

Isaac Ambrose's *Looking unto Jesus* in its Westminster Context

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Isaac Ambrose's *Looking unto Jesus* can be defined as a spiritual classic.¹ Ambrose wrote his classic devotional book after recovering from a serious illness. Many believers have been spiritually nourished by the warm words Ambrose wrote about Jesus. Through Ambrose's classic, they have found words to make sense of their own dealings with Jesus, and more importantly, through Ambrose, they have personally exercised spiritual communion with Jesus Christ.

Tom Schwanda has done an excellent job of investigating, analyzing, and describing the contemplative-mystical piety of Puritanism in general and of Ambrose in particular.² His research has revealed that the reality of the mystical union in the metaphor of spiritual marriage is an important framework for the interpretation of the contemplative-mystical piety of Ambrose's work.

1. Isaac Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus, or the Soul's Eyeing of Jesus as Carrying on the great work of Man's Salvation* (originally published 1658). I used the translation by Johannes Lampe in Dutch, Sneek: J. W. Boeijenga, 1925 (eleventh reprint). The Dutch publisher Den Hertog mentions nineteen reprints of this work in Dutch in 2007, <https://uitgeverijdenhertog.nl/volwassen/flash/9789033117565/2/> (accessed January 13, 2022). Because there are several editions of *Looking unto Jesus*, I refer to the division in chapters and (sub)paragraphs that can be applied to every edition. For biographical information, see Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 33–37. Beeke and Pederson write about a "classic." In this context it is remarkable that a treatment of Ambrose is missing in Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason, eds., *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

2. Tom Schwanda, *Soul Recreation: The Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Puritanism* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2012).

The great value of his research can also be seen in the fact that he placed his interpretation of Ambrose into the context of the spiritual Christian tradition. He clarified how Ambrose is related to Bernard. Although there is a different interpretation of the *unio mystica* (mystical union), there are nevertheless several similarities. The accent of affective love is characteristic for both theologians. Also, the reciprocal character of the relationship between Jesus and His people in Bernard's work is to be found in the Puritan Ambrose as well as in Bernard's interpretation of the Song of Solomon.

Schwanda also discerned a relationship with Calvin. While Calvin applied the spiritual marriage especially to the ecclesiastical liturgy of the Lord's Supper, Ambrose was open to the individual relationship with the heavenly Bridegroom. Calvin was a theologian of faith, not without love, while Ambrose can be characterized from the opposite framework.

This historical sensitivity in Schwanda's research raises the question of how Ambrose should be related to his own confessional context. This brought me to the proposal to interpret Isaac Ambrose's spirituality in *Looking unto Jesus* theologically. I will use the Westminster Confession as an interpretative framework to understand the spiritual-theological concepts in Isaac Ambrose's *Looking unto Jesus*.

I use the methods of comparison and analysis of spiritual-theological concepts in order to come to a deeper interpretation of Ambrose's work. Although Ambrose's *Looking unto Jesus* can be considered as a devotional book and the Westminster Confession as a confessional document, comparison is not impossible for three reasons. First, Ambrose's spirituality is embedded in spiritual-theological concepts, which makes a comparison with a theological document possible. Second, Ambrose accepted the Westminster Confession and belonged to its theological and spiritual tradition.³ Third, although the Westminster Confession is in itself a confessional document, it is not without its own spirituality.

In order to study the relationship between the concepts in Ambrose and in the Westminster Confession, I have divided Ambrose's concepts into five categories in this article, namely, spiritual marriage, happiness, the person of Jesus, the heavenly Christ, and *visio beatifica* (beatific vision). So, we start with the treatment of the concepts in *Looking unto Jesus* and next

3. This appears clearly from Ambrose's book *Prima, Media et Ultima, or The First, Middle and the Last Things* (Glasgow: John Knox, 1757), his (somewhat speculative) book *War with devils: ministration of, and communion with angels* (Glasgow: Joseph Galbraith, 1769), and also his book about family life, *The Well-ordered Family* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1762).

we relate them to the theology and spirituality of the Westminster Confession. After this research, some conclusions and further considerations may be drawn.

Spiritual Marriage

One of the most important results of Schwanda's research was the concept of spiritual marriage in Ambrose's work. This is clearly a leading theological concept in Isaac Ambrose's spirituality. From this concept, the affective love in *Looking unto Jesus* can be easily accounted for. Also, the reciprocity in the relationship between Christ and His bride is understandable in the context of this concept. Although Ambrose does not use erotic language to find words for the intimate relationship between the heavenly Bridegroom and the earthly bride, the lyrical language of passion and enthusiasm is to be found on almost every page.⁴

O love more deep than hell! O love more high than heaven! The brightest seraphims that burn in love, are but as sparkles to that mighty flame of love in the heart of Jesus.⁵

The sources of the concept of spiritual marriage can not only be found in the Pauline words of Ephesians 5:30–32, but also in the Old Testament.⁶ The only reason that Song of Solomon is included in the Old Testament is because of its reference to God's marital relationship with His people. In this context, the research of Karl Shuve is of interest. He found that in the patristical and medieval church, the Song of Solomon was used to interpret difficult texts.⁷ In other words, Song of Solomon was a sort of interpretative framework to understand biblical truth. This means that God's truth was interpreted in relational terms.

During the time of the Reformation, something changed. The Reformation can be seen as a movement that rediscovered the Letter to the Romans. The doctrine of justification in this way was the sun, the day, the

4. In Ambrose, *Prima, Media et Ultima*, 79–85, in the meditations on the soul's love of Jesus, we find some expressions that touch the erotic.

5. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (third part) 3.6.

6. According to Hermann Friedrich Kohlbrugge, there are at least six hundred references to spiritual marriage in the Old Testament. *Een commentaar op Psalm 45* (Utrecht: De Banier, 1995), 149. Joel Beeke and Mark Jones relate the allegorical explanation of the Song of Solomon to the motive of highlighting communion with Christ. Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 32.

7. Karl Shuve, *The Song of Songs and the Fashioning of Identity in Early Latin Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3.

light of the church, the master, and the king that preserved all ecclesiological doctrines.⁸ This was also true for Calvin. According to Calvin, this doctrine was the main pillar of religion and the foundation of piety.⁹ This was, for the reformer of Geneva, related to the importance of Romans, which he called in a letter to Simon Gryneüs, the opening to the whole of Scripture.¹⁰

The fact that Zanchi (1516–1590) wrote a treatise about spiritual marriage indicates this medieval approach did not disappear entirely in the Reformed tradition.¹¹ Also, Calvin—as we saw above—could use the concept of spiritual marriage to interpret theological and spiritual realities. At the same time, the Song of Solomon lost its central place in Bible interpretation. This position was assumed by the book of Romans. It is understandable that this change influenced spirituality. The more juridical language of Romans relates to another spirituality than the more relational Song of Solomon. The more legal approach meant that the question of legal position became important, so that the personal relationship and intimacy with Jesus disappeared from view. We can also imagine that the language of faith replaced the language of love.

How does this relate to the Westminster Confession? It can be easily seen that the theological inventions of Reformed theology in the seventeenth century are applied in the Westminster Confession. This theological renewal concerned the covenant.¹² The covenant is not only a substantial theme in the Westminster Confession; it also determines the structure of

8. Martin Luther, WA (= D. Martin Luthers Werke Kritische Gesamtausgabe Weimarer Ausgabe, Weimar 1883–1929,) 48, 10. Luther said of the doctrine of justification, “Stante enim hac doctrina stat Ecclesia, ruente autem ruit ipsa quoque,” (For by standing on this doctrine the church stands, by rushing she also rushes) WA 40. III: 351, 34–35.

9. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.11.1, translated by Henry Beveridge (<https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes/institutes.i.html>, accessed October 31, 2022).

10. CO (= Joannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia, eds. E. Cunitz, J. W. Baum and E. W. E. Reuss (Brunsvigae: C.A. Schwetschke, 1863)) 10,403.

11. Girolamo Zanchi, *The Spiritual Marriage between Christ and His Church and Every One of the Faithful*, trans. Patrick J. O'Banion (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021).

12. John H. Leith, *Assembly at Westminster: Reformed Theology in the Making* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1973), 91. Leith judges this as a positive development, 94. Also, Sinclair B. Ferguson understood this turn to the covenant as a turn to Scripture. “The Teaching of the Confession,” in *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today*, ed. Alasdair I. C. Heron (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1982), 36–37. James B. Torrance was negative, because he interpreted this turn as juridical contract-thinking. “Strength and Weaknesses of the Westminster Theology,” in Heron, *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today*, 44–48. Thomas F. Torrance understood the covenant as part of a

this confession. The covenant can be called—as B.B. Warfield styled it—“the architectonic principle” of the Westminster Confession.¹³

We see the covenant structure in the chapters of the Confession. Chapter 7 confesses God's original covenant, the breaking of it by Adam, and God's invention of “a second covenant, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved”. Chapter 8 treats Christology, namely incarnation, Christ's offices, the accomplishment of redemption, Christ's resurrection, and the effectivity of redemption. Chapters 9–10 treat the acceptance of the covenant, while chapters 11–13 unfold the benefits of the covenant. In the next five chapters, we read about the life of the covenant, while chapters 19–24 explain obedience within the covenant.

It is not difficult to interpret the covenant of grace as a marriage covenant.¹⁴ But this is not made explicit in the Westminster Confession. So, here we see a difference between the Westminster Confession and Isaac Ambrose's approach. While Ambrose thought from the marriage covenant, his Puritan environment confessed the covenant of grace. Although these concepts do not exclude each other, it is clear that the use of a different concept implies a difference in spirituality. Ambrose is focused on the personal relationship and the intimacy with the heavenly Bridegroom, while the Westminster Confession speaks more objectively about the covenant, purchased redemption in the framework of the covenant, the responsibility of the human being in the covenant, and the benefits of the covenant for the believer.

logical-causal structure to execute God's eternal decrees. *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 136–44.

13. B. B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003), 6:56. See also Jeong Koo Jeon, *Covenant Theology: John Murray's and Meredith G. Kline's Response to the Historical Development of Federal Theology in Reformed Thought* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1999), 40.

14. Jonathan Edwards did do that. Willem van Vlastuin, “Federalism and Reformed Scholasticism: Jonathan Edwards's Doctrine of the Covenant in its Reformed Context,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Jonathan Edwards Online*, ed. Douglas A. Sweeney and Jan Stievermann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 183–98, here 192–93. See also Willem van Vlastuin, “Spiritual marriage: A Key to the Theology and Spirituality of Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711),” *Journal for the History of Reformed Pietism* 2, no. 2 (2016), 27–53; Willem van Vlastuin, “The Fruitfulness of a Paradox: The Doctrine of the Covenant in Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711) Reapplied,” in *Covenant: A Vital Element of Reformed Theology—Biblical, Historical and Systematic-Theological Perspectives*, ed. Hans Burger, Gert Kwakkel, and Michael Mulder (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 283–98.

Happiness

Augustine's *Confessions* is the first, the most well-known, and the most influential Christian autobiography that consists of a diverse blend of philosophy, theology, and exegesis of the Bible. Its solid commencement is telling and revealing:

Great are You, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Your power, and of Your wisdom there is no end. And man, being a part of Your creation, desires to praise You—man, who bears about with him his mortality, the witness of his sin, even the witness that You resist the proud,—yet man, this part of Your creation, desires to praise You. You move us to delight in praising You; for You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.¹⁵

In the context of this research, we hear in this confession God's greatness, the purpose of man in God, the delight in God's praise, the weakness and sinfulness of man, and the inner unrest in the heart of man until we find our deepest rest in God. We can summarize these words with the insight that finding God as our ultimate goal makes us happy.

This focus on human flourishing and eudaimonism is also explored by the Puritans.¹⁶ We find this aspect also in Isaac Ambrose. Mystical contemplation is "soul recreation,"¹⁷ which means that the soul never becomes weary of it, while the spiritual eyeing of Jesus gives continual energy to the soul. Ambrose does not understand mystical contemplation in an ontological sense, but as relational affection. Although it is a moral duty, it is not a heavy burden, because the human soul comes to its ultimate purpose in looking unto Jesus. The book begins with the reality of satisfying of all our longings in Jesus:

Because all other things can never satisfy the eye. "All things are full of labour," saith Solomon, "man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing": it is but wearied with looking on divers objects, and yet still desires new ones; but once admit it to that glorious sight of Christ, and then it rests fully satisfied.¹⁸

15. Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.1 (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110101.htm>, accessed October 31, 2022).

16. Nathaniel A. Warne, *Call to Happiness: Eudaimonism in English Puritan Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress Academic, 2019).

17. According to the main title of Schwanda's research, *Soul Recreation*. See also p. 150.

18. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 1.2.3.6. See also 5.1.10.

Significant also is the reference to Bernard:

As whatsoever we give unto thee, Lord, unless we give ourselves, cannot satisfy thee; so whatsoever thou givest unto us, Lord, unless thou givest thyself, it cannot satisfy us.¹⁹

This concept of spiritual satisfaction is clearly illustrated in the description of Jesus's appearing to Mary Magdalene, on which Ambrose comments, "When nothing else would satisfy, Jesus himself appears."²⁰ Ambrose closes his long treatment about looking unto Jesus with the satisfaction of our needs and longings:

Surely Christ is enough to fill all our thoughts, desires, hopes, loves, joys, or whatever is within us, or without us. Christ alone comprehends all the circumference of all our happiness. O the worth of Christ! Compare we other things with him, and they will bear no weight at all; cast into the balance with him angels, they are wise, but he is wisdom; cast into the balance with him men, they are liars, lighter than vanity, but Christ is "the amen, the faithful witness"; cast into the scales kings, and all kings, and all their glory; cast in two worlds, and add to the weight millions of heavens of heavens, and the balance cannot down, the scales are unequal; Christ outweighs all. Shall I yet come nearer home?

We see that Ambrose unites the filling of our thoughts, desires, hopes, loves, and joys with our happiness. Looking unto Jesus brings our soul to taste the real spiritual rest in which we desire nothing else, and in which we do not become tired of desiring—a foretaste of eternal life. Every earthly joy will weary us, but the mystical contemplation of Jesus is an unfathomable fountain of satisfaction.

How does this relate to the Westminster Confession's theology and spirituality? In the first question and answer of the Westminster Larger Catechism we read these classic words: "Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God and fully to enjoy him forever." The concept of "enjoy" reveals that the glorification of God makes human beings happy. Or oppositely, in order to have our deepest needs satisfied, we must glorify God. But in the outworking of the Westminster Confession these aspects are not really addressed. In the Reformation, these notions did not disappear, but the Christian life became focused on reconciliation and justification. We find

19. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 3.2.2.3.

20. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (fourth part) 2.4.2.

the same approach in the Westminster Confession. Apparently, the confession aims to clarify Reformed theology. In the context of this study, it is enough to observe this; further investigation is needed to identify the possible causes for this development. But we can observe that certain aspects of the spirituality of the Middle Ages remain present in the spirituality of the Puritans, as can be seen by reading the spiritual classics, such as Bernard and others.

The Person of Christ

Isaac Ambrose is in agreement with the vision of writers who prefer to be in hell with Christ to being in heaven without Christ.²¹ The presence of Christ makes heaven to be heaven. In such expressions, Christ is much more highly valued than His gifts in creation and re-creation. This does not mean that Ambrose undervalues Christ's benefits, but that the gifts are evaluated as Christ's gifts and for the sake of Christ. This also means that his soteriology is determined by Christ and our mystical union with the person of Christ.²² Treating the hypostatic union of Christ's divine person and the assumption of our human nature, he also deals with the mystical union between Christ and believers, which he characterizes as follows:

It is a total union; that is, whole Christ is united to the whole believer, soul and body. If thou art united to Christ, thou hast all Christ; thou art one with him in his nature, in his name; thou hast the same image, grace, and spirit in thee, as he hath; the same precious promises, the same access to God by prayer as he; thou hast the same love of the Father; all that he did or suffered, thou hast a share in it; thou hast his life and death; all is thine. So, on thy part, he hath thee wholly, thy nature, thy sins, the punishment of thy sins, thy wrath, thy curse, thy shame; yea, thy wit, and wealth, and strength, all that thou art, or hast, or canst do possibly for him. It is a total union: "My beloved is

21. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (fourth part) 2.2. Compare 4 (sixth part) 2.3.

22. Compare Thomas Goodwin: "More of God's glory shall instantly shine forth in that small Model, the Man Christ Jesus, having the God-head dwelling in him personally, than by God's making Millions of Worlds furnished with Glories.... And although our Redemption by Christ, as we are Sinners, is an infinite Benefit; yet his Person thus given us, is more worth than all those his Benefits, *Est aliquid in Christo formosius Salvatore*. And then by our Interest in his Person, we come to inherit God with him, to be Heirs, and Coheirs with Christ of God, in such a way communicated, as but for this his Union with God first, we should never have attained." Mark Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth. The Christology of the Puritan Reformed Orthodox theologian, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 209.

mine, and I am his": whole Christ is mine, and all that I am, have, or can do, is his.²³

It is clear that believers have all spiritual and physical benefits in their union with Christ. Christ is not only their Savior, they do not only believe in Christ, but they exist "in" Christ as their head, their bridegroom, and their true vine. In this citation of Ambrose, the believer has primarily Christ and "only" secondarily the gifts of Christ. The benefits that Christ has accomplished are not enjoyed without enjoying Christ. The spiritual benefits for believers are determined by Christ, so that spiritual joy in the benefits is a benefit because of Christ. The beauty of the gifts is the beauty of Christ. Therefore, Ambrose summarizes God's covenant in the person of Christ. We do not only receive several gifts, but we receive a person:

Thus runs the tenor of his covenant: "I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee." This is the general promise; I may call it the mother-promise, that carries all other promises in its womb. Consider, that it is God in Christ that is propounded to us in this phrase, "I will be a God to thee." Here is the greatest promise that ever was made. Christ, God, is more than grace, pardon, holiness, heaven; as the husband is more excellent than the marriage-robe, bracelets, rings.²⁴

Thinking from the person of Christ implies a spiritual focus on the incarnation of God's Son:

We should labor to apprehend what is the riches of this glorious mystery of Christ's incarnation; we should dive into the depths of his glorious actings; we should study this mystery above all other studies. Nothing is more pleasant, and nothing is more deep. That one person should be God and man; that blessedness should be made a curse; that heaven should be let down into hell; that the God of the world should shut himself up, as it were, in a body; that the invisible God should be made visible to sense; that God should make our nature, which had sinned against him, to be the great ordinance of reconciling us unto himself; that God should take our flesh, and dwell in it with all his fullness, and make that flesh more glorious than the angels, and advance that flesh into oneness with himself, and through that flesh open all his rich discoveries of love and free grace unto the sons of men; that this God-man should be our Saviour, Redeemer,

23. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 3.1.4.2.3.

24. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 2.2.2.3.

Reconciler, Father, Friend; Oh what mysteries are these! No wonder if when Christ was born, the apostles cry, "We saw his glory, as of the only begotten Son of God"; noting, that at the first sight of him, so much glory sparkled from him as could appear from none, but a God walking up and down the world.²⁵

It is remarkable that Ambrose says that we should study the mystery of the incarnation "above all other studies." It might also strike our attention that Ambrose's excitement about the mystery of the incarnation of God's Son is motivated by his understanding of the unity of the person of God's Son rather than a sum of the divine and the human natures. Thinking from the unity of His person leads to the deep mystery that God's Son exists as a finite creature, in which both the theologoumenon of the so-called *communicatio idiomatum* (communication of properties) and the theologoumenon of the *anhypostasis* (Jesus's human nature did not exist apart from the divine person) are expressed.

It may also strike us that Ambrose speaks about our "oneness" with God as fruit of God's union with the human nature, in which we hear a qualified *theosis* (divinization or deification). Ambrose denied an ontological union with God, but he reasoned from the mystical union with Christ by the indwelling of the Spirit.

The infinite condescension of God in Christ bridges the infinite distance between man and God, so that the incarnation is the sure basis for the boldness of faith to come to God in Christ:

O the infinite condescension of God in Christ! God takes up our nature, and joins it to himself as one person, and lays that before our faith; so that here is God, and God suited to the particular state of the sinner. Now with what boldness may our souls draw nigh to God! (...) Oh, look once more, and be not discouraged! See, God is not come down in fire. God is not descended in the armour of justice and everlasting burnings; no, he is clothed with the garments of flesh, he desires to converse with thee after thy own form, he is come down to beseech thee to see with thine own eyes thy eternal happiness. Oh, the wonder of heaven! It is the cry of some poor souls, O that I might see God! Lo here God is come down in the likeness of man, he walks in our own shape amongst us. It is the cry of others, O that I might have my heart united to God! Why, he is come down on this very purpose, and hath united our nature unto himself. Surely God hath left

25. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (first part) 2.5.3.3.

all the world without excuse: O that ever there should be an heart of unbelief, after these sensible demonstrations of divine glory and love! Why wilt thou now stand off?²⁶

The infinite condescension of God in Christ does not only grant the boldness to come to God's Son, but it assures us also of the incomparable preciousness of Christ's work. This is a great comfort for people who feel themselves great sinners. Ambrose allows himself the freedom to speak here in a comparative sense of the weight of sin. While the absolute weight of sin can only be underestimated (Anselm), the weight of sin in comparison to the value of Christ's sacrifice cannot be overestimated:

Christ's death and blood is superabundant to our sins: The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant, 1 Tim. i. 14, *υπερπελονασε*, it was over full, redundant, more than enough. Many an humble soul is apt to complain, "O if I had not been so great a sinner, there might have been hope." This is to undervalue Christ's redemption, this is to think there is more in sin to damn, than in Christ's sufferings to save: whereas all thy sins to Christ, are but as a little cloud to the glorious sun; yea, all the sins of all the men in the world, are but, to Christ's merits, as a drop to the ocean.²⁷

Ambrose describes the meeting of Christ and His bride at the day of judgment in a very intimate way:

They look, and gaze, and dart their beams, and reflect their glories on each other. Oh the communications! Oh the dartings of beams betwixt Christ and his saints I look as when two admirable persons, two lovers meet together, their eyes sparkle, they look on, as if they would look through one another: so Christ and his saints at first meeting, they look on, as if they would look through one another: and such is the effect of these looks, that they give a lustre to each other by their looks.²⁸

The same is true of Jesus opening His heart at that day in which He explains in direct speech His eternal and ever-active love for His bride:

Before I made the world I spent my infinite eternal thoughts on thy salvation ; when the world began, I gave thee a promise, that I would

26. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (first part) 2.5.4.2.

27. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (third part) 3.3.4. This quote also caught the attention of Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 369.

28. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 5.1.4.1.

betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, in loving kindness, in mercy, and in faithfulness, Hos. 2:19, 20. It was I that for thy sake was incarnate, and lived, and died, and rose again, and ascended : and since my ascension that have been interceding for thee, and making ready the bride-chamber, where thou and I must live for ever and ever.²⁹

This personal character of the interaction with Jesus determines also the way we read the Bible. For Ambrose, the Bible is not (only) a book with objective information, but the great Subject of salvation is present in Scripture, so that he reads Scripture as a personal meeting of Jesus with himself. We see that, for example, in his treatment of the capture of Jesus by His enemies in the garden of Gethsemane. Ambrose does not only see historical persons acting in this capture, but he feels himself involved:

Oh, my pride! and oh, my covetousness! and oh, my malice and revenge! oh my unbelief! and oh, my unthankfulness! and oh, my uncharitableness to the needy members of Christ Jesus! why, these were the rout, these were they that led, and dragged, and drew Jesus (as it were) by the hair of his head; these were they that took hold of the chains, and pulled him forwards, and showed him in triumph to this bloody Annas; nay, these were the Judas, Jews, Annas, and all: Oh! that ever I should lodge within me such an heart, that should lodge in it such sins, such betrayers, such murderers of Jesus Christ.³⁰

The same is the case in the historical moment where Jesus asks Peter for the third time whether he loves Him. Without any interruption, announcement, or explanation, Ambrose applies this directly to the believing reader: “Nay, art thou not grieved that Christ should ask the third time for thy love?”³¹

In this context, it is also understandable that this approach to the Bible is related to preaching the Word of God. Sermons should be full of the warmth of Christ’s presence:

Oh that our sermons were warming sermons! May we not fear that the Spirit is gone, whilst the people are dead, and we are no more lively in our ministry? It is said of Luther, That when he heard one preach very faintly, preaching, here is no heat at all to be gotten.” Oh? when

29. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 5.1.4.4.

30. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (third part) 1.6.4.

31. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (fourth part) 2.6.

the Spirit comes, it comes with a tongue of fire; instead of words, sparks of fire will fall from us on the hearts of hearers.³²

How does this relate to the Westminster Confession? The theologians of the Westminster Confession are emphatically in the line of the Reformation, as evidenced by the scriptural principle they employ. The scriptural teaching in the first article leaves no room for misunderstanding that the authority of Scripture precedes everything else and that the entire content of faith is carried by this authority. This may give the impression that objective Scripture is isolated from the life of faith. In Ambrose, it appears that Scripture functions as the *viva vox Christi* (the living voice of Christ), right in the middle of the life of faith. For him, the objectivity of Scripture is not an end point, but a starting point, because the person of Christ speaks to us in a living voice in the form of Scripture.

We see a comparable relationship in Christology. Formally, Ambrose agrees with Westminster, because in Westminster also the human hypostasis of the divine Son is acknowledged. Both Westminster and Ambrose agree with orthodox Christology. But in the working out of the details, we see great distinctions and differences with their implications for spirituality.

The accent in the Westminster Confession is on soteriology. In chapter 8 of that Confession, complete redemption accomplished by Christ is clarified—He is also a mediator of application. So, Christology and accomplishment are combined in one chapter. This means also that this confession is characterized by great emphasis on the application of redemption and the order of salvation. The themes of effectual calling, justification, adoption, sanctification, saving faith, repentance unto life, good works, perseverance of the saints, and assurance of grace and salvation are distinguished and separated from Christology.

The extensive treatment of the benefits for the believer in the Westminster Confession coheres with the covenant structure of this confession, which makes it necessary to treat the human party in the covenant. In this context it is revealing that the concept of mystical union is missing in the Westminster Confession. This means that the benefits of grace are described from the viewpoint of the regenerated man, while it is clear in Ambrose's work that believers have these benefits "in" Christ.

The distinction between Christ and His benefits can help to clarify that the soteriological character of faith is at stake. It is well known that

32. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (fifth part) 1.9.6.

the speculative theology of the Middle Ages could say much about Christ's essence and His natures, without soteriological relevance. In contrast to the speculative interest in Christ's person, theologians of the Reformation underlined the soteriological character of Christian faith.³³ We see this in the first edition of Melancthon's *Loci Communes*.³⁴ The Wittenberg theologian equates knowledge of Christ with knowing His benefits.

The weak point of this approach, however, could be that Christology is completely functionalized or instrumentalized and that Christ is identified solely in terms of His benefits. The sharp distinction between accomplishment and application could give rise to an instrumentalization of Christology. In the case of an instrumentalized Christology, Christ is only the accomplisher of benefits for sinners, while an intimate personal relationship with Christ is lacking. Spirituality will then be focused more on the spiritual position of the believer than on the knowledge of the person of Christ.

To avoid this functionalization of Christology, the Heidelberg Catechism provides a nuanced distinction between Christ and His benefits by distinguishing between the ingrafting in Christ and the reception of His benefits.³⁵ Also, in the Puritan tradition we are conscious of various efforts to focus attention on the person of Christ.³⁶ The words of John "Rabbi" Duncan help our reflection:

We make far too little of the Incarnation; the Fathers knew much more of the incarnated God. Some of them were oftener at Bethlehem than

33. Compare Luther in his explanation of Psalm 51 (WA 40.I, 328): "The true subject of theology is the man who stands under the accusation of sin, and God, who justifies and saves the sinful man.... Thus this is the essential theological knowing—that the man knows himself."

34. Philip Melancthon, *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, Corpus Reformatorum Series I (Halle: Saale, 1834 sqq) 21.85. Luther (WA 1,362) said, in his twentieth thesis of the Heidelberg Theses in 1518, that true theology and knowledge of God exist in the crucified Christ. In his commentary on John 4:10, Calvin (CO 47, 80) remarks that we know Christ only if we know the gifts of the Father.

35. See Willem van Vlastuin, "The Promise of *unio mystica*: An Inquiry into the Functioning of a Spiritual-Theological Concept in the Heidelberg Catechism," in *Spirituality of the Heidelberg Catechism*, ed. Arnold Huijgen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2015), 168–185.

36. In the Puritan tradition, the glory of Christ's person was an explicit theme. Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth*, 202–14. See also, Beeke, *A Puritan Theology*, 154–59. Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) called the practice of loving Jesus because of His benefits "the love of a whore." *Letters of Samuel Rutherford* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), 72–73.

at Calvary; they had too little of Calvary, but they knew Bethlehem well. They took up the Holy Babe in their arms; they loved Immanuel, God with us. We [can never be] too often at the cross, but we are too seldom at the cradle; and we know too little of the Word made flesh, of the Holy Child Jesus.³⁷

We can conclude that Duncan's remark cannot be applied to Isaac Ambrose. Looking at his relationship with Bernard and theologians of the early church, we see that he was not only rooted in the theology of the cross of the Reformation, but he was also rooted in the theology of the cradle of the early church. We can also say that the latter theology was the window to relate to the theology of the Reformation in his *Looking unto Jesus*. This qualitative remark is quantitatively confirmed by the fact that Ambrose refers more to Augustine and Bernard than to Luther and Calvin.³⁸

The Heavenly Christ

Luther is well known as a theologian of the cross.³⁹ Calvin was more sensitive to the heavenly glory of Christ. In this respect, Ambrose joins the Calvinistic tradition. Looking in the table of contents, it is remarkable how large the part about the heavenly Christ is in *Looking unto Jesus*. The chapters about Christ's ascension and intercession together make up sixteen percent of the entire book. While the description of the ascension is comparably short, the great accent is on the spiritual meaning of Christ's ascension and His work as ascended Lord.

This emphasis on the heavenly Christ and His work is, on the one hand, related to the history of salvation; namely, that the Christ to whom we are related in this dispensation has risen and is active on the right hand of His Father. There is a definite new position in Christ's existence, because Christ did not have this kingdom before as God-man.⁴⁰ On the other hand, the focus on the heavenly Christ is an indication of the spirituality of Ambrose. Christ's glory is an important aspect in Ambrose's spirituality.

37. Alexander Moody Stuart, *Recollections of the Late John Duncan, LL.D. Professor Of Hebrew And Oriental Languages, New College, Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1872), 167.

38. In *Looking unto Jesus*, Ambrose refers once to Calvin, four times to Aquinas, eight times to Goodwin, ten times to Luther, seventeen times to Bernard, and twenty-one times to Augustine.

39. See Carl R. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015).

40. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (fifth part).1.5.

Furthermore, it is important for Ambrose that Christ's work is continuing in heaven. Without Christ's continuing work in heaven, His sacrifice at the cross would be without effect: "So all that ever Christ did or suffered upon earth, had been ineffectual unto us, had he not entered into heaven."⁴¹ This is a great designation of the unity of Christ's accomplishment and application.

Christ's presence in heaven on behalf of His people on earth is depicted in a personal way. Ambrose is not only talking about Christ's intercession, Christ's love, and Christ's compassion in heaven, but he also introduces Jesus as speaking to and pleading with the Father, so that the reader witnesses the encounter between Father and Son: "I do have your company, but I must have theirs as well."⁴² So, Christ pleads with His Father to have His complete body of the elect with Him. He loves His church, He cannot miss her, and He is in love with her. The terms Ambrose uses remind us of the theological concept of *totus Christus*, implying that Christ is not complete without His body:

Behold how the joy of the bridegroom is over his bride on the wedding day (...) so is Christ's joy over His saints on the last then, then begins that joy, which shall not end in all eternity (...) Christ as Mediator is not fully perfect until all His members are united with Him in glory; as we say that the head lacks an arm, or hand, or leg, so it is a kind of spiritual lameness when Christ our Head does not have all His members with Him.⁴³

So, it is understandable that Christ as a person is completely dedicated to His church on earth, and that He is still compassionate toward them. While the glory of Christ's heavenly position might give the impression that Christ had lost awareness of the brokenness of earthly reality, Ambrose assures us of the contrary:

Surely there's a violence of heavenly passion in Christ's heart, as God-man, which makes him to break out into prayer to God, and into compassions towards men. O that tempted souls would consider this! It may be Christ is giving you a cup of tears and blood to drink, but who knows what bowels, what turning of heart, what motions of compassion, are in Jesus Christ all the while? Those who feel the fruit

41. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (sixth part) 1.7.

42. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (sixth part) 1.8.

43. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 5.2.3.

of Christ's intercession, know this; and cannot but subscribe to this truth. O ye of little faith, why do ye doubt of Christ's bowels? Is he not our compassionate high-priest? he is touched, saith the apostle, with the feeling of infirmities; it is an allusion to the rolled and moved bowels of God, in Jeremiah xxxi. 20. Christ in heaven is burning and flaming in compassion towards his weak ones; and therefore he pleads, intercedes, and prays to God for them.⁴⁴

We perceive also a theological reflection upon the relationship between Christology and pneumatology when Ambrose unites Christ's intercession in heaven and the intercession of the Spirit in us. The effect of Christ's intercession is the groaning of the Spirit in the soul of believers. This leads to a holy unity between the praying Christ, the praying Spirit, and the praying Christian:

If Christ's intercession is mine, then is the Spirit's intercession mine: in this case we need not ascend up into heaven to learn the truth, rather let us descend into our own hearts, and look whether Christ hath given us of his Spirit, which makes us cry unto God with sighs and groans which cannot be uttered; O come and let us ransack our own consciences; let us search whether we feel the Spirit of Christ crying in us, "Abba Father": Certainly these two are as the cause and the effect: Christ's intercession in heaven, and his Spirit's intercession, are as twins of a birth! Or rather, Christ's intercession in heaven breeds another intercession in the hearts of his saints.⁴⁵

The reverse is that experience of the groaning Spirit in us assures us of the burning heart of the heavenly Christ for us:

O my soul, hath God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into thy heart? Hast thou the indwelling of the Spirit; and now by the help of the Spirit canst thou pray with earnestness, confidence, and an holy importunity? Canst thou cry, "Abba, Father"? Canst thou cry with earnestness, with confidence, Father? and "Abba, Father," (or Father, Father,) with an holy importunity? These are the signs of the Spirit's intercession (...) Surely this is the fruit, the effect, of Christ's intercession, and therefore thou mayest comfortably conclude, "Christ's intercession is mine." If I feel a holy disposition to pray and intercede

44. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (sixth part) 1.7.4. Thomas Goodwin's most popular book was related to this reality, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven Towards Sinners on Earth* (1651).

45. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (sixth part) 2.4.1.

for others, especially for the distresses of the church of God, then is Christ's intercession mine. We should, as near as we may, in everything conform to Christ; and this conformity is an evidence of our interest in Christ: O my soul, go down into the inmost closet of thy heart, look what disposition there is in it towards the members of Christ; and thou mayest conclude; there is in Christ's heart the very same disposition towards thee.⁴⁶

How is this heavenly-mindedness related to the Westminster Confession? The first observation is that the heavenly Christ is not an explicit theme in the Confession. The second observation is that we do find the heavenly Christ in chapter 8.4. Expressing that Christ rose in the same body in which He suffered, the Westminster Confession explains further about this body "with which also He ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of His Father, making intercession."

We see that Ambrose acts within the framework of the Westminster Confession, but the significance of the ascended Christ is much greater in Ambrose. In the Heidelberg Catechism, Christ's ascension has an important place, seen in questions 46–49. However, there is a great difference with Ambrose. While Ambrose treats the fact of the ascension quite briefly, in the Heidelberg Catechism three of these four questions are dedicated to the ascension. We can understand that in the Lutheran context of Heidelberg, it was necessary to relate to Luther's view of the ubiquitousness or omnipresence of Christ's body to account for his doctrine of consubstantiation with regard to the Lord's Supper.

Ambrose's accent on the heavenly Christ reminds us more of the Belgic Confession, in which one article, article 24, is explicitly dedicated to Christ's intercession. In this article we read the warm language of the comfort in Jesus's humanity in heaven and His intercession for His people on earth. Also, in the Westminster Larger Catechism, questions 53–55, we find the spiritual meaning of Christ's ascension and intercession. It seems that the Heidelberg Catechism has more emphasis on spirituality than the Westminster Confession. If we understand this as characteristic for a confessional document, it implies that spirituality and theology, head and heart, are distinguished and even separated from each other.⁴⁷ It can also

46. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (sixth part) 2.4.1–2.

47. According to Philip Sheldrake, this unity of heart and head is broken after the late Middle Ages. *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004), 33–64. See also Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation:*

be asked whether it is not necessary to explain doctrinally the relationship between Christology and pneumatology.

We can conclude that the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Westminster Larger Catechism make the spiritual meaning of the heavenly Christ explicit, but that the Westminster Confession lacks this focus on the spiritual meaning of Christ's ascension and intercession, while Ambrose explores this spiritual meaning of Christ in heaven.

Visio beatifica

In the history of the church, much consideration is given to texts in the Bible that speak about seeing God, such as Job 19:27, Matthew 5:8, 1 Corinthians 13:12, and 1 John 3:2. Calvin understood the seeing of God in heaven as seeing His essence.⁴⁸ Paul's words in 1 Tim. 6:16 about God dwelling in an inaccessible light problematizes the direct seeing of God in the eschaton. Most theologians understood the *visio beatifica* (beatific vision) as a seeing of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Texts as John 1:14, 1:18, 14:8, and 2 Corinthians 4:6 gave the biblical foundation to this approach. Which place did Ambrose take in this tradition?

It is important to understand that, according to Ambrose, there is a continuity between seeing by faith in this life and the seeing of God face to face in the eschaton. So, Ambrose did not make a contradiction between seeing by faith and the immediate seeing of God, because the beginnings of the eschatological seeing of God are already present in this dispensation:

Consider that looking unto Jesus is the work of heaven; "it is begun in this life, (saith Bernard), but it is perfected in that life to come;" not only angels, but the saints; in glory do ever behold the face of God and Christ; if then we like not "this work, how will we live in heaven? The dislike of this duty is a bar against our entrance; for the life of blessedness is a life of vision; surely if we take no delight in this, heaven is no place."⁴⁹

Does this imply that there is an immediacy in faith? Ambrose reasons along the lines of Ephesians 1:18 that believers have an enlightened eye of their

The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 52–83. J. I. Packer offers a concept to unite heart, head, and hands in *A Passion for Holiness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1992), 167–70.

48. Hans Boersma, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 271–78.

49. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 1.3.7.11.

intellect to see God in Jesus. Also, in heaven, God's people do not see God in Christ in His glorified humanity with their bodily eyes, but with the eyes of their mind. Only in the second coming of Jesus, they will see God in Christ also with the eyes of their glorified bodies.⁵⁰

The pivotal point in understanding Ambrose's theological spirituality is the insight that the present seeing of Jesus with the intellectual eyes of faith is effective in our souls. Not only are our minds filled with knowledge, but by looking unto Jesus our affections are warmed.

That Christ gives a sincere and inward love of himself unto their hearts. No sooner is their eye of faith looking unto Jesus, but presently their heart is all on fire. Such a suitableness is betwixt Christ and their souls, as is between the hearts of lovers; their love to Christ is like the love of Jonathan to David, a wonderful love, and "passing the love of women," 2 Sam. 1:26. They love him as the bridegroom to whom their souls are married, as the choicest pearl by whom they are enriched, as the sun of consolation, by whose beams their souls are comforted, as the fountain by whom their hearts are refreshed, and their desires every way satisfied.⁵¹

It is necessary that the spiritual knowledge of Christ has effect on the whole of our souls. This means that looking unto Jesus is more than a bare intellectual and speculative knowledge. Therefore, Ambrose is also careful in distinguishing between common and general emotions on the one hand, and the effective affections of the saving work of the Spirit:

When it is not done to purpose, as if our look to Christ, makes us not like Christ; a man may give a thousand glances every day towards Christ, yet if there be no effectual impression upon the heart, Christ takes it, as if he had never looked towards him at all.⁵²

This important distinction raises the issue of testing our affections, because there can be many affections that are not saving. The Devil can believe the message of Christ's resurrection, but that is not experimental faith.⁵³ Characteristic of saving affections is the spiritual effect of the affections, namely that our souls are directed heavenward.

50. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 1.3.1.1. See also, 5.1.10.; Cf. Schwanda, *Soul Recreation*, 156; Boersma, *Seeing God*, 319–20.

51. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 1.3.6.10. See also 1.3.2 and 4.2.2.

52. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 1.3.3.1.1. See also the whole of 1.3.3 and 4 (third part) 3.1.

53. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (fourth part) 2.5.

Certainly affections in holy administrations with delight and joy, maybe in those, who, yet have no true grace; so it may be, that the novelty and strangeness of a doctrine may much affect and delight; or the nature of the doctrine, as it is comfortable, without any respect to spiritual operations, may exceedingly affect, or the minister's abilities, because of his parts, eloquence, elocution, affectionate utterance, may much delight and stir up the hearers' affections; fine head-notions may produce some affectionate heart motions; but what symptom of grace in all this? The sign therefore I lay down of my propriety in Christ's intercessions is not every sweet motion, or every excited affection, but that which is holy, spiritual, heavenly, saving; I may discern much of this, if I will but look into the grounds and effects of my excited or stirred-up affections, if the ground thereof be fetched from heaven, and in their effect they tend towards heaven, if they wean my heart from the world, if they elevate and raise up my affections to things above, if they form, and frame my conversation heavenwards, then may I be assured these motions and affection are of the right stamp, for all such motions are but sparks of that heavenly fire, the fame whereof is mindful of its own original; they are the fruit of Christ, and they go back to Christ, they work towards their centre, they tend towards the place from whence they came.⁵⁴

We may notice that the fruits of practical life are not mentioned. Ambrose can express the effect of looking unto Jesus in other spiritual dimensions, but also, in his alternative expression, the accent is on the effects upon the heart:

Would you know wherein lies the power of Christ? I answer, In casting down the strongholds of sin, in overthrowing Satan, in humbling men's hearts, in sanctifying their souls, in purifying their consciences, in bringing their thoughts to the obedience of Christ, in making them able to endure afflictions, in causing them to grow and increase in all heavenly graces; and this power we partake of, who rightly and experimentally look up to Christ.⁵⁵

After the commencement of eternal life in this life and renewal in the image of Christ, Christians are prepared for heaven. When Christ's plan of history is fulfilled, Christ will return. According to Ambrose, Christ will step

54. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (sixth part) 2.4.2.

55. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 1.3.5. Perhaps Ambrose wants to distinguish saving faith with the virtues of philosophers and civil people, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (fourth part) 2.4.

back in His coming back as mediator. He will deliver His kingdom to His Father; God will not reign through Christ's humanity, but by Himself. Then, the glory of Christ's divine nature will be revealed more clearly, so that God's people will see Him as God all in all:

For this essential divine glory. Divine glory, it is that glory which Christ hath as God: this he never laid aside, but as the sun in a dark gloomy day may not send forth his beams, so Christ the Sun of righteousness, in the time of his abode upon earth, (except a little glimpse only in his transfiguration), did not set forth his glorious beams; but hereafter the body or humanity of Christ shall not hinder the breaking forth of all his divine glory. No sooner the Son is subjected, and his mediatory office discharged, but Christ as God, will manifestly put forth his more immediate glory to all his saints, "Behold now, we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is", 1 John 3:2.⁵⁶

Although the beatific vision implies the direct knowledge of Christ as the divine Son, this does not mean that His human nature is laid down. This appears from Ambrose's description of the beatific vision:

There is a mental vision, a sight of Christ by the eyes of our understandings; and surely this exceeds the former, the eye of the body is only on the body of Christ, but the eye of the soul is on the body and soul, on the humanity and Deity of Jesus Christ. This is the very top of heaven, when saints shall have been lightened with a clear and glorious sight of Christ as God; divines usually call it, "Beatifical vision."⁵⁷

The reference to 1 John 3:2 in the previous quotation raises the issue about our deification. Ambrose can write in quite an open-minded way about his interpretation of this text and 2 Peter 1:4, saying, "It was the great promise of the Old Testament, that Christ should partake of our human nature, and it was the great promise of the New Testament, that we should partake of his divine nature."⁵⁸ It seems that Ambrose interprets this deification pneumatologically:

56. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 5.1.10. see also 5.1.8–9. It seems that Boersma accents too much that the saints will see God in Christ. I think that Ambrose underlines more the divine essence of Christ than God in Christ. Boersma, *Seeing God*, 320–21.

57. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 5.1.10.

58. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4 (fifth part) 1.8. See also 4 (first part) 1.5: "And as this conjunction is immediately made with his human nature, so thereby we are also united

Awake, awake, O my soul, awake, awake, utter a song!" tell over these passages, That God is come down into the world, that God is come down in the flesh, that God is come down in flesh in order to thy reconciliation; that God is come down in the likeness of man, that he may bring thee up into the likeness of God, and that all these are but the first openings of the grace, and goodness, and glory of God in Christ to thy soul: and oh what work will these make in thy soul, if the Spirit come in who is the Comforter!⁵⁹

How does this relate to the Westminster Confession? The differences between the Westminster Confession and Ambrose are great. First, the Westminster Confession does not speak or refer directly to the beatific vision. The only indirect reference can be found in the expression that the saints in heaven behold "God's face" in chapter 32.1 and the "presence of the Lord" in chapter 33.2.

Second, while Ambrose's understanding of personal renewal is characterized by continuity between sanctification and glorification, this relationship is very implicit in the Westminster Confession. In chapter 13.2 we read about sanctification as "imperfect in this life;" also, in 16.4 and 16.6 we read the qualification of "this life," and in 16.2 we read that good works as God's workmanship are created in Christ Jesus with eternal life as "the end." In an implicit way, we can understand these expressions as the continuity between sanctification and glorification.

Third, Ambrose understands sanctification as the beginning of glorification, which means that glorification is the theological starting point of sanctification. This means that Ambrose understands the Christian life in its eschatological perspective and that this perspective is determinative for the interpretation of sanctification. In the Westminster Confession, this approach is reversed. Ambrose approaches from union with Christ, while the Westminster approaches from the regeneration of man.

Fourth, Ambrose describes the Christian life especially as an affective life, while the Westminster Confession focuses on the ethical dimension of the Christian life. This makes Ambrose more mystical and spiritual, while the Westminster is characterized by external, practical Christianity. We can also say that Ambrose's spirituality is more characterized by

to the divine nature, 2 Pet. 1:4. Yea, the person of the believer is indissolubly united to the glorious person of the Son of God."

59. Ambrose, *Looking unto Jesus* 4.2.7.

heavenly-mindedness, while the Westminster Confession is more focused on perseverance in the struggle on earth.

Fifth, because in Ambrose's theological concept the beatific vision is an important pivotal point, we see in his work a reflection on the relationship between Christ's divine and human nature in heaven, and Christ's position as mediator. These reflections are absent in the Westminster Confession. The Confession focuses on the details of judgment, resurrection, and eternal life, while Ambrose is interested in the content of eternal life.

Conclusions and Considerations

What is the conclusion of this comparison between the Westminster Confession and *Looking unto Jesus*? First, we can conclude that there are great differences between the Westminster Confession and Ambrose within the framework of a theological and doctrinal agreement. These differences between Westminster and Ambrose cannot be interpreted by the metaphor of the skeleton and the flesh, in which the skeleton represents the theological system and the flesh represents the corresponding spiritual experience. The differences between the confession and Ambrose cannot be divided between the theological and the spiritual dimensions, because those differences also concern theological issues. Apparently, doctrinal agreement provides room for different theological and spiritual emphases.

Second, we can conclude that Ambrose's theological concepts are directly related to spiritual life, and that his understanding of spiritual life is determined by the personal, intimate knowledge of and relationship with Jesus. His focus on personal happiness is directly related to this personal interpretation of spiritual life. This means that Ambrose's theology serves his understanding of the spirituality of the personal relationship with Jesus. While the Westminster Confession focuses on the soteriological earnestness to be saved, the order of salvation in believers, the benefits they receive, the responsibilities they have, the conflicts that they experience, and the obedience to which they are obliged, Ambrose's spiritual theology is focused on the person of Jesus and the relationship with Him. Without contrasting these approaches as such, we can contrast their spiritual directions. While the Westminster Confession is benefit oriented, Ambrose is person oriented.

Third, Ambrose's person-oriented theology accounts for specific accents in his theology, for example, with regard to the offer of grace. Ambrose reasons that sinners have boldness to come to Jesus because God's Son has become incarnate in our nature. Another example is the value of Christ's

offer. Because Christ is a person of infinite worth, His satisfaction is of infinite value, to comfort sinners that they are definitively right with God and may be assured that Christ's satisfaction for sin is greater than their guilt. Furthermore, the person-oriented theology of Ambrose is a potent remedy against the functionalizing and instrumentalizing of Christology. Another aspect of person-oriented theology is the sensitiveness for the heavenly Christ, His intercession, and His desire to have His bride present with Him. These dimensions are not present in the Westminster Confession.

Fourth, Ambrose's person-oriented theology gives another perspective to the Christian life. The affective and eschatological character of the Christian life is directly related to consciousness of the personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Consciousness that the Christian life is the beginning of glorification, and its openness to deification, is related to this personal relationship.

My conclusion is not that the Westminster Confession and *Looking unto Jesus* should be contrasted with each other. Neither the Westminster theologians nor Ambrose would have agreed with this reciprocal exclusion. However, the comparison between the Westminster Confession and Ambrose can serve to raise our consciousness of the differences between these theologies and spiritualities. In part, these differences can be related to the different character of these writings. The Westminster Confession is a doctrinal document, while *Looking unto Jesus* is devotional in nature. Ambrose wrote his *Looking unto Jesus* after recovery from serious illness, while Westminster was written by a committee in a careful process of seeking theological balance and uniting different wings of Christian orthodoxy. But this difference of character does not completely account for the variances between the two works. The different character of these writings could explain different accents, but we see also different theological and spiritual concepts in Ambrose. Further research can investigate how unique Ambrose's concepts are and what possible reasons can be offered for the use of those concepts.

In the context of this article, it is enough to acknowledge and to be conscious of the spiritual difference between the Westminster Confession and Ambrose's *Looking unto Jesus*. This consciousness can help us to use both writings to enrich our theology and spirituality. In this way, the contrast between theology and spirituality can be reduced, so that our theology is spiritual and our spirituality is theological, and the unity between heart and head is promoted. Our theology will be served by a spiritual consciousness, which enriches the experience of theological realities, and which has

the potential to uncover new theological perspectives. On the other hand, the affectionate spirituality of Ambrose in this particular book (as in other writings of Ambrose) can be enriched by the consciousness of conflicts and wrestlings with the old nature, the duty to be obedient, and the practical responsibility for the church and public life that is expressed in the Westminster Confession and other writings of Ambrose, such as his *War with Devils*.