The Experience of God in the De Contemplando Deo of William of Saint Thierry

Wolfgang C. Schroeter

Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses

Part of the Medieval History Commons, Philosophy Commons, and the Religion Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses/2202
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Professor E. Rozanne Elder, of the Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, for competently and patiently directing this thesis, and Professors John R. Sommerfeldt and Guntram Bischoff for their helpful suggestions as readers of the thesis. I thank Ms. Judith Singleton for help in locating source material, Doctor Robert Mareck for an extended loan of material from the Institute of Cistercian Studies library, and Reverend Stanislaus Ceglar for permission to quote from private correspondence. For their interest and encouragement I thank my superior, Abbot John Eudes Bamberger, and my monastic brethren, the monks of Our Lady of the Genesee Abbey, Piffard, New York; Bishop Paul V. Donovan and Monsignor Joseph R. Byrne, with whom I lived while studying in Kalamazoo; and, last but not least, my parents, brothers, sister, and other relatives and friends.

Patrick H. Ryan
INFORMATION TO USERS

This material was produced from a microfilm copy of the original document. While the most advanced technological means to photograph and reproduce this document have been used, the quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help you understand markings or patterns which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting thru an image and duplicating adjacent pages to insure you complete continuity.

2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a large round black mark, it is an indication that the photographer suspected that the copy may have moved during exposure and thus cause a blurred image. You will find a good image of the page in the adjacent frame.

3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., was part of the material being photographed the photographer followed a definite method in "sectioning" the material. It is customary to begin photoing at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue photoing from left to right in equal sections with a small overlap. If necessary, sectioning is continued again — beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.

4. The majority of users indicate that the textual content is of greatest value, however, a somewhat higher quality reproduction could be made from "photographs" if essential to the understanding of the dissertation. Silver prints of "photographs" may be ordered at additional charge by writing the Order Department, giving the catalog number, title, author and specific pages you wish reproduced.

5. PLEASE NOTE: Some pages may have indistinct print. Filmed as received.

University Microfilms International
300 North Zeib Road
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106 USA
St. John's Road, Tyler's Green
High Wycombe, Bucks, England HP10 8HR

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
RYAN, Patrick H.
THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD IN THE DE CONTEMPLANDO
DEO OF WILLIAM OF SAINT THIERRY.

Western Michigan University, M.A., 1977
History, medieval

Xerox University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ......................................................... ii  
Table of Contents ......................................................... iii  
Abbreviations ............................................................... v  
Bibliography ................................................................. viii  
Preface ........................................................................ xxix

## PART I. INTRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PART II. THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD

| IV | THE NATURE AND DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD IN THE **DE CONTEMPLANDO DEO** | 48 |

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Nature of the Experience of God in the De contemplando Deo</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Description of the Experience of God in the De contemplando Deo</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>A COMPARISON OF THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD IN THE DE CONTEMPLANDO DEO WITH SOME OF THE CLASSICS OF WESTERN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY AND SOME CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSIONS OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Place of the De contemplando Deo in the History of Western Christian Spirituality</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The De contemplando Deo and Some Contemporary Expressions of Spiritual Experience</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>AN EXAMINATION OF THE WORDS USED TO DESCRIBE THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD IN THE DE CONTEMPLANDO DEO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Self</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEME AND VOCABULARY OF THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD IN WILLIAM'S LATER WORKS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCSL</td>
<td>Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina. Turnhout: 1954-.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ColLOCR</td>
<td>Collectanea Ordinis Cisterciensium Reformatorum. Westmalle: 1934-64 (1965-: CollCist).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td>Dictionnaire de spiritualité. Paris: Beauchesne, 1937-.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPQ</td>
<td>International Philosophical Quarterly. New York: 1961-.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Throughout this thesis I have tried not to abbreviate the titles of the works of William of Saint Thierry. On occasion I have abbreviated two of these titles, in this way:
BC  Brevis commentatio in cantici canticorum priora
duo capita. PL 184, 407-436.

IL  Soliloquium "In lacu miseriae". PL 184, 365-67A.
I. Primary Sources:
The Works of William of Saint Thierry

Aenigma fidei. PL 180, 397-440.

Brevis commentatio in cantici canticorum priora duo capita. PL 184, 407-436.

Commentarius in cantica canticorum e scriptis Sancti Ambrosii. PL 15, 1945-2060.

De contemplando Deo. PL 184, 367-80.


De natura corporis et animae. PL 180, 695-726.
De natura et dignitate amoris. PL 184, 379-408.
Thomas, Robert, ed. Guillaume de S Thierry: Nature et

De sacramento altaris. PL 180, 341-66.

Disputatio adversus Petrum Abaelardum. PL 180, 249-328.

Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei. PL 184, 307-354.
Davy, M.-M., ed. and trans. Un traité de la vie solitaire:
Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei par Guillaume de
Saint-Thierry. 2 parts. Études de philosophie
(part I), and 334 (part II).

Déchanet, J.-M., ed. Guillaume de Saint-Thierry: Lettre
aux frères du Mont-Dieu (Lettre d’or). SC 223

Thomas, Robert, ed. Guillaume de St. Thierry: Lettre aux
frères du Mont-Dieu. PC 33 and 34 (1968). Pp. 239
(vol. 33), and 159 (vol. 34).
The Golden Epistle: A Letter to the Brethren at Mont Dieu.

Epistola Guillelmi abbatis, ad Gaufridum Carnotensem episco-
pum, et Bernardum abbatem Clarae-Vallensem (Ep. 326:
"Confundor . . ."). PL 182, 531-33.

Excerpta ex libris S. Gregorii papae super cantica canti-
corum. PL 180, 441-74.

Expositio altera super cantica canticorum. PL 180, 473-546.
Davy, M.-M., ed. Guillaume de Saint-Thierry: Commentaire
Pp. 244.

Déchanet, J.-M., ed. Guillaume de Saint-Thierry: Exposé
418.

Thomas, Robert, ed. Guillaume de S Thierry: Commentaire
sur le cantique des cantiques. PC 9-12 (1961).
Pp. 131 (vol. 9), 131 (vol. 10), 131 (vol. 11),
and 151 (vol. 12).

Exposition on the Song of Songs. Trans. Mother Columba
xlviii + 169.

Expositio in epistolam ad Romanos. PL 180, 547-694.
In lacu miseriae. PL 184, 365-67.

Meditativae orationes. PL 180, 205-248.


Speculum fidei. PL 180, 365-98.

Vita Bernardi. PL 185, 225-66.

Déchanet, J.-M., ed. Œuvres choisie de Guillaume de Saint-Thierry: De la nature du corps et de l’âme; De la nature et dignité de l’amour; Sur le cantique des cantiques (extraits). Bibliothèque philo-


II. Primary Sources:
The Works of Other Authors

A. Biblical

Biblia sacra vulgatae editionis Sixti V pont. max. jussu
recognita et Clementis VIII auctoritate edita.
Rome: 1598; 5th ed., Tournai: Desclée and Lefebvre,
1894. Pp. xxviii + 694 (Vetus testamentum) + 186
(Novus testamentum) + (24) (Appendices).

B. Classical


Loeb Classical Library. 1929; rpt. Cambridge: Har­

Seneca. Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales, I. Trans. Richard
W. Gummere. Loeb Classical Series, no. 75. 1917;
 xv + 467.

C. Early Christian—fourth and fifth centuries

Athanasius, Saint. Life of St. Anthony. Trans. Sister Mary
J. Deferrari. FC 15 (1952), 125-216.

Augustine, Saint. Confessio n um lib r i t r e dec i m . Corpus
Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, XXXIII, 1.
xxxiv + 396.

Confessions. Trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin. 1961; rpt. Balti­

De civitate Dei, libri XI-XXII. CCSL 48 (1955).

The City of God. Trans. Marcus Dods. A Select Library of
the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian
Church, 1st Series, vol. 2, pp. 2-511. 1886; rpt.

__De trinitate__, libri XV. CCSL 50 (libri I-XII) and 50a (libri XIII-XV) (1968). Pp. ci + 775.


__Opera omnia__. PL 32-46.


D. Medieval

Anselm of Bec-Canterbury, Saint. __Opera omnia__. PL 158, and 159, 9-272.


__Sermones in cantica canticorum__. PL 183, 785-1198.


Gregory the Great, Saint. *Homilia XXVII; Habita ad populum in basilica sancti Pancrati martyris, die natalis ejus*. PL 76, 1204-1210.


______ *Libellus alter de divina contemplatione*. PL 147, 459-64.


______ *Opera omnia*. PL 202, 405-1146.


Walz, P. A. "Augustini de Dacia O. P. 'Rotulus pugillaris.'" Angelicum, 6 (1929), 253-78.


E. Sixteenth century


F. Twentieth century


III. Secondary Sources:
Studies on William of Saint Thierry


Ceglar, Stanislaus. Letter to me. 9 May 1975.


"Ascèse et vertu d'après Guillaume de Saint-Thierry." RAM, 19 (1938), 225-44.

"La connaissance de Dieu d'après Guillaume de Saint-Thierry." RSR, 28 (1938), 430-56.

"La psychologie de la foi d'après Guillaume de Saint-Thierry." RTAM, 10 (1938), 5-35.

"La théologie spirituelle de la Lettre d'or." VS, 53 (1937), Supplément, pp. (86-115).

"Les trois étapes de la vie spirituelle d'après Guillaume de Saint-Thierry." RSR, 23 (1933) 569-88.


"Autour d'une querelle fameuse: De l'apologie à la lettre d'or." RAM, 20 (1939), 3-34.


"Guillaume de Saint-Thierry." DS. VI, 1241-63.

"Guillaume de Saint-Thierry." VS, 53 (1937), 40-64.


"Le 'naturam sequi' chez Guillaume de Saint-Thierry." ColloQR, 7 (1940), 141-48.

"Le pseudo-prologue du De contemplando Deo." Citeaux in de Nederlanden, 8 (1957), 5-12.


Pennington, M. Basil. "Two Treatises on Love." Privately circulated, to be published in a volume of the CS Series.


"La préface de la lettre aux frères du Mont-Dieu." *Rueve Bénédictine,* 36 (1924), 229-47.


IV. Other Secondary Sources


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.


Corblishley, T. "Mysticism." NCE. II. 175-79.


Hamon, Auguste. "Coeur (Sacre)." DS. II, 1023-46.


___________ "Getting Acquainted with the Cistercian Fathers." *Monastic Exchange,* vol. 6, no. 3 (1974), 63-79.


"The Practical Demands for the Experience of God in our Monastic Life Today" was the theme chosen for the 1974 General Chapter of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance, the monastic order to which I belong. When I began this thesis in early 1974, Cistercian monks and nuns throughout the world were discussing this theme on the local and national levels, and I hoped that a thesis on some aspect of the experience of God in medieval monastic tradition might provide helpful background material for these deliberations. To make my research as specific as possible, I chose to concentrate on the experience of God in one spiritual treatise, William of Saint Thierry's *De contemplando Deo* (On Contemplating God). When I started to work on the thesis I put the present monastic discussion within mental brackets in order that the research involved in writing the thesis might not be influenced by the more immediate concerns of this discussion. In the conclusion I will try to relate the results of my research to the present monastic situation.

The thesis begins with three chapters of necessary introductory material on the terms which make up its title. Chapter One contains an introduction to my favorite medieval monastic author, William of Saint Thierry, and a description of how this thesis fits into the present ferment of studies on William. Chapter Two is an explanation of the date at xxix
which the *De contemplando Deo* was written and of the reasons why it may be considered William's first work, an account of the various editions and English translations of this treatise, and a consideration of its structure and tone. Chapter Three proceeds to a descriptive definition of the experience of God and an exposition of the degrees of intensity with which this experience may occur.

Once these preliminaries have been treated, it is possible to consider more directly the subject matter of the thesis. Chapter Four comments on the nature of the experience of God portrayed by William in the *De contemplando Deo* and on his manner of describing this experience. Chapter Five underlines the unique character of William's description of the experience of God in the *De contemplando Deo* by comparing it with some of the classics of western Christian spirituality as well as with some contemporary expressions of spiritual experience. Chapter Six highlights this uniqueness by examining in detail the words William uses in the *De contemplando Deo* to depict his experience of God. Finally, Chapter Seven reveals the dynamism of William's earliest thoughts on the experience of God, contained in the *De contemplando Deo*, by tracing the development of the theme and vocabulary of the experience of God in his later works.

My aim in writing this thesis has been to discover and to describe something of the vitality and warmth of the spiritual wisdom of William of Saint Thierry. I have not been
concerned with controversies in the field of William studies, and I am happy to say that only by way of rare exception have I found it necessary to criticize the views of others who have written about William. In the few instances in which it has been necessary to advert to disputed questions, I have expressed an opinion. But I wish to make it clear that I have tried to concentrate on the spiritual doctrine of the De contemplando Deo rather than on differences of opinion about William of Saint Thierry, because I think an irenic approach to the study of the De contemplando Deo best reflects the spirit in which William composed it.

This thesis has been written as part of an academic program of studies and the reader is invited to examine it with a critical eye, judging its line of reasoning and its conclusions in the light of all available evidence. I believe, however, that the reader will best understand my own intentions, and come closest to the mind and heart of William, by reading the thesis with a contemplative eye, striving to taste and to see something of the vision which drove William of Saint Thierry to write so compellingly of the experience of God in his De contemplando Deo.
CHAPTER ONE

WILLIAM OF SAINT THIERRY

A Brief Biography

William of Saint Thierry was born in Liège ca. 1070, studied at Reims from ca. 1088 to ca. 1094, entered the Benedictine abbey of Saint Nicaise at Reims ca. 1094, and became abbot of the Benedictine abbey of Saint Thierry, a few miles north-west of Reims, in 1121.¹ At Saint Thierry he wrote a number of treatises on the spiritual life, and he continued to write after he resigned his abbatial duties in 1135 to enter the Cistercian monastery of Signy,² where


² The dates of William's works have been studied by a French Benedictine specialist in medieval monastic spirituality, André Wilmart, "La série et la date des ouvrages de Guillaume de Saint-Thierry," Revue Mabillon, 14 (1924), 157-67 (hereafter cited as "La série"); and, more recently, by Ceglar, William of Saint Thierry: The Chronology, pp. 239, 378, and passim.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
he died on 8 September 1147.3

The Context of the Present Thesis

During the present century an increasing number of studies of the life and writings of William have appeared. In 1942, Jean-Marie Déchanet, a French Benedictine monk and the foremost William scholar today, described how a number of studies of William in the 1920's and 1930's had helped to bring him to the attention of intellectuals and mystics (William of St. Thierry: The Man, 152-64). The appearance of twentieth-century editions and translations of a number of William's works, beginning with the French scholar Marie-Madeleine Davy's edition and translation of the Meditativae orationes in 1934, has also helped to promote interest in William.4

3 For the date of William's death I again follow Ceglar, William of Saint Thierry: The Chronology, p. 241, where he holds for 1147, correcting Déchanet, who holds for 1148 (William of St. Thierry: The Man, p. 108), and Marie-Madeleine Davy, who holds for 1148 or 1149 (Un traité de la vie solitaire, II: Lettre aux frères du Mont-Dieu [Paris: Vrin, 1946], p. 34).

4 Details on the various editions and translations of William's works may be found in the bibliography of the present thesis. Here it must be noted that in 1942 Déchanet severely criticized the work of Davy which had appeared to that date for its lack of comprehension of William and poor editing and translating (William of St. Thierry: The Man, 155-58), and that students of William tend to be cautious in using Davy's work. Déchanet himself has edited and translated some of William's works, as have two other well-known William scholars, Jacques Hourlier, a French Benedictine monk, and Robert Thomas, a French Cistercian monk.
Throughout this time, works on William have been either full-scale examinations of his life and works, investigations of some of his major theological themes, or more particularized studies of one or another aspect of his spiritual teaching. During the past decade a tendency toward greater specialization has developed. Of the six doctoral candidates who completed dissertations on William during the years 1969-72, Thomas Tomasic and E. Rozanne Elder treated one theme in William's writings as a whole.

---

5 Déchanet's William of St. Thierry: The Man; and André Adam, Guillaume de Saint-Thierry, sa vie et ses œuvres (Bourg: Imprimerie du Journal de l'Ain, 1923).


(the theological virtues, and Christology, respectively);^ 8 Rita Riccio and John Anderson studied only one of William's works (the Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei, and the Aenigma fidei, respectively);^ 9 Louis Savary limited himself to one set of themes in one of William's works (psychological themes in the Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei);^ 10 and Stanislaus Ceglar, in the second part of his dissertation, minutely examined the sources and text of one of William's works (the De natura et dignitate amoris), William's part in another work (the Brevis commentatio), and his authorship of two other works (the In lacu miseriae, and the Reply to Cardinal Matthew).^ 11

Studies of various aspects of William's doctrine on


the experience of God have shown a similar movement toward
greater specialization. Théodore Koehler, at the Marianist
seminary in Fribourg, Switzerland, when writing in 1964
(later at the University of Dayton, Ohio), and Pierre Miquel,
abbot of the Benedictine abbey of Ligugé in France, writing
in 1968, considered William's works as a whole.\textsuperscript{12} But
Sister Monique Simon, a Cistercian nun of the convent of
La Paix-Dieu in France, writing in 1973, limited herself to
one of his works, the \textit{Meditativae orationes}\textsuperscript{13}

Such specialized studies, if they are able to shed
light on one small part of William's work, may also prepare
the way for a more accurate appreciation of the whole. I
would like to continue this trend toward greater specializa-
tion in William studies by concentrating on William's
doctrine on the experience of God in one of his shorter
works, his first work, the \textit{De contemplando Deo}.

\begin{enumerate}
\item Théodore Koehler, "Thème et vocabulaire de la 'Frui-
tion divine' chez Guillaume de Saint-Thierry," RAM, 40
(1964), 139-60. Pierre Miquel, "Les caractères de l'ex-
périence religieuse d'après Guillaume de Saint-Thierry,"
CollCist, 30 (1968), 3-14.
\item Sister Monique Simon, "Le 'face à face' dans les
Méditations de Guillaume de St.-Thierry," CollCist, 35
(1973), 121-36.
\end{enumerate}
CHAPTER TWO

THE DE CONTEMPLANDO DEO

In selecting one of William of Saint Thierry's works in which to examine his doctrine on the experience of God, I have purposely chosen a work from the very earliest years of his writing career. By studying one of these early works, one which may even be considered William's first work, I hope to be able to discern his earliest intuitions on the experience of God, his seminal insights, which served as the source of his later ideas on this subject. Hourlier has written of the De contemplando Deo:

Even though, by the light of later writings, we recognize in this treatise the author's fundamental ideas, they are still imperfectly formed and expressed far less clearly than they will be in subsequent works. William's entire literary endeavor will be directed to making them more precise.¹

¹ On Contemplating God. Prayer. Meditations, The Works of William of St. Thierry, vol. 1, trans. Sister Penelope, CF 3 (1971), 13; hereafter cited as CF 3. Hourlier's original French appears in Guillaume de Saint-Thierry: La contemplation de Dieu, L'oraison de Dom Guillaume, SC 61 (1959), 2nd ed. SC 61 bis (1968), 18; hereafter cited as SC 61 bis. Note that CF 3 uses SC 61, not SC 61 bis. CF 3 also contains translations of William's Oratio (Prayer), Meditativae orationes (Meditations One-Twelve), and another, originally untitled, text (Meditation Thirteen). The Latin texts on which these translations are based are described on page 191 of CF 3. The translation of each work is preceded by an introduction. The introductions to the De contemplando Deo and the Oratio are translations of Hourlier's French introductions to these works in SC 61; the introduction to
Thus I feel that in the De contemplando Deo we may truly drink from the fountainhead of William's doctrine on the experience of God. However, the question of the date of composition of the De contemplando Deo, and that of its place in the chronological sequence of William's works, present problems which must be examined in some detail to clarify the sense in which the De contemplando Deo may be considered William's first work. An adequate introduction to the De contemplando Deo must also concern itself with the various editions and English translations of this treatise, its structure, and the tone which pervades it.  

Meditations One-Twelve is by Hourlier, and does not seem to have appeared elsewhere previously; and the introduction to Meditation Thirteen is a translation of Déchanet's French introduction to this work which appeared in an appendix to his book, Guillaume de Saint-Thierry: L'Homme et son œuvre (Bruges: Beyaert, 1942), pp. 187-91. Parts of Hourlier's French introduction to the De contemplando Deo in SC 61 do not appear in the translation of it in CF 3. Also, for the footnotes of this introduction, and of the text of the De contemplando Deo itself, there is not always an exact correspondence between SC 61 and CF 3. In referring to the introduction or textual footnotes of the De contemplando Deo in SC 61 or in CF 3, it will thus be necessary to mention in each case whether the pertinent passage occurs in SC 61 only, CF 3 only, or both SC 61 and CF 3 (actually, I will refer to SC 61 bis rather than to SC 61; but these two editions are exactly the same for all the references in this thesis).

In accord with my intention of being as specific as possible, I will concentrate in this chapter on the De contemplando Deo itself, and I will only rarely include necessary details on its twelfth-century context through the rest of the thesis. For detailed descriptions of this context, see Hourlier's introduction to the De contemplando Deo (SC 61 bis, 7-48, and CF 3, 3-35), and The Cistercian Spirit: A Symposium in Memory of Thomas Merton, ed. M. Basil Pennington, CSJ (1970).
The Date of the *De contemplando Deo*

From the presently available evidence, it is not possible to determine with absolute certitude either the date of composition of the *De contemplando Deo* or its place in the chronological sequence of William's works. I would like to examine this evidence, however, to benefit from the real, although limited, insight it affords.

In 1924, André Wilmart, a French Benedictine scholar, made a thorough study of William's own list of his works in the preface of his *Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei*, and concluded with an "approximate classification" of William's works, placing the *De contemplando Deo* in the period 1119-28. During the following decades a number of other authors ventured an opinion on the date of the *De contemplando Deo*. Étienne Gilson, renowned French medievalist, placed it in the period 1119-35. Déchanet, Davy, François Vandenbroucke (a Belgian Benedictine specialist in medieval monastic spirituality), and Hourlier were all more precise, dating it "about 1120," "between 1119 and 1122," or "1119-

---


1120.° Ceglar, however, claims:

Déchanet's dating of CD [the De contemplando Deo] and NDA [William's treatise De natura et dignitate amoris] is certainly wrong. It has been shown in Chapter IV that William did not become abbot of St. Thierry before 1121 (around Easter), and this is the terminus post quem, since he composed these two works while he was abbot at St. Thierry. There is no evidence that he wrote or published CD and NDA in the first years of his tenure there. Gilson prudently put the year 1135 as the terminus ante quem of CD and NDA.°

But Ceglar is subsequently more specific in regard to both the terminus post quem and the terminus ante quem of the


° William of Saint Thierry: The Chronology, p. 377. Concerning the date at which William became abbot of Saint Thierry: in a letter to me dated 9 May 1975, written in the midst of "many distractions," Father Ceglar writes that on the basis of a document brought to his attention only after he had completed his dissertation, he now holds that "the change of abbots at St. Thierry must have occurred during the winter of 1120-21, i.e., between Christmas 1120 and before the council of Soissons (not later than March 1121). One can say, therefore, with relatively good precision, that William became abbot at St. Thierry about Feb. 1121." I thank Father Ceglar for his kind permission to quote from this letter.
De contemplando Deo and the De natura et dignitate amoris. In comparing these two works with a treatise entitled Brevis commentatio, he writes: "there are no cogent reasons to date CD and NDA before the mid-twenties of the XII century (1124-26)" (p. 378). Comparing these two works and William's Meditation Eleven with the Reply to Cardinal Matthew, he claims: "Since the Reply may be safely dated in 1132, this year can be taken as the terminus ante quem for the above works [CD, NDA, Meditation Eleven]. CD and NDA must have been composed within the decade 1122-1132" (p. 407).

It seems, therefore, that it is not possible to be more specific in assigning a date to the De contemplando Deo than to say that it was written during the period 1124/26-32, or, allowing a safer margin, 1119-35. Moreover, the situation is complicated by the fact that William may have written the De contemplando Deo over the course of a number of years. Ceglar suggests this when he writes: "At the time [of William's stay at Clairvaux in January 1122, or 1123, or 1124], William's work On Contemplating God may have been far advanced, but it must have received its final touches and could have been published only after his stay at Clairvaux" (p. 158). Déchanet, who holds that the De contemplando Deo dates from William's first years as abbot of Saint Thierry, nevertheless claims that it was "doubt-
less begun at St Nicaise. 7

The possibility that the De contemplando Deo was written over a number of years means that it may overlap some of William's other works. These two possibilities introduce a number of problems into the question of the place of the De contemplando Deo in the chronological sequence of William's works, and it is necessary to study them.

William himself included a list of his works in the preface of his penultimate work, the Epistola ad frateres de Monte Dei. 8 Wilmart, and Hourlier (in SC 61 bis), both interpret this list to indicate that the De contemplando Deo was his first work. 9 Déchanet, Davy, and Thomas also consider it his first work. 10 Vandebroucke claims that the De contemplando Deo was William's second work, written

---

7 William of St. Thierry: The Man, p. 11, and p. 8, note 24. Saint Nicaise was the monastery at which William had been a monk until he became abbot of Saint Thierry.

8 Guillaume de Saint-Thierry: Lettre aux frères du Mont-Dieu (lettre d'or), SC 223 (1975), 132-38; hereafter cited as SC 223. Ceglar holds that the Epistola ad frateres de Monte Dei: "was probably written between 1144 and 1146" (William of Saint Thierry: The Chronology, p. 192).


shortly after his *De natura et dignitate amoris*, but he gives no evidence to support this claim.11

Yet in his introduction to the *Meditations* in CF 3, published in 1971, and thus three years after SC 61 bis, Hourlier holds that most of these *Meditations* are prior to the *De contemplando Deo*. He writes:

> Anyone familiar with William's working methods knows that this [the *Meditations*], even more than other works, could not have been done in a single breath. . . . Analysis of the *Meditations* and comparison with other writings allow one to isolate a considerable number of parts which have been gathered into small units, and then combined to form one whole.12

He suggests that William's thought progressed from the *Meditations* to the *De contemplando Deo* and then to the *De natura et dignitate amoris*, concluding with this suggestion:

> "We might propose that around 1128-1132, William of St Thierry, who has already written his two books on the love of God [the *De contemplando Deo* and the *De natura et dignitate amoris*], adds to them a collection of prayers [the *Meditations*] most of which are anterior to this time" (p. 86). But Hourlier's proposed dating cannot be taken as conclusive, because Ceglar holds that William probably wrote "several *Meditations*" after retiring to Signy "about September 1135,"13 and Déchanet also holds that William only

11 *La morale monastique*, pp. 136-37.
12 CF 3, 84-85.
13 *William of Saint Thierry: The Chronology*, p. 239.
completed the Meditations at Signy.\textsuperscript{14}

Although Ceglar does not date the Meditations prior to the De contemplando Deo, he complicates the question of the chronology of William's works even further by his discussion of the authorship and date of the Brevis commentatio in cantici canticorum priora duo capita (PL 184, 407-436), commonly known as the Brevis commentatio (BC). In Chapter IX of his dissertation, "William's Part in the Brevis commentatio" (pp. 350-79), Ceglar reviews the discussion of BC which has been carried on "since Mabillon first published it in 1667" (p. 350); and he comes to conclusions of his own, some of them stated in tentative terms.

First, Ceglar writes: "It can be taken for certain that BC is a more or less faithful literary record of the spiritual conversations of the two friends [Bernard and William]" (p. 352), which took place "between (January) 1122 and (January) 1124" (p. 378).

Then Ceglar suggests or claims several times that William wrote BC: "it must have been William who wrote BC" (p. 361); several passages from William's other works "clearly show that BC was written by William" (p. 364); and:

Concerning the date at which William retired to Signy: in his letter to me dated 9 May 1975, cited above in note 6, Father Ceglar writes that he now holds that William "retired to Signy in the summer of 1135 (probably in July or early August)."

\textsuperscript{14} William of St. Thierry: The Man, p. 8, note 24.
"There is no joint authorship, since the right hand, Bernard, did not know what the left hand, William, was about to do" (p. 375). But he takes care to give this claim several crucial nuances: "whatever part of it [the Tres sunt status amoris, which is the opening section of BC] may have come from the heart and lips of St. Bernard, it must have been William who wrote it down, and in this sense it is his work" (p. 382); and: "Except for the first introductory paragraphs, BC is a kind and subtle effort on Bernard's part to help William solve his internal tensions concerning the active and contemplative life" (p. 379); and, most significant of all: "It [BC] is a composite work, for which Bernard supplied most of the thoughts and expressions, a discourse in which William took part and contributed thoughts and expressions of his own" (p. 375). Ceglar's opinion on the authorship of BC is, therefore, somewhat ambiguous. He appears to hold that William actually wrote BC, but that one cannot claim that BC is simply a work of William without adding important qualifications to this claim.

On the question of the date of BC, Ceglar implies or states several times that BC was written before any of William's (other) works (pp. 366, 367-68, and 377-78). His clearest assertion on this point is: "The expression 'dispensationis humanae,' which in CD, NDA, and De sacramento altaris appears as a firmly established part of William's vocabulary, is in BC only in the process of developing, and
therefore BC appears to be chronologically anterior to the other works" (p. 377).

From this it may be concluded that although Hourlier maintains that some of the \textit{Meditations} precede the \textit{De contemplando Deo}; and although Ceglar maintains that the \textit{Brevis commentatio}, which appears to be anterior to the \textit{De contemplando Deo}, is in some sense a work of William; nevertheless, neither Hourlier nor Ceglar claim that there is any work which is solely by William and completely precedes the \textit{De contemplando Deo}.\textsuperscript{15} At one place Ceglar refers to "the \textit{De contemplando Deo}, which is usually considered as his [William's] first published work" (p. 158), and he nowhere explicitly rejects this traditional view.

It is necessary, moreover, to consider the evidence William himself gives to the chronology of his works in his list of them in the preface of his \textit{Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei}. It is true that in this list he places the

\textsuperscript{15} As I mentioned above (see note 11), Vandenbroucke claims that the \textit{De natura et dignitate amoris} precedes the \textit{De contemplando Deo} (\textit{La morale monastique}, pp. 136-37). In describing the \textit{De natura et dignitate amoris}, Vandenbroucke quotes from a work of Jean Leclercq, renowned French Benedictine scholar of monasticism (\textit{La spiritualité du moyen âge}, p. 254). On page 250 of this work Leclercq lists the \textit{De natura et dignitate amoris} before the \textit{De contemplando Deo}, but he does not say anything about which of these two treatises was written first. In any event, neither Vandenbroucke nor Leclercq give any details on the chronological sequence of William's works, and thus the scant evidence from their writings as to which of William's works was written first cannot be considered conclusive.
Speculum fidei and the Aenigma fidei before the De contemplando Deo, but Wilmart and Hourlier have explained that he does this because of the current interest of these two works for the brethren of Mont-Dieu, whom he is addressing. For the rest, William places the De contemplando Deo immediately after the Speculum fidei and the Aenigma fidei, and before the De natura et dignitate amoris, the Meditationes, and all the other works he lists; and he makes no reference to the Brevis commentatio in this list. This may be taken as an indication that in William's own mind, the De contemplando Deo was his first work.

It may be concluded, therefore, especially if one keeps in mind the qualifications I have just made, that the De contemplando Deo is, in a very real sense, William's first complete work. This is an important point. In this thesis I am trying to be as specific as possible in treating William's doctrine on the experience of God, and for this reason I am examining one of his shorter works. The fact that this work, the De contemplando Deo, may truly be called William's first work is important because: "A man's first book is very often the truest expression of his mind."

---

16 SC 223, 134-36.
18 SC 223, 134-38.
19 A priest of the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani.
By considering in detail the expression of William's doctrine on the experience of God contained in the De contemplando Deo, therefore, we should be able to penetrate to his most spontaneously personal insights, the ones he first gathered together into a complete work.

Editions and English Translations

Davy, Hourlier, and Thomas have described, in the introductions to their editions of the De contemplando Deo, the history of the Latin text of this treatise, and its numerous medieval manuscripts and the editions which have been made from them. Here it should suffice to outline briefly the four most recent editions and the English translations based on two of these editions, and to explain my choice of Hourlier's edition and of Sister Penelope's English translation in this research.

In 1854, an edition of the De contemplando Deo appeared in Migne PL 184, 365-80. Migne simply reprinted the edition of Jean Mabillon, originally published in 1667, and reprinted eight times during the next two centuries.
Mabillon's edition was based on the latest of the four twelfth-century manuscripts, Bruges 128.²²

Since 1953, three new editions of the De contemplando Deo have appeared. In 1953, Davy published her edition in Deux traités de l'amour. In 1959, Hourlier published his edition in SC 61; the second edition of this work, which appeared in SC 61 bis in 1968, does not contain any changes in the text, for as Hourlier explains: "The newness of the present edition will be limited to some corrections or additions in the notes, and to a summary bibliography."²³ In 1965, Thomas published his edition in PC 23. All three of these editions contain a French translation accompanying the Latin text, and all three use the earliest twelfth-century manuscript, Mazarine 776 (Paris), as their texte de base.

Migne differs from Davy, Hourlier, and Thomas in all the places where Bruges 128 differs from Mazarine 776. Davy


²² Davy, Deux traités de l'amour, pp. 7-8, 12; Déchanet, "Le pseudo-prologue," pp. 7-11; Hourlier, SC 61 bis, 19, note 1; and Ceglar, William of Saint Thierry: The Chronology, pp. 381-84.

²³ SC 61 bis, 6: "La nouveauté de la présente édition se bornera donc à quelques corrections ou additions dans les notes, et à une bibliographie sommaire." Trans. mine. Only one footnote has been added in SC 61 bis (69, note 4), and only three have been corrected (13, note 3; 71, note 1; and 124, note 1). These changes do not affect the pagination of the introduction or of the text of the De contemplando Deo, which are identical in SC 61 and SC 61 bis.
explains that between Bruges 128 and Mazarine 776 "there are many variant readings, but they do not affect important expressions." Migne also differs from the three later editions by substituting a nineteen-line passage from William's Meditation Eleven for a four-line passage in paragraph 2 of the De contemplando Deo. But, most important of all, Migne differs from Davy, Hourlier, and Thomas by including as a prologue (Prooemium) to the De contemplando Deo a passage three paragraphs in length beginning with the words In lacu miseriae. Davy, Hourlier, and Thomas all make note of this difference, and claim that II is not an integral part of the De contemplando Deo. Déchanet agrees that II is not part of the De contemplando Deo, and even claims that William is not the author of II.

24 Deux traités de l'amour, p. 8: "les variantes sont fréquentes mais ne portent pas sur des expressions importantes." Trans. mine.

25 Hourlier, SC 61 bis, 19, note 1; and 62. Déchanet, "Le pseudo-prologue," p. 10, note 11. Déchanet states, incorrectly, that the passage is from Meditation Twelve. Moreover, the passage as it appears in Migne's edition of the De contemplando Deo (PL 184, 367D-68A) is not a verbatim rendition of the corresponding passage in Meditation Eleven (PL 180, 237CD), but contains nine variant readings, three of which involve several words.

26 PL 184, 365-67A. Hereafter cited as II.

27 Davy, Deux traités de l'amour, p. 7. Hourlier, SC 61 bis, 19, note 1, where Hourlier refers the reader to Déchanet, "Le pseudo-prologue." Thomas, PC 23, 34, note a, where Thomas refers to his own more detailed explanation of this point in PC 3, 113, note 2, where he in turn also refers to Déchanet, "Le pseudo-prologue."

28 "Le pseudo-prologue," pp. 5-12.
Ceglar reviews all the evidence on these questions and, on the basis of his own comparison of *II* and the *De contemplando Deo* with some of William's other works, concludes that *II* is a genuine work of William, but is not part of the *De contemplando Deo*.\(^\text{29}\) I agree with Ceglar, because I have compared the vocabulary and literary style of *II* and the *De contemplando Deo* and have concluded that both works are by William, but that they do not hang together as parts of an integral whole. For all these reasons, Migne's edition of the *De contemplando Deo* must be considered inferior to those of Davy, Hourlier, and Thomas, and it may be excluded from consideration in the present thesis.

The editions of Davy, Hourlier, and Thomas all begin with the words *Venite ascendamus*, and although there are some differences in these editions in orthography, and each is differently divided into paragraphs, there are relatively few variant readings.\(^\text{30}\) There are, however, notable differ-


\(^{30}\) Hourlier, alone of the three, follows Mazarine 776 in dividing the text into thirteen paragraphs of unequal length. The first three paragraphs contain a total of eighty-eight lines. In these eighty-eight lines Davy's text differs from Hourlier's in only four instances, all of which involve only one word; there is a change of meaning in only one of these instances, and this seems to be a misprint (*vivere*, Davy, p. 36, line 1, for *videre*, Hourlier, p. 64, paragraph 3, line 18). Thomas' text differs from Hourlier's in these eighty-eight lines only six times, each of which involves only one word, and only two of which change the meaning.
ences in the thoroughness of the critical apparatus. Hourlier uses fifteen manuscripts and five editions for his critical apparatus, while Davy uses only three manuscripts, and Thomas uses only two manuscripts and the edition of Migne with the manuscripts it represents. Moreover, Vandenbergoucke refers to Davy's edition as "less certain" than Hourlier's. I will, therefore, use Hourlier's edition of the De contemplando Deo, as it appears in SC 61 bis, throughout the present thesis.

Only two English translations of the De contemplando Deo have ever been published. In 1955, two English priests, Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker, published an English translation, noting: "The text used for the translation was Migne P. L. Vol. 184." Because I have decided not to use Migne's edition, I will not use this English translation of it.

In 1971, CF 3 published a translation of the De contemplando Deo made by Sister Penelope, "based on the critical Latin text established by Dom Jacques Hourlier and published

---

(De minimis non Craigius, Thomas, p. 38, lines 16-17, for attempiare, Hourlier, p. 60, paragraph 2, line 17; and Respondet, Thomas, p. 40, line 8, for Respondet, Hourlier, p. 62, paragraph 3, line 1). Spot checks through the rest of the treatise revealed only similarly slight variants.

31 La morale monastique, 137: "moins sûre." Trans.

in Sources Chrétiennes 61 (Paris, 1959)."33 This translation is consistently faithful to the Latin text, reads gracefully, and has the additional merit of being based on the edition of the Latin text I will be using; thus I will use Sister Penelope's translation in this thesis. But in order to emphasize nuances of certain key words, I will occasionally substitute a translation of my own for that of Sister Penelope.

Having considered the date of the De contemplando Deo, and its various editions and English translations, I will now say something of its structure and tone.

Structure

Although its parts form an organic whole more clearly than do William's various Meditations, the De contemplando Deo is quite loose in its structure. The manner in which the sections fit together may be explained in different ways. Hourlier writes:

An attentive reading of On Contemplating God distinguishes two parts differing in subject and even in style. The first part, the more vehement, seems more personal and intimate, for it endeavors primarily to describe the desire that urged William on to the contemplation of God. The second part is more didactic; it reflects on the way in which God brings to realization the desire of his creatures.34

33 CF 3, 191.
34 CF 3, 21, and SC 61 bis, 32.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Thomas speaks of an opening prayer (paragraphs 1-6); a first discourse on the thirst and quenching of love (paragraphs 7-8); a second discourse on the experience and contemplation of God (paragraphs 9-19), which progresses in two cycles (paragraphs 9-13, and 14-19) from a consideration of our love for God to an expression of joyful enthusiasm for such a great gift, an invocation to the Spirit of love, and a loving look to Jesus; and a closing prayer (paragraphs 20-22). Davy describes an introduction in which William leaves his cares behind in order to devote himself to contemplation with his reason and intelligence (paragraph 1), a first part on the desire for God (paragraphs 2-7), a second part on the love of God (paragraphs 8-27), and a conclusion in which William is called back to his duties and declares his love for God (paragraphs 27-28).

Thus we see that Hourlier, Thomas, and Davy each has his or her own way of describing how the parts of the treatise are fitted together. The only common element in their descriptions is the theme: God—the desire for, the love, and the contemplation—what we commonly call the experience—of God.

These explanations are based, moreover, on three different ways of dividing the text into paragraphs. Hourlier,

---

35 PC 3, 11-27, passim.
36 Deux traités de l'amour, p. 16.
following the most ancient manuscript evidence, has thirteen paragraphs of unequal length totaling six hundred and fifteen lines. Thomas follows Migne in dividing the text into twenty-two paragraphs. Davy mentions explicitly that she is introducing her own (twenty-eight) paragraph divisions into the text, in order to facilitate reading. And, despite the face that each divides the text into two sections, each begins the second section at a different place in the text. Hourlier begins it at the words Recedat itaque (paragraph 9, line 1), Thomas at Et hoc est amare tuum (paragraph 9, line 1, corresponding to Hourlier's paragraph 7, line 1), and Davy at Est amor desiderii (paragraph 8, line 1, corresponding to Hourlier's paragraph 5, lines 33-34).

37 SC 61 bis, 32, note 1, and CF 3, 22, note 30; "The manuscript tradition is divided on this point into two homogeneous groups. In the first, to which the most ancient... manuscripts belong, the text is divided into thirteen paragraphs the length of which varies from a few lines to several pages. The second group divides the work into ten paragraphs. This division, which manifestly derives from the preceding, is the act of a logical mind that did not know how to penetrate the thinking of the author. In the manuscripts of the first group the cut between the two parts of the treatise can be recognized by an initial of a different color (v. g. Bruges 128)."

38 Thomas does not follow Migne in distributing these twenty-two paragraphs through ten chapters. These ten chapters of Migne would seem to correspond to the ten paragraphs of the second manuscript group, mentioned by Hourlier above (note 37). But it is interesting to note that Bruges 128, the manuscript on which Migne's edition is ultimately based, is in the first manuscript group, which divided the text into thirteen paragraphs.

39 Deux traités de l'amour, p. 29.
All this variation indicates that, although the experience of God is the unifying theme of the *De contemplando Deo*, it is developed in a roundabout way. The untidy structure of the treatise reflects the fluidity of its thought.

**Tone**

The unsystematic structure of the *De contemplando Deo* can be at least partly explained by the pervading tone of the work, a passionate preoccupation with God. In the first paragraph William addresses his own emotions, both: "Yearnings, strivings, longings, thoughts and affections, and all that is within me," and "worries and anxieties, concerns and toils, and all the sufferings involved in my enslaved condition." But the rest of the treatise is composed of prayers addressed directly to God and prayerful reflections on the love of God (William's love for God, as well as God's love for himself and all his creatures, including William), also addressed directly to God. If William is conscious of himself, this self-awareness is primarily the knowledge of his

40 CF 3, 36. SC 61 bis, 58: "Intentiones, intentiones, voluntates, cogitationes, affectiones, et omnia interiora mea," and: "Curae, sollicitudines, anxietates, labores, poenae servitutis." To facilitate the understanding of this and future references to CF 3 and SC 61 bis: CF 3 contains Hourlier's introduction to the *De contemplando Deo* on pp. 3-35, and Sister Penelope's English translation of William's Latin text on pp. 36-64; SC 61 bis contains Hourlier's introduction on pp. 7-48, and William's Latin text on pp. 58-120 (with French translation on pp. 59-121).
desire for God, and it leads him to focus his gaze directly on God. As Thomas observes:

The search for God, the search for contemplation, for love, for the possession of God, that is the theme of this work; it is the subject most dear to William of Saint Thierry and which he expresses here in a manner all the more warm and spontaneous in that he wished to compose his treatise in the form of an elevation toward God.\footnote{PC 3, 10-11: "La recherche de Dieu, la recherche de la contemplation, de l'amour, de la possession de Dieu, viola le theme de l'ouvrage; c'est le sujet cher entre tous a Guillaume de Saint-Thierry et qui s'exprime ici d'une mani\`ere d'autant plus chaude et spontan\`ee que l'auteur a voulu composer son trait\`e sous la forme d'une \'el\'evation vers Dieu." Trans. mine.}

If William is seeking to love God, however, he is also seeking to know God, and to know how to love God. If he is "affective, almost sentimental," he also "stands out for his intellectual effort."\footnote{Hourlier, CF 3, 33, and SC 61 bis, 46.} His De contemplando Deo, by the harmony of its ardent prayers to God and its penetrating reflections on the exact manner of our union with God in love, reveals "a degree of affection unattainable by the kind of pious writings which give free rein to sensibility while lacking doctrinal content."\footnote{Hourlier, CF 3, 34, and SC 61 bis, 47. Actually, Hourlier makes this claim for William's works as a whole; here I am predicing it only of the De contemplando Deo.} Hourlier explains this combination of elements when he writes:

On the one hand, he considers the pure of heart who merit to see God as he is because they have
become one spirit with him. On the other hand, he takes up the theme of God, the exemplary cause, abasing himself by "condescension" to all that is most intimately man's, so that man may return to that which is most intimately God's. He realizes this in a two-fold way. First, man's unsatisfied desire to know leads into love which, when satisfied, assures at one and the same time both possession and vision. Then, the study of love in itself, on a more philosophical plane, leads to the concrete case of love in the bosom of the Trinity and in the manifestations of the Trinity to the intelligent creature. God, who is love, accomplishes the very object of On Contemplating God. Beginning from the Father, in the successive mediation of the Son and of the Spirit, and also in the concomitant mediation of the Son in the Spirit he accomplishes this by unity of nature and love, which makes a unity of knowledge possible.  

It seems to me that these themes of seeking God, becoming one spirit with God, returning to God, desiring God, knowing God, loving God, possessing God, and being united with God are best summed up in the phrase "the experience of God." It is true that William uses the actual word "experience" (experimento, the ablative form of experimentum [experience, or proof from experience]) only once in the De contemplando Deo.  

But Thomas describes the opening paragraphs of the treatise by saying: "An agonized longing for God; a conscience overwhelmed by its indigence and unworthiness, yet intensely confident; burning love,

---

44 CF 3, 34-35, and SC 61 bis, 47.

45 SC 61 bis, 116. Even in this one instance William does not use the phrase "the experience of God" (experimentum Dei, or experientia Dei); but the context is that of a description of what is clearly an experience of God.
and sometimes even the sweet experience of the goodness of God—this is what William feels in his soul and expresses to God in the opening pages of this work."\textsuperscript{46} And "the experience of God" seems to be the phrase which best describes the tone of the treatise as a whole, the only phrase comprehensive enough to bring out all the nuances of William's zeal for God. Thus I will proceed, in Chapter Three, to consider the meaning of this phrase.

\textsuperscript{46} PC 3, 11: "Tourment de Dieu, conscience écrasante de son indigence et indignité, ardente confiance cependant, brûlant amour et parfois même suave expérience de la bonté de Dieu, c'est tout ce qu'éprouve l'âme de Guillaume, c'est tout ce qu'elle dit à Dieu dans les premières pages de ce livre." Trans. and emphasis mine.
CHAPTER THREE

THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD

Jean Mouroux, a French Roman Catholic theologian, has written that "there is nothing more difficult to define than experience."¹ William of Saint Thierry himself is aware of the difficulty of understanding and explaining experience, that sphere of human life so close to us, and yet so hard to treat objectively. In his De natura et dignitate amoris, writing of the great things which love and reason can accomplish when they work together, William says "it is not possible to learn this except by experience, and it cannot be explained to the inexperienced."² If experience itself is so hard to understand, the experience of God is even more difficult to comprehend. The effort to attain such an insight can lead to a disagreement as profound as that which has occurred between Denis Huerre, abbot of the French Benedictine abbey of La Pierre-qui-Vire, and Illyd Trethowan, philosopher and monk of the English


Benedictine abbey of Downside. Reviewing and quoting Huerre's preface to the autumn 1972 issue of Monastic Studies dedicated to the theme On the Experience of God, Trethowan writes:

Of course 'God as God is always beyond experience' in the sense that our experience of him is limited, but not in the sense that we do not really make contact with him. The Abbot seems to accept that 'man cannot in any way experience a divine Person' (I should want to say that such an experience is the basis of Christian faith).³

The very fact that the word "experience" and the phrase "the experience of God" are so hard to understand makes it imperative to establish working definitions of them in this chapter before beginning, in Chapter Four, to study William's doctrine on the experience of God in the De contemplando Deo. I will do this by trying to extract from several definitions and descriptions of these terms by various authors the most significant insights, those most pertinent to this thesis.

Experience

We begin with the word "experience." Ralph J. Masiello, an American philosopher, explains that, etymologically, experience is:

A term rooted in the Greek ἐπειρήμα, from which the word empirical is directly derived, and in the Latin experientia, whose verb form experiri means to try, to put to the test, to

know by experience, and whose past participle
furnishes the term expert.4

Karl Rahner, a German Jesuit and one of the foremost
theologians of our day, describes experience as:

A form of knowledge which arises from the di-
rect reception of an impression from a reality
(internal or external) which lies outside our
free control. It is contrasted with that type,
or aspect of knowledge in which man is an ac-
tive agent, subjecting the object of his own
viewpoints and methods and to critical inves-
tigation.5

This emphasis on experience as knowledge is significant be-
cause, as we have seen above, William stands out from his
contemporaries by the extent of his intellectual effort.

A more detailed explanation of the relation of experi-
ence to knowledge is given by William J. Hill, an American
Dominican theologian, when he describes experience as:

the impression and immutation of a conscious
rational subject resulting from actual contact
with things, from living through an event or
events. The actuality and concreteness of the
contact distinguishes experience from what is
ideal or imaginary and locates it largely in
sensation and feeling, not, however, to the


5 "Experience," Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler,
Theological Dictionary, ed. Cornelius Ernst, trans. Richard
Strachan (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), p. 162. Em-
phasis mine. Rahner and Vorgrimler note in their preface
to this dictionary: "As each of the two authors has con-
tributed about half the text, it seemed unnecessary to
specify the precise authorship of each section" (p. 5).
I have attributed the article "Experience" to Rahner, the
better-known author; but it may actually be by Vorgrimler,
another German Roman Catholic theologian.
exclusion of intellectual and volitional elements, as long as direct intuitional contact with reality is involved. Every experience would seem to involve at once cognitional and appetitive (both emotional and volitional) elements, with the latter, however, predominating; experience is not mere knowing but more a matter of being affected by the object. As such it is largely subjective, with emphasis upon affectivity. The experience is not limited to the mere passive immutation of the subject but includes as well his vital responses, especially the spontaneous ones.

Hill's emphasis on affectivity is important because, as we have seen, William's De contemplando Deo reveals: "a degree of affection unattainable by the kind of pious writings which give free rein to sensibility while lacking doctrinal content." Later I will try to clarify William's notion of affection by examining his use of the words affectus ("attachment," an abiding tendency in the depths of the soul) and affectio ("feeling," a more superficial emotion) in speaking of his relationship with God in the De contemplando Deo and throughout his later works.

Thus we see that Rahner emphasizes experience as knowledge, and Hill speaks of the affective element of experience. Mouroux, however, describes experience from a different vantage point, striving to highlight the personal element in experience as a preparation for a more accurate understanding of religious experience. Speaking of his dissatisfac-


7 Hourlier, CF 3, 34, and SC 61 bis, 47. Emphasis mine.
faction with the efforts of contemporary philosophers to define experience, he writes:

the main error tends to be the depersonalizing of experience. Because it is treated as though it could be defined outside the personal relationship upon which it is based and within which it is realized, it gives rise to two opposing kinds of error, which may be described as follows. On the one hand, there is an empirical conception of experience, as though there was no experience except of "things," and as though an out-and-out subjective passivity was the absolute criterion of experience. . . .

At the other end of the scale we find an idealist definition, according to which experience is a purely mental construct of a special kind, manifesting the mind's omnipotence and producing the only genuine kind of truth. There are no "things" here, of course; experience is simply the expression of the immanent activity of the mind, which is independent and absolute. . . . But both these conceptions are equally unfaithful to the person, the first tending to regard him as a thing, and the second as a self-enclosed, impersonal activity. Consequently they mutilate religious experience, which is the experience of the person in contact with a personal God.

I suggest, therefore, that there is experience when the person is aware of himself in relationship to the world, himself, or God. More precisely, experience is the act through which the person becomes aware of himself in relation to the world, himself, or God.8

Mouroux's approach is different from that of Rahner and Hill. But if, instead of choosing one approach or the other, we try to combine the best insights of all three of these authors, we may speak of experience as a form of knowledge which is decidedly affective, or as the person's

awareness of himself in relation to the world, himself, or God.

Now we must explain that form of awareness of self in relation to God in which a human person has an affective knowledge of God—in short, an experience of God.

The Experience of God

In speaking of the experience of God we may begin by describing this phrase itself. Then, because William writes within and always presupposes a Christian context, and we will thus be concerned with this precise context throughout this thesis, we must explain the specific nature of the Christian experience of God. Finally, it will be necessary to clarify the terminology of religious experience and mystical experience, and the way these terms should be used to depict the degrees of intensity with which the experience of God may occur.

The experience of God

When we speak of the experience of God we must remember that, according to common Christian belief, God is transcendent and we cannot speak to God as simply one object among other objects of experience. Yet if God transcends

---

9 Martin Buber, renowned Jewish philosopher, insisted on restricting the word "experience" to our life with things, and using the word "relation" to describe our life with
the world of experienced objects, he is also present to us in some way as the one experienced. Yves Raguin, head of the Ricci Institute for Chinese Studies, Taiwan, underlines this conjunction of transcendence and presence when he describes the experience of God as "a perception or awakening to a reality both immanent and transcendent, or more simply, something present in concrete reality yet reaching beyond it." Keeping this awareness of God's transcendence in mind, we may proceed to a few more specific descriptions of the experience of God.

Trethowan writes that "an experience of God can mean only an awareness of him," and he adds: "It seems to me that the awareness of God is at the root of all specifically human experience, although it is so often not recognized." Trethowan thus adds the note of awareness of God himself to Mouroux's emphasis on awareness of oneself in relation to nature, men, and spiritual beings (I and Thou, 2nd ed. [1923; trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, rpt. New York: Scribner's, 1958], pp. 4-5). Buber made this distinction in order to emphasize the dialogical character of our life with nature, men, and spiritual beings. Despite the merits of Buber's distinction, however, most authors have continued to speak of "the experience of God," and it seems best to follow this common usage in the present thesis.


God. We might expand on this brief description with the explanation of the monks of the Cistercian community of Azul, Argentina, who describe the experience of God as:

a knowledge of the Living God. It is a knowledge fraught with mystery, and we prefer not to define it more precisely for the present . . . It is for the one who possesses it a sign of the active presence of the transcendent Being and a privileged means of apprehending, perceiving and understanding his living reality and his work.12

The terms perception, awakening, awareness, knowledge, apprehending, perceiving, and understanding in these descriptions of the experience of God denote the element of knowledge which we have seen contained in the notion of the word "experience." The quality of affectivity, also inherent in the word "experience," is explained by Mouroux when he speaks of "an affective element"13 in religious experience, and describes it by saying:

the act in which I wager my destiny, and in which I fulfil my being by giving it to God, is bound to have repercussions in my innermost depths and to arouse within me an overflowing joy and praise and adoration which remain unknown to me until I meet with the infinite. Thus I feel myself and know myself to be "prevented," surrounded, called. The consciousness and acceptance of this vocation unfold in a profound feeling of adoration, a sense of grace, supplication, inspiring humility—in a vibration of my whole being, which is penetrated to its inmost depths by the God who so infinitely transcends it.14


14 The Christian Experience, pp. 15-16.
Knowledge and affectivity were essential characteristics in our definition of experience. Here we see that they also play a central role in the experience of God.

The Christian experience of God

To understand better the nature of the experience of God which William of Saint Thierry describes in the *De contemplando Deo*, it is necessary to study the specific characteristics of the experience of God as it occurs among Christians. Raguin explains the Christian experience of God as an experience rooted in faith in Christ, who knows God:

When Christ witnesses to what he knows, what he lives and what he is, he refers to his own experience. And this testimony is corroborated by that of his Father. When Christ asks for faith it is because he knows what he is talking about: "In very truth I tell you," he says to Nicodemus, "we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen" (Jn 3:11). Then he adds: "No one ever went to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of Man whose home is in heaven" (Jn 3:13).

Raguin goes on to emphasize the need for making the experience of Christ our own when he says:

These remarks, dropped in the course of a conversation, express the specific nature of the Christian experience of God. It is that we take into our own lives the very experience of Christ himself.

---

16 ibid.
The Christian experience of God, therefore, is an experience of sharing by faith in Christ's own experience of knowing God.

André Louf, abbot of the French Cistercian abbey of Mont des Cats, describes the Christian experience of God as one of receiving God's mercy in conversion:

there is no way to encounter God truly and to know him besides this way of conversion. Before it God is a word, an analogical concept, a pre-sentiment, a desire, the God of the philosophers and poets, but not yet the God who reveals himself through an excess of love. The Lord came for sinners, to live and to eat with them and not with the just, to find what was lost (Matt. 9:13; 18:11). God makes himself known in pardoning. As for the sinner, it is in measuring the pit of his sin that he discovers the abyss of mercy, at the moment when the one fills up the other and engulfs it.17

Louf portrays the Christian experience of God as one involving both knowledge and affectivity, and he links the knowledge of God very closely to the love of God. William of Saint Thierry, as we shall see in later chapters, speaks of his experience of God as a love which is so closely related to understanding as to be defined as love-understanding (amor-intellectus).

Mouroux refers more explicitly to the Trinitarian dimension when he writes that the Christian experience:

can be summed up in agape, understood in its fullness: the Father loves us and gives his Son to save us; the Son loves us and delivers himself up for us; both give us their Spirit, who makes of us, in Christ, sons who give glory to their Father. The mystery of agape lived out in faith is the object of Christian experience. St. Paul emphasizes that it is an experience in Christ (living with, by and in Christ, the dead and risen Lord), and an experience in the Spirit, which makes us realize our filiation and enter into the deep things of God.18

When Mouroux says that we "realize our filiation" he shows again that we have an awareness of ourselves in relation to God, and when he says that we "enter into the deep things of God," he shows that we are aware of God himself.

Mouroux goes on to emphasize the eschatological character of the Christian experience when he writes: "this experience is always eschatological, because it bears on a mystery possessed in hope, revealed but not a vision. It may tend to mystical experience, but will not be consummated till the second epiphany of the Lord" (p. 293).

Thus we have seen that the Christian experience of God is an affective knowledge of God rooted in faith in Christ, in the context of incorporation into Christ, conversion to God, awareness of the Trinity and of oneself in relation to the Trinity, and an eschatological expectation.

---

Religious experience and mystical experience

Before giving his description of the Christian experience, Mouroux had taken care to explain that this experience is only one aspect of Christian existence:

The primary element in Christianity is not the Christian experience but the Christian existence: the activities of faith, hope and love, by which, on the basis of "his inexpressible gift," we attain God himself as the principle, the object and the goal of all our being. Here is the eternal life which our Lord came to communicate to us. Experience can therefore be no more than an aspect or dimension of Christian existence. It at once becomes something merely relative.

But this experience is an essential element of revelation because it is implied in Christian existence.19

This distinction between Christian experience and Christian existence given by Mouroux introduces a problem of terminology concerning the experience of God and the intensity with which this experience may occur, and an examination of this problem should help to clarify the meaning of the experience of God.

Rahner makes the same distinction as Mouroux between two aspects of Christianity, but instead of using Mouroux's terms "Christian existence" and "Christian experience," he speaks of: "Religious experience in the strict sense, that which constitutes faith" (Mouroux's "Christian existence"), and: "Religious experience as the inner self-attestation of

supernatural reality (grace)"\textsuperscript{20} (Mouroux's "Christian experience"). However, Don Talafous, an American Benedictine monk and associate professor of theology at St John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, distinguishes faith from religious experience, as does Mouroux. Talafous writes: "Religious experience is desirable as a confirmation of faith."\textsuperscript{21}

This difference of opinion on the use of the term "religious experience" is an example of the lack of a uniform terminology among authors writing about the Christian experience of God. Today the terms "religious experience," "spiritual experience," and "mystical experience" are used frequently, but different authors give them their own, sometimes widely differing, definitions. Moreover, twentieth-century terminology for religious experience, of whatever hue, is not the same as the terminology utilized by twelfth-century authors, which will have to be explained briefly in Chapter Four. A thorough examination of this question would take us too far afield, but it is necessary to make a few clarifications concerning present-day descriptions of the different stages of the Christian experience of God.

We have already seen the distinction some authors make between Christian faith itself and religious experience, this

\textsuperscript{20} "Experience," \textit{Theological Dictionary}, p. 162.

latter being thought of as a more experiential awareness of God's love for us in Christ. This more experiential awareness admits of different stages, the most important distinction among them being the difference between a more elementary type of experience, referred to simply as "religious experience," or "spiritual experience"; and the experience of God in the fullest possible sense of this phrase, which is called a "mystical experience." Once again, as on the question of faith and religious experience, those who discuss the relation of ordinary religious experience and mystical experience present different points of view. David Knowles, well-known English medievalist and spiritual writer, claimed: "This [mystical] life, though it is a prolongation of the life of grace that is shared by all Christians . . . differs from the common life of grace in kind, not only in degree."\(^{22}\)  

But the participants in the Second Asian Monastic Congress (Bangalore, India, 14-22 October 1973) held that "mystical experience does not differ in nature from ordinary religious experience; there is between them a difference of degree."\(^{23}\)  

This difference of outlook indicates something of the difficulty in speaking about religious experience and


mystical experience. There is a vast amount of literature on these two types of experience, especially the latter, and in Chapter Four I will speak of mystical experience in some detail. At this point, however, it would be distracting to get involved in disputed points or detailed explanations; it seems better to begin with as simple a comparison of these two types of experience as possible. Mouroux writes that "religious experience can be defined as the act--or group of acts--through which man becomes aware of himself in relation to God." He goes on to describe it as an integrating experience which has intellectual, voluntary, affective, active, and social elements; an experience of God as both transcendent and immanent; an experience which is a relationship between two acts, God's and one's own (pp. 15-19). He then adds what will be the basis for a distinction between religious experience and mystical experience when he says:

Religious experience is, finally, a mediated experience. The presence and grasp of God which it involves are both realized through the mediation of a sign. . . . 

. . . . And the sign by which God is grasped is the religious act itself--the whole act, of course, with its essential characteristic of being both received and posited, and with all its principles both objective and subjective--the flash of intelligence and the Being who is thought, the act of will and the Being who is chosen, the ardour of affectivity and the Being who is loved, the act of generosity and the Being who is served. . . .

---

24 The Christian Experience, p. 15.
This act, with all its many components, is what mediates the presence; and religious experience is precisely the consciousness of the mediation realized in this act, the consciousness of the relationship it establishes between man and God.25

The most important idea in this description of religious experience is that of mediation--religious experience is a mediated experience of God, an experience of God through the mediation of the sign of the religious act itself.

Mouroux explicitly contrasts this type of experience with mystical experience when he writes:

Mystical experience . . . as conscious spiritual passivity, means the highest act of experience in the empirical sense of the word: this "suffering" presents itself on its own level as an immediate fact . . . the consciousness of a direct communion with God.26

Thus we can distinguish religious experience of a more ordinary kind from mystical experience by the simple fact that religious experience is a mediated experience of God, while mystical experience is an immediate experience of God.

Jacques Maritain, a well-known French Thomist philosopher and spiritual writer, explained the way in which we must understand the immediacy of the mystical experience of God when he wrote:

It is clear than an absolutely immediate, and therefore perfectly experimental, knowledge of God is reserved for beatitude. But on this


26 _The Christian Experience_, p. 44. Emphasis mine.
side of that end, a knowledge which is truly, though imperfectly, immediate can begin even here below.27

Maritain went on to make this point clearer:

When the soul has become love through and through without anything in it providing an obstacle to the light of the Holy Ghost, and when it fastens its knowledge upon itself, it becomes a means of perceiving God through a certain act of touch and a kind of spiritual testing. Insofar as God is known through His effects in such a suprahuman manner, He is known immediately . . . since in this case, created effects are no longer known as a quod wherein, as in a mirror, a likeness of God is seen, but only as a quo or means of attaining God Himself. This is not an absolutely immediate knowledge (only the beatific vision is immediate in this case), but it is a knowledge of God that is truly immediate, even though imperfectly so, without passing from a created quod, that would be first known, to a divine quod. Thus, God is not only attained without reasoning, in the manner in which substance is seen "per accidens," but He is Himself touched and experienced in an obscure manner.28

Yet, although we may distinguish a mediated religious experience of God from an immediate mystical experience of God, we must take care not to separate artificially two types of experience of God which, according to most Christians, are not in actual fact foreign to each other, each of which has a place in the Christian life. Mouroux himself


28 The Degrees of Knowledge, p. 261, note 3.
underlines this point when he writes of these two types of experience:

But if the mystic is within the faith, if faith is the fundamental principle of both kinds of experience, and if this is necessarily so because faith is the axis of the spiritual life, we must emphasize the continuity of the two experiences. Faith appears in two different states of purity, strength and fervour—in one case as a living faith and in the other as a lively faith—but in each case the faith is the same, and therefore throughout the discontinuity, which may be very deeply felt, there must run an extremely profound continuity, a radical homogeneity in the aspiration towards God, a similarity of life in the two different growths. Therefore the mystical life is not a sudden flowering that is foreign to the soul (if not an aberration), something absolutely unprepared for; it cannot even be an experience that follows upon an absence of experience, appearing as a kind of life absolutely new in its principles (the gifts), its objects (God, as someone seen and felt) and its acts (intuition or experimental knowledge). On the contrary, it appears as an experience that is a continuation of another experience—a supreme experience that deepens and purifies, clarifies, transcends, and crowns a fundamental experience of a more humble nature manifesting itself in a diversity of ways.  

This emphasis on the harmonious interrelationship of mediated religious experience and immediate mystical experience completes our examination of the experience of God, and it is now possible to sum up the results of this investigation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the writings of a

number of contemporary philosophers, theologians, and spiritual writers, and I have drawn from them the following definitions. Experience is a form of knowledge which is decidedly affective and which connotes a person's awareness of himself in relation to the world, himself, or God. The experience of God is an affective knowledge of God in which a person is aware of God and of himself in relation to God. The Christian experience of God, which will be our specific concern in this thesis, is an experience of God rooted in faith in Christ in the context of sharing in Christ's own experience of God, receiving God's mercy in conversion, awareness of the Trinity and of oneself in relation to the Trinity, and an eschatological longing for the second epiphany of the Lord. Finally, the Christian experience of God may be either a mediated experience of God, which we shall call a religious experience, or an immediate experience of God, which we shall call a mystical experience.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE NATURE AND DESCRIPTION OF
THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD
IN THE DE CONTEMPLANDO DEO

Thus far in this thesis I have been concerned with necessary introductory material—a brief biography of William of Saint Thierry, an explanation of the purpose of the present thesis, a description of the De contemplando Deo, and a clarification of the meaning of the experience of God. Now I will begin to focus directly on the topic of the thesis—the experience of God in William's De contemplando Deo. In this chapter I will explain the nature of the experience of God to which the De contemplando Deo gives witness, and William's manner of describing this experience.

The Nature of the Experience of God
in the De contemplando Deo

Speaking of the experience of God, the participants in the Second Asian Monastic Congress made this distinction:

First, there is the experience itself, which cannot be communicated. . . . Then, there is the memory of the experience. It is at this level that one finds religion and religious traditions. Finally, there is the interpretation of the experience, which is the level of theological reflection.¹

¹ "Synthesis of Group Discussions," Christian Monks, 48
I would like to claim that the De contemplando Deo contains a number of memories and interpretations of William of Saint Thierry's personal experiences of God along with aspirations toward further such experiences, and that at least some of these experiences contain the characteristics which typify the Christian mystical experience of God.

If, as the participants in the Second Asian Monastic Congress claimed, the experience of God itself "cannot be communicated" (p. 90), we cannot expect William to spell out his experience of God for us directly in every detail. But we have seen that the pervading tone of the De contemplando Deo is that of a passionate preoccupation with God, and it is clear that William is speaking from personal experience when he says: "Thus far I have perceived and seen, faintly enough indeed; and yet that slight experience has sufficed to kindle my longing afresh." That he remembers a number of experiences, rather than only one experience, is apparent when he claims: "In fact, as long as we are in this life, it is given to us to enjoy the ineffable peace of the 'silence in heaven' . . . only on occasion, for the space of half an hour, or 'for scarcely half an

p. 90. This statement is made in the general context of the experience of God in the religions of the world. As I have mentioned in Chapter Three, the present thesis focuses specifically on the Christian experience of God.

2 CF 3, 39. SC 61 bis, 64: "ex eo quod vel leviter sensi, vel vidi, magis accenso desiderio vix patienter expecto."
hour." And that William interprets his experiences in the theological framework of Christian revelation seems clear from this passage:

But, when we love you, your Holy Spirit truly acts upon our spirit; through his indwelling we possess the love of God shed abroad in our hearts.

And when your love, that is, the love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Son for the Father—-the Holy Spirit, when he dwells in us, he is to you that which he is—-love. And he turns toward himself and hallows all the "captives of Sion," that is to say, all the affections of the soul. And, when he does all that, we love you, or you love yourself in us, we affectively and you effectively, making us one in you, through your own unity, through your Holy Spirit whom you have given us. So it comes to this: that as for the Father to know the Son is nothing else but to be what the Son is, and for the Son to know the Father is simply to be what the Father is (whence comes the Gospel saying: "No one knows the Father save the Son, and no one knows the Son except the Father"), and as for the Holy Spirit to know and understand the Father and the Son is simply to be what the Father and the Son are, so is it with us.

3 CF 3, 49. SC 61 bis, 86: "Quamdiu quippe in hac sumus vita, hoc felicissimae pacis silentio in caelo . . . aliquando fruitor affectus, sed hora dimidia, vel quasi dimidia." Emphasis mine.

4 CF 3, 57-58. SC 61 bis, 104-106: "Sed cum te amamus, afficitur quidem spiritus noster, spiritui tuo sancto: per quem habitantem in nobis, caritatem dei habemus diffusam in cordibus nostris. Cumque amor tuus, amor patris ad filium, amor filii ad patrem, spiritus sanctus habitans in nobis ad te est quod est id est amor omnem captivitatem Syon id est animae nostrae omnes affectiones in se convertens, et sanctificans, amamus te, vel amas tu te in nobis, nos affectu, tu effectu, unum nos in te efficiens per unitatem tuam id est ipsum spiritum sanctum tuum, quem dedisti nobis, ut sicut non est aliud patri nosse filium, nisi hoc esse quod est
We see, then, that in the De contemplando Deo William is speaking from personal experience, that he remembers a number of his experiences of God, and that he interprets them in the light of Christian revelation. But can it be said that these experiences manifest the qualities of what is today referred to as a Christian mystical experience of God? I think it is fitting to make such a claim if we can show that in his description of his experiences of God William includes the characteristics which we have seen typify an experience of God in a Christian context, and to a mystical degree. I will now examine the De contemplando Deo to determine whether or not these characteristics are present; in the process of doing this, I will also note and explain some of the major themes which recur throughout the treatise.

The experience of God

We begin with the experience of God. We have seen that this experience is a form of knowledge. William affirms that his experiences include an element of knowledge when he says:

O Majesty transcending understanding, to the filius, nichil aliud filio nosse patrem, nisi hoc esse quod est pater, unde in evangelio: Nemo novit patrem nisi filius, et nemo novit filium nisi pater, et sicut spiritui sancto nichil est aliud nosse vel comprehendere patrem et filium, quam hoc esse quod est pater et filius; ita nobis.
soul that loves you, you do seem understand-
able. For though no faculty of soul or spirit
can ever comprehend you, nevertheless, the man
who loves you in his loving understands you
totally, in all your greatness.5

This passage contains in seed the doctrine of understanding
God by loving him which William will develop in his later
works. This identification of love and understanding is so
crucial to William's teaching on experience that in Chapter
Six I will study the words William uses in the De contem-
plando Deo in speaking of understanding, and in Chapter Seven
I will trace the development of the theme and vocabulary of
understanding in his later works.

The experience of God is a particular kind of knowledge
of God, an affective knowledge. We have already quoted Hill
as writing that "experience is not mere knowing but more a
matter of being affected by the object. As such it is
largely subjective, with emphasis upon affectivity."6 We
have also seen Hourlier's claim: "William's works reveal a
degree of affection unattainable by the kind of pious writ-
ings which give free rein to sensibility while lacking doc-
trinal content."7 The affective tone of the De contemplando

5 CF 3, 57. SC 61 bis, 104: "o incomprehensibilis
majestas: comprehensibilis esse videris animae te amanti.
Licet enim nullus sensus animae cujuslibet vel spiritus te
comprehendat, tamen totum te quantus-es comprehendit amor
amantis, qui totum te amat, quantus es." Emphasis mine.

NCE, V, 751-52. Emphasis mine.

7 See Chapter Two, note 43. CF 3, 34, and SC 61 bis,
47. Emphasis mine.
Deo reveals itself on every page of the treatise. Davy explains:

The style of the De contemplando Deo is constantly affective. William addresses himself directly to God, poses questions to him, and presses supplications on him. He expresses his personal feelings and the different states of his soul.

From the point of view of the order of the words, this affective style is characterized by the [frequent] appearance of the verb at the beginning of a phrase, contrary to the usage which places the verb at the end of a phrase.8

An emphasis on affection is present, moreover, not only in the literary style of the De contemplando Deo, but in its contents as well. In this short treatise William uses the verb affectare nine times, the noun affectus twelve times, and the noun affectio seven times. It is difficult to explain and translate these terms, each of which may have several nuances. Hourlier explains the verb affectare thus:

To be "affected" expresses the modification undergone and experienced by the soul when it is made a participant of uncreated Love; it is this participation which makes it tend to God and be united with him. The accent may be placed on the action by which God communicates himself (affecta a Deo), on the tending aspect of love (ad Deum), on its unitive

8 Deux traités de l'amour, p. 19: "Le style du De contemplando Deo est constamment affectif. Guillaume s'adresse directement à Dieu, lui pose des questions, le presse de supplications. Il exprime ses sentiments personnels, ses divers états d'âme.

Du point de vue de l'ordre des mots, ce style affectif est caractérisé par la place du verbe en tête de la phrase, contrairement à l'usage qui met le verbe en fin de phrase." Trans. and emphasis mine.
aspect (in Deo), or on its character of participation (affici Deo).\(^9\)

Yet in his French translation which accompanies the Latin text of the *De contemplando Deo* in SC 61 bis, Hourlier does not emphasize these various nuances of this word, but translates *afficere*, and its various grammatical forms, by *affecté* in all nine instances of its occurrence. In her English translation in CF 3, however, Sister Penelope does bring out these nuances, translating *afficere* and its various forms by the terms "affected," "acted upon," or "united to." This shows that the verb *afficere*, as it occurs in the *De contemplando Deo*, may be interpreted in different ways, and that it is a difficult word to explain and to translate.

A review of a recent study of the concept of *affectus* in William of Saint Thierry's works as a whole by the German scholar W. Zwingmann has shown:

The term is used nearly 250 times and covers several different meanings, but it may be said to indicate the deepest aspect of our tending towards God. On the one hand, *affectus* relates to the soul's ascent towards God (man is active); on the other, it also serves to designate the condescending grace of God, who stoops to the

---

\(^9\) SC 61 bis, 67, note 1: "Etre 'affecté' exprime la modification subie et expérimentée par l'âme lorsqu'elle est rendue participante de l'Amour incréé; c'est cette participation qui la fait tendre vers Dieu et l'unit à lui. L'accent peut être mis sur l'action par laquelle Dieu se communique (*affici a Deo*), sur l'aspect tendanciel de l'amour (*ad Deum*), sur son aspect unitif (*in Deo*), sur son caractère de participation (*affici Deo*)." Trans. mine. The footnote which appears at this point in the text in CF 3, 39-40, note 27, is different from this footnote of Hourlier, and offers its own explanation of this word.
soul in search of Him (so that man, in a sense, is passive). It should be noted that in the second case the affectus is bound up with the work of the Holy Spirit. One may say that in the affectus God works in us and we co-operate in this divine action.¹⁰

In his treatise De natura et dignitate amoris, written shortly after the De contemplando Deo (see above, Chapter Two), William himself explicitly contrasts the concepts affectus and affectio when he writes:

For attachment [affectus] is one thing, feeling [affectio] is another. Attachment takes hold of the soul with a certain general power and abiding virtue, firm and stable, which is brought about by grace. Feelings, however, are carried along by the varying occurrences of the changing course of events.¹¹

But it would be incorrect to apply such a sharp distinction to these two words as they occur in the De contemplando Deo.


¹¹ PC 24, 66: "Aliud quippe est affectus, aliud affectio. Affectus est qui generali quadam potentia et perpetua quadam virtute firma et stabili, mentem possidet, quam per gratiam obtinuit. Affectiones vero sunt quas varias varios rerum et temporum affect evenus." Trans. and emphasis mine. "Attachment" seems to be the English word which comes closest to doing justice to as many of the nuances of William's use of the Latin word affectus as possible, and the difference between affectus and affectio which William explains in this passage seems to be brought out best by contrasting the words "attachment" and "feeling."
Hourlier translates all twelve occurrences of the word affectus and all seven of the word affectio by the same French word, affection. Sister Penelope translates affectus by "affection," "passion," "feeling," or "disposition"; and affectio by "affection," "relationship," "mood," or "thought."

Hourlier seems to equate affectus with affectio in the De contemplando Deo when he refers to a passage which contains the word affectus to explain the word affectio. And William himself comes close to equating these two words in the De contemplando Deo when he writes:

And when your love, that is the love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Son for the Father—the Holy Spirit, when he dwells in us, he is to you that which he is—love. And he turns toward himself all the "captive of Sion," that is to say all the affections [affectiones] of the soul. And, when he does all that, we love you, or you love yourself in us, we affectively [nos affectu] and you effectively [tu effectu], making us one in you, through your own unity, through your Holy Spirit whom you have given us.13

Thus we see that William begins to speak of affection, and to use the words affectus and affectio, in the De contemplando Deo, but that he makes a clear distinction between

---

13 CF 3, 58. SC 61 bis, 104-106: "Cumque amor tuus, amor patris ad filium, amor filii ad patrem, spiritus sanctus habitans in nobis ad te est quod est id est amor omnem captivitatem Syon id est animae nostrae omnes affectiones in se convertens, et sanctificans, amamus te, vel amas tu te in nobis, nos affectu, tu effectu, unum nos in te efficiens per unitatem tuam id est ipsum spiritum sanctum tuum, quem de-disti nobis." Emphasis mine.
these two words only later, in his *De natura et dignitate amoris*. This is another example of a theme being introduced in William's first work, and more fully developed in one of his later works.

But if we are not able to give the words *affectus* and *affectio* as they occur in the *De contemplando Deo* a specific meaning, this last quotation from William highlights what is the most important aspect of both of these words—they are both closely related to the word *love* (*amor*). William gives both the word *affectus* and the word *affectio* several shades of meaning in the *De contemplando Deo*; but the word *affectus*, in eight of its twelve occurrences,\(^\text{14}\) and the word *affectio*, in three of its seven occurrences,\(^\text{15}\) appears in a context which includes the word *amor*. On three occasions in the *De contemplando Deo* he uses the phrase *amoris affectus*—the attachment of love.\(^\text{16}\) We have seen William relate knowledge to love; here we see him relate the quality of affection to love. *Love*, therefore, is beginning to emerge as a leading idea in William's treatment of the experience of God in the *De contemplando Deo*.

\(^{14}\) SC 61 bis, 84, line 28; 88, line 4 (twice); 94, line 35; 94, line 1; 96, line 4; 104, line 110; and 108, line 8.

\(^{15}\) SC 61 bis, 82, line 60; 100, line 56; and 104, line 108.

\(^{16}\) SC 61 bis, 94, line 1; 96, line 4; and 108, line 8.
The Christian experience of God

In describing the Christian experience of God in Chapter Three I noted that it is rooted in faith in Christ, that it is a sharing in Christ's own experience of God, an experience of receiving God's mercy in conversion, an awareness of God and of oneself in relation to God, and an eschatological experience which will be consummated only at the second epiphany of the Lord. I believe it is possible to show that William includes all these aspects in his descriptions of his experience of God in the De contemplando Deo.

An experience rooted in faith in Christ

William affirms that the experience of loving union with God about which he is writing is rooted in faith in Christ by stating, and then answering, the question of the way in which we love God. He poses this question when he says: "it is important, Lord, that we should know how one loves you."17 William's response to this question takes the form of a contrast between the way of: "The philosophers of this world,"18 and the Way with which he is concerned, namely Christ himself. He describes the philosophers of this world by saying:

though they had love of a sort and had some honest actions to their credit, they nevertheless lacked the faith that works by love. And, because their love (such as it was) and their good actions neither sprang from the fountain of true righteousness nor led to its end, these men went ever more hopelessly astray as they ran ever faster off the way. 19

William then shows that he considers Christ to be the true Way: “For the Way, O Father, is your Christ, who said: ‘I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.’” 20

A sharing in Christ’s own experience of God

It is clear from the passage of the De contemplando Deo which we have just seen that William considers his experience of God not only rooted in faith in Christ, but also a sharing in Christ’s own experience of God. He makes this even clearer when he writes:

But now, through the grace inbreahted into us by the Spirit of your adoption, we have confidence that all the Father has is ours also. So, through the grace of adoption, we invoke you now under the same name as your only Son invokes you by right of nature. But because all this derives exclusively from you, O sovereign Father of lights, for whom to love is to do good and from whom comes every good  

19 CF 3, 60. SC 61 bis, 110: “Non enim habebant fidem quae per dilectionem operatur, licet affectatum quendam amorem, et opera quaedam haberent honestatis; quae quia ex fonte verae justitiae finem ibant, tanto desperatius errabant, quanto fortius extra viam currebant.” Emphasis mine. I have altered the translation of the word viam from “the track” to “the way.”

endowment and every perfect gift, you, I say, love yourself in us, and us in yourself, when we love you through you. We are made one with you just insofar as we are worthy to love you and— as we said just now— become sharers in the fulfillment of your Son's prayer: "I will that, as you and I are One, so these also may be one in us." For we are your people, Lord, God's People, as your Apostle says, making the heathen poet's words the vehicle of good, so that only the savor of the good thought should be sensed. We are, I say, God's offspring, we, all of us, are gods and sons of the Most High through a kind of spiritual kinship. We claim for ourselves a closer relationship with you, because through the Spirit of adoption your Son does not scorn to be known by the same name as we, and because with and by him, taught by saving precepts and schooled by God's ordinance, we are bold to say: "Our Father, who art in heaven." 21

Here again we notice an emphasis on love. William goes on,

21 CF 3, 55. SC 61 bis, 98-100: "jam per inspiratam nobis gratiam per spiritum adoptionis tuae, omnia quae patris sunt nostra esse confidentes, ipse te nomine invocemus per adoptionis gratiam quo filius tuus unicus per naturam. Sed quia hoc abs te t quem est cujus amare, hoc est bene facere, a quo omne datum optimum et omne donum perfectum summe pater luminum, tu te ipsum amas in nobis, et nos in te, cum te per te amamus, et in tantum tibi unimur, in quantum amare te meremur; et participes efficimur ut dictum est orationis illius Christi filii tuui: Volo ut sicut ego et tu unum sumus: ita et ipsi in nobis unum sint. Genus enim tuum sumus domine, genus dei, sicut dicit apostolus tuus transferens ethnici sententiam de malo vase in vas bonum: ut non nisi ipsam et vas bonum sapiat. Genus inquam sumus dei, dii et filii excelsi omnes, cognatione quodam spirituali, magnum apud te nobis vendicantes affinitatem, cum per spiritum adoptionis filius tuus unum nobiscum nomen sortiri non designatur; et cum ipso et ipsum praecipit salutaribus moniti et divina institutione formati, audemus dicere: Pater noster qui es in coelis." Emphasis mine. The reference to "the heathen poet's words" is to a passage from Aratus, Phaen[omena], 5, (quoted by Luke in Acts 17:28-29).
moreover, to speak of the enjoyment, or delight, or fruition (fruitio) of this loving union with God in Christ: "And this union, this adherence, this enjoyment [fruitio] of your sweetness will be such that our Lord, your Son, will call it unity, in saying: 'That they may be one in us.'"\(^{22}\) This enjoyment is for William an essential aspect of loving God. He uses the word "enjoyment" (fruitio and frui) six times in the De contemplando Deo, and on one occasion he even claims that it merits the perfection of our love: "The love of desire sometimes merits sight, sight merits enjoyment [fruitionem], and enjoyment [fruitio] merits the perfection of love."\(^{23}\)

William continues to utilize this vocabulary of enjoyment, or delight, or fruition, in his later works, especially in the Expositio super cantica canticorum. This shows that enjoyment may be added to understanding God by loving him, and to affection, as themes which first appear in the De contemplando Deo and continue to be developed in William's later works. The focal point around which these themes revolve in the De contemplando Deo is love, which infuses

\(^{22}\) CF 3, 56. SC 61 bis, 100: "tantaque fit conjunctio, tanta adhaesio, tanta dulcedinis tuae fruitio, ut unitas ab ipso domino nostro filio tuo vocetur dicente: Ut sint ipsi unum in nobis." Emphasis mine.

\(^{23}\) SC 61 bis, 74: "Amor desiderii meretur aliquando visionem, visio fruitionem; fruitio amoris perfectionem." Trans. mine.
understanding, affection, and enjoyment, and brings them into a harmonious unity.

Receiving God's mercy in conversion

William includes the next aspect of the Christian experience of God, that of receiving God's mercy in conversion, in his description of his experience of God in a context in which he is speaking, once again, of love. Describing a process in which God reaches out to us in love and converts, or turns us back, to his love, he writes:

You, therefore, love us insofar as you make us lovers of yourself, and we love you insofar as we receive your Spirit, who is your Love, and let him lay hold of and possess all our secret affections, converting them into the perfect purity of your truth, and the truth of your purity, into full concord with your love.24

By showing how the Holy Spirit gently turns the willing soul to God, this passage explains the notion of conversion. William explicitly adverts to our receiving God's mercy in another passage, when he writes:

But you, O righteous Lord, you who wish to save us, you never save or condemn anyone otherwise than justly. You are the author of both our

---

24 CF 3, 55-56. SC 61 bis, 100: "Amas itaque nos in quantum nos efficis tui amatores, et nos amamus te, in quantum a te spiritum tuum accipimus, qui est amor tuus obtinentem et possidentem omnes affectionum nostrarum recessus; et perfecte eos convertentem in puritatem veritatis tuae, in veritatem puritatis tuae, in plenum amoris tui consensum." Emphasis mine. I have altered the translation of the word convertentem from "transmuting" to "converting."
judgment and our cause. Sitting upon your throne and judging righteous judgment, you judge the righteousness that you yourself have made. Thus will every mouth be shut, and the whole world be made subject to God, when you have pity on him on whom you will have pity, and extend mercy to him to whom you will be merciful.25

William shows that he considers this reception of God's mercy also in the context of love when he goes on to say in the next sentence:

We could not with justice have been saved, had we not loved you, nor could we have loved you, save by your gift. You willed, therefore, that we should love you. So, Lord, as the Apostle of your love tells us, and as we ourselves have said before, you "first loved us"; and you love all your lovers first.26

Awareness of God and of oneself as dependent on God

The next thing we noted about the Christian experience of God was that it is an awareness of God and of oneself as dependent on God. William's constant awareness of God is shown in the De contemplando Deo by the continuous prayers


26 CF 3, 53. SC 61 bis, 94: "Voluisti ergo ut amaremus te, qui nec juste poteramus salvari, nisi amaremus te; nec amare te poteramus, nisi procederet a te. Ergo domine sicut apostolus amonis tui dicit, et nos jam diximus, prior dilexisti nos; et prior diligis omnes dilectores tuos." Emphasis mine.
addressed directly to God and the prayerful reflections on the love of God also addressed directly to God. The tone of his prayers indicates that William is speaking about his own experiences of God, and he could only do this if he were aware of himself as dependent on God. These two themes of awareness of God and of oneself as dependent on God occur together in a striking passage toward the beginning of the treatise, in which William says:

And you know, since it happens only by your gift, you know how from the inmost depths of my being and after I have put away from me all striving after worldly honors and delights and pleasures, and everything else than can—and often does—arouse in me the lust of the flesh, or of the eyes, or that stirs up in me a wrong ambition—you know how my heart then says to you: "My face has sought you; your face then will I seek. Do not turn your face from me; do not turn away in anger from your servant."27

Later in the treatise he shows that he has reached a certain fullness of this double awareness by being drawn into intimate union with God. He says:

So it comes to this: that as for the Father to know the Son is nothing else but to be what the Son is, and for the Son to know the Father is simply to be what the Father is (whence comes the Gospel saying: "No one knows the Father save the Son, and no one knows the Son

---

27 CF 3, 37. SC 61 bis, 60: "Et tu scis qui jam hoc ipsum das, quam ex omnibus suis recessibus abjectis procul omnibus saeclis hujus altitudinibus, pulchritudinibus, dulcedinibus, et quicquid concupiscis tiam carnis vel oculorum, vel ambitione spiritus attemptare potest, vel solet: tibi dicit cor meum: Exquisitum te facies mea; faciem tuam domine requiram. Ne avertas faciem tuam a me; ne declines in ira a servo tuo." Emphasis mine.
except the Father"), and as for the Holy Spirit to know and understand the Father and the Son is simply to be what the Father and the Son are, so is it with us. We were created in your image. Through Adam we have grown old in unlikeness; but now through Christ we are being renewed in that image day by day. So for us who love God, I tell you, to love and fear God is nothing other than to be of one spirit with him.28

Here again, describing his intimate union with God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, William speaks of knowing and loving God.

An eschatological experience which will be consummated only at the second epiphany of the Lord

The final characteristic of the Christian experience of God is that it is an eschatological experience which will be consummated only at the second epiphany of the Lord. Rahner defines eschatology as: "The theological doctrine of the last things,"29 and he goes on to distinguish between "individual eschatology (death, the particular judgment, the heaven or hell or purgatory of the individual) and general

28 CF 3, 59. SC 61 bis, 106: "ut sicut non est alius patri nosse filium, nisi hoc esse quod est filius, nichil alius filio nosse patrem, nisi hoc esse quod est pater, unde in evangelio: Nemo novit patrem nisi filium, et nemo novit filium nisi pater, et sicut spiritui sancto nichil est alius nosse vel comprehendere patrem et filium, quam hoc esse quod est pater et filius; ita nobis qui ad imaginem tuam conditi sumus, et ab illa per Adam invetustati, per Christum ad illam renovamur de die in diem, amantibus deum nichil sit alius amare et timere deum et mandata ejus observare, quam esse, et unum spiritum cum deo esse." Emphasis mine.

29 "Eschatology," Theological Dictionary, p. 149.
esch atology (the general Judgment, eternal heaven, eternal
hell)" (p. 150). He describes the parousia, or second epi-
phany of the Lord, as "the consummation of history (Christ's
and the world's) in God, who will be directly revealed in
his glory."\textsuperscript{30}

William speaks in terms of \textit{individual eschatology} when
he describes his experience of God in this life as an antic-
ipation of his hoped-for entrance into eternal life:

In fact, as long as we are in this life, it is
given us to enjoy the ineffable peace of the
"silence in heaven"--that is, in the soul of
the righteous which is the seat of Wisdom--only
on occasion, for the space of half an hour, or
"for scarcely half an hour." But with the
thoughts that remain the soul's attention re-
mains fixed on you, as in the observance of
a perpetual feast day. \textit{In that blessed and
eternal life, however, of which it is said,
"Enter into the joy of your Lord," there alone
will the enjoyment be perfect and perpetual.
And the bliss then will be proportionately
greater, in that by that time all the things
that now seem to hinder or retard it will have
been done away; and the eternity of her love
will be secure for ever, her perfection will
be inviolable, and her bliss such as cannot be
corrupted.}\textsuperscript{31}


\textsuperscript{31} CF 3, 49. SC 61 bis, 86: "Quamdiu quippe in hac
sumus vita, hoc felicissimae pacis silentio in caelo, id est
in anima justi quae sedes est sapientiae, aliquando fruitur
affectus, sed hora dimidia, vel quasi dimidia; intentio vero
de reliquis cogitationis diem festum perpetuum agit tibi.
In illa vero beata et aeterna vita de qua dicitur: Intra in
gaudium domini tui, sola erit perfecta et perpetua fruitio;
et tanto felicior quanto remotis jam omnibus quae hoc tardare
vel impedire videntur, amoris ejus indissolubilis aeternitas,
irrequagabilis perfectio, incorruptibilis erit beatitudo."
Emphasis mine.
As for general eschatology, William devotes the whole of paragraph 6 of the De contemplando Deo (SC 61 bis, 76-82; CF 3, 44-47) to heaven, considering the endless perfecting of love and desire. Here he speaks at length of the souls of the just:

But he who desires what he cannot get is in a pitiable state; and misery like that is far removed from the kingdom of bliss. So, up there, everyone who desires anything attains it. What shall we say to that? What, I repeat, shall we say? Speak, I beg you, Lord, for your servant listens! Those who are in the kingdom of God, both great and small, each one in his own order, do they not love, and do they not desire to love? And does not the unity of love permit that there shall also be diversity? While he, to whom it has been given so to do, loves more ardently, does not his "lesser" brother love, without any envy, the good he desires for himself wherever he beholds it? And is it not certain that in this way he has in its entirety, however great that is, the love which he loves in him who loves?32

These considerations of the souls of the just show that William’s scope transcends himself, but they do not contain any clear references to the second epiphany of the Lord. Moreover, in paragraph 6 of the De contemplando Deo there

is no explicit mention of any of the three elements we have seen contained in the concept of general eschatology—the general Judgment, eternal heaven, and eternal hell. There is no reference at all in the De contemplando Deo to the general Judgment, and only one indirect reference to hell; and all of the references to heaven are to heaven as it is now, not as it will be at the second epiphany of the Lord. In one of his references to heaven William says:

And for him who desires and loves, O Lord, you make what he desires so to abound that the desirer is vexed by no anxiety, nor does he who has plenty ever have too much. And, O Lord, I ask you: is not this the eternal way of which the Psalmist sings: "See if there be a way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way eternal?"

Although William uses the word "eternal" here, it is clear that he is thinking in terms of his present relationship with God, not of his future beatitude.

---

33 CF 3, 63: "Only the apostate spirit takes pleasure in our wretchedness, and counts our benefit his bane; for he has fallen away from the common good and from true happiness, and is no longer subject to the truth. Hating the common good, he therefore rejoices in isolation, hugging a joy belonging to himself alone." SC 61 bis, 118: "Solius enim apostatae spiritus est nostram misericordiam suam facere laetitiam, nostrum bonum suum dampnum, nimirum quia a communi omnium bono, et vera beatitudine lapsus, non est subditus veritati: privato suo gaudens, et commune omnium odiens bonum."

34 CF 3, 47. SC 61 bis, 80: "et desideranti et amanti quod desiderat et amat, sic facis abundare o domine: ut nec anxietas desiderantem, nec fastidium affligat abundantem. Et numquid obsecro domine haec est via aeterna, de qua cantat psalmus: Et vide si via iniquitatis in me est, et deduc me in via aeterna?" Emphasis mine.
We see, then, that in describing his experience of God, William refers to the individual eschatology of his own place in heaven. If he does not refer explicitly to the general eschatology of the eternal heaven of all the redeemed after the second epiphany of the Lord, nevertheless, he does extend his concern beyond himself to the souls already in heaven.

It is noteworthy that in all the quotations from paragraph 6 of the De contemplando Deo in which William speaks of heaven, there is an emphasis on the theme we have seen already so often: love. At one point in this paragraph William explicitly relates love to understanding, as we have seen him do before:

For, as I said, Love is he who is loved. It is he who, by the flood of his delights, relieves the man who loves him from all his distress, whether it be that of surfeit which comes of satisfaction, or of the anxiety that desire breeds, or of the envy that grows out of zeal. As the Apostle says, he enlightens them "from glory to glory," so that in the Light they see light, and they understand love in Love.35

Thus far in this chapter I have pointed out the presence in the De contemplando Deo of all the characteristics

---

35 CF 3, 46. SC 61 bis, 80: "Amor enim est ut dictum est, qui amatur; qui a voluptatis suae torrente omnem ab amatore suo repellit vel in satietate fastidii, vel in desiderio anxietudinis, vel in zelando invidiae miseriam, illuminans eos ut dicit apostolus a claritate in claritatem: ut in lumine videant lumen, et in amore concipiant amorem." Emphasis mine.
of the Christian experience of God: knowledge, affectivity, union with Christ, conversion effected by the mercy of God, awareness of God and of oneself in relation to God, and an eschatological thrust. I have also shown that William speaks from his own experience and looks directly to God and that he introduces the themes of love, knowledge, affection, and enjoyment of God, all of which he will develop in his later works. Now I will address the question of whether the experiences William describes in this treatise can be called 'mystical'.

The Christian mystical experience of God

In Chapter Three we saw that, at the level of a simple preliminary comparison, a more ordinary kind of religious experience may be distinguished from mystical experience by saying that religious experience is a mediated experience of God, while mystical experience is an immediate experience of God. In order to ascertain whether at least some of the experiences of God which William of Saint Thierry describes in the De contemplando Deo may be considered mystical experiences, however, it is necessary to speak of mysticism in more detail. But to discuss mysticism in reference to William's experience of God presents two difficulties. The first difficulty is that, as Knowles has written: "Everyone in our day who proposes to speak or to write of mysticism must begin by deploping both the ambiguity of the word itself
and the difficulty of defining it in any of its meanings."36

The second difficulty is that, to spiritual writers of the
twelfth century, the word "mystical" denoted one or more of
the four senses of Scripture, which will be explained later
in this chapter. Twelfth-century authors did not use the
word "mystical" to describe what we today call mystical ex-
periences, for which they had a different way of speaking.
To quote Knowles again: "Mysticism, both as a word and as
a topic of discussion, is of relatively recent birth" (p.
12). Because the word "mysticism" has become so much a
part of our spiritual vocabulary today, it seems necessary
to explain William of Saint Thierry's experience of God in
its terms, and to make the necessary efforts to overcome
these two difficulties.

Contemporary descriptions of mystical experience

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, after a two
centuries' lack of interest in mysticism, a revival of such
interest occurred among scientific psychologists and among
Christians of several denominations. In The Nature of Mys-
ticism, Knowles describes this revival as it manifested
itself among the psychologists, and among a number of Roman
Catholic thinkers, of whom he writes:

Some were drawn by devotional motives, others

36 The Nature of Mysticism, p. 9.
hoped to use the mystical experience as an argument for the truth of Christian belief, but most of these Catholic thinkers, in this resembling the psychologists, approached the subject from outside, with a quasi-scientific technique of observing and comparing phenomena in the hope of arriving at general conclusions and a definition of their subject.37

Knowles criticizes both of these groups, whose ranks included such well-known authors as William James, Evelyn Underhill, and Baron Friedrich von Hügel, claiming that "they remained on the phenomenal level" (p. 11), and "made no attempt at a theological analysis of the mystical experience" (p. 11). He distinguishes his own method from theirs by emphasizing his theological intention:

it is part of the purpose of this book to explain the mystical experience by showing what it has in common with the theology of grace considered as the principle of the Christian life. This in its turn can be understood and analysed only from above, so to say, that is, in the light of the common and traditional Christian teaching whose authority must be sought in the teaching of Christ and his apostles. To say this may surprise many, and will certainly not meet with agreement from those (and nowadays they are many) who are interested in mysticism as psychologists or students of religious experience, and who regard mysticism either as a purely subjective activity, or as the outward appearance of powers rare in themselves or at least normally overlaid by superficial activity or, finally, as a purely natural contact with a power or spirit within the framework of the universe. Such disagreement is inevitable if we hold that the true mystical experience is an instance of the (normally imperceptible) action of God within the soul and powers of a human being. If we hold this, any

37 The Nature of Mysticism, p. 11.
consideration of it must pass, so to say, from God downwards before we are in a position to look at the visible evidence and consequences of God's action.\(^{38}\)

This theological approach to mysticism is closer to the spirit of William of Saint Thierry's descriptions of his experiences of God in the *De contemplando Deo* than the psychological approach of those whom Knowles criticizes; as we have seen, William presupposes the framework of Christian theology, and he focuses more on the God he is experiencing than on his experience itself.

Knowles claims that mystical experiences have a "supernatural . . . origin" (p. 13). He offers this definition of mysticism:

> In this book we shall be concerned primarily with theological mysticism or, to use the term consecrated by tradition, "mystical theology," and this may be defined as "an incommunicable and inexpressible knowledge and love of God or of religious truth received in the spirit without precedent effort or reasoning." More loosely used, it may comprehend the normal conditions, accompaniments and side-effects of such knowledge, and a description of the circumstances of its reception, and of the attempts made to receive it and to convey its meaning and effects to others.\(^{39}\)

Here we see that in explaining the incommunicability, inexpressibility, and gratuitous nature of mysticism, Knowles refers to it clearly as a form of knowledge and love.

---


themes which, as we have seen, appear often in the *De contemplando Deo*. In the conclusion of his book, Knowles explains this knowledge and love in greater detail when he writes:

At a certain spiritual level determined by the providence of God, the action of the Holy Spirit, from being an imperceptible aid and inspiration and light, becomes, at first rarely but later almost continuously, a source of a new knowledge and love of God, which in its fullest growth is an effluence of the love and knowledge which God has of himself and which enters into the relationships of the divine Persons. This knowledge is still to the soul obscure and this love is of itself too deep for feeling, but the knowledge and love are intimately and most vividly experienced in an inexpressible way by the soul and recognized also in their effects by the soul and others. This is the mystical life, which increases in depth and becomes the rarer of attainment the purer it is. As it grows, the union of the soul and the divine Word becomes more complete and the knowledge more perfect, not by the comprehension of the Divinity, which can only be achieved in the light of glory in the eternal life, but in an increasing clarity of perception both of what is not God and of what God is not, and an increasing apprehension, arising from the likeness that love bestows, of the truth and beauty of all that he has revealed of himself and his ways.40

Here we note also a number of other themes reminiscent of emphases of the *De contemplando Deo*: awareness of the divine Persons, union with the Word, and an eschatological thrust; and the "love . . . too deep for feeling" (p. 134) bears a striking resemblance to the *affectus amoris* (attachment of love) as William contrasts it with *affectio* (feeling) in his

---

De natura et dignitate amoris.

For Knowles, then, mysticism is a knowledge and love of God which is incomunicable, inexpressible, and gratuitously given by God to the person as a supernatural gift. But in order to approach mysticism from more than one point of view, it will be helpful to supplement these characteristics given by Knowles, who is primarily an historian and spiritual writer, with the description given by an author with a more scientific and philosophical background: Joseph Maréchal (1878-1944), a Belgian Jesuit professor of rational and experimental psychology at the Jesuit Philosophical and Theological College at Louvain, and founder of the Roman Catholic theological and philosophical movement known as transcendental Thomism. Maréchal's monumental study of mysticism is his *Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics*, a work which Knowles neither criticizes nor utilizes, and which we may thus use as an objective check on Knowles's description of mysticism. In this book Maréchal analyzes religious psychology as a positive science, the problem of mystical grace in Islam, and the comparative study of mysticism. After examining "the principal data which the mystical documents, general psychology and Catholic theology in turn supply to us" (p. 199), he gives these essential characteristics of

Christian mysticism: its evidence as an effect of "super-natural grace" (p. 199), and its witness to "a new element, qualitatively distinct from the normal psychological activities and from ordinary grace; we mean the active, non-symbolic presentation of God to the soul, with its psychological correlative: the immediate intuition of God by the soul" (p. 200). In the second of these two fundamental characteristics we notice the presence of the word "immediate," which I took as the keynote of mysticism in Chapter Three. Maréchal then proceeds to complete this basic description of Christian mysticism with "some secondary characters, which are mostly only corollaries" (p. 200). First he explains: "The normal predisposition for mystical favours will always remain, with a privileged physical temperament, the perseveringly progressive ascetic of recollected prayer and moral action" (p. 201). He hastens to add, however, that "mystical union . . . is a free and gratuitous gift of God, a favour independent of any law, withdrawn from human will and consequently impossible to foresee" (p. 201), and to claim: "The conciliation of these characteristics, so easy from the point of view of Christian mysticism, is doubtless also a differential note thereof" (p. 201). Finally, he gives as a negative, but very important characteristic of authentic mysticism, "its entire agreement with Christian dogma and morals" (p. 202).

If we compare the descriptions of mysticism given by
Knowles, the historian and spiritual writer, and Maréchal, the scientist and philosopher, we see that both explicitly utilize principles of Catholic theology, and both stress the supernatural origin and the gratuity of mystical experience. Knowles also notes that it is a knowledge and love of God that is incommunicable and inexpressible, and Maréchal adds considerations of physical temperament, ascetical effort, and agreement with Christian dogma and morals. Knowles's claim: "Within this mystical life God may also by special illumination of the mind and touches of love in the will lift, as it were, a corner of the veil that hides his infi- nite perfection from all created understanding," though it does not contain the actual word "immediate," would seem to be a description of what Maréchal calls "the immediate intuition of God by the soul." All this shows that, even if these two authors emphasize different aspects of mysticism, they are fundamentally in harmony with each other in their thinking on it.

We may conclude, then, that a contemporary Roman Catho- lic theological description of mysticism maintains that it is a supernatural knowledge and love of God which is incommunica- bile and inexpressible, an immediate intuition of God by the soul which is somehow influenced by physical tempera-

42 The Nature of Mysticism, p. 134.
ment and prepared for by the ascesis of recollected prayer and moral action, but remains a gift freely given by God, and is in agreement with Christian dogma and morals.

It is possible to illustrate that William's experience of God, as described in the *De contemplando Deo*, contains all of these characteristics, with the sole exception of any direct reference to his physical temperament. Thus, although William does not use the actual word "supernatural," it is clear that he conceives of the experience of God in supernatural terms in this passage:

I can scarcely now contain myself for hoping that one day you will remove your covering hand and pour out your illuminating grace, so that at last, dead to myself and alive to you, according to the answer of your truth with unveiled face I shall begin to see your face, and by that seeing shall be united to you. 

That William considers his experience to entail the **knowledge and love of God** appears when he says:

And yet, O Majesty transcending understanding, to the soul that loves you, you do seem understandable. For though no faculty of soul or spirit can ever comprehend you, nevertheless,

---

44 CF 3, 39. SC 61 bis, 64-66: "vix patienter expecto ut aliquando auferas manum tegentem, et infundas gratiam illuminantem; ut tandem aliquando secundum responsum veritatis tuae mortuus michi, et vivens tibi, revelata facie ipsam tuam faciem incipiam videre, et affici tibi a visione faciei tuae." Emphasis mine. Note 25 on page 39 of CF 3 (a note which does not appear in SC 61 bis) explains: "The soul has an aptitude to know and to love God. It is here that it is the image of God by creative grace. By the supernatural illumination of grace the soul can progressively come to know and love God. It is then the image of God by illuminating grace." Emphasis mine.
the man who loves you in his loving understands you totally.\textsuperscript{45}

In this passage we notice again how William relates understanding and love to each other. He describes the incomunicable and inexpressible nature of his experience in this way:

In fact, as long as we are in this life, it is given us to enjoy the ineffable peace of the "silence in heaven"—that is, in the soul of the righteous which is the seat of Wisdom—only on occasion, for the space of half an hour, or "for scarcely half an hour."\textsuperscript{46}

William affirms an immediate intuition of God by his soul:

"0 the incalculable blessedness of the soul that merits so to be acted on by God, that through unity of spirit she loves in God, not just some property of his, but God himself."\textsuperscript{47}

It is true that here William is speaking impersonally of "the soul," but I think the intensity of the passage, in the context of the treatise as a whole, justifies our considering

\textsuperscript{45} CF 3, 57. SC 61 bis, 104: "Alioquin, o incomprehensibilis majestas: comprehensibilis esse videris animae te amanti. Licet enim nulius sensus animae cujuslibet vel spiritus te comprehendat, tamen totum tequantus esse comprehendit amor amantis, qui totum te amat, quantus est." Emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{46} CF 3, 49. SC 61 bis, 86: "Quamdiu quippe in hac sumus vita, hoc felicissimae pacis silentio in caelo, id est in anima justi quae sedes est sapientiae, aliquando fruitur affectus, sed hora dimidia, vel quasi dimidia." Emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{47} CF 3, 48. SC 61 bis, 84: "Et o felicem et animam felicissimam, quae deo sic a deo meretur affici ut per unitatem spiritus in deo solum amat deum, non suum aliquod privatum." Emphasis mine.
this an oblique reference to himself. Also, the verb "to be acted on" is a translation of the Latin word affici, which I have commented on earlier in this chapter in speaking of the affectivity inherent in the Christian experience of God.

William's repeated use of scriptural expressions of a desire to see God (for example, "My face has sought you; your face then will I seek"48), shows that the ascesis of recollected prayer was the lifeblood of his soul. He explicitly mentions the ascesis of moral action as a predisposition for his prayer in the passage which leads into this quotation from Psalm 26:8-9:

And you know, since it happens only by your gift, you know how from the inmost depths of my being and after I have put away from me all striving after worldly honors and delights and pleasures, and everything else that can--and often does--arouse in me the lust of the flesh, or of the eyes, or that stirs up in me a wrong ambition--you know how my heart then says to you: "My face has sought you; your face then will I seek."49

In this same passage we also notice William speaking of this very seeking for God as a gift: "since it happens only by

---

48 CF 3, 37. SC 61 bis, 60: "Exquisivit te facies mea; faciem tuam domine requiram." This same quotation from Psalm 26:8-9 recurs in CF 3, 40; SC 61 bis, 66.

49 CF 3, 37. SC 61 bis, 60: "Et tu scis qui jam hoc ipsum das, quam ex omnibus suis recessibus abjectis procul omnibus saeculi hujus altitudinibus, pulchritudinibus, dulcedinibus, et quicquid concupiscentiam carnis vel oculorum, vel ambitionem spiritus attemptare potest, vel solet: tibi dicat cor meum: Exquisivit te facies mea; faciem tuam domine requiram."
your gift." Elsewhere he affirms that the experience of God itself is also a gift freely given by God:

Till when, O Lord, tell when? How long must I seek counsel in my soul and be vexed in my heart every day? How long will your Spirit thus come and go in mortal men, never remaining with them, blowing where he will? Finally, William shows that he is in agreement with Christian dogma and morals when he says:

And yet it is by your command and by your gift that I stand upon the rock of faith in you, the rock of the Christian faith, and in the place where truly you are present. On that rock I take my stand meanwhile, with such patience as I can command.

In all of these passages, taken one by one, we can see that William's experience of God, as described in the De contemplando Deo, contains all of the characteristics of the Christian mystical experience of God given by Knowles, and all except one of those given by Maréchal. The following passage, which gives witness to several of these characteristics, reveals to us something of the fiery ardor of Wil-
liam's experience of God:

But, Lord, make haste, don't loiter! For the grace of your wisdom—or the wisdom of your grace—has its short-cuts. For there, where there are no rational arguments or lines of thought to lead one on and upwards step by step, up to the torrent of your delights and the full joy of your love—there, I say, he to whom you grant it, he who seeks faithfully and persists in knocking, there of a sudden he may often find himself already arrived:

But, Lord, when something of this joy falls to my lot—and it is all too seldom that it happens—but when it does, Lord, then I cry aloud and shout: "Lord, it is good for us to be here!"53

I think we may affirm that William is here describing what is called today a "mystical experience."

But, as I have mentioned above, in order to speak of William's experience of God in relation to mysticism, it is necessary not only to describe the term "mysticism" as it is used today; we must also consider how twelfth-century authors used the word "mystical," and how they described the experience which is today called a mystical experience.

The use of the word "mystical" in the twelfth century

The word "mystical" (mysticus) was indeed used by spiritual writers in the twelfth century, but not to describe an individual spiritual experience. Rather, it was used in the domain of scriptural exegesis, in the context of the theory of the four senses of Scripture: the literal or historical sense, the allegorical sense, the moral or tropological sense, and the anagogic or eschatological sense. Henri de Lubac, a well-known French Jesuit theologian, has examined the use of this theory of the four senses of Scripture by medieval authors in his monumental two part, four tome Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l’Écriture. Robert McNally, an American Jesuit church historian, commenting on this work, briefly synthesizes de Lubac’s explanation of the interrelationship of the various senses. McNally writes:

When the exegete passed from the historical level to the theological, he passed from litera to spiritus, from history to allegory, whose prime function is to detect, to search out, the mystery of Christ hidden in, yet expressed by, the historical event. . . . As Christian virtue only comes after the possession of Christian faith, so tropology only comes after allegory. . . . The most noble of the four senses, the last and highest achievement of biblical exegesis, is the anagogic sense, searching superiorem, invisibilia.

futura, ultima, and raising us up from the realities of the earthly Jerusalem to the realities of the heavenly Jerusalem.55

In this exegetical context medieval authors used the word mysticus somewhat loosely. It could refer to all of the last three senses, the spiritual senses, as a whole; or it could refer to any one of these three as a single sense.56

It is possible to give examples of the use of the word mysticus in this context by twelfth-century authors. William's contemporary and fellow Cistercian Guerrić of Igny (d. 1157) uses the word mysticus to refer to the allegorical sense when, in speaking of the need to search the Scriptures, he says: "There is need for searching not only to draw out the mystical sense but also to taste the moral sense."57

John Morson, an English Cistercian who has edited the critical edition of the Sermons of Guerrić in the Sources chrétiennes series,58 explains the use of the word "mystical"

---


56 See de Lubac, Exégèse médiévale, I, 2, 555-56; and McNally, "Medieval Exegesis," 453.


here when he comments on this sentence:

Mystica in the old sense of the word: all
that belongs to the Mystery of Salvation
through Christ [that is, the allegorical
sense]. Moralia in the old sense: not mere­
ly our observance of precepts or even of
counsels; but our life of union with God
[that is, the moral or tropological sense].

William himself does not use the word "mystical" at all in
the De contemplando Deo, but he does use it in two of his
later works. In the preface to his Expositio super cantica
canticorum he writes:

Now this song is written in the manner of a
drama and in dialogue style, as if to be re­
cited by characters and with action. Just as
various characters and various actions appear
in the recitation of dramas, so in this song
characters and affections seem to combine to
carry through this trafficking of love and the
mystical contract of the union of God and man.

The use of the word "mystical" here might seem to refer to a
spiritual experience, but the passage occurs in the middle
of a section (CF 6, 7-10) explicitly concerned with the dif­
fferent exegetical senses of the Song of Songs. In a differ­

---

59 Via Veritas et Vita: Christ in the Sermons of Guer­
ric of Igny, Diss. Gregoriana 1971 (Achel, Belgium: Abbatia

60 Exposition on the Song of Songs. The Works of William
of St Thierry, vol. 2, trans. Mother Columba Hart, CF 6
(1970), 9; hereafter cited as CF 6. Guillaume de Saint­
Thierry: Exposé sur le cantique des cantiques, ed. J.-M. Dé­
chanet, SC 82 (1962) (hereafter cited as SC 82), 80: "Scri­
bitura autem Canticum hoc in modum dramatis et stylo comico,
tanquam per personas et actus recitandum; ut sicut in com­
diis recitandis personae diversae, et diversi actus, sic et
in hoc Cantico concurret sibi videantur personae et affectus,
ad peragendum suscipientim negotium amoris, et mysticum contra­
tum divinae et humanae conjunctionis." Emphasis mine.
ent context, explaining how to understand the meaning of God's works, William writes in his *Speculum fidei*:

> All the actions of the Word are words for us, in which he speaks to us, manifesting himself to us when we understand his actions correctly. They are understood not only through mystical interpretations, in thought or the word of knowledge; but more sweetly and effectively through the devout affections of love, in meditation and the word of wisdom. 61

Thus it is clear that the word "mystical" was used in the twelfth century, but not to describe one's own experience of God. Nevertheless, twelfth-century authors did have a way of describing what we today call mystical experiences.

**The twelfth-century manner of describing mystical experiences**

The title of the treatise of William being studied in this thesis is *De contemplando Deo—On Contemplating God*. William uses the word "contemplation" (*contemplatio* and *contemplare*) in a number of his works, and on one occasion he uses it to describe a spiritual experience containing the quality of immediacy which I have taken as the keynote of mysticism. In his *Expositio super cantica canticorum* he

---

describes the experience of the Bride in this way:

A while ago she had some experience [Exper[ta] of love for the Bridegroom, and now she sighs after the bed. For an hour she tasted that which is imperfect, and now she desires repose and rest in that which is perfect. For in contemplation [In contemplatione] of the highest Good, through the natural attraction of that same Good, whatever delights the lover is wont to appear, to the believer, immediately [statim] obtainable.62

This shows that William uses the word "contemplation" to describe an experience which we today would call a mystical experience. He does this even more clearly in his De natura corporis et animae. Toward the end of this treatise William considers "the steps, from the lowest up to the highest, along which the soul striving for perfection advances as it ascends to its Maker."63 Of the highest step he writes:

In the very vision and contemplation [contemplatione] of the truth, which is the seventh and highest step of the soul or, even more than a step, a kind of mansion, to which it has come by the other steps: what joys, what enjoyment [fruitiio] of the true and highest good! Only he who has enjoyed [qui fruitur]

62 CF 6, 82-83. SC 82, 232: "Exper[ta] aliquando aliquem de Sponso affectum suspirat ad lectum, degustato ad horam quod ex parte est, accubitum seu requiem desiderat in eo quod perfectum est. In contemplatione namque summi boni, ex naturali boni ipsius gratia, praesumptibile statim fieri solet credenti, quidquid amantem delectat." Emphasis mine. Note William's use of the word "experience" (Exper[ta]) here in the context of his use of "contemplation" (contemplatione).

63 PL 180, 723A: "gradus ab imo usque ad supremum, quibus anima ad perfectionem contendens, proficiendo ad suum conscendit auctorem." Trans. mine.
the breath of this serenity can understand it."64

Here we notice once again the themes of enjoyment and understanding which, as we have seen so often, are of central importance in William's treatment of the experience of God in the De contemplando Deo.

Other twelfth-century authors also use the word "contemplation" to indicate the highest stage of spiritual experience. In his De consideratione, William's friend St Bernard of Clairvaux defines contemplation and distinguishes it from consideration (consideratio), a more preliminary form of spiritual activity which resembles meditation. Bernard writes:

Contemplation [contemplatio] may be defined as the soul's true and certain intuition of a thing, or as the indisputable apprehension of truth. Consideration [consideratio] is thought earnestly searching, an effort of the soul to track down the truth.65

Here Bernard contrasts the repose of contemplation, which

---

64 PL 180, 724D: "in ipsa visione et contemplatione veritatis, qui septimus est atque ultimus gradus animae, neque jam gradus sed quaedam mansio, quo illis gradibus pervenitur, quae sint gaudia, quae fruitio veri et summi boni, cujus serenitatis afflatus, solus intelligit qui fruitur." Trans. and emphasis mine.

calmly possesses the truth, to the activity of consideration in search of the truth.

In his *Sermones super cantica canticorum* Bernard relates the increasingly more intense stages of the experience of the Bride in the garden, the wine cellar, and the bedchamber to the progressively more spiritual senses of Scripture:

Let us seek the meaning of the garden, the wine cellar, and the bedchamber in the holy Scriptures. For in them the soul thirsting for God willingly pauses and lingers, knowing without any doubt that she will find him for whom she thirsts there. Thus let us take the garden to signify the plain and simple history, the wine cellar the moral sense, and the bedchamber the inmost secret--pure contemplation [arcanum theoricae contemplationis].

Guigo II, a Carthusian (d. 1188), distinguishes contemplation from three other spiritual activities. In his *Epistola de vita contemplativa* (*scala claustralium*), he writes:

---

66 *Sermones super cantica canticorum*, ed. J. Leclercq, C. H. Talbot, and H. M. Rochais, Op S Bern I (1957) (hereafter cited as Op S Bern I), *Sermo* 23, 140: "Et qu aeramus, si placet, tria ista is Scripturis sanctis, hortum, cellarium, cubiculum. In ipsis nempe libenter Deum sitiens anima versatur et moratur, sciens se ibi absque dubio inventuram quem sitit. Sit itaque hortus plana ac simplex historia, sit cellarium moralis sensus, sit cubiculum arcanum theoricae contemplationis." Trans. and emphasis mine. Here "the plain and simple history" (*plana ac simplex historia*) refers to the first sense of Scripture, the literal or historical sense; "the moral sense" (*moralis sensus*) refers to the third sense, the moral or tropological sense; and "the inmost secret--pure contemplation" (*arcanum theoricae contemplationis*) refers to the fourth and highest sense, the anagogic or eschatological sense.
One day, while I was engaged with practical things, at manual labor, I began to think about the spiritual exercise of man, and suddenly four spiritual steps occurred to me as I was musing, namely reading \( \text{[lectio]} \), meditation \( \text{[meditatio]} \), prayer \( \text{[oratio]} \), and contemplation \( \text{[contemplatio]} \). This is the monks' ladder by which they ascend from earth to heaven. . . . Its base rests on the earth, but its top pierces the clouds and examines heavenly secrets.\(^6\)

Having mentioned the four steps, Guigo describes them in more detail:

Reading is a diligent scrutiny of the Scriptures with an exertion of the soul. Meditation is a studious activity of the mind, seeking knowledge of a hidden truth, guided by its own rationality. Prayer is a fervent movement of the heart to God, seeking the removal of evil things or the obtaining of good things. Contemplation is a certain elevation into God of a soul suspended above itself and tasting the joys of eternal sweetness.\(^6\)

Surely the experience of God which Guigo II refers to as


\(^6\) SC 163, 84: "Est autem lectio sedula scripturarum cum animi intentione inspectio. Meditatio est studiosa mente actio, occultae veritatis notiam ductu propriae rationis investigans. Oratio est devota cordis in Deum intentio pro malis removendis vel bonis adipiscendis. Contemplatio est mentis in Deum suspensae quaedam supra se elevatio, eternae dulcedinis gaudia degustans." Trans. and emphasis mine.
**contemplation** is the type of experience we today would call a mystical experience. Other twelfth-century authors could be cited, but the use of the word "contemplation" by William, Bernard, and Guigo II seems sufficient to indicate that, in the twelfth century, the word "contemplation" was used to describe mystical experiences.

In the text of the *De contemplando Deo* William uses the word "contemplation" four times. He uses the verb *contemplare* (to contemplate) twice, once of his contemplation of Christ, and once of his contemplation of himself desiring to see God. This reminds us that in addition to being aware

---

69 For example, the Cistercian Guerric of Igny (d. 1157), *In assumptione beatae Mariae, sermo quartus*, SC 202, 466: "His interim, ut opinor, contemplationibus pascebatur Maria, hanc optimam partem elegerat, quae non ablata sed perfecta est hodie in ea. Quia enim negligens aut segnis non extitit in opere Marthae, nequaquam vacua derelicta est a fructu Mariæ. Labor in actione, fructus seu merces in contemplatione"; and the Benedictine Peter of Celle (d. 1183), *Sermo LXIX, De assumptione B. Mariae virginis III*, PL 202, 857D: "ex divina lectione et meditatione, coelestium contemplatic." Emphasis mine for both authors.

70 CF 3, 38: "And sometimes, when I gaze with longing, I do see the 'back' of him who sees me; I see your Son Christ 'passing by' in the abasement of his incarnation." SC 61 bis, 62-64: "et aliquotiens contemplans et videre gestiens posteriora videntis me: humilitatem scilicet per-transeuntem dispensationis humanae, Christi filii tui sus-picio." Emphasis mine.

71 CF 3, 40: "So, as I said: by a gift of your grace looking at all the nooks and limits of my self-awareness, I desire only and exclusively to see you, so that all the ends of my earth may see the salvation of their God." SC 61 bis, 66: "Itaque ut dixi ex dono gratiae tuae contemplans omnes conscientiae meae angulos, vel terminos, unice et singulariter desidero videre te ut omnes fines terrae meae videant"
of God, William is also aware of himself in relation to God.

We have seen that in his De natura corporis et animae William describes the highest spiritual step, that of "the vision and contemplation of the truth,"\textsuperscript{72} as the "enjoyment of the true and highest good."\textsuperscript{73} This theme of goodness is also present in William's two uses of the noun contemplatio in the De contemplando Deo, both of which refer to his contemplation of God's goodness. Once he says: "This is my cleansing, my confidence, my justice: the contemplation of your goodness, good Lord."\textsuperscript{74} In another place he writes:

> For just as my offerings do not please you perfectly unless I offer myself with them; so the contemplation of your goodness does refresh us sweetly, but it does not satisfy us perfectly unless we have you along with it.\textsuperscript{75}

In the first of these two passages William is speaking of contemplation in relation to ascetical purification. The

\textit{salutare domini dei sui.} Emphasis mine. I have altered the translation of the word conscientiae from "conscience" to "self-awareness."

\textsuperscript{72} PL 180, 724D: "visione et contemplatione veritatis." Trans. and emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{73} PL 180, 724D: "fruitio veri et summi boni." Trans. and emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{74} SC 61 bis, 60: "Haec est enim mundatio mea, haec fiducia mea, haec justitia: contemplatio bonitatis tuae, bone domine." Trans. and emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{75} SC 61 bis, 68: "Sicut enim mea non tibi perfecte placent oblata nisi mecum: sic bonorum tuorum contemplatio reficit nos quidem dulciter; sed non satiat perfecte nisi tecum." Trans. and emphasis mine.
second, however, shows us that it is not so much his contemplation, his own experience, that concerns him, but rather God himself who is reached in and through the experience of contemplation. William speaks from his experience, but his gaze is focused on God, whom he addresses directly, "your goodness, good Lord . . . my offerings do not please you . . . the contemplation of your goodness . . . unless we have you along with it." In these passages William seems to affirm clearly that he has experienced the contemplation of God's goodness; yet he does not affirm clearly that he has experienced God himself, although he does seem to suggest that he has. But in another passage he identifies the goodness of God with the Holy Spirit: "O you who are the One supremely good and the ultimate Goodness, your love is your goodness, the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son!" In a later passage which begins in a curiously impersonal vein, William comes very close to affirming explicitly that he has experienced the Holy Spirit:

And sometimes, Lord, when I, as if with eyes closed, gasp for you like this, you do put something in my mouth, but you do not permit me to know just what it is. A savor I perceive, so sweet, so gracious, and so comforting that, if it were fulfilled in me, I should seek nothing more. But when I receive this

76 SC 61 bis, 60, 68, as in notes 74 and 75. Trans. and emphasis mine.

77 CF 3, 54. SC 61 bis, 96: "amor tuus bonitas tua est, summe bone et summum bonum, spiritus sanctus a patre procedens et filio." Emphasis mine.
thing, neither by bodily sight nor by spiritual sense nor by understanding of the mind do you allow me to discern what it is. When I receive it, then I want to keep it, and think about it, and assess its flavor; but forthwith it has gone. Whatever it was, no doubt I swallowed it down in the hope of eternal life. But I pondered long on its effect on me, and in so doing I wanted to transfuse into the veins and marrows of my soul a sort of vital sap. I wanted to be rid of the taste of every other affection, and savor that alone, for evermore. But it very quickly passed. And when, in seeking or receiving or experiencing this, I try to make my memory retain the more precise impressions of its features, or even, since my memory is fallible, to help it by writing something down, this attempt only forces me to recognize that here is what you say about the Spirit in the Gospel: “And you do not know whence he comes nor whither he goes.” For whatever the particular features of the experience may have been, I have wanted to commit them to memory, so that I could in a way go back to it, and take it to myself again whenever I was so minded, and so submit this power to my will whenever I chose. But every time this happens I hear the Lord say to me: "The Spirit blows whither he will." And knowing even in myself that he breathes not when I will, but when he himself wills, I find everything devoid of taste and dead. And then I know that it is to you alone, 0 Fount of life, that I must lift up my eyes, that I may see light only in your light."

78 CF 3, 61-62. SC 61 bis, 114-116: "Et nonnumquam domine quasi clausis oculis ad te hianti mittis michi in os cordis; quod non licet michi scire quid sit. Saporem quidem sentio, dulcem adeo, suavem adeo, adeo confortantem: ut si perficeretur in me, nihil ultra quaererem. Sed cum accipiens nullo corporis visu, nullo animae sensu, nullo spiritus intellectu advertere me permittas quid sit; cum accepero tenere et ruminare volo, et dijudicare ejus saporem, sed statim transit. Deglutio quidem illud quicquid illud est, in spem vitae aeternae, sed operationis ejus virtutem diu ruminandum omnibus animae meae venis et medullis quasi vitaelem quendam sucum optabam transfundere, ut ab omnibus
It is very rare in spiritual literature that an author will explicitly claim to have had an immediate experience of God, the type of experience which was called "contemplation" in the middle ages and is called a "mystical experience" today. William's description of his contemplation of God's goodness comes as close to such a claim as we can reasonably expect.

In the above quotation, moreover, we can notice several of the traits contained in the contemporary description of mysticism already explained in this chapter. William emphasizes that his experience is a gift freely given by God when he says "he breathes not when I will but when he himself wills." His description of his inability to remember, or even to write down, "the more precise impressions of its features," shows that not only is it incommunicable to others, but also inexpressible even to himself. Finally, when William says that he "recognizes that here is what you

aliis affectionibus desipere, et illud solum, et semper saperet; sed festinat transire. Et cum de inquisitione ejus vel acceptione, vel usu, formata quaedam liniamenta memoriae gestio artius impressa committere, vel etiam memoriam labilem scripto juvare, re, et experimento cogor discere quid illud sit quod in evangelio dicis de spiritu; Et nescis unde veniat aut quo vadat. Quaecumque enim quasi quibusdam liniamentorum figuris commendare curavi memoriae, quorum quasi quodam reductu, cum volueri illuc me recolligam, ac per hoc subesse mihi velim posse quotienscumque volueri, audiens a domino: Spiritus ubi vult spirat, et sentiens etiam in me, quia non quando ego volo, sed quando ipse vult spirat, omnia illa mortua invento et insipida; et ad te solum levandos esse oculos fons vitae, ut in tuo solo lumine videam lumen." Emphasis mine.
say about the Spirit in the Gospel: "And you do not know whence he comes nor whither he goes" (emphasis mine), he suggests that what he has been talking about is an immediate intuition of God.

We may conclude that since in the De contemplando Deo William uses the word "contemplation," which was used in the twelfth century to refer to what is today called a mystical experience, in a sense which seems to measure up to the requirements of mystical experience, he is describing his experience of God in the manner in which twelfth-century authors described mystical experiences, and we may thus describe his experience of God as a mystical experience.

Having examined the nature of William's experience of God in the De contemplando Deo, I will now comment on his description of this experience.

The Description of the Experience of God in the De contemplando Deo

In this chapter I have already mentioned several times that in the De contemplando Deo William speaks from his own experience and looks directly to God. In Chapter Two I pointed out that in the first paragraph William addresses his own feelings, but that the rest of the treatise is addressed entirely to God; thus throughout twelve of the treatise's thirteen paragraphs, containing six hundred and two of its six hundred and fifteen lines, William directly addresses God. This directness is the key to understanding
his manner of describing his experience of God in this treatise. William does not write as if from outside, he does not write about the experience of God—he prays, he cries aloud to God, he seeks God's face, he strives to come into the presence of God and to be perfectly united with him, he tastes the goodness of the Lord and rejoices in him; and when he writes, he is simply allowing us to sense something of the weight and strength of his own experience. Thus, William cries out: "O face, face, happy face that merits thus to be united to yourself through seeing you,"79 and: "I hope one day to love you perfectly, you who first loved us, you the love-worthy, you the lovable,"80 and:

You, therefore, love us insofar as you make us lovers of yourself, and we love you insofar as we receive your Spirit, who is your Love, and let him lay hold of and possess all our secret affections, transmuting them into the perfect purity of your truth, and the truth of your purity, into full concord with your love. And this union, this adherence, this enjoyment of your sweetness will be such that our Lord, your Son, will call it unity, in saying: "That they may be one in us."81

79 CF 3, 39-40. SC 61 bis, 66: "Et o facies, facies, quam beata facies; quae affici tibi meretur videndo te."

80 CF 3, 44. SC 61 bis, 74: "amem te perfecte aliquando, o qui prior nos amasti amande et amabilis domine."

81 CF 3, 55-56. SC 61 bis, 100: "Amas itaque nos in quantum nos efficis tui amatores, et nos amamus te, in quantum a te spiritum tuum accipimus, qui est amor tuus obtinentem et possidentem omnes affectionum nostrarum recessus; et perfecte eos convertentem in puritatem veritatis tuae, in veritatem puritatis tuae, in plenum amoris tui consensus, tantaque fit conjunctio, tanta adhaesio, tanta dulcedinis
Here again we note the themes of love, affection, and enjoyment which we have already seen so often.

On the other hand, however, William does write about the experience of God, but his thoughts on it are so caught up in his impassioned search for God that it is hard to reflect on them without being swept up into this movement toward God. In addition to the numerous passages in which we have already heard him speak of his experience of God in the very act of addressing God, he also expresses his burning zeal in terms such as: "You have your own way, my Lord God, of saying to my soul: 'I am your salvation,'" and: "Let your voice testify deep down within my soul and spirit, shaking my whole being like a raging storm, while my inward eyes are dazzled by the brightness of your truth," and: "Thus far I have perceived and seen, faintly enough indeed; and yet that slight experience has sufficed to kindle my longing afresh."

\[\text{tuæ fruïtio, ut unitas ab ipso domino nostro filio tuo vocetur dicente: Ut sint ipsi unum in nobis.} \]

Emphasis mine.

\[82\] CF 3, 37. SC 61 bis, 60: "Ergo, o domine deus meus, qui dicis animae meae modo quo tu scis: Salus tua ego sum."

\[83\] CF 3, 38. SC 61 bis, 62: "Respondeat quippe michi intus in anima et mente mea tumultuans in me et concutiens omnia interiorea mea vox testificationis tuae, et caligent oculi mei interiores a fulgore veritatis tuae."

\[84\] CF 3, 39. SC 61 bis, 64: "et ex eo quod vel leviter sensi, vel vidi, magis accenso desiderio."
William makes it quite clear, moreover, that the God with whom he is preoccupied is the God who has revealed himself in Christ. He explicitly professes the place of Christ in his experience of God: "And sometimes, when I gaze with longing, I do see the 'back' of him who sees me; I see your Son Christ 'passing by' in the abasement of his incarnation." In another passage he explains how the Holy Spirit unites us to the Father and the Son:

O you who are the One supremely good and the ultimate Goodness, your love is your goodness, the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son! From the beginning of creation he has been borne upon the waters--on the tossing souls of men, that is--offering himself to all, drawing all to himself. And by breathing into and upon them, by warding off things harmful and supplying things useful, he unites God to us and us to God. Your Holy Spirit, who is called the Love, and the Unity, and the Will of the Father and the Son, dwells in us by his grace and implants in us the charity of God; and through that charity he reconciles God to us. And thus he unites us to God through the good will that he breathes into us.

---


86 CF 3, 54. SC 61 bis, 96: "amor tuus bonitas tua est, summe bone et sumnum bonum, spiritus sanctus a patre procedens et filio: qui ab initio creaturae superfertur super aquas, id est, mentes filiorum hominum fluitantes, omnibus se offerens, omnia ad se trahens, inspirando, aspirando, noxia arcendo, providendo utilia, deum nobis et nos uniens deo. Sic enim ipse spiritus sanctus tuus, qui amor dicitur patris et filii et unitas et voluntas, per gratiam suam in nobis inhabitans, et dei in nos caritatem commendans, et per ipsum ipsum nobis concilians, deo nos unit, per inspiratam nobis bonam voluntatem." Emphasis mine.
William's manner of describing his Christian mystical experience of God in the *De contemplando Deo*, speaking from his own experience and directly addressing God with passionate intensity, has a unique character, which I will try to illustrate in the next chapter by comparing it with some of the classics of western Christian spirituality, as well as with some present-day examples of spiritual experience.

**Conclusion**

The experience of God which William of Saint Thierry describes in the *De contemplando Deo* has the nature of a Christian mystical experience of God because it contains all the characteristics which have been considered constitutive of such an experience, both in the middle ages and in our own time. It is a Christian experience of God because it is an affective knowledge of God rooted in faith in Christ, a sharing in Christ's own experience of God, an experience of conversion to God, and a longing for the second coming of Christ. It is a Christian mystical experience because William himself describes it as a supernatural knowledge and love of God which is incommunicable and inexpressible, an immediate intuition of God which has been prepared for by the ascesis of recollected prayer and moral action, but a gift freely given by God, and in agreement with Christian dogma and morals—or, to use his own word, a true gift of "contemplation." In the course of explaining this experience
of God in the *De contemplando Deo*, his first work, William introduces in seed form the themes of love, knowledge, affection, and enjoyment—all of which flower into fuller development in his later works.

In his *description* of his experience William speaks from his own experience and looks directly to God with fiery ardor. I have claimed that this description has a unique character which can be brought out by comparing it with some classic expressions of Christian spirituality, and with some contemporary examples of spiritual experience.
CHAPTER FIVE

A COMPARISON OF THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD IN THE DE CONTEMPLANDO DEO WITH SOME OF THE CLASSICS OF WESTERN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY AND SOME CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSIONS OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

By comparing the experience of God in the De contemplando Deo with some of the classics of the history of western Christian spirituality and some contemporary expressions of spiritual experience I hope to demonstrate the unique way in which William speaks from his own experience and looks directly to God with burning zeal. This comparison will be in the form of a brief survey, because a detailed study of so many different areas is not possible within the scope of the present thesis, and also because it would take us too far afield.¹ I will explain briefly each person or movement

¹ Although I will limit the first part of this chapter to a brief survey of the major figures in the history of western Christian spirituality, I feel that I should point out, even if it is not possible to explain it in detail here, that the direct address to God in the De contemplando Deo has been influenced by a late eleventh-century and early twelfth-century monastic rhetorical tradition. Works in this tradition which seem to have influenced the De contemplando Deo include a treatise by John of Fécamp (c. 990-1078) entitled Confessio theologia (text in J. Leclercq and J.-P. Bonnes, Un Maître de la vie spirituelle au xie siècle—Jean de Fécamp [Paris: Vrin, 1946], pp. 109-83; the Proslogion (PL 158, 223-48) of St Anselm of Bec-Canterbury (1033-1109); and a Liber meditationum et orationum (PL 158, 709-820) and a series of Orationes (PL 158, 855-1016), both attributed to St Anselm, but of which only a minority of the prayers contained are authentically Anselmian (see A. Wilmart, “La tradition des prières de Saint Anselme. Tables et notes,” Revue Bénédictine,
to be compared with William, and how William's description of his experience differs from these other descriptions of spiritual experience.

The Place of the De contemplando Deo in the History of Western Christian Spirituality

In his introduction to the De contemplando Deo in CF 3, Hourlier claims: "To localize On Contemplating God in the history of spirituality is too vast an undertaking" (p. 32). He contents himself with examining one question, the place of the De contemplando Deo in the medieval theological quarrel concerning the vision of God (pp. 32-35), and concludes:

when it [the De contemplando Deo] places the emphasis on the unity that love establishes between man and God, it proceeds to steer the solution of the problem of contemplation towards an insertion of the loving activity of the soul into the circuit of the divine operations. It is perhaps here that in relation to the history of spirituality and the life of William, we find the most original element of On Contemplating God.2

Once again we notice an emphasis on love which, as we have seen so often, is the central theme of the De contemplando Deo.

I agree with Hourlier that it is too vast an undertaking to localize the De contemplando Deo in the history of spir-

36 [1924], 52-71). The De contemplando Deo, however, maintains a direct address to God more consistently than do any of these works.

pirituality if this effort would entail a complete study of the history of spirituality in the light of a thorough examination of the *De contemplando Deo*. It is possible, however, to select one or two authors from the main epochs of this history, ancient, medieval, and modern, and to compare them with the *De contemplando Deo* on a single point: the authors' expression of their experience of God. By doing this I hope to bring out the unique way in which William of Saint Thierry speaks from his own experience and looks directly to God with fiery ardor. To avoid the pitfall of selecting only authors who will support this point, I will concentrate on major figures, those authors who have played a central role in the development of the history of western Christian spirituality. I have chosen St Augustine for the ancient period, St Bernard and Richard of Saint Victor for the medieval period, and St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross for the early-modern period.

**St Augustine**

In his section on the sources of William's *De contemplando Deo*, Hourlier writes:

Augustine is, perhaps, his preferred author. It is he who, in numerous passages, inspires William’s style... He sets the tone of a colloquy with God. . . .

Throughout the treatise, similarities in words, expressions and ideas reveal the extent to which the Abbot of St. Thierry is familiar with the work of the Bishop of Hippo, particu-
larly his Confessions, the Treatise of the Trinity, the City of God and Letter 147.3

Nevertheless, even if it is Augustine who "sets the tone of a colloquy with God" (CF 3, 28) for the De contemplando Deo, if we compare William's treatise with the writings of Augustine we note that William looks more directly to God than does Augustine. William speaks to God about God. It is true, as I mentioned in Chapter Four, that William briefly addresses his own emotions in the first paragraph of the De contemplando Deo: "Yearnings, strivings, longings, thoughts and affections, and all that is within me," and "worries and anxieties, concerns and toils, and all the sufferings involved in my enslaved condition" (CF 3, 36). The rest of the treatise is, however, a prayer addressed directly to God. This prayer contains some reflections on how William is united with God in love, but William does not say anything about the details of his personal history. The De contemplando Deo is not a book about William of Saint Thierry; it is not an autobiography. As its title indicates, it is about God and how to contemplate God: De contemplando Deo.

The only work throughout which St Augustine maintains a direct address to God is the Confessions. But in this work Augustine himself tells us: "This is the fruit of my confessions, that I should confess not what I may have been,

3 CF 3, 28. SC 61 bis, 40-41.
but what I may be, not only before you . . . but also in
the ears of the believing sons of men." This passage shows
that Augustine is concerned to speak at length about himself,
and also that he addresses himself to a human audience as
well as to God. The Confessions is, moreover, the most well-
known autobiography in the history of Christian spirituality.
Even though Augustine does address God in the Confessions,
then, he does not look as directly to God in this autobi-
ographical work as does William in the De contemplando Deo.

It is also instructive to consider paragraph 13 of the
De contemplando Deo (SC 61 bis, 118-20), a twenty-six line
prayer of which almost every phrase has been taken from
Augustine's De vera religione, LV, 112-13. In this passage
Augustine repeatedly speaks of God in the third person, say-
ing "him" (in illo, ipsum, ipsi); but William changes all of
these pronouns into the second person "you" (te, tibi).
This slight change underlines both William's debt to Augus-
tine and William's originality. Augustinian themes, such as
the Holy Spirit as the bond of love between the Father and
the Son, and an emphasis on human weakness and sinfulness,
are present throughout the De contemplando Deo. When William

---

4 Confessionum libri tredecim, X, iv, 6. PL 32, 781D:
"Hic est fructus confessionum mearum, non qualis fuerim, sed
qualis sim, ut hoc confitear non tantum coram te . . . sed
etiam in auribus credentium filiorum hominum." Trans. mine.

5 CCSL, XXXII, 259-60.
looks more directly to God than does Augustine, however, it is clear that, although he remains within the Augustinian tradition, he is developing his own spiritual outlook.

St Bernard

In the general introduction to their critical edition of the eight treatises and three minor works of St Bernard, J. Leclercq and H. M. Rochais explain that these works are the only ones of St Bernard which are neither sermons nor letters. Thus they are the only works of Bernard which could have been addressed directly to God, but not one of them is. Each of the eight treatises, De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae, Apologia ad Guillelum abbatem, De diliendo Deo, De gratia et libero arbitrio, Ad milites Templi de laude novae militiae, De praecepto et dispensatione, Vita Sancti Malachiae, and De consideratione ad Eugenium papam, is addressed to a specific person. The three minor works, Officium de Sancto Victore, Prologus in Antiphonarium, and Epitaphium et Hymnus de Sancto Malachia, are all liturgical pieces. There is, then, no work of Bernard which is entirely, or almost entirely, addressed to God, as is William's De contemplando Deo. Bernard could speak from his own experience with burning zeal, as is apparent in this passage from his seventy-fourth Sermon on the Song of Songs:

I confess to you I have many times received the visits of the Word. I could not perceive the exact moment of his arrival. He did not enter by the senses, but whence did he come? Perhaps he did not enter at all, for he who enters comes from without. But I found him closer to me than I to myself. How can I perceive his presence within me? It is full of life and efficacy, and no sooner has he entered than my sluggish soul is awakened.

He moves and warms and wounds my heart, hard and stony and sick though it be. It is solely by the movement of my heart that I understand that he is there, and I realize the power of his action when I see my evil tendencies disappear and my carnal affections quieted. ... Once he leaves, everything falls back into slumber, all grows cold like a boiling pot of oil withdrawn from the fire.

Bernard, however, usually addresses his fellow men rather than God. The combination of the three qualities of speaking from one's own experience, addressing God directly, and speaking with fiery ardor, is still unique to William's expression of his experience of God in the De contemplando Deo.

---

Richard of Saint Victor

In his commentary on the De contemplando Deo Hourlier also claims:

Under this double aspect, that of the thinker [that is, the intellectual emphasis] and the man of heart [that is, the affective emphasis], another parallel can be established with works of the second half of the twelfth century or later. The Abbot of St Thierry knows how to bring together both aspects, even though writers are soon to divide into two distinct camps. . . . The evolution begins to make its appearance only a few years after On Contemplating God with On the Love of God of Bernard who is, however, still close to his friend, but more methodical and more rational. 8

In Chapter Two I showed that the safest margin for the date of the De contemplando Deo is 1119-35, with the more exact dates of 1122-32 solidly probable. Leclercq and Rochais claim that Bernard's On the Love of God (De diligendo Deo) dates from the period 1126-41, because "it is dedicated to the Cardinal-Deacon Haimeric, chancellor of the Roman church, who was invested with that dignity from 1126 until his death in 1141." 9 If we pause to reflect on the rise of scholastic theology within this same period, we realize that shortly after William wrote the De contemplando Deo a shift toward a more methodical approach to contemplative topics can be

---

8 Cf 3, 34. SC 61 bis, 47.

detected. This tendency is noticeable in a spiritual writer who flourished shortly after William and Bernard: Richard of Saint Victor, an Augustinian canon at the famous Parisian abbey of Saint Victor from ca. 1141 until his death in 1173.\textsuperscript{10} Clare Kirchberger of Oxford, who has translated some of Richard's most important contemplative writings into English, writes: "Richard of Saint-Victor's title to distinction lies in this, that he was the first writer to systematize mystical theology."\textsuperscript{11} Richard's two main works on contemplation are the Benjamin Minor and the Benjamin Major. Kirchberger dates the Benjamin Minor in the period 1153-62 (pp. 22-23), and the Benjamin Major later, but within the period 1153-65 (p. 22). Then she proceeds to describe the contents of these two books:

In the Benjamin Minor he produces a first sketch of the powers and activities of the soul as they are found allied to the body. It is almost a course of first principles of psychology for the novices whom he taught, but combined with a first year of ascetic and spiritual doctrine. They are interwoven and indivisible. The object is a preparation for contemplation, the knowledge of and union with God. But when his students are ready for more advanced analysis, the Benjamin Major provides a course of epistemology, with elements of logic and metaphysics as the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Selected Writings, introduction, p. 37.
\end{itemize}
basis of contemplation.\textsuperscript{12}

Richard's approach to contemplation is quite different from William's in the De contemplando Deo, which Hourlier has described by saying: "In his reasoning he preserves a liberty which will transcend preestablished and logical schemes."\textsuperscript{13}

Moreover, in none of Richard's voluminous writings, neatly divided in PL 196 into exegetical treatises of a spiritual nature (columns 1-888), theological treatises of a more technical nature (columns 887-1224), and letters and miscellaneous works (columns 1225-1366), does the Victorine address God directly. Finally, although Kirchberger gives as a characteristic of Richard's writings "the analysis of personal experience of mystical prayer" (p. 73), she says of one of the works of his early (pre-1162) period:

> When we compare Richard's commentary on the Canticle, which belongs to this period, with some of those by his contemporaries, it is impossible not to be disappointed. . . . There is nothing of the genuine spontaneous devotion and exultation of S. Bernard or of his successor Gilbert. Richard's oratory, save for a few passages, is still that of a beginner, and he gives the impression that he has not yet experienced what he describes.\textsuperscript{14}

Later she adds: "It may occur to the reader to ask if Richard gives the impression of a man growing in depth of thought

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12] Selected Writings, introduction, p. 29.
\item[13] CF 3, 34. SC 61 bis, 47.
\end{footnotes}
and spiritual experience with the years. This is a hard question to answer" (pp. 24-25, emphasis mine).

It appears that Richard of Saint Victor, writing about thirty years after William completed his De contemplando Deo, represents a different approach to describing the experience of God, a systematic approach which placed the emphasis more on an analysis of contemplation than on the God who is being sought in contemplation. His greatest work, the Benjamin Major, also bears the title De gratia contemplationis (PL 196, 63-64)--On the Grace of Contemplation, whereas William's treatise is entitled De contemplando Deo--On Contemplating God. Richard writes about God at great length in several of his later writings, De trinitate (PL 196, 887-992), De tribus appropriatis personis in trinitate (PL 196, 991-94), De verbo incarnato (PL 196, 995-1010), etc. (to PL 196, 1032). But these technical theological treatises are quite different from his earlier, more contemplative exegetical writings. In the earlier writings his focus of attention was not on God, but on the contemplative activity of the human person. Kirchberger explains:

From first to last he is a psychologist and turns the theological problems he finds in Augustine and Denis in the interest of the humanist solutions of the twelfth century. The knowledge of what goes on in the human mind becomes an all-absorbing preoccupation. It leads to the evolution of his conception of contemplation and particularly to the systematization of the hitherto unexplored field of supernatural phenomena in prayer. But in humbler matters, as in the innumerable
ascetic and devout works, Richard also habitually asks what effect a given cause has, how the mind and feelings react, how best good may be increased and evil avoided, in preference to enquiring about what is the nature of the divine cause of things.\(^{15}\)

In Chapter Six I will show that William was also aware of the feelings of the person experiencing God. The greater attention Richard gives in his contemplative writings to this psychological humanism clearly distinguishes him, however, from William who, though speaking from personal experience, nevertheless directs his gaze primarily to the God whom he addresses with passionate intensity.

**St Teresa of Avila**

As examples of the early-modern period of western Christian spirituality I have chosen St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross. These two sixteenth-century Spanish proponents of a reform in the Carmelite order typify a school of spirituality very different from that of the Fathers of the Church and medieval monastic authors. Writing at a time of Spanish cultural and spiritual ascendancy, in the context of the Catholic Counter-Reformation associated with the Council of Trent, they represent an outlook on the spiritual life which retained considerable influence for several centuries. In this spirituality more stress is placed on mental prayer

\(^{15}\) Selected Writings, introduction, p. 24. Emphasis mine.
than on liturgical prayer, and the psychological emphasis we have seen in the description of the experience of God by Richard of Saint Victor is present in an even more fully-developed form.¹⁶

The works of St Teresa include two volumes of letters and three volumes of spiritual writings.¹⁷ Most of these writings are either autobiographical (Life, Book of the Foundations), or treatises which discuss contemplation and the different degrees of the spiritual life of the individual Christian (Spiritual Relations, Book Called Way of Perfection, Interior Castle, Conceptions of the Love of God). These works are noteworthy for a concern with the interior life and emotions of the human person, and for a descriptive, even racy style, which manifests a more earthy type of psychological orientation than that of the theologian Richard of Saint Victor. Vandenbroucke has written that in St Teresa's autobiography (Life): "contemplation is viewed


under its psychological aspect rather than in terms of its object. . . . While she recognized the importance of dogma, St Teresa's aim was to describe what she felt."¹⁸ This psychological emphasis is clearly different from William's stress in the De contemplando Deo on God who is being contemplated rather than on the human person and his act of contemplation.

All of the above-mentioned works of St Teresa are, moreover, addressed to her confessors or to her Carmelite Sisters; they are not addressed to God. Besides a few minor prose works and poems of a similar nature, there remains among her writings only the Exclamations of the Soul to God. These Exclamations are divided into seventeen sections of roughly equal length, averaging about thirty-five lines each, and the work as a whole is thus slightly longer than the De contemplando Deo.¹⁹ The Exclamations "were first written in the sacred moments of her [sacramental] Communions,"²⁰ and thus each one stands as a self-enclosed unit and the work as a whole is more a collection of these prayers than a unified treatise. These Exclamations bear a decided resemblance to William's De contemplando Deo, however, because the themes


of love and desire are prominent, and also because Teresa speaks from her own experience with burning zeal. She also addresses God directly in this work, but a close examination shows that she does not maintain as consistent a direct address to God throughout the Exclamations as does William in the De contemplando Deo. As we have seen, William addresses his own interior faculties in the first paragraph of his treatise, but then addresses God directly in the remaining twelve paragraphs. Throughout her Exclamations Teresa continually switches back and forth from directly addressing God to addressing her own soul. This focus on her soul as well as on God shows once again that her emphasis in writing of her experience of God is more psychological and humanistic than William's more consistently theocentric thrust. Teresa also addresses several groups of people, and other objects: "O children of men" (III, 404), "O long life" (VI, 406), "O death, death" (VI, 407), "O Christians" (X, 410), "Oh, you who are accustomed to delights and pleasures and comforts and to following your own will" (X, 411), "O endless torment [of hell]" (XI, 411), "O mortals" (XII, 413), "O souls that now rejoice without fear of losing your joy and are forever absorbed in the praises of my God [the saints in heaven]" (XIII, 414), "O brethren, brethren, children of this God" (XIV, 415), "Oh, my sweet rest pertaining to the lovers of God" (XV, 416), and "O free-will" (XVII, 420). The manner in which St Teresa,
even in the one work in which she directly addresses God, continually switches her attention and her actual address to her own soul, to other people, and to other objects shows that her description of her experience of God is different from William’s description of his experience of God in the De contemplando Deo.

St John of the Cross

St John of the Cross, St Teresa’s younger contemporary Carmelite friend, also directs his attention primarily to the soul itself and the different degrees of prayer and the life of Christian virtue. The only two works in which he addresses God directly are The Spiritual Canticle and The Living Flame of Love. These two works are similar in that each consists of a poem, preceded by a prologue addressed to a person who had seen the poem and requested a commentary on it, and followed by a lengthy commentary.21 The poem in The Spiritual Canticle (pp. 410-15) consists of forty stanzas of five lines each. It is written in the style of the Song of Songs, and takes the form of a dialogue between a Bride (the soul) and a Bridegroom (God). Only the stanzas uttered by the Bride (1-13b, 14-19, 24-33, and 36-40) are

addressed to God; and even within these stanzas the direct focus on God is interrupted by addresses such as: "Shepherds" (2, 410), "O woods and thickets . . . O green meadow" (4, 410), "Be still deadening north wind; south wind come" (17, 412), and "You girls of Judea" (18, 412). The poem in The Living Flame of Love (pp. 578-79) consists of only four stanzas of six lines each. It is clear from St John's own commentary (pp. 579-649) that he considered this poem a direct address to God. The language of the poem is highly symbolic, however, and it contains no explicit mention either of God or of any one of the three divine Persons.

In both of these poems St John of the Cross speaks with fiery ardor, and when they are placed in the context of his life and other writings it seems certain that he is speaking from personal experience. One of the poems, however, is addressed to God only in part, and neither of them mentions God explicitly. Moreover, each of them is imbedded in a total work which includes a prologue and a lengthy commentary addressed not to God, but either to Mother Ann of Jesús, prioress of the Discalced Carmelite nuns in Granada (The Spiritual Canticle), or to Doña Ana de Peñalosa, a widow living in Granada (The Living Flame of Love).

We may conclude that a comparison of the De contemplando Deo with the writings of the major figures in the history of western Christian spirituality shows that William's manner of describing his experience of God in this treatise contains
a unique blend of personal involvement, direct attention to God with the self always subordinated to the God addressed, and passionate intensity.

The De contemplando Deo and Some Contemporary Expressions of Spiritual Experience

The unique character of William's description of his experience of God in the De contemplando Deo may also be brought out by comparing it with some contemporary expressions of spiritual experience. Augustin Léonard, Belgian Dominican author of the article "Expérience spirituelle" in the Dictionnaire de spiritualité, claims that "the word experience is one of the master-words of twentieth-century thought." 22 Helen James John, assistant professor of philosophy at Trinity College, Washington, D. C., explains the intellectual climate in which this accent on experience has come to the fore:

The metaphysical revival in twentieth-century Europe has arisen in large measure from the convergence of a profound insight and a powerful method: the insight of existentialism, with its emphasis upon the uniqueness and dignity of the human person, and the method of phenomenology, concerned with the exact description of the whole range of man's concretely given awareness. 23


23 "Existentialist and Phenomenological Thought: Heidegger,
One dimension of man's awareness which has recently received widespread attention is his spirituality, and this concern has expressed itself in a number of popular movements. From a generically human point of view we might single out the use of psychedelic drugs and experimentation with the prayer techniques of Zen Buddhism as examples of this interest in spiritual experience; within a specifically Christian perspective there is the Pentecostal movement. In addition to these popular movements we may add, as a focal point of interest in spiritual experience, certain forms of contemporary Christian theology.

The use of psychedelic drugs

It is frequently claimed that the use of psychedelic drugs enables the user to have religious, and even mystical, experiences. Alan Watts, who admitted: "I myself have experimented with five of the principal psychedelics," wrote:

The experiences resulting from the use of psychedelic drugs are often described in religious terms. They are therefore of interest to those like myself who . . . are concerned with the


psychology of religion. For more than thirty years I have been studying the causes, consequences, and conditions of those peculiar states of consciousness in which the individual discovers himself to be one continuous process with God, with the Universe, with the Ground of Being, of whatever name he may use by cultural conditioning or personal preference for the ultimate and eternal reality. We have no satisfactory and definitive name for experiences of this kind. The terms 'religious experience,' 'mystical experience,' and 'cosmic consciousness' are all too vague and comprehensive to denote that specific mode of consciousness which, to those who have known it, is as real and overwhelming as falling in love. This article describes such states of consciousness as and when induced by psychedelic drugs, although they are virtually indistinguishable from genuine mystical experience.25

It seems clear from this description that Watts, unlike William, was more interested in experiences and states of consciousness than he was in God, and that he was not writing within a specifically Christian context. Moreover, his claim to describe states of consciousness "as and when induced by psychedelic drugs" (p. 78), clearly distinguishes him from William, who describes his experience by saying "every time this happens I hear the Lord say to me: 'The Spirit blows whither he will.' And knowing even in myself that he breathes not when I will, but when he himself wills."26 The question of the religious nature of psychedelic experiences is de-


cidedly problematic, but, even if we give the position of Watts the benefit of the doubt, it is obvious that the experiences he envisions center more on the person experiencing than on the deity experienced, and in this concentration they are quite different from the experience of God described by William of Saint Thierry in the De contemplando Deo.

The prayer techniques of Zen Buddhism

Another expression of interest in spiritual experience which has become widespread in the past few decades is the use of Zen Buddhist prayer techniques by many people in the West. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, a Japanese Zen Buddhist monk and foremost twentieth-century authority on Zen, has given this description of Zen Buddhist prayer:

The life of prayer begins with confession; for prayer, in whatever sense it may be taken, is the expression of an earnest desire which is raised when the devotee feels something lacking in himself and seeks to complete himself either through an outside power or by digging deeper into his own being; and the confession consists in frankly recognising this fact which is in some cases felt as sinfulness. In Buddhist terminology, this means to grow conscious of the heaviness of one's own karma-hindrances which have been raised in the past by means of body, mouth, and mind. When the devotee is innerly impelled to become conscious of this, he prays. He may not have any definitive knowledge as regards the objective body to which his prayer is offered. This knowledge is not generally essential, because his prayer is the uncontrollable outburst of an intensely intimate desire.
William, however, prays not to some "objective body," but to God the Father through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Also, he considers a profound knowledge of God one of the fruits of the action of the Holy Spirit in the praying Christian, as is clear when he writes:

O ever-present Father, we offer you our prayers, our sacrifices and our vows, and everything that we possess through Jesus Christ your Son; for we believe and know that all the good in us derives from you, through you and for you, through him from whom we have our very being. All these things we believe and understand, as far as they can be understood, through the operation of your Holy Spirit dwelling in us. ... And yet, O Majesty transcending understanding, to the soul that loves you, you do seem understandable. For though no faculty of soul or spirit can ever comprehend you, nevertheless, the man who loves you in his loving understands you totally.28

When Suzuki describes prayer as "the uncontrollable outburst of an intensely intimate desire" (p. 73), we may say that he is speaking with fiery ardor; and I would not want to deny that he is speaking from personal experience, a fact which appears clearly enough in his book as a whole.


28 CF 3, 57. SC 61 bis, 102-104: "orationes nostras, vota et sacrificia, et omnia nostra offerimus tibi pater as-sidue per dominum nostrum Ihesum Christum filium tuum: credentes et intelligentes, ex te, a te, et ad te, per ipsum nobis esse quicquid bonum nobis est, a quo habemus ipsum esse. Quae omnia per subministrationem spiritus sancti tui habitantis in nobis credimus et intelligimus, quantum intelligere fas est. ... Alioquin, o incomprehensibilis majesta-tas, incomprehensibilis esse videris animae te amanti. Licet enim nullus sensus animae cujuslibet vel spiritus te com-prehendat, tamen totum te quantus es comprehendit amor aman-tis, qui totum te amat." Emphasis mine.
He does not, however, address God directly. He does not even mention God, but rivets his attention on the person praying. His expression of spiritual experience is clearly different from William’s expression of his experience of God. Zen Buddhist prayer techniques may be used by Christians as an aid in their Christian prayer, but in themselves, as is apparent from the description of them by their foremost twentieth-century practitioner, they are not comparable to the expression of the experience of God which William gives in his *De contemplando Deo*.

**The Pentecostal movement**

In speaking of the use of psychedelic drugs and Zen Buddhist prayer techniques, I was considering phenomena which express a concern with spiritual experience in a general, and sometimes even a vague, way. The Pentecostal movement, on the other hand, is explicitly Christian in its emphasis on the experience of God. Frederick Dale Bruner, professor of systematic theology at Union Theological Seminary, the Philippines, explains that "the adherents of the Pentecostal movement unite around an emphasis upon the experience of the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual believer and in the fellowship of the church."²⁹ Within the Pentecostal

movement, however, we must distinguish between the classical Pentecostal denominations which arose as the movement began in the early twentieth century, the spread of the movement into mainline Protestant denominations in the 1950's and 1960's, and its later dramatic development in the Roman Catholic Church after 1967. Because the growth of the movement in the mainline Protestant denominations, and especially in the Roman Catholic Church, is so recent, rapid, and even controversial, however, it is difficult to assess these manifestations of it from the necessary historical distance. All the basic characteristics of the movement emerged, moreover, in classical Pentecostalism. I will therefore consider the movement only as it has manifested

30 For a history of the classical Pentecostal denominations, see John Thomas Nichol, Pentecostalism (New York: Harper and Row, 1966). Doctor Nichol is an American historian. For a brief description of the history of the movement in the Pentecostal and mainline Protestant denominations, as well as in the Roman Catholic Church, see Edward D. O'Connor, The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1971), pp. 13-35. Father O'Connor is a member of the theology department at the University of Notre Dame. His book contains a select annotated bibliography of the Pentecostal movement and related topics; it must be noted, however, that the literature on the Pentecostal movement and related topics continues to grow at a rapid pace, and any bibliography in this area is quickly outdated. Also, since the early 1970's most Catholic Pentecostals have come to speak of their movement as "the charismatic renewal," and to speak of themselves as "charismatics."

31 For a report of the response to the movement by Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic authorities, see O'Connor, The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church, pp. 13-35.
itself in the classical Pentecostal denominations.

Nichol, himself a Pentecostal, describes Pentecostalism as "a movement which boldly maintains that a Holy Spirit baptism that is accompanied by the evidential sign of 'speaking in tongues' is a normative religious experience available to all Christians" (p. xi, emphasis mine). Bruner, a United Presbyterian missionary whose concerns are more doctrinal than those of the historian Nichol, writes:

Pentecostalism wishes, in brief, to be understood as experiential Christianity, with its experience culminating in the baptism of the believer in the Holy Spirit evidenced, as at Pentecost, by speaking in other tongues. This experience with the Spirit should continue, as in the early church, in the exercise of the spiritual gifts privately, and then publicly in the Pentecostal meetings where the gifts have their most significant sphere of operation. 32

The emphasis on experience in both of these accounts is unmistakable, but it is also obvious that the expressions of this experience are different from those of the experience of God described by William of Saint Thierry in the De contemplando Deo. William does not equate his experience with the baptism in the Holy Spirit spoken of in the New Testament (Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5; 11:16, etc.), as do the Pentecostals. Neither does he say anything about speaking in tongues (see Acts 10:46; 19:6; 1 Corinthians 14).

Nichol and Bruner, moreover, both address their readers,

rather than directly addressing God. Both authors briefly advert to their own relation to the Pentecostal movement, but neither really speaks from his own spiritual experience.\(^{33}\) Bruner includes in his book the testimonies of a number of those who have had the experience of the Pentecostal baptism in the Holy Spirit (pp. 118-29). All of these testimonies are given from personal experience and with passionate fervor, but all are in the form of a witness to the experience directed to the reader rather than a direct address to God. Moreover, they all focus on the experience itself rather than on God who is experienced. Thus William's expression of his experience of God in the De contemplando Deo differs from the expression of this experience given by contemporary Pentecostals.

\(^{33}\) Nichol, Pentecostalism, p. xiii: "it seems only fair to inform the reader that I have been reared in Pentecostalism. However, as a historian I have striven not to allow my heritage or my deeply held convictions to distort this chronicle of the twentieth-century charismatic revival." Bruner, A Theology of the Holy Spirit, p. 8: "I have sought to understand, first, the Pentecostal movement and its experience of the Spirit. I have attended Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal meetings, conferences, clinics, and prayer meetings, talked with members and leaders, read the literature. But because my concern has wanted to be more than merely academic, I have asked myself the persistent question asked by Pentecostals of any who will listen: Should I have the Pentecostal experience? As Pentecostals sometimes put it: Did I want more than a head knowledge, did I want a heart knowledge of the Pentecostal gift first known by the apostles and known now by Pentecostals themselves? This question of 'should I,' and then the larger churchly question of 'should we,' led me as a Protestant to the New Testament. The result is this essay."
Christian theology

It is not possible to include here a complete survey of present-day Christian theology, but it does seem necessary to mention some trends of this theology which complement the practical emphasis on experience in popular movements such as Pentecostalism. I hope this will give a more complete appreciation of how the contemporary concern with experience has affected, and is expressed by, Christian believers.

A quarter of a century ago Paul Tillich, world-famous Protestant theologian, wrote:

The sources of systematic theology can be sources only for one who participates in them, that is, through experience. Experience is the medium through which the sources "speak" to us, through which we can receive them. The question of experience, therefore, has been a central question whenever the nature and method of theology have been discussed. . . . The principle of experience was preserved by sectarian movements . . . in the pre-Reformation and Reformation periods. . . . Although the victory of ecclesiastical or biblical authority in all Continental churches and the rise of classical orthodoxy suppressed the principle of experience, it never eradicated it. The principle of experience reappeared in full strength in Continental Pietism and Anglo-American Independentism, Methodism, and Evangelicalism. In these forms it survived the period of the Enlightenment and found classical theological expression in Schleiermacher's theological method.

No present-day theology should avoid a discussion of Schleiermacher's experiential method. 34

---

Tillich goes on to discuss Schleiermacher's method (pp. 41-42), and other forms of experiential theology (pp. 42-46), but this is a relatively small part of his three-volume *Systematic Theology*, and he does not speak from his own experience or address God directly. Thus we cannot consider Tillich's words on experience as an expression of an experience of God which can be compared with William's expression of this experience. They are, rather, a perceptive indication of contemporary theological needs.

More recently the theme of experience has come to the fore in Catholic theology. Books such as *The Theology of Experience*, 35 *New Dimensions in Religious Experience*, 36 *The God Experience: Essays in Hope*, 37 and *The Experience of* 


God are only the most obvious and explicit examples of a pervasive mood influencing innumerable authors. As with Tillich's *Systematic Theology*, however, most of these books are formal theological tracts. Some of the authors do speak, at least to a certain extent, from their own experience, but they do not address God directly.

One exception to this style of writing is *Encounters with Silence* by the German Jesuit Karl Rahner, perhaps the most influential Catholic theologian of our time. Rahner addresses God directly throughout the ten short chapters of this eighty-seven page book. He speaks from his own experience, and although his style cannot be described as one of burning zeal, he writes with an honesty and depth of spiritual conviction which signify an authentic commitment to God. Yet there is a marked concern with the human situation which distinguishes Rahner from William. Rahner begins the first chapter of this book, "God of My Life," with these words:

I should like to speak with You, my God, and yet what else can I speak of but You? . . .

On the other hand, if I try, shyly and hesitantly, to speak to You about Yourself, You will still be hearing about me. For what could I say about You except that You are my God, the God of my beginning and end, God of

---


my joy and my need, God of my life? William speaks to God of himself (William) in the De contemplando Deo, but it is usually of his desire and love for God that he speaks. Rahner, although he speaks of his desire and love for God, speaks at greater length about the actual circumstances of his own concrete life situation. He devotes whole chapters to God seen as: "God of My Prayer" (Chapter Two, pp. 19-25), "God of My Daily Routine" (Chapter Six, pp. 45-52), "God of My Brothers" (Chapter Eight, pp. 61-68), and "God of My Vocation" (Chapter Nine, pp. 69-77).

We might bring out the difference between William and Rahner by saying that William is sensitive to a need to leave the cares of this world behind in order to see God on the mountain of the Lord, while Rahner is more attuned to the encounter with God which takes place in his own human situation. William begins his treatise by addressing his own inner faculties, but he does this in order to invite them to leave the concerns of this world and to contemplate God:

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us his ways."

Yearnings, strivings, longings, thoughts and affections, and all that is within me, come and let us go up to the mountain or place where the Lord both sees and is seen! But worries and anxieties, concerns and toils, and all the sufferings involved in my enslaved condition, all of you must stay here with the

---

Encounters with Silence, p. 3.
ass—I mean my body—while I and the lad—my intellectual faculties—hasten up the mountain; so that, when we have worshipped, we may come back to you.

For we shall come back, and that unfortunately, all too soon. Love of the truth does indeed lead us far from you; but for the brethren's sake, the truth of the love forbids us to abandon or reject you. But, though your need thus calls us back, that sweet experience must not by wholly foregone on your account.41

We may note in passing that William's recognition, expressed in the last paragraph of this quotation, that he must return to the everyday realities of life shows that he realizes that he must take into consideration the necessities of his human situation, but his ardent desire to see God directly is what stands out most in the passage as a whole. Rahner speaks to the God who infinitely transcends this world, but he goes on to show how he himself can only encounter this God in his own life:

And when I give praise to You as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, when I confess the thrice holy mystery of Your life, so eternally hidden in the abysses of Your Infinity that it leaves

41 CF 3, 36-37. SC 61 bis, 58: "Venie ascendamus ad montem domini, et ad domum dei Jacob; et docebit nos vias suas. Intentiones, intensiones, voluntates, cogitationes, affectiones, et omnia interiora mea: venite ascendamus in montem vel locum ubi dominus videt, vel videtur. Curae, sollicitudines, anxietates, labores, poenae servitutis, expectate me hic cum asino, corpore isto; donec ego cum puero, ratio cum intelligentia, usque illuc properantes, postquam adoraverimus, revertamur ad vos. Revertemur enim. Et heu quam cito. Abducit enim nos a vobis caritas veritatis; sed propter fratres abdicare et abjurare vos non patitur veritas caritatis. Sed licet retrahat vestra necessitas; non propter vos omnino omittenda est illa suavitas."
behind in creation no sign that we could make out by ourselves, am I not still praising You as the God of my life? Even grating that You had revealed to me this secret of Your own inner life, would I be able to accept and realize this mystery if Your life had not become my life through grace? Would I be able to acknowledge and love You, Father, and You, Eternal Word of the Father's Heart, and You, Spirit of the Father and the Son, if You had not deigned to become through grace the triune God of my life?42

Of all the contemporary expressions of the experience of God, Rahner's *Encounters with Silence* is the one which is most similar to William's *De contemplando Deo*. Yet even Rahner distinguishes himself from William by his greater attention to himself and to the experience of God as occurring in the daily circumstances of his life.

**Conclusion**

I conclude that all of the expressions of spiritual experience and of the experience of God in the classics of the history of western Christian spirituality, and in contemporary popular spiritual movements and Christian theology, which I have examined in this chapter differ from the expression of the experience of God which William of Saint Thierry gives in his *De contemplando Deo*. All of the other expressions, even those in which the author addresses God directly, look to the human person and the experience itself more than to God.

42 *Encounters with Silence*, pp. 3-4.
William, speaking from his own experience and addressing God with burning zeal, looks to God more than to the human person and his experience.

This unique way in which William concentrates on God himself has particularly important consequences for us today. The prevailing twentieth-century intellectual and cultural stress on the human person and his concrete situation has had many ramifications in the religious sphere, and those who describe the experience of God concentrate on the human person and the experience itself. We have seen that a similar anthropological emphasis also characterizes the major figures of the history of western Christian spirituality. William of Saint Thierry shows us, in the expression of the experience of God he gives in the De contemplando Deo, that there is another way to approach this experience: it is possible, while not neglecting the realities of our human situation, to focus our attention directly on God.
CHAPTER SIX

AN EXAMINATION OF THE WORDS USED TO DESCRIBE THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD IN THE DE CONTEMPLANDO DEO

One good way to comprehend the unique character of an author is to study the words he uses, especially those he uses most frequently, and to consider these favorite words as accurate manifestations of his particular spirit. William of Saint Thierry draws on a wide vocabulary of significant words to describe his experience of God in the De contemplando Deo. In this chapter I will examine these words, especially those he uses most often, because I believe they reveal very clearly his unique way of looking directly to God.

It is interesting that, although William speaks of the experience of God so frequently in the De contemplando Deo, he uses the word "experience" (experimento, the ablative form of experimentum) only once in this treatise; and this one use does not refer directly to his experience of God, but to his own inability to remember the details of this experience.¹ The words he does use in describing his

¹ CF 3, 62: "this attempt [experimento] only forces me to recognize that here is what you say about the Spirit in the Gospel: 'And you do not know whence he comes nor whither he goes.'" SC 61 bis, 116: "experimento coger discere quid illud sit quod in evangelio dicis de spiritu: Et nescis unde veniat aut quo vadat." Emphasis mine.
experience of God usually refer either directly to God or to William himself; two other groups of words refer to his central theme of love, and to understanding, which is so closely related to love in William’s mind. Therefore I will examine William’s vocabulary of the experience of God in the De contemplando Deo under these four headings: God, the self, love, and understanding.

God

We have seen that William addresses God directly in twelve of the thirteen paragraphs of the De contemplando Deo and that this direct address to God is one of the main characteristics of the treatise. In fact, the word "you" is the word he uses most often in addressing God. He uses "you" (tu, te) one hundred and sixty-eight times, "your" (tuus) one hundred and fifteen times, and "yourself" (tu ipse) four times.

It is significant that forty-two of William’s fifty-nine uses of the word "Lord" (dominus) are in the form of direct address (domine). This word "Lord" (domine) is always directed to God the Father, with one exception occurring in the concluding paragraph of the treatise, a prayer which relies on the concluding passage of Augustine’s De vera religione and is addressed to all three divine Persons.² Except

² CF 3, 63-64: "Now, therefore, Lord, in complete faith
for this concluding paragraph, William always addresses the
Father. He uses the word "God" (deus) forty-six times in
the text of the De contemplando Deo. Nine of these uses are
in the form of direct address, six to the Father, throughout
the treatise; and three to the one God, all three of which
occur in the final paragraph. William uses the word "Father"
(pater) in reference to God the Father twenty-seven times,
and seven of these uses are in the form of direct address:
the Father,"6 "Abba, Father!,"7 "O sovereign Father of
lights,"8 and "Our Father, who art in heaven."9

William also uses a number of other words and phrases
in speaking to God the Father. His central theme of love

I worship you. . . . To you be glory forever! Amen." SC
61 bis, 118-20: "Nunc ergo domine plena fide te deum colo
. . . tibi gloria in saecula. Amen." See De vera religi-
one, 112-13, in CCSL, XXXII, 259-60: "Ecce unum deum colo
. . . Ipse gloria in saecula saeculorum. Amen." Emphasis
mine. Augustine does not use the word "Lord" (domine), nor
does he address God directly.

3 CF 3, 57. SC 61 bis, 102: "pater."
4 CF 3, 60. SC 61 bis, 110: "pater."
5 CF 3, 48. SC 61 bis, 86: "te patrem."
6 CF 3, 63. SC 61 bis, 118: "Te . . . deum patrem."
7 CF 3, 55. SC 61 bis, 98: "Abba pater."
8 CF 3, 55. SC 61 bis, 98: "summe pater luminum."
9 CF 3, 55. SC 61 bis, 100: "Pater noster qui es in
coelis."
stands out with particular force when he addresses the Father as: "Love,"10 "true Lord and true only Love,"11 "you who are Love supreme,"12 "O you who are true Love, love-worthy Lord,"13 "love-worthy Lord,"14 "O Lord adorable and lovable,"15 "you who first loved us, you the love-worthy, you the lovable,"16 "you who first loved us,"17 "you, to whom alone love is due,"18 "you, whose is the sole authentic claim on love,"19 and "you for whose sake I love that which I love."20 It is noteworthy that in each of these instances of addressing God the Father in terms of love William

10 CF 3, 49. SC 61 bis, 86: "amor."
11 CF 3, 50. SC 61 bis, 90: "vere unice amor et vere domine."
12 CF 3, 41. SC 61 bis, 68: "summe amor."
13 CF 3, 48. SC 61 bis, 84: "o vere amor et amande domine."
14 CF 3, 54. SC 61 bis, 98: "amabile domine."
15 CF 3, 40. SC 61 bis, 68: "o in omnibus adorande et amabilis domine."
16 CF 3, 44. SC 61 bis, 74: "qui prior nos amasti amande et amabilis domine."
17 CF 3, 52. SC 61 bis, 92: "tu . . . qui . . . prior nos dilexisti." Emphasis mine.
19 CF 3, 50. SC 61 bis, 88: "te, qui amandus solus es vere."
20 CF 3, 50. SC 61 bis, 90: "te: propter quem amo quod amo."
uses the Latin noun amor, rather than caritas. The adjective he uses in each instance is amandus (to be loved, love-worthy), or amabilis (lovable); and, with the exception of one use of diligere which I have underlined, the verb he uses for love in speaking to the Father is amare. His interest in understanding manifests itself when he addresses the Father as: "O majesty transcending understanding."22

William speaks to the Father several times as Creator: "you, the Creator [conditor] of all things,"23 "you, the Maker of all men and all things [qui omnes et omnia facis],"24 and: "O God, our souls' Creator [creator]."25 He emphasizes the Father's goodness [bonum]: "You who are . . . sovereign Good [bonum],"26 "O you who are the One supremely good [bone] and the ultimate Goodness [bonum],"27 "you are he who is supremely good [bone], goodness [bonum] itself."28 On one occasion he brings the themes of God the Father as Creator

21 I will comment on William's vocabulary of love later in this chapter.
22 CF 3, 57. SC 61 bis, 104: "o incomprehensibilis majestas."
23 CF 3, 53. SC 61 bis, 94: "Tu . . . conditor omnium."
24 CF 3, 53-54. SC 61 bis, 96: "qui omnes et omnia facis."
25 CF 3, 53. SC 61 bis, 94: "creator animarum, deus."
26 CF 3, 41. SC 61 bis, 68: "summum bonum."
27 CF 3, 54. SC 61 bis, 96: "summe bone et summum bonum."
28 CF 3, 37. SC 61 bis, 60: "summe bone, summum bonum."
and as good together into one short phrase: "O good Creator [creator bone]." 29

William pays homage to the Father as adorable [adorandus]: "O you who are adorable [adorande], tremendous, blessed," 30 and: "O Lord adorable [adorande] and lovable." 31 He refers to the Father's righteousness [justitiae]: "O God, true righteousness [justitiae]," 32 and: "O righteous [juste] Lord." 33 He also addresses the Father as: "Fount of life," 34 "the life of the hearts of men and the light of their inward eyes," 35 "the same One who you always are," 36 "my helper of old and my unwearying defender," 37 "you, O Lord, from whom salvation comes and whose blessing is upon your people," 38 and: "Rabboni, Master supreme, you who alone can teach me...

30 CF 3, 58. SC 61 bis, 106: "Adorande, tremende, bendicende."
31 CF 3, 40. SC 61 bis, 68: "o in omnibus adorande et amabilis domine."
32 CF 3, 59. SC 61 bis, 108: "o vera justitia deus."
33 CF 3, 53. SC 61 bis, 94: "domine juste."
34 CF 3, 62. SC 61 bis, 116: "fons vitae."
35 CF 3, 37. SC 61 bis, 60: "vita cordium, lux oculorum interiorum."
36 CF 3, 47. SC 61 bis, 82: "qui semper idipsum es."
38 CF 3, 51. SC 61 bis, 90: "o domine, cujus est salus, et super populum tuum benedictio tua."
how to see the things that I desire to see." The intensity of William's preoccupation with gazing on God reveals itself with particular force when he addresses the Father as: "O face, face [o facies facies]." "To seek the face of God" was a phrase used by biblical authors to express the desire to come into the presence of the living God. William quotes the Psalmist's use of this phrase when he says to the Father: "you know how my heart then says to you: 'My face has sought you: your face then will I seek. Do not turn your face from me.'" Even more moving is the following heartfelt prayer incorporating this Psalm verse:

I can scarcely now contain myself for hoping that one day you will remove your covering hand and pour out your illuminating grace, so that at last, dead to myself and alive to you, according to the answer of your truth with unveiled face I shall begin to see your face, and by that seeing shall be united to you. O face, face, happy face that merits thus to be united to yourself through seeing you! It builds in its heart a tabernacle for the God of Jacob and does everything according to the pattern shown it in the mount:

39 CF 3, 37. SC 61 bis, 60: "Rabboni, summe magister, unice doctor videndi quae videre desidero."

40 CF 3, 39-40. SC 61 bis, 66: "o facies facies."


42 CF 3, 37. SC 61 bis, 60: "tibi dicit cor meum: Exquisivit te facies mea; faciem tuam domine requiram. Ne avertas faciem tuam a me." The quotation is from Psalm 27:8-9.
Here with truth and fittingly it sings: "My heart has said to you, 'My face has sought you; your face, Lord, will I seek.'" \(^43\)

William's habit of addressing his prayer to God the Father shows his deep insight into Christian prayer. Jesus instructed his disciples to address their prayer to the Father when he taught them the Our Father. \(^44\) William quotes the first line of this prayer, and in doing so he uses the introductory words used by the priest in the Eucharistic anaphora of the Roman rite, itself entirely addressed to the Father, saying: "taught by saving precepts and schooled by God's ordinance, we are bold to say: 'Our Father, who art in heaven.'" \(^45\)

In the final paragraph of the De contemplando Deo, in which he draws heavily on the concluding passage of Augustine's De vera religione, William directly addresses both the Son ("You, Wisdom of the Father,/ by whom we have been


\(^{45}\) CF 3, 55. SC 61 bis, 100: "praecptis salutaribus moniti et divina institutione formati, audemus dicere: Pater noster qui es in coelis."
made anew and taught to live wisely\textsuperscript{46}, and the Holy Spirit ("You, Holy Spirit, whom and in whom we love"\textsuperscript{47}). In this paragraph he also addresses two short prayers to the one God, both of which clearly include a separate address to each of the three divine Persons. He writes: "You who are God, the one Cause of all that is, the Wisdom whence the wiseness of every wise man comes, the Gift whence every happy man derives his happiness"\textsuperscript{48}; and: "You, who are Three in one Substance, the one God,/ from whom we are,/ by whom we are,/ in whom we are,/ . . . You, the Beginning, to whom we are returning,/ the Pattern we are following,/ the Grace by which we are reconciled."\textsuperscript{49} Aside from these brief prayers, however, the words and phrases William uses to describe the Son and the Holy Spirit are contained in his prayers addressed to the Father, and in the reflections stimulated by these prayers.

In this context he refers to the Son as the Son (\textit{filius}, nineteen times), your Son (\textit{filius tuus}, five times), Christ

\textsuperscript{46} CF 3, 63. SC 61 bis, 118: "te sapientia patris, per quem reformati sapienter vivimus."

\textsuperscript{47} CF 3, 63. SC 61 bis, 118: "te sancte spiritus quem et in quo diligentes."

\textsuperscript{48} CF 3, 63. SC 61 bis, 118: "unum te omnium principium, et sapientiam qua sapiens est, quaeque anima sapiens est; et ipsum donum quo beata sunt quaeque beata sunt."

\textsuperscript{49} CF 3, 64. SC 61 bis, 118-20: "unius substantiae trinitatem, unum deum a quo sumus, per quem sumus, in quo sumus . . . principium ad quod recurrimus, forma quam sequimur, gratia qua reconciliamur."
your Son (*Christus filius tuus*, twice), your only Son (*filius tuus unicus*, once), our Lord, your Son (*dominus noster filius tuus*, once), our Lord, Jesus Christ your Son (*dominus noster Ihesus Christus filius tuus*, once), the Son of your right hand (*filius dexterae tuae*, once), Christ Jesus (*Christus Ihesus*, twice), Christ (*Christus*, once), your Christ (*Christus tuus*, once), Christ the Master (*magister Christus*, once), the Man whom you made strong for your own self, Jesus, that is to say, Savior (*hominem quem confirmasti tibi Ihesum, id est salvatorem*, once), the Way (*via*, thrice), your Truth (*veritas tua*, once), the Truth (*veritas*, once), and the Life (*vita*, once).

In one striking passage William refers to the heart of Jesus:

And sometimes, when I gaze with longing, I do see the "back" of him who sees me; I see your Son Christ "passing by" in the abasement of his incarnation.

But when in my eagerness I would approach him and, like the woman with the issue, am ready to steal the healing for my poor ailing soul by furtively touching even the hem of his garment, or when like Thomas, that man of desires, I want to see and touch the whole of him and--what is more--to approach the most holy wound in his side, the portal of the ark that is there made, and that not only to put my finger or my whole hand into it, but wholly enter into Jesus' very heart [*ipsum cor Ihesu*], into the holy of holies, the ark of the covenant, the golden urn, the soul of our humanity that holds within itself the manna of the Godhead--then, alas! I am told: "Touch me not!"50

---

In another place he incorporates the passage from Wisdom 18:14-15, which was used until recently in the Introit song for the Sunday within the Octave of Christmas in the liturgy of the Roman rite, into a beautiful description of the way in which the Father speaks to us in Christ:

This, Lord, is your word to us, this is your all-powerful message: he who, while all things kept silence (that is, were in the depths of error), came from the royal throne, the stern opponent of error and the gentle apostle of love. And everything he did and everything he said on earth, even the insults, the spitting, the buffeting, the cross and the grave all that was nothing but yourself speaking to the Son, appealing to us by your love, and stirring up our love for you.51

In this same frame of reference of addressing the other, William speaks of the Holy Spirit as your Spirit (spiritum contemplans et videre gestiens posteriora videntis me: humilitatem scilicet pertranseuntem dispensationis humanae, Christi filii tui suspicio. Sed cum accedere gestio ad eum, et vel sicut emorrousa illa, infirmae et miserae animae meae a salutifero tactu vel fimbriae ejus, quasi furari gestio sanitatem; vel sicut Thomas ille vir desideriorum totum eum desidero videre et tangere, et non solum, sed accedere ad sacrosanctum lateris ejus vulner, ostium archae quod factum est in latere, ut non tantum mittam digitum vel totam manum, sed totus intrem usque ad ipsum cor Ihesu, in sanctum sanc- torum, in arcam testamenti, ad urnam aereum, animam nostrae humanitatis continentem intra se manna divinitatis: heu dicitur michi: Noli me tangere." Emphasis mine, except for the word "then."

51 CF 3, 52. SC 61 bis, 92-94: "Hoc est verbum tuum ad nos domine, hic omnipotens sermo: qui dum medium silentium, profundum scilicet erroris tenerent omnia, a regalibus sedibus venit, durus errorum debellator, dulcis amoris commendator. Et quicquid fecit, quicquid dixit in terra, usque ad obprobria, usque ad sputa, et alapasa, usque ad crucem et sepulchrum, non fuit nisi loqui tuum nobis in filio: amore tuo provocans, et suscitans ad te amorem nostrum."
tuus, thrice), the Holy Spirit (spiritus sanctus, twice),
your Holy Spirit (spiritus sanctus tuus, once), the Spirit
(spiritus, twice), the Spirit of your Son (spiritus filii

tui, once), the Spirit of your adoption (spiritus adoptionis
tuae, once), and the Spirit of adoption (spiritus adoptionis,
one). On a number of occasions he gives brief descriptions
of the Holy Spirit: "your love is your goodness, the Holy
Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son,"\(^{52}\) "your
spirit, who is your love,"\(^{53}\) and: "Your Holy Spirit, who is
called the Love, and the Unity, and the Will of the Father
and the Son."\(^{54}\) Here again we see William's emphasis on
love. His desire to be united with God through the power of
the Holy Spirit shines forth clearly in this prayer he ad­
dresses to the Father:

0 you who are adorable, tremendous, blessed,
give him to us! Send forth your Spirit, and
we shall be made, and you will renew the face
of the earth! For it is not in a flood of
many waters, in the disturbance and confusion
of our moods, which are as many in number as
they are different in kind, that we shall
draw near to God. Lord, that disaster, the
punishment of Adam's seed, has gone on long
enough! Bring in your Spirit on the earth,
let the sea draw back, let the wilderness of
ancient condemnation draw back, and let the

\(^{52}\) CF 3, 54. SC 61 bis, 96: "amor tuus bonitas tua est
... spiritus sanctus a patre procedens et filio."

\(^{53}\) CF 3, 55. SC 61 bis, 100: "spiritum tuum ... qui
est amor tuus."

\(^{54}\) CF 3, 54. SC 61 bis, 96: "spiritus sanctus tuus, qui
amor dicitur patris et filii et unitas et voluntas."
parched earth appear, thirsting for the fount of life! Let the dove come, the Holy Spirit. . . .
Let the dove, I say, come with the olive branch, proclaiming peace with the branch that speaks of renewal and light! May your holiness and hallowing make us holy, may your unity unite us and, through what is indeed a sort of blood relationship, may we be united to God who is love through the name of love. We shall be made one with him through the power of this name.55

William's use of such an extensive vocabulary to speak to God and to speak of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, within a treatise as short as the De contemplando Deo shows that he is passionately preoccupied with God. These words and phrases, so often spoken directly to God, also underline the unique way in which he looks straight to God.

The Self

William directs his prayer to God, but he is also keenly aware of himself as the one who is praying to God, and he speaks from his own experience. It is true that he addresses God, "you" (tu, te), one hundred and sixty-eight times, and

"yourself" (tu ipse), four times; yet he refers to himself, "I" (ego), forty-eight times, and "I myself" (ego ipse, ego-metipse), five times. He says "your" (tuus), one hundred and fifteen times, but he says "my" (meus), fifty-two times. There is in fact a constant rhythm in the De contemplando Deo of reaching out to God and being thrust back into the self:

Into this contemplation my soul puts all its energies; in the course of it I push my spirit around like a rasping broom. And, using those qualities of yours that make you lovable like hands and feet on which to lift my weight, with all my powers I reach up to you, to you who are Love supreme and sovereign Good. But the more I reach up, the more relentlessly am I thrust back, and down into myself, below myself.56

What does William do when he is thrust back into himself?

"So I look at myself, and size myself up, and pass judgment on myself."57

This examination of the self, this searching into the soul, is a perennial aspect of monastic tradition. It may take the form of a simple reflection, or of a more detailed analysis. St Anthony overcame his famous temptation by "meditating on Christ and reflecting on the nobility that is

56 CF 3, 41. SC 61 bis, 68: "Haec est animae meae assidua exercitatio, hinc assidue scobo, vel scopo spiritum meum et cum bonis et amabilibus tuis, quasi pedibus et manibus et totis innitens viribus, sursum tendo ad te, in te, summe amor, summum bonum; sed quanto tendo fortius, tanto retrudor durius infra in memetipsum, sub me ipso." Emphasis mine.

57 CF 3, 41. SC 61 bis, 68: "Sic ergo respiciens et discernens et dijudicans meipsum."
ours through Christ and on the spiritual nature of the soul. Evagrius Ponticus was more precise:

The rational soul operates according to nature when the following conditions are realized: the concupiscible part desires virtue; the irascible part fights to obtain it; the rational part, finally, applies itself to the contemplation of created things.

William himself would later write a searching analysis of the composite nature of man, De natura corporis et animae (PL 180, 695-726). In the De contemplando Deo he takes a more phenomenological approach, simply reflecting on and describing the realities of the inner life. This description of the self stands out most clearly in William's rich vocabulary, which reflects both his familiarity with the Bible and patristic literature, and his own subtle self-awareness and keen insight into the human heart. He uses words and phrases such as: all that is within me (omnia interna mea), the light of the inner eyes (lux oculorum interiorum), all my powers (totis viribus), deep within my heart (intus in corde meo), all the intricacies of our feelings (omnes affectionum nostrarum recessus), the sense of the soul (sensus animae), the feelings of our soul (animae nostrae affectiones), considering all the corners and limits of my

---


self-awareness (contemplans omnes conscientiae meae angulos, vel terminos), the mouth of the heart (os cordis), to ruminate or reflect (ruminare), all the veins and marrow of my soul (omnibus animae meae venis et medullis), and human feelings (affectiones humanas). Particularly striking are the phrases: "Let your voice testify deep down within my soul and spirit, shaking my whole being like a raging storm, while my inward eyes are dazzled by the brightness of your truth," and: "For it is not in a flood of many waters, in the disturbance and confusion of our moods, which are as many in number as they are different in kind," and "my wide wilderness and the great emptiness of heart."

How does William experience himself? He experiences himself as needy and troubled, but also, and primarily, he experiences himself as a man aflame with the desire to experience God. His self-examination reveals clearly enough his weakness: "So I look at myself and size myself up, and pass judgment on myself. And there I am, facing myself, a

---

60 Trans. mine for all these words and phrases.

61 CF 3, 38. SC 61 bis, 62: "Respondeat quippe michi intus in anima et mente mea tumultuans in me et concutiens omnia interiora mea vox testificationis tuae, et caligant oculi mei interiores a fulgore veritatis tuae."


63 CF 3, 61. SC 61 bis, 112: "de deserti mei vastitate, de cordis mei spatiosa . . . vanitate."
very troublesome and trying business." He admits his sinfulness: "For I indeed am as yet wholly in my sins." He laments that when he would approach the Lord he hears "that word from the Book of Revelation: 'Dogs outside:'" William claims that he does occasionally experience the joy of seeing God: "something of this joy falls to my lot--and it is all too seldom that it happens"; but even then he soon senses his own weakness again: "But then forthwith I fall to the ground as one dead, and when I look around me I see nothing. I find myself just where I was before, back in my sorrow of heart and affliction of soul." This awareness of his wretchedness, however, only leads William to seek the Lord all the more: "O may this blessedness of being in you be given to me, for whom the worst thing possible is to be in myself."

64 CF 3, 41. SC 61 bis, 68: "Sic ergo respiciens et discernens et dijudicans meipsum: factus sum michiipsi de meipso laboriosa et taediosa quaestio."

65 CF 3, 38. SC 61 bis, 62: "Ego enim vere in peccatis totus usque adhuc."

66 CF 3, 39. SC 61 bis, 64: "Et illud de Apocalipsi: Foris canes."

67 CF 3, 42-43. SC 61 bis, 72: "quando quod quam rarum est me in aliqua hujus gaudii parte invenio."

68 CF 3, 43. SC 61 bis, 72: "Sed repente cado in terram quasi mortuus et respiciens nichil video; et me prius ubi eram invenio, in dolore scilicet cordis, et afflictione spiritus."

69 CF 3, 42. SC 61 bis, 72: "et bene michi sit in te, cui pessime est in se."
The word William uses most frequently to express his distress is *miseria* (misery, wretchedness). It was customary in twelfth-century monastic literature to contrast the *misericordia* (mercy, loving-kindness) of God to the *miseria* of man. William uses these words and others like them, and the fact that he uses the words *miser* (miserable, pitiable) and *miseria* on nine occasions, while using the words *miserere* (to have mercy) and *misericordia* only five times (four of these uses being in one sentence [SC 61 bis, 94, paragraph 11, lines 41-42]), shows how central this realization of his weakness was in his self-awareness. Typical is the sentence in which William says: "My wretched soul is naked and cold and benumbed."

William's acute sense of his wretchedness, however, leads not to a stagnant despair but to a living, throbbing movement toward God. He realizes: "To want to see God when one is unclean in heart is surely quite outrageous, rash and presumptuous, and altogether out of order and against the

---

70 See, for example, Guerric of Igny, *Liturgical Sermons*, I, trans. Monks of Mount Saint Bernard Abbey, CF 8 (1970), Sermon 6, The First Sermon for Christmas, 37: "The eternal birth certainly is more full of glory, but the temporal more lavish in mercy, in that it is on my behalf who needed mercy. I was besieged by misery, misery I could not expiate." SC 166, 164: "Illa quidem nativitas amplioris gloriae; sed ista profusioris misericordiae. Ista si quidem propert me, qui misericordia indigebam; quoniam miseria circumdatus eram, et miseria quam expiare non poteram." Emphasis mine.

71 CF 3, 6. SC 61 bis, 112: "nuda est ... et gelida et algens *miser* anima mea." Emphasis mine.
rule of the word of truth and of your wisdom." But he begs God for his mercy: "For your goodness' sake, then, have mercy on me, Lord." And he claims that it is the experience of union with God which will finally relieve the distress of the human heart:

And the more plentifully he pours himself into the faculties of those who love him, the more able does he make them to receive himself. He satisfies, but never surfeits them; and the satisfaction itself does not lessen their desire, but rather increases it, although it takes away from it the worry and distress.

Yet the sense of dynamism, the ongoing quest remains: "He satisfies, but never surfeits them." Moreover, William manifests the liveliness of his desire by using two different forms of exclamation: 0 (0, twenty-one times) and alas (heu, six times).

It is this lively desire to see God that I have described previously as William's fiery ardor, his passionate preoccupations.

---

72 Cf. 3, 37. SC 61 bis, 60: "Sed heu heu domine quam praeproperum est, quam temerarium, quam inordinatum, quam praesumptuosum, quam alienum a regula verbi veritatis, et sapientiae tuae: corde immundo velle deum videre."

73 Cf. 3, 37. SC 61 bis, 60: "propter bonitatem tuam domine miserere."

74 Cf. 3, 46. SC 61 bis, 80: "et quantum se amantium sensibus largius infundit, tanto eos sui capaciores efficit, satietatem faciens sed sine fastidio; de ipsa satietate non minuens desiderium sed augens, sed remota omni anxietudinis miseria." Emphasis mine.

75 Cf. 3, 46. SC 61 bis, 80: "satietatem faciens sed sine fastidic."
pation with God. As with his addressing God directly and his speaking from his own experience, so also this burning intensity appears most clearly in William's extensive vocabulary. He speaks of his union with God as a "clinging [adhaesio]" to God. He describes his desire to see God as "a torment [tormentum]," which leaves him "faint with longing [in languore desiderii mei]." He tells God: "I, as if with eyes closed, gasp [hianti] for you"; and that "to want you, to want you vehemently [vehementer] . . . is to want nothing but what is good." 

On several occasions William uses the word currere (to run, hasten, or press forward) to describe his desire for God. Quoting, and seeming to paraphrase, Philippians 3:12, he says: "I press forward [currere], hoping to make him my own who has made me his own." He holds the humble con-

---

76 SC 61 bis, 100: "adhaesio." Trans. mine.
77 CF 3, 40. SC 61 bis, 68: "tormentum."
78 CF 3, 40. SC 61 bis, 66: "in languore desiderii mei."
81 CF 3, 44. SC 61 bis, 74: "currre ut apprehendam, in quo apprehensus sum." The Sixto-Clementine (1598) Vulgate version of Philippians 3:12 reads: "sequor autem, si quomodo comprehendam in quo et comprehensus sum." (Tournai: Desclée Lefebvre, 1894). Emphasis mine in both cases. William's word currre is more emphatic than the word sequor (I follow, pursue). Elsewhere (CF 3, 47; SC 61 bis, 82) William expli-
viction that "you quickly forgive your blind man as he runs [currenti] toward you, and you reach out your hand to him if he stumbles over any obstacle as he runs [in currento]."\(^82\) His ardor shines forth when he prays "that I, Lord, may so see your glory that, forgetting all about my poverty and littleness, my whole self may stand erect and run [curram] into your love’s embrace."\(^83\)

William’s awareness of himself as weak, yet as burning with passionate desire to see God, stands out forcefully in

\(\text{citely quotes Philippians 3:12-15, using the verb sequor, rather than curro. In William of Saint Thierry: The Chronology, Ceglar explains William’s manner of quoting Scripture: “William rather seldom quotes Scripture from what is called nowadays the Vulgate Bible; and when he does, it is not from the Sixto-Clementine official text, of course, but according to the current manuscript tradition available to him. . . . In most cases, however, when he does use the Vulgate text, he adapts it to his purpose to such an extent that it can no longer be considered a direct quotation. When he quotes from the Old Latin version (Vetus Latina, VL), he is merely following the wording of patristic sources. It is surprising how often William’s quotations of the Bible, in their variant readings, can be traced back to these sources, usually St. Augustine or St. Jerome. Sometimes the documentation for certain forms of scriptural variants in the patristic tradition is so abundant that it would be impossible to determine which of the patristic writings was actually his source” (pp. 242-43). It is very difficult, therefore, to know which version of the Bible William is quoting or paraphrasing in any given instance (surely never the Sixto-Clementine Vulgate, which dates from 1598).}

\(^82\) SC 61 bis, 62: "cito ignoscis caeco tuo ad te currenti, et manum das in aliquibus in currento offendenti." Trans. and emphasis mine.

\(^83\) CF 3, 42. SC 61 bis, 72: "ut videam domine gloriam tuam; ut oblitus parvitatis et paupertatis meae, totus erigas, et curram in amplexus amoris tui." Emphasis mine.
a passage toward the end of the *De contemplando Deo* in which he gathers together several of the words which we have seen characterize his approach to God and to himself:

Towards you, then, Lord, are all things turned—
and may my eyes be among them! May every step that my soul takes be towards you, in you, and through you. And when my strength, which is nothing, fails, may my very weaknesses still pant for you! But in the meantime, Lord, how much longer are you going to put me off? How often must my wretched, harassed, gasping soul trail after you? Hide me, I beseech you, in the secret place of your face.

The rich vocabulary William uses to describe his awareness of himself shows that he experiences himself as a sinful man, but as one who burns with the desire to experience God.

**Love**

We have seen how the words and phrases William of Saint Thierry uses in the *De contemplando Deo* to describe God and himself manifest the unique way in which he gazes on God as he speaks from his own experience and addresses God with passionate intensity. Now I will examine the words William uses to speak of his major theme, love; and because love is so central in the *De contemplando Deo*, I will also study a

---

84 CF 3, 62. SC 61 bis, 116: "Ad te igitur domine ad te sunt, et sint oculi mei, ad te, in te, de te proficiant omnes animae meae profectus; et cum defecerit virtus mea, quae nulla est post te anhelent omnes ejus defectus. Sed interim quandiu me differs, quandiu miseram et anxiam et anhelam post te animam meam prostrahis. Absconde me obsecro in abscondito faciei tuae." Emphasis mine.
number of questions raised by William's description of it.

The vocabulary of love

The words William uses in the De contemplando Deo to speak of love include: love (amor), to love (amare), lovable (amabilis), lover (amator), love, or charity (caritas), love, or choice (dilectio), to love, or to choose (diligere), to affect (afficere), attachment (affectus), feeling (affectio), embrace (amplexus), desire (desiderium), sweetness (dulcedo, suavitas), enjoyment (fruitio), joy (gaudium), perfection (perfectio), unity (unitas), happy (beatus, felix), to have (habere), and to see (videre). One of the first things that strikes a reader of the De contemplando Deo is the frequency with which these words occur.

It is even more striking that, of the three words or groups of words which directly signify love, William uses the word caritas eight times, and dilectio and diligere and their derivatives twenty-nine times— but he uses the words amor and amare and their derivatives two hundred and twenty-six times. This obvious preference for amor and amare is accentuated by the fact that, in the thirty-seven instances in which William uses the words caritas, dilectio, dlector, dilectus, and diligere, he is almost always either quoting the Bible, 85 or

85 SC 61 bis, 90: "prior dilexit nos," is the same as the Sixto-Clementine Vulgate version of 1 John 4:10. SC 61 bis, 100: "deo qui est caritas," is very similar to the
using a literary device, such as antimetabole, assonance,
alliteration, or rhyme, in which one of these words is more
effective than amor or amare would be.\(^{86}\) This means that
his actual preference for amor and amare is almost total;
but he does not explain why he uses these words so frequently
in the *De contemplando Deo*, nor does he make any distinctions
between amor, caritas, and diletio in this work. In order
to shed some light on William's use of amor in the *De con­
templando Deo* I will study two of his later works in which
he distinguishes between amor, caritas, and dilectio; and I
will examine the use of amor by John Scotus Eriugena and
Augustine, both of whom influenced the *De contemplando Deo*.

William's *De natura et dignitate amoris*, written short­
ly after the *De contemplando Deo*, is roughly three times as
long as the latter work.\(^{87}\) In the *De natura et dignitate

---

Sixto-Clementine Vulgate version of 1 John 4:8, which reads:
"Deus caritas est." Emphasis mine in both cases.

\(^{86}\) An example of William's use of caritas in antimetabole
(the inversion of an idea already stated) and assonance
occurs in SC 61 bis, 58: "caritas veritatis ... veritas
caritatis." On another occasion he uses dilectus and dili­
gere in alliteration, assonance, and rhyme, all in one short
phrase, SC 61 bis, 110: "dilectus dilecti cum dilectus dis­
cipulus diligit." Emphasis mine in both cases. For a thor­
ough study of the literary style of the *De contemplando Deo*,
see Davy, *Deux traités de l'amour*, pp. 19-25. Davy does not
comment, however, on William's frequent use of amor in the
*De contemplando Deo*.

\(^{87}\) I have discussed the dates of these two works in
Chapter Two. Both works date from the earliest period of
William's writing career, and may even overlap somewhat.
The *De natura et dignitate amoris* contains one thousand nine
amoris William uses amor and amare one hundred and five times, caritas seventy-eight times, and dione and dili-
gere ten times. He still prefers amor, therefore, but even in a work with this very word in its title he uses it far less often than he had in the De contemplando Deo. In the De natura et dignitate amoris, also, William clearly distinguishes between amor and caritas as two stages in the development of love from the basic capacity of the will to love, to its full fruition in wisdom: "according to the progress of virtue the will grows into love [amorem], love [amor] into charity [caritatem], and charity [caritas] into wisdom." 88 He explains this process in more detail by defining love, charity, and wisdom: "For love [amor] is nothing else but a vehement will for what is good," 89 "Charity [caritas] is illumined love; charity is love from God, in God and toward God. Moreover, charity is God: 'God,' we read, 'is charity,'" 90 and: "This enjoyment [fruitio] [of God] is a hundred and twenty-three lines of text, as compared with the six hundred and fifteen lines of the De contemplando Deo.

88 PC 24, 22: "secundum virtutem profectum voluntas crescit in amorem, amor in caritatem, caritas in sapientiam." Trans. and emphasis mine.

89 PC 24, 28: "Nihil enim est aliusd amor quam vehemens in bono voluntas." Trans. and emphasis mine.

90 PC 24, 58: "Amor quippe illuminatus, caritas est; amor a Deo, in Deo, ad Deum, caritas est. Caritas autem Deus est: 'Deus, inquit, caritas est.'" Trans. and emphasis mine.
certain divine taste [sapore], and thus from taste [sapore] we get wisdom [sapientia]."91 William can therefore explain: "The will [voluntas] first moves the soul toward God; then love [amor] speeds it along, charity [caritas] contemplates, and wisdom [sapientia] enjoys."92

The Expositio super cantica canticorum, written in 1139-40, is more than six times as long as the De contemplando Deo.93 In this work William uses amor and amare three hundred and eighty times, caritas seventy-eight times, and dilectio and diligere one hundred and thirty times. This shows that he still uses amor more often than caritas and dilectio, but in relation to the length of the two treatises, he uses amor and amare far less often in the Expositio super cantica canticorum than he had in the De contemplando Deo. In the Expositio super cantica canticorum he distinguishes clearly between all three of these words, amor, caritas, and dilectio; but his approach here seems decidedly more casual than in the De natura et dignitate amoris. He writes:

For this canticle deals with the love of God--

91 PC 24, 112: "Fruitio autem haec in sapore quodam divino est, unde et a sapore sapientia." Trans. and emphasis mine. Note William's use of the word "enjoyment" (fruitio) here.

92 PC 24, 110: "Primum enim ad Deum voluntas animam movet, amor promovet, caritas contemplatur, sapientia fruitur." Trans. and emphasis mine.

93 It contains three thousand eight hundred and seventy-three lines.
the love whereby God is loved, or the love whereby God himself is called Love. Whether we call it love [amor] or charity [caritas] or diletion [dilectio] matters not, except that the word "love" [amoris] seems to indicate a certain tender affection on the part of the lover with the implication of striving or soliciting; "charity" [charitatis] a certain spiritual affection or the joy of one who has fruition; and "dilection," [dilectione] a natural desire for an object which gives delight. But all these things one and the same Spirit works in the love of Bridegroom and Bride. 94

In these two later works, therefore, William makes some distinctions in his vocabulary of love which he had not made in the De contemplando Deo. The De natura et dignitate amoris is a logically structured reflection on love, while the Expositio super cantica canticorum is a commentary on the first few chapters of the Song of Songs, interlaced with brief prayers addressed to God. This difference in literary genre from the De contemplando Deo, almost entirely a prayer to God, may explain why William would be more inclined to make distinctions in his vocabulary of love in these two works, but his casual approach to these distinctions in the latest of these works, the Expositio super cantica canticorum.

94 CF 6, 8. SC 82, 78: "Agit enim de amore Dei, vel quo Deus amatur, vel quo ipse Deus Amor dicitur; qui utrum amor dicatur, an caritas, an dilectio, non refert, nisi quod in amoris nomine, tener quidam amantis indicari videtur affectus, tendentis vel ambientis; in nomine vero caritatis, spiritualis quaedam affectio, vel gaudium fruentis; in dilectione autem, rei delectantis appetitus naturalis; quae tamen omnia, in amore Sponsi et Sponsae, unus atque idem Spiritus operatur." Emphasis mine in English translation only.
shows that he did not hold rigidly to them. Moreover, it must be noted that neither the De natura et dignitate amoris nor the Expositio super cantica canticorum yield any clue as to why William, though still using amor more than caritas and dilectio in them, does not use it nearly as often as he had in the De contemplando Deo.

At one point in the De contemplando Deo William gives a free rendition of a definition of love which had appeared in Book I, paragraph 74 of the De divisione naturae of John Scotus Eriugena, whom William refers to as "one of your servants." William writes: "Est enim amor animae rationalis sicut dicit quidam servus tuus, motus, vel quieta statio, vel finis, in id ultra quod nil appetat: vel appetendum judicet voluntatis appetitus." Eriugena's Latin reads: "Amor est naturalis motus omnium rerum, quae in motu sunt, finis quietaque statio, ultra quam nullus creaturae progre-ditur motus." In this paragraph Eriugena uses amor and amare twenty-five times, caritas not at all, and dilectio

95 SC 61 bis, 88. CF 3, 50: "In fact, as one of your servants has said, the love of the rational soul is 'a movement, a quiet abiding, or an end, in which the will neither seeks anything beyond that which it has, nor reckons anything to be desirable." Emphasis mine. The nature of this quotation, and of some others in this chapter, seems to necessitate that the Latin appear in the text, with English translation in the notes.

96 PL 122, 519B. "Love is the natural motion of all things which are in motion, the end and quiet resting-place beyond which no created motion proceeds." Trans. and emphasis mine.
and *diligere* three times. It is clear that William is paraphrasing Eriugena in this definition of love, but it would be straining the evidence too much to conclude that Eriugena's use of *amor* in this paragraph influenced the entire *De contemplando Deo*. *Amor* and other words for love are not, in fact, a prominent part of Eriugena's vocabulary as a whole. In Book I of the *De divisione naturae*, which occupies roughly eighty columns of Migne's Patrology (PL 122, 441-524), he uses *amor* and *amare* ninety-one times, *caritas* three times, and *dilectio* and *diligere* twenty-two times, but his uses of *amor*, *amare*, *dilectio*, and *diligere* are mostly bunched together in a few paragraphs, and they appear less often than words such as *creare*, *movere*, and *essentia*, which are more characteristic of Eriugena's vocabulary. In speaking of the three divine Persons he uses the words *essentia*, *sapientia*, and *vita*, rather than *amor* or any word for love.

In discussing the different names for God, he lists *essentia*, *bonitas*, *Deus*, *veritas*, *aeternitas*, *sapientia*, *vita*, and

---

97 *Amor* and *amare* appear twenty-five times in paragraph 74, twenty-three times in paragraph 75, twenty-one times in paragraph 62, and eight times in paragraph 20; in all they appear in only ten of the seventy-eight paragraphs of Book I of the *De divisione naturae*. *Dilectio* and *diligere* appear eight times in paragraph 62; in all they appear in only six paragraphs.

98 PL 122, 455C: "per essentiam Patrem, per sapientiam Filium, per vitam Spiritum Sanctum intelligi"; "by essence I understand the Father, by wisdom the Son, by life the Holy Spirit." Trans. and emphasis mine.
lux—again he does not mention *amor*, *caritas*, or *dilectio* (PL 122, 459C-460B). There is no solid evidence, then, of any further influence of Eriugena on William’s use of *amor* in the *De contemplando Deo* except the one passage which is evidently based on the corresponding passage of the *De divisione naturae.*

At another place in the *De contemplando Deo* William uses *amor* and *amare* nine times in a two-line passage which depends on a passage of Augustine’s *De trinitate* for both content and vocabulary. William writes: “Sed forsitan cum amo amorem non amo amorem quo amo quod amare volo, et amo quicquid am: sed me amantem.” Augustine had written: “Non enim quisquis se amat amor est nisi cum amator ipse amor. Aliud est autem amare se, aliud amare amorem suum. Non enim amat amor nisi iam aliquid amans quia ubi nihil amat, nullus est amor.” In this paragraph of the *De

---

99 Hourlier suggests (SC 61 bis, 99, note 2) that William’s phrase “amas et te ipsum in nobis,” (SC 61 bis, 98, paragraph 11, line 26) bears some relation to Eriugena, *De divisione naturae*, I, 76; PL 122, 522BC: “Non vos estis, qui amat... in nobis et in seipsa amat.” Emphasis mine in both cases. But the similarity of thought and vocabulary here is too general to demonstrate a real reliance of William on Eriugena.

100 SC 61 bis, 70. CF 3, 41: “But maybe when I love love, it is not the love that I love—the love, that is, with which I love that which I want to love and by which I love everything that I do love at all—but it is I myself whom I love in the act of *loving*.” Emphasis mine.

101 *De trinitate*, IX, ii, 2; CCSL, I, 294. Trans. Stephen McKenna, FC 45 (1963), 272: “For there is no love
trinitate (IX, ii, 2), Augustine uses *amor* and *amare* seventy-one times in forty-three lines (forty-seven times in the first seventeen of these lines), while not using *caritas* or *dilectio* at all. This concentrated use of *amor* and *amare* is very similar to the vocabulary of the passage of the *De contemplando Deo* I have just quoted (paragraph 4, lines 27-28), at which point William uses *amor* and *amare* twenty-one times in nine lines (lines 21-29), also entirely leaving out *caritas* and *dilectio*.

A comparison of the contents of the two passages shows that William is developing, in his own frame of reference, Augustine's thoughts on "the love of love." It seems clear, then, that at this point of the *De contemplando Deo* William's use of *amor* and *amare* depends on Augustine's use of these words in Book IX, paragraph ii, 2, of the *De trinitate*. A closer look at Augustine's use of *amor* and *amare* reveals some interesting facts. In the five hundred and thirty-one lines of Book IX of the *De trinitate* Augustine uses *amor* and *amare* two hundred and one times—this is almost the exact same ratio as William's two hundred and twenty-six uses of these words in his six hundred and fifteen-line *De contemplando Deo*. Moreover, in Book IX of the *De trinitate* Auguste-
tine uses *caritas* only six times and *diligere* only three times. But, if William's very frequent use of *amor* and *amare* in relation to *caritas* and *dilectio* in the *De contemplando Deo* is not nearly as marked in his other works, this is even truer of Augustine. In Book VIII of the *De trinitate*, in which he also writes of love, Augustine uses *amor* and *amare* thirty-three times, and *caritas* twenty-six times—but he uses *dilectio* and *diligere* one hundred and fifty-seven times. In all of the other paragraphs of his works which seem to have had some influence on the *De contemplando Deo*, Augustine uses *amor* and *amare* eighteen times, and *caritas* eight times—but he uses *dilectio* and *diligere* thirty-four times.\(^{102}\) This means that, although William generally prefers *amor* to *caritas* and *dilectio*, Augustine does not. This draws our attention all the more to the very close parallel between Book IX of Augustine's *De trinitate* and William's *De contemplando Deo*, in both of which *amor* appears far more often than *caritas* and *dilectio*.

It is not easy to know how to interpret this preference for *amor* in these two books. The influence of the contents of Book IX of the *De trinitate* on the *De contemplando Deo* is clear in the corresponding passages on "the love of love" I have quoted above (*De trinitate*, IX, ii, 2, and *De contem-}

\(^{102}\) Here I am depending on the list of Augustinian references given by Hourlier, SC 61 bis, 153.
plando Deo, paragraph 4, lines 21-29), but there is no further evidence that the contents of Book IX of the De trinitate influenced the De contemplando Deo. Book IX of the De trinitate is a reflection on "the mind, its knowledge of itself, and its love of itself," while the De contemplando Deo is an expression of an impassioned desire to see God.

Augustine and William both, however, use the literary devices of alliteration, assonance, and rhyme, and in doing so they play with the words amor and amare. Augustine writes: "Et amor quamuis referatur ad mentem amantem cuius amor est, tamen et ad se ipsum est amor ut sit etiam in se ipso quia et amor amatur, nec alio nisi amore amari potest." William exclaims: "ut amem te perfecte aliquando, o qui prior nos amasti amande et amabilis domine." But it is not clear why Augustine in Book IX of the De trinitate, and William in the De contemplando Deo, use amor rather than caritas or diletio so often in these literary devices. Augustine shows himself capable of playing with diletio in

103 Stephen McKenna, PC 45, introduction, p. xi.

104 De trinitate, IX, v, 8; CCSL, L, 300. Trans. Stephen McKenna, PC 45, 277-78: "And love, although it is referred to the mind that loves, of which it is the love, yet it is likewise love in respect to itself, so that it also exists in itself. For love is also loved, nor can it be loved with anything else except with love." Emphasis mine.

105 SC 61 bis, 74. CF 3, 44: "I hope one day to love you perfectly, you who first loved us, you the love-worthy, you the lovable." Emphasis mine.
Book VIII of the De trinitate,106 and he plays with caritas in Book IX itself.107 William plays with both of these words in the De contemplando Deo, as I have shown above in this chapter (see note 86).

It seems highly probable, then, that Augustine's frequent use of amor in Book IX of the De trinitate influenced William's use of it in the De contemplando Deo. But in these two works neither author takes care to distinguish amor from caritas and dilectio. In one passage of Book IX of the De trinitate Augustine uses all three of these words, more or less interchangeably, within nine lines:

Ergo aut cupiditate aut caritate, non quo non sit amanda creatura, sed si ad creatorem refertur ille amor, non iam cupiditas sed caritas erit. . . . Sicut enim te ipso non in te ipsum frui debes sed in eo qui fecit te, sic etiam illo quem diligis tamquam te ipsum.108

106 De trinitate, VIII, viii, 12; CCSL, L, 286: "Diligat fratrem et diligat eandem dilectionem; magis enim nout dilectionem qua diligit quem fratrem quem diliget." Trans. Stephen McKenna, FC 45, 262: "Let him love his brother and he will love the same love. For he knows the love by which he loves more than the brother whom he loves." Emphasis mine.

107 De trinitate, IX, viii, 13; CCSL, L, 304: "Ergo aut cupiditate aut caritate, sed si ad creatorem refertur ille amor, non iam cupiditas sed caritas erit." Trans. Stephen McKenna, FC 45, 282: "Therefore, it is conceived either by desire (cupiditas), or love (caritas); not that the creature ought not to be loved, but if that love for him is referred to the Creator, it will no longer be desire but love." Emphasis mine, except for the words cupiditas and caritas, which appear within translator's brackets in the English translation.

108 De trinitate, IX, viii, 13; CCSL, L, 304. Trans. Stephen McKenna, FC 45, 282: "Therefore, it is conceived
In one four-line passage of the *De contemplando Deo* William uses *amare* and *diligere* each three times, also more or less interchangeably: "qui docuit nos *amare* se, cum usque ad mortem crucis prior *dilexit* nos, *amando* et *diligendo* suscitans nos ut *amemus* eum, qui prior usque in finem *dilexit* nos."  

Neither Augustine nor William gives any reason for his frequent use of *amor*, and I am unable to find a convincing reason for the choice of this word by either author.  

either by desire (*cupiditas*), or love (*caritas*): not that the creature ought not to be loved, but if that love for him is referred to the Creator, it will no longer be desire but love. . . . For just as you ought to enjoy yourself, but not in yourself but in Him who made you, so you ought also to enjoy him whom you love as yourself." Emphasis mine, except for the words *tamquam te ipsum* in the Latin text, and *cupiditas* and *caritas* in translator's brackets in the English translation.

109 SC 61 bis, 90-92. CF 3, 51: "him who taught us to love himself when he first loved us, even to death on the cross. By loving us and holding us so dear he stirred us up to love himself, who first had loved us to the end." Emphasis mine.

110 In this study of the use of amor by Augustine and William I have tried to be as specific as possible by concentrating on the relevant texts themselves. A look at Augustine’s works as a whole, or at William’s twelfth-century background, however, does not yield any supplementary evidence on their use of amor in the texts with which we are concerned. In *The City of God*, Augustine himself says: "Some think choice [dilectionem] or charity [caritatem] is one thing, and love [amorem] another. . . . But it is most certain that not even authors of secular literature speak in this way. . . . The Scriptures of our religion, whose authority we prefer to all other writings, do not distinguish between love [amorem], and choice [dilectionem] or charity [caritatem]." Trans. mine. *De civitate Dei*, XIV, vii; CCSL, XLVIII, 422: "nonnulli arbitrantur aliquid esse dilectionem siue caritatem, aliquid amorem. . . . Sic autem nec ipsos auctores saecularium litterarum locutos esse certissimum
From all of this evidence on the use of amor drawn from William's *De natura et dignitate amoris* and *Expositio super cantica canticorum*, Eriugena's *De divisione naturae*, and Augustine's *De trinitate*, I conclude as follows: The literary genre of the *De contemplando Deo*, a prayer addressed to God, does not lend itself to the kind of distinctions between amor, caritas, and dilectio which William makes in his *De natura et dignitate amoris* and *Expositio super cantica canticorum*. The influence of Eriugena's use of amor in a definition of it in Book I of his *De divisione naturae* is apparent in William's use of amor in a similar definition in the

est. . . . Scripturas religionis nostrae, quarum auctoritatem ceteris omnibus litteris anteponimus, non aliud dicere amorem, aliud dilectionem uel caritatem." Johan Chydenius, a Finnish scholar, has described Augustine's use of amor, caritas, and dilectio by saying: "St. Augustine uses the terms amor, dilectio and caritas interchangeably. Certainly, he is aware of the existence of a traditional distinction between amor, which is supposed to stand for a lower sort of love, and dilectio and caritas, which are supposed to stand for a higher sort. But he is anxious to show that these three terms fundamentally stand for one and the same thing. He rejects any distinction between them" (The Symbolism of Love in Medieval Thought, in Societas Scientiarum Fennica: Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum, 44 No. 1 [1970] 15). John C. Moore, associate professor of history at Hofstra University, Long Island, New York, describes the vocabulary of love in twelfth-century France: "Twelfth-century writers learned their Latin from the pagan and Christian writers of ancient Rome and from the Vulgate Bible. There they found the nouns amor, dilectio, and caritas and the verbs amare and diligere, all meaning love. . . . One might have hoped that with these rich resources, twelfth-century writers would have cleared things up a little by carefully reserving each word for a certain kind of love. Unhappily, they did not" (Love in Twelfth-Century France [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972], p. 2).
De contemplando Deo, but Eriugena's influence on William's use of amor in the De contemplando Deo is limited to this one brief passage. The contents of Augustine's thoughts on "the love of love" in Book IX, paragraph ii, 2, of his De trinitate influenced paragraph 4, lines 21-29 of the De contemplando Deo. Moreover, there is a striking similarity in the ratio of uses of amor in these two writings—two hundred and one times in the five hundred and thirty-one lines of Book IX of the De trinitate, and two hundred and twenty-six times in the six hundred and fifteen lines of the De contemplando Deo. This similarity cannot be explained on the basis of the contents of the two treatises. Augustine and William both use amor in various literary devices in these two works, and this suggests some influence of Augustine on William; but it is not clear why they use amor so frequently in these devices, because both of them also use caritas and dilectio is such devices.

In addition to these conclusions, I would like to mention here that even if this influence of Book IX of Augustine's De trinitate on William's use of amor in the De contemplando Deo is as important as I have concluded, William's use of amor in the De contemplando Deo nevertheless shows his independence, and his original use of this word. Augustine had reflected on the nature of love (amor); William directly addresses God as love (amor) with passionate intensity: "O
love [amor], come into us, possess us."\(^{111}\) Once again, then, we see that William's use of words reveals his unique way of looking straight to God.

**Questions on love**

In this chapter I am concerned primarily to study the way in which William of Saint Thierry uses an extensive vocabulary in the *De contemplando Deo* to describe his experience of God. Because the word "love" (amor) is the most significant word in this vocabulary, I will examine William's concept of love in some detail, even though this will necessitate an orientation less explicitly toward word-study than that of the other sections of this chapter.

In his introduction to the *De contemplando Deo* in SC 61 bis, Hourlier has given a good description of William's treatment of: the relation of knowledge and love (11-12); the nature and development of love itself (12-13); the perfection of love (33); our union with God in love (33, 36); the proof of love given by works animated by faith (34); several Augustinian themes, such as the role of love attributed to the Holy Spirit in uniting the Father and the Son, love as a weight drawing us to the Principle in whose image we are made, the distinction between love and the love of

\(^{111}\) SC 61 bis, 86: "O amor veni in nos, posside nos." Trans. and emphasis mine.
love, and the doctrine of the progress of love from desire to enjoyment (40); and, finally, the way in which William's reflections on the nature of love lead him to an understanding of love in the bosom of the Trinity and in the Trinity's self-manifestations to intelligent creatures (45, 47). 112

I will concentrate on demonstrating how certain questions raised by William's description of love in the De contemplando Deo manifest his God-centered orientation.

William himself raises a question about the nature of love when he inquires of the Lord: "What does it mean, to love love and to desire desire?" 113 He hears the Lord answer his question:

Yet deep within my heart the truth of your consolation and the consolation of your truth reply: "There are two loves, the love of desire and the love of delight. Desiring love is sometimes rewarded with sight; the reward of sight is delight, and delight earns the perfecting of love." 114

112 In the footnotes of his text and French translation of the De contemplando Deo in SC 61 bis, Hourlier also comments on these aspects of William's concept of love in this treatise: the love of God and the duty of serving other men (59, note 2), the love of the love of God (71, notes 1 and 2), the manner of man's participation in God's love (83, note 3), the roles of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in God's loving plan of salvation (91, note 1), that God has loved us first (93, note 1), and the role of the Holy Spirit in uniting us to God in love (97, note 1).

113 CF 3, 41. SC 61 bis, 70: "Quid enim est amare amorem, desiderare desiderium?"

114 CF 3, 43. SC 61 bis, 74: "Sed respondet michi intus in corde meo veritas consolationis tuae; et consolatio veritatis tuae. Est amor desiderii; et est amor fruitionis. Amor
This answer, however, raises another question: are not both of these loves, the love of desire (amor desiderii) and the love of delight, or enjoyment, or fruition (amor fruitionis), essentially self-centered? Is not William seeking to find self-fulfillment by seeing God, rather than to go out of himself by praising God in altruistic love?

In Chapter Four I commented on the importance of the theme of enjoyment, or delight (fruitio) in the De contemplando Deo. Desire is also a prominent theme in this treatise. William uses the word "desire" (desiderium and desiderare and their derivatives) fifty-two times. He utilizes one or the other of these themes when he speaks of wishing to see God: "To want [velle] to see God,"\(^{115}\) of having God: "anyone has [habet] you insofar as he loves you,"\(^{116}\) and of enjoying him: "this enjoyment [fruitio] of your sweetness."\(^{117}\) He extols the happiness of loving God: "For only those who love you truly are truly and uniquely and singularly happy [beati], and they are perfectly happy [beati], who love you truly and perfectly."\(^{118}\)

---

\(^{115}\) CF 3, 37. SC 61 bis, 60: "velle deum videre."

\(^{116}\) SC 61 bis, 102: "habet te quis, in quantum amat te." Trans. mine.

\(^{117}\) CF 3, 56. SC 61 bis, 100: "tanta dulcedinis tuae fruitio."

\(^{118}\) CF 3, 56. SC 61 bis, 102: "Beati enim vere et unice.
... gaudium] of your love,"¹¹⁹ and he uses two different words, suavitas and dulciter, to express the sweetness of contemplation: "that sweetness [illa suavitas],"¹²⁰ and "the contemplation of your goodness refreshes us so sweetly [dulciter]."¹²¹

These passages do indeed emphasize William's desire to delight in God for his (William's) own happiness. Other passages, however, show that William is even more concerned to love God for God's sake. He laments: "I indeed am as yet wholly in my sins, I have not learned yet how to die to myself in order to live to you."¹²² He shows how the Holy Spirit inspires us to direct our love to God:

Your Holy Spirit, who is called the Love, and the Unity, and the Will of the Father and the Son, dwells in us by his grace and implants in us the charity of God; and through that charity he reconciles God to us. And thus he unites us to God through the good will that he breathes into us. And with us this vehement good will goes by the name of love, by which we love what we ought to love, namely you.¹²³

et singulariter: et perfecte beati, qui vere et perfecte amant te."

¹¹⁹ CF 3, 42. SC 61 bis, 72: "plenum amoris tui gaudium."
¹²⁰ SC 61 bis, 58: "illa suavitas." Trans. mine.
¹²³ CF 3, 54. SC 61 bis, 96: "Sic enim ipse spiritus
He describes the heights which this altruistic love for God can reach: "when a great grace is given to someone who loves God, it is possible for his love to reach the point of loving neither you nor himself for himself, but you and himself for yourself alone." He then goes on to exclaim:

O the incalculable blessedness of the soul that merits so to be acted on by God, that through unity of spirit she loves in God, not just some property of his, but God himself, and even loves herself only in God! Like God, she loves and approves in herself what God must approve and love, that is to say, himself. Or, to put it in another way, she loves and approves in herself that which must be loved by both God the Creator and by his creature. In a word, neither the name of love nor love itself belongs by right to anyone, nor is owed to any, save to yourself alone.

It seems clear, then, that no matter how strong William's

sanctus tuus, qui amor dicitur patris et filii et unitas et voluntas, per gratiam suam in nobis inhabitans, et dei in nos caritatem commendans, et per ipsam ipsum nobis concilians, deo nos unit, per inspiratam nobis bonam voluntatem; cujus bonae voluntatis vehementia amor in nobis dicitur, quo amamus quod amare debemus, te scilicet." Emphasis mine.

124 CF 3, 48. SC 61 bis, 84: "possibile est amori deum amantis, ubi magna occurrit gratia, eo proficere, ut nec te nec se amans propter se, et te et se propter te solum amet." Emphasis mine. Hourlier (SC 61 bis, 85, note 1) comments on the similarity of this passage to St Bernard's third and fourth degrees of love.

125 CF 3, 48. SC 61 bis, 84: "Et o felicem et animam felicissimam, quae deo sic a deo meretur affici ut per unitatem spiritus in deo solum amet deum, non suum aliquod privatum, nec nisi in deo amet se ipsum, et deus in ipso amet vel approbet quod amare vel approbare debet deus, id est se ipsum: immo quod solum debet amari, et a creatore deo, et a creatura de. Amoris enim vel nomen vel affectus nulli competit vel debetur nisi tibi soli." Emphasis mine.
God-given and fully human desire to enjoy God is, his desire to love God for God's sake is even stronger.

In another passage, commenting on God's love, William raises the question of God's immutability when he says:

"For, when you love us, you are in no wise affected either for or by us; but you simply are what you are. You are the same One who you always are." He even claims that it would be contrary to faith to hold that God is affected by loving us:

Do you, the Creator of all things, both of the good dispositions and of the souls that are to be affected by them, do you love those whom you do love by some extraneous, incidental activity? And are you, the Maker of all men and all things, in some way, in some respect, affected in so doing? It is unthinkable! It would be ridiculous and contrary to faith to impute such a thing to the Creator of all!126

William explicitly contrasts this immutability of God to our human response to God's love:

We, on the other hand, when we love you—we, for whom in some wretched way it is possible to exist and yet not to love you, to be, that is to say, and to be evil—we, I say, when we

126 CF 3, 47. SC 61 bis, 82: "Non enim afficeris ad nos, vel a nobis cum nos amas; sed es quod es, qui semper idipsum es." Emphasis mine.

love you are affected by you, toward you and in you. 128

William's manner of explaining the traditional Christian belief in God's immutability seems to picture God as remote, and as uninterested in our loving response to him. Such a view of God is uncongenial to the existential religious consciousness shared by many people today. W. Norris Clarke, an American Jesuit professor of philosophy at Fordham University, describes this religious consciousness as one which places "strong emphasis on the truly personal relation which must exist between a religiously available personal God and finite persons He has created." 129 Clarke prefers an explanation of God's immutability which leaves sufficient room for "the religious consciousness to speak in the warmest personalist terms of God's truly caring, mutual relation of love with us" (p. 67). He writes:

the immutability which must be affirmed of God is the unchanging, indefectible steadfastness of an infinite plentitude of goodness and loving benevolence, but a benevolence which also expresses itself in a process, a progressive unfolding, of mutual interpersonal relationships... in terms of which He is truly related to us by an intentional relation of personal consciousness. With less immutability we would

128 CF 3, 47. SC 61 bis, 82: "Nos autem a te, ad te vel in te afficimur cum te amamus, qui possumus miserum aliquo modo esse, et non amare te: id est, esse et male esse."

not have a truly infinite God; with more, we would not have a truly personal God.\footnote{130}

William's view of God's immutability leads him to claim that God is not affected by loving us. Nevertheless, it is clear that he does speak of God's love for us in terms of a warm, intimate relationship. He tells God that his soul "longs to be warmed at the fire of your love."\footnote{131} We have seen above that the tone of the entire De contemplando Deo is one of passionate preoccupation with God.

Throughout the ages Christians have tried to reconcile God's immutability with his interpersonal relations with all too changeable men. Clarke's recent attempt underlines the interest this question is still capable of arousing. William of Saint Thierry's effort to explain God's immutability in his De contemplando Deo, with its denial that God is affected by loving us, poses problems for twentieth-century readers. But it must be admitted that William manages to affirm both God's immutability and the warmth of God's personal love for us; and that he does this in a way which, by stressing God's transcendence, once again underlines his God-centered orientation.

This theocentric tendency manifests itself also in another question on love raised by the De contemplando Deo--


\footnote{131} SC 61 bis, 112: "desiderans calefieri calore amoris tui." Trans. and emphasis mine.
the question of brotherly love and its relation to the love of God. Brotherly love is not a central theme in the De contemplando Deo. William uses the word "brothers" (fratres) only once, and the word "neighbor" (proximum) only twice in this treatise. His use of "brothers" occurs in the opening paragraph, and William says explicitly that he experiences a conflict between his desire to experience God and his duty to serve his brothers:

Love of the truth does indeed lead us far from you [his own yearnings and worries]; but for the brethren's sake, the truth of the love forbids us to abandon or reject you. But, though your need thus calls us back, that sweet experience [of God] must not be wholly foregone on your account.  

In the passage in which William uses the word "neighbor" he gives a brief description of his views on fraternal charity, and in so doing he manages to emphasize once again that our love should be directed to God:

It is . . . in order that there may be no defect in charity that we are told to love our neighbor, according to the law of perfect love. Just as God loves only himself in us, and we have learned to love in ourselves only God, so we are to begin now to love our neighbor "as" ourselves. For in our neighbor we love God alone, even as we love him in ourselves.  

---


133 CF 3, 60-61. SC 61 bis, 112: "Exinde ne manca sit
It is true, of course, that because God is the Principle both of all love and of all human persons, human love is a reflection of God's love, and in all proper human love God himself is the beloved, in the sense that God is the ultimate end to which all human love should be directed. In the De contemplando Deo, however, William emphasizes this movement of all human love to God in what appears an absolute, almost a severe, fashion: "in our neighbor we love God alone." In his later works, as will be seen in Chapter Seven, William speaks more appealingly of the human warmth present in authentic fraternal love.

It is clear, then, that in his treatment in the De contemplando Deo of the questions of the nature of his own love for God, the immutability of God even in loving us, and the relation of brotherly love to the love of God, William orients his mind and heart straight to God as he declares over and over again that God is the one whom we are to love.

Understanding

At the beginning of this chapter I mentioned that in

caritas, docemur amare proximum, secundum legem caritatis puram, ut sicut deus non nisi seipsum amat in nobis, et nos solum deum didicimus amare in nobis, ita et proximum sicut nos incipiamus amare: in quo solum deum amamus, sicut in nobisipsis." Emphasis mine.

134 CF 3, 60. SC 61 bis, 112: "in quo [proximo] solum deum amamus."
the De contemplando Deo William has a whole group of words which refer to understanding, and that understanding is closely related in his mind to love. The words William uses to describe activities related to understanding include: thinking (cogitatio, twice), understanding (intellectus, once; intelligentia, once), the mind (mens, thrice), reason (ratio, twice), reasoning (ratiocinatio, once), rational (rationalis, twice), comprehensibility (comprehensibilitas, once), comprehensible (comprehensibilis, once), incomprehensible (incomprehensibilis, once), to comprehend (comprehender, five times), to understand (intelligere, six times), to know (noscere, or nosse, six times; scire, six times), and not to know (nescire, thrice). In this group the verbs comprehendere, intelligere, noscere, and scire stand out as the most frequently used words, and William's use of them manifests both his direct focus on God and the way he relates understanding to love.

Three of William's six uses of scire are in the second person singular and addressed directly to God. In paragraph 2 he says: "O Lord my God, you who say to my soul in a way which you know [tu scis]: 'I am your salvation,'" and then he adds: "And you know [tu scis], because you bestow it... that my heart says to you: 'My face has sought you; "

135 SC 61 bis, 60: "O domine deus meus, qui dicis animae meae modo quo tu scis: Salus tua ego sum." Trans. and emphasis mine.
your face, Lord, will I seek."\textsuperscript{136} In paragraph 10 he ex-
claims: "For, O God, our souls' Creator, you knew \textit{[sciebas]}
that this attachment cannot be forced on the souls of the
sons of men, but must be appealed to in them."\textsuperscript{137} On one
occasion he uses \textit{noscere} in a short phrase about the name of
the Lord addressed to the Lord: "We first hoped, because we
knew \textit{[noveramus]} your name, O Lord."\textsuperscript{138} William's five
other uses of \textit{noscere} all occur in a sentence about the
mutual knowledge of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and our
relation to the three divine Persons:

Just as for the Father to know \textit{[nosse]} the Son
is nothing else than to be what the Son is,
and as for the Son to know \textit{[nosse]} the Father
is nothing else than to be what the Father is
\begin{itemize}
\item whence in the Gospel we read: "No one knows \textit{[novit]} the Father but the Son, and no one
knows \textit{[novit]} the Son but the Father"),
\item and as for the Holy Spirit to know or to comprehend
\textit{[nasse vel comprehendere]} the Father and the
Son is nothing else than to be what the Father
and the Son are, thus is it with us, who have
been made in your image.\textsuperscript{139}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{136} SC 61 bis, 60: "\textit{Et tu scis qui jam hoc ipsum das . . . tibi dicit cor meum: Exquisivit te facies mea; faciem
tuam domine requiram.}" Trans. and emphasis mine. This pas-
sage includes a quotation from Psalm 27:8-9.

\textsuperscript{137} SC 61 bis, 94: "\textit{Sciebas enim creator animarum, deus, in animabus filiorum hominum cogi non posse: sed provocari
opportere affectum istum.}" Trans. and emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{138} CF 3, 55. SC 61 bis, 98: "\textit{primum sperabamus, quia
noveramus nomen tuum domine.}" Emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{139} SC 61 bis, 106: "\textit{sicut non est aliud patri nosse
filium, nisi hoc esse quod est filius, nichil aliud filio
nosse patrem, nisi hoc esse quod est pater, unde in evan-
gelio: Nemo \textit{novit} patrem nisi filius, et nemo \textit{novit} filium
In another passage William uses *comprehendere* twice in a short sentence addressed to God: "For though no faculty of soul or spirit can ever *comprehend* [comprehendat] you, nevertheless the love of the one who loves you *comprehends* [comprehendit] you totally, in all your being." 140

In this last sentence we see that, in addition to addressing God directly while using the vocabulary of understanding, William speaks of the relation of understanding to love when he states that it is love itself, rather than any faculty of understanding, that fully grasps the mystery of God. This relation of understanding and love is one of the central concepts of William's writings as a whole, and in Chapter Seven I will comment on it in greater detail. In one passage in the *De contemplando Deo* William puts the relation of understanding and love into the same theocentric frame of reference which we have seen recurring throughout this treatise when he shows how our understanding and love are modelled on, and share in, the understanding and love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He writes:

> And when your **love**, the **love** of the Father for the Son and the **love** of the Son for the

---

nisi pater, et sicut spiritui sancto nichil est aliud nosse vel *comprehendere* patrem et filium, quam hoc esse quod est pater et filius; ita nobis qui ad ymaginem tuam conditi sumus." Trans. and emphasis mine.

140 SC 61 bis, 104: "Licet enim nullus sensus animae cujuslibet vel spiritus te *comprehendat*, tamen totum te quantus es *comprehendit* amor amantis." Trans. and emphasis mine.
Father, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, is to you that which he is, love, turning to himself and sanctifying all the captives of Sion, that is the feelings of our souls, we love you, or you love yourself in us, we affectively but you effectively. You make us one in you through your unity—the very Holy Spirit whom you have given us. Therefore, just as for the Father to know the Son is nothing else than to be what the Son is, and as for the Son to know the Father is nothing else than to be what the Father is (whence in the Gospel we read: "No one knows the Father but the Son, and no one knows the Son but the Father"), and as for the Holy Spirit to know or to comprehend the Father and the Son is nothing else than to be what the Father and the Son are, thus is it with us. We have been made in your image and, long since having strayed from it through Adam, we are being renewed in it daily through Christ, because for those who love God to love and to fear God and to keep his commandments is nothing else than to be, and to be one spirit with God.  

The examination in this chapter, then, of the words William uses in the De contemplando Deo to speak of God, himself, love, and understanding has enabled us to see how William directs his mind and heart consistently to God.

141 SC 61 bis, 104-106: "Cumque amor tuus, amor patris ad filium, amor filii ad patrem, spiritus sanctus habitans in nobis ad te est quod est id est amor omnem captivitatem Syon id est animae nostrae omnes affectiones in se convertens, et sanctificans, amamus te, vel amas tu te in nobis, nos affectu, tu effectu, unum nos in te efficiens per unitatem tuam id est ipsum spiritum sanctum tuum, quem dedisti nobis, ut sic tu non est aliud patri nosse filium, nisi hoc esse quod est filius, nichil aliud filio nosse patrem, nisi hoc esse quod est pater, unde in evangelio: Nemo novit patrem nisi filium, et nemo novit filium nisi pater, et sicut spiritui sancto nichil est aliud nosse vel comprehendere patrem et filium, quam hoc esse quod est pater et filius; ita nobis qui ad imaginem tuam conditi sumus, et ab illa per Adam invetustati, per Christum ad illam renovamur de die in diem, amantibus deum nichil sit aliud amare et timere deum et mandata ejus observare, quam esse, et unum spiritum cum deo esse." Trans. and emphasis mine.
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEME
AND VOCABULARY
OF THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD
IN WILLIAM'S LATER WORKS

In this thesis I have chosen to concentrate on the experience of God in William of Saint Thierry's first work, his De contemplando Deo. There is, however, a real unity in the entire body of William's works, and his more mature expressions of his experience of God were already contained in seed form in the De contemplando Deo. A look at these later expressions should help us to appreciate the dynamism of William's original inspiration.

In this chapter I will outline the theme of the experience of God in a number of William's later works. Then I will study the vocabulary William uses in speaking of this experience in one of these works, the Expositio super cantica canticorum, which he wrote in 1139-40, and in which he concentrates more directly and more exclusively on spiritual experience than he does in his other later works. William himself has given us a description of his writings in his penultimate work, the Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei,¹ and a number of scholars have commented on the dates and contents

¹ SC 223, 132-38.
of his works;\textsuperscript{2} thus it seems possible to examine these works without giving a detailed explanation for each of them.

Theme

In studying the theme of the experience of God in William's later works I will use the headings of God, the self, love, and understanding, which I used in Chapter Six to examine his vocabulary of the experience of God in the De contemplando Deo. These categories tend to overlap each other, but they facilitate an orderly approach to a theme such as the experience of God, which might otherwise become too diffuse.

God

Throughout his writings, when he is describing how we experience God, William frequently speaks of grace, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and love. In the De contemplando Deo he uses the word "grace" (gratia) twelve times. In one of these instances he comments on the indwelling Holy Spirit, through whom the love of God becomes present to the Christian: "Your Holy Spirit, who is called the Love, and the Unity, and the Will of the Father and the Son, dwells in us by his grace and implants in us the charity of

\textsuperscript{2} Wilmart, "La s\'{e}rie"; Déchanet, William of St Thierry: The Man; Ceglar, William of Saint Thierry: The Chronology.
God; and through that charity he reconciles God to us." 3
In the preface of his lengthy Expositio in epistolam ad
Romanos, written sometime during the period 1135-38,4 William explains his motivation in writing this treatise by
saying: "What drives me to this is the joy of contemplating
the grace of God." 5 In a later passage of this treatise, in
which he reiterates the claim that God is not affected by
loving us which we have seen in the De contemplando Deo,
William describes the fullness of loving union with God into
which God's gift of grace introduces us in greater detail
than he had described it in his first treatise:

Our love is an attachment of the human mind;
the love of God is an attachment of grace
gratiae affectus. We are affected when we
love God; but God is not affected when we
are loved by him. His love is the Holy Spirit,
through whom, when he deigns to give him to us,
he pours forth into our hearts the charity by
which we love him. Therefore he loves us when
he enriches us with the gift of his love. We
love him when with the entire weight of our
soul we are drawn into him; this is what we
owe to God alone. 6

3 CF 3, 54. SC 61 bis, 96: "Sic enim ipse spiritus
sanctus tuus, qui amor dicitur patris et filii et unitas et
voluntas, per gratiam suam in nobis inhabitans, et dei in
nos caritatem commendans, et per ipsam ipsum nobis concilians."

4 For the dates of William's works I am following Ceglar,
William of Saint Thierry: The Chronology, pp. 188-92, 239.

5 PL 180, 547B: "Me autem ad hoc compulsit contemplandae
gratiae Dei jucunditas." Trans. and emphasis mine.

6 PL 180, 643C: "Amor noster mentis humanae affectus
est; amor Dei gratiae affectus est. Afficiumur nos, cum Deum
amamus; non autem afficitur Deus, cum ab eo amamus; sed amor
This emphasis on experiencing God by loving him stands out even more forcefully in the opening paragraph of the *Expositio super cantica canticorum*, composed in 1139-40. In this paragraph William is addressing God directly and speaking from his own experience with burning intensity, as he had in the *De contemplando Deo*, and his focus is once again on love. He says:

O splendor of the highest Good, you ravish with desire for you every rational soul; the more a soul burns for you, the purer it is in itself; the purer it is, the freer it is from bodily things to turn rather to spiritual things. Free then from the servitude of corruption that inner force of ours which ought to serve you alone: I mean by this our love. For it is love that, when it is free, makes us like to you, to the degree in which we are drawn to you by the sense of life. And through this whoever lives by the Spirit of life experiences you.  

In his *Aenigma fidei*, written during the period 1140-44, William studies the mystery of God from a more speculative

---

In *Aenigma fidei*, written during the period 1140-44, William studies the mystery of God from a more speculative

---

7 Cf. 6, 3-4. SC 82, 70: "summi boni species, quae rapis omnem animam rationalem desiderio tui, tanto ad te ardentio, quanto in se mundiorem, tanto autem mundiorem, quanto a corporalibus ad spiritualia liberiori; libera a servitute corruptionis, id quod tibi soli deservire debet in nobis, amorem nostrum. Amor enim est, qui cum liber est, similes nos tibi efficit, in tantum, in quantum nos tibi afficit sensus vitae, quo te sentit quicumque vivit de spiritu vitae." Emphasis mine. I have altered the translation of the phrase desiderio tui in the first sentence of this quotation from "with desire of you" to "with desire for you."
Thus, indeed, it is said, "because God loved us first"; and we, therefore, love him because he loved us first. Now God loved us first, not with an affective love but an effective love, since before the ages he predestined us to be adopted sons and in the time of his good pleasure he poured out his love in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. For, the Eternal loves no one temporally, and he who is unchangeable is not subject to affections. The Spirit of the Lord fills the earth with the goodness of his omnipotence, and bathes all things in the great richness of his superabundant grace according to the capacity and measure of each, so that each might take its proper place and willingly remain there. . . . For the sons of grace and the poor in spirit he is the advocate and consoler in the exile of the present life; he is strength against adversities, help in tribulations. He himself, teaching man to pray as he ought and drawing man to God and rendering him pleasing and able to be heard, illumines his intellect and shapes his disposition. The Spirit creates and brings to perfection and is sufficient alone, if he can exist alone or ought to be spoken of as alone. But he is sufficient alone because he cannot be separated from the Father and the Son inseparably together with whom he does all that he does.8

8 The Enigma of Faith. The Works of William of St Thierry, vol. 3, trans. John D. Anderson, CF 9 (1974), 116-17; hereafter cited as CF 9. Anderson's translation: "is based on a reading of the only twelfth-century manuscript extant, Charleville MS 114, and an examination of the fifteenth-century manuscript, Uppsala C. 79" (p. vii). I have not seen either of these manuscripts. The Latin text of this passage appearing in PL 180, 440B-D reads: "Unde etiam dicitur, quoniam 'Prior' Deus 'dilexit nos (Joan. IV)'; et
In his *Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei*, probably written between 1144 and 1146, William returns to the themes of love and the indwelling Spirit in a detailed description of how we actually experience God:

When the object of thought is God and the things which relate to God and the will reaches the stage at which it becomes love, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of life, at once infuses himself by way of love and gives life to everything, lending his assistance in prayer, in meditation or in study to man's weakness. Immediately the memory becomes wisdom and tastes with relish the good things of the Lord, while the thoughts to which they give rise are brought to the intellect to be formed into affections. The understanding of the one thinking becomes the contemplation of one loving and it shapes it into certain experiences of spiritual or divine sweetness which it brings before the gaze of the spirit so that the spirit rejoices in them.

And then, insofar as it is possible for man, worthy thoughts are entertained of God, if

```quia nos idcirco eum diligimus, quoniam ipse prior dilexit nos. Prior enim Deus dilexit nos, non affectu, sed effectu charitatis, cum ante saecula in adoptionem fillorum nos praedestinavit; in tempore vero beneplaciti sui charitatem suam per Spiritum sanctum diffudit in cordibus nostris. Neminem enim temporaliter diligit aeternus, nec efficitur, qui incommutabilis est. Ipse est Spiritus Domini replens orbem terrarum (Sap. I) omnipotentiae suae bonitate, ingenti ubertate superabundantis gratiae perfundens omnia pro captu et modo singulorum, ut ordines suos singula teneant, et sponte locis suis acquiescant. . . . Ipse filii gratiae, pauperibus spiritu, in praesentis vitae exsilio advocatus est et consolator, virtus in adversis, in tribulationibus adjutor. Ipse docens orare, quomodo oportet, hominemque Deo afficiens, et placetem et exaudibilem efficiens, illuminat intellectum, format affectum; faciens, perficiens, et solus, si solus esse potest, vel dici debet, sufficiens, sed ideo solus sufficit quia separati a Patre et Filio non potest, cum quibus inseparabiliter facit cuncta quae facit." Emphasis mine.```
indeed the word "thought" (cogitatio) is correct where there is no impelling principle (cogit) nor anything impelled (cogitur), but only awareness of God's abundant sweetness leading to exultation, jubilation and a true experience of the Lord in goodness on the part of the man who has sought him in this simplicity of heart.  

He then goes on to point out the role of grace in this experience, and his description here contains several of the elements which I discussed in Chapter Four as constituents of a twentieth-century Roman Catholic theological description.

---

9 The Golden Epistle: A Letter to the Brethren at Mont Dieu, The Works of William of St Thierry, vol. 4, trans. Theodore Berkeley, CF 12 (1971), 92; hereafter cited as CF 12. Lettre aux frères du Mont-Dieu, II, ed. Robert Thomas, PC 34 (1968) (hereafter cited as PC 34), 74-76: "Cum vero de his quae de Deo vel ad Deum sunt cigitatur, et voluntas eo proficit ut amor fiat, continuo per viam amoris infunditur in Spiritus Sanctus, Spiritus vitae, et omnia vivificat, adjuvans seu in oratione, seu in meditatione, seu in tractatu infirmitatem cogitantis. Et continuo memoria efficitur sapientia, cum suaviter ei sapiunt bona Domini et quod ex eis cigitatum est formandum in affectu, adhibet intellectui. Intellectus vero cogitantis efficitur contemplatio amantis, et formans illud in quasdam spiritualis vel divinae suavitatis experientias afficit ex eis aciem cogitantis. Illa vero efficitur gaudium fruentis. Et tunc de Deo bene cigitatur secundum humanum modum, si tamen cigitatio dicenda est, ubi nil cogit, nil cigitur, sed tantummodo in memoria abundantiae suavitatis Dei exsultatur, jubilatur, et vere sentitur de Domino in bonitate, ab eo qui in hac simplicitate cordis quaesivit illum." Note William's use of the word contemplatio, which I discussed in Chapter Four in relation to mysticism. The English translation of the Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei which appears in CF 12 is based on the edition of Robert Thomas in PC 33 (1968) and PC 34; whenever I use the English translation in CF 12, therefore, I will give the corresponding Latin text as it appears in PC 33 or PC 34. All other references to the Epistola will be to Déchanet's critical edition, which appeared in SC 223 in 1975, after CF 12 had been published. There are, however, only a few very minor variant readings between PC 33-34 and SC 223.
of mysticism: the gratuity of God's gift, man's role in preparing to receive this gift, and the supernatural knowledge and love of God it entails. William writes:

But this way of thinking about God does not lie at the disposal of the thinker. It is a gift of grace, bestowed by the Holy Spirit who breathes where he chooses, when he chooses, how he chooses and upon whom he chooses. Man's part is continually to prepare his heart by ridding his will of foreign attachments, his reason or intellect of anxieties, his memory of idle or absorbing, sometimes even of necessary business, so that in the Lord's good time and when he sees fit, at the sound of the Holy Spirit's breathing the elements which constitute thought may be free at once to come together and do their work, each contributing its share to the outcome of joy for the soul. The will displays pure affection for the joy which the Lord gives, the memory yields faithful material, the intellect affords the sweetness of experience.¹⁰

It is clear, then, that in his later works William develops the insights, which first appeared in the De contemplando Deo, into the role played by grace, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and love in our experience of God.

¹⁰ Cf. 12, 93. PC 34, 76: "Sed modus hic cogitandi de Deo non est in arbitrio cogitantis, sed in gratia donantis, scilicet cum Spiritus Sanctus, qui ubi vult spirat, quando vult et quomodo vult, et quibus vult in hoc aspirat. Sed hominis est jugiter praeparare cor, voluntatem expediendo ab affectionibus alienis, rationem vel intellectum a sollicitudinibus, memoria ab otiosis vel negotiosis, nonnumquam et a necessariis occupationibus. Ut in die bona Domini, et in hora beneplaciti ejus, cum audierit vocem Spiritus spirantis, ea quae cogitationem faciunt, continuo libere concurrant sibi, et cooperentur in bonum, et quasi symbolum faciant in gaudium cogitantis; voluntas exhibendo in gaudium Domini puram affectionem; memoria, materiam fidelem; intellectus, experientiae suavitatem." Emphasis mine.
The self

In Chapter Six we saw that in the De contemplando Deo William showed that he experienced himself as a sinful man, but as one who burned with the desire to experience God. In his Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei William shows how it is possible to have a joyful experience of God in oneself and of oneself in God, at the same time as one is painfully aware of one's own weakness. He says:

The man who has God with him is never less alone than when he is alone. It is then he has undisturbed fruition of his joy, it is then he is his own master and is free to enjoy God in himself and himself in God. It is then that in the light of truth and the serenity of a clean heart a pure soul stands revealed to itself without effort, and the memory enlivened by God freely pours itself out in itself. Then either the mind is enlightened and the will enjoys its good or human frailty freely weeps over its shortcomings.\textsuperscript{11}

Here we notice the theme of enjoyment, or fruition (fruitio, frui) which, as we have seen in Chapter Four, is one of the central themes of the De contemplando Deo.

In his Expositio in epistolam ad Romanos, commenting on Romans: 8:26a "The Spirit helps us in our weakness, because

\textsuperscript{11} CF 12, 19-20. PC 33, 64-66: "Cum quo enim Deus est, nunquam minus est solus, quam cum solus est. Tunc enim libere fruitur gaudio suo, tunc ipse suus sibi est ad fruendum Deo in se, et se in Deo. Tunc in luce veritatis, in sereno mundi cordis utro patet sibi pura conscientia, et libere se in se fundit affecta deo memoria. Et vel illuminatur intellectus et bono suo fruitur affectus; vel libere seipsum deflet humanae fragilitatis defectus." Emphasis mine.
we do not know how to pray as we ought," William shows how we can rise up to the contemplation of God by examining ourselves:

Often the faithful and devout soul, while it strives in its prayer . . . to contemplate the invisible, and strains to see with the blinking pupil of the inner eye, is worn out by such a difficult effort and returns to itself. Then it gradually rises above itself: 

first, if it is able, it considers itself;
then, to the extent that it is equal to such a task, it investigates that nature which is above it. But our mind, if it has been dispersed among carnal images, is in no way able to consider itself, or the nature of the soul; because by however many such thoughts it may have been drawn away, by that many obstacles it is blinded. The first step, then, is to get hold of oneself; the second is to see what this self is like; and the third is to rise above this self and to apply oneself to the contemplation of the invisible Maker.13

In the De contemplando Deo William was aware of himself as one who desired to experience God. In his later works he

---


13 PL 180, 637CD: "Saepe enim fidelis et devota anima, dum in oratione sua . . . conatur . . . ad contemplandum invisibilem, et videndum tremente pupilla oculi interioris intendens, ipsa difficultate fatigata ad se redit, sibique de seipsa gradus ascensionis facit, ut primum semetipsam, si valet, consideret, et tunc illam naturam quae supra ipsam est, in quantum praevalet, investiget. Sed mens nostra, si in carnalibus imaginibus fuerit sparsa, nequaquam vel se, vel animae naturam considerare sufficit; quia per quot cogitationes ducitur, quasi per tot obstacula caecatur. Primus ergo gradus est, ut se ad se colligat; secundus, ut videat qualsis est collec . . . [the last three (?) letters of this word are not legible in the Latin text], tertius, ut super semetipsam surgat, ac se in contemplatione auctoris invisibilis subjiciat." Trans. and emphasis mine.
shows that the very experience of oneself striving to know God in the midst of human shortcomings, falling back into oneself and rising up toward God again through the very consideration of oneself, is an excellent way to move upward to the experience of God.¹⁴

Love

In Chapter Six I emphasized the centrality of the vocabulary and theme of love in William's *De contemplando Deo*, and I commented on the vocabulary of love in two of his later works, the *De natura et dignitate amoris* and the *Expositio super cantica canticorum*. In the section on God in the present chapter I showed the importance which the theme of

¹⁴ Note the similarity of the first sentence of the above quotation from the *Expositio in epistolam ad Romanos* ("Often ... returns to itself"), to a passage in the *De contemplando Deo*: "With all my powers I reach up to you, to you who are Love supreme and sovereign Good. But the more I reach up, the more relentlessly am I thrust back, and down into myself, below myself" (CF 3, 41. SC 61 bis, 68: "totis infinitis viribus, sursum tendo ad te, in te, summe amor, summum bonum; sed quanto tendo fortius, tanto retrudor durius infra in memetipsum, sub me ipso"). In the *De contemplando Deo*, however, William simply prayed to be delivered from himself and thus come to God: "So, when my inward eyes grow blurred like this, and become dim and blind, I pray you with all speed to open them. ... In this way, dying to myself, I shall begin to live in you. O may this blessedness of being in you be given to me, for whom the worst thing possible is to be in myself" (CF 3, 42. SC 61 bis, 70-72: "Cum igitur hoc modo deficiant et caligent et caecuantur interiores oculi mei, oro ut citius a te aperiantur ... et mori- ens in me, vivere inciapiam in te; et bene michi sit in te, cui pessime est in se"). But in the *Expositio in epistolam ad Romanos* he describes a gradual process of rising above oneself to God achieved through the very consideration of oneself.
experiencing God by loving him played in the development of William's thoughts on the experience of God. Here I will concentrate on the development of William's ideas on fraternal love.

In the De contemplando Deo, as we saw in Chapter Six, William treats fraternal love in relation to the love of God, but he does not say much about the actual love of one's brethren. In his later works he continues to stress the theocentric context of authentic fraternal charity, but he dwells more on the concrete experience of this brotherly love. In the De natura et dignitate amoris, written shortly after the De contemplando Deo, he notes:

In their practice of charity in community they see the presence of the divine goodness in whatever grace is manifested in each other's faces and bodily comportment, and they embrace it with such deep attachment that, like the seraphim, they inflame each other in the love of God.

But this Godward emphasis comes at the end of a lengthy description of "that good and joyful dwelling together of brothers" in the monastic community, in which William

---

15 In the next section of this chapter, on understanding, I will study the relation of love and understanding in William's later works.

16 PC 24, 104: "In communibus pietatis studiis, in quaedam etiam vultuum et corporum et habituum gratia, invicem in seipsis bonitatis divinae videntes praesentiam tanto se affectu compectuntur, ut, sicut Seraphim, in amorem Dei alter ardeat ex altero." Trans. mine.

17 PC 24, 98: "bonum illud et jucundum cohabitationis fraternalae in unum." Trans. mine.
describes how the monks share each other's lives and encourage each other by the practice of virtue.\textsuperscript{18}

In Meditation Twelve, written shortly after William arrived at Signy in 1135, he concludes a lengthy description of "the souls who love you [God],"\textsuperscript{19} by affirming that it is only God whom he loves in them:

When I see these people, I am wholly drawn to the love of your love, which effects this in them. Your love in them I grasp by a certain sure experience known to those who love. I love them, therefore, because they love you. And I love them much, even as I love in them the love with which you are loved. And if I love them in this way, so that I love nothing except you in them and in their natural affection which is full of you and never love my own affection unless I find myself attracted to you, what then do I love save you in those whom I love in you, and in myself whom I desire to love in you alone? The answer is, surely, nothing.\textsuperscript{20}

The human warmth so evident in this passage, however, stands in marked contrast to the more restrained statement in the

\textsuperscript{18} PC 24, 96-104.

\textsuperscript{19} CF 3, 175. Oraisons méditées, II, ed. Robert Thomas, PC 22 (1964) (hereafter cited as PC 22), 96: "hi sunt qui te amant."

\textsuperscript{20} CF 3, 176-77. PC 22, 100: "Istos cum video, in amorem amoris tui, qui hoc in eis operatur, totus afficior, quem in eis deprehendo certa quaedam experientia cognita amantibus. Amo ergo eos, quia te amant, et multum amo, sicut amo amorem quo amaris quem in ipsis amo. Et si eos hoc modo amo, ut in eis et in affectu eorum naturali nil amem, nisi te, cum ipsum affectum ob hoc tantum amem, quia plenus est te, sed in meipso nunquam meum amem affectum, nisi cum ipso affectum me invenio de te, in eis quos amo in te et in meipso, quem non nisi in te amare volo, quid amo, nisi te? Nil penitus." Emphasis mine.
De contemplando Deo: "It is ... in order that there may be no defect in charity that we are told to love our neighbor, according to the law of perfect love." Elsewhere in Meditation Twelve William describes the joyful union of brothers loving the Lord in each other with these moving words:

For when I see your children feasting at your table, amid the delights of your love, for all that I myself am starving I love your love in them intensely, and in my heart I do embrace most tenderly those who love you thus. And I see them rejoicing in my joy which joy I have because of theirs.

We see, then, that in his later works William integrates a more affective element into the strikingly theocentric conception of fraternal love which he first introduced in the De contemplando Deo.

Understanding

In the De contemplando Deo William had used a number of words, most often in verb form, to speak of understanding, and in one passage he related understanding to love (SC 61

---

21 CF 3, 60. SC 61 bis, 112: "Exinde ne manca sit caritas, docemur amare proximum, secundum legem caritatis puram."

22 CF 3, 174. PC 22, 94: "Nam cum in mensa tua filios tuos epulantes video in deliciis amoris tui, jejunus amorem tuum amo in eis vehementer, et ipsos te amantes in medio cordis mi ampliator dulciter. Et video eos conaudentes gaudio meo, quod habeo de gudio eorum." William also develops his ideas on fraternal love in the Expositio super cantica canticorum, #s 121-29 (SC 82, 262-76).
bis, 104. Cf 3, 57). In his later development of these themes he makes more use of nouns, especially reason (ratio), and understanding (intellectus). This shift from verbs to nouns may be related to the development of William's thinking; but this can be true only to a certain extent because, as Ceglar has shown, William's terminology is not always precise. 23

William used several words for understanding in the De contemplando Deo, but he did not speak of understanding itself directly in his first treatise. For this reason it would be incorrect to attach too much importance to the preponderance of verb forms, although it may be noted that verbs, as dynamic words, would seem to fit the restless quest for God embodied in the De contemplando Deo better than nouns, which are static in form. In his later works William develops a real doctrine of understanding, and his greater use of nouns in the relevant passages of these works may be taken to signify an emphasis on theoretical examination rather than on the anxious striving of love. I will examine two aspects of William's doctrine of understanding in his later works: the distinction he makes between human reason (ratio humana) and the reasoning of faith (ratio fidei), and his use of the words "reason" (ratio) and "understanding" (intellectus), especially in relation to "love" (amor).

William's first use of the phrase "the reasoning of faith" (ratio fidei) occurs in his Expositio in epistolam ad Romanos, written during the period 1135-38. William simply quotes a Latin version of a phrase from Romans 6:12: "Sive prophetiam secundum rationem fidei," and does not explain the meaning of rationem fidei (the reasoning of faith).

In early 1140 William sent Bernard of Clairvaux and Bishop Geoffrey of Chartres a copy of his Disputatio adversus Petrum Abaelardum, along with a covering letter (Ep. 326: "Confundor . . ."). In the letter he notes that he had recently read a copy of Peter Abelard's Theologia Petri Abaelardi, and that in it he sees "the faith [fidem] of our common hope very seriously and dangerously corrupted," and that Abelard is "treating in his study of sacred Scripture what is usually treated in logic." In the Disputatio William attempts to refute this approach to the faith, which he considers overly rationalistic. He describes faith in the Trinity

---

24 PL 180, 673A. Emphasis mine. The Sixto-Clementine Vulgate version of this phrase is exactly the same as William's quotation.


as something which "curbs and drives away every effort of human reason [humanae rationis]," and which must be treated "according to the reasoning of faith [rationem fidei]." In this polemical work against Abelard, then, William begins to distinguish between two types of reason: human reason (ratio humana), and the reasoning of faith (ratio fidei).

Shortly after writing the Disputatio adversus Petrum Abaelardum, William composed another polemical work, the De erroribus Guillelmi de Conchis: "Vereor . . . ." in which he argues against the rationalistic views of Abelard's follower, William of Conches. In this treatise he explains his distinction between human reason and the reasoning of faith in more detail when he describes how we should speak of the things of God:

It is very dangerous to venture forth into

---

27 PL 180, 252A: "omnem compescat et absterreat humanae rationis." Trans. and emphasis mine.

28 PL 180, 252C: "secundum rationem fidei." Trans. and emphasis mine.

29 Ceglar does not offer a date for this work. Anderson, in the introduction to his translation of the Aenigma fidei (CF 9), accepts the traditional view that William sent it to Bernard "around 1140" (p. 13). From internal evidence it would seem that William wrote the De erroribus shortly after the Disputatio: it is addressed to Bernard (the Disputatio is addressed to Geoffrey, bishop of Chartres, and Bernard), and in the first paragraph of the De erroribus William writes: "Etenim post theologiam Petri Abaelardi, Guillelmos de Conchis novam afferit philosophiam, confirmans et multiplicant quaecunque ille dixit, et impudentius addens adhuc de suo plurima, quae ille non dixit." "Les lettres," 382-83. Emphasis mine.
such things, except where evident authority guards one, or the clear reasoning of faith [ratio fidei] leads one forth. But the reasoning of faith [ratio fidei] considers all human reason [rationem humanam] of less account than faith, or uses it in the service of faith. It does not ignore, nor in any way transgress, the boundaries of that faith, which have been fixed by our fathers. 30

Having refuted Abelard and William of Conches in these two polemical works, William went on to write two irenic books during the period 1140-44, the Speculum fidei and the Aenigma fidei. In his Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei, written during the period 1144-46, he treats these two books as a composite work on faith, which he describes as "another work which the needs of certain brethren, troubled by anxiety rather than threatened by danger, drove me to write for their consolation and to help their faith." 31 He goes on to speak of it as a work which "is divided into two books, the first of which, because it is straightforward and easy, I entitled. The Mirror of Faith [Speculum fidei]: the second, because it will be found to contain a summary of the grounds and the formulations of faith according to the words and the thought

30 "Les lettres," 384: "Periculosum enim nimirum est audere in talibus, nisi ubi vel evidens tuetur auctoritas, vel manifesta ducit ratio fidei. Ratio autem fidei est omnem rationem humanam fidei postponere vel in obsequium fidei captivatam redigere, terminos fidei ipsius, quos posuerunt patres nostri, non ignorare, nec in aliquo eos praeterire." Trans. and emphasis mine.

31 CF 12, 4. PC 33, 22-24: "aliud quoddam opusculum quod in consolationem suam, et in adjutorium fidei facere me compulsit fratrum quorumdam plus anxia quam periculosa necessitas."
of the Catholic Fathers and is a little more obscure, The Enigma of Faith [Aenigma fidei].”32 In the Aenigma fidei he develops his notion of a unique reasoning of faith even more, continuing to distinguish it from human reason and utilizing it to examine the Trinity and to emphasize the mystery inherent in our quest to understand God. He writes:

The form of the words sound in faith is a special way of speaking about God. . . . based on the authority of Christ the Lord and of the Apostles and apostolic teachers, and which in time past the usage of pious Christians developed concerning the Divine Names and that which is said in the confession of faith about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, this way of speaking about God has its own discipline supported by the rules and limits of faith so as to teach a manner of speaking about God reasonably according to the reasoning of faith and to prepare men to think about and perceive the ineffable in an ineffable way. Now, we say "according to the reasoning of faith" because this manner of speaking about God has certain special words which are rational but not intelligible except in the reasoning of faith, not however in the reasoning of human understanding. What we said a little earlier—that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, but that there are not three gods but one God—is understood to some extent according to the reasoning of faith, but not at all according to the reasoning of human understanding. For, in human matters human reason acquires faith for itself, but in divine affairs faith comes first and then forms its own unique reasoning.33

32 CF 12, 5. PC 33, 26: "Dividitur autem idem opusculum in duos libellos, quorum primum, quia planus est et facilis, Speculum fidei, alterum vero quia rationes et formam fidei secundum dicta et sensus catholicorum Patrum summam continere videtur, et est aliquantulum obscurior Aenigma fidei vocari statui."

33 CF 9, 73-74. The Latin of PL 180, 417AB reads:
William goes on to show that this quest to understand God by the reasoning of faith takes place in a context of desiring to experience God. He explains this "inquiry about God," by saying: "it is by experience itself that it instructs those who believe, and teaches them to attain the reward of contemplation through the meritorious practice of faith."

"Forma vero sanorum in fide verborum est, proprius quidam modus loquendi de Deo . . . quem ex auctoritate Christi Domini, et apostolorum et apostoliconorium doctorum, jam olim usus Christianae pietatis obtinuit circa nomina divina, et ea quae in confessione fidei dicuntur de Patre, et Filio, et Spiritu sancto. Modus autem hic loquendi de Deo propriam quandam habet disciplinam regulus ac terminis fidei munitam; ad docendum loqui de Deo rationabiliter secundum rationem fidei, et praeparandos homines ad cogitandum ac sentiendum ineffabiliter de ineffabili. Idcirco autem dicimus, secundum rationem fidei, quia modus hic loquendi de Deo habet quaedam propria verba, rationabilia quidem, sed non intelligibia, nisi in ratione fidei, non autem in ratione sensus humani. Quod enim paulo ante diximus, quia 'Deus est Pater, Deus Filius, Deus Spiritus sanctus, et tamen non tres dii, sed unus est Deus,' utcumque capitur, secundum rationem sensus humani. In rebus enim humanis humana ratio parat sibi fidem: in divinis vero praecedit fides, deinde ipsa sui generis format sibi rationem." Emphasis mine. For a thorough discussion of William's use of ratio fidei, see Anderson's introduction to his translation of the Aenigma fidei in CF 9, 1-33, especially pp. 14, 22-27. I follow Ceglar, however, in those cases in which the dates he gives for William's works in William of Saint Thierry: The Chronology, pp. 170-92, and 239, differ from those given by Anderson in CF 9.

34 CF 9, 74. The Latin of PL 180, 417B reads: "inquisitio de Deo."

35 CF 9, 74. The Latin of PL 180, 417C reads: "ipsa magis experientia docens credentes, et informans per meritum et usum fidei pervenire ad praeium contemplationis." Emphasis mine. Note that William here uses the words experientia and contemplatio.
In speaking of experience and contemplation in this passage William has, in a sense, come full circle in developing his thoughts on the distinction between human reason (ratio humana) and the reasoning of faith (ratio fidei). When he read Abelard's Theologia Petri Abaelardii in early 1140 he was in the midst of writing his Expositio super cantica canticorum, in which he explains that his purpose is to comment on the loving union "of Bridegroom and Bride, Christ and the Christian soul." He describes this union of love by saying that "the Bride contemplates the coming of the Bridegroom to her when she experiences in her soul all the ways in which he comes to her." When he read Abelard's theories on several key mysteries of the faith, however, he interrupted the Expositio to respond to what he considered dangerous novelties. As he explained later, in his Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei:

There is also Against Peter Abelard [Disputatio adversus Petrum Abaelardum], and it was this which prevented me from completing the preceding work [Expositio super cantica canticorum], for I did not think I was justified in enjoying such delightful leisure within doors while outside he, with naked sword as they say, was ravaging the confines of our faith.

36 CF 6, 7. SC 82, 76: "de Sponso ac Sponsa, de Christo et christiana anima."

37 CF 6, 121. SC 82, 314-16: "Sponsa Sponsi ad se adventum contemplatur, cum ejus omne ad se veniendi modum in semetipsa . . . experitur." Emphasis mine.

38 CF 12, 6. PC 33, 28: "Nam Contra Petrum Abaelardum,
In the two polemical works, *Disputatio adversus Petrum Abaelardum* and *De erroribus Guillelmi de Conchis*: "Vereor . . .", William refuted the theories of Abelard and William of Conches, and in doing so he began to distinguish between human reason (*ratio humana*) and the reasoning of faith (*ratio fidei*). He continued to develop his views on these two kinds of reason in two irenic works, *Speculum fidei* and *Aenigma fidei*. In the *Aenigma fidei* he brings his concept of the reasoning of faith to full maturity, using it as a theological tool to examine respectfully the mysteries of the faith, and linking it to the themes of contemplation and experience with which he had been preoccupied in the *Expositio super cantica canticorum* when he was interrupted by the need to oppose the views of Abelard.

William develops his ideas on reason (*ratio*) in a number of other ways in his later works. He offers several definitions for reason (*ratio*), and he distinguishes reason, as a faculty, from reasoning (*ratiocinatio*), as the use of that faculty, in the *Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei*.³⁹ He devotes the entire middle section of this *Epistola* to the rational state, which here, and throughout his other later

qui praedictum opus ne perficerem effecit, neque enim integrum mihi fore arbitrabar tam delicato intus vacare otio, ipso foris fines fidei nostrae nudato, ut dicitur, gladio tam crudeliter depopulante."

³⁹ *SC* 223, 310-12.
works, he describes as the second of three states of soul, namely the animal, the rational, and the spiritual. I will concentrate, however, on how he relates the two words "reason" (ratio) and "understanding" (intellectus) to the word "love" (amor) in his later works.

In one passage of the De contemplando Deo William briefly mentioned the relation of love and understanding by using the noun amor with comprehendere, one of the verbs for understanding he used most frequently in that treatise: "For though no faculty of soul or spirit can ever comprehend [comprehendat] you, nevertheless the love of the one who loves [amor amantis] you comprehends [comprehendit] you totally, in all your being." In his later works he develops this theme in detail, but in doing so he uses the nouns ratio and intellectus more often than verbs. In the De natura et dignitate amoris, written shortly after the De contemplando Deo, he says:

The organ of sight, the natural light of the soul created by the Author of nature for seeing God, is charity [caritas]. But there are two eyes in this vision, always striving by a certain natural inclination to see the light which is God—love [amor] and reason [ratio]. When one attempts this without the other, it

40 SC 223, 304-340. See also SC 223, 176; and the Expositio super cantica canticorum, SC 82, 84, and passim.

41 SC 61 bis, 104: "Licet enim nullus sensus animae cujuslibet vel spiritus te comprehendat, tamen totum te quantus es comprehendit amor amantis." Trans. and emphasis mine.
does not get too far; when they help each
other, they are capable of much more, even
of becoming like the one eye of which the
Spouse says in the Song of Songs: "You have
wounded my heart, my friend, with one of
your eyes."42

Here we notice that the noun William speaks of along with
love (amor) is reason (ratio). In the Epistola ad fratres
de Monte Dei, written ca. 1144-46, William again speaks of
reason (ratio) and love (amor) becoming one: "And when
reason [ratio] as it progresses mounts on high to become
love [proficiendo in amorem], and grace comes down to meet
the one who so loves and desires, it often happens that rea-
son [ratio] and love [amor], which produce those two states,
become one thing."43

In a passage on contemplation in the Expositio super
cantica canticorum, written in 1139-40, William explains this
union of reason (ratio) and love (amor) at greater length,
showing that when reason and love are illumined by grace they
become understanding (intellectus), which transcends reason.

42 PC 24, 84: "Visus ergo ad videndum Deum naturale
lumen animae, ab Auctore naturae creatus, caritas est. Sunt
autem duo oculi in hoc visu ad lumen quod Deus est videndum
naturali quaedam intentione semper palpitas, amor et ratio.
Cum alter conatur sine altero, non tantum proficit; cum in-
vicem se adjuvant, multum possunt, scilicet cum unus oculus
efficiuntur, de quo dicit Sponsus in canticis: 'Vulnerasti
cor meum, o amica mea, in uno oculorum tuorum.'" Trans. and
emphasis mine.

43 Cf 12, 78. PC 34, 20: "Cumque ratio proficiendo in
amorem sursum ascendit, et amanti et desideranti gratia con-
descendit, unum saepe fiunt, quae duos illos status efficiunt,
quae sunt ratio et amor." Emphasis mine.
He writes:

Contemplation has two eyes, reason [ratio] and love [amor], as the prophet says: "the riches of salvation are wisdom and knowledge." One of these eyes searches the things of men, according to knowledge; but the other searches divine things, according to wisdom. And when they are illumined by grace, they are of great mutual assistance, because love [amor] gives life to reason [rationem] and reason [ratio] gives light to love [amorem]; thus their gaze becomes simple as the dove’s in contemplation and prudent in circumspection. Often when these two eyes faithfully cooperate, they become one; in the contemplation of God, where love [amor] is chiefly operative, reason [ratio] passes into love [amorem] and is transformed into a certain spiritual and divine understanding [intellectum] which transcends and absorbs all reason [rationem].

Elsewhere in this Expositio he clearly identifies our love (amor) for God with this understanding (intellectus): "For love [amor] of God is itself understanding [intellectus] of him"; and he shows that this love-understanding (amor-intellectus) transcends reason (ratio) when he says: "Where reason [ratione] draws back, devout love [amor pius] itself

44 CF 6, 74. SC 82, 212: "Duo sunt oculi contemplationis, ratio et amor. Et secundum quod dicit Propheta: 'Divitiae salutis sapientia et scientia,' alter secundum scientiam, quae sunt humana; alter vero divina scrutatur secundum sapientiam. Cum vero illustrantur a gratia, multum se adjuvant ad invicem, quia et amor vivificat rationem, et ratio clarificat amorem, fitque columbinus intuitus, simplex ad contemplandum, prudens ad cavendum. Piuntque saepe duo isti oculi unus oculus, cum fideliter sibi cooperantur, cum in contemplatione Dei, in qua maxime amor operatur, ratio transit in amorem et in quemdam spiritualem vel divinum formatum intellectum, qui omnem superat et absorbet rationem." Emphasis mine.

45 SC 82, 188: "Amor quippe Dei, ipse intellectus ejus est." Trans. and emphasis mine.
will become its own understanding [intellectus suus]. 46

In a passage on contemplation in the Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei, William explains that this understanding which comes from love is brought about by illuminating grace. He writes:

the wise and devout soul, with grace to enlighten and assist it, in the contemplation of supreme Good gazes also upon the laws of unchangeable Truth to the extent that it is found worthy to attain to them by means of the understanding that comes of love [intellectu amoris]. 47

In this same passage he goes on to show how this enlightened love, gazing upon heavenly realities, transcends reason (ratio), which is concerned with earthly realities:

It [the wise and devout soul] gazes up at heavenly realities by desire and clings to them by love [amando], while it accepts earthly realities, and adapts and conforms itself to them by the perception of discernment, the consideration of reasoning, and the judgment of reason [judicio rationis]. 48

To explain William's way of relating reason (ratio) to

46 CF 6, 115. SC 82, 304: "cum retroacta ratione amor pius ipse efficietur intellectus suus." Emphasis mine.

47 CF 12, 99. PC 34, 102: "sapiens et pius animus per illuminantem et adjuvantem gratiam in contemplatione summi Boni speculatur etiam regulas incommutabilis Veritatis, in quantum ad eas pertingere meretur intellectu amoris." Emphasis mine.

48 SC 223, 366-68: "illis . . . suspiciens desiderando, vel inhaerens amando; ista suscipient et eis se coaptans et conformans non sine discretionis judicio, non sine examine ratiocinationis et judicio rationis." Trans. and emphasis mine.
love (amor), I have chosen passages from one of his earliest works, the De natura et dignitate amoris, and from his penultimate work, the Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei; and to explain his way of relating understanding (intellectus) to love, and I have chosen passages from these two works, as well as from the Expositio super cantica canticorum, written in 1139-40, during the period between these two works. However, unlike the development in William's thinking on human reason (ratio humana) and its relation to the reasoning of faith (ratio fidei), which occurred during the years 1140-44, it is not possible to detect any development in the way he relates reason (ratio) and understanding (intellectus) to love (amor). Throughout the entire body of his works written after the De contemplando Deo, William consistently treats understanding as a more exalted form of knowledge than reason. In a passage in his Expositio in epistolam ad Romanos, written during the period 1135-38, he reiterates this point of view, and goes on to show how understanding can draw reason into the aura of its own light. Describing the three forms in the doctrine of faith, rational, spiritual, and intellectual, William says:

The rational is in the sacraments and practices, adapted to men, by which the Lord speaks in parables, announcing the reign of God. The spiritual is in application to reading and meditation, and in the doctrine of outstanding writers; it is appropriate for those of whom the Lord says: "To you it is given to know the mystery of the reign of God" (Luke 8[10]). The intellectual is
in the attachment of illumined love [amoris illuminati], which is proper for the clean of heart who merit to see God. The rational regulates voluntary obedience and active perfection, the spiritual a sober sense and humble contemplation [contemplationem], and the intellectual a peaceful and familiar experience [pacificam et familiarem experimentam]. Coming from above, this understanding [hic intellectus] is not formed by reason [non formatur a ratione], but it conforms reason to itself, not that it might deprive reason of anything, but that reason might be illumined by it whenever reason acts in harmony with it.\(^{49}\)

In this passage we also notice the words "contemplation" and "experience" which, as we saw in the discussion of the reasoning of faith, figure prominently in several of William's later works.

Finally, if we wish to know why it is so important to William to explain the relation of understanding (intellectus) and love (amor), he himself gives us the answer in his

\(^{49}\) PL 180, 609D-610A: "Rationalis est in sacramentis et moribus, apta illis hominibus, quibus Dominus dicit in parabolis annuntiandum regnum Dei. Spiritualis est in lectionis studio et meditationis, et majorum doctrina, conveniens eis quibus Dominus dicit: 'Vobis datum est nosse mysterium regni Dei' (Luc. VIII). Intellectualis est in amoris illuminati affectu, quae propria est mundorum cordium, quae Deum videre merentur. Rationalis exigit voluntarium obedientiam, et activam perfectionem, spiritualis sobrium sensum, et humilem contemplationem; intellectualis pacificam et familiarem experimentam. De sursum enim veniens hic intellectus non formatur a ratione, sed ipse sibi conformat rationem, non ut eum capiat, sed ut illuminata ab eo, alliquando in eum consentiat." Trans. and emphasis mine. Although, as I have already pointed out in this chapter (see note 40), William frequently describes an ascent from animalis to rationalis to spiritualis, in this instance the ascent is from rationalis to spiritualis to intellectualis. This shows how high above ratio and rationalis William places the realm of intellectus and intellectualis.
Expositio super cantica canticorum when he writes:

For what is loved must be understood. . . .
For unless what is loved is found at hand by the lover through his memory and becomes known through his understanding [per intellectum], love itself [amor ipse] decays and languishes.50

In his later works, then, William goes into more detail than he had gone into in the De contemplando Deo to explain the relation of understanding and love. He shows that when the union of reason (ratio) and love is illumined by grace it becomes an understanding which is love, and he emphasizes the centrality of this love-understanding (amor-intellectus) in the experience of God.

Vocabulary

In examining the development of the theme of the experience of God in William's later works, we have seen how often the very words he uses play a central role in William's expression of his thinking. Now I will concentrate more directly on these words, on William's vocabulary. Rather than try to trace the development of this vocabulary in all of William's later works, however, I will focus on his Expositio super cantica canticorum. A number of William's other later works, especially the Speculum fidei and the Epistola ad

50 CF 6, 99. SC 82, 266: "Quod enim amandum est, intelligendum est. . . . Quod enim amandus est, nisi praesto fiat amanti per memoriam, innotescat per intellectum, amor ipse obsolescit, et languet." Emphasis mine.
fratres de Monte Dei, contain abundant material on spiritual experience; but it is in the Expositio super cantica canticorum that he sustains most consistently the intense expression of his experience of God, and this work thus corresponds in a unique way with the De contemplando Deo.

Many words which had occurred in the De contemplando Deo are also present in this Expositio: love (amor), love, or charity (caritas), desire (desiderium), attachment (affectus), faintness (languor), to ruminate, or to reflect (ruminare), to taste (sapere), wisdom (sapientia), solitude (solitudo), unity of spirit (unitas spiritus), prayer (oratio), contemplation (contemplatio), grace (gratia), light (lux, lumen, illuminatio), joy (gaudium), enjoyment (fruitio), God (deus), Father (pater), Jesus (Jesus), Christ (Christus), savior (Salvator), Holy Spirit (spiritus sanctus), the face (facies), life (vita), death (mors), and peace (pax).

The language of human love

In the Expositio, however, William uses a whole complex of words which in his earlier work he had used rarely: kiss (osculus), embrace (amplexus), or not at all: the Bridegroom (Sponsus), the Bride (Sponsa), breasts (ubera), to recline (cubere), reposing together (accubitus), joining together (conjunctio), to feed (pascere), slumber (somnus), secret (secretus), communion (communio), friendship (amicitia), ecstasy (extasis), and transport (excessus). All of these
new words are common in the language of human love, and this is not surprising. The *Expositio* is a commentary on the Song of Songs, a biblical book which Roland E. Murphy, an American Carmelite scripture scholar, has described as: "a group of songs that have been loosely united around the theme of love." Murphy goes on to explain: "The literal sense ... seems to be a celebration of the fidelity and love between man and woman" (p. 507); but he also notes: "However, it appears that a higher meaning, fuller or typical ... should also be envisioned. ... Human love in itself is an echo of the divine love to which it is inherently directed" (p. 507). We can understand, then, why in the *Expositio* William speaks of God as the Bridegroom (*Sponsus*) and of the human person as God's Bride (*Sponsa*), and why he describes their loving union in language such as this: "Then in her transport [*excessu*] and ecstasy [*extasi*], in the slumber [*somno*] of quiet, the Bride [*Sponsa*] hears the voice of him who entreats her." Another passage in which he uses several of these new words from the language of human love is that in which William says:

---


52 CF 6, 112. SC 82, 296: "Deinde in *excessu* suo seu *extasi*, in *somno* quietis, audiens *Sponsa* vocem adjurantis." Emphasis mine.
This embrace [Amplexus] extends to man, but it surpasses man. For this embrace [Amplexus] is the Holy Spirit. He is the Communion [Communion], the Charity, the Friendship [Amicitia], the Embrace [Amplexus] of the Father and of the Son of God; and he himself is all these things in the love of Bridegroom [Sponsi] and Bride [Sponsae]... This embrace [Amplexus] is begun here, to be perfected elsewhere. This deep calls on another deep; this ecstasy [ex-tasis] dreams of something far other than what it sees; this secret [secretum] signs for another secret [secretum]; this joy evokes another joy; this sweetness foretells another sweetness... For when Face shall be fully revealed to face, and mutual knowledge shall be perfect, and the Bride [Sponsa] shall know even as she is known, it will then be the full kiss [osculum] and the full embrace [amplexus]; for she will not need the left hand to stay her up, but the delights of the Bridegroom's [Sponsi] right hand shall completely embrace [amplexabuntur] the Bride [Sponsam] even to the end of infinite eternity.53

In the section in this chapter on love we saw that in his later works William emphasizes the human warmth of brotherly love in a way in which he had not emphasized it in the De contemplando Deo. In this passage from the Expositio

53 CF 6, 106-107. SC 82, 282-84: "Amplexus iste circa hominem agitur, sed supra hominem est. Amplexus etenim hic Spiritus sanctus est. Qui enim Patris et Filii Dei Communio, qui Caritas, qui Amicitia, qui Amplexus est, ipse in amore Sponsi ac Sponsae ipsa omnia est... Amplexus autem iste, hic initiatur; alibi perficiendus. Abyssus hanc alteram abyssum invocat; extasis ista longe alius quod quam videt somniat; secretum hoc alius secretum suspirat; gaudium hoc alius gaudium imaginatur; suavitas ista aliam suavitatem praerogatur... Cum enim plene revelavit facies ad faciem, et perficietur mutua cognitio, et cognoscet Sponsa, sicut et cognita est, tunc erit plenum osculum, plenusque amplexus; cum non indigebitur laeva fulciente, sed totam amplexabuntur Sponsam delectationes dexterae Sponsi usque in finem aeternitatis infinitae." Emphasis mine.
super cantica canticorum we see William enrich his vocabulary of the experience of God by introducing many words from the language of human love. It seems, then, that in his later works William shows himself more sensitive to human affectivity.

In studying the theme of the experience of God in the De contemplando Deo in Chapter Four I commented on William's use of the word "attachment" (affectus) in that treatise. In the passage immediately following the above quotation from the Expositio super cantica canticorum William uses this word affectus to describe the perfection of the experience of God which will be realized in the full kiss and the full embrace of the Bridegroom and the Bride in eternal beatitude. He writes:

Then, I say, it will be the full kiss [plenum . . . osculum] and the full embrace [plenusque amplexus], whose power is the wisdom of God, whose sweetness is the Holy Spirit, whose perfection is the full enjoyment [plena fruitio] of the divinity, and God all in all. There faith will not tremble, hope will not quake with fear, because full charity in the full vision will cause all human attachments [omnes affectus] to blossom forth in joy and in the enjoyment [fruendi] of one and the same goal.  

54 SC 82, 284: “Tunc, inquam, plenum erit osculum plenusque amplexus, cujus virtus sapientia Dei, suavitas Spiritus Sanctus, perfectio plena fruitio divinitatis, et Deus omnia in omnibus. Non ibi palpitabit fides, non spes pavesbit, quia plena caritas, in plena visione Dei, omnes affectus in unum gaudendi atque fruendi mirificabit effectum.” Trans. and emphasis mine. Note William's use of the word "enjoyment" (fruitio, fruendi).
This use of the word *affectus* to depict the fullness of the enjoyment of the experience of God shows how in the *Expositio super cantica canticorum* William expands the concept of *affectus* to explain the highest spiritual realities in the most appealing human terms. It also illustrates the greater emphasis on human affectivity which marks William's later works as a whole when they are compared with the *De contemplando Deo*.

The word "experience"

William's use of the very word "experience" (*experi-entia, experirî, experimentum, expertus*) in the *Expositio super cantica canticorum* also manifests the development of his vocabulary of the experience of God. We have seen that William used the word "experience" only once in the *De contemplando Deo*. In describing his inability to remember the precise impressions of his experience of God, he said: "by experience [experimento] [of this inability] I am brought to learn that which you say about the Spirit in the Gospel: 'and you know not whence he comes nor whither he goes.'"55

William uses this word in a number of his other works, frequently when speaking of the experience of God, though never using the exact phrase "the experience of God" (*experi-entia*  

---

Dei), or "to experience God" (experiri Deo). I have found the word "experience", in one or other of its Latin forms, ninety-three times in the entire body of William's works. It is significant that this word occurs twenty-nine times in the Expositio super cantica canticorum, far more often than in any of William's other works.

It must be admitted, however, that the word "experience" does not really occur often either in William's works as a whole or in the Expositio. By way of comparison, in this same Expositio, amor occurs three hundred and eighty times, caritas seventy-eight times, and dilectio one hundred and thirty times. It cannot be maintained, then, that the word "experience" itself is of central importance in William's

---

56 One or another form of the word "experience" (experimentia, experiri, experimentum, expertus) occurs once in the De contemplando Deo, seven times in the De natura et dignitate amoris, seven times in the Meditativae orationes, six times in the Expositio in epistolam ad Romanos, four times in the De substantia corporis et animae, twenty-nine times in the Expositio super cantica canticorum, three times in the Disputatio adversus Petrum Abaelardum, once in the De erroribus Guillelmi de Conchis: "Vereor . . . ". six times in the Speculum fidei, three times in the Aenigma fidei, eleven times in the Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei, and eight times in the Vita Bernardi. It also occurs five times in the Brevis commentatio in cantici canticorum priora duo capita which, as has been shown in Chapter Two, is in some sense a work of William; and twice in the Commentarius in cantica canticorum e scriptis S. Ambrosii, which is a collection of passages from various works of Ambrose gathered together by William. The word "experience" does not occur in the De sacramento altaris, the Oratio domni Willelmi, the Epistola Guillelmi abbatis, ad Gaufridum Carnotensem episcopum, et Bernardum abbatem Clarae-Vallensem (Ep. 328: "Confundor . . . "), the Excerpta ex libris S. Gregorii papae super cantica canticorum, or the In lacu miseriae.
vocabulary; nevertheless, his use of this word reveals the development of his thinking on spiritual experience. Throughout his works he uses it most often in speaking of the experience of God, and, although in a number of his works he uses "experience" once or twice to refer to other aspects of human experience, in all twenty-nine uses of this word in the *Expositio* he speaks of the experience of God.

I think it is possible to detect the influence of St Bernard on William's use of the word "experience" more often in his *Expositio super cantica canticorum* than in his other works. In his *Vita Bernardi*, describing the spiritual conversations which he had had with Bernard on the Song of Songs ca. 1122, William uses the words "experience" (*experientia, experiri*) twice and "inexperienced" (*inexpertus*) once within one sentence, a frequency of occurrence of the vocabulary of

---

57 For example, *De natura corporis et animae*, PL 180, 708A: "ratione et experientia discernuntur a physicis et philosophis" ("learned by physicians and philosophers by their use of reason and by their experience"); *Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei*, SC 223, 262: "Credite enim, fratres, et utinam experiri vobis non contingat, quia pulchritudines istae, et foreenses honestates, cito virile propositum enervant" ("Believe me, brothers, and may you not have to learn by experience, these luxuries and stately edifices quickly weaken a manly determination"); *Vita Bernardi*, PL 185, 226B: "non invisibilem illam vitam viventis et loquentis in eo Christi enarrare proposui, sed exteriors quaedam vitae ipsius experimenta" ("I do not propose to tell of that invisible life of Christ living and speaking in him, but of some external experiences of his life"). Trans. and emphasis mine for all these quotations.

58 For this date, see Ceglar, *William of Saint Thierry: The Chronology*, p. 158.
experience rare for William within such short space. He writes:

> He explained his intellectual convictions and the sense of his experience [sensus experientiae suae], and he strove to explain to one inexperienced [inexpertum] many things which cannot be learned except by experience [nonnulli experiendo].

This use of the language of experience to describe a series of conversations which he had had with Bernard several years before he composed the *Expositio* in 1139-40 shows that William, under the influence of Bernard, was already thinking of the Song of Songs in terms of the word "experience" at an early date in his writing career. In the relatively brief *Brevis commentatio* (PL 184, 4007-4036), a literary record of these conversations with Bernard on the Song of Songs which also stems from his early days as a writer, William uses the word "experience" five times. Only two of these uses, however, refer to the experience of God. The other three uses refer to the experience of oneself. At this early date, then,

---

59 *Vita Bernardi*, PL 185, 259C: "communicaret sententias intelligientiae et sensus experientiae suae, et multa docere niteretur inexpertum, quae nonnisi experiendo discuntur." Trans. and emphasis mine.

60 I have discussed the authorship and date of the *Brevis commentatio* in Chapter Two. William describes these conversations with Bernard in the *Vita Bernardi*, xii, 59, PL 185, 259BC.

61 See PL 184, 409B and 411B.

62 See PL 184, 425B. The word "experience" does not occur in William's *Excerpta ex libris S. Gregorii papae super*
William was using the word "experience" in commenting on the Song of Songs under the influence of Bernard, but he had not fully consolidated his use of it into the context of his thinking on the experience of God.

William wrote the *Expositio* in 1139-40, a few years after Bernard began his *Sermones super cantica canticorum*. Leclercq and Rochais, in a note to the reader at the beginning of their critical edition of the *Sermones*, claim that Bernard began these eighty-six *Sermones* in 1135 and completed the first twenty-four of them by 1136, when he journeyed to Rome; on his return from Rome he continued the *Sermones*, of which sermons 65 and 66 can be dated ca. 1143-45, sermon 80 a little before the Council of Rheims in 1148, and the last six between 1148 and 1153. Thus William could have had access to at least the first twenty-four of Bernard's *Sermones*, and perhaps more of them, while he was writing his

cantica canticorum (PL 180, 441-74); it occurs only twice in his very lengthy *Commentarius in cantica canticorum e scriptis S. Ambrosii* (PL 15, 1945-2060), and neither of these occurrences refer to the experience of God (see PL 15, 2003B and 2009A). In *William of Saint Thierry: The Chronology*, p. 239, Ceglar holds that these two works were probably written during the period 1135-39, just before William composed his *Expositio super cantica canticorum*. The minimal use of the word "experience" in these collections of passages from the works of Gregory and Ambrose which William put together shortly before he composed his own *Expositio super cantica canticorum*, when compared with its frequent use in works in some way connected with Bernard, strengthens the claim for the influence of Bernard on William's more frequent use of the word "experience" in his *Expositio super cantica canticorum* than in his other works.

63 See Op S Bern I, ix.
own *Expositio* in 1139-40. It is noteworthy that in the first twenty-four of his *Sermones* Bernard uses the word "experience" thirty-one times, a rate of occurrence almost as frequent as William's twenty-nine uses of this word in his *Expositio*.\(^6^4\) It is possible, then, that William read Bernard's first twenty-four *Sermones super cantica canticorum* and that Bernard's use of "experience" in these sermons influenced William's greater use of this word in his *Expositio super cantica canticorum* than in his other works.

When we look at the spiritual and linguistic context of the passages in the *Expositio* in which William uses "experience," however, we do not detect the influence of Bernard. Bernard's influence was so prevalent in the *Brevis commentatio* that that work can be called: "a composite work."\(^6^5\) William's *Excerpta ex libris S. Gregorii papae super cantica canticorum* and his *Commentarius in cantica canticorum e scriptis S. Ambrosii* are even less original than the *Brevis commentatio*, because they are florilegia, simple collections

---

\(^6^4\) I have used the critical edition of William's *Expositio super cantica canticorum* in SC 82, and of Bernard's *Sermones super cantica canticorum* (1-24) in Op S Bern I, in computing their uses of the word "experience," and it is difficult to compare the length of works appearing in these two different series. But in the editions of these works in Migne's Latin Patrology, William's *Expositio* occupies seventy-four columns (PL 180, 473-546), while Bernard's first twenty-four *Sermones* occupy one hundred and fifteen columns (PL 183, 785-899). Bernard also uses the word "inexperienced" (in-expertum) four times in his first twenty-four *Sermones*.

of various texts of Gregory the Great and Ambrose on the Song of Songs. But in the *Expositio* William speaks more from his own experience, and he has absorbed his sources to the point that their influence is not readily apparent. In his twenty-nine uses of "experience" in this work there is no evidence of spiritual or linguistic dependence on Bernard's thirty-one uses of it in his first twenty-four Sermones. William always uses "experience" in the *Expositio* to speak of the experience of God. Bernard uses "experience" in his first twenty-four Sermones to speak of the experience of God, but he also uses it to speak of other forms of human experience than the experience of God. Moreover, there is no pattern of similar words or phrases which William borrows from Bernard in the contexts in which he uses "experience" in the *Expositio*. William has developed his own vocabulary and he utilizes it creatively and effectively.

An examination of the twenty-nine instances in the *Expositio* in which William uses the word "experience" reveals both the continuity and the development of his expression of his experience, as well as the richness of the vocabulary he

---

66 For example, Op S Bern I, Sermon 11, p. 58, lines 16-17: "quid . . . filii huici saeculi experiatur de carnis illecebris" ("what worldly men may experience of the allurements of the flesh"); Sermon 23, p. 142, lines 15-16: "experiensque quod scriptum est: 'Ecce quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum''" ("experiencing what is written; 'Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to live together as one'"). Trans. and emphasis mine for both these quotations.
uses to express it. In the phrases in which he uses some form of the word "experience" in the Expositio he uses a number of the words he had already used in the De contemplando Deo: sweet (suavis and dulcis), light (lumen), goodness (bonitas), certain (certus), a sense (sensus), inbreathed (inspiratrum), happy, or blessed (beata), clear (manifesta), attachment (affectus), joy (gaudium), the fountain of life (fons vitae), conscience, or self-awareness (conscientia), to enjoy (frui), to rejoice (gaudere), and to contemplate (contemplare). But he also uses a number of other words which are new: joyful (jucunda), the Bridegroom (Sponsus), the Bride (Sponsa), new grace (nova gratia), the word of life (verbum vitae), the proof of faith (fidei argumentum), curious (curiosus), powerful (efficax), and first fruits (primitiae). A typical use of the word "experience" in the Expositio to describe the experience of God reads:

Hence by the sense of enlightened love, the Bride begins to experience [Sponsa incipit experiri] more fully and dearly the sweet charms of the love of the Bridegroom who loves her. In her are accomplished the words of the Apostle: "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."67

Here William's emphasis on love stands out once again, as it has so often in our study of his expression of his experience

---

67 CF 6, 46. SC 82, 152: "per illuminati sensum amoris, largius ac dulcius, Sponsa incipit experiri, et fit in ea quod Apostolus dicit: 'Caritas Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum sanctum qui datus est nobis.'" Emphasis mine.
of God. In another passage in which he uses the word "experience", William speaks of love along with his other favorite themes of understanding (intellectus), enjoyment, or fruition (fruitio), and attachment (affectus), all interlocked with each other, mutually supporting and completing each other in the eschatological context of a movement forward to the full vision of God in heaven. William says:

In the meantime, the Bride sometimes goes over the wall not by herself [in se] but in you, O Lord her God [Deo]; and she is admitted to clearer understanding [ad lucidius aliquid intelligendum], more perfect knowledge and sweeter love [ad dulcius amandum]. Not only does she experience [experiatur] the fountain of life which is with you and the light in your light, but she is also allowed for awhile to stand still and enjoy fruition [ad fruendum] with such deep feeling, such strong attachment [tam valido affectu] and such clear understanding [tam manifesto intellectu] that . . . it seems to her as if only the interstice of human mortality separates her from the perfection of full vision.68

In this one text William brings together into a unified whole the many key words and themes he had first introduced in the De contemplando Deo: God (deus), the self (se), to love (amare), understanding (intellectus), to enjoy fruition

68 CF 6, 128. SC 82, 328-30: "Interim etiam aliquando non in se, sed in te Domino Deo suo, transgrediens murum, admittitur ad lucidius aliquid intelligendum, ad perfectius cognoscendum, ad dulcius amandum, non solum ut experiatur apud te fontem vitae, et in lumine tuo lumen, sed ut etiam permittatur aliquantisper stare ad fruendum, tam efficaci sensu, tam valido affectu, tam manifesto intellectu, ut . . . a perfectione plenae visionis, solo sibi distare videatur interstitio humanae mortalitatis." Emphasis mine. I have altered the translation of the word affectu from "affection" to "attachment."
of (fruor), and attachment (affectus); and he joins them all together in the context of experiencing (experiri) God. In the De contemplando Deo William had begged God: "O Love [O amor], come into us, possess us"; and he had told God: "We love you [nos te diligimus] by the attachment of love [affectu amoris] which you have given us." In the Expositio super cantica canticorum the same William, but a William who has grown in the experience of the love of God and who expresses this experience in more passionate language, entreats God:

O Love [O Amor], from whom all love [omnis amor] . . . takes its name: O Love [Amor], holy and sanctifying, pure and purifying! You, Life Who are life-giving! Show us the meaning of your holy canticle, reveal the mystery of your kiss and the inner pulsing of your murmured song wherewith, to the hearts of your sons, you chant your power and the delights of your sweetness.

This wise and "experienced" William explains: "a memory that is not ungrateful for God's benefits swiftly merits the joy of spiritual understanding [spiritualis intellectus

69 SC 61 bis, 86: "O amor veni in nos, posside nos." Trans. mine.

70 SC 61 bis, 94: "Sed nos te diligimus affectu amoris a te nobis indito." Trans. mine.

gaudium]; and this spiritual understanding at once becomes open to sweet experiences of love \([\text{in suaves } \ldots \text{ amoris experientias}]\).\(^{72}\)

In his later works, therefore, William masterfully develops that preoccupation with the loving experience of God which he had introduced in his first work, his \textit{De contemplando Deo}.\(^{72}\)

\(^{72}\) CF 6, 66. SC 82, 192. "Beneficiis etenim Dei non ingrata memoria cito \textit{spiritualis intellectus gaudium meretur; qui etiam continuo \textit{in suaves quasdam amoris experientias}.}" Emphasis mine.
CONCLUSION

In this conclusion I will group together the specific conclusions which I have reached in the course of the thesis; then I will formulate a general conclusion to the thesis as a whole, and relate this to the present monastic concern with the experience of God, which was the starting point of the thesis.

Specific Conclusions

There is at present a tendency toward greater specialization in studies of William of Saint Thierry and his writings, and in this thesis I have tried to continue this trend by studying in detail one theme in one of William's works. The *De contemplando Deo*, which was written in the period 1119-35, most probably sometime during the years 1122-32, may be considered William's first complete work. A study of the *De contemplando Deo* should enable us to penetrate to William's most spontaneously personal insights on the experience of God, the ones he first gathered together into a complete work. The experience of God is the unifying theme of the *De contemplando Deo*, but William's tone of passionate preoccupation with God lends his treatise an uneven structure.

Experience may be described as a form of knowledge which is decidedly affective; it is a person's awareness of himself in relation to the world, himself, or God. In a Christian
context, the experience of God is a loving knowledge of God and of oneself in relation to God achieved by glorifying God in union with Christ; for the Christian this experience is one of receiving God's mercy in conversion, and it will be brought to perfection only at the final coming of Christ. In modern terminology, if this experience of God is mediated by the sign of a religious act, such as an act of faith or of prayer, it is called a religious experience; if it is immediate, an awareness of being touched directly by God, it is called a mystical experience.

The experience of God which William describes in the De contemplando Deo has all the characteristics of a Christian mystical experience of God, although he speaks of it as "contemplation" (contemplatio), using the word "mystical" (mysticus) only in the context of biblical exegesis, to denote the spiritual sense of the Bible. In describing his experience of God in the De contemplando Deo, William speaks from his own experience, looks directly to God, and expresses himself with passionate intensity. William's unique combination of these three elements distinguishes him from such classical authors of western Christian spirituality as St Augustine, St Bernard, Richard of Saint Victor, St Teresa of Avila, and St John of the Cross; and also from such contemporary expressions of interest in spiritual experience as the use of psychedelic drugs, experimentation with the prayer techniques of Zen Buddhism, the Pentecostal movement, and the
works of such Christian theologians as Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner. William focuses his attention directly on God, whereas all of these other authors and movements look more to the human person and the experience itself.

William's manner of looking so directly to God reveals itself clearly in the vocabulary of the De contemplando Deo, especially those words which manifest his key themes; God, the self, love, and understanding. For William, to experience God is to be united to God in love, and to understand God by loving him. "Love" (amor, amare) is the most frequently used word in the De contemplando Deo, and its rate of occurrence in relation to the words "charity" (caritas) and "choice" (dilectio, diligere) is strikingly similar to Augustine's ratio of use of these words in Book IX of the De trinitate. This suggests the influence of Book IX of Augustine's De trinitate on the vocabulary of the De contemplando Deo.

In his later works William develops the insights on God, the self, love, and understanding which first appeared in his De contemplando Deo. In a series of works on faith written during the period 1140-44, he works out a distinction between human reason (ratio humana), which acquires faith for itself in human matters, and the reasoning of faith (ratio fidei), which obtains in divine affairs, in which faith comes first and then forms its own unique reasoning; and he uses this reasoning of faith to examine the
mysteries of faith. Throughout all his later works William shows that when the union of reason (ratio) and love (amor) is illumined by grace it becomes an understanding (intellec-
tus) which is love, and which is thus a higher form of knowledge than reason, which it transcends and absorbs. It is by this love-understanding (amor-intellectus) that the human person experiences God.

The word "experience" (experientia, experiri) occurs only once in the De contemplando Deo. Although this word occurs with only moderate frequency in William's later works, his use of it in his Expositio super cantica canticorum reveals that in his later years William grew more aware of the emotional intricacies of our love for God and expressed in a more appealingly affective way that ardent preoccupation with God which he had first introduced in the De contemplando Deo.

General Conclusion

In the De contemplando Deo William of Saint Thierry reaches up to God. When he feels himself thrust back into himself, he examines the inner recesses of his own human self-awareness—and he is compelled to reach up to God again, in desire and in love. This search for God, this love for God, this passion for God strikes the reader of the De con-
templando Deo and urges him to respond. William has experi-
enced God. In his De contemplando Deo he gives witness to this experience and he invites us to look to God as directly
as he has looked to God.

William's invitation to look to God has universal appeal, for it addresses a human desire which transcends the limits of time and space. I think, however, that it has particular meaning for us today. Influenced by the phenomenological and existential emphasis on the concrete experience of the human person in his actual situation, we tend to focus our attention on our own experiences, or even on the process of experiencing, more than on the persons and the world we experience. Within this cultural framework, it is not surprising that the 1974 General Chapter of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance was concerned with the practical demands for the experience of God today—what do we as human persons, as monks and nuns, have to do in relation to our life situation if we wish to experience God? This is an excellent question, for it is necessary to be aware of the specifically human aspect of our experience of God, and it is inevitable that a monastic General Chapter will concern itself with the actual life situation of monks and nuns. But William forcefully reminds us that the fundamental dynamism of the human situation itself, in whatever time or place, is the desire to experience God in love. Today we are keenly aware that in order to be as genuinely human as possible, it is necessary to look closely at ourselves and at our human situation. In his De contemplando Deo William shows us that the deepest penetration into all that is most truly human
leads us, by the very process of an ever greater fidelity
to our most profoundly human aspirations, to look directly
to God.

The General Chapter of 1974 has ended. The discussion
initiated by the decision to center this chapter around the
theme "The Practical Demands for the Experience of God in
our Monastic Life Today" has been absorbed into the ongoing
life of a monastic order. The focus of attention has moved
on to other issues, some of them raised by this discussion
itself. Yet the basic question remains, more insistent for
having been posed explicitly and discussed at such length:
how can we experience God? William of Saint Thierry answers:
look into your heart, yes, look into your total life situa-
tion; but, more important, look to God, seek to understand
God by loving God, in short—contemplate God.