84.
\(^\text{41}\) Baker, Directions H, 85.
1.4. CONCLUSION

By examining Baker’s *Catalogue* and *Apologie*, and setting them in the context of another near-contemporary account of his work, I have argued that it is correct to understand Baker’s Cambrai treatises as essentially occasional, a series of pedagogic responses to the spiritual needs of the nuns of Cambrai. Additionally, I have argued that all of these witnesses point to the conclusion that a complete account of Baker’s project requires that his written texts be understood in relation both to his oral teachings and spiritual direction of the nuns, and to the conscious efforts he makes throughout his texts to situate them relative to other “mysticke authors”, and to show how any spiritual books, including his own, were to be read. In Baker’s own telling expression, his treatises make available to the nuns of Cambrai “such supplies, additions, & accommodations” as he judged them to require for their contemplative lives.42

2. THE BACKGROUND TO BAKER’S WRITINGS: THE SPIRITUALITY OF EARLY MODERN CATHOLICISM

The perspective established in the previous section necessarily raises two questions: what does Baker understand by contemplative prayer, and which “mysticke authors” are we talking about? This second section will begin to answer these questions, by seeking to situate Baker’s project within the context of early seventeenth century spirituality, and by introducing some of the key figures with whose spirituality Baker’s texts are in dialogue.

Since it has become commonplace in many texts about Baker for his spirituality to be described as somehow “separate” from that of the seventeenth century Catholic mainstream,43 it will be important first to deal with some of the

42 Baker, Anchor, Apologie, Summary, 63.
myths that exist about Baker’s spirituality. This topic will be addressed in section 2.1.

In section 2.2, I seek to situate Baker within two traditions of spirituality which extend, in various forms, from the medieval period through into the world of early modern Catholicism. I shall suggest that it is by considering some of the authors whom Baker read and recommended to the Cambrai nuns that we can best contextualise his own spirituality.

2.1. SOME BAKER MYTHS

David Lunn has noted that “it has become a part of the conventional wisdom of the English Benedictines” that Baker is the contemplative opponent of methodological, discursive prayer, who, like a latter day St. George, single-handedly rescued the Dames of Cambrai from the dragon of activist, Jesuit-inspired spiritual methodology. Versions of this account are to be discovered, in whole or part, in several modern summaries of Baker’s work at Cambrai. Lunn cites two significant versions of this understanding of Baker’s project written by English monastics: those of J.C. Hedley and Felicitas Corrigan. Among more recent students of Baker one might point to the thoughtful and well-informed essay of Daniel Rees, or the seminal study of Placid Spearritt. Even a popular account of Baker’s spirituality published as recently as 2010 contains echoes of the same mythology, with its images of Baker as a man who “sets himself firmly against the

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prevailing customs” of his contemporaries.\(^{49}\)

Lunn points out that the relationship between enclosed, contemplative religious and the styles of spirituality inspired ultimately by the *devotio moderna* is much more complex than this “travesty of the truth” suggests; at the same time he draws attention to the fact that the mystical tradition was not absent from Ignatian spirituality, as the writings of Ignatius himself, and later Jesuit writers on contemplation (for example, Alvarez de Paz), demonstrate.\(^{50}\) Baker’s own writings, and especially the reading lists he set down for the nuns, detailing and commenting on the extensive range of texts he had collected or composed for them, indicate clearly that Baker’s position on such matters is far more subtle.\(^{51}\)

Perhaps equally widespread as the positioning of Baker in an over simple fashion as an opponent of methodical prayer is the view that, in this opposition, “he stands as the final flowering of the pre-Reformation English mystical tradition”,\(^{52}\) and that it is from this island spirituality that he draws his opposition to the mainland European tradition of prayer. Even as careful a scholar as Columba Stewart is misled by the received reputation of Augustine Baker into identifying the fourteenth century English text *The Cloud of Unknowing* as the principal influence upon Baker’s spirituality.\(^{53}\) As I shall suggest below, responsibility for establishing this position should probably be laid at the door of David Knowles,\(^{54}\) and it is equally in need of re-examination.

Lunn, to whose work on Baker’s historical context all students of this topic owe a debt, is guilty of perpetrating his own travesty of the truth when he involves himself in claims that Baker should be understood as one who promoted a

\(^{49}\) De Waal, 11.

\(^{50}\) Lunn, *The English Benedictines*, 206.

\(^{51}\) See, for example, the discussion in Rhodes, J.T. “Dom Augustine Baker’s Reading Lists.” *Downside Review* July 1993: 157–73.


spirituality which is “anarchic”. Lunn writes that Baker “is a free spirit, a universal figure, who belongs to all ages and all creeds”. This is simple historical fantasy. Baker, as we shall see, is very firmly grounded in the spiritual landscape of post-Tridentine Catholic spirituality. He is in fact, in many respects, a somewhat backward-looking figure, especially if set alongside such of his contemporaries as Mary Ward.

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

Higgins comments on the popular image of Augustine Baker as “one revolting against the [spiritual] methodology of his day” that this is too simplistic a

picture to be either accurate or useful. She argues that Baker is better understood as England’s first representative of a type of spiritual writing increasingly common in sixteenth and early seventeenth century Catholic Europe, concerned above all with a renewed teaching of contemplative prayer. She writes:

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

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

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

58 Higgins, 86.
59 Higgins, 85.
60 Higgins, 69–105.
61 Higgins, 79.
She writes that recusant manuals of prayer and spiritual guides were “geared to the active life of the layman, were highly practical in design, and usually carried by implication or even explicit warning, a certain distrust of any form of contemplative prayer”.\(^{62}\) It may therefore be said that in the early seventeenth century, not only an absence of contemplative writing, but an active hostility to contemplation, characterises the native English and Welsh Catholic scene. This fact is in strong contradistinction to the situation across much of the rest of Catholic Europe.

The point may be supported by reference to the work undertaken by Kent Emery on Baker’s English near-contemporary, William Fitch, known in religion as Benet of Canfield (1562-1611).\(^{63}\) Like Baker, Canfield was a convert to Catholicism, a London trained lawyer, and a religious refugee in continental Europe, although, unlike Baker, Canfield became a Capuchin and made his permanent home in France. Emery points out that, once out of England, Canfield “benefitted from the preservation and wide dissemination of medieval contemplative works which accompanied Catholic reform everywhere on the continent, especially in France”.\(^{64}\)

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

> the preponderance of English Catholic literature during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, either translated or newly composed, was apologetic, controversial, devotional or meditational, designed to serve the needs of the domestic religious practice of the English lay remnant.\(^{65}\)

Canfield’s own contribution to the development of the French school of mystical

\(^{62}\) Higgins, 80.
\(^{65}\) Emery, Renaissance Dialectic and Renaissance Piety, 17.
spirituality has been widely recognised, and receives high praise from the classic historian of French spirituality, Henri Bremond: “Master of the masters themselves, of Berulle, Madame Acarie, Marie de Beavuillier and many others, he, in my opinion, more than anyone else gave our religious renaissance this clearly mystical character”.66 In the present context, it is noteworthy that Canfield, whose subtle analyses of the psychology of prayer also draw comment from Bremond,67 was among the half dozen favourite authors to whom Baker himself again and again returns, and whose texts he was concerned to promote among the Cambrai nuns.

Higgins writes that Baker’s own treatises “bear undeniable witness that the interest in method, the new psychological awareness of prayer as an experience, and the paucity of contemporary contemplative treatises were in the background of his thinking”.68 Her persuasive contention is that Baker represents not a final flowering of the pre-Reformation English tradition, but rather a first attempt from within the English recusant community to incorporate into a renewed and, effectively, updated practice of contemplative writing the “detailed, methodical, highly practical, yet liberating, instructions” for mystical prayer now becoming widespread in post-Tridentine Europe, instructions “adapted to a generation well versed in formal method”.69 That is to say, Baker is attempting in an English monastic context to do what many continental theologians of spirituality had already undertaken. Under the guidance of writers of the continental Catholic mainstream he writes about contemplative prayer in a manner wholly of his time, but not wholly in keeping with the outlook of his fellow English and Welsh recusant Catholics.

67 Bremond, 117.
68 Higgins, 81.
69 Higgins, 86.
Clark notes that Baker “is often included among the ‘English Mystics’. But in fact, while he is deeply appreciative of the pre-dissolution English contemplative tradition, the key writers for his spiritual formation belong rather to mainland Europe”. The view that Baker is best understood as the inheritor and perpetuator of the fourteenth century English mystical tradition is probably the result of the work of David Knowles, who included a chapter on Baker at the end of his two popular introductions to medieval English spirituality. In fact, apart from his occasional use of the writings of the sixteenth century Bridgettine, William Bonde, Baker’s use of the English mystics is confined to The Cloud and Walter Hilton.

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

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71 In his earlier writings, for example, The English Mystics (London, Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1927), Knowles views Baker as ‘one of a group of remarkable men who gave distinction to the rebirth of the English Benedictine Congregation’ (p. 151), stating that ‘it is precisely because Father Baker, both in study and practice, went behind his contemporaries to the old English mystics, that he is so valuable’ (p. 151). Today, this position appears unsustainably hagiographical. The later Knowles, revisiting the same territory in his 1961 book, The English Mystical Tradition, although still associating Baker firmly with the 14th century English tradition is more inclined to question Baker’s teaching.
73 Clark, Secretum, Introduction and Notes, 23.
74 This point will be investigated further in Chapter 4.
dissolution English tradition and the early modern spirituality of the renewed Catholic Church in mainland Europe that is the driving force here, not some attempt to re-inhabit the English past. Indeed, in her recent study, Victoria Van Hyning has advanced the provocative argument that it may be as a result of Baker’s own literary activities that the category “English Mystics” came into being as a way of characterising certain fourteenth century English texts.75

Equally in need of nuance is the view that Baker’s teaching represents a rediscovery in a seventeenth century context of a monastic vision founded upon the perspectives of Cassian and the desert fathers. Once again, it is Clark who has pointed out that while, as a monk, Baker was “grounded in Cassian and the Desert Fathers and the Rule of St Benedict” his knowledge of spiritual writers before the fourteenth century is fragmentary and often dependent on quotations in secondary sources, perhaps the monastic breviary or from the more recent spiritual authors he has been reading. Clark comments, “it is from the fourteenth century right up to his own day that his reading really expands”.76

This section has sought to rebut several misleading characterisations of Augustine Baker’s spirituality which continue to appear in modern accounts of his work. I have argued that Baker’s project has more to do with the reconnection of English monastic spirituality with the European Catholic mainstream (of which the Ignatian tradition, while a very significant element, is far from being the only element) than it has to do with a clash between Benedictine and Jesuit spiritualities, or a revival of the pre-Reformation English mystical tradition.

It is to the question of how best to locate Baker within that European Catholic mainstream that I turn in the following section.


76 Clark, “Towards a Reassessment.”
2.2. EXTENSIONS OF MEDIEVAL MYSTICISM IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

The student of the spirituality of early modern Europe must reckon with the fact that the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, “witnessed seismic transformations on the European continent in all the major areas of human concern: politics, economics, culture and religion”.\textsuperscript{77} This same early modern period was the context for an unusually rich and extensive outpouring of spiritual writings. Perhaps as a consequence, few modern studies exist which offer a confident overview of the many facets of the spirituality of this period. Jordan Aumann, offering a survey chapter on the topic, suggests that “merely to list the writings and their authors would comprise a large volume”.\textsuperscript{78} Higgins considers that the cross-currents and unpredictable tides of spirituality during this period defy easy categorization. “If there is a pattern, it is that of the kaleidoscope”, she writes.\textsuperscript{79} The classic study of Cognet, with greater restraint, speaks of the “very diversified appearance” of the spirituality of this period.\textsuperscript{80}

Even the precise terminology to be applied to the period in question is itself a matter of controversy: the terms post-Tridentine, post-reformation, counter-reformation, Catholic reform, early modern and baroque are variously deployed by writers who have explored aspects of the period in question. It is in part as a consequence of this complex backcloth that the work of Augustine Baker has proven so difficult appropriately to contextualise.

Perhaps the most influential perspective upon an understanding of Catholic spirituality in the early modern period for scholars writing in the later decades of

\textsuperscript{79} Higgins, 78.
the twentieth century has been the work of H. Outram Evennett. Evennett’s account of the direction of the spirituality of this period is summed up by David Luebke in the following paragraph. For Evennett the period witnesses:

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

Evennett’s thesis contains many persuasive components, and possesses above all the virtue of offering a coherent picture of a period which can sometimes appear baffling in its complexity. The summary cited demonstrates the extent to which it is Evennett’s account of early modern Catholicism which lies behind the image painted of the background to Baker’s work in several influential studies, encountered in the previous section. But Evennett’s account of post-Tridentine spirituality, which positions some aspects of the Ignatian tradition at its centre, has to be regarded as incomplete, and in some important respects, inaccurate.

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

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83 Evennett, 55.
84 Cognet, 10.
85 Higgins, 78–79.
Evennett writes that there is in this period a “departure from the contemplative mysticism of the late Middle Ages”, and that this is replaced by an “intensive and exclusive concentration on formal discursive meditation with its mental efforts, and on the principle of activity and struggle - of which the Jesuits were the supreme and the extreme champions”. He suggests that as a consequence contemplative spirituality was rendered merely a “running undertone of dissatisfaction”.\textsuperscript{86} This is surely too strong a claim. Almost the entirety of the French school of mystical spirituality, which would reach its zenith in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is sidelined by such a view, as is the golden age of Spanish mysticism, and much Italian spirituality.

In fairness to Evennett, it should be allowed that there are many passages of complaint in Baker’s treatises about the situation of Catholics in England which closely parallel Evennett’s analysis of early modern spirituality. But Baker is very specifically commenting on the English Catholic scene, which, as we have noted above, is a special case.

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

\begin{quote}
A surprising feature of “modern” Christian spirituality is its continuity with the past. The same models (the soul as image of God inhabited by a divine presence), the same influences (mainly Neoplatonic) that directed late medieval piety still determine the devotion of the modern age.\textsuperscript{87}
\end{quote}

Dupré is far from being alone in making this point. Cognet’s study of post-reformation spirituality spends four of its five chapters directly addressing the mystical movements of early modern Europe, which he sees as a manifestation of this set of continuities.\textsuperscript{88} Dupré goes on to speak of a “flowering of mystical

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{86} Evennett, 62.
\end{flushleft}
movements” at this time across early modern Europe, and both authors are at pains to detail strong continuities with the medieval past where such movements find their roots.

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

This is a fair judgment, although the broader context within which he is to be placed should also involve a recognition of the continuities between Baker’s position and that associated with the affective spirituality of the movement known as the devotio moderna. Baker’s preoccupation with spiritual texts and their value in developing a fruitful interior life in many ways parallels that to be found among the first practitioners of the devotio, and later developed widely by those influenced by their spirituality. In fact, Baker’s work may be said to reflect two movements of continuity from the late medieval period through into the early modern, one stemming from the devotio moderna; the other having to do with continuing influence of the pseudo-Dionysian mystical tradition. The connections between

89 Clark, “Towards a Reassessment,” 221.
90 Clark, Secretum, Introduction and Notes, 21.
these two complementary streams of spirituality, as well as their presence within
the outlook of Augustine Baker, may be illustrated here by an examination of some
of those authors with whom we know Baker’s work to be connected because he
himself tells us so.

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

And now the reading of those books (being indeed of the higher
strain of spirituality) made him see where he had lost himselfe, and
was a strong invitation for him to returne again ad priora opera [...] 
One of those books was Speculum Perfectionis, a Latin Book [...] It
was indeed written in the originall by Johannes Lanspergius, the
Carthusian, and is to be found among his works. 91

This is the same Lanspergius to whose text The Epistle of Jesus Christ to a faithful
soul Baker himself makes reference in his Catalogue, the set of readings lists he
composed for the Cambrai nuns, suggesting that of the Lanspergius text they
should read “All. This is good for a rawe beginner”. 92 Lanspergius’ book is placed
by Baker at the very head of the Catalogue, a fact which, when coupled with
Prichard’s witness, suggests both his familiarity with that author’s works and his
belief that they would be of benefit to those of his students who found themselves,
as he had once found himself, at the very beginning of the spiritual path.

Johannes Gerecht, a sixteenth century Carthusian known to posterity as
Lanspergius from his birthplace of Landsberg in Bavaria, lived from about 1489 to
1539. Lanspergius worked, for the most part, in the Charterhouse of St. Barbara in
Cologne, with a short spell as prior of the Charterhouse in Vogelsang near Juliers.
The monks of the Cologne Charterhouse strove to maintain a living connection

91 Prichard, Leander. “The Second Treatise Concerning the Life and Writings of the
Venerable Father, F. Augustin Baker, Preist of the Holy Order of S. Benet, Congregationis
Anglicanae. Written by the Reverend Father, F. Leander Pritchard, Who Had Bin His Socio for
Several Years.” Memorials of Father Augustine Baker and Other Documents Relating to the
English Benedictines. Ed. Justin McCann and Hugh Connolly. London: Catholic Record Society,
1933. 101.
92 Baker, Directions H, 82.
with the mystical writers of the medieval period, both through their activity as copyists and through their spiritual practices; indeed, it is to the literary efforts of the Cologne Carthusians that we owe the survival of many of the texts of the Flemish and Rhineland mystics. At the same time, the Cologne house was the inheritor of much that had come from the devotio moderna, most notably its traditions of textual reflection and strongly affective, individual piety.

In keeping with the outlook of the devotio, Lanspergius seeks to promote a revival in personal spirituality, believing that “the most effective way of countering the spread of Protestantism was to revive the Church by giving the faithful a really fervent spiritual life”. ⁹３ Thus he places a stress upon individual ascetical discipline, and the development of the practice of interior prayer. Lanspergius promotes the superiority of the affective mysticism of the will over any other mode of spirituality, and it was towards the promotion of this form of inner devotion with its focus upon the person of Christ that the majority of his writings were directed. In these respects he is the inheritor of the outlook of the devotio, whose “piety tended towards interior experience and ascribed great importance to individual psychological states”. ⁹⁴ Pierre Pourat found that Lanspergius’ work “reminds us of the Imitation [of Christ]”. ⁹⁵ Cognet echoes this sentiment. ⁹⁶ It is surely no accident that Baker includes among his list of “other treatises of my making” a short series of texts by Thomas à Kempis, each of which invites its reader to practice the same affective interior focus upon the person and work of Christ, springing from the heart, that is to be found in Lanspergius.

The major part of Lanspergius’ writings are his sermons (three of the five volumes of his collected works), but he also wrote spiritual treatises and letters of

⁹３ Cognet, 17.
⁹⁴ Cognet, 14.
⁹⁶ Cognet, 18.
direction. The work which Baker promotes to the nuns at Cambrai is the final section of a longer work, the *Alloquia Jesu Christi ad quamvis animam fidelem*, a lengthy exhortation to a renewal of the spiritual life with an emphatically practical point of view, laying stress upon forms of prayer, meditations and ascetical instructions. The final section of Lanspergius’ *Alloquia Jesu Christi*, entitled *Epistola Salvatoris ad quandam animam fidelem*, was often printed separately from the rest of the treatise and became the best known of Lanspergius’ writings. It is this final part, the *Epistola*, translated into English by the Earl of Arundel, that Baker is commending in the reading list.

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

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

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

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

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

97 Baker, *Directions H*, 83.
98 Baker, *Directions H*, 83.
Peryn’s *Spirituall Exercises* are, however, not simply Ignatian in origin: as well as his exposure to Spanish counter-reformation practices, Peryn was himself influenced by the late medieval Flemish mystical tradition, and in his adaptation of Van Ess specifically makes use of the teachings of “ye godly father henry harp”. ¹⁰⁰ “Harp” is the fifteenth century Flemish Franciscan, Hendrick Herp, known to Baker as Harphius, whose influence upon Baker was perhaps more determinative than that of any other single writer, and whose role as a conduit between the Rhineland mystics and the spirituality of early modern Catholicism is of considerable significance. From the Flemish mystic’s affective spirituality Peryn borrows both his stress upon an ascesis of personal abnegation as a preparation for an affective relationship with Christ, and his use of “aspirations” or short affective exclamatory prayers. ¹⁰¹ We shall see that both of these dimensions of Harphius’ teaching are of central importance to the spirituality of Augustine Baker.

The particular value to my argument of Baker’s unqualified recommendation of Peryn’s text is that it highlights the point I am seeking to make by offering this brief survey of certain of the books in Baker’s *Catalogue*. In Peryn’s work we discover the simultaneous influence of the two currents of spirituality I have identified as operating in the works of Augustine Baker: the later forms of the *devotio moderna*, mediated through the growing late-medieval and early-modern fascination with mental prayer, now developed by Ignatius into the *Spiritual Exercises*, and the continuing impact of the Rhineland and Flemish mystics mediated through the writings of Hendrick Herp. It is to the work of Harphius, who also features in Baker’s *Catalogue*, that I now wish to turn.

Harphius, as was stated above, is Hendrick Herp, a Flemish Franciscan of the Observance who was born around 1400 near s’Hertogenbosch, probably in the

¹⁰⁰ Peryn, *Spirituall Exercyses*. Cited in Wizeman, 210:
village of Erp. He died in Mechelen in 1477. As widely read and well known in
his own day, and through into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as he is
forgotten today, Harphius is a pivotal figure for the spirituality of Augustine Baker.

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

In a helpful recent essay on the affective Dionysian tradition, Boyd Taylor
Coolman notes that at the core of this medieval mystical tradition there is to be
found an “interpolation of love over knowledge” in the relationship between
humanity and God. Coolman finds that this viewpoint is the product of
the convergence of two theological traditions flowing through the
Western Middle Ages: the (Augustinian) assumption that God is
fully known and loved in a beatific visio Dei, which is the goal of
human existence, and the (Dionysian) insistence that God is
radically and transcendentally unknowable.

102 Short, William. “Hendrick Herp: The Mirror of Perfection or Directory of
Ruysbroeck During the Period of Early Reform and in the Counter-Reformation.” Miscellanea
Anglistik und Americanistik, Universitat Salzburg, 1979. 117.
Dionysius the Areopagite. Sarah Coakley and Charles M Strang. Malden, MA: Blackwell,
2009. 85.
105 Coolman, 85.
In this “profound medieval intuition about affect and intellect” it is the affective mode of humanity’s access to God which emerges as the dominant thread, and at the risk of distorting the original sense of pseudo-Dionysius’ text, becomes the accepted manner of reading the *Mystical Theology*. Coolman notes that what is at stake here is “a conviction regarding how human beings are most basically constituted and how they relate most fundamentally to God”.  

Baker makes reference to Harphius at many points in his treatises, as well as translating significant portions from his works, and recommending him in the *Catalogue*. It is from Harphius especially that Baker draws his doctrine of the prayer of aspirations. Stephanus Axters argues that Harphius’ “theory of aspirations, repeated acts of faith and love, which he makes the nerve centre of the interior life, is all his own”, although there are affinities and sources for this manner of prayer in Hugh of Balma. What cannot be disputed is that it is from Harphius that Baker inherits this mode of prayer, which he too makes central to his teaching about contemplation. But, as the brief consideration of the affective Dionysian tradition offered above begins to suggest, with the affective accent of this manner of spirituality there also comes an implied position on the question of the relationship between love and knowledge in mystical union. It is to the outworkings of this “implied position” within Baker’s spirituality that I shall return below, seeking to discover the extent to which this outlook may have contributed to the double attitude towards religious reading found in Baker’s writings. The influence of Harphius upon Baker in this respect, was not unambiguously positive.

2.3. CONCLUSION

In the course of his discussion of Harphius’ writings, Kent Emery notes that one of the very many later mystical writers who read Harphius was the French

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106 Coolman, 86.
Capuchin, Benet of Canfield. Canfield was extensively influenced by Harphius, whom his order promoted, and was directly introduced to Harphius’ works by his novice master.108 “The Will of God, by Fa: Benet Fitch the Capucin”, as was noted above, features in Baker’s Catalogue for the nuns, and Canfield is among the authors with whom Baker’s own texts are often in dialogue. As we have seen, Clark identifies Canfield as one of the central quintet of writers who influenced Baker’s views.

“If there is a pattern, it is that of the kaleidoscope” writes Higgins of the backcloth against which the spirituality of Augustine Baker has to be set.109 It is as if, with a turn of the kaleidoscope of early modern spirituality, we pass from the devotio within which Lanspergus worked and Harphius was rooted, through the mysticism of the affective Dionysian tradition, to arrive in the French “abstract school” of Canfield,110 which would reach its zenith in the writings of Berulle, whose key early work “Interior Abnegation. A written hand treatise” is commended by Baker to the Cambrai sisters. They are to read “All”.111

This section has argued that the context of Baker’s spirituality can best be established by examining the mutual relationships and influences that exist between the wide range of spiritual books he commended to the nuns of Cambrai for their spiritual reading. Two patterns of continuity with the traditions of spirituality found in late medieval Europe have been highlighted, the one flowing through the developments of the devotio moderna into the early modern preoccupation with method in prayer, the other arising from the mystical writings of the affective Dionysian tradition. I have suggested that in the voluntarism of the

108 Emery, Kent, Jr, 126–27.
109 Higgins, 78.
110 Cognet, 57.
111 Baker, Directions H, 83.
affective tradition of prayer and in the prioritizing of affectivity over intellect we may be able to identify one of the factors contributing to Baker’s curiously two-sided approach to spiritual reading.

3. AUGUSTINE BAKER AND THE CAMBRAI TREATISES, 1627-1632

No standard introductory account of the Baker canon exists, partly because the publication of the complete edition of Baker’s writings remains ongoing. As Spearritt observed in 1974, until this is achieved it remains difficult to undertake such a task as a thorough introduction.112 Much of the work of identifying and cataloguing Baker’s works in manuscript copies was undertaken during the early twentieth century by Justin McCann. This resulted in his “Register of Fr Baker’s Writings”.113 Building upon McCann’s listing of Baker’s texts is that of Spearritt.114 Both these compilers of catalogues of Baker’s works have made the extent of Baker’s written achievements more easily recognised. Spearritt’s catalogue lists sixty-nine distinct works composed, collected or translated by Baker. But both catalogues are, of necessity, alphabetically organised lists of Baker’s written works; they therefore constitute a necessary but not a sufficient tool for the task of surveying the extent of his project. More recently the editorial work of Clark, leading to the first ever published editions of Baker’s treatises, together with his short studies of Baker’s texts,115 have made this undertaking more realistic.

114 Spearritt, “The Survival of Medieval Spirituality.”
However, the absence of such a standard overview of Baker’s texts, especially those he composed during the Cambrai period, has been a major contributory factor to the unsatisfactory nature of many studies of Baker which are otherwise factually well informed. The tendency of many such studies, as chapter 1 has argued, is to move directly from a set of general statements about Baker’s work among the nuns of Cambrai to an account of his spirituality based exclusively on Sancta Sophia.

This section will offer the reader an orientation for the chapters that follow, by providing a brief overview of Baker’s Cambrai treatises, organised as far as possible chronologically. Baker did not himself provide completion dates for his manuscript works, for the most part, and it must be remembered that the autograph originals of Baker’s texts were lost at the time of the French Revolution. The surviving manuscript copies of Baker’s texts in many instances contain dated documents of official endorsement by English Benedictine censors, which are of assistance in fixing the date by which a work was certainly complete and available to readers. Otherwise, dating is largely dependent upon internal evidence; for example, Baker’s frequent cross-references to other texts of his own creation.

3.1. BAKER’S WORK AT CAMBRAI, 1624-1627

There is no evidence that Baker wrote anything substantial for the nuns of Our Lady of Consolation any earlier than 1627, although he had resided in their guesthouse at Cambrai from mid-1624. Baker tells us about his arrival at the Cambrai convent, and his early years there, in the course of his Dame Gertrude More. He writes as follows, referring to the events of 1624:

It hapned in that yeare, that is to saie about the mid’st of Julie, that a certain Father of the Order and Congregation arrived at Cambray, beig appointed by Superiors to live there for some time, he being newlie comme out of Englande for avoiding of the distractions,
which he conceaved he should finde there uppon a persecution [...]\textsuperscript{116}

The immediate background to Baker’s departure from England early in 1624 has to do with a worsening of the situation of English Catholics in the aftermath of the breakdown of the negotiations which had been under way between England and Spain, intended to lead to the marriage of Prince Charles to the Infanta of Spain.\textsuperscript{117} It is entirely characteristic of Baker that he writes of his departure from England as occasioned by the need to “avoid distractions”. Having arrived at St. Gregory’s monastery, Douai, “about May, 1624”, it was only a matter of days before “it happened that there was need of a priest or confessarius to the English Benedictine Dames of our Lady of Comfort, at Cambrai”.\textsuperscript{118} Baker describes himself at this time as:

... one, who though he were a Priest and in the Mission of England, yet did he not deale in the matters of mission, but with the leave of Superiors, attended to himself, leading a retired and Contemplative life, which he then did and had done for some yeares before.\textsuperscript{119}

Perhaps, as Serenus Cressy works hard to suggest in his biography of Baker, it was for this reason that he was deemed suited to the task of assisting the recently established house of nuns.\textsuperscript{120} It is also possible, however, that in this period of powerfully held positions on the status of “the Mission of England” among the Benedictines, the presence at Douai of an accomplished and articulate proponent of the “retired and Contemplative life” did not wholly suit the authorities of the Congregation. However, our main source of information concerning the circumstances surrounding Baker’s move to Cambrai so soon after his arrival at Douai is Serenus Cressy, and Cressy’s account is carefully constructed to

\textsuperscript{117} Prichard, 114–15.
\textsuperscript{118} Prichard, 116.
\textsuperscript{119} Baker, Dame Gertrude More, 28.
emphasise the neediness of the Cambrai Dames as the motivating force behind the appointment. It may therefore never be possible to be completely certain about the reasons for Baker’s rapid transfer.

The more local background to Baker’s arrival in Cambrai is explained by Truran:

> As is well-known, on 31st December 1623 nine young women, headed by St. Thomas More’s great-great-granddaughter, Helen, later Dame Gertrude More, had been clothed as Benedictine novices in a building off what is now known as Rue des Anglaises in the city of Cambrai.¹²¹

The three senior members of this small and very young community, including the Abbess and the novice mistress, who would be responsible for guiding the newcomers, had been drawn from the English convent in Brussels, where all three had been trained in a tradition of spirituality borrowed in essence from the more activist styles of religious life which we have already heard of above as widespread on the English Catholic scene. It is this fact which is advanced by Cressy, and hence by most subsequent accounts, as the necessity which required Baker’s presence at Cambrai. It was, by some accounts, around this group that the opposition to Baker’s teachings which would eventually lead to his removal from Cambrai in 1633, began and focused.

Abbess Catherine Gascoigne later wrote of Cambrai in its earliest days that “about all external observances ... instructions were not wanting, but what I was to do concerning mental prayer I ... could find none to teach me”.¹²² It may be that the concerns of the youthful Cambrai neophytes were a part of the process which led the President of the Congregation, Dom Rudicind Barlow, to send Baker from Douai to Cambrai with such unseemly haste. The fact remains that Baker’s position at the Cambrai convent was, and remained, wholly unofficial. He was never appointed to the position of *Vicarius Monialium*, or official confessor to the nuns,

¹²¹ Truran, “The Present Author,” 71.
¹²² Gascoigne, C. Cited in Truran, “The Present Author,” 73:
although he effectively carried out the duties of this office for much of the time he lived at Cambrai.¹２３

Baker himself tells us:

Now he being comme thether, was enterteined and lodged in the Hostrie of the Nunnery, that is without, and there remained. Whereupon some of the Religious women there; yea, divers of them, hearing that he was a man, that followed a retired and spirituall life, sought to speak with him, and desired some spiritual instructions at his handes;¹２⁴

Baker was a “tabler”, effectively a paying guest, in the “Hostrie” or guesthouse of the convent for the whole of the nine years he “there remained”. His own account, if it is to be taken at face value, seems to imply that the initiative which led to his offering “spiritual instructions” to the nuns came from the sisters themselves; but to make a firm conclusion of this point may be to over-read Baker’s text. However it came about, he appears to have very quickly begun to work in this capacity, meeting his students in the parlour of the convent (the room where the enclosed nuns could meet with “externs”).

Baker’s account continues:

... therewith [i.e. with Baker’s spiritual instructions] for the time they were satisfied; but all of them did not adhere to them, because indeed they founde, or at least conceaved them to be improper for them and the qualities of their spirits. But some others of them persevered therein and do to this daie.¹２⁵

Here, perhaps, we can see the first suggestion of the division of opinion within the Cambrai community over the value of Baker’s teaching (which, given the circumstances of the times, seems to have been construed as a discussion about their doctrinal orthodoxy). This division of opinion would ultimately lead, in 1633, to Baker’s departure from Cambrai.

However, from the very first such was Baker’s impact upon at least some of the community that when, in the following year 1625 it appeared that the General

¹２３ Truran, “True Christian Amazons?” 159.
¹２４ Baker, Dame Gertrude More, 28.
¹２５ Baker, Dame Gertrude More, 28.
Chapter of the Congregation might elect to remove him from Cambrai, Dame Catherine Gascoigne, one of the novices Baker had been instructing, petitioned the Chapter for his continued presence at Cambrai.\footnote{Truran, “The Present Author,” 73.} It seems from the fact that Baker remained at Cambrai that at least some notice was taken of her request.

The young community grew rapidly in the first years Baker was present in Cambrai. Truran writes that the newcomers to religious life he had found on his arrival in 1624, “were followed by a steady stream of novices in 1625-26”, of whom six persevered in monastic life.\footnote{Truran, “The Present Author,” 75.} There was clearly no shortage of work for Baker instructing these young Benedictine women in the art of contemplation.

Although we have almost no descriptions of Baker’s way of working with the nuns, we do have from this same early period the striking vignette of Baker reading to Dame Gertrude and another sister from de Barbanson, a passage which suggests that his manner of teaching the nuns was largely text based:

\begin{quote}
... one daie [he] was reading to her and to another some things out of a booke [... and] our Virgin was somewhat struken with it, and suddenly said: O, O, that must be my way, I pray you (said she to him) lette me have that place translated into English. And so [he] did, and gave it to her, and she made great use of that doctrin, and continued her prayer with great profit.\footnote{Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 38.}
\end{quote}

It is reasonable, therefore, to suppose that although Baker wrote no treatises during these first years, he was already gathering texts by other authors both for his own use (in the \textit{Secretum} he mentions his habit of reading spiritual texts) and to use in his meetings with the nuns. The passage quoted above strongly suggests that the basic activity Baker conducted was public spiritual reading of the “mysticke authors” he favoured, and that having read a section to the nuns he would discourse upon it. We can note such a pattern of quotation followed by or even interspersed with commentary in many sections of the Cambrai treatises.
It may be that Baker was already making some sort of notes to use in such
periods of spiritual teaching, and that reading sessions such as that recorded above
might give rise to specific and limited requests for translations. However, it is from
Lent 1627 that we know Baker’s work of writing to have begun in earnest.

3.2. BAKER’S WRITINGS IN 1627

*A Spirituall Treatise Called A. B. C.*

It is difficult to know what tipped the balance for Augustine Baker from
simply undertaking the spiritual guidance of the Cambrai nuns by way of oral
instructions to the vast project of writing which he began in 1627. He himself
writes of the moment of change in his treatise, *Secretum*. He describes what he
calls an alteration in the “Prosecution of his Spirituall Course”, which occurred on
a “Mid-lent Sunday” in that year. But, he notes, “What it was or is, or ye reason of
it, I Cannot tell you”. He does, however, record some of the effects of this
“Alteration”. These include:

> th’ he found in himselfe a greater light & facility for ye penning of
> Some spirituall things than before he had. For before that time, &
> while ye work was in the Parts beneath the head, his spirit did
> wondefully abhorre to set pen to paper, especially for writing of any
> long Discourse.

Baker explains that before this point he had been accustomed to spend his spare
time in spiritual reading, or “in Spirituall Discourses to some Needy & ignorant
persons, according to ye poor Talent th’ was in him”. After this mid-Lenten Sunday,
however, he tells us that he has been able to write a variety of books.

In another place, Baker informs us that his earliest spiritual text written at
Cambrai is *Book A*, “the first booke that I wrote in this house, called A”. This is

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now found together with Book B and Book C in the tripartite treatise, *A Spirituall Treatise Called A.B.C.*, each of the three parts appear to have been composed or compiled in 1627, and the order of composition may be the order of presentation; however in mentioning the constituent treatises Baker sometimes gave priority to Book C in a manner which is difficult to account for. Neither is it absolutely clear why Baker adopted (only later to abandon) a somewhat mechanical system of titling for his texts.

In spite of its title, the *Spirituall Treatise* does not fall within the genre of texts sometimes known as “Spiritual Alphabets”, where the initial steps of the spiritual life are detailed for a newcomer, as if in a schoolbook for one beginning to learn to read. Rather, the three treatises are essentially independent texts which simply find themselves between the same set of covers, perhaps for straightforward reasons of convenience. Each of the treatises collects together diverse material, much of it short passages translated by Baker from his favourite spiritual texts. It seems reasonable to suppose that the three treatises of the *A,B,C* , which together run to some forty-one thousand words, collect material which Baker had been making use of in oral instructions to the nuns before this time.

In *Book A* Baker gathers a variety of brief extracts from a wide range of authors, mostly focussing on issues in mental prayer, but ends the treatise with a series of spiritual rhymes of his own devising. Using alliteration and rhyme as mnemonic devices in this way indicates that Baker clearly expects at least some of what he is writing down to be committed to memory. The metaphor of the schoolroom, as well as certain of its practices, is never far from Baker’s mind.

*Book B*, after considering the three degrees of the spiritual life, gathers a series of brief translated passages on the love of God, again from a very extensive

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range of sources. The early section of this text is preoccupied with the vocabulary which various writers employ to analyse the degree of the spiritual life: “the three degrees in a spiritual life are variously expressed by writers, though to the same effect”\textsuperscript{134}. This is one of the earliest examples of Baker’s interest in reconciling differing accounts of the language of the spiritual life.

*Book C* instructs its reader on how to ensure that “offices and employments” do not stand in the way of spiritual progress. Perhaps the busy life of a new community struggling to find its feet in a foreign land is at least partly reflected in Baker’s choice of topic. Baker ends the description of *Book C* with an explicit note about the need for his personal exposition of certain sections of the text to its prospective reader.

Even these very short treatises from 1627 are composite in nature. Baker seems to have acquired the habit of bundling together sets of papers which were in some way related, possibly related because of the use he had made of them more than because of a connection of subject matter. It has been suggested that this habit might have come from his legal training.

Although no other texts appear to be completed during 1627, the sheer quantity of Baker’s texts in subsequent years strongly suggests that he was at work on several of them, and especially upon the volumes of translations, in the course of this year, although he completed them later.

3.3. BAKER’S WRITINGS IN 1627-8

*Book E*

*Sickness*

*Confession*

*Tauler, Part 1*

\textsuperscript{134} Baker, *Spirituall Treatise*, 25.
Bonilla, The Quiet of the Soul
Blosius, The Spiritual Institution
Harphius, The Twelve Mortifications

Book E, a collection of rather more extensive translations from several of Baker’s favourite spiritual writers, appears to follow soon after the Spirituall Treatise, in 1627/1628.135 It runs to some seventy thousand words. Its title in full is: Various collections of diverse authors about the contemplation, the preparation of a perfect union, the discretion of spirits, etc., partly penned and partly translated by Father Augustine Baker, monk of the English Congregation.

The Book E collection contains some fifteen chapters, several of which are drawn from single authors, among them Harphius, Canfield, and de Barbanson, writers whose works, as we have seen, are favourite points of reference for Baker’s teachings. Also included are passages from the Carmelite authors Joannes à Jesu Maria and Thomas à Jesu. McCann points out that Baker has reproduced several sections of this collection in other treatises;136 in addition Baker frequently refers to this collection in other texts. In modern terms, we might describe the book as a “course reader” for Baker’s students. Clark speculates that with Book E we witness the beginning of Baker’s formal undertaking of the task of translation of Latin spiritual texts for the nuns which he had previously undertaken “informally and extempore” in his teaching meetings with them.137

Book E thus provides further evidence for the view that Baker is more concerned to establish among his students the practice of reading and learning from a variety of spiritual sources than he is to promote an original doctrine. Not only do we discover a movement back and forth between citation of spiritual authorities,}

136 McCann, Justin, 175.
137 Clark, “Chronology,” 5.
commentary upon them, and original composition of Baker’s own, in each of Baker’s individual works, but this pattern is to be observed also across the body of Baker’s texts taken together.

Also written at about this time is Baker’s treatise *Sickness*. The full title of the treatise, which runs to sixty-three thousand words, is: *A Treatise, shewing one how he is to behave himself in the time of Sicknes or corporall infirmitie, and how to prepare himself for death.* This treatise is a lengthy exhortation to practice mortification and resignation, with many illustrations from other spiritual writers, from which Baker develops his own teaching. It is not impossible that Baker, who appears never to have enjoyed robust health, wrote this treatise as a result of a bout of sickness. In the course of the text he refers to himself as being unwell.

The *Treatise of Confession* is also to be dated to 1627/1628. It is about thirty-two thousand words in length. Baker explains that his practice of dissuading his students from making lengthy and frequent confessions (which in his view promoted scrupulosity rather than sanctity) was misunderstood by “some others” leading him to write a treatise about the sacrament. Characteristically, Baker organises the treatise around a series of numbered points, under nine distinct headings. One entire section is given over to the “sayeings of certeine holy Writers” on the topic under consideration, and many of the issues Baker addresses clearly reflect his experience in speaking with the young religious of Cambrai.

It appears that during this same period, 1627-1628, Baker was also working on a series of lengthier translations from his favourite authors, especially Tauler.

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140 Baker, *Five Treatises*, 75.

for the use of the nuns. Clark, who has published details of the full extent of Baker’s work in translating Tauler and Blosius,\(^{142}\) notes that Baker would eventually create eight volumes of Tauler translations; perhaps as many as three or four of these volumes were already in existence by this time. Clark writes:

> He had an abiding commitment to Tauler and pseudo-Tauler, as well as to Suso and pseudo-Suso (Rulman Murswin), and to some small items attributed to Eckhart, through the Latin translations of the Carthusian, Laurentius Surius.\(^{143}\)

The sheer extent of Baker’s literary output in translations from other spiritual authors is remarkable. In addition to the Tauler translations, Baker was working at this time on at least three other texts. These are: Bonilla’s *A Short Treatise of the Quiet of the Soul*, which he translated from its Latin edition of 1626, *Pax Animae*; Blosius’ *Spiritual Institution*, and perhaps other texts in addition; and also the so-called *Twelve Mortifications* of Harphius, which comprise the opening section of the 1538 edition of the *Theologia Mystica*, which he would go on to translate more extensively.

These translations are a crucial background to the creation of his Cambrai treatises, which are almost bound to be misunderstood if they are treated as separate from this work.

### 3.4. BAKER’S WRITINGS IN 1628

*Directions for Contemplation - Book D*

*Directions for Contemplation - Book F*

*Directions for Contemplation - Book G*

*Directions for Contemplation - Book H*

*Collections I-III*

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\(^{143}\) Clark, “Chronology.” 5.
The year 1628 saw another six nuns enter the novitiate of the Cambrai community.\textsuperscript{144} The same year sees the completion of what may be Baker’s most important original work, the series of linked treatises entitled \textit{Directions for Contemplation, Book D, Book F, Book G and Book H}. Clark finds that “\textit{Directions for Contemplation} is conceived as a whole”, and suggests that it is one of Baker’s most systematic works in which Baker’s oral instructions to the nuns between 1624 and 1627 are drawn together in an ordered manner. He writes that the linked treatises “give the impression of extreme care and economy in composition, with logical progress and avoidance of repetition”.\textsuperscript{145} Clark is correct to find the treatises more tightly constructed than some of Baker’s texts, but it is difficult wholly to endorse his judgement, if the point of comparison was to be any published spiritual author of the same period. Baker’s approach remains disparate, with a variety of original passages once more interspersed among translations from other authors.

Taken together, the four volumes of \textit{Directions} are among Baker’s most substantial works, and certainly his most extensive consideration of the various forms of contemplative prayer. The books contain some one hundred and fifty thousand words. It is from the materials to be found in \textit{Directions} that a substantial element of the raw substance for \textit{Sancta Sophia} was drawn by Serenus Cressy, and the sub-title of that work is also borrowed from this Baker treatise.

\textsuperscript{144} Truran, “The Present Author,” 75.
\textsuperscript{145} Clark, “Chronology,” 4.
For the purposes of this survey it is important to note that in the several distinct treatises which Baker has assembled to make up the completed Directions, he once again moves regularly between extensive passages of translation and citation of favourite authorities upon the life of prayer, and exposition of this material. At the end of Directions Book H, Baker includes A Catalogue of such English bookes as are in this house, most helping towards contemplation, the extensive and annotated reading list of spiritual texts for his students, which includes many of his own works to date. This Catalogue, as we have seen above, is of considerable value for establishing a sense of the authors whom Baker had been able to obtain for his own and the nuns’ reading at Cambrai.

Also written in 1628 is Baker’s series of three volumes of translations now known as Collections, Volumes 1-3. Clark believes that Baker had been assembling the material to be found in these volumes for some time before bringing this series of translations together into the text we now possess, a conclusion which is wholly reasonable. The three volumes, of which the first comes entirely from Harphius, the second wholly from de Barbanson, and the third “out of divers authors” including Johannes a Jesus Maria, Blosius, Alvarez de Paz, Ruysbroeck, and Benet Canfield, runs to some sixty three thousand words.

Baker’s important text on discernment, the treatise Doubts and Calls was written during 1628, perhaps extending into 1629. In three parts, it is roughly seventy three thousand words in length. This treatise is used by Baker to explore the topic of the guidance which a faithful soul should expect from God. Baker explores the issue of discernment of the will of God, the difference between ordinary and extraordinary calls, and the relationship of calls to authority in a

146 Or possibly at the end of Directions, Book F. See Baker, Directions H, ix-x:
monastic community. In the first of the three parts of *Doubts and Calls* Baker offers some of his most detailed teaching on the role of reading in the spiritual life, and this section will be examined in detail in Chapter 3.

The treatise entitled *The Anchor of the Spirit*, also written during this year, is a series of commentaries by Baker upon the mnemonic rhymes he composed to assist his students. McCann comments that “the book contains instructions for souls troubled by temptations, and especially for those suffering from spiritual desolation”. McCann, Justin, 164. David Lunn found the verses Baker composed for this volume “delightful”. Lunn, The English Benedictines, 212. This may be an overstatement. Once again, Baker is making use of the schoolroom technique of the mnemonic verse to assist his young students. It would be genuinely misleading to search for literary merit as such in the end result.

To the *Anchor*, Baker has attached his own translation of a work called *Remedies against temptations*, which he believes to be by Richard Rolle, but is in fact by William Flete. Taken together, *Anchor* and *Remedies* contain approximately twenty-seven thousand words.

Baker’s *Treatise of the Discretion that is to be used and held in the Exercise of a Spirituall Life* also belongs to this same year, 1628. Baker, Augustine. *Discretion*. Ed. John Clark. Analecta Cartusiana. Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1999. Discretion is written to rebut the view that a life of prayer is ruinous to physical health. Baker is concerned to establish an appropriate moderation in the spiritual life of his students. As is commonly his practice, Baker writes throughout *Discretion* with one eye on his favourite spiritual authors, especially Harphius and Blosius, who are regularly cited and commented upon. This treatise happens to cite two little-known English proverbs, “Love me a little & love me long”, Baker, *Discretion*, 15, and “A soft fire makes sweet malt”, Baker, *Discretion*, 19, both of which are used by Baker as direct and simple illustrations

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149 McCann, Justin, 164.
150 Lunn, The English Benedictines, 212.
of the spiritual life. The reader is several times referred to Baker’s own collections and translations from these writers for further information. The book runs to some forty-three thousand words.

3.5. BAKER’S WRITINGS IN 1628-9

Translations from Thomas à Kempis

Spirituall Alphabet

Order

The completion of a series of translations from Thomas à Kempis is to be dated at about this time. Not all of Baker’s translations from à Kempis survive, but some of the material he created is preserved in manuscript in the Lille archive.\(^{154}\)

As we have seen earlier, Baker shares many of the preoccupations of the authors of the devotio moderna.

A Spirituall Alphabet for the Use of Beginners, composed by Baker in 1628-1629, is characterised by David Lunn as “contemplation without tears”.\(^{155}\)

Alphabet, together with its natural companion piece, The Order of Teaching,\(^{156}\) are probably intended to be of use to novices in the community, or more likely to a novice formator, as they detail the process of teaching the newcomer which Baker would commend.

The Alphabet, which once again does not fall in any straightforward way into the genre of “spiritual alphabets” referenced earlier, is organised in short numbered sections, and runs to some twenty-eight thousand words. Baker demonstrates interest throughout the text in “the books that the soul is to use at y[e]
first for her spirituall instruction”, cross referencing extensively to his own and others’ writings. Although Order is left unfinished, at sixteen thousand words it is still a substantial treatise. In this treatise Baker is concerned to guide the newcomer to contemplation towards the appropriate kind of spiritual exercise.

3.6. BAKER’S WRITINGS IN 1629

Enquiry
Apologie
Five Treatises
A Secure Stay in all Temptations
Library
Secretum

The year 1629 was a significant one for the rapidly expanding Cambrai monastery. The community now numbered some twenty-nine sisters, and the time had arrived for one of the Cambrai community themselves to succeed their founding superior, Dame Frances Gawen, as Abbess. Although she fell below the canonical age for election, the lot fell upon Baker’s most resolute supporter in the community, Dame Catherine Gascoigne. Her appointment as Abbess was made by a General Chapter of the Congregation, held that year. At the same meeting, it is apparent that some form of disquiet about Baker and his teaching had surfaced, although it is difficult to be sure exactly what had transpired. Truran writes:

[Baker’s] Apology (perhaps early 1629) indicated [...] that a few, probably including Abbess Frances Gowen, were uncertain about Father Baker’s guidance. In 1629 Father Baker therefore asked for approbation of his works, duly given by the two most learned men in the English Congregation, Dom Leander Jones [...] and Dom Ridicind Barlow.

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157 Baker, Alphabet, 5.
159 Benedictines of Stanbrook, 12.
160 Truran, “The Present Author,” 76.
This moment of difficulty is an advantage to the historian of Baker’s works, as it
gave rise to the dated official texts of approval which were subsequently prefaced
by Jones and Barlow to Baker’s treatises, and are often the only evidence we
possess for completion dates of his texts. In addition, the Apologie itself, as I
suggest above, is of great value to an understanding of Baker’s project.

The final outcome of the Chapter was the appointment of Fr. Francis Hull
to the position of Vicarius Monialium, the official chaplain and confessor to the
convent. This, as subsequent event were to prove, was a less happy result. Baker
himself remained at Cambrai, and continued his activities as before; but, although
we know from Christina Brent that for about two years “himselfe & Fa: Baker ...
liued together in good agreement”, it would not be very long before the Vicarius
began to feel “it to derogate from his authority, that another should giue
instructions to some of those vnder his charge”.\textsuperscript{161} Thus from 1629 the stage was
being set for the final act of Baker’s time at Cambrai.

In the course of this year, Baker’s interest in spiritual books \textit{per se} is
illuminated by his troubling to write the treatise, \textit{An Enquiry about the author of
the Foregoing Treatises of The Abridgement, & Ladder of Perfection}.\textsuperscript{162} The
\textit{Enquiry} seeks to put right the misattribution of authorship and translation he
detects in the French edition of 1620.

Around the same time, Baker was at work on the texts which now compose
\textit{A Book Consisting of Five Treatises}.\textsuperscript{163} Together the five books contain about
twenty thousand words. Baker explains the contents

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{161} Brent, 97.
\item \textsuperscript{162} Baker, Augustine. \textit{An Enquiry About the Author of the Treatises of the Abridgement
and Ladder of Perfection; The Mirror of Patience and Resignation; Love of Enemies; All Virtues
in General; Spiritual Emblems}. Ed. John Clark. Analecta Cartusiana. Salzburg, Austria: Institut für
\item \textsuperscript{163} Baker, Augustine. \textit{Five Treatises; The Life and Death of Dame Margaret Gascoigne;
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
The First is against being Sollicitous of ye Honour of ye House or Order.
The Second is about ye electing of Worthy and Fit Counsellers within this House.
The Third is a Treatise about Scandalls.
The Fourth is about ye Book Intituled De Bono Status Religiosi. The Fifth is, that ye Cowle Maketh not a Monk, nor a Nunne.164

This disparate series of titles makes plain the extent to which the location of a specific text by Baker between the same set of covers as another may be a simple matter of convenience.

Also in 1629, Baker composed A Secure Stay in all Temptations, which addresses the issue of religious scruples, a difficulty to which he found the Cambrai nuns to be especially vulnerable.165

Baker’s brief text, Concerning the Library of this House166 is an account of how and why religious books should be adequately stored in the monastery at Cambrai.

The work undertaken by Baker in 1629 which is of most importance for this study, however, is the treatise he titled Secretum sive Mysticum.167 The Secretum presents itself as “an Exposition of the Book called The Cloud” (i.e. The Cloud of Unknowing). The text was complete by early in 1630, and runs to some one hundred thousand words.

3.7. BAKER’S WRITINGS IN 1630

Idiot’s Devotion
Admittance
Examples

164 Baker, Five Treatises, 1.
166 Baker, “Librarie.”
167 Baker, Secretum.
Completed in 1630, although in composition for some time before this, was the extensive collection of religious exercises and affective prayers entitled *Ideots Deuotion, or the Desires of Loue*.\(^{168}\) This text is notable not least because Baker himself gives an account of how much of it came to exist in his later treatise, *The Life and Death of Dame Gertrude More*, (a book he himself called “The Life of Trutha”, and which he wrote at Douai in 1635/6):

> After sticking to her Praier, and being diligent and industrious, as she was, by reason of the foresaid Propension aided or caused by the divin grace, and using at the first onlie out of necessitie such ejaculations, as she gotte out of bookes, she camme in a short time to use other meerelie of her owne framing, as suggested to her by her owne nature or spirit, or by the divin spirit, which oftentimes she used to sette downe in writing for her helpe in times of more ariditie. And those so expressed in writing, some others in the howse comming to see them, liked so well of them, that they used to copie them out. By this means in time there was in the howse great store of those Amourous affections of her collection or framing, that were written or scattered heere and there in divers and sundrie bookes and papers. The 2nd, or 3rd parte, or both of them of the bookes called the Ideots Devotion, that are in this howse, do consist of her said doengs, the Author [i.e. Baker himself] having onlie reduced them into some order and into certein exercises.\(^{169}\)

This picture of the literary activities of the Cambrai community, and the close connection between the spiritual life of the nuns and the writing and copying of texts, is instructive.

The *Book of Admittance* is one of the, fortunately few, Baker treatises which have been lost, but of whose existence we are aware because of mention made of them in his other books. In the case of this specific text we also know of its contents because of the survival of some sixteen pages of extracts from it in one surviving manuscript. The surviving extracts have now been published.\(^{170}\)

McCann believes that *Admittance* was

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\(^{169}\) Baker, *Dame Gertrude More*, 45.

probably written at Cambray about 1630. The treatise contained advice for the convent of Cambray regarding the admission of novices. Fr Baker recommends that only such novices should be taken as are fitted for the life of prayer and recollection. Treating also of the qualities necessary in a superior, he desires especially devotion to interior prayer.\footnote{McCann, Justin, 162.}

Also lost is the vast part of Baker’s \textit{Selected Examples out of Vitae and Collationes Patrum and other Authors}, which was composed in the course of this year. Mentioned in the works of both Prichard and Cressy, only a single section of the original work has survived. The section that does still exist is the “sixth part” of the whole, and contains extracts from a variety of patristic and mediaeval sources. McCann considered that the original text would have been a “large work”.\footnote{McCann, Justin, 177.}

3.8. BAKER’S WRITINGS IN 1631

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Rule, Volume 1}
  \item \textit{Rule, Volume 2}
  \item \textit{Rule, Volume 3}
\end{itemize}

The year 1631 found Baker engaged on one of his most extensive pieces of writing for the nuns of Cambrai, his enormous three volume translation and commentary upon the Rule of St Benedict. Baker’s \textit{Exposition of ye Rule of our most holy father S’ Bennet} is in many respects his most coherent and systematic composition from the Cambrai years. It nevertheless retains the quality of response to need which has been noted in his other Cambrai compositions, as it was written in response to a request from Baker’s devoted disciple, Abbess Catherine Gascoigne. Baker himself writes in a dedicatory epistle, prefaced to the first of the three volumes:

\begin{quote}
Madam, Now at ye end of five months I come to present unto you ye accomplishment of your desires & my promise [...] there is none so
\end{quote}
By the end of this year, the tensions between Baker and the official chaplain or Vicarius, Francis Hull, which may very well have been simmering from the time of the latter’s arrival in Cambrai in 1629, were beginning to reach boiling-point. We have few details of what occurred at each stage of the gathering storm, but Christina Brent writes that Hull “began to speak to some of them [i.e. the nuns] as if they went not in a way of obedience, raising by that occasion scruples & difficulties in them; & they coming to him, he sought to direct them in a course of prayer according to his opinion”. The evidence suggests that the heart of the dispute, in so far as it went beyond a territorial dispute between proud men, was that Hull believed Baker’s teaching on religious obedience to be questionable.

It may therefore not be an accident that Baker’s major work in the course of the year, the *Vox Clamantis*, was diverted from its original course as a commentary upon Walter Hilton into becoming an extended defence of his doctrine of divine calls, the foundation of Baker’s understanding of freedom in prayer, within the context of the Rule of St Benedict, i.e. the very point at issue in the conflict with Hull.

\[174\] Brent, 97.
Baker’s *Vox Clamantis in Deserto Animae*,\(^{175}\) which he completed during 1632, was begun as an introduction to and commentary upon one of his favourite mystical books, the *Scala Perfectionis* of Walter Hilton. Frustratingly for the modern reader, having declared his intention at the beginning of the text to write such a book, Baker appears simply to change his mind and “hauing begunne the penning of the said aduertisements, in my progresse thereupon I forgot or relinquished my first intention, and passed to treating of other matters that do not much concerne the said worke”.\(^{176}\)

As a result only the first few pages directly deal with Hilton. At this time, Baker had been engaged in writing a modernised text of Hilton’s book, for the use of his students, and appears to have begun the *Vox Clamantis* in order to guide them in reading this medieval work, “wch otherwise would not be easie for the vnlearned and vnexperte to vnderstande”. In the event, he rapidly moves away from his account of Hilton into an extended treatment of his doctrine of divine calls in the context of the provisions of the Rule of St Benedict. As Baker moves from discussing Hilton to an explicit defence of his manner of dealing with his young students, it is entirely possible that the conflict with Hull was the reason he abandoned the Hilton project.

A second text from this period, the *Collections out of the book called Death* is dated by Baker as having been completed on 6th July 1632.\(^{177}\) This step, an unusual one for Baker, is capable of being interpreted as a consequence of the fact that, as he writes immediately before dating the completed book, that he was at this time sick, and believed himself about to die:

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\(^{176}\) Baker, *Vox Clamantis*, 1.

The writer hauing written thus farre, was himself surprised wth a sicknes or bodilie indisposition, wch he thinks will shortly free him from this life ...\footnote{178}{Baker, \textit{Sickness, with Collections from the Book Called Death}, 127.}

In the event, Baker’s pessimistic assessment of his own condition proved unfounded. However, Baker’s physical illness may itself have been in part the consequence of the gathering storm at Cambrai. In the present context it is worthy of note that as part of his brief concluding remarks to the present life Baker once again mentions in passing the fact that his book is intended only for the use of the nuns of Cambrai.

Baker’s \textit{Book K} was completed in the course of 1632, but very shortly afterwards Baker himself destroyed the manuscript. McCann believes that some sections of the \textit{Dame Gertrude More} were drawn from this text.\footnote{179}{McCann, Justin, 184.} It is unclear whether Baker’s actions were precipitated by his worsening situation at Cambrai, but it is possible that this is the case.

It is evident that circumstances at Cambrai were now such that Baker’s work of writing and collecting of texts for the nuns was effectively over. The \textit{Vicarius} wrote to the President of the Congregation at some point in the second half of the year, setting out his complaints against Baker. From this point, Baker’s mind appears wholly to have focused upon defence of his activities and of the Cambrai nuns whom he had instructed in how to use the “bookes of mysticke authors”. No further treatises were forthcoming.

In October of 1632 a formal list of \textit{Objections}, seventeen in total, from Hull to Baker’s teachings at Cambrai was “sent by Verie Reverend Father President to Augustin Baker [...] that he might answer them”.\footnote{180}{Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 366.} In his edition of the \textit{Dame Gertrude More} Wekking presents a series of excerpts from the \textit{Vindication} which Baker wrote in response to Hull’s document.\footnote{181}{Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 366–78.}
the point that he has built no spiritual system of his own, or sought to cultivate a
league of “followers of my Doctrine”. He states that “all my Bookes were putte
into the common Librarie to be common for all”.\textsuperscript{182}

Wekking writes, in summary of the events which followed in 1633, as far
as the sources allow us to understand them:

As a result of his broil with Francis Hull, chaplain and confessor of
the house, who had questioned Baker’s orthodoxy, it was decided by
the General Chapter that both had to leave the community of
Cambrai. Baker, though in fact exonerated by the Chapter as far as
his teaching was concerned, was sent to Douai to St. Gregory’s,
evidently for the sake of peace [...] Francis Hull was sent to St.
Edmund’s in Paris and later to the priory of St Malo where he died
in 1645.\textsuperscript{183}

Thus, somewhat ignominiously, Baker’s most creative and productive period of
writing and translating, the period of the Cambrai treatises, came to an end.

4. CONCLUSION

This chapter has been concerned to present an account of that “world of
books”, his own and those of other “mysticke authors”, which sits at the centre of
the mysticism of Augustine Baker and which forms the context for his teaching
about the practice of spiritual reading.

First, I have argued that Baker’s project at Cambrai was much more
intimately identified with the use of spiritual books than some previous accounts
might have led us to suppose, and that early witnesses to Baker’s work along with
certain of Baker’s own texts point very directly towards the provision of the
“bookes of mysticke authors” as a key element in the work he undertook for the
nuns. Baker’s Cambrai treatises, characterised by their author as “supplies,
additions, and accommodations”, have been overshadowed historically by the

\textsuperscript{182} Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 368.
\textsuperscript{183} Wekking, Ben, ed. \textit{Augustine Baker. The Life and Death of Dame Gertrude More,
Edited from All the Known Manuscripts}, Analecta Cartusiana. Salzburg, Austria: Institut fur
systematic volume created by Serenus Cressy. Their original context reveals them to have been written by Baker as one element in a broader strategy of spiritual formation and guidance, a series of pedagogic essays which were intended to enable the Cambrai community to access the extensive written tradition of contemplative prayer, the books of the “mysticke authors”, without the need for Baker himself to be present to guide them.

Second, I have sought to offer a corrective to some of the mistaken understandings of the context of Baker’s spirituality which have arisen in the secondary literature. I concur with the perspective established first by Higgins, and developed in greater depth by Clark, that Baker’s is in essence an entirely mainstream European Catholic spirituality of the early seventeenth century, rooted in the later manifestations of the *devotio moderna* and especially in the affective mystical heritage of the Dionysian tradition, mediated most directly through Harphius. I have suggested that it is towards the “interpolation of love over knowledge”\(^{184}\) associated with this tradition that we will look to discover one of the factors leading to the fault line in Baker’s attitudes towards religious reading.

Finally, I have attempted an outline chronological survey of Baker’s writings during the Cambrai period. Even as simple a sketch as this serves to establish two facts which have a bearing upon our appreciation of Baker’s project. The first is the extent to which Baker’s activities appear to have been capable of provoking controversy among his contemporaries, to the extent that his arrival at Cambrai may well have been, as his exit certainly was, the consequence of the reactions of some of his fellow monks to what he was believed to stand for. The second is that Baker’s work at Cambrai began unexpectedly, grew and changed in unpredictable ways, and ended suddenly. The “world of books” he bequeathed to

\(^{184}\) Coolman.
the Cambrai community was therefore always unlikely to possess an ordered or systematic quality.
Chapter 3

A Necessarie Food For Your Soules
The Place of Reading in Baker’s Teaching of the Mystic Way

INTRODUCTION

Writing on the provision of a room to act as a library for the convent at Cambrai in his treatise Concerning the Librarie of this Howse, Baker remarks: “good bookes are a necessarie food for your soules; for by them you are (as by the voice of God) incited to devotion, and nourished in it, and greatlie holpen and directed in your spirituall course”.

In the book called Doubts and Calls, concluding a passage in which, echoing the Rule of St. Benedict, he has likened the monastery to a craftsman’s workshop and the spiritual practices of monastic life to the tools in that workshop, Baker writes: “Good books I account among those tools, & the right use of them is to be taught”. Taken together, these two passages represent the range of perspectives on spiritual reading and its role in the religious life explored by Baker in the Cambrai treatises. At one end of the scale the neophyte is “greatlie holpen and directed” by books, the spiritual book acting as guide for her “spirituall course”, the equivalent in this context to what Baker elsewhere writes of the human spiritual director, and second only to “the voice of God”. At the other end of the scale, there is a specific range of skills required to

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3 For Baker, there are many parallels between the role played in religious formation by the spiritual text and by the spiritual director; and in both cases the authoritative position of the guide does not preclude the provision of detailed instructions for the student in how to make best use of the process of direction.
read spiritual texts with profit, and these should be the subject of instruction for beginners: the book is an object of study, a tool of the spiritual craft, and the “right use of them is to be taught”. Having surveyed the range of texts written by Baker for the nuns of Cambrai in the previous chapter, and argued that they are to be understood not as the beginnings of a systematic treatment by Baker of a conspectus of mystical spirituality of which he understood himself to be the originator, but rather as “supplies, additions and accommodations” to a range of mystical texts gathered for the instruction of the young aspirants to contemplation with whom he worked, I turn in this chapter to explore in greater detail the range of perspectives on spiritual reading and its role in the religious life to be discovered in Baker’s Cambrai treatises.

Baker wrote the treatise Concerning the Librarie of this Howse in 1629 to advise the nuns on the “preservation of those bookes” their library was furnished with. This text, hardly more than a fragment, has an eminently practical purpose in that it envisages a future expansion of the Cambrai convent building to include “a little competent roome buillt withall, and destined for a librarie”, and seeks to offer guidance to the nuns on how to construct, furnish and make use of such a facility. In this context, Baker is especially anxious to warn his readers about the dangers posed to monasteries by fire. “There is scarce anie auncient monasterie or nunnery but hath some time or other ben consumed by fire,” he writes. But he is determined that, should a future fire consume the Cambrai buildings, “the librarie ... may be so buillt that there will be no perill at all unto it by fire, howsoever it stande or go about the rest of the howse”. Unsurprisingly, in such a context, Baker speaks of books and why they are of value in the spiritual life; the simplicity and directness of his remarks here makes this short text a useful starting point.

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Baker begins his remarks by noting that, since the Cambrai community belongs to the “contemplative estate” it is necessary for them to be provided with books proper to their calling. Leaving to one side “vulgar bookes”, which he quickly identifies as unsuited to his enclosed readers, Baker dismisses even most spiritual books written in his own day. These, he judges, “can little speed” his readers, “being proper onlie for them that live in the world and leade active lives”.

It is fortunate, therefore, that Cambrai possesses a “good and choice librarie”, among whose volumes Baker picks out for particular mention on the one hand “good olde English bookes”, and on the other “Blosius his workes”; that is to say, he couples the English pre-dissolution tradition together with the more recent continental tradition, adding to these “some other things of my translating and doeng”. Baker does not differentiate between differing accounts of the nature of the monastic life, but takes what is, in effect, the common account of the early seventeenth century as a given. It is valuable, therefore for the modern reader of the Cambrai treatises to be aware of how Baker understands the nature and purpose of the “contemplative estate” within the church, since this impacts upon his approach to the books he judges suited to that state of life. Baker’s understanding of the spirituality of monastic life will form the subject of Section 1 of this chapter.

Baker goes on to write of the books to be found in the convent:

... good bookes are a necessarie food for your soules; for by them you are (as by the voice of God) incited to devotion, and nourished in it, and greatlie holpen and directed in your spirittuall course. And therefore they are of farre more worth and more to be regarded then is transitory pellf [sic. *i.e.* wealth] of money or other temporal goodds, that neither have spirit, nor do cause spirit [...] I saie that good bookes, being a more immediate and effecacious meane for the good of our soules, are more to be tended and cared for , then are other dumbe and spiritlesse transitorie goods.

Baker tells us here that books are an “immediate and effecacious meane for the

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good of our soules” in several distinct ways, each of which will be addressed in greater detail below.

In Section 2 I shall consider Baker’s comment that the soul is “greatlie holpen and directed in [her] spirituall course” by the provision of appropriate books. Baker regards spiritual texts as having among their primary values for enclosed religious the capacity both to inform and to guide the soul on the path to perfection in contemplative prayer. This path he regularly terms “your spirituall course”. For Baker, texts which fulfil this aim are always the creation of individuals who have themselves trodden this path; he will speak of such writers as “mystic authors”, and regards what he terms “experience” as their single most significant qualification. As we have seen, it was to provide the Cambrai nuns with a sufficient collection of the books of the mystic authors that Baker set about the collection, translation and composition of the books that composed their library.

Underlying this simple phrase, “your spirituall course”, is a significant set of assumptions on Baker’s part not only about the nature of the monastic life, but also about what might be termed the spiritual itinerary of contemplative prayer.

Baker also states that books assist the soul because by them the contemplative is “incited to devotion, and nourished in it”. Section 3 of this chapter will address the ways in which Baker understands the spiritual text as the starting point and inspiration for certain forms of affective prayer. Baker taught his disciples to follow his own example of copying out sections of texts which moved their spirit, as well as creating original compositions based upon them. His verses, and the collections called the Idiot’s Devotions, for example, exemplify this practice.7

Section 4 of this chapter will explore Baker’s equation of the spiritual book with the “voice of God”. Baker’s view is that the aspirant to contemplation is ultimately to be guided by God himself, and that all other guides are both secondary to that divine guidance and are best regarded as means towards achieving an ability to receive such guidance. However, in so far as the spiritual text incites and guides the soul forward towards the situation where she can be guided directly by God, such a text has value; indeed, it is fulfilling the same role that the “voice of God” will eventually fill. Thus the parenthetical comment both stresses the value of the spiritual text, and, at the same time, relativises it. There is a tension here, nevertheless, and it is often this tension that is reflected in Baker’s frequent warnings against spiritual books and suggestions that they can be impediments rather than assistants on the path to God.

As we have seen, in his 1628/9 treatise on discernment and divine guidance, Doubts and Calls, Baker writes about the use of books within the “shopp or workinge-howse” of the monastic life: “Good books I account among those tools, & the right use of them is to be taught”.8 Thus the same spiritual text which can be equated with the voice of God is also an object of study, a tool of the spiritual craft, and it is necessary for the monastic neophyte to be instructed in its use so that she will approach her reading using the appropriate skills. In Section 5 I will address Baker’s approach to teaching the use of spiritual texts.

Later in the treatise on the Library, Baker writes that “the time will come ... that soules will desire and seeke to have spirituall guids and directors, and will be able to find none”, and that in this eventuality it will be to “good bookes” that souls will turn for guidance.9 Baker writes:

I know that God can if he will supplie them with his internall directions and inspirations, but we must not so relie on that (least thereby we deceave oursellves as we are liklie to do) that we neglect

8 Baker, Doubts, 16.
the having and preserving of good bookes by which allso God useth to speake unto us and to teach us.\textsuperscript{10}

In terms of the range of perspectives Baker adopts towards spiritual texts, this short paragraph exemplifies an ambiguity that runs through his teaching on the subject. Baker holds that only the “internall directions and inspirations” of God are ultimately of value to the soul in her contemplative journey. He also believes that books can and do assist the aspirant in learning to hear that voice, and receive its directions. As we shall see below, many of the apparently contradictory statements Baker makes about religious books arise because of the gap between these two statements.

1. BAKER’S PERSPECTIVE ON BENEDICTINE MONASTIC LIFE

In his three volume treatise, \textit{St. Benedict’s Rule}, a translation of and a commentary on the Rule, written at the request of Abbess Catherine Gascoigne for the Cambrai nuns, Baker writes as follows, offering a brief overview of his understanding of the role of reading within the Benedictine way:

... indeed our whole \textit{Rule} consists almost wholly of these three things; y\textsuperscript{f} is to say, prayer, reading, & working, all w\textsuperscript{ch} are to be directed by obedience. And note well y\textsuperscript{g} places w\textsuperscript{ch} our holy father hath given to these two advices for prayer and reading: For in the first place he puts reading, saying: To read & hear good lessons willingly; and in y\textsuperscript{g} very next place after he putteth prayer, saying: To apply our-selves frequently to prayer. And y\textsuperscript{g} reason of this order in placing is like to be, because reading is a preparation, means or help, or motive to prayer.\textsuperscript{11}

At numerous points in his treatises, Baker makes plain the fact that he understands the monastic life in the fashion outlined in the paragraph quoted above, presenting spiritual reading as a foundational element of the Benedictine way for the Cambrai nuns as it has been for monastics throughout the ages, and identifying its value as closely associated with monastic prayer, for which he sees it as in various senses a

preparation. It is therefore wholly appropriate to begin a survey of Baker’s approach to spiritual reading by situating his teaching on that subject within his broader understanding of Benedictine life.

The material to be found in the volumes of Baker’s commentary on the Rule is drawn from his reading of the standard commentators available to him. Baker makes no claim to original scholarship on the subject, writing that “both in the translation of the Rule it-self and in the exposition, I have chiefly regarded & followed yᵉ senses and the interpretations of such holy & learned writers, as in diverse ages & countries have commented on yᵉ Rule”.\textsuperscript{12} His only departures from convention are occasioned, he claims, by his knowledge of his audience: “I have principally regarded the persons for whom I write”. With regard to his understanding of the monastic life as a whole this is also Baker’s characteristic stance.

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

Fundamental to the dynamics of the Catholicism of this period is a two-tier account of the church, which held that while the divine call to holiness of life applied to all baptised Christians, only those in the religious state were called to perfection in holiness. Thus, the seventeenth century doctrine held that vowed religious, uniquely, make the pursuit of perfection the centre of their lives. By their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, founded upon the evangelical counsels of

\textsuperscript{12} Baker, Rule, Vol.1, 7.
the gospel, vowed religious are specially graced to live out a form of life that is both stable and permanent, and which places the pursuit of perfection in holiness at its core. Scholastic theologians taught that the various modes of the religious life to be found in the Church could be understood as exemplifying the different means of attaining this ideal of vowed perfection: for example, the religious life might be solitary or communal, active or contemplative, priestly or lay.\textsuperscript{13}

It was the common outlook of the time that the Benedictine monastic ideal was one of perfection achieved via an ascesis of life ordered towards contemplative prayer. Baker unhesitatingly adopts such a perspective throughout his writings for the nuns of Cambrai.

Here we should recall that Baker was not, nor did he ever claim to be, either an originator of new ideas, or a trained theologian. He was never formally trained as a theologian, and his year as a novice in Padua would certainly not have involved theological studies. His later private reading, which we know was extensive, was concerned with Benedictine history and the literature of spirituality. It is therefore unsurprising that, when he writes about the nature and purpose of monastic life his underlying viewpoint is the conventional outlook of his period.

For example, at the beginning of \textit{Directions D} he writes, of monastics: “The end w\textsuperscript{ch} they are to aime at, is the perfect loue of God. The means for the attaining to that end are prayer & mortification”.\textsuperscript{14} He will return to this simple foundational statement throughout \textit{Directions for Contemplation}, and throughout his treatises. For example: “The way to the perfect love of God (w\textsuperscript{th} is spirituall perfection) is by prayer & mortification prosecuted”.\textsuperscript{15} Thus it is within this shared

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} For a helpful overview of the spirituality of early modern monasticism, see: Pereira, Jose, and Robert Fastiggi. \textit{The Mystical Theology of the Catholic Reformation. An Overview of Baroque Spirituality}. Lanham, MD: University press of America, 2006.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Baker, \textit{Directions D}. 47.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
seventeenth century view of religious life that Baker’s account of the “spirituall course” to be pursued by his readers is to be situated.

Basing their account of much of what they term “Baroque Spirituality” on the works of the Jesuit theologian Francisco Suarez (1548-1617), regarded both in his own time and subsequently as a major figure of scholastic theology, Pereira and Fastiggi approach the mainstream early seventeenth century understanding of the nature and purpose of Benedictine monastic life by summarising the monastic spirituality of the period in seven key themes.16

These may be briefly stated as: (i) Man’s alienation from God through sin; (ii) man’s conversion to God; (iii) the sovereign power of divine grace; (iv) the human response to grace in ascetical striving; (v) monastic detachment from the world; (vi) participation in the passion of Christ; and (vii) prayer as the fullness of the spiritual life. It is this approach to monastic spirituality which underlies everything that Baker writes, and which may be found stated explicitly in its various parts at points in his treatises. Occasionally, Baker is moved to offer a summary statement of the whole nature of the Benedictine life; when he does so, it is the themes headlined above that he is exploring.

For example, writing in Directions F Baker offers the following summary account of the purpose of monastic life, which he frames as an answer to a direct question from a Cambrai novice (whom he identifies as “one of the children”):

Being asked by one of the children (preparinge herselffe to be clothed) a question that was not childish, wch was “What am I” (saith he) “to aime at by vndertakinge a state of religion?”, I answered her as followeth, viz.:
Whereas at this present, through corruption of nature caused by originall sinne & your owne evill customes & habits, you are full of selfe-loue, wholy regardinge & louinge yourselfe, & in all that you doe or forbear do only or at least cheefely intend your owne commodities & ends, & not the loue and honour of God ...

16 Pereira, and Fastiggi, 76–78.
Here we can see the characteristic anthropology of the early modern Catholic church, involving an account of man’s alienation from God through original sin, the first theme identified above. Baker’s text continues, addressing the theme of conversion:

... & not the loue and honour of God, wch you ought only to regard & intend, now all your endeavours & labours must be for a reformation of your soule in this poynt ...

The second theme, of man’s conversion to God, involves both the recognition of the “curruption of nature” and the need to place “the loue and honour of God” at the centre of one’s life. Baker then pictures the soul turning to the religious state as “a wonderful great help” to the achievement of the intended “reformation of soule”. The religious life is therefore in Baker’s text a concrete manifestation of theme three, the action of divine grace. Baker’s text continues:

... for the effecting whereof the state of religion is a wonderfull great helpe, & therefore is tearmed the schoole of vertues, & to my present purpose I may tearme it the shopp or workinge-howse wherein vertues are exercised in their best perfection;

The religious life is presented as the perfect co-operation of divine grace with human response. It is a “wonderful great helpe” to the soul in effecting an internal reformation, and it is the “shopp or workinge-howse” where a discipline of virtue is brought about, as the human response to divine grace (theme four). Baker moves on to describe the “exercises” proper to the “estate of religion”:

And therefore in this estate of religion (whereof you meane to make a probation), you are by the exercises of prayer & mortification (both wch wherein they do consist I haue wth subdiuisions of them shewed you in the beginninge of the first part of this treatise) to labour for the abandoninge out of your soule all selfe-loue, & in lew of it to bringe in the deuine loue, whose property & perfection is only to loue God & intend him & his honour in all that you do or forbeare.

Here we encounter, albeit in a highly condensed form, the working out of Perera and Fastiggi’s fifth theme, detachment from the world, which they describe in more detail as the tendency of Benedictine spirituality, with its intensely monastery-based rhythm of life and spiritual practice, to “limit the realisation of Christian
ideals to the monastery”. Indeed, so completely has this “limiting” occurred in the Baker passage we are examining here that the whole of Perera and Fastiggi’s sixth and seventh themes, participation in the passion of Christ and prayer as the fulfilment of the spiritual life are understood by Baker as “internal” to the individual aspirant to contemplation, and are addressed by Baker almost as a parenthetical cross-reference back to an earlier section in the treatise:

exercises of prayer & mortification (both wch wherein they do consist I haue wth subdiuisions of them shewed you in the beginninge of the first part of this treatise)

As we shall have occasion to note in more than one subsequent section of this study, the language Baker employs here (and the fact that he can make the point so quickly) reveal the extent to which he takes for granted the fact that Christian ideals are pursued “internally” (i.e. within the individual soul) in the context of monastic contemplative life. In his treatise Admittance, Baker writes:

A conteplatiue spirit doth chiefly, yea wholy, regarde ye interior, doeng alle things according to ye interior & for ye good therof.19

He writes in another context of his disciple, Gertrude More, that

all the difficultie was for her entrie and getting into her interior, and for to learne how she should leade an internall life.20

The theme of detachment has been carried to an extreme in the spirituality of the early modern Catholic Church, so that the perfection towards which Baker points his followers, achieved by “exercises of prayer and mortification”, is understood as primarily located within the interior landscape of the individual soul.

Finally, in this set piece account for novices, Baker returns to the themes of God’s grace and man’s response, before finishing with a clear statement of the fact that the ultimate aim of all forms of religious life is perfection, which it will be

18 Pereira, and Fastiggi, 77.
noted is described as a relationship between God and the individual which takes places “in the soule”:

And this is not the worke of one day only or of one yeare, but it stands vpon the industry of the party wth the helpe of the deuine grace [...] And to haue this deuine loue perfectly in the soule is perfection, wch all religious are to aime at.²¹

Baker’s account covers the conventional ground found in seventeenth century accounts of Benedictine life as a form of religious life, intended to lead the soul to perfection.

Baker takes this understanding of monastic life, its implied anthropology, its theology of grace, and of human striving towards perfection, etc. for granted as a simple given. He neither questions it, nor argues for it. It is of fundamental importance for his understanding of the role of religious reading, since Baker will also tend towards the view that spiritual texts all share this account. As we shall see in a number of contexts, Baker is inclined towards a somewhat Procrustean method of dealing with disagreements between spiritual authors. It is in his confident belief in a clear and obvious account of the nature of religious life that this approach is to be grounded.

For Baker, then, as for most Catholics of his time, the religious life is a given of Christian existence, and entry into it is entry into a structured state of life whose aims and methods can be clearly stated. Part of the task of those who train newcomers to that life is to introduce them to these aims and methods. Reading, in this view, is one of the methods whereby religious are to be guided towards the perfection of life which is their aim.

Baker makes use of several images to describe this process of guidance. The images all offer ways of understanding the process of growth, the ways in which progress is made, in religious life. These metaphors also offer a way to

understand Baker’s approach to the task he has undertaken at Cambrai, and the role that reading plays within that task.

In the first of the three parts of *A Treatise of Doubts and Calls*, Baker presents two images for the process of initiation into the spiritual life, that of a child growing to maturity, and that of an apprentice learning the mastery of a craft; he also makes reference to a third, which he borrows from Walter Hilton, that of a pilgrim travelling to Jerusalem. These images are characteristic of the outlook Baker adopts throughout the Cambrai treatises, and each will be addressed briefly below.

The first image is that of a child growing towards physical maturity, which Baker deploys as an analogy of the process of initiation into a spiritual life and growth in maturity as a religious:

> At ye first it fareth w^th a soul as it doth with a little child, who is not able to stand on his legs, much lesse to goe, but is born up by another & holpen & taught to goe, & is held in this course, dayly growing more & more able to goe of himself without ye help of another, & in time he cometh to be able to run. Even so it is in a spirituall way; the soul is first for some good space instructed to walk, & afterwards is committed to God & himselfe, & hath little or no need of help or instructions from others, but holds on his way, (yea, at length comes to run), under ye conduct & guidance of ye divine spirit, w^ch liveth & reigneth within him.\(^{22}\)

Here we see what is in practice Baker’s favourite image of the young religious worked out in more than usual detail. He regularly speaks of his “scholars”, and we have earlier noted his use of the term “one of the children” to denote a monastic novice. Schoolroom and childhood images are never far from his mind when he speaks of the process of instruction and formation he has come to be involved in, and it is clear that the potential within these images to focus upon growth or progress in relationship to a teacher or senior is what leads him to make use of them.

But it is equally characteristic of Baker that his use of this image of spiritual formation is partly occasioned by his desire to stress that

the soul being once well enterd & somewhat forward in her way, is to be very wary & sparing of her exterior consults & questionings.\textsuperscript{23}

Baker believes that the mature contemplative “hath within her that only master who can & will teach her”,\textsuperscript{24} but is equally certain that before the point where the soul is ready to be “committed to God & himself”, there is a period (of varying length for different individuals) wherein the soul “is born up by another & holpen & taught to goe, & is held in this course”. It is with this period of instruction for the “little child”, newly entered into the contemplative way, that Baker is largely concerned.

This image of instruction, support and assistance offered by a teacher or senior to a newcomer or student offers a first picture of Baker’s recognition that the experience of the practised contemplative is a necessary resource for the newcomer to the monastic life; although he also notes the need for the moment to come when the teacher steps aside. As we shall see, the spiritual text is for Baker a dimension of this role of the monastic guide, and may in some contexts supply the absence of a living teacher. A spiritual book can be a guide, teacher or help to growth on the spiritual course.

In another, more developed analogy, Baker pictures the monastic neophyte as “a young man, who is to become an apprentice to an handy-craftsman” such as “to a watch-maker or to a clock-maker”. Although he is surrounded by all the tools and resources of the master’s workshop, the apprentice is powerless to set to work and make a watch or a clock, for the simple reason that he does not know how. Baker writes:

Now if ye master should come to him & say: ‘Come on, sirrah, make me a watch; here you have all the necessaries for it;’ what, think you, would the poor apprentice say? Mary, he would (or at least

\textsuperscript{24} Baker, \textit{Doubts}, 6.
justly & reasonably he might) say: `Sir, there is yet wanting ye most necessary thing of all, and that is th' you or some other by your appointment or providing, do shew unto me in what sort I am to use all these materialls & tools for ye making of ye watch, for otherwise of myselfe I know not what to do w/th them ...

Baker continues by picturing the master and his journeymen instructing the apprentice, “shewing him how ye materialls & tools are to be used; and the prentice carefully giving ear to ye instructions”, until he arrives at the point where “he comes to be able to work, & at length so perfectly, that of himselfe he can make a watch”.

Like the analogy of the infant learning to walk, the analogy of the watchmaker’s apprentice anticipates a movement on the part of the learner towards independence from the teacher, although in this more developed account (or, as Baker describes it “this over-long similitude”), it is less clear that complete independence from the teacher is ever fully attained. Baker writes as follows:

... yet hardly or never doth he become so cunning, but that at some time, in a point of some extraordinary artificiall workmanship, he needeth to ask, either of the journey-man or at least of the master himself, [...] now & then, (but very rarely) a question of difficulty.

Baker summarises his view of this process of spiritual formation:

ye spirituall scholar having some instructions for ye first time, & continuing in practice w/th some questions now & then, comes at length to be able to proceed & work with few or no questions at all.

Although the details of this image differ from those of the infant and the schoolroom, the dynamic is very similar if not identical: the beginner is instructed by the senior, until he or she reaches the point of independence. It is possible to see the spiritual text, within this metaphor, as having a dual role. Baker explicitly identifies books as among the tools of the spiritual craft, but it is apparent that they also function as master, instructing the apprentice in his approach to that task.

25 Baker, Doubts, 15.
26 Baker, Doubts, 15.
27 Baker, Doubts, 16.
The third image that concerns us here is not original to Baker, but is among his favourite references to other spiritual writers. Speaking of the child learning to walk and to run in the first image we examined above Baker writes:

Even so it is in a spirituall way; the soul is first for some good space instructed to walk, & afterwards is committed to God & himselfe, & hath little or no need of help or instructions from others, but holds on his way, (yea, at length comes to run), under ye conduct & guidance of ye divine spirit, wch liveth & reigneth within him. An example of this you have in ye pilgrim for Jerusalem, (as you read in ye Scale of Perfection) ... 28

The final reference here is to one of Baker’s favourite passages from Walter Hilton, “ye pilgrim for Jerusalem”. This reference is to Scala Perfectionis, Book 2, Chapters 21-23, in which Hilton likens the spiritual life to the journey of a pilgrim, travelling to Jerusalem:

There was a man wanting to go to Jerusalem, and because he did not know the way he came to another man who he thought knew it and asked whether he could reach that city. [...] The other man answered and said this: “See, I am setting you on the right road. This is the way, and be sure to keep the instructions I give you”. 29

Although in Doubts and Calls he only makes a passing reference to the similitude of the pilgrim, Baker values Hilton’s teaching in general, and this portion of his work especially, making more than one reference to it in the treatises and reproducing the entire section, modernised into the English of his own day, at the end of his treatise A Secure Stay in all Temptations. 30 At the end of his “translation” of the Hilton passage, Baker writes:

The wch words of his are an abridgement of the spirituall life; yea, if you regard them well, you shall find that they contain in all particulars all necessary & essential instructions for such a life. In so much that if a forward & well-willed soul had no other instructions, and would well consider of them and take on her the heart & courage wch they require for prosecuting a spirituall life, she would

28 Baker, Doubts, 6–7.
walk very securely, and at length would infallibly attain to the end of them, being the perfect love of God.\textsuperscript{31}

This passage is of particular value in this context, as it brings together the two concerns of this section.

I have argued that Baker’s understanding of the Benedictine monastic life is essentially the standard account offered by writers of the early seventeenth century, and that Baker takes this view for granted. Thus he can assume that an “abridgement of the spirituall life” is a resource which makes sense to his readers, for he shares with them a common understanding of the outline of the religious life. He also makes frequent, if understated, use of the metaphors of the pilgrimage (spiritual path, way, course, walk secure) or of the workshop (work, prosecuting), or of the child growing and learning (images of the schoolroom, scholar, teacher). He assumes that the spiritual life is available to his readers in a manner similar to the way in which it is described by the authors to whom he directs their attention. Common to all the three images is a relationship between one who has already undertaken the process or task in question, the teacher, adult, guide or master-craftman, and one who is setting out upon it for the first time. This notion of “experience”, as Baker calls it, will play a significant part in his doctrine.

2. “DIRECTED IN YOUR SPIRITUALL COURSE”

At several points in the Cambrai treatises Baker is to be found explicitly setting out what amounts to a spiritual curriculum for beginners in the monastic life. An example is \textit{A Spirituall Alphabet for the Use of Beginners},\textsuperscript{32} a text whose composition Truran finds to be associated with the entrance of several newcomers to the religious life at Cambrai.\textsuperscript{33} Early in this text, Baker makes reference to the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Baker, A Secure Stay, 152.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} Truran, Margaret. “‘The Present Author Hath Been Driven to This’: What Needs Was Fr Baker Trying to Meet?” \textit{That Mysterious Man, Essays on Augustine Baker 1575–1641}. Ed.
newcomer to the religious life as “*tamquam tabula rasa* (i.e. a sheet of clean white paper)”\(^{34}\). Having raised the issue of the inexperience and impressionable character of the religious novice, a topic which might have led in any one of a number of directions, Baker’s mind turns immediately to “the books that the soul is to use at the first for her spiritual instruction”. He refers the reader to his own reading lists of books helpful for contemplative prayer in *Directions for Contemplation: Book H*\(^{35}\), and “for further instructions in particulars, I do refer the soul to other books”\(^{36}\).

The *Spirituall Alphabet* certainly recognises the importance of an “instructor”, the spiritual director who is to “guide a scholar in the way”, but it is to the books that the “scholar” is to use that Baker returns repeatedly with detailed instructions as to where to find the material necessary to address a particular subject:

For ye right use of sensible devotion, I wish her to peruse the Book H, in ye later end of the treatise De Custodia Cordis, what I have there brought in out of Harphius, which maketh six leaves of my writing.\(^{37}\)

For Baker, it is as if the *tabula rasa* of the monastic neophyte is an opportunity for the text of the contemplative author to be reproduced afresh. In addressing issues of spiritual initiation, Baker is immediately drawn to conceive of that process in the context of a dialogue with a set of spiritual books; a dialogue, moreover, which is geared to an internalisation and personal appropriation of the mystical text.

This bookish quality to Baker’s spirituality has provoked more than one previous student of his work to conclude that he is in some sense less than a

\(^{34}\) Baker, *Alphabet*, 5.


mystic; as H.C. White writes, there is “something dry about him, something pedagogic rather than prophetic”. Mounting a similar critique, J.T Rhodes comments: “Baker’s attempts to persevere in contemplative prayer always foundered until he began to find books to help him”. Rhodes believes that Baker’s relationship to written texts must lead his reader to question “the real extent of his personal mystical experiences”. In the case of both scholars we may well be encountering the view, critiqued by Bernard McGinn, that the primordial, raw experience enjoyed by the so-called “true mystic” only at a secondary stage comes to be written down as conceptualised within a belief system, and that it is therefore exclusively to autobiographical accounts of personal mystical experiences that credence should be given.

Departing from this approach, the present study follows McGinn in seeking to recognise the “textually and theologically mediated nature of all Christian mysticism”. Thus, far from Baker’s bookishness disqualifying him from the title “mystic”, it is precisely as a devotee of mystical writing that Baker is of interest. It is in his reading, teaching, translating and writing of mystical texts that the specific qualities of Baker’s spirituality are to be discovered.

We have seen that Baker understands reading as an essentially monastic practice, and situates his teaching about spiritual reading within his broader account of the nature and purpose of monastic life. He specifically understands the spiritual text to have a formative role in enabling the contemplative neophyte to discern her “spirituall course”, in guiding her through the difficulties and danger she may encounter along the way.

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41 McGinn, Foundations, xv.
Towards the end of *Directions H*, Baker writes:

> When you were in the world, or else in religion before you seriously determined to prosecute a spiritual life, you did likely read good booke out of some curiosity or to drive away the time; but now you are to read them (I mean, such of them as are proper for you) with a serious resolution of putting in practise whatsoever you read that shall be good & proper for you, & so not content yourselfe with only bare delightfull readinge of those good books. Before you would say: ‘This or that is a very good booke’, & layeinge it aside, this was all that you did wth it: but now you must say to yourselfe: ‘This or that thinge that I reade in this booke is a good instruction & proper for me, & I will put it in execution when it shall be time and place for it’.  

This movement from “bare delightfull readinge” to an appreciation of the spiritual text as “good instruction” is fundamental to Baker’s approach to religious reading. The texts which he recommends function for their readers as material which they are to “put in execution” when it is appropriate for them to do so. Baker will offer careful guidance to his students in discerning how to identify the instruction that is “proper for me” at this very time, and which should be stored up until “it be time and place for it”.

This perspective is to be found in a number of places throughout the Cambrai treatises. Baker will carefully set out where and in which texts his young students should look to discover the spiritual practice that is appropriate for them at a specific time. Thus Baker writes, for example, in the *Secure Stay*:

> ... for to understand better what contrition is, and how to practice it, I wish you diligently to peruse & seek to understand a little treatise of Contrition & Attrition, wch you shall find both in the beginning of the little book called *The Key of Paradise*, and in the later end of another book beginning wth Molina of Mentall Prayer. And both these books are in this house.  

And a little later in the same treatise:

> Also there is a chapter of prayer in the Book called Alphonsus (or The Method to Serve God), the wch chapter (wch you may find out by the table in the later end of the book), will teach you how to make your acts to be acts of love & contrition answerable to what I have here before breifly taught you. And if, after that you have perused the said two books, you read over again what I have said in

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42 Baker, *Directions H*, 38.  
this clause about contrition, I hope you will the better understand my meaning in it.\textsuperscript{44}

There is every reason to suppose that this approach to the text as guide in the contemplative life, found throughout Baker’s writings, reflects his own experience of struggling to discover his own way in prayer without adequate formation or guidance.

He discusses this dilemma in his treatise \textit{Secretum}, where he again emphasises the positive value of books as guides in the spiritual life:

\begin{quote}
Our Scholar \textit{[i.e. Baker himself]} now Partly through y\textsuperscript{e} like Experience in some Others also, but more through reading of books & Consideration upon these matters, knoweth what, w\textsuperscript{th} y\textsuperscript{e} help of God, may suffice for Occurring Difficulties ... \textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

He makes the same point several times, insisting upon: “y\textsuperscript{e} Necessity or great good of y\textsuperscript{e} forsaid Practice, w\textsuperscript{ch} is of perusing books t\textsuperscript{h}t treat of these matters, & pondering & understanding them y\textsuperscript{e} best you Can”.\textsuperscript{46} It is clear from all that has gone before about Baker’s labours as a writer and translator during his years at Cambrai that he believes in practice that the use of spiritual texts is a basic need for the contemplative, and that by reading over the accounts to be discovered in his own books and those of other writers recommended by him “by y\textsuperscript{e} grace of God you will never fail for want of knowledg in yourselves or in your books”.\textsuperscript{47}

In what would be the last of the Cambrai treatises, the \textit{Vox Clamantis}, Baker writes about the need for those who aspire to contemplation to read about the nature of the spiritual path, and the varieties of prayer they may find themselves required to make use of:

\begin{quote}
For the reading and knowledge of such bookes are necessarie for such, as telling them of the spirituall things they are to aime at, and teaching them the waie thereto. And for whose vse were those bookes written but for the vse of such persons? And the more learned such men be, the more worthy and fitting are they to reade
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{44}Baker, \textit{A Secure Stay}, 127.
\textsuperscript{46}Baker, \textit{Secretum}, 64.
\textsuperscript{47}Baker, \textit{Secretum}, 65.
those bookes; for though these men are not as yet come to ye actuall experience of the perfection of those bookes, yet through the naturall aptnes that is in them for those waies, and desire of attaining the ende thereof, they vnderstande and relish those matters in some good measure.\textsuperscript{48}

It is Baker’s view that the contemplative should have read about and thus been prepared for the experiences that they will encounter in their spiritual path, even though they “are not yet come to ye actuall experience”. This is what he suggests in the \textit{Secretum} he himself had lacked in his early attempt to undertake contemplative prayer.

He teaches the nuns that, as their spirituall course advances,

\textit{Change in prayer rightly made is compared to frute wch beinge fully ripe doth of itselfe fall of from the tree; even so when we are in a settled exercise we are not of our owne heads or election to cast it away & to take another, but we are to continue and & hold ourselves in that same exercise, till that it being come to ripenes, it falls away of itselfe ...\textsuperscript{49}}

Nevertheless, he is clear that it is of immense advantage to be more aware of the stages and degrees of the spiritual course than he himself had been, and it is to this end that he tells them:

\textit{In a spirituall life, consider & looke vpon the wayes, states & degrees that ly before you, so that when they come vpon you, you may not be alltogether to seeke as to the vnderstandinge of them; & least perhaps you may not easely & readely find another that can vnderstand your case [...] And now as for those future cases (for examples sake), I put you in mind to forethinke (as you can wth the helps of bookes & writings) of the degrees & varieties of aspirations, of the passive contemplations, of the great desolations that follow it ...\textsuperscript{50}}

And from this same process no doubt emerge many of the instructions in the \textit{Catalogue} of books “most helping towards contemplation”, which we noted in the previous chapter are described by Baker in such a way that his students would know where to look for help in a specific circumstance. For example, Baker writes

\\textsuperscript{49} Baker, \textit{Directions F}, 29.
\textsuperscript{50} Baker, \textit{Directions F}, 29.
of Francis de Sales, “Introduction to a Deuote Life. In this I commende vnto you to be read in the 4th parte the 13th chapter and thence to the ende of the 4th parte, being concerning desolations”.

A similar motivation would appear to lie behind Baker’s related practice of writing sets of mnemonic verses for the use of the nuns. In some collections, the texts are left to speak for themselves, and in others Baker explains the verses in more detail. So, for example, in the Spirituall Treatise we discover a series of short verses which Baker describes as “composed by yᵉ author, for yᵉ relaxation of his spirit, in times of recreation”. They are clearly intended to be didactic, and to teach simple spiritual morals. For example:

Only he that doth persever
Shall yᵉ fruits of labour gather.

All fear & greife & hope & joy
Keep out, wᵉ will your soul annoy.

Ile teach you perfection in a song:
Bear & forbear. It is not long.

Baker’s purpose is not to create great poetry, nor does he anywhere suggest that he thinks that he has done so. It is simply to offer his young students a series of easily memorised “hooks” upon which to hang the outlines of the doctrine he seeks to inculcate in them.

In The Anchor of the Spirit Baker creates an entire short treatise out of verses of this kind, accompanied by commentary upon them. Once again, the purpose is to teach the sisters a series of points about the spiritual life, using the verses as memorable “anchors” for the doctrine. He writes:

I call it an Anker, by reason that as a shippe by the meane of an anker, (to wᵉ it is fast tied), is preserved against all stormes, tempests, & perils of shipwracke, so the doctrine of this breefe treatise being well obserued in practise, will secure a soule in all

51 Baker, Directions H, 85.
53 Baker, Spirituall Treatise, 23.
tentations & perills that may occurre in a spirituall life, & will hold her fast to God.  

The “anchors” throughout the treatise are brief verses of Baker’s own composition, such as:

My light is faith,  
My hope is no possession;  
My loue vnstinted,  
This is my condition.  

Each of the verses is then explicated in a prose commentary, with the aim, as Baker writes, that by giving an understanding of the matters to be faced and addressed in the pursuit of a spiritual life, the text will help to “secure a soule in all tentations & perills that may occure in a spirituall life”.  

Writing of himself in the third person, Baker offers the following comments in the *Secretum* on how he pursued his own “Spirituall Course”, seeming at first to endorse the view explored in this section, that to find the guidance required in the spiritual life from a director, or from a book, is to be preferred to blindly setting out into unknown terrain. However, it is not long before Baker complicates his own statement:

Indeed ye greatest, yea in my Conscience ye only Want was, th’ he had not a better & more expert Master than he had. For I make no doubt, but th’ if he had had a better Master he had not So fallen, but had prosecuted & held on his Course even during his life. He never knew any other Master, nor could tell where to find a better. He never could find any other master or Man th’ would put him into any Spirituall Course, & as he began Masterlesse [...], so he prosecuted his Course Masterlesse, yet not wthout a Master. For certainly both for ye Beginning of his Course, & to ye Attaining to ye Said Contemplation, he had for his Master (as to all matters & directions of moment) ye Spirit of God for his Interior Director.  

The knots Baker begins to tie himself in towards the end of this passage reflect the awkward tension between his desire to insist that God is the only “Master” and
“Interior Director” of souls, who can guide and illuminate a contemplative directly, without the need for books or human guides, and the rather more pragmatic outlook with which he begins the passage quoted. We shall return to this point below in greater detail.

3. “INCITED TO DEVOTION, AND NOURISHED IN IT”

In the treatise *Discretion* Baker writes of the Cambrai sisters that “Your life should be a continuall spirituall exercise”, and goes on to note that “It is an English proverb, Love me little & love me long; so may you every day exercise your love towards God, th' you may increase in it while you live, & dayly increase in it while you live, & dayly increase in his love, & at length come to y⁶ perfection of it”.⁵⁸ He continues:

A spirituall life is a continuall thread, & admitteth of noe interruptions, th' are cuts. This daies exercise must persue yesterdaies exercise, & tomorrows exercise must persue this daies exercise, & y⁶ evenings exercise must persue y⁶ mornings.⁵⁹

Baker has as one of his primary purpose in his selection of texts for the Cambrai nuns the notion that an affective mystical path is the most suited to monastics, and especially for women, and that the most suitable texts are those which guide the aspirant along what he conceives of as the stages of that path. As the passage above makes clear, it is part of his purpose to ensure that there should be no interruptions along the way, and so he teaches a series of ways to “exercise your love towards God” by using religious texts to stir the spiritual affections, inciting devotion and nourishing it.

Dame Gertrude More’s volume of devotions, *Confessiones Amantis*, opens with this pair of verses:

My God, to thee I dedicate
This simple worke of mine,

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And with it also heart and soul
To bee for euer thine;
Noe other motiue I will haue,
But by it thee to praise,
And to stirre vp my frozen soule
By loue it-selfe to raise.

All things, desires, & loues are vaine,
But only that wch tendes
To God alone our chiepest good,
And all things else transcends;
My soule therefore by this sweet loue
Shall day and night aspire,
And rest in God all things aboue
My loue and leifes desire.60

In her project of striving to “stirre vp my frozen soule/ By loue it-selfe to raise” she demonstrates how well she has learned from Baker. The entirety of that volume of devotions consists, in effect, in a series of practices by which she was able “every day to exercise [her] love towards God”, which she has then written down, in precisely the way she had learned from her director.

A sense of the ways in which Baker taught the nuns to use texts to incite devotion may be gathered from the Preface he wrote for The Book Directions for the Right Use of Ideots Devotions or the Desires of Loue.61

He begins by pointing out that

the terme Ideot in the title of this booke I use in the sense that it is vsed in the Acts of the Apostles, where mention is made that the people did admire to heare & see such great matters as they saw & heard spoken & done by Peter & Jhon, the Apostles, since they knew them to be homines ideotas, wch is, men without learning.62

He goes on: “A good will, wch such ideots may wth the grace of God haue, & usuallie haue indeed, doe they cheeflie or onlie require, & not acutenesse of witte, nor humane learninge, or knowledge”. He explains that “In the vse of them there is
no discourse or other vse of the vnderstandinge” but rather “in the will lieth the essence or life of prayer & vnion wth God, & not in the vnderstandinge, that at the most is both an helpe to moue the will”.\textsuperscript{63}

It is not long before Baker is citing Harphius, from whom he learned the use of affective aspirations in the life of prayer:

By the exercise & elevation of the will (saith he), a simple old woman or a countrey ploughman or heardsman may, w\textsuperscript{th} puritie of soule & elevation of spirit, be able to raise themselues to that hight & diuine knowledge, to w\textsuperscript{ch} none of all the wise men of the world, swelling w\textsuperscript{th} pride of their learninge, are able by any industries of theirs, in any sort to reach or attaine to.\textsuperscript{64}

Baker goes on:

This booke doth conteine acts of loue, by the practise whereof in time & by degrees one shall attaine to perfect loue. By vsing to write, though imperfectie, men come to write perfectlie, by reading imperfectie children come to read perfectlie, & so in other things that men leerne. And accordingelie these acts of loue, (though imperfect), will in time bringe one to the perfect exercise of loue.\textsuperscript{65}

In this passage it is difficult not to notice Baker drawing direct parallels between the process of learning to pray, to attend to the divine voice or interior master, and the uses of reading and writing.

The “acts of loue” contained in the book are completely conventional affective acts directed towards God. For example: “O my most merciful Lord, I adore thee, praise thee, & glorify thee”.\textsuperscript{66} Their value lies neither in their originality nor in their phraseology, but, as Baker writes:

They are but meere plaine & homelie affections & desires of the will, w\textsuperscript{th}out needing speculation or streininge of the vnderstandinge, such as any that hath a good will may prosecute, & w\textsuperscript{ch} beinge prosecuted w\textsuperscript{th} perseuerance & obseruation of the changeable tracts or drawings of God, will bringe whether all the subtilitie of witt or store of humane learninge can neuer bringe him; & that is to mysticke theologie, perfect contemplation, vnion wth God ...\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{63} Baker, Idiot’s Devotion, 2.
\textsuperscript{64} Baker, Idiot’s Devotion, 5.
\textsuperscript{65} Baker, Idiot’s Devotion, 5.
\textsuperscript{66} Baker, Idiot’s Devotion, 69.
\textsuperscript{67} Baker, Idiot’s Devotion, 5–6.
This theme of using texts to stir affective motions in the soul runs through the entire body of the Cambrai treatises. In the very first text he wrote for the nuns, the *Spirituall Treatise*, Baker cites Harphius’ warning against prayer as “meer intellectuall exercise”, stating that prayer must have “y e amative part (w ch is y e will) for her mistress & guid”. The collection of treatises which makes up the *Directions for Contemplation* is peppered with brief instructions about the use of affective texts in prayer, and in *Directions G* Baker offers a selection of affective acts and aspirations which anticipates the *Idiot’s Devotion*.

Very often, when he is not approaching the spiritual text as guide to the path his students must follow, Baker’s focus is upon the capacity of the religious text to act as a conduit for the aspiring contemplative which will channel her praying mind from a preoccupation with discursive thought, or simple distraction, into the experience of affective motions of the soul directed towards God. In this sense he understands the text as “nourishment” for the religious reader, and values especially those texts which are able to “incite devotion”.

4. “AS BY THE VOICE OF GOD’

In a valuable summary statement of his outlook on how the soul learns the art of contemplation, to be found in his treatise *Doubts and Calls*, Baker writes as follows:

... these three teachers do commonly do their parts in ye guiding of all souls to contemplation; that is to say: 1. God himselfe, immediately; 2. A visible teacher (w ch is a man), & 3. Books. Though the prime guid, & as it were the ruler of the stern of all these, is God himselfe.

As I have shown in the previous sections, Baker holds that the soul will make use

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of a variety of approaches to learn the ways of contemplation, and sees this process as progressive; but he is quite clear that the leading teacher in this venture will always be God himself.

Even when he allows a central role in the learning process to the spiritual book, “by which allso God useth to speake unto us and to teach us”, Baker never strays from this position. Therefore the relationship which exists in Baker’s account of spiritual reading between the spiritual text, the “dumb master” as Prichard terms it, and the divine voice or “interior master” is the central issue for Baker’s teaching on this point. It is in his conviction that a spiritual reader can be addressed by God via the religious text, “by which allso God useth to speake unto us and to teach us”, that we discover one of the driving forces behind Baker’s creation of a world of books for the Cambrai nuns. And yet it is his consciousness of the potential of exactly these same texts to mislead, to divert from the path or to cause harm to the reader that give rise to some of his seemingly extravagant denunciations of religious books. Thus he writes of those who do not follow his principle of always privileging the “interior master”:

And whosoever doth not hold this course, which is in regarding chiefly his call & spirit, & not making ye divine call subject to the books, it were better for him that he had no books at all, nor any human instruction, cleaving only to ye observation of ye divine call, which in case of necessity alone would suffice ...

Here we have the fault line observed earlier in Baker’s attitude to spiritual reading. For Baker, the contemplative’s capacity to be guided by “God himselfe, immediately” is at least as capable of being impeded by a spiritual book as it is likely to be facilitated by it:

For God often-times by ye means of books doth call a man, & doth intimate his will unto him. But for want of observing ye said divine call ... they gather more errors than wholesome instructions by their readings ...

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72 Baker, Doubts, 42.
73 Baker, Discretion, 77.
In this passage we can see at work both the reverence displayed by Baker towards the religious book, and his almost simultaneous disparagement of the same texts. As I shall note at the end of this section, Baker is never able fully to resolve this basic tension.

As we have seen from all that has gone before, Baker takes the spiritual book as a most significant guide for the newcomer to the religious life, inviting the novice to learn from the experience to be found there, to model her affective aspirations on the texts she reads, and to seek to hear God’s voice speaking to her in the author’s written text. Thus, the first and the most significant of Baker’s advices with regard to the skills to be used in approaching the spiritual texts is that he always wishes his students to give priority to “the divine interior call” as they read, just as they would in any other circumstance.\(^\text{74}\)

In this way, even in reading (and, perhaps, especially in reading) “the prime guid, & as it were the ruler of the stern of all these, is God himselfe”. Baker holds that the text has no purpose if it does not open its reader to the possibility of coming under the sway of the divine voice. In the last analysis, Baker would argue that all the advice he offers is intended simply to make it possible for the soul to respond to this divine voice.

Baker always places priority upon the “divine call”, although he maintains that hearing this call is “often-times” assisted by the appropriate use of spiritual texts. Baker writes:

\begin{quote}
Two waies doth God call a soul. The one is interiorly, by himselfe immediately moving or inspiring her to do or forbear y\(^\text{2}\) doing of a thing. The other is by an externall mean, as by ye command of our superior or the bidding of our Rule [...] And both these, that is, as well this externall as the internall, are calls from God.\(^\text{75}\)
\end{quote}

The unique quality of the spiritual book, it appears, is that it can, if God so wills,

\(^{74}\) Baker, *Doubts*, 49.
\(^{75}\) Baker, *Doubts*, 21.
be understood to be the occasion of both “externall” and “internall” calls. It is this double dimension to the spiritual book which may help to explain some of Baker’s awkwardly abrupt changes of tack when dealing with the topic of reading.

In the brief passage from his *Dame Gertrude More* in which Baker pictures himself reading from de Barbanson to a small group of nuns, we have a rare glimpse of the process whereby the two manners of call can be experienced together as one, a particular quality of the spiritual reading process which must have influenced Baker’s realisation that, whatever their potential drawbacks, spiritual books remained central to the process of discovering one’s path towards contemplation: “... one daie [he] was reading to her and to another some things out of a booke [...] and] our Virgin was somewhat struken with it, and suddenly said: *O, O, that must be my way ...*.76 This is the only passage in Baker’s treatises which offers us what might be termed narrative access to such a moment, although there are several hints at something not wholly dissimilar in Baker’s regular advice on using books to prepare for prayer:

> Let the soule helpe itself w^th sometinge in a booke as long as it needs in the time of prayer, yet beinge wary not to tarry ouer longe in the booke, or to vse it further then needs to stirre vp some affection w^th is presently to be exercised so longe as it lasteth, taking new helpe when it is growne cold.77

But this process of using the spiritual text to “stirre vp some affection”, which I have explored in more detail in section 3 of this chapter, is not the same as the discovery of her “spirituall course” depicted in the *Dame Gertrude More* vignette, which is closer to Baker’s accounts of the process of hearing the divine call.

Writing on the late medieval tradition of mystical handbooks, Bernard McGinn cites a passage found in the *Life and Revelations* of the thirteenth century beguine Agnes Blannbekin, in which her anonymous Franciscan confessor and director reads to her from St. Bernard on the *Song of Songs*. The account tells us

77 Baker, *Directions D*, 46.
that the beguine “... thought about this intensely in her mind [...] and when she contemplated this in her mind, she heard a voice within her ...”. McGinn comments that such an account of a spiritual director reading to his student, within a process of spiritual guidance and direction, and of her responding to the text and discovering divine confirmation in prayer “is like a window opening on a world rarely glimpsed - the actual process of reading and instruction that was integral to the mystical tradition, as well as its confirmation through the reception of an inner divine voice”.  

Baker’s account of Dame Gertrude’s discovery of her “way” is in many respects a parallel to the passage from the Life and Revelations. It certainly opens a similar window to that spoken of by McGinn; in this case a window both into Baker’s way of working with his young students, and into the most significant dimension of their joint encounters with spiritual texts, the discovery of the interior call in the spiritual text. As we shall see in the next chapter, Baker believes that a substantial challenge to Dame Gertrude was the difficulty she faced in “getting into her interior”, and in these words from de Barbanson she begins to find the route.

Although Baker never again offers such an account of this moment either in his own experience or that of another, he often makes use of the metaphor of the divine voice, or the inner call, to describe the most significant working of God in the soul, and on one occasion speaks of “yᵉ book of books, wᵉ is yᵉ interior instruction & light wᵉ th they had from God, wᵉ I term to be the divine call”. 79 Thus, in the Secretum Baker offers this brief hint at his own experience of such a call:

But as far as memory now serveth, I say th' it was a speaking of God to yᵉ Soul; I do not know whether yᵉ Soul spake any-thing in Answer to God or noe [...] This he then & yet knoweth wᵗ th' greatest Assurance, th' it Can not be but th' it was yᵉ Sole work of God, & Could not be yᵉ work of any Creature. 80

79 Baker, Discretion, 77.
80 Baker, Secretum, 57.
It may be an over-reading of this passage to suggest that in identifying a “speaking of God” as the core of his experience that Baker is conscious of the significance that the words of religious texts have carried for him, just as they did for Dame Gertrude. Nevertheless, he writes in *Discretion* that “God often-times by ye means of books doth call a man, & doth intimate his will unto him”. And, when Baker comes to the most fully developed account of his doctrine of divine calls, in the *Vox Clamantis*, he again makes use of this metaphor of the divine voice:

The way to contemplation being an internall and spirituall way, it must be acknowledged that the supreame spirit, which is God, is the principall or onlie teacher of that waie. The soule her-selfe by reason of her natural darknes is not able of her-selfe to find it; much less is another man able to shew it her; all that he can doe is but dispose her (as before I haue said) to observe and hearken to the divine voice of her maister, that abideth most secretlie and internally wthin her. Now this maister will not haue his scholer to take his light but onlie from him or as he shall appoint ...

But there is potential for difficulty in Baker’s view that the interior master “will not haue his scholer to take his light” other than from him, or by his appointment. His statement here that “another man ... can but dispose her” to hear the divine voice is a weakening of the position he takes up elsewhere with regard to books, and may be seen as one of several unsatisfactory attempts to resolve the fact that he does occupy two incompatible positions on the matter.

Baker is never able satisfactorily to resolve this difficulty, which affects matters other than religious reading, and was almost certainly at the core of Francis Hull’s argument with Baker in 1632-1633. As we saw earlier, Baker sometimes ties himself in knots attempting to address this problem, writing in the *Secretum* that he was without any guide or master, but “he had for his Master (as to all matters & directions of moment) ye Spirit of God for his Interior Director”,

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81 Baker, *Discretion*, 77.
while at the same time lamenting his fall from grace because of the lack of guidance he had experienced.

Describing the “divine interior call” in itself, Baker writes the following account in the *Doubts and Calls*:

The divine interior call wch hitherto I have spoken of, is a certain invitation of God, inclining a soul to doe or to forbear the doing of a thing, & it passeth & is wrought so secretly in the soul, that neither ye soul itselfe [...] nor the senses of ye body, either exterior or interior, do see or plainly discern it, but only perceives an inclination in herselfe for ye doing or not doing of a thing. Wch inclination, though she verily think that it comes from God, yet she neither sees God (who is ye worker of it), not any-thing representing him; no, nor yet doth clearly see any-thing representing that to wch she is invited; only she finds, as I have said, an inclination wrought in her, wch be ye tokens that I have discovered unto her, she sees that she may put in execution, as proceeding from God.84

Thus Baker attempts to alert his reader to the ways of grace working in the soul, occasionally to be discerned as “an inclination wrought in her”. But when he comes to consider the relationship between the divine call and the spiritual text, he can only suggest that the call is to be given priority. There is no attempt made to determine the relationship between the text, which is so often the occasion of this “inclination” and the divine call itself. Thus, we are advised in the *Vox Clamantis*:

especiallie to observe this one point, wch is, that in matters that otherwise are not of some obligation, they obscure and follow thier owne Call, and not the prescripts or teachings of this or anie other bookes, in things contrarie or different from such Call of theirs. And therefore when they meete wth any-thing whereto they finde themselves neither to have any kinde of obligation nor any Call, but rather a Call to the contrarie, they are to passe it ouer as not pertaining to them; for in those matters, this and other spirituall Authors do most comonlie write according to some experience and good they haue founde either in their own practise [...] and not wth intention for any to imitate, but according to what aptnes and Call they had thereto ...

Writing in *Discretion*, Baker offers the following observations, both as to the value of spiritual books and as to their dangers:

There have been a very great number of saints th' could never read books, as who have bin lai-brethren in religion, sheperds, plowmen;

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84 Baker, *Doubts*, 49–50.
and some holy lay-brethren there be even at this day, in some Orders of religion, th’ could never read a book; but they had yᵉ book of books, wᶜʰ is yᵉ interior instruction & light wᶜʰ they had from God, wᶜʰ I term to be the divine call. And though there have bin as great (if not a greater number) of those th’ have come to sanctity, observing yᵉ divine calls, together wᶜʰ yᵉ helps of books, wᶜʰ they could & did much read; yet have there bin, & yet are, as many, or rather many more, who dayly, yea hourly, doe peruse, tosse & retosse spirituall books, & have good wills & desires to profit thereby, but indeed are never yᵉ better for it, for want of observing yᵉ divine calls; wᶜʰ if they did, their readings would be at least comfortable if not profitable unto them. For God often-times by yᵉ means of books doth call a man, & doth intimate his will unto him. But for want of observing yᵉ said divine call [...] they gather more errors then wholesome instructions by their readings ...

This passage, with its muddled pattern of “a very great number”, “as great, if not a greater number”, “as many, or rather many more”, which begins to leave the reader as puzzled as he is enlightened, once more points towards the fault line in Baker’s thinking on the relationship between the religious book as guide and director, and God as both the inspiration for and the object of the “spirituall course”.

5. “THE RIGHT USE OF THEM IS TO BE TAUGHT”

At the end of the similitude of the watchmaker and his tools, in the treatise *Doubts and Calls*, Baker states that “good books I account among those tools, & the right use of them is to be taught”. Much that has been addressed in the earlier sections of this chapter, especially regarding the use of the book to guide the contemplative and to assist her in raising her affections to God, would certainly fall within the scope of the “right use” of the spiritual book to which Baker refers here; his guidance in each of the areas already described, therefore, forms part of what he understands should be taught to the neophyte about the use of these tools of the spiritual craft. In this section I wish to examine several other dimensions of Baker’s attitude to the uses of spiritual reading, not already directly covered by these topics.

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86 Baker, *Discretion*, 77.
87 Baker, *Doubts*, 16.
Baker’s treatise *Doubts and Calls* contains a section of instructions to his readers on the use of religious books which is useful to us in this regard. He is largely concerned to address the question of how his student can discover whether a specific religious text will be of use to her: “For your using of books, I wish you to consider in them those circumstances by which you shall somewhat better know how far they are like to be for your use”.  

No doubt part of Baker’s purpose here is to prepare his students for the situation he frequently makes reference to: in the future he, Baker, will not be available as their guide and they will be required to make the selection of texts for themselves which now he makes for them.

Baker begins a list of five points intended to address this issue, but as is often his practice, Baker’s list rapidly digresses into a series of additional injunctions and observations on related topics.

Baker begins with the issue of authorship. “The first [circumstance] is for the author, who not being contemplative, can hardly write that shall be much for your use”. Baker uses this observation to suggest that books by Jesuits are unlikely to be useful, “much lesse are ye books written by others, who practice not mentall prayer so much as they doe”. This injunction is effectively the continuation of the policy Baker himself has practiced in obtaining suitable books for the Cambrai library, or writing them himself. It may be noted here that Baker makes clear in several places in the Cambrai treatises, and especially in *Discretion*, why he is critical of the application of the spiritual exercises of the Jesuits to enclosed religious. In that treatise he writes:

> And a cheif cause of their defect therein may be their being boren in hand wth those spirituall exercises, wch ordinarily are grounded only upon ye consideration of ye Four Last Things of man, or upon some other matter th' is more proper for ye seculars of ye world then for enclosed religious [...] And ye books tht are put into their hands are but the same wch those seculars do also peruse & read; & those commonly doe treat of ye said spirituall exercises ...

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88 Baker, *Doubts*, 34.
89 Baker, *Doubts*, 34.
Baker argues that “true divine love & true humility” are the proper subjects for enclosed religious, whose business should be the “gaining of those divine virtues”. If they busy themselves with books that “are proper for seculars” then it is no marvel “if they (though religious) do still retain ye spirit of secularity”.\[91\]

Baker writes, slightly later in the same treatise, but with the same topic clearly in mind:

> Contemplative writers & books are also termed mysticks, in regard th' y^e^ w^a^ies w^ch^ they teach & ye matters w^ch^ they handle are mystick; that is to say, secret & hidden from y^e^ knowledge & understanding of sensuall men [...] & they are learnt & understood only by experience.\[92\]

Competence to write as a guide for contemplatives is itself the fruit of having practised contemplation, and only those authors who have done so are to be regarded as “mysticks”.

Baker’s second point in *Doubts and Calls* is to do with the subject matter of the book:

> The second circumstance is about y^e^ matter or subject of y^e^ book; and in this point there is much scarcity of books (especially in ye English tongue) as for your use. For that the most part of ye world professing the active life, the matters of books are accordingly. I mean, the books do contain instructions for ye active life, & so are little or nothing usefull for you.\[93\]

It is largely for this reason, as we have seen earlier, that Baker has undertaken the vast task of writing of which *Doubts and Calls* forms a part. But there is another side to the point he makes here. While it is the case that “instructions for the active life” are unsuitable for his students, in other parts of the Cambrai treatises Baker is concerned that some of the books which might, indeed pass the test of being written with professional contemplatives in mind, are nevertheless unsuitable for his students at Cambrai.

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In the treatise *Discretion*, as well as warning against the dangers of the Spiritual Exercises, Baker is concerned that certain of the texts he considers suitable for his students to read in part, counsel a rigorist approach to the ascetical path which he is not prepared to commend. Baker writes:

> Of ye like rank of voluntary mortifications are those wch are advised in ye books called The Method to Serve God (wch others term Alphonsus), the First Book of Ye Will of God, made by F. Bennet Fitch, & ye book called The Spirituall Conflict. These books are full of voluntary mortifications, and those so rigorous tht it is very hard, yea without extraordinary grace impossible, to follow them.\(^94\)

A concern demonstrated by Baker throughout the Cambrai treatises is that his young students should not become needlessly preoccupied with the image of holiness as somehow associated with a heroic degree of self-imposed ascetical practices. He recognises, and wishes them to see, that such forms of behaviour are not usually part of the contemplative path, and are more likely to be destructive of their capacity to sustain a spiritual life. His warning here is one of several, pointing them away from material which, as he indicates here, can be discovered even in texts which he otherwise commends to them.

Baker’s third point in the *Doubts and Calls* list teaches that:

> even in books written both by contemplative persons & of contemplative matters, the soul must observe & take what is for her present state & call, (and that perhaps will be but few things); and for the rest, though she read them, yet for this time & as her case now stands, let her not meddle w\(^95\) ye practice of them.

This is one of Baker’s most characteristic insights about religious reading, and accounts for some of the statements he makes which can appear straightforwardly dismissive of the very texts he has worked so hard to create or to assemble. Only that matter to be discovered by the individual reader which is suited to her actual spiritual state at the time of reading is to become part of her religious practice.

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\(^{94}\) Baker, *Discretion*, 56.

\(^{95}\) Baker, *Doubts*, 35.
Baker declares. For the rest of what she encounters, the aspirant to contemplation should note it and pass on.

He goes on to explain that each book his student reads will, in his view, contain three kinds of subject matter: first, that which is for the soul’s “present purpose”, i.e. the matter identified in the previous paragraph which she may begin to make part of her spiritual practice; second, that which is not, but “will be for her future”, and therefore is noteworthy even though not of immediate relevance; and last, the “third kind is such as neither is nor ever will be for her purpose”, although it may be of use to others. Baker uses a very concrete image to characterise the all important process whereby the reader is to discern the difference between these three types of material:

And for her to know what is for her spirit & purpose, it must stand on her own wary observation of what her spirit most relishes, & seemeth th'it will most help for ye state that she is in then, not casting her spirit on all that she reads; like as if a weak-stomack’t man were sate at a table, where there were a great variety of dishes, he would not make his choice at random, but would observe what dish would be most gratefull to his palat, & thus would he take counsell of his own tast; & doing so he would eat wth more satisfaction to nature, & more suitably to his stomack as to digestion.\(^{96}\)

Baker returns to this point in several contexts, emphasising that while a particular spiritual practice may well have been of immense importance to another Christian on his or her way to perfection (and this is especially true of the doings of saints and holy men, he observes), it does not follow that it is for the reader’s own benefit:

For the thing may be good & an help for ye most part of men, & yet not good nor proper for you in the case wherein you then stand, but may hap to be good for you in time to come; and then & not before are you to take hold of it.\(^{97}\)

Baker is clear that this provision applies not only to the generality of spiritual texts, but also to his own:

\(^{96}\) Baker, Doubts, 35.
\(^{97}\) Baker, Doubts, 37.
... as I have warned you to take heed in ye reading of other men’s books or hearing of their words, how you practice them, not so much regarding them, as what your spirit or call requireth; so do I now give you ye like caveat for my own writings & sayings, wherein you may happen to erre at some time if you do not take ye same heed that I advised you to do about other mens sayings.\(^{98}\)

In writing as he does here, Baker clearly has in mind the use of his texts largely by those whom he has been teaching personally in the monastery, since he goes on to suggest that his oral guidance makes this less likely to happen in the case of his own books.

A related principle which Baker wishes his reader to be aware of and to practise in her approach to spiritual texts (and, indeed the spiritual life as a whole) is what he terms “riddance”. Baker writes:

> In ye businesse of spirituall tendence towards God, no doctrine or help is so necessary as that of riddance, towards ye procuring of simplicity, nor any doctrin or practice more perillous in ye businesse, than devising & imposing on ye soul anything more than already by nature or otherwaies lyes on her.\(^{99}\)

Although “riddance” is not intended by Baker to apply only to religious reading, this teaching is closely allied with the several injunctions we have seen that he issues to protect the religious reader from the inappropriate imitation of practices or ideals to be discovered in the texts he recommends.

Baker’s “fourth circumstance” is closely related to the previous principle. It appears at first to advise the opposite of what might be expected; namely, that if one does not understand what one has read, rather than seeking to understand by further study it is better to pass on and read something else.

Baker writes: “when you light on any place (as often you will), which you do not then readily understand, do not study much about it, but passe it over”.\(^{100}\) In itself, this approach to reading could be either anti-intellectual, or capable of being understood as an encouragement to laziness in reading only familiar material. It is

\(^{98}\) Baker, *Doubts*, 41.
\(^{100}\) Baker, *Doubts*, 36.
more likely that in Baker’s mind it is related to the notion of the divine call. If the reader does not understand a passage, Baker reasons, it most certainly cannot be for her present purpose, and therefore should not detain her. It may of course be of use to her later, and he allows of this eventuality by writing:

you will in your readings hereafter (especially if it come to be for your use), after more practice & experience in a spirituall life, as also after ye reading of other books, (for one book helps to understand another), you will, I say, come to understand ye place far more clearly & more readily.101

Baker argues, as he has in other places in the treatises,102 that the reader will in all likelihood come to understand such a passage when she has greater practice and experience in the spiritual life, and a wider knowledge of spiritual texts. “But if you should do otherwise, you would perhaps both trouble & distract your spirit & misspend time, not reaching to the understanding of it”.103

We shall have occasion to note in the next chapter that Baker in effect practises what he is teaching here in his approach to reading and commenting upon The Cloud of Unknowing in his treatise Secretum.

Baker’s fifth point is as follows:

The fift circumstance to be observed about books is this: that though (speaking most commonly & for the most part), among ye exercises of a contemplative life I esteem reading to be next after prayer, (I mean, for spirituall profit & worth), yet if by reason of obedience or other necessity the soul should be abridged or hindered from ye reading of books, let her be contended; the force & light of her prayer, with her naturall light [...] will suffice to guide her. Yet when she hath some convenience for it, let her read somewhat, though it be but little.104

Part of the significance to be drawn from this point is the fact that Baker makes such a firm distinction between reading, on the one hand, and prayer on the other. As we have seen earlier, he promotes forms of reading which elide into prayer, such as the affective uses of the text; nevertheless, Baker’s approach to mental

101 Baker, Doubts, 36.
102 See, for example: Baker, Directions D, 39.
103 Baker, Doubts, 36.
104 Baker, Doubts, 36.
prayer is such that he does not, in the last analysis, understand the two processes as of equal value or even more intimately related, but privileges mental prayer.

The instruction should also be seen to be related to the comment that when a soul is reading and discovers a call to prayer, she should give up the reading.

In reading of spirituall bookes, euer giue ouer when you are inuited to aspirations; & take it for a generall rule that you must never reade so much that you hinder your spirit for prayer, wch is infinitely farre better then readinge. And therefore in readinge you must often forbeare, as a mortification; I mean, not only when it is an impediment to your prayer, allso when you are impetuously & greedily carried away wth desire of reading ...

So, although Baker gives much attention to the use of spiritual books to raise affective aspirations to God, he is unambiguous about the difference between the practice of reading and the business of prayer, and very certain that the latter is to be preferred.

At the end of this list of points in *Doubts and Calls*, Baker returns to the theme which we have noted several times already when he is speaking of the use of religious books:

And whosoever doth not hold this course, wch is in regarding chiefly his call & spirit, & making ye books, sayings & examples of others to serve that spirit & call, & not making ye divine call subject to the books, it were better for him that he had no books at all, nor any human instructions, cleaving only to ye observation of ye divine call, wth in case of necessity alone would suffice ...

This is the same perspective we have seen in *Directions D* and in many of the passages encountered earlier in this chapter.

There is one other dimensions of Baker’s approach to the reading of spiritual texts which should be included in this section which addresses the specific instructions Baker writes about the topic of religious reading, but which is not part of the list included in *Doubts and Calls*.

\[106\] Baker, *Doubts*, 42.
At a number of points in the Cambrai treatises Baker is concerned to offer the nuns some guidance on understanding the particulars of the language used by spiritual writers. He notes that at times “spirituall writers are to be understood in another sence then their words do sound”.  

Baker is never very concerned to respect the perspectives adopted by individual authors. As I have suggested in section 1 of this chapter, he tends to adopt a unitary view of the “spirituall course”, and takes it that other mystic authors intended to do the same. Thus he seems to assume that if the account of one mystic writer appears to differ from that of another, the differences are only apparent, and are probably a matter of choice of language. In the Spirituall Treatise we encounter sections with titles such as: “The Vision or sight of God is taken in divers manners”, or “Certain points wherein spirituall writers are to be understood in another sence then their words do sound”. In each of these sections, Baker is concerned to draw together differing accounts of mystical experiences by a variety of authors and demonstrate that the differing terminology they use is best understood in Baker’s own terms.

In a similar way, he is concerned to warn against an over literal approach to the language of spiritual texts. Thus he writes, in Discretion:

> And let her take heed of erring in ye understanding of books th talk of much holding ye continuall presence of God, & counsell tht we never be idle, but be ever doing of some good either interiorly in our souls or by externall actions, & we through such erroneous opinions come to destroy our heads & healths & consequently our spirituality.

Instead Baker explains that the “continuall presence of God wch they advise us to hold is but ye forsaid care over our consciences”. He goes on to note that:

> indeed if a man do stand only upon ye litterall words of books [...] he must in his head be ever grinding (as a mill, night & day, is of

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107 Baker, Spirituall Treatise, 12.
108 Baker, Spirituall Treatise, 11.
109 Baker, Spirituall Treatise, 12.
110 Baker, Discretion, 49.
some corn or other), of some pious thoughts or other, & never cease\textsuperscript{111}

Only a few pages beyond his instruction on the right use of good books in the treatise \textit{Doubts and Calls}, Baker writes: “About the reading of books, I adde this further saying: that we must be wary how we practice all that we read in books”\textsuperscript{112}. It seems that when Baker writes of a right use of books, he has in mind precisely an equivalent to the wariness that is appropriately taught to the apprentice in handling a sharp-edged and potentially lethal workshop tool. As we have seen, Baker is always conscious that even a “good book” is easily capable of misleading an unwary reader.

6. CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that a significant factor in understanding Baker’s approach to spiritual texts is an appreciation of the account of the nature of monastic spirituality which he takes for granted as foundational to his teaching at Cambrai. In common with other early modern Benedictine teachers, Baker understands monastic life as a specialised and privileged route to holiness pursued by the individual soul “internally”, \textit{i.e.} not simply within the walls of the monastery, but within the interiority of the self. Reading, which is understood by Baker to be among the core aspects of monastic ascesis (along with prayer and work), especially when it is individual, private reading, stands as a bridge between the public self and the private self, and therefore occupies a privileged place in his attentions. At the same time, Baker’s conviction (which he shares with other monastics of his period) that there is a clearly articulated spiritual itinerary to be pursued by the aspirant to contemplative life strengthens his conviction both that a

\textsuperscript{111}Baker, \textit{Discretion}, 49.
\textsuperscript{112}Baker, \textit{Doubts}, 37.
series of texts offering guidance in this path is a requirement for his Cambrai students and that all of these texts should, in essence, teach the same thing.

Nevertheless, I have shown that even as Baker promotes the use of the spiritual text among the aspirants to contemplative prayer in the Cambrai monastery, he is warning them of pitfalls to be encountered in the use of these same texts.

With regard to the contemplative using spiritual books to enable her the better to understand, and thus to follow, her spiritual course, Baker writes of “ye Necessity or great good of ye forsaid Practice, w^ch is of perusing books th' treat of these matters, & pondering & understanding them ye best you Can”. 113 This is surely a primary motive for his work at Cambrai, and we have seen that he says as much in his accounts of why the treatises were written. But he can equally write of the unlettered lay brother, the plowman or the shepherd who has never opened a spiritual text, but who is graced with knowledge of “ye book of books, w^ch is ye interior instruction & light w^ch they had from God”; 114 a dismissal of the need for books which it is difficult not to notice uses the metaphor of a book to describe the very “interior instruction” which supersedes the need for written instructions.

We have seen that Baker teaches the use of spiritual texts to promote affective modes of prayer, and even the extent to which he models the learning of this practice upon the learning of reading and writing:

By vsing to write, though imperfectlie, men come to write perfectlie, by reading imperfectlie children come to read perfectlie, & so in other things that men learne. And accordingelie these acts of loue, (though imperfect), will in time bringe one to the perfect exercise of loue. 115

In this way, he writes, we can aspire to “mysticke theologie, perfect contemplation, vnion w^th God”. 116 But Baker can equally well advise: “In readinge of spirituall

113 Baker, Secretum, 64.
114 Baker, Discretion, 77.
115 Baker, Idiot’s Devotion, 5.
bookes, euer giue ouer when you are inuited to aspirations” and “prayer [...] is infinitely farre better then reading”.117 He seeks to maintain an absolute distinction between the spiritual practices of reading and mental prayer, even though in other contexts he attempts to draw them together.

Although Baker has experienced the value in his own life and observed others profit from the use of spiritual texts, achieving the desired degree of interiority for affective prayer only when the right book pointed the way, Baker can still maintain that the contemplative’s capacity to be guided by “God himselfe, immediately” is at least as capable of being impeded by a spiritual book as it is likely to be facilitated by it:

For God often-times by yé means of books doth call a man, & doth intimate his will unto him. But for want of observing yé said divine call ... they gather more errors than wholesome instructions by their readings ...118

We have discovered no final resolution of this tension within Baker’s own writings on the topic of spiritual reading, but only an inclination on his part towards his least clear style of writing when he attempts to explain the relationship between the spiritual text and the divine call.

The following chapter will explore Baker’s approach to the use of spiritual books in more detail through an examination of two of his more substantial treatises, the *Secretum sive Mysticum*, and *The Life and Death of Dame Gertrude More*.

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117 Baker, Directions D, 39.
118 Baker, Discretion, 77.
INTRODUCTION

This chapter will build upon the examination of the several dimensions of Baker’s teaching about spiritual reading undertaken in chapter 3 by looking in more detail at his approach to the use of the spiritual text in two specific works, each of which represents a different genre of writing: the Secretum and the Life and Death of Dame Gertrude More.

Baker wrote the Secretum sive Mysticum at Cambrai in the course of 1629-1630. The Secretum is described in its sub-title as “Containing an Exposition of the Book called The Cloud”. The fact that this book is presented by Baker as the occasion for a commentary upon the fourteenth century mystical treatise The Cloud of Unknowing for his Cambrai students makes it of particular interest for this study of Baker’s approach to spiritual reading, and particularly the reading of an older text. At the same time, the treatise contains narrative passages offering intimate details about the “spirituall course” of an unnamed individual, “our Scholar” as Baker refers to him, which there is every reason to believe are in fact autobiographical in nature. Thus the Secretum offers the only direct account by Baker of the role played by spiritual reading in his own prayer.

The Life and Death of Dame Gertrude More, which Baker himself

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3 Baker, Secretum, 1.
originally entitled “The Life of Trutha”, was not written at Cambrai but at St. Gregory’s, Douai, after Baker’s abrupt removal there in 1633. Baker seems to have written it in the course of the period between the death of Gertrude More herself, in August 1633, and 1636 when it was complete. Although its composition after the time of Baker’s work at Cambrai means that it is not one of the Cambrai treatises, the fact that it details the “spirituall course” of Gertrude More (one of the small group of nuns who arrived as novices at the foundation of the fledgling community in which Baker was to work and who, after some initial hesitations, became one of his most devoted disciples) means that the text contains the only extended account by Baker himself of his work at Cambrai. It was from Gertrude More’s written affective exercises that Baker assembled the material for the *Idiot’s Devotion,* and in this treatise he offers some account of More’s use of spiritual texts under his guidance. At the same time, in the *Dame Gertrude More,* Baker is to be found shaping a piece of writing which, he claims, is “more tending to edification of soules, and much more for use in this present age” than many other spiritual texts; i.e. the book makes an explicit claim to model the type of spiritual text Baker believes the aspirant to contemplation should have available to her.

By examining sections of these two texts in a more detailed way than was possible in the general survey undertaken in the previous chapter, the present chapter seeks to explore somewhat further the account Baker offers of the process of reading as a significant dimension of the process of spiritual guidance. In the case of the *Secretum,* I shall be especially concerned to examine how Baker approaches the issue of teaching his students to read an earlier mystical text, and

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5 Baker, *Dame Gertrude More,* xxii.
with his account of his own spiritual experience. In the case of the *Dame Gertrude More*, my concern is both with Baker’s presentation of Gertrude More’s reading practices in the course of his narrative of her life, and also with what kind of text he writes when he wishes to create an original work for his students’ use.

1. THE SECRETUM

The complete text of Baker’s treatise *Secretum sive Mysticum, Containing an Exposition of the Book called The Clowd*, was published for the first time in Clark’s edition of 1997, although sections of it had been published earlier in the twentieth century by McCann as *The Confession of Venerable Father Augustine Baker*, and as an appendix to McCann’s edition of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. These earlier, partial, editions have arguably added to the sense discussed in chapter 1 of Baker’s works being better approached via *Sancta Sophia* than through his original writings, by once again reorganising Baker’s text rather than publishing it as he left it.

The *Secretum*, as its subtitle states, sets out to offer a commentary on the late fourteenth century English text, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which Baker believed, inaccurately, to be in all probability an early sixteenth century text. The Cambrai community possessed a manuscript copy of this book, which Baker states had come to them from the library of Benet of Canfield. Baker appears to have valued the *Cloud* in part for this reason. He speaks of “the hight or Sublimenesse of ye Matter” of which it treats, addressing the “exercise of a mystick life in such plenty and cleernesse of words”, and he was conscious of the connection it represented with the pre-dissolution traditions of English spirituality. That said, it

is notable that he never references it as a source for one of the many excerpted passages of spiritual advice he offers to his readers scattered across the Cambrai treatises, and in the *Catalogue* it figures modestly as “An excellent written hande treatise called the Clowde”.\(^{12}\)

In the event, the *Secretum* does not directly fulfil the promise Baker makes to offer a systematic commentary on the *Cloud*. There are similarities to the case of the *Vox Clamantis*, Baker’s final Cambrai treatise, written three years later in 1632, which sets out to offer a commentary on Walter Hilton’s *Scala*, but is derailed from this purpose into undertaking a defence of Baker’s teachings, almost certainly by the conflict which had by then erupted with Francis Hull. But the reason for Baker’s scaling down of his work on the *Cloud* is not so clear, and, as we shall see, the change of plan is presented very abruptly within the treatise itself.

In Part 1 of the treatise, which he completed on December 1st 1629, Baker introduces the central ideas of the *Cloud*, before offering a comparison of them with the doctrines of Benet of Canfield and Constantin de Barbanson, two authors contemporary with Baker, writing from within the Franciscan tradition. Both, as we have seen, were often referenced by Baker. He then moves to a lengthy sequence devoted to what is almost certainly an autobiographical account of his own spiritual life, focused upon two particular episodes which he explores in detail. We are informed that this narrative is intended to be “an Example & Encouragement to you for your Good, ye intending whereof hath made me So large in this Expressment”.\(^{13}\) This section forms the bulk of the material which was adapted by McCann for his *Confession of Venerable Father Augustine Baker*.

Part 2 of the treatise, which Baker appears to have finished about a year later than the first part, is closer to being the commentary he had intended, although


\(^{13}\) Baker, *Secretum*, 77.
even here, as Clark explains:

the commentary on the various chapters varies in length; for some chapters there is nothing at all. The points which Fr. Baker singles out are those which bear upon his characteristic teaching, and are not in all cases those which would be of particular concern to a modern commentator interested to draw out the Cloud-author’s own intention.14

As Clark makes plain, Baker remains more interested in his own “characteristic teaching” than in a disinterested exposition of the earlier text. Indeed, in several cases, Baker’s commentary upon specific chapters in the Cloud is the pretext for a lengthy discursus on a dimension of his own spiritual teaching, usually in the context of that of Canfield and de Barbanson. As is the case in several of Baker’s treatises, additional materials related to the main themes of the text follow the formal ending of the work.

In this discussion of the contents of Baker’s Secretum I have two principal interests:

i) To explore the ways in which Baker approaches the reading of an earlier mystical text, which he seems to value and wishes his students to value. In the approach Baker takes to the Cloud in this treatise we are able to glimpse something of the manner in which he may well have taught his students to read any mystical text. For example, in the previous chapter we have noted Baker’s tendency to subsume the individual perspectives of particular texts into a single unified account of the spiritual life, which he asserts is the common teaching of all “mystical authors”. The Secretum offers the opportunity to see this process at work in Baker’s encounter with an earlier English spiritual text, and to discover whether the practice is universal to Baker’s treatises.

ii) To examine what Baker tells us of the role of spiritual reading in his own “spirituall course”, especially in the autobiographical sections of the Secretum, and also to explore what light these sections throw upon one of Baker’s most

characteristic assertions: namely, that “experience” is the category which
differentiates the merely scholastic teacher of contemplative prayer from the true
mystic author. Although Baker sometimes uses this expression to mean the wider
knowledge that comes from having read more spiritual books, and sometimes to
mean simply length of time spent in the religious life, he more characteristically
seems to use it to refer to familiarity with the types of spiritual events he narrates in
this part of the Secretum. The Secretum therefore both offers further evidence for
this perspective, and exemplifies in some detail what Baker means by
“experience”.

1.1. PREFACE TO PART ONE OF THE SECRETUM

Baker opens the Secretum with a lengthy quotation from Harphius’
Paradise of Contemplatives in Baker’s own translation. This passage had already
appeared, a few months earlier, in Baker’s extended set of translations from
Harphius in the treatise known simply as Collections.\textsuperscript{15} As was noted in chapter 2
of this study, Harphius’ spiritual texts have exercised a great influence upon Baker,
and by placing this passage at the beginning of his work on the Cloud he wishes to
associate the two authors as mystic writers of the same standing. Baker writes that
the Harphius passage “in my mind may well (& not unfitly) be applyed to this
present treatise”.\textsuperscript{16}

The Harphius passage concerns the process of spiritual reading itself,
specifically the reading of a mystical text, and places stress on the category of
“experience” as determinative of the ability to read such a text with profit.
Harphius writes that

\begin{quote}
No man is able by ye profoundnesse of his Learning [...] Perfectly to
Comprehend or Understand; but it is only Learned & understood by
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{15}Baker, Augustine. Collections I-III and the Twelve Mortifications of Harphius. Ed.
John Clark. Analecta Cartusiana. Salzburg, Austria: Institut fur Anglistik und Amerikanistik,
\textsuperscript{16}Baker, Secretum, 2.
experience by him, to whom ye Divine Goodnesse & liberality shall please to impart ye same experience & knowledg.¹⁷

Baker identifies himself with the perspective set out in the Harphius passage, which reflects his own frequently employed strong contrast between the humble untutored soul who, in purity of spirit, may possesses experience of “this high & Divine knowledg”, from which Harphius declares that the pride of the learned schoolmen excludes them.

It may be noted in this context, that Baker does not appear to notice the extent to which his own way of reading Harphius’ text (which explicitly privileges “a simple old woman or a Country plowman or Herdsman” as the recipients of “this high & Divine knowledg”) itself involves a considerable reinterpretation. Baker chooses to employ texts such as this to warn that only the elite members of a religious order, properly prepared and trained, are suited to read the text he is about to write. It is apparent that in its original context, Harphius’ writing was part of a process of the democratising of religious reading, aiming to make the fruits of contemplation available to a wide range of Christian readers. As with certain other attitudes towards religious life, discussed earlier, Baker here reveals his own very different agenda.

A part of Baker’s purpose in choosing to place such a passage at the opening of his exposition of the Cloud-author’s work is that he believes, and wishes his students to hold, that mystical texts are mutually illuminating. He teaches later in the Secretum that “partly through ye like Experience in some Others also, but more through reading of books & Consideration upon these matters”,¹⁸ he himself had learned to understand the contemplative path more fully. The use of Harphius here, as elsewhere in the Cambrai corpus, is therefore much more than a “motto”, it is an element of Baker’s commentary upon the Cloud.

¹⁷ Baker, Secretum, 1.
¹⁸ Baker, Secretum, 64.
Introducing the *Secretum* in his own words, Baker first states that it will be an “Exposition of the Book Called *The Cloud*”, before explaining the significance of its title, in three ways. Each of these is part of Baker’s insistence that his text has a quality that means it may only be read by a select few, even among the enclosed nuns of Cambrai. He writes that the *Secretum*:

i) treats of “Mystick matters”; *mysticum* and *secretum*, he writes, mean the same thing;

ii) thus this book has a relationship with the tradition of Dionysius the Areopagite, whose writings are the foundational text upon which all later mystic writings, for example *The Cloud*, have commented;

iii) by choosing this title, Baker, following Pseudo-Dionysius, indicates that the book is not “fit to be made known to All, nor indeed to any, save such as do really Lead or pursu internall lives”. Baker therefore advises that “Respect be had to whom yᵉ perusall of yᵉ present Treatise be yeelded”, suggesting that the Superior or the Librarian should exercise this discretion.

Thus from the very beginning of the *Secretum* Baker displays a preoccupation with the question of appropriate readership, such as we have encountered before, for example in his *Apologie*. The reading of the spiritual text is, indeed, associated with a specific mode of reading, but it is a mode of reading that can only be appropriately practised, it would seem, by those who involve themselves in “internall & Spirituall exercises”. Baker requires that those who “do more use their externall Senses” in their prayer, who nevertheless read his book, must “Reverence wth Silence what they find therein above their Knowledge, or different from their own Practice or Course of life”. His concern here appears to be that such readers will “deride or deprave” what they have read, rather than that they themselves may come to harm. As we have noted, however, Baker is able to

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recontextualise Harphius’ much more democratic account of religious experience without apparently recognising that he has done so.

Baker offers a “Preface to the Ensuing Exposition”, which first presents to the reader a brief account of the context of writing and authorship of The Cloud of Unknowing, as understood by Baker, along with the history of the specific copy from which he is working, before turning to situate the teaching of the Cloud in the context of the doctrines of other mystical authors familiar to Baker. Interpersed with these topics are further passage of advice from Baker on the reading of this text.

It is tempting to find in Baker’s interest in the history of the Cloud (which he mistakenly believes to date from about 1500) a concern to ground his spirituality and that of his students in the pre-reformation English Catholic tradition. There is something in what Baker says to support such a reading, especially his interest in the provenance of the copy of the Cloud that has arrived in the Cambrai library, allegedly via English Carthusians fleeing “ye Schism of K. Henry ye Eigth”, and thence to Benet of Canfield. But this is not Baker’s primary preoccupation: for the most part, he demonstrates a concern first to stress the “hight or Sublimenesse of ye Matter” to be found in the book, and to relate this to the fact of the book’s having never been print-published, and then (and at much greater length) to establish both parallels and contrasts between the teachings of the Cloud and those of several continental spiritual authors.

Baker writes of the Cloud:

God enable you to understand it, & to make right use of it. For I esteem it to be an excellent Book for those th’understand it, and for everyone that reads it, so far as He Understands it, & doth not take on him to understand more of it then indeed he doth.

And thereby he establishes his primary perspective for the approach to this, or, we

21 Baker, Secretum, 4–5.
22 Baker, Secretum, 3.
23 Baker, Secretum, 5.
may suppose, any other spiritual classic. He is touching, yet again, on the theme of appropriate readers, which has been present from the very first lines of the Secretum, and re-iterating the theme of practical application of texts in the spiritual life. He is also sounding that note of caution we encountered in several contexts in the previous chapter, warning against inappropriate use of spiritual texts.

Baker writes, addressing the presumed reader who is a Cambrai nun, that he commends the reading of The Cloud of Unknowing to anyone given to “Prayer & to ye reading of Good Books”, providing that his earlier advice about how to make use of books is observed in this case as in any other, namely:

... what you do not understand, you trouble yourselves no more about it, but understand when you may, wch perhaps in time you will, after more Experience in a Spirituall life, & after more reading of Other books, & oftener reading of this book itselfe.

There is a clear overlap here, as one might expect, with the approach Baker recommends to spiritual texts we noted in the previous chapter, with the emphasis remaining on the reader’s own “experience” as the crucial category which will enable a meaningful interaction between reader and text to take place.

As in the treatises examined in the previous chapter, Baker maintains a focus upon the “call” of the individual religious as the criterion for discerning the manner in which a spiritual text is to be appropriated by a reader:

And for what ye think ye doe understand, take heed how ye put the Same in practise upon yourselves. Observe your own way, Spirit & Call, & of books take and practise according as you shall find to be proper & answerable to such way, Spirit & Call of yours, & no more nor further.

Baker states that only by maintaining such a discipline in her approach to spiritual texts may the religious reader be assured that the process of reading will bring benefit and not harm:

And doing So, you may almost by all kind of Spirituall books receive Comfort or other good, & no manner of harm; whereas if ye do not hold such a Course about what ye read, it were better tht ye read nothing at all, but only observed your Spirit & Call, as ever have done those Good Soules (and many such there have bin) that

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24 Baker, Secretum, 5.
never Could read books, or had none to read, & yet attained to great perfection & Sanctity.\textsuperscript{25}

In this paragraph we may note once again the presence of Baker’s willingness to dismiss any form of religious reading as valueless if it does not promote the attention of the aspirant to the voice of the “interior master”.

It is unclear, because Baker nowhere explicitly addresses the question, to what extent the quality in his work which the modern reader would find elitist (that is to say, his insistence that only the enclosed contemplative, properly trained and disposed, should have access to certain kinds of religious texts) is related to his doctrine of the divine call. It is tempting to think, but difficult to prove, that Baker believes that the lay reader might be genuinely placed at a disadvantage if allowed to read the sort of text he understands the \textit{Cloud of Unknowing} to represent.

In the next section of the \textit{Secretum}, Baker moves on to offer a short and quite technical account of the teaching of the \textit{Cloud}, set within what amounts to a brief history of mystical writing.\textsuperscript{26} Baker writes that:

\begin{quote}
The Author (for ought that I by my reading Can find) was ye first that hath deliverd us ye exercise of a mystick life in such plenty & cleerness of words ...\end{quote}

Baker attempts to situate the teaching of the \textit{Cloud} both historically and doctrinally within that of other “mystic authors” known to him, looking specifically at the \textit{Brief Method ... how to serve God} of the Spanish Franciscan, Alphonsus of Madrid, (early sixteenth century), at Benet of Canfield, at Constantin de Barbanson, and at the earlier Benedictine author, Blosius.

Perhaps surprisingly, after his disparagement of learning as an approach to God, Baker demonstrates a fascination with both the historical detail of the texts he is considering, and the technical differences between their respective teachings on prayer. Thus he introduces reference to the work of Alphonsus of Madrid (whom

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{25} Baker, \textit{Secretum}, 5.  \\
\textsuperscript{26} Baker, \textit{Secretum}, 6–17.  \\
\textsuperscript{27} Baker, \textit{Secretum}, 6.  
\end{flushright}
he calls “Madriliensis”), and compares his doctrine with the teaching of the Cloud. But, it rapidly becomes clear that the comparison is introduced largely in order to discover the ways in which Madriliensis falls short of the teaching of the Cloud. Baker writes

... to my seeming he is very short, not only as to ye writing, but also as to ye apprehending of ye Nature of ye Exercise handled by our Author of ye Cloud. For it seemeth to me th' Madriliensis treats no further nor otherwise in ye said matter of ye love of God, & about ye exercises of it, then usually doe Scholastick Divines, whose teaching & Delivery in it is far different from that the experienced Mysticks deliver unto us. 28

The clue to Baker’s preoccupation here lies in his belief that the criterion of experience is crucial as a prerequisite both for the author and for the reader of mystical texts. Baker argues that only the teacher experienced in the ways of the interior master is qualified to offer a guidance which may be described as “mystick”. Thus, Baker is defending his position that all mystic teachers have a single doctrine partly by the strategy of excluding from the category “mystic teacher” any author who does not approximate to the perspective he approves.

In the next few paragraphs, Baker develops a second point about the potential for apparent disagreements between authors writing about contemplative prayer:

The next that I have met wth who wrote of this matter (I mean, in Expressment of the Exercise of Perfect Love) is ye third Book of the aforesaid F. Bennet Fitch Of The Will of God, wth was in the year 1610. And after him (viz. in ye year 1624) did the Author of Secre Sentiers set out The same Book of his. The wth Third Book of the Will of God, & The said Book of Secre Sentiers are of the same Effect as is our Book of The Cloud; though in those th' are Unexperienced they would not seem to be so, but to be different Exercises, whereas indeed They are not, but are of one Effect, if they were rightly Understood, as indeed they Can hardly be wthout some Experience. 29

Once again, we may note Baker’s deployment of the criterion “experience” to underwrite his argument, now suggesting that for the reader who possesses the

28 Baker, Secretum, 6.
29 Baker, Secretum, 8–9.
appropriate experience of contemplative prayer even authors who appear to be substantially different in their teachings are actually capable of being understood as teaching the same thing.

Baker realises that this claim may not be immediately convincing, and continues:

The truth is, th' All these Mystick writers in Expressement of the Spirituall Course they have run, doe seem to differ wholly one from one another, whereas indeed They do not, or at least not much. All the difference (if Matters were rightly Understood) is but in the Differences in words & Terms, & not in matter.  

Baker’s distinction between “words & Terms”, on the one hand, and “matter”, on the other, is one which, interestingly, has been applied to his own texts subsequent to the writing of Sancta Sophia, as I showed in chapter 1 of this study. Here, however, he is certainly preoccupied with his conviction that, since God is the internal master of the true mystic, the spiritual course written about by each mystic is one and the same, irrespective of the language the mystic author deploys.

He goes on to elaborate this point, stressing that since there are no “proper terms” for the subject matter addressed by mystical authors, each author is driven to find a language which seems best to him, words that are “fittest for the purpose”:

... and each one doth according to his own manner, and his manner is different from the manner th' the Other holds in y' Expressement. I mean, cheifely for terms; & thereupon they Seem to y' Unexperienced to handle different matters, whereas indeed they do not, but handle y' same Matter in Different terms.

This poverty of spiritual vocabulary is exacerbated, Baker goes on to say, when the author attempts not merely to speak of human experience of the encounter with God, which is itself impossible to write about unless one has personally enjoyed the experience, but to write of God’s part in the process, which of its nature is inexpressible.

Baker instructs his reader that “The whole Course & processe of our present Book Called The Clowd is but a prosecution of the Exercise of the Will”,  

Baker, Secretum, 9.  
Baker, Secretum, 10.
and thus the reader is to understand

all this processe in exercise of the Will thus prosecuted throughout
ye book, is in Effect & Substance but ye selfsame Course of
Spiritual life wch I have so much intimated & inculcated to you by
word of mouth & by writing ... 32

It is part of Baker’s express purpose here to assimilate the doctrine of the Cloud to his own teaching. Thus Baker enjoins his reader to be aware that in reading Baker’s own “simple writings”, or Canfield or de Barbanson, they are

for matter and Substance but the Selfe-Same as is the Book called
the Cloud, though All of Us do expresse our matter & meanings in
Various terms; but the Reader is wth his judgment to reconcile all
those terms (as well he may), drawing them all into one meaning, as
to the matter & substance of what is intended in & by them.33

As we have seen, the underlying assumption made by Baker is that the “matter & substance” intended by the various terms he is speaking about refer to one and the same reality.

In her recent study of Baker’s texts, Van Hyning has rightly drawn attention to the “self-authorising” nature of Baker’s manoeuvre here (and elsewhere), of claiming “texts of varying origins to be of equal intention and design”.34 She points out that Baker’s way of treating his sources is a mode of acquiring authority for himself as a mystical teacher. While accepting her conclusions, it is a part of my purpose here to place greater emphasis upon the view that Baker genuinely believes that “ye selfsame Course of Spiritual life wch I have so much intimated & inculcated to you” was followed by the author of the Cloud of Unknowing, and that it is necessary for his young students to grasp the same point.

Baker next spends several paragraphs developing the distinction between what he regards as the two ways in which God “calleth & guideth Soules towards his Perfect Love”,35 on the one hand, the ordinary way, with which the Cloud,

32 Baker, Secretum, 11.
33 Baker, Secretum, 11.
35 Baker, Secretum, 12.
Baker’s own writings and those of other mystic authors are concerned; and on the other, the extraordinary way, “by wch he Calleth Some Speciall Soules [...] to Divers Graces & Favours”. He stresses the notion that since he and his readers are called to the ordinary way “good it will be for us to be acquainted wth the Books th' Describe the same”, whereas accounts of souls called to extraordinary graces “are no proper examples or Patterns for us much to look into, & lesse to imitate”. This is a strategy we have encountered before: Baker is frequently concerned to advise his young charges against aspiring in their zeal to practices they read about which might be the opposite of helpful to them.

Having prepared his reader for the commentary on the *Cloud of Unknowing*, Baker moves on to explain the way in which he intends to approach that task. This section is valuable, even though Baker does not actually fulfil the plan he sets out here. The interest lies in the way in which Baker proposed to approach teaching about the book, as this may throw light upon what he was accustomed to offer his students in oral exchanges.

He distinguishes between a variety of materials to be encountered in the text. First come “some things I shall only note unto you, wishing you to Observe the same”; next he speaks of “some other things th' seem Obscure”, which he undertakes as best he can to “expound unto you”. But it is at first surprising to find that he also refers, at greater length, to “Some things th' I do not myselfe well Understand”, or “I do in some Sort understand, yet find myselfe not able to Expound them”, and in such cases he tells us that he “will not meddle w' th' such material, but will leave the reader to understand as best he can, or to pass them over.

Here, Baker is in fact observing his own injunction about how to approach texts that are not understood by the reader, and openly allowing that there is much of the *Cloud* that falls into such a category. It may very well be that it is this very

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point that lies behind his eventual decision, signalled to the reader some ten pages later, not to proceed with the commentary he had originally set out to write. Whether or not this is the case, it is useful to see that Baker is prepared to be very direct in following the advice he has earlier offered to his students.

The Preface concludes with a detailed paragraph of instructions on the use of the commentary Baker has stated that he intends to write. He advises his reader:

First to read over what you find of my doing upon a chapter, & afterwards read the chapter as it is in the Author himself; and thirdly (if you please) ye may read again what you have before read of My Doing upon th' Chapter.\(^{37}\)

In this way, the reader is to make her way through the Cloud, accompanied by Baker’s exposition as a preparation and a follow up to each chapter.

As a method of guided reading this places the weight of interpretative authority with the commentator, whose words are to precede and follow the text being addressed, establishing a framework of interpretation which leaves little room for hermeneutical manoeuvre. After Baker’s emphatic insistence in what we might term his “doctrinal preface” that he has been teaching the Cambrai nuns the same form of prayer as that to be discovered in the Cloud such a privileging of his own commentary should come as no surprise. Elisabeth Dutton comments that Baker “had no qualms about driving his own agenda through the texts he mediated”.\(^{38}\) She is quite correct, as she is also in finding his desire to control his audience’s apprehension of textual meaning “blatant”. But, as the previous chapter has shown, Baker was not at any point seeking to encourage a recognition in his students of a variety of perspectives on the contemplative life. He believes that there is only one route for them to follow as they prosecute their “spirituall course”, and it is therefore his responsibility as their teacher to ensure that potential misunderstandings are removed from their reading practices.

\(^{37}\) Baker, Secretum, 17.
We may have here a pointer to the way that Baker read over his chosen mystical texts with the nuns, preparing them for the material that was to be read, and then identifying the salient points for them to ponder after the chapter had been rehearsed. Many of the sections in his *Collections* from earlier authors suggest such a method, beginning or ending with brief comments from Baker himself.\(^39\) In collections of texts such as these, of course, even the selection of passages itself is an authoritative manner of exercising control over what is read, and we have seen earlier, for example in the context of his *Catalogue*, that Baker is self-consciously seeking to direct the reading of his students in the way that he understands to be for their best advantage.

1.2. PART ONE OF THE *SECRETUM*

After the considerable anticipation Baker has generated in his reader throughout the *Preface* as to the contents of the treatise which is to follow and the method it will deploy in addressing its subject, he opens Part One of the *Secretum* with what must be one of the most banal anti-climaxes in the whole of mystical literature:

> Touching the proposed Exposition. Upon further Consideration of ye matters Contained in our Treatise Called *The Clowd*, I am come to be of the mind th' it will not be convenient for me to take in hand an Exposition.\(^40\)

He goes on to explain that he is concerned that he will only confuse his readers if he attempts to record a series of comments “as mystick & obscure (if not Obscurer) as is *The Clowd* it selfe”.

Baker’s dramatic change of plan is frustrating to his modern reader, as is the not dissimilar manoeuvre which occurs a few pages into the *Vox Clamantis*. It is, however, useful here to notice the reasons which Baker gives for this failure to proceed. Essentially, he makes three points: some of the *Cloud* he does not himself

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\(^39\) Baker, *Collections*.

\(^40\) Baker, *Secretum*, 19.
understand; some of it he cannot adequately explain for others; and some of his
difficulty arises from a lack of adequate vocabulary to write of “matters wch are
Spirituall & Mystick”. This explanation, if taken at face value, throws light on
Baker’s encouragement of his students to read and spend time only with those
sections of a contemplative work which they are able readily to understand; but it
complicates Baker’s reasons for choosing to make use of a text such as the Cloud
in the first place.

He nevertheless instructs his reader:

I would wish th' at least once in every two years you take this Book
Called The Cloud for your private Reading Book, & read it twice or
thrice over, one after another; and I hope you will every time
understand it better then before you did.

He observes, in keeping with the advice we have noted earlier, that “the reading of
other books from time to time, wth your Observation of what you read, will
increase your light & ability for better Understanding of these matters” as will
their prayer, where they will “gather much Experience & light for y e Understanding
of these matters”. Thus, although Baker’s own exposition is curtailed, what we
are presented with is a model of how he understands the attentive contemplative
reader should approach a text.

A central conviction of Baker’s project, as we have seen, is that there is
only one mystic itinerary. Thus he offers a summary account of “the work treated
in this book”, which he states is the “Exercise of proper Aspirations”, a topic that
he tells us he himself has addressed, from a theoretical perspective, in Directions
G. Baker goes on to note that the authors with whom he is most concerned in the
Secretum, the Cloud-author, Benet of Canfield, and Constantine de Barbanson,
have themselves all followed this same path that he is sketching out:

I do assure myselfe, th' both our Author of y e Cloud & y e Authors of
Secre Sentiers & of The Will of God have in their writtings

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41 Baker, Secretum, 19.
42 Baker, Secretum, 20.
43 Baker, Secretum, 20.
44 Baker, Secretum, 19.
expressed but those Waies by \textit{w}ch God guided Each of them. The \textit{w}ch waies, thogh in substance they were all one (as being of Spirituall Love), yet in ye manners of their Exercises I esteem they did not much differ from one another.\footnote{Baker, \textit{Secretum}, 33.}

Without further preamble Baker begins a lengthy section of the \textit{Secretum} which is taken by most commentators to be autobiographical, although narrated in the third person. He offers no initial rationale for sharing the information which follows, but by where he places it within the text of this treatise Baker appears to signal the fact that he wishes the reader to be better informed about the actual experience of prosecuting this way “of Spirituall Love”, and to be prepared for some of the events which they may meet with along the way.

There are two parts to the autobiographical material Baker offers; the first part describes experiences in his own prayer life from about 1620 through to the time of the writing of the \textit{Secretum} in 1629; the second part, potentially somewhat confusingly, describes an earlier period in Baker’s life, in 1608.\footnote{Clark, \textit{Secretum, Introduction and Notes}, 30–31.}

The first part of Baker’s narrative recounts events which took place while Baker was living “at the home of Philip Fursdon in Devonshire, in May 1620 and the period immediately following”.\footnote{Clark, \textit{Secretum, Introduction and Notes}, 30.} It is wholly taken up with an account of his own “interior workings”, or as he puts it here of the “working of a Soul \textit{w}th in ye Body”. He tells us:

\begin{quote}
After th\textprime{} he had Spent first about three months in ye exercise of Meditation, & afterwards about an year in the Exercise of Immediat Acts, he came then to be called to ye use of proper Aspirations, yet not soe but that he was sometimes driven to ye Use of Acts also, till th\textprime{} (\textit{w}ch was about halfe a year after) he came to have a settled Exercise, wholly Consisting of Aspirations.\footnote{Baker, \textit{Secretum}, 34.}
\end{quote}

Baker goes on to tell us, in some detail, about the experience of “his working” during a period of a little over “nine years & about five months” in total, \textit{i.e.} up to...
the time of the writing of the passage. Perhaps mercifully, he attends mostly to the first few years, since “if I were to tell you ye Varietyes & changes wch during those years passed in our Said Schollars Exercises, there would scarce be any end of such relation”.49

At the beginning of this spirituall course, Baker tells us:

... his working [...] Seemed to be Exercised without. So that it seemed to him, th' Exercised them all wthout ye body, here & there, up & down; but all of them (I say) seemed to be wthout ye dores or Windows of the body.

Baker goes to to narrate the progress of the “workings”, which “came to draw towards & into the body”, at first via the extremities, the arms and legs, but eventually after a year or so moving towards the “middle part of ye body”.

From here, via the head, “it seemed to him th' work left all ye Residence it had in ye Outward place of the head, & came to be more inward”,50 and he suggests that if God so grants, the work will grow “more & more abstract from ye body” in the future.

For a theoretical framing of the experience he has just recounted, Baker refers his reader to his own account “in my Book G under ye title of Intellectuall Operations, where I shew th' higher ye soul is Elevated from ye Bodily senses [...] ye lesse subject is She to be Caryed away wth ye inordinate passions ...”.51 He goes on to note that this “habitation above in Spirit is well described by ye Author of Secre Sentiers”, that is by Constantine de Barbanson; and finally that it is “our present matter, being ye Work of Love, th' is handled in ye Book of ye Clowd”.

Baker recounts over several pages some of the positive consequences that have followed from his prosecution of this path of prayer, and offers a series of observations on what he has written about it. For the purposes of this study, the

49 Baker, Secretum, 41.
50 Baker, Secretum, 35.
51 Baker, Secretum, 36.
most significant of these comes towards the end of his account. Baker explains that his purpose in writing has been that his readers

all or some of them will reap good by it; not by imitating any-thing th' therein they shall find, doing ye same meerly out of their own heads, w\textsuperscript{52} in no sort they must doe, but that they may thereby discern & know tht there be Varietyes & strange Passages in the waies toward God, & that if God shall offer to Call or lead them by any such [...] they shall not refuse ...\textsuperscript{52}

Baker appears to be telling his students that the reason for his wishing them to know of his own experiences in prayer is that the “Varietyes & strange Passages” through which God may lead the soul in the course of the mystical itinerary must not be found intimidating. His preoccupation with what are in some sense physiological sensations in the course of his long narrative of his prosecution of the “way of love” seems, in Baker’s own terms, preparatory to his claim that the process becomes “more abstract” in its mature stages. In terms of the strategies we have discovered in Baker’s texts to this point, this entire lengthy narrative appears then to fall into the category of guides to the spiritual path, offering the aspiring contemplative some sense of what she may expect to discover along her way. This understanding is perhaps confirmed by Baker’s conclusion to his comment, in which he notes that “y\textsuperscript{e} hearing or reading in Books” of matters such as that which he has just recounted “may doe him good, for divers respects whereof I have before intimated some unto you”.\textsuperscript{53}

Baker’s second autobiographical passage concerns an earlier stage in his spiritual course. He recounts something of his early attempts to pursue a life of contemplative prayer, and goes to some lengths to stress that these first beginnings came to nothing because he had no director to guide him: “he prosecuted his Course Masterlesse”.\textsuperscript{54} Clark writes of this section of the Secretum:

It was through lack of instruction in coping with the experience of desolation that Fr. Baker had earlier given up the attempt to pursue mental prayer, and so had fallen back in the interior life. What is

\textsuperscript{52} Baker, Secretum, 43.
\textsuperscript{53} Baker, Secretum, 43.
\textsuperscript{54} Baker, Secretum, 63.
described here took place at Cook Hill, Worcestershire, the home of
Sir Nicholas Fortescue, in the spring of 1608 and the period
immediately following.\textsuperscript{55}

Baker tells us that had he “but good information about it” (\textit{i.e.} the spiritual course,
and especially the experience of desolation), he might not have made the mistakes
he claims he did make. In a very direct way, he tells us of his faulty reading
practices of this time, and recognises that these were at the root of his failure to
follow through on the invitation from God he believes that he was given. He writes
that “his error was th\' while he was tending towards Contemplation, he did not give
himselfe more than he did to ye reading & Studying of Spirituall books & matters”.
Instead, “opening ye book, he would read a little here or there according as he
lighted by chance upon opening ye book, & having read a little would put up ye
book agen”.\textsuperscript{56}

This account of his own practice is reminiscent of Baker’s description of
the manner of reading that the newcomer to the monastery might have been
accustomed to follow while she was still in the world, found in \textit{Directions H.} In
that treatise Baker writes:

\begin{quote}
When you were in the world, or else in religion before you seriously
determined to prosecute a spirituall life, you did likely read good
bookes out of some curiosity or to driue away the time [...], only
bare delightfull readinge of those good books. Before you would
say: ‘This or that is a very good booke’, & layeinge it aside, this
was all that you did with it.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

It was just such a “bare delightfull readinge” which led Baker to make the mistakes
of which he accuses himself, according to the \textit{Secretum} narrative. Here we see an
clear example of Baker committing himself to the view that, even when a divine
call is experienced, the contemplative is very likely to require the guidance of a
teacher, or of a good reading practice established on the appropriate texts, in order
for the call to be appropriately discerned.

\textsuperscript{55} Clark, \textit{Secretum, Introduction and Notes}, 31.
\textsuperscript{56} Baker, \textit{Secretum}, 63.
\textsuperscript{57} Baker, \textit{Directions H}, 38.
In the text of the *Secretum*, Baker spends some time drawing out the lessons he wishes his students to apprehend from the autobiographical story he has recounted, but here we may take as a summary of his comments his brief note that his students, “being, as you are, instructed & forewarned by words, writing and Example ...”, will not make the same error that he accuses himself of falling into.\(^58\)

Baker’s exposition of “y\(^e\) Example of our Scholar”,\(^59\) almost certainly two autobiographical episodes from his own life, can therefore be seen to function within the text of the *Secretum* in several ways.

First, after having abandoned the original scheme for a systematic chapter by chapter exposition of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, Baker turns to a direct account of personal experience in order to illuminate the teaching of that book, and his own right to comment upon it. This is, effectively, a fleshing out of the point he has several times made about the necessity for experience in the spiritual life, and casts light upon what he means by this claim.

Next, Baker is offering further details regarding a topic which is never far from his concerns, namely the nature of the spiritual course to be followed by his students. In his account of the “y\(^e\) work” he has undertaken, he is offering direct guidance on the spiritual path.

Thirdly, and very significantly in the context of this study, Baker is quite explicit in the second autobiographical passage, about the relationship between the divine call and the process of guidance, in a way that in other contexts he attempts flatly to contradict.

Finally, it is clear that Baker’s lightly disguised autobiography is offered as encouragement and example to his students, as he himself effectively states:

> Alasse! had our poor Scholar had but ye witt & Grace, or ye instruction tht you have had [...] to what facility, purity, Abstraction & Elevation of Prayer [...] had he by this time Ascended ...\(^60\)

\(^{58}\) Baker, *Secretum*, 70.

\(^{59}\) Baker, *Secretum*, 75.

\(^{60}\) Baker, *Secretum*, 76.
The story of the “Scholar” is intended to model a number of different dimensions of the experience of a spiritual neophyte, and to encourage the Cambrai novices to press on in contemplative prayer, no matter the challenges that may present themselves:

And Let his doings be an Example & Encouragement to you for your Good, ye intending whereof hath made me So large in this Expressement of our Scholar’s Courses.  

1.3. PART TWO OF THE SECRETUM

By the time Baker came to write the second part of the Secretum he had long abandoned the scheme he had so boldly announced in the Preface, with the result that he titles this part of the treatise rather more modestly: “an Exposition, or Certain Notes upon the Mystick Book Called the Cloud”. As has been noted earlier, Baker’s notes or commentary are very varied in length; some chapters are effectively passed over, while others strike him as being of particular interest because they accord with his own teachings, or because he wishes to show accordance with other authors whose views he approves.

Sometimes Baker has nothing to add to the text of the Cloud itself, which he evidently regards in many cases as “plain Enough”. Thus, for example, in the case of several chapters Baker simply states, of chapter six, “I have no Speciall Matter to Note in this chapter, but Referre you to it as it lieth in the Book”, or, “I Referre you to the chapter itself”, of chapter nine.

In the case of some parts of the Cloud, Baker wishes to show that the specific terminology being used, which he judges might appear confusing to his_________________

61 Baker, Secretum, 77.
62 Baker, Secretum, 117.
63 Chapters 26, 43 and 44 of the Cloud provoke especially lengthy digressions from Baker.
64 Baker, Secretum, 135.
65 Baker, Secretum, 129.
66 Baker, Secretum, 131.
students, is effectively the same as that to be found in more contemporary contemplative writers. Thus, Baker writes of chapter five:

The clowd of forgetting of Creatures wch our Author here mentioneth, is but ye Active Annihilation of Creatures, wch F. Bennet Fitch So much Speaketh of in his third Book of ye Will of God. And I Commonly do term it a Transcending of Creatures. And so ye forgetting of Creatures, Active Annihilation of Creatures, And Transcending of them, are all of them in effect but one & the selfe-Same thing, though expressed in & by those divers Terms ...

Alternatively, he may simply regard occasional uses in the Cloud to be less clear than he might wish, and so explicates them, as here, writing of chapter eleven: “By Rechlessnessse he means Carelessenesse or Neglect, as rechlessenesse of Veniall Sins he intends to be a not Caring to Committ veniall Sinnes”.

But Baker several times expands beyond an explanation of terminology or a simple association of the Cloud’s key expressions with those to be found in other mystics, to make points which associate together aspects of the doctrine of his various sources in a more fully elaborated fashion. Thus he writes in his notes on the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters: “In ye Exercise of Love intended by our Author, the Soul putteth herselfe into God, regardeth God, & in that while doth as it were Annihilate herselfe & all other Creatures; and this is ye Active Annihilation treated of by F. Bennet Fitch”. He goes on to link the same doctrine with the teachings of Alphonsus of Madrid, and with parts of his own earlier teachings.

Occasionally, Baker intervenes to advise the reader of the Cloud to suspend judgement of a particular point, until the reader is better acquainted with the book as a whole:

As for making use of a Word of one Syllable, as Love or Sinne, whereof our Author Speaketh, I wish you to suspend your judgement, at least as to ye practice, till th' you hear our authors fuller Explanation of himself, wch you shall hereafter find in another chapter of this his Book.
This approach is in keeping with his more general advice, considered in the last chapter, to allow mystical texts to be mutually illuminating in exactly the way he clearly attempts in this treatise.

Only two sections of the commentary on the Cloud are developed by Baker at any length, those on chapter twenty-six, and on chapters forty-four and forty-five taken together. What is striking here is the detailed fashion in which Baker pursues his explication of those dimensions of the doctrine of the *Cloud* which he wishes his students most especially to note, and the way in which he once again spends extended passages associating the doctrine to be found in the *Cloud* with that discovered in de Barbanson or Canfield. This strategy for commentary may be regarded in the present context as the detailed working out of the reading perspective we noted being established so explicitly in Part One of the treatise.

2. *THE LIFE AND DEATH OF DAME GERTRUDE MORE*

Like Baker’s *Secretum*, his treatise *The Life and Death of Dame Gertrude More* appeared in an incomplete printed edition early in the twentieth century, although the full text was not available until 2002 when Ben Wekking published his edition. Wekking, in his preface to the complete text points out that the earlier, Weld-Blundell, edition was created without reference to the full range of available manuscripts and “dealt rather freely with the text”. As noted above, this treatise was not completed by Baker during his time at Cambrai. Although it is possible that some of the material now incorporated into the *Dame Gertrude More* was written during this period, the treatise as a whole was only completed after

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Baker’s removal from Cambrai to Douai. However, since its subject matter is the “spirituall course” of one of his students among the Cambrai nuns, and it addresses the subject of Baker’s teaching during his time at Cambrai, it has appeared appropriate to include the *Dame Gertrude More* in this study of the Cambrai treatises.

Baker was certainly working on the *Dame Gertrude More* by 1635, and it was most probably completed either that year or the next.74

Wekking helpfully supplies the following outline plan of the contents of the work, following the scheme sketched out by Baker himself:

1. Prelude: Gertrude’s birth, education, vocation and departure for Cambrai, 1606-1623.

2. First Stage: Her first difficult years as a nun, 1624-1625.

3. Second Stage: She finds her spiritual course, 1626-1631.

4. Third Stage: Baker’s course, which is also Gertrude’s, is questioned, 1631-1633.

5. Fourth Stage: Her last illness and death, 31st July - 17th August 1633.

In the *Dame Gertrude More* Baker unites a spiritual biography of Gertrude More, the best known of his Cambrai students, with a developed account (and, it must be said, extended defence) of his own teachings at Cambrai. Wekking points out that as a consequence of this double focus the treatise is “essentially a work of instruction and edification for would-be contemplatives as well as containing directives for superiors and spiritual directors”.75

Its value for this study lies in this fact, since the book represents Baker’s most complete attempt to offer an overview of his spiritual doctrines, an overview which is grounded in the story of the religious life of one who followed them, and is at the same time intended to represent the type of religious literature Baker

74 Wekking, xxiv.
75 Wekking, xxv.
believed to be of greatest value to the aspiring contemplative. Our attention here will focus on the earlier sections of the treatise, in which more material concerning spiritual reading is to be found.

2.1. THE PRELUDE

Baker begins the treatise by initially noting that the *Dame Gertrude More* will not address what he terms “great externall matters”, by which he intends “miraculous fastings, abstinences, watchings and other corporall and externall doings, rapt and Exstasies, visions, and apparitions, and revelations, and other supernaturall and extraordinarie operations”. Of such matters, which he states are frequently related both in his own day and in the past, he maintains that while they “manifest the glorie of God in himself, and in his works”, they are in effect mere curiosities: they produce no “true good or benefit of soule” for those who read of them. Baker’s purpose in writing, he states, is to provide “things more imitable by others, and more tending to edification of soules, and much more for use in this present age”.

Thus it is clear from the very beginning of the text that Baker intends the narrative to serve an immediate and practical purpose in the religious lives of aspiring contemplatives.

He proceeds to detail the outlines of Gertrude More’s life, with the purpose of emphasising his contention that in spite of “good will towards God”, a “call from God to leave the world”, and the opportunity to enter “an Order, that of his nature was contemplative”, it remained the case that “she could not tell how, nor finde the meanes for a long time, by which she might serve God in soule”. Baker states that the conventional observances of religious life (“no Regularitie or externall disciplin alone, nor anie corporall austerities”) were not capable of

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enabling Gertrude to find her way, and that neither were the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises.\textsuperscript{77}

... but that she had both lived and died most miserablie, if God had not provided other helpes and means: And yet those of no such height or extraordinarie qualities, but that all other well-minded soules maie comme to the like ... And manie of them (as is to be feared) do stande in the like need ...\textsuperscript{78}

So his purpose here is to model an alternative “knowledge of the meanes and waie, how to serve God in soule in a true and sincere maner”.\textsuperscript{79} It is Baker’s contention that such an alternative “spiritual course” involves no such height or extraordinarie qualities, but that all other well-minded soules maie comme by the like ... in proportion and qualitie answerable to their spirits.

It is his intention that “this life of our Virgin ... maie be ... some good example and encouradgment unto them”.\textsuperscript{80}

Baker indicates his intention to relate More’s life and death using the structure of a prelude about her childhood and entry into religious life, followed by four chronological headings or, as he puts it, “stations”.\textsuperscript{81} He states that from time to time he has “treated in generall of divers spirituall matters, that do not alltogether concerne the particuler of our Virgin”\textsuperscript{82} \textit{i.e.} he uses the specific story of More as a context within which to make wider points. As we have seen in earlier considerations of Baker’s texts, this digressive method is characteristic of his manner of thinking and of writing. It happens that it is particularly well suited to the kind of spiritual biography Baker intends to create here.

Baker further defends his method of paying great attention to “the particulars of her life” on the grounds that the majority of spiritual works tend towards a “generall maner” in their accounts of the spiritual course of their

\textsuperscript{77} Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 3.
\textsuperscript{78} Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 4.
\textsuperscript{79} Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 3.
\textsuperscript{80} Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 5.
\textsuperscript{82} Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 7.
subjects. He argues that readers cannot benefit from texts which offer no access to
the specifics of “the natures of their spiritual exercises, or their internall carriidge;
wherein onlie or radicallie doth true spirituallitie and perfection consist”.\textsuperscript{83} The
shortcomings of most works of spirituality are detailed:

> Usually they treating of their Praier or mortification, do deliver the
same in a generall maner, without distinguishing the natures thereof,
that are divers; and they tell us of their externall doings (that are of
lesse moment) and not of their internall demeanour, which were the
best knowledge for us ... They tell us of the Sanctitie and perfection
of those, whose lives they treate, but tell us not of the meanes,
which brought them thereto, being principally their internall doings,
whence all external good proceedeth ... \textsuperscript{84}

Baker’s view is that in the detail of interior “doings” the spiritual reader should
discover “erudition or instruction for our practise”.

There is one general point, however, upon which Baker insists, and which
again he argues is “not usually much handled in spirituall Authors, nor in the lives
of Spirituall livers”:

> And the point is, the observing of the internall divin lights, and
tracts, inspirations, or calls ... the which were the principall or onlie
Maister or guide of the Religious Virgin ... \textsuperscript{85}

The importance of this perspective cannot be overemphasised for Baker. It
“containeth in it all the necessary particulars”, and if it is lacking all instruction
will be fruitless in guiding a soul into an interior life.

Baker’s final point in this section addresses the issue of his intended
audience, and plainly reflects his concern that only “those, that have in them an
aptnes and call to an internall or Contemplative life”\textsuperscript{86} should read the book he is
creating. He maintains that the vast majority of individuals have no such call.
Consequently, they should either not read the book, or read it only with the caution
that they must not attempt to practice the specific spiritual instructions it contains,
“for ... they will more harme themselves”.

\textsuperscript{83} Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 8.
\textsuperscript{84} Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 8.
And indeed it maie well be, that the reason, why Spirituall Authors do not (which I have before signified) more specifie and handle in particulars those matters of inspirations and internall carriadges is the perill they might conceave of harme, which some indiscreet Readers or Practisers might cause to themselves by misunderstanding or misapplieng such their spirituall instructions.\(^{87}\)

After these opening remarks, the remaining sections of the Prelude fulfil Baker’s intention of sketching Gertrude More’s life up to and including her entry into religious life in the convent at Cambrai, and most of this detail need not concern us here. From the opening section of the *Dame Gertrude More* the following points emerge.

First, Baker is writing this treatise with a clear sense of who he wishes to read the text, namely, those called to an interior life. As has been apparent in several other contexts, Baker grounds the pursuit of the contemplative life in an interior call from God, and holds that only those who possess such a call may profitably read texts such as the one he is writing. Baker is writing with the notion that what he offers here, although it concerns one specific religious, is appropriate as guidance for others. He wishes to provide them with knowledge of “the meanes and waie”, so that they will be able to follow their own call.

Next, the method Baker has followed in most of his treatises has been digressive, *i.e.* he tends to allow a particular preoccupation to guide the direction of his thought, and several pages can pass befor he recognises that what began as the central theme is in danger of being lost in his attention to a particular point. By using the spiritual growth of More herself as the central focus of his text, Baker retains a clear focus, but is able at appropriate moments to digress, widening his narrative at many points to attend to doctrines.

Thirdly, the treatise exhibits a central concern about tracts and calls, and Baker spends some time in the early sections of the treatise detailing the route whereby his student was able to “get into her interior” and discover the way she

was to find most fruitful for her. Emerging from this fact, the overarching metaphor running through the book is that of interiority.

2.2. STAGE ONE OF THE DAME GERTRUDE MORE

Baker writes of the disposition of Gertrude More towards religious life:

Comming into Religion I thinke she camme in as it were blindfolde, and did not well knowe, what she did in it, being ledde by imaginations, hearesaies, and other things, whereon she could not, nor did determin anie thing ... 88

He goes on to discuss her “Call from God to Religion”, identifying the issue of discernment of this call as central. “... it seemeth that God had reserved the notification of his call, till that she were comme into a course and state more capable of discerning it”. 89

Baker’s view is that More was called by God to the pursuit of “an internall life”, and that without this, she would never have been satisfied or settled in conventual life. He writes that:

... all the difficultie was for her entrie and getting into her interior, and for to learne how she should leade an internall life; which indeed she did not knowe what it meant, nor had heard much of it; and yet reallie she had a privie divin Call to it. 90

It is this difficulty in “getting into her interior” which makes the young nun an ideal subject for Baker’s text, as he appears to conceive of this as a common experience among those called to contemplation, and thus by addressing More’s difficulties he will address the situation experienced by many others.

Baker explains that two “defects or wants” stood in More’s way: one being her extroverted nature, and he spends a time detailing the ways in which she found herself effectively at war with her own way of life; but it is the more important “defect” which interests him more, namely how to get into her interior “to be

88 Baker, Dame Gertrude More, 19.
taught either by God or man, how to do it: for of herself she could not learne it; no more can any other soule”.  

Baker tells us that More, possessed of a very strong good will and a desire to amend her life, “sought for all the meanes, which natural reason did suggest unto her for her helpe” in this situation. He details her first strategy as reading: “She redde over all the bookes, that were in the howse ... and redde them seriously”. She obtained books from abroad, printed and in manuscript, as well as reading the “whole English Bible privatly to herself, continuatim from the verie beginning to the ende”. He quotes from her own account of this process:

... I did in those times rowse up and peruse all the bookes in the house; and whatsoever I founde, that anie had donne to please God, I took notes of it and did practise it, aswell as I coulde [...] and all this would do me no good, and me thought I was as great a stranger to Almightie God, as I was in England ...

Baker concludes this section, noting that “by all this, that you have heard, you see the difficultie she had for getting into her interior”. This account is, in a sense, the mirror image of Baker’s Secretum account of his own poor reading practices. While in the earlier text we noted Baker’s clear insistence that only by reading “seriously”, as he says here of More, could he have avoided losing his way, here we find him speaking of a well motivated and responsible reader failing to discover her way through what he appears to see as a wholly appropriate use of religious books.

He proceeds to detail “Her problems of attaining to a true spiritual course” in a section which examines More’s attempts to use a variety of forms of prayer, without success, and moves to itemize “4 or 5 repugnant or contrarie qualities or conditions” in the nun. Here Baker appears to be dissecting aspects of More’s psychological makeup, suggesting contradictory aspects of her personality and

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92 Baker, Dame Gertrude More, 23.
93 Baker, Dame Gertrude More, 23.
behaviour. His observation that she possessed both a great capacity for “extroversions” and yet “none had a greater Call and aptnes to a true introversion; but that as yet she knew not how to performe it”\textsuperscript{95} prompts a digression which is revealing of Baker’s attitude towards spiritual texts.

In a dense paragraph Baker describes the relationship between the “Divin working” and human industry “by virtue of the Divin grace” in bringing about what he labels “Reformation” of soul in Gertrude More. He sets down what we are told became her “Motto or Poesie”, namely “Regarde your Call/ that’s all in all”. He writes:

And heere by the waie I am to lette you knowe, that by thes severall tearmes, which I use in this Treatise, I intende in effect, but one and the selfsame thing; videlicet; Divin Call, Divin Inspiration, Divin Voice, Divin Impulse, Motion, Illumination, Tract, Intimation of the Divin Will, Divin Admonition, Divin Instinct. And other tearmes there be, which by the speakings, workings, and deeds of God in and upon a soule (as Divin Inaction, and other tearmes) are expressed. And likewise there be divers other tearmes, by which the reciprock dealing or behaviour of the soule towards God are expressed; as, her obedience to the Divin voice, tract, etc.; Her conformitie or Uniformitie of will to the Divin; Her resignacion, her correspondence to the Divin, etc. And divers other tearmes there be, in effect all of them being one of the two here mencioned, videlicet: either the working of God in or upon a Soule, or her working or behaviour towards him.\textsuperscript{96}

This is the same manoeuvre we have encountered before in Baker’s texts, most recently in the \textit{Secretum}, whereby Baker subsumes within a single approach to a topic in mystical theology any other perspectives, whether coming from other writers or, as appears to be the case here, his own varied uses of terminology. We have seen Baker insist in the \textit{Secretum} “though All of Us do expresse our matter & meanings in Various terms; but the Reader is w\textsuperscript{th} his judgment to reconcile all those terms (as well he may), drawing them all into one meaning”.\textsuperscript{97} This is another example of the same outlook, although it is especially important in the case

\textsuperscript{95} Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 25.  
\textsuperscript{97} Baker, \textit{Secretum}, 11.
of the “Divin Call” because of the central importance of this idea to Baker’s teaching.

It is at this point in his account of Gertrude More’s spiritual course that Baker introduces the figure of “Anonimous”, universally regarded by all who have commented on the *Dame Gertrude More* as a cipher standing for Baker himself, just as the “Scholar” did in the *Secretum*. He recounts the ups and downs of what was evidently a volatile relationship between himself and More, at least at first. The final sections of Stage One address the difficulties More experienced about the time of her religious profession, which Baker sums up as follows:

> then she fell to bethinke herself how she might come to live more contented, and thought of some means for it, though indeed there was onlie one, which as yet she knew not, and that was, being putte into a right waie of spirit and proper for her, and answerable to the Call she had from God.\(^9^8\)

It is from this search, he will go on to explain, that More was to begin to discover the right path.

This account of Stage One of More’s religious life is used by Baker further to develop the themes he had introduced in the Prelude, but with a particular stress upon the need to find the appropriate way for her to develop spiritual interiority. This is naturally taken by Baker to be associated with the identification by More of her “Call”.

As a text to be read by others, this section of the *Dame Gertrude More* invites the reader to understand herself or himself as faced by a choice similar to that of More, and in pursuit of a similar means “how she might come to live more contented”.

### 2.3. STAGE TWO OF THE DAME GERTRUDE MORE

Baker writes that the turning point for More came as a consequence of her finally seeking out the advice of Baker himself. He tells us that even though he

offered her direction “by worde of mouth”, this advice “tooke no good effect with her”. His analysis of Gertrude More’s situation is that “she did not hitte uppon the nature of a right praier”, or perhaps failed to follow through upon it if she did. He tells us that, for a contemplative like More, “all her spiritual good and reformation was to proceed from Praier”, and thus “the difficultie was how to fitte her with a right Praier”. He then goes on to offer an account of how this was finally achieved.

Baker writes that the most widely advised route into contemplative prayer, through the practice of meditation, was closed to More, for although

... she could volve and revolve in her minde the images of creatures, and thereby discourse and inferre, yet all that would not serve to move her will anie thing at all towards God, whereby she might the better prorumpere in actus amoris, breake furth into actes of love ...

On the contrary, to attempt meditation was for More “in her will as if she had but discoursed or preached to a stone”. He argues that this was the result of being graced by God with “a wonderfull strong propension in the will of the Superior soule ... for seeking after him and eternall felicitie”.101

Baker tells us that such a propension is “a verie privie and spirituall thing”, and therefore not capable of being anatomised in great detail, nevertheless he believes that “it must have a proper action of her or of other owner of the like, for to make use and exercise of it (for otherwise of it self it doth no good)”.102

This “proper action” is the point at issue in the process of discerning a “right praire” which will enable the aspirant to “get into her interior”. Baker writes that in More’s case, this “proper action” consisted not in the imaginative discourse of meditation or of any use of sensible imagery, but was achieved “meerelie by the exercise of Amourous affections”. Such a form of prayer might be hit upon as a

100 Baker, *Dame Gertrude More*, 36.
101 Baker, *Dame Gertrude More*, 36
102 Baker, *Dame Gertrude More*, 36
consequence of possessing the propension alone, or through suggestion from an external source such as a book. In More’s case

... she selected out of St Augustins Confessions and Meditations and out of the workes of other such like affective Praier-men, great store of amorous actuations of soule, which wonderfullly fitted her foresaid Propension.

It is this discovery of “the exercise of Amorous affections” which, according to Baker, is transformative of More. He writes:

And thereby she camme (commonly) to have a verie efficatious Praier, and that of much Recollection and internall sight of herself; whereby she both discovered her inordinate affections and other defects, and also obtained a great strength and grace in will for the amendment of them.103

This discovery of how to get into her interior, enables Gertrude to have a “good interior light within her”, which meant that she was “comme into the waie”.

The danger which Baker alerts his reader to next is one which he tells us he himself had been affected by.

Nevertheless frequently it fell out, that none of those selected amorous affections would availe her, nor could she produce them at with anie gust, but she would be in a certein dullnes, coldnes, or stupiditie of will, and then indeed would she thereby be in some perplexitie or great difficultie.104

It is at this point that Baker recounts the incident I have refered to earlier in which he reads to More from de Barbanson, and through the reading of the text she begins the discovery of her Call:

... one daie [he] was reading to her and to another some things out of a booke [... and] our Virgin was somewhat struken with it, and suddenly said: O, O, that must be my way, I pray you (said she to him) lette me have that place translated into English. And so [he] did, and gave it to her, and she made great use of that doctrin, and continued her prayer with great profit.105

This passage illuminates clearly the manner in which Baker understands the contemplative aspirant to be invited to discover her own individual call from God within the spiritual literature of the “mystic authors”. It may well be that part of

103 Baker, Dame Gertrude More, 36
104 Baker, Dame Gertrude More, 37.
105 Baker, Dame Gertrude More, 38.
Baker’s purpose here, if we contrast this passage with his earlier accounts of More’s fruitless although serious reading in an attempt to find her way, is to deliberately interject himself as mediating presence into the account of More’s experience. The book alone could not avail her, but as presented by Baker, it became a source of spiritual progress.

Quoting from More’s own writings, Baker tells us that “God did shewe me plainlie in reading Anonimus his bookes, that my waie was to overcomme myself, as I could, and not as I would”.\textsuperscript{106} Such a passage rather tends to support the view that Baker is concerned to promote his own role as director in this account.

Baker goes on to examine More’s natural disposition for an internal life. He elaborates his understanding of what it is to guide a contemplative, or, in his own phraseology, “to hold in the right internall waie”.\textsuperscript{107} He stresses the idea that, although the guide is helpful to the beginner

\[\ldots\text{yet was his doeng but a disposition for her in it. It was her abiding to his generall instructions, and her observing of the divin lights or tracts \ldots that wrought her good.}\]

He justifies his writing of More’s transformation at some length “as serving to afforde matter of edification, as the great mercie and goodnes of God towards her, the mischief of not being in a true spirituall course in the state of Religion, and the happines of being”.\textsuperscript{108} The Life is intended to be a work of “edification”. Nevertheless, there is no escaping the fact that, to an even greater extent than was the case in the texts he wrote at Cambrai, here in the \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, Baker is involved in a retrospective exercise of defending himself and his teaching.

More usefully for the purposes of this study, Baker takes time to outline the origins of More’s practice of writing down her “Amorous affections”. He shows something of how this undertaking at Cambrai gave rise to the book he created

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{106} Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 40.
  \item \textsuperscript{107} Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 41.
  \item \textsuperscript{108} Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 43.
\end{itemize}
from More’s papers, the *Idiot’s Devotion.*

She sticking to her Praier, and being diligent and industrious, as she was, by reason of the foresaid Propension aided or caused by the divin grace, and using at the first onlie out of necessitie such ejactulations, as she gotte out of booke, she came in a short time to use other meerlelie of her owne framing, as suggested to her by her owne nature or spirit, or by the divin spirit, which often times she used to sette downe in writing for her helpe in times of more ariditie.

Baker goes on to state that others who saw Gertrude’s writings liked them, and “used to copie them out”. In this way, there came to be a “great store” of such papers in the Cambrai house.

Baker elaborates at some length upon “the impulse of the will for spirituall elevation or aspiration”, which he says is the essence of the propension which guided More, associating this view with that expressed by other spiritual writers.

Baker further justifies his approach to guiding More, writing that “by what I have said maie appeare unto you, how improper and insufficient the common instructions of booke (which yet men do usuallie followe) had ben for our Virgins reformation.”

There is a running together in the later sections of the *Dame Gertrude More* of Baker’s earlier attacks upon inappropriate reliance upon spiritual books, and his defence of his own approach to directing his student:

And indeed all the defect, that she founde and felt in the instructions given her by others, before she mette with Anonimus, was but onlie this in a generall, that they prescribed unto her some or all of the foresaid limited vulgar, and bookish, or human instructions concerning praier and mortification ...

Thus, for example, he explores her approach to “the matter of Examin of conscience”. He is concerned to make the point that in this matter our Virgins practice [was] different from the common instructions of booke sette furth and practised, especiallie in thes later daies by

some newer Orders, that are indeed more Active, then Contemplative ...\textsuperscript{114}

Here Baker uses the example of More to explore his regular teaching on examination of conscience, confession, and the related issues of “inordinate feare and scrupulositie”\textsuperscript{115} which have been his concern at a number of points in the Cambrai treatises.

In addressing the details of the spiritual direction relationship between More and himself, Baker is clear that

... his whole office with her was, but onlie to animate her and beare her up against all temptations to the contrarie [...] And allso generall instructions he often treated uppon with her. But as for particulars, he referred her to her proper maister, that was the internall.\textsuperscript{116}

The next section addresses the prayer “of ariditie”, which frequently represents the condition in which More found herself. Baker writes

Aliso it was a good while before she founde the meane of helping herself in the praiyer of Affection; and Anonimus could not prescibe unto her her kinde of praiyer, but told her that she must finde it out by her owne Experience and observation. Onelie in matter of Praier he insisted uppon two growndes with her. The one was, that some Mentall Praier was necessarie for her, though it must be her Office to finde, what praiyer would fitte her. The other was; that she was capable of Mentall Praier of one kinde or other ...\textsuperscript{117}

2.4. STAGES THREE AND FOUR OF THE DAME GERTRUDE MORE

These final sections of the \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, valuable as they are especially for Baker’s use of his account of More as a vehicle of self-promotion and for making his case in the aftermath of his removal from Cambrai, are less useful for the subject of this study, Baker’s approach to spiritual reading. I shall therefore move quickly through them, drawing attention only to material that is helpful for this study.

\textsuperscript{114} Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 104.

\textsuperscript{115} Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 112.

\textsuperscript{116} Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 115.

\textsuperscript{117} Baker, \textit{Dame Gertrude More}, 120–21.
The third stage of the text opens with an account of the tribulations of the sixteenth century Jesuit, Balthasar Alvarez, confessor to St Teresa of Avila, a story which Baker judges to be a parallel to his own experience in the final conflict at Cambrai. He goes on to explain how More’s own “spirituall course” was challenged, and this offers him the opportunity to defend his teaching: “Why Gertrude and her associates should not relinquish their form of prayer”. Such lengthy and detailed defences by Baker of his teaching at Cambrai become a major feature of the texts he wrote after moving to Douai, and this digression into extended polemic makes Baker’s later works less useful than they might otherwise have been. Here in the Dame Gertrude More the digression into polemic remains just that.

The most significant passages in the remaining sections of the Dame Gertrude More are those in which Baker spends some time exploring once again the ways in which More made use of “matter or wordes of Love” to raise her heart to God. As this is the fullest account Baker would ever offer of the practice of the prayer of affection it is especially useful. Baker is writing of More:

... the maner how she used those gathered or excogitated affections, was this: So soone as she had looked and reflected on with her corporal eyes and minde anie of those affections, her corporall nature was presentlie and easilie moved thereat. But such motion did not tarie there, but was instantlie carried up into the Superior soule in vertue of the said propension, that laie therein and ever draws towards itself and into God. And the affection being comme thetether, the same Superior soule did therewith feed itself towards God and in God, and in such feeding or enjoieng remained so long, as the vertue of such motion would last which was but for a verie little time. And that ceasing she would againe looke uppon her booke or paper and take another affection [...] and therewith she would do as she did with the former. And doeng thus for many and divers affections, she so spent her time of mentall praier.  

This is an account which suggests much about the relationship between text and prayer in the practice of Baker’s disciples. It may be said to underline the extent to which Baker approaches spiritual texts in two fundamentally different ways,
depending upon whether they are intended, as More’s “gathered or excogitated affections” are intended, to facilitate the process of prayer, or whether they are intended to act as guides to the spiritual course.

Finally, for our consideration of this text here, Baker is also interested to give some account of More’s later approach to this second type of reading:

She had an excellent judgment for discerning what bookes and matters best helped soules towards Contemplation, and what did tende to breed Simplicitie in soules towards it, or what Multiplicitie, that was a full impediement to Contemplation [...] For her owne parte she relished no bookes, Sermons, or Instructions, that did tie soules to certein practices in matters, that of themselves were indifferent and might lawfullie (as of themselves) be donne or left undone. And therefore the bookes or places in bookes, Sermons, and saiengs that best pleased and fitted her [...] were those that in a generall exhorted and taught soules to observe their Calls about those indifferent things.120

Here we are very probably witnessing Baker’s use of More to promote his own attitude to spiritual books, as her “excellent judgment” happens to coincide perhaps rather too conveniently with his own.

3. CONCLUSION

In the last analysis, both Baker’s Secretum and his Dame Gertrude More at least partly disappoint the modern reader who approaches them seeking, in the case of the one, an example of how Baker would approach the teaching of an older spiritual text, and in the other, a book suited to fulfilling Baker’s aim of writing a text “more tending to edification of soules, and much more for use in this present age”121 than other spiritual books of his time. As we have seen, the Secretum only partly fulfils the promise Baker makes of commenting on the Cloud, the treatise becoming preoccupied rather with Baker’s own account of why he has not done what he said he would undertake at the beginning of the text. The Dame Gertrude More, like all too many of Baker’s later texts, is ultimately unable to escape from ____________________

120 Baker, Dame Gertrude More, 250.
121 Baker, Dame Gertrude More, 2.
beneath the weight of Baker’s overwhelming need to justify himself in the aftermath of the final debacle at Cambrai.

Nevertheless, there is much to be learned about Baker’s understanding of the practice of spiritual reading from these texts.

From the *Secretum*, we note once again Baker’s preoccupation (seen in many of the Cambrai texts) with the fitting of text to audience. He begins the *Secretum* with expressions of concern about who should appropriately read his books; although his approach is arguably elitist and perhaps backward looking for its day, it is the case that Baker believes that only appropriately trained contemplatives should read the kind of book he is writing. This is, as it were, the parallel to his conviction, expressed many time throughout the Cambrai texts, that the contemplative requires an appropriate literature of mystic texts to guide her in her spiritual course.

Baker demonstrates in the *Secretum* the extent to which he is committed to understanding spiritual writers, at least those writers he calls mystic writers and approves of, from a unitary perspective. All these mystic authors “but handle ye same Matter in Different terms”. 122 And, as he also remarks, what they “handle” is what he discovers in the *Cloud*: “the exercise of the Will, as a man would say, from Top to Toe, excluding all discourse, Meditation & Consideration”. 123 We discovered in the previous chapter that, underlying Baker’s labours to provide the Cambrai nuns with “bookes most helping toward contemplation” 124 is the conviction that it is feasible to articulate, at least in broad terms, the stages of the spiritual itinerary the contemplative will tread out as she prosecutes her course. The *Secretum*, especially in Part Two, allows us to witness the working out by Baker of this conviction as he places several contemplative texts alongside one another and finds them to be teaching the same thing.

124 Baker, *Directions H*, 82.
In the sections of the Secretum in which we appear to encounter autobiography, Baker is pursuing effectively the same agenda. His first account offers his reader an insight into what the path of mystical prayer may have in store: it is a sharing of Baker’s “experience”. The second account is intended to forewarn the reader against making the author’s own error of underestimating the value of reading about such experiences before she encounters them.

The lengthy passages of self-defence to be found in the Dame Gertrude More, and especially in its later stages, are more of a witness to the difficulties Baker faced in his last years than they are to his work among the nuns of Cambrai, the ostensible subject of the treatise. However, there are valuable glimpses of that period within the text, and some key issues are genuinely highlighted.

The first is Baker’s belief that the texts his students most need to have available to them will stress two related things. These are, first, that books for contemplatives will address the “internall doengs” of their subjects, “the meanes which brought them” to sanctity, and not the external consequences of that sanctity; and, second, that such books must teach “the observing of the internall divin lights, and tracts, inspirations, or calls”. 125 While it should be allowed that the Dame Gertrude More does indeed largely attempt to fulfil the first part of this agenda, other than an insistence upon the central importance of the latter objective, Baker offers nothing new in this regard.

Baker uses the Dame Gertrude More, rather as he did the autobiographical material in the Secretum, to present some of the “Varietyes & strange Passages in the waies toward God”, 126 and for the same reason. Thus we discover much about the “internall doengs” of Gertrude More, of which details perhaps the extended account Baker offers of her practice with “matter or wordes of Love” is the most important for the present study. The use of texts as part of the process of prayer is

125 Baker, Dame Gertrude More, 8.
126 Baker, Secretum, 43.
nowhere narrated in such detail in Baker’s treatises as it is here, although at a theoretical level the first section of the *Idiot’s Devotion* has much to say about this practice.
Chapter 5

All yᵉ Books in yᵉ World Will Not Alone Suffice
Spiritual Reading in Augustine Baker

INTRODUCTION

As we have seen in the previous two chapters, Baker believes the process of initiation into the contemplative life to be the result of the co-operation of three “teachers” (a metaphor for spiritual guidance which is one of Baker’s favourites); namely, “1. God himselfe, immediately; 2. A visible teacher (wᵉ is a man), & 3. Books.”¹ He writes that “these three teachers do commonly their parts in yᵉ guiding of all souls”. Nevertheless, as this short summary again makes plain, the roles they each play are by no means equal. “The ruler of the stern of all these,” Baker writes, “is God himself”. This is what we would expect, and it presents no problems for the role of religious reading in the spiritual life, understood as a mode of God’s indirect or mediated guidance of the soul. The fracture line which runs through Baker’s account of religious reading is apparent at the point at which he places the word “immediately” alongside “God”, since by this manoeuvre Baker runs the risk of relativising all other forms of guidance, capable of being understood as God’s mediated “guiding of all souls”, and of thus rendering them obsolete. This is effectively what takes places when he writes that it would not ultimately matter “If all the bookes in the world were burnt & lost”.²

Although the written word is his medium of instruction and guidance and he invests great energies in advancing the cause of what might be called spiritual literacy among his students, I have shown that throughout the Cambrai treatises in which he so vigorously promotes the use of the written text in the spiritual life, Baker simultaneously mounts a double critique of the use of religious books in the contemplative life. It is important to notice the difference between the two sides of this critique, to distinguish between the positive advice offered on how to use spiritual texts, and the objections Baker raises against their use, perhaps rather more clearly than Baker himself always does.

While the first critique Baker develops is to be seen as a dimension of his advice about the use of spiritual texts and may therefore be termed a critique of spiritual literature from within that literature, suggesting (for example) which parts of it are valuable and which not, Baker’s second approach is of a different order, and is more problematic. This is because it effectively assumes a standpoint which is, so to speak, outside spiritual literature, suggesting other avenues of approach and pointing towards the dismissal of the legitimacy of spiritual reading as an exercise within the contemplative life.

Baker’s first set of concerns, what might be called his positive critique, have to do with the inadequacy of much religious literature for use by enclosed contemplatives, while allowing that it may have value for those in other walks of Christian life. As we have seen earlier, in common with the majority of his contemporaries, Baker holds a clear view about the distinct vocations of contemplatives and actives among those who pursue the religious life, and about the lay state. Spiritual texts for enclosed contemplatives, in his view, have a specialist task, just as the way of life of the contemplative is specialised. He holds that much religious literature, by contrast, is written for the “generality” of Christians. Either it addresses the wrong topics, fails to deal adequately with the areas that need to be explained, or allows the stress to fall on the wrong dimensions
of the spiritual life, thereby actually disabling the contemplative from following her path. It is, significantly, from this critique that the entire project of the Cambrai treatises arises in the first place. Since the literature available to him in teaching the nuns is only partly adequate to the task, Baker argues, he himself must supply the deficiency.

It is in this sense that Baker seeks to present his own writings as “supplies, additions and accommodations”. It is for this reason that he has striven to create a library of appropriate texts for the nuns of Cambrai, translated and collected texts from a wide variety of authors, ancient and contemporary, and written reading lists to show which texts might be suitable for his students. For the same reasons he has critiqued specific authors or practices, and especially some of the more activist, theologically controversialist, or speculative texts. In a similar way, he regularly voices his opposition to much Ignatian spirituality, which he appears to have encountered in something of a debased, mechanical form; he understands the Spiritual Exercises to be largely preoccupied with formal discursive meditation, and therefore to be unsuited to contemplatives. Here we see Baker guiding his students in what kind of spiritual literature it is appropriate for them to read, and we have seen that a substantial part of his work in Cambrai was associated with this task. We have further noted the extent to which Baker promotes the value of an interplay between, on the one hand, the human guide or spiritual director, and the spiritual text on the other, since each performs what is effectively the same task, “to dispose the scholer for the instructions of the spirit”.  

Closely allied to Baker’s critique of inadequate religious literature is what might be termed his positive teaching on how to make use of appropriate spiritual texts. The instructions Baker offers to his students in how to approach and make use of a spiritual text find their

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natural context here, within Baker’s critique of religious literature, since the advice he offers amounts to a positive critique of modes of religious reading.

However, Baker has a second, quite distinct critique directed against spiritual books. This goes to the heart of his understanding of the contemplative way, and is at the root of his more radical attacks upon the value of religious literature per se. Thus, as we have seen, he writes in the final paragraph of Directions D:

> If all the bookes in the world were burnt & lost, & that one had not any man to instruct him, yet if the soule will prosecute prayer, abstraction, & vndergoe necessary mortifications, obseruinge God & his call both interiorly & exteriorly, & so forsakinge & renouninge himselfe in spirit & body, hauinge God & his loue, will & honour for his finall intention, such a one would walke cleerly, securely, & arriue to an happy end, w^th God send vs all. Amen.\(^4\)

Behind a passage such as this lies Baker’s belief that the contemplative is to be guided by “God & his call” immediately, and not through any human ministry. As I have shown, this notion of God acting upon the soul “immediately”, which Baker refers to by a variety of terms, such as tracts, calls, or the voice of the interior master, is frequently deployed in the Cambrai treatises in a way which tends to undermine rather than to confirm the general direction of Baker’s project. Baker is sometimes moved to write as though the very books he has promoted among the nuns can be almost their worst enemies. We saw at the very opening of this study that, in creating his Baker digest, Sancta Sophia, Serenus Cressy had believed it necessary substantially to rewrite the passage just quoted, in order to avoid precisely such an impact. As we have noted, Baker himself sometimes offers a somewhat less absolute a statement of the same point, as here in Doubts and Calls:

> But for ought that I ever could or can see, yea it is most certain, th\(^t\) all ye books in ye world will not alone suffice for ye directing and guiding of a soul in ye way of perfection [...] unless he be withall immediately illuminated & directed by God, or else mediately by some man who will instruct him in guiding him for his interior; and then may good books be a good help, the party being illuminated by

\(^4\) Baker, Directions D, 107.
God or instructed by a visible teacher how to make right use of books ... 5

But even here, Baker is close to dismissing the value of books: “... all ye books in ye world will not alone suffice ...”. Although Baker allows a role for the human director in *Doubts and Calls*, while dismissing this in *Directions D*, his critique of religious books is consistent, and still relies upon the reader being “immediately illuminated & directed by God” in his reading.

The crucial point is what Baker terms the immediate and direct illumination of God. It is this perspective concerning the role of the “internall Maister” which is pivotal to Baker’s spiritual teachings and which stands behind the second type of attacks we have noted upon the value of religious reading. While much of what Baker writes takes for granted the necessity of a guide to the life of the spirit, either a director or a good set of texts, and ideally both, and anticipates the process of guidance leading to a point where such guidance ceases to be necessary, passages such as these adopt a different set of priorities and place all responsibility for spiritual progress directly in the hands of God.

The previous chapters, in examining Baker’s own account of spiritual reading and the various roles it might play within the religious life discovered no straightforward resolution within Baker’s own thinking to this dilemma. The task of this chapter, then, will be to situate Baker’s approach to religious reading in a somewhat broader context with a view less to solving the difficulty which Baker has written into the Cambrai texts, than to understanding how and why he might have arrived at such a position, and thus what his writings tell us about the approach or approaches being taken to the use of spiritual texts as a dimension of the contemplative live in early seventeenth century English Benedictine communities.

5 Baker, *Doubts*, 14.
Section 1 will therefore situate Baker’s approach to spiritual reading as we have discovered it in the Cambrai treatises within a wider movement in the history of religious reading, arguing that it is in the disappearance of the classic monastic discipline of lectio divina, and its transformation over a period of centuries into what is, by Baker’s time in the seventeenth century, recognisable as the modern practice of spiritual or devotional reading that we shall find the beginning of the answer to why Baker writes as he does about religious texts.

Section 2 takes up the theme of the emphasis upon the will to be discovered in Baker’s spirituality, developing the insights offered by the view that Baker’s teachings should be located within the tradition of affective Dionysian mysticism. Here I shall explore the position Baker occupies on the respective roles of love and knowledge on the path to the goal of mystic union, which may be said to one which accepts “the mediaeval interpolation of love over knowledge”. The primacy of affectivity invites consideration of the priority given to the faculty of the will over the intellect in such a spirituality, to the point where a disjunction between the two appears to be operating. The implications of such a stance for the process of religious reading may be seen at work in the Cambrai treatises, with their curious mixture of learning and the dismissal of learning.

1. Lectio Divina, Lectio Spiritualis, Spiritual Reading

It would be difficult at the beginning of the twenty-first century to discover a presentation of the spirituality of the Benedictine monastic tradition which does not place the lectio divina of scripture at the centre of that tradition, or which fails to suggest that the practice of scriptural lectio is the characteristic manner of

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Benedictine prayer. Thus, for example, the American Benedictine scholar, Columba Stewart, writes in his popular account of that tradition:

... the prayerful encounter with the Bible called *lectio divina*, ‘sacred reading’, is the hallmark of Benedictine spirituality. The liturgical prayer for which Benedictine monasticism is best known is the ecclesial and communal side of each individual’s *lectio divina* [...]

To see *lectio* as fundamental to all Benedictine prayer does not downplay the communal liturgy but points to its heart, the unifying Word.7 Stewart’s is only one voice among many, but it is reasonable to allow him to speak for all, as the view that this model of *lectio* is “primary among the elements of a monastic approach to God”8 is the common view of monastics in the Benedictine tradition at this point in time.

We have seen that Baker regards prayer and reading as two of the key duties of monastic life. However, it has been abundantly evident that the two are understood by Baker in the early seventeenth century as related in quite a different way from that identified by Stewart at the end of the twentieth century. Here I wish to situate Baker’s approach to the relationship between contemplative prayer and reading over against that to be discovered in the classic model of monastic *lectio divina*, drawn from the mediaeval period, and within the practice of *lectio spiritualis* which replaced the classic model. In this way it may become easier to understand both where Baker’s position on reading finds its origins and why we discover such tensions within it.

In his well-known study of the monastic practice of *lectio divina* Jean Leclercq discovers in St. Benedict and St. Gregory the Great “the essential elements of monastic culture and the decisive factors which guided it”.9 Underlying their contemplative practice was a tradition with roots in pre-Christian ascetical

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and philosophical endeavours, both Hebrew and Greek, and in earlier Christian practice, notably that of earlier Christian monastic authors.\textsuperscript{10} Origen and Augustine especially played significant roles in the development of a theologically grounded method of reading the scriptures, on the one hand, and the relationship between the text and the self, on the other: “Reading the scriptures, for Augustine, led to a rereading and re-editing of the self”.\textsuperscript{11}

Leclercq’s study of the monastic culture of prayerful reading emphasises the extent to which the practice of \textit{lectio divina}, while capable of being analysed into the constituent elements of \textit{lectio}, \textit{meditatio} and \textit{oratio}, is essentially a unitary activity of prayerful reading, or reading as prayer. It is completely focused upon the text of scripture, and the task of individually appropriating that text gives the process its dynamic. Thus Leclercq writes of the \textit{meditatio} that it “consists in applying oneself with attention to this exercise in total memorization; it is, therefore, inseparable from the \textit{lectio}”.\textsuperscript{12} He goes on to stress that this activity “is, necessarily, a prayer”. In support of this outlook, Leclercq cites the text of an early Cistercian author, Arnoul of Bohéris:

\begin{quote}
When he reads, let him seek for savour, not science. The Holy Scripture is the well of Jacob from which the waters are drawn which will be poured out later in prayer. Thus, there will be no need to go to the oratory to begin to pray; but in reading itself, means will be found for prayer and contemplation.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

According to Leclercq, then, the prayerful reading of scripture stands at the heart of the classic understanding of monastic prayer. It is not one activity alongside others, it is rather the very fabric of monastic prayer, the material out of which this most foundational of monastic concerns is fashioned.

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\textsuperscript{11} Studzinski, 83.

\textsuperscript{12} Leclercq, 90.

\textsuperscript{13} Cited by: Leclercq, 90.
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Leclercq’s effective rediscovery of the practice of lectio divina, and of the monastic theology to which he shows that it both gave rise and was a crucial part, has itself been contextualised by more recent scholars. Studzinski’s recent study of the “evolving practice of lectio divina” is perhaps the outstanding example of an historical contextualisation both of Leclercq’s work and of the “surge of appreciation for the scriptural word and the ancient practice of lectio” which “unfolded ... dramatically in the Roman Catholic Church after 1960”, and which was at least in part a response to that work.\textsuperscript{14}

As we have already noted, Baker’s approach to religious reading is distinct from the mediaeval practice described by Leclercq. How does it come about that the Benedictine tradition so dramatically shifted its approach to the use of scripture and sacred texts as a medium for the encounter with God? Building especially upon the insights of Ivan Illich, Studzinski explores the post-thirteenth century demise of the classic model of monastic lectio divina, and particularly the process whereby “Lectio divides into prayer and study”.\textsuperscript{15} This fracture in many respects anticipates and underlies the fault-line I have suggested is to be found running through Baker’s writings, and especially his attitude towards religious reading.

Following Illich’s analysis of the history of reading in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Studzinski finds that in the course of this period the monastic “marriage” between “reading and spirituality, between textuality and interiority” ruptures under the weight of the new methods of a more dialectically oriented, academic scholasticism. Lectio becomes the term for a university lecture, it no longer refers to a personal interiorisation of biblical narrative. The scholastic task is understood primarily as one of commentary and analysis, and scriptural texts are “reduced to props” as the commentator’s own original writings effectively become

\textsuperscript{14} Studzinski, 192.
\textsuperscript{15} Illich, Ivan. In the Vineyard of the Text, a Commentary to Hugh’s Didascalicon. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993. 65.
more important than the Bible upon which he comments. Here we may note the first of several respects in which the previously central role of the scriptural text is eroded in favour of secondary texts, which both in the university and in the realm of individual piety begin to assume the position previously assigned only to the inspired word.

“Spirituality was undergoing a substantial shift because of an evolution in a key practice”, Studzinski writes. Under the influence of scholastic practices in the new universities the written text, and particularly the printed text, moves from its earlier position in Christian (and especially monastic) spirituality as “script for life” to become “a blueprint for thinking”, a guide to abstraction and logical reasoning. As Illich writes, describing the same phenomenon, “… academic pursuits … now monopolise the word studium”.

While the universities came to be understood as the appropriate locus for this new, scholastic understanding of the lectio and the studium, which were the primary public uses of the book in this new era, in the realm of personal piety the religious houses of friars, the Franciscans and Dominicans, also introduced a new understanding of the role of reading: “Pious reading which nourishes by contemplation”, as Illich describes it, lectio spiritualis as it came to be called, or “spiritual reading”; an activity which more closely resembles prayer than it does study, but which is no longer objectively attached to the text of scripture. Importantly, this is only one of the ways in which the sacred text, or (increasingly) a non-biblical religious book, can be used; not the way, as had been the case in the monastic model. Studzinski writes: “In this new ‘spiritual reading’ the text assumes a subordinate role. It is the affective life of the reader that becomes more

16 Studzinski, 172–73.
17 Studzinski, 174.
18 Illich, 64.
19 Illich, 64.
important [...] the text is no longer central; the person of the reader as a thinking
and feeling subject is.”

At this point we have begun to touch an approach to the spiritual use of a
text familiar to the reader of Baker’s Cambrai treatises, which regularly invite their
reader to employ the written text as a vehicle to further their quest for a personal
interiority in which an affective encounter with God may occur.

It is to Brian Stock’s work on the broader history of lectio spiritualis that
we should look for an appreciation of this transformation in the role of reading
within Christian spirituality, which is addressed only briefly by both Illich and
Studzinski. Stock argues that it is the influence of Augustine which, from his own
time onwards, promotes within Christianity a form of reading that has a
relationship with older Hellenistic contemplative practices, and is associated with
introspective mental exercises, paying attention especially to the words and images
which surface during this process. Stock believes that it is this Augustinian
heritage which influenced the Christian reading of scripture and helped to shape
the practice of lectio divina.

Stock notes that, over time “it was inevitable that Christian thinkers
engaged in lectio divina would begin to ask questions about the nature of the
interior reflection that was involved”, and specifically “how words and images
functioned in the mind during devotions, and how such internal representations
could influence lived experience”. It was from this process of reflection upon the
self, as old as the Soliloquies and Confessions of Augustine, but tethered by the
monastic practice of the mediaeval period to the text of scripture, that a practice
evolved during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries which, while not itself lectio

\[\text{References}\]

\[20\] Studzinski, 173.

\[21\] Stock, After Augustine, 103–05.

\[22\] Stock, After Augustine, 105.
divina, is closely related to it. This is the practice which, after the fourteenth century, comes to be known as lectio spiritualis.

Stock writes that “it came to differ from lectio divina in a number of ways that have to do with internal words and images in a contemplative context”. To concretise the point, he offers the following helpful illustration of the difference between the two spiritual disciplines. First, he offers an example of lectio divina:

Suppose you are asked to repeat aloud a verse of the psalm with your eyes on the text and your mind fixed on the meanings of the words by means of verbal repetition. If you perform this task with attention, you will be close to the mediaeval discipline of lectio divina: you will be reading strenuously [...]"

Next, Stock contrasts this practice with the process involved in lectio spiritualis:

Then perform a second experiment. With the sound of the text still reverberating in your ears, close your eyes and concentrate on the inner development of your own reflections, following them as they proceed in an associative manner from the meaning of the text to other pious thoughts [...] If you perform this task without permitting distractions, you will be close to lectio spiritualis."

Stock points out that, although this mode of reading was not invented in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, this is the “point of departure for the consolidation of lectio spiritualis”. He argues that in an important sense, “Lectio spiritualis thus completes the transition begun in lectio divina, in which the project involved in the reading process moves from outer text to inner person”.

To fill out this suggestive headline, Stock offers a series of pointers towards the ways in which these two spiritual disciplines differ.

First, while the process of lectio divina involved an interior unity of reading the biblical text, meditation and prayer, in lectio spiritualis the focus lay in the interplay of “reading, interior reflection, and a number of other devotional activities”. While the biblical text was an inescapable and fundamental core to the

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23 Stock, After Augustine, 105–06.
26 Stock, After Augustine, 106–08.
process of *lectio divina*, in *lectio spiritualis* the words, interior motions or experiences which arose during or subsequent to the reading became the focus of attention, thus *lectio spiritualis* could take place in the absence of the text.

Next, the integral role of *lectio divina* to the monastic form of life, the sense it which it is not an “autonomous activity”, as Stock puts it, or a “stand-alone” form of spiritual exercise, gives way in *lectio spiritualis* to a practice which is fragmented into discrete pockets of activity: reading the text, self-exploration, and associated devotional activities. The most significant of these, as Stock points out, is that *lectio spiritualis* is “an inner discipline that could involve self-exploration on the part of the subject as an aspect of his or her spiritual progress”.

Thirdly, Stock notes that “reading also meant texts other than the Bible”. He points towards the conclusion that this development must of itself have led to the development of different modes of reading, since the approach taken towards the sacred text in *lectio divina* would clearly not be appropriate for other forms of spiritual literature.

Lastly, he argues that “if *lectio divina* focused on content and constantly returned the reader to the biblical original, *lectio spiritualis* was chiefly concerned with expression, as an outgrowth of the individual’s affective life”. The key point here is an appreciation of the differing approaches to human emotion to be discovered in each of these modes of reading as prayer. Stock writes that *lectio divina* functioned within monastic ascesis as “a way of controlling, managing or reshaping” the emotions of those who practised it. The classical monastic tradition, as represented for example by John Cassian, assigned moral value (positive or negative) to emotional or spiritual states in advance of the practice of reading, and made use of the texts of scriptures almost as a “pharmacy where an ascetic could find suitable remedies for various ailments”. The process of *lectio divina* thus

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28 Studzinski, 112.
gives priority to the emotions discovered in the biblical text, while the subjective state of the reader is diminished in importance. Quite the reverse is the case in *lectio spiritualis*, in which the emphasis is placed upon the subject’s increasing awareness of her or his emotions, to the extent that this manner of reading might be described as a way of heightening the subject’s awareness of emotional states. Stock writes that “in *lectio spiritualis* ... one can speak of a subjectively organised narrative of the emotions that is enacted in the reader’s mind”. 29

The significance of Stock’s insights for our study lies in the light they throw upon the consequences of the demise of the classical monastic model of *lectio*, and the establishment in its place of a model of prayerful reflection in which the emotional experiences of the individual become the “centralising element”, while the strenuous engagement with the scriptural text is increasingly understood to be the province not of the individual at prayer, but of the scholar in his study. One sign of this change of emphasis is that spiritual and edifying texts other than the bible become ever more prominent in the lists of recommendations for spiritual reading. 30 We have certainly seen extensive evidence for such an emphasis in the works of Augustine Baker, and I shall explore this dimension further below. Another sign, which can similarly be discovered in Baker’s texts, is a major shift in the way the Bible itself is employed by the spiritual reader: no longer (in Studzinski’s happy phrase) as “script for life”, the central organising feature of the spiritual lives both of the community and of the individual, but now simply as a “prop” to what Stock terms the “subjectively organised narrative of the emotions that is enacted in the reader’s mind”.

Baker’s own approach to the use of scripture is best understood in terms of this changed point of emphasis within Christian spirituality. Although at no stage in my account thus far have I found it necessary to advert to Baker’s use of the

scriptural text, so peripheral has it become to his understanding of the reading process within the religious life, it nevertheless would not be true to say that we encounter no uses of scripture in Baker’s treatises. Baker’s ways of using the text of scripture have, however, little or nothing in common with the approaches described by Leclercq in his account of mediaeval *lectio divina*. The most frequent use of scripture references in Baker’s writings is their use effectively as authorities to support a point he wishes to make, precisely as “props”, as Studzinski puts it, although in Baker’s case they are props to an argument; and one can be left with the feeling that Baker might just as easily have reached for a passage from a favourite spiritual writer rather than from scripture if the moment had led him in that direction, since (as we have seen in previous chapters) this is in fact what he does even more frequently than he reaches for scripture.

Thus, for example, in *Doubts and Calls*, Baker is speaking of the necessity in prayer of not seeking after or attaching oneself to such supernatural manifestations as visions and revelations, which might be encountered by the faithful contemplative, because of their “being inferior to God, whom only we are to seek after”. He stresses a “more firm adhering unto God; which (as I have before said), is the proper end of all our exercises [...] according to that saying of our Blessed Saviour, that Mary had chosen the better part, which should never be taken from her; for she was to continue it in heaven for all eternity”.31 It is difficult not to find this use of a scriptural text virtually incidental to the argument Baker is advancing. The same usage of scriptural texts is to be found regularly throughout the treatises, texts from St. Paul’s letters being among those which Baker most regularly employs. The point is clear, however, that the scriptural text is most assuredly secondary to the point it is being employed to authorise, which arises either from Baker’s own teaching or from that of another author whose work he is

31 Baker, *Doubts*, 84.
exploring at that point. This is not the weaving together in a mutually illuminating fashion of scriptural references we discover in the monastic theologians of the mediaeval period; it is that somewhat mechanical application of scriptural authority to an independent argument which characterises the scholastic period.

But there is another, and more significant, use of scripture in Baker’s texts, and this is helpful in situating Baker’s outlook within the practice of *lectio spiritualis*. He uses biblical texts as the basis for many of the individual aspirations he records in the collections of such prayers to be found within the treatises, and in *Directions G*, for example, he offers the reader an entire list of such scriptural aspirations. Here we encounter a mode of using the text of scripture which offers compelling evidence of the mindset of *lectio spiritualis* as characterised by Stock.

Towards the end of *Directions G*, a set of “choyce aspirations, for the most part taken out of the Scripture” is offered to the reader, for use in her prayer. As with Baker’s use of the text of scripture as an authority in his argument, here the scriptural text is made to serve the purpose of the collection or treatise rather than having what might be termed its own integrity. Baker stresses that in using the aspirations “the party may take such as his soule shall relish”, to which end he offers the texts both in English and Latin: “if the Latein do relish you, you may very profitably vse them though you do not vnderstand the meaninge of the wordes”. This is his perspective throughout any section of the treatises which involves the affective use of scriptural texts. He writes:

> Commonly those aspirations are most gratefull to the soul wch are somewhat short & runne most glibbe & currant, & have no rubbs or iobbs in them, as are these few that immediately follow, though perhaps they are not so glibbe & currant in the English as they are in the Latein.”

33 Baker, *Directions G*, 64.
34 Baker, *Directions G*, 64.
Baker is inviting a use of the scriptural text which reminds us of the process of *lectio spiritualis*, as described earlier by Stock. It is the “internal representations” that arise from the process of reading which are important; indeed, as we have seen, in the case of Baker’s aspirations this is the entire purpose of the exercise.

This impression is confirmed, and the manner in which Baker anticipates the texts being employed is described more fully, at the end of the collection of aspirations:

> Those [aspirations] are best for you wch your soule doth most relish. It is no matter what the sense or meaninge of the words be: If they delight your soule, it is well enough & all in all, be the meaninge of the words what it will, or have they no sense or meaninge at all, but be wthout witt or sense; yea, such may be & are best of all ...\(^{35}\)

Baker is quite explicit about the fact that meaning is secondary in this exercise, indeed, it is actually irrelevant: the soul is to seek for “relish”, for an interior affective experience, not for sense or meaning.

As Stock points out, *lectio* of this kind can take place in the absence of the text, and it is in just this direction that Baker is pointing when he writes that the best aspirations have “no sense or meaninge at all”. The weight of significance has moved from the text, understood as the point of reference not only of sense and meaning but of contact with God, to the individual’s own interiority, the affective motions of the soul which are to be cultivated and promoted, and are now understood as in some sense themselves revelatory of the divine presence. Baker writes in *Directions H*, concerning the identification of appropriate reading matter concerning the Passion of Christ, suited to stir affective motions, “The soule is to observe what matter doth most moue her affection, & accordingly to choose such matter; & to do so is to observe the deuine call about the matter of prayer”.\(^{36}\)

\(^{35}\) Baker, *Directions G*, 72.

is not quite an identification of that which “moue[s] her affection” with the “deuine call”, but it is an indicator as to the direction in which Baker’s mind moves when he is discussing the two in close proximity. As Stock shows, the practitioners of lectio spiritualis are preoccupied with the examination of the interior affective movements consequent upon an encounter with the text; it is precisely these movements which Baker at times comes close to identifying as the soul’s place of encounter with God.

A very similar manoeuvre is to be observed in the description of Gertrude More’s affective prayers, which we saw in the passage on the use of aspirations in prayer from the Dame Gertrude More examined in the previous chapter. We may note also, from passages such as this, that this same method of approaching the text of the prayers of aspirations is employed by Baker, whether the text is scriptural or from another source entirely. Baker describes More’s prayer, beginning from a written text but tells us that

such motion did not tarie there, but was instantlie carried up into the Superior soule in vertue of the said propension, that laie therein and ever draws towards itself and into God. And the affection being comme thether, the same Superior soule did therewith feed itself towards God and in God\textsuperscript{37}

His concern, as the passage makes abundantly apparent, is what occurs in “the Superior soule”, since it is here that the aspirant to contemplation is able to “feed”, “towards God and in God” and “into God”. Once again, the affective motion is not the same thing as the divine call, or in this account, simply “God”, but the one is the very means of discovering and encountering the other.

Only when (and this was but a “verie little time”) this communion ceased, Baker tells us, would More “againe looke uppon her booke or paper and take another affection […] and therewith she would do as she did with the former. And

doeng thus for many and divers affections, she so spent her time of mentall praier”. The distinction which Baker employs between reading, on the one hand, and prayer, on the other, is apparent here; and so is the very close connection between the two dimensions of personal spirituality. Most significantly, however, is what Baker’s approach to the use of texts, biblical or otherwise, within the prayer of affection reveals about his understanding of the locus of the encounter with the divine, which is situated somewhere within what Stock termed the “subjectively organised narrative of emotions that is enacted in the reader’s mind”.

The third context in which we discover Baker making reference to scripture is in the Catalogue, his lists of books for the Cambrai nuns, of which we explored a little earlier those “most helping toward contemplation”. Towards the end of the series of lists which composes this section of the Directions for Contemplation, Baker presents a series of what he calls: “Other bookes tending more to helpe for praier or for the raising or nourishing of good affections, and not conteining particular instructions”. This list features several texts such as Augustine’s Confessions, à Kempis’ Imitation of Christ, “A book of St Bernards, written hande”. They are all texts which, as Baker’s note on one of them indicates, “contein good affective vocal prayers”. The list contains “The New Testament”, immediately followed by a book of vocal prayers, “Sister Martha hath it” and a section of Blosius’ works, “his fift parte”. There immediately follows a list of more than a dozen sets of saints lives and stories of people of faith, which ends with:

The Olde Testa:, wherein besides matters of storie are bookes of the greatest pietie, and apt to raise and nourish good affection, as the booke of Wisedome, Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiasticus, Canticles, Prouerbs; But they are more proper, yea absolutelie good for soules

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38 Baker, Dame Gertrude More, 237.
39 Stock, After Augustine, 107.
40 Baker, Directions H, 87.
41 Baker, Directions H, 88.
that are arrived to contemplation; and so likewise are the bookes of
the New Testament.\footnote{42} This arrangement of material is illustrative of the way Baker views the scriptural
text as having its greatest value as matter for raising affective motions in the soul,
as discovered in the previous point. It also highlights what we have identified as an
important dimension of the function of religious reading for Baker, in the fact that
scriptural texts are seen as “not conteining particular instructions”.

Here we move from considering Baker’s use of scripture to the more
familiar territory of his approach to the treatises he himself wrote or translated,
since the “instructions” to which Baker makes reference are the substance of what
he has been concerned with in the Cambrai treatises, and in the whole business of
building up the nuns’ familiarity with the “bookes of mysticke authors”. According to Stock, the early seventeenth century Jesuit author Alvarez de Paz,
with some of whose writings Baker was familiar, writes in his definition of \textit{lectio spiritualis}, that “we call spiritual reading \textit{lectio spiritualis} the activity in which
we open and read mystical books or spiritual treatises. In this activity we seek not
only information concerning spiritual matters but preferably in addition their
flavour and emotional content”.\footnote{43} This seeking of information or instruction from
mystical books or spiritual treatises to which Alvarez de Paz makes reference as
the core activity of \textit{lectio spiritualis} goes some way towards explaining the extent
to which scriptural texts are pushed to the margins of Baker’s concerns in his work
for the Cambrai nuns.

As we have seen, “flavour and emotional content”, in Alvarez de Paz’s
expression, are to be discovered in the scriptural texts, but Baker does not see them
as the appropriate source for “particular instructions”. By this he means “the books
that the soul is to use at the first for her spiritual instruction” in the ways of

\footnote{42} Baker, \textit{Directions} H, 88.
\footnote{43} The passage is from: Alvarez de Paz, J. \textit{De Extreminatione Mali et Promotione Boni},
1613. It is quoted from: Stock, \textit{After Augustine}, 126.
contemplative prayer, as he puts it in the *Spirituall Alphabet*, where he adds that for “further instructions in particulars, I do refer the soul to other books”.\(^4\) I have shown earlier in this study that Baker believes that “the reading and knowledge of such bookes are necessarie for [contemplatives], as telling them of the spirituall things they are to aime at, and teaching them the waie thereto”\(^5\). It has also become clear, from accounts such as the passage in which Gertrude More finds her “way”, that Baker understands the text of the mystic authors as one “by which allso God useth to speake unto us and to teach us”.\(^6\) He appears to share Alvarez de Paz’s understanding of the reading process as one which certainly communicates information about the spiritual course, but as one which, at the same time can directly disclose something of the working of God in the soul: “preferably in addition their flavour and emotional content”.

In some aspects of Baker’s way of working with a spiritual text we appear to see the appropriation of the model of scholastic studies to the use of a mystical text. Writing on the history of reading practices in the same period in which we witness the emergence of *lectio spiritualis*, Jacqueline Hamasse notes that:

> What we have in the age of scholasticism is a person reading, explaining and commenting on a work that was an integral part of a programme of studies. The technique was not new. In the early Middle Ages, school lessons had been based on the explanation and commentary on classical texts ...

We have noted the prevalence of the schoolroom as a metaphor throughout the Cambrai texts, and it is apparent from Baker’s preliminary section to the *Secretum* that something like this model of explanation and commentary was in his mind as

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he prepared to work on the *Cloud of Unknowing*. There is scattered evidence in the
treatises of Baker having employed a commentary method of teaching as he
worked with the nuns, reading from the texts he wrote and collected, and then
explaining them. It is also apparent from the shape of Baker’s entire project at
Cambrai that the availability of spiritual texts to the nuns, in order that they might
learn from them, was a high priority to Baker.

Even so, we have seen that Baker places a stress on the category of
“experience” as determinative of the ability to read such a text with profit. Perhaps
the emphasis Baker places upon interior “relish” in his account of the use of
prayers of aspiration, and the concern of a practitioner of *lectio spiritualis* to
interiorise a text, throws light upon what Baker means by “experience”, and how it
sets his practice in using spiritual texts in his teaching apart from the methods used
by scholastics in a university.

In the early pages of the *Secretum*, a text which is directly concerned with
how to teach the use of a mystical book, Baker quotes Harphius writing that:

> No man is able by ye profoundnesse of his Learning [...] Perfectly to
> Comprehend or Understand; but it is only Learned & understood by
> experience by him, to whom ye Divine Goodnesse & liberality shall
> please to impart ye same experience & knowledg.  

We have noted that Baker consistently follows this perspective. He often contrasts
the scholastic manner, which for him is characterised by “ye profoundnesse of ... Learning”, with what he calls the mystic manner, an approach which can be
followed even by the humble untutored soul who, because of purity of spirit, may
possesses experience of “this high & Divine knowledg”.

It is here that we have encountered some of Baker’s least convincing
attempts to reconcile the demand for what really seems to amount to book learning
as necessary to progress in contemplation with his claim that “all ye books in ye


world will not alone suffice for ye directing and guiding of a soul in ye way of perfection [...] unless he be withall immediately illuminated & directed by God”.

Perhaps part of the answer to this seeming chasm in Baker’s thinking is to be located precisely in this concern to promote an interior encounter with God, understood as closely associated with the emotional movements of the soul which occur in *lectio spiritualis*.

By exploring the similarities between the type of reading Baker describes in his passages addressing the use of affective aspirations we have noted the extent to which he comes very close to identifying the experience of interior emotional movements during or as a result of reading with what he otherwise speaks of as “ye said divine call”, or one of its many synonyms. The stress placed within the *lectio spiritualis* tradition upon the experience and expressions of the individual’s affective life seem to go some way towards allowing us to appreciate what Baker is describing in such moments, and towards understanding why he might wish to associate it so closely with the activity of God in the contemplative’s soul. “For God often-times by ye means of books doth call a man, & doth intimate his will unto him,” as he wrote in *Discernment*.

In *lectio spiritualis*, the focus “in the reading process moves from outer text to inner person”. In Baker’s work, all types of reading are focused upon the inner person, and it is in his quest for this interiority that Baker is sometimes driven to question the value of reading as a spiritual technique unless it is a reading which opens the reader to the interior motions which he believes carry the potential for an encounter with God.

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2. AFFECTIVITY AND INTELLECT

Baker writes, of the reason why he has invested such energies in the creation of a range of spiritual treatises for the nuns of Cambrai, supplementing his written guidance with his personal help:

And the reason, (as before I haue said), why so few of well-minded & apt soules doe attaine to contemplation or make progresse in spirit, is because they have no instructions saue those generall of bookes that are made for all, and haue not besides some instuctions proper for their individuall & perticular spiritts.53

In the previous chapter we have seen that, in the case of his pupil Gertrude More, Baker believed that the “instuctions proper” for her “individuall spiritt” had to do with the process of “getting into her interior”. I have suggested in my consideration of the Dame Gertrude More that Baker intends the young nun to be exemplary of most aspirants to contemplation, and that we should therefore understand him to be writing with a wider purpose than simply that of describing one individual. Thus when Baker writes as follows about More, we should understand him to be addressing all those who aspire to contemplation:

... all the difficultie was for her entrie and getting into her interior, and for to learne how she should leade an internall life; which indeed she did not knowe what it meant, nor had heard much of it; and yet reallie she had a privie divin Call to it.54

The concept of the “interior” of the person is closely associated in Baker’s mind with leading an “internall life”, with his understanding of the “divin Call”, and of the “privie” or private self. And the principal mode Baker had come to know, through his own difficulties in trying to practise contemplative prayer, of getting into one’s interior was by finding the right books, suited to guiding the individual aspirant in the way that was right for him or her. But, as the previous section has argued, Baker understands the use of these texts, even when they are primarily

54 Baker, Dame Gertrude More. 20.
intended to provide information, as going beyond the uses of the schoolroom and of their very nature intended to promote an interior encounter with God.

Beginning her discussion of devotional reading and the private self in late medieval England, Jennifer Bryan borrows from the Syon Abbey Brigittine canon, Richard Whytford, a pre-dissolution English author with some of whose writings Baker was familiar, his definition of contemplative life as “a diligent inward beholding with desire of heart”. She writes that

His definition encompasses four categories that had, over the previous two hundred years, become central to the discourses of private devotional reading and self-construction in England: diligence, or “business”; inwardness, often associated with solitude and/or spiritual isolation; beholding; and desire.\(^{55}\)

Whytford was writing in about 1532, in an English religious landscape very different to that familiar a century later to Augustine Baker. Nevertheless (as has already been observed) in spite of the upheavals of the sixteenth century in spirituality “medieval tendencies actually continued for a long time”\(^{56}\), and the reader of the Cambrai treatises will note parallels in this understanding of contemplative life with several of Baker’s preoccupations: especially with regard to what Whytford calls “diligence”, the sense of the contemplative path as a task to be undertaken and “prosecuted”, and the association of interiority with affectivity, which he terms “desire of heart”.

Perhaps the clearest pointer towards Baker’s understanding of interiority comes from the fact that he differs from Whytford in tending to deploy metaphors of hearing rather than seeing when he addresses the interior encounter with God. This is surely no accident in an author whose preoccupation is with written texts, and we have noted the extent to which Baker’s imagery and vocabulary of the divine encounter are regularly drawn from the realm of texts, books, voices and


speech, such as would be discovered in reading. For Baker reading functions as one of the central modes of access to the divine lights and calls, with which he is so much concerned, both by offering guidance towards the encounter with God on the path of contemplative prayer, and by having the potential to become the momentary locus, through the affective movements of the soul, of a dimension of that encounter.

Baker understands the book as a potential bridge for the aspiring contemplative towards the interior landscape that he sees as the territory she is called by God to inhabit. In so far as a written text can promote the individual aspirant’s apprehension and appreciation of that landscape, to that extent a book is a useful tool. If the book impedes that movement into the interior, or becomes the focus of attention, it is to be avoided completely. As I have suggested, Baker nowhere fully resolves the paradox that in his own case, and that of many others, no progress at all was possible without a book to act as a guide. Part of the reason for this lack of final resolution may be seen to lie in Baker’s conviction that the path towards the interiority which for him lies at the core of the mystical tradition, an interiority which he believes is promoted by the texts he writes, translates and collects at Cambrai, is to be found in an “Exercise of Perfect Love”, 57 or “a prosecution of the Exercise of the Will”. 58 In this respect, Baker is to be firmly located among those who teach an affective reinterpretation of Dionysian spirituality. I have suggested in earlier chapters of this study that what Coolman calls the “interpolation of love over knowledge”, 59 to be discovered in this spiritual tradition, has a part to play in Baker’s disparagement of religious texts.

In a suggestive essay, Sarah Coakley contrasts two approaches to an understanding of the human self which she argues may be taken as representative

57 Baker, Secretum, 8–9.
58 Baker, Secretum, 10.
59 Coolman, 85.
of a growing distinctiveness between western and eastern Christianity emerging from the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{60} It is with her exposition and analysis of the views to be discovered in west that I am concerned here.

Coakley argues that an examination of texts from this period, of which she singles out the \textit{Cloud of Unknowing}, suggests that from the fourteenth century onwards western Christian spiritual texts are to be found “driving wedges between faculties in the self”.\textsuperscript{61} She writes that she detects manifestations of:

\begin{quote}
\textit{an emerging sense of optionality} in the West in this period about what constitutes the ultimate locus of the self; the \textit{perichotetic} cooperation of memory, understanding and will authoritatively found in Augustine, is, in various ways, rent apart disjunctively in the spiritual texts of this time.\textsuperscript{62}
\end{quote}

The option which Coakley is most concerned to explore, and which throws light on Baker’s outlook, is that which privileges the faculty of the will.

As has been noted by other commentators on the subject of the relationship between the faculties of the soul as understood by the western mystical tradition, notably Bernard McGinn, for much of the tradition up to the thirteenth century love and knowledge, activities of the will and the intellect respectively, are unified in the realisation that “love \textit{is} a form of knowing”. However, a disjunction between the faculties of knowing and loving appears with the thirteenth century Victorine writer, Thomas Gallus.\textsuperscript{63} It is to this disjunction that Coakley also draws attention.

She writes: “Gallus held the view that there are two quite distinct ways of relating to God corresponding to this difference between knowing and loving”.\textsuperscript{64} Coakley finds in Gallus’ theology, which locates mystical union with God quite

\begin{footnotes}
\item[61] Coakley, “Visions of the Self.” 89.
\item[62] Coakley, “Visions of the Self.” 89.
\item[64] Coakley, “Visions of the Self.” 96.
\end{footnotes}
explicitly and exclusively in the affective powers of the soul, the originating moment of this process of disjunction within the human self.

McGinn writes of the same topic:

Gallus’ language about the relation of knowing to loving in the ascent to God stresses a rather sharp separation or cutting off of all intellectual operations [...] For Gallus and his followers, affective union no longer seems as interested in subsuming the lower forms of intellectual activity as it is in kicking them downstairs.65

McGinn’s metaphor of divine union kicking intellectual activity downstairs reminds us in the present context of Augustine Baker’s language of “all the bookes in the world ... burnt & lost”,66 and for good reason. It seems that in many respects the two perspectives share a common root in the affective Dionysian interpolation of love over knowledge. Baker, as we have seen, is no theologian. But his outlook in practice corresponds closely to that identified by McGinn as characterising the followers of Thomas Gallus.

Coakely’s analysis of the tradition stemming from Gallus identifies several significant results for western Christian spirituality from the disjunction she identifies. What she terms “the choice of will over intellect as the faculty of divine interchange”,67 the notion of contemplation as an exercise for the naked will alone, is especially pertinent here.

One of Baker’s ways of distinguishing between the value of different spiritual authors for his students is the distinction between “them that proceed after the scholastick manner & them that goe after the mystick.”68 Baker tells us in Directions D that meditation in each of these “manners” may be distinguished by the priority given to the understanding by scholastic authors, while for mystic authors “the will is the beginninge & the end”.69 The role played in Baker’s

65 McGinn, 13.
68 Baker, Directions D, 82.
69 Baker, Directions D, 83.
spirituality by the strong distinction between the understanding and the will, and
the associated dualism of knowledge and affectivity, with a priority always
accorded to will, goes at least some way towards explaining his paradoxical
attitude towards the learned activity he frequently finds himself involved in.

In the Secretum Baker writes of the Cloud author:

And we may well Conceive th't he was endued w'th Humility, who
was Come to such experience in matters of Spirit; & there is no
doubt but th't he wrot it cheifly out of ye Experience he had had in
himselfe, and otherwise could not have written what he Hath done,
& as he hath done.\(^{70}\)

In that same commentary, Baker makes much use of one of his most significant
sources, Harphius, the fifteenth century Flemish Franciscan, Hendrick Herp.
Harphius stands in the tradition identified by Mc Ginn, Coakley and others as
originating with Thomas Gallus, having inherited this way of reading the pseudo-
Dionysian tradition from the thirteenth century Carthusian, Hugh of Balma.\(^{71}\) Both
from Harphius and from the Cloud-author, as well as other writers of the same
outlook, Baker derives a concept of “experience” of matters of the spirit which
locates such events exclusively within what Baker understands as the “Exercise of
the Will”.\(^{72}\) Only practitioners of such a spirituality can be reckoned as
“experienced” in the sense in which Baker intends it.

The interior landscape, into which Baker intends his students to be initiated,
and of which he hopes that they will become habitual inhabitants, requires of them
a familiarity with its features, and to that end Baker writes those treatises which
comprise a curriculum for the contemplative life. But, for all the value Baker
places upon it, this is the work of the intellect, and in the last analysis can only ever
be of secondary value, unless the contemplative aspirant acquires the experience of

\(^{70}\) Baker, Secretum, 4.
\(^{71}\) For Hugh of Balma, see: Martin, Dennis D., trans & intro. Carthusian Spirituality. The
\(^{72}\) Baker, Secretum, 10.
a different order, through the “exercise of the will” that will qualify her to “experience in matters of Spirit”.

This aspect of the mystical tradition as Baker received it appears to play a major part in leading him to undercut his own primary activity.

3. CONCLUSION

There is a passage in Baker’s autobiographical material in the *Secretum* which recounts a reading experience he underwent, as a consequence of his brief experience of what he describes as “Passive Contemplation”. Baker is addressing the positive effects of this event, and tells us:

The Second good Effect of ye said Contemplation was Illumination, & that was great & strange. For one token I tell you, th' after ye said Contemplation, ye same day, or the day following, our Scholar taking into his hand a Spirituall book [...] w[ch] before he used to read, & now would look upon as it were for his Spirituall Recreation, & he now looking upon it did find th' he now understood it in a far higher & truer manner then ever before he did; he now penetrated spiritually into it, w[ch] before he never did nor could ...  

Baker expands upon his “higher & truer” understanding of the text, stating that “for this understanding of his he used no manner of Study”, but rather the sense “did plainly appear unto him”. He tells us that “it seemed to him th' before he had fed himselfe only w[th] ye Letter, & th' now first of all he understood the Sense & Spirit”.  

The passage is, like much of the autobiographical account in *Secretum*, something of a curiosity. Sometimes, Baker uses a language of “illumination” to characterise the quality necessary to make the reading of books spiritually fruitful. But it would be fanciful to suppose that he is using the term in the same sense in this account of his own prayer experience and in his advice about the reading

74 Baker, *Secretum*, 57.
75 Baker, *Secretum*, 57.
process in general. I have attempted in the preceding two sections to sketch out two
approaches to Baker’s disjunctive approach to religious reading which may prove
more fruitful.

The tradition of *lectio spiritualis* offers an insight into Baker’s evident
preoccupation with the affective response of the reader to the material she is
reading, and throws light upon the prioritisation of the reader’s response over any
other consideration, to the point where Baker comes close to identifying affective
response with experience of God. The affective reinterpretation of the pseudo-
Dionysian tradition, as communicated by a long succession of mystical authors,
many of whom Baker had read and used at Cambrai, presents a focus upon the
faculty of the will to the virtual exclusion of other values in the spiritual path.
When interiority is viewed through these two lenses, it perhaps becomes possible
to appreciate Baker’s complicated relationship with his own texts.
Conclusion

This study arose from the discovery of a very strong disjunction in Augustine Baker’s presentation of the role of reading in the spiritual life. He worked vigorously over a period of years to furnish the newly founded community of English Benedictine nuns of Cambrai with a library of spiritual texts, many of them of his own teachings, as well as a range of translations and compilations, ultimately creating so extensive a corpus of spiritual texts that his output has been termed a very “world of books”.\(^1\) Baker taught that “God often-times by ye means of books doth call a man, & doth intimate his will unto him.”\(^2\) But it is also true that he disparages the necessity for the use of books in the spiritual life, claiming that:

> The way to contemplation being an internall and spirituall way, it must be acknowledged that the supreame spirit, w^ch is God, is the principall or onlie teacher of that waie. The soule her-selfe by reason of her natural darknes is not able of her-selfe to find it; much less is another man able to shew it her.\(^3\)

Because of this, he goes so far as to write that it would little matter “if all the bookes in the world were burnt & lost”.\(^4\)

I have sought to discover how this bookish monk could apparently both cherish and dismiss the role of religious reading as part of the contemplative

monastic life, a way of living which appears itself always to have been mediated to him by way of books.

After a survey of the secondary literature about Augustine Baker’s work, Chapter 1 of this study concluded that no serious attempts have been made to approach the question of spiritual reading in previous studies of Baker, very largely because most work undertaken on the subject until very recently has approached Baker from the perspective of the digest volume, *Sancta Sophia*. I have argued that this can no longer be regarded as an authoritative source for the study of Augustine Baker. It is better regarded as the most valuable of several witnesses to the reception of Baker’s teachings among the first generation of his disciples among the monastics of the newly re-established English Benedictine Congregation; and the secondary literature springing from it is, until very recently, to a very large extent a series of commentaries upon *Sancta Sophia*, a text that has often been understood to present the official voice of the spirituality of that monastic Congregation.

In chapter 2, I argued that the literary form taken by *Sancta Sophia* has tended to generate an image of Baker as the self-conscious author of a mystical system, whereas the Cambrai treatises make very clear the occasional, pedagogic, and sometimes directly personal nature of Baker’s project between 1627 and 1632. In essence, Baker’s work at Cambrai involved furnishing the nuns with spiritual guidance, both in the form of personal direction and that of the writing of texts. With regard to the literary dimensions of that work, Baker was building a library of suitable texts, his own and those of others, not setting out to fashion his own handbook of mystical spirituality. At the same time, I argued that the promotion within the secondary literature of the idea that Baker’s was nothing more than an anti-Ignatian perspective, involving a rediscovery of the outlook of the English fourteenth century has disguised the actual context of Baker’s work within the renewed affective apophatic spirituality of the early seventeenth century, a tradition
that until he came to write had largely passed England by. His aim was to give the Cambrai nuns access to an appropriate range of texts from within that tradition, suited to their specialist way of life and useful to them for guidance in contemplation when Baker himself was not available to guide them directly.

In Chapter 3 I argued that Baker, in common with the outlook of early modern Catholicism, takes for granted a perspective upon the nature and purpose of the monastic life, and of the contemplative’s “spiritual course” or journey of prayer, which is more explicitly articulated in the literature of the period than has been the case in more recent eras. This makes it more straightforward for Baker to write down his instructions for his contemplative students, effectively to construct a contemplative curriculum for them to use in their living and praying, since he assumes that for the most part they will all encounter similar issues as they follow their path to God.

I went on to suggest that there are two different types of spiritual reading envisaged by Baker, and that while they are related they are not identical. The texts he provided for the nuns are intended to act as guides to the path of prayer they have set out to follow, and to the difficulties and dangers of a spiritual life. In this sense they are instructional texts. But Baker also intends certain texts to be specifically devotional, to act as nourishment for a process of affective prayer. He teaches his students how to read both sorts of texts.

What both forms of reading share in common is Baker’s concern that his readers should give an absolute priority to what he terms the “divine voice” or the “call of God”, a personal manifestation of the will of God for the individual soul, which he believes can become apparent to the contemplative aspirant through the process of reading, or independently of it. If the aspirant is assisted by a text to hear that call, Baker approves of this process, but he deprecates the notion that a book in and of itself can guide a soul to God in the absence of the divine call. By contrast, he is clear that divine guidance can be provided irrespective of the availability of
religious texts. What remains unclear after an examination of a range of Baker’s texts is how an aspirant to contemplation is to behave when seemingly told at one and the same time to make use of religious texts and to be prepared to dismiss them completely.

Chapter 4 pursued this inquiry further by examining two specific texts by Baker, the *Secretum* which promises to provide a commentary on the *Cloud of Unknowing* and the *Dame Gertrude More* which offers an account of Baker’s teaching practices at Cambrai. Although each text offers further insights into Baker’s approach to teaching the Cambrai nuns, neither provides material which would enable a resolution of the question being investigated.

In Chapter 5 I explored two perspectives which appear to throw light upon the disjunction in Baker’s works about the value of religious books. The first, that of the reading theory of *lectio spiritualis*, a mode of religious reading which succeeded the now better-known medieval monastic practice of *lectio divina*, suggests that Baker places his emphasis upon the affective response of the contemplative to what she reads, coming close to identifying this movement of soul with the divine call. The second perspective involves the recognition that, in the affective Dionysian tradition of mystical spirituality, Baker inherited an outlook which was itself inclined to behave disjunctively, prioritising the interior faculty of the will over that of the intellect, resulting in the view that human knowledge plays no part in the spiritual encounter with God.

At the end of this study I suggest, therefore, that when Baker speaks of the soul who will “prosecute prayer, abstraction, & undergo necessary mortifications, obseruinge God & his call both interiorly & exteriorly, & so forsakinge & renounsininge himselfe in spirit & body, hauinge God & his loue, will & honour for his finall intention” being able to “walke cleerly, securely, & arriue to an happy
end” even though “all the bookes in the world were burnt & lost”, Baker is not simply offering a rhetorical flourish - as Cressy’s digest has led us to believe for almost four hundred years. Baker means what he says, and is pointed towards this position by the very books and reading practices he has learned from. He does occasionally demonstrate an awareness of the tensions within his position, as I have suggested in Chapter 3. Here we also noted that Baker is at his least clear when he attempts explicitly to hold together two positions which may very well be irreconcilable.

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