

The Use of Scripture and the Spiritual Journey in Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*

Recent studies of medieval mysticism have paid little attention to how the mystics articulate Scripture's role in undergirding and guiding the spiritual journey. This conspicuous silence can be partially remedied by a careful explication of the biblical hermeneutic of Walter Hilton, a 14th c. English Augustinian canon and mystic whose interpretation theory fruitfully illustrates the critical dialectic that often exists between exegesis and spiritual growth.

The few commentators on Walter Hilton who discuss his use of Scripture do so briefly, frequently saying little more than that his writings are, in the words of Evelyn Underhill, "saturated" with scriptural references¹). His use of Scripture is most often described as "typical" of 14th c. English mystical writers — although a few scholars, like Helen Gardner, observe that Hilton seems to surpass other 14th c. English mystics in his frequent use of biblical quotations²). While Walter Hilton's adept interweaving of scriptural motifs throughout his major middle-English work *The Scale of Perfection* may be typical in the sense that most medieval writers referred to Scripture frequently, I will suggest here that an understanding of precisely how he used Scripture is essential to comprehending Hilton's particular form of spiritual guidance.

This paper explores Scripture's critical role in Hilton's analysis of the believer's mystical journey to love and knowledge of God: the Bible not only provides resources and encouragement for the process, but,

¹) WALTER HILTON, *The Scale of Perfection by Walter Hilton, Canon of Thurgarton*, ed. Evelyn Underhill (London: John M. Watkins, 1923), xix.

²) Helen L. GARDNER, "Walter Hilton and the Mystical Tradition in England", in: *Essays and Studies of the English Association* 22 (1936): 107. One notable exception to the general neglect of Hilton's scriptural ties appears in Janel MUELLER's recent book, *The Native Tongue and the Word*. She argues convincingly, and rightly, I think, that the central features of Hilton's style "can be traced and accounted for by relation to the two prominent Biblical sources used in the *Scale* — the affective and introspective portions of Paul's Epistles, and the lyrical and gnomic books of the Old Testament and especially the Psalter" (Janel MUELLER, *The Native Tongue and the Word: Developments in English Prose Style 1380-1580* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1984], 60). Mueller, however, does not discuss Hilton's analysis of spiritual growth which is my explicit concern here.

even more, a growth in scriptural understanding accompanies spiritual progress. Growing closeness to God includes a deepening perception of Scripture's four-fold meaning. Beginners on the spiritual journey are comforted by the literal meaning of Scripture; the moral meaning of Scripture guides their personal reformation, eventually enabling them to recognize the Bible's allegorical meaning which reveals the church- and God-centered nature of reality; and, finally, the heavenly or anagogical meaning yields a special sustenance to those advanced in contemplation.

This paper will explore the significance of the particular ordering of the four types of scriptural interpretation in Hilton. The step-by-step progression of the human person in relationship to God correlates, first, with an appreciation for the literal meaning of the Bible, then with recognition of the moral meaning, and finally with an understanding of the allegorical and anagogical meanings of Scripture. As Henri de Lubac points out, medieval authors quite frequently listed moral interpretation third in the interpretive process; and mystical, or allegorical interpretation, second (in Augustine and Cassian, e.g.)³). As I will indicate, though, the progression here from literal, to tropological, to mystical interpretation — typical of Origen and Jerome and adopted by many of the 12th c. Cistercians, who were important sources for Hilton — better fits Hilton's understanding of spiritual psychology.

The *Scale* (or at least the first of its two books) is addressed specifically to a recluse, an anchoress committed to pursuing the contemplative life, but more generally the work serves as a spiritual guide for cultivating believers' relationships with God. Like Augustine, Hilton maintains that humans are naturally oriented toward God: "for [the soul] nothing may suffice as rest but God alone"⁴). However, since the relationship to God was damaged by the fall, persons must experience a process of restoration to God before resting in God. The *Scale*

³) Henri DE LUBAC, *Exégèse Médiévale: Les Quatre Sens de L'Ecriture* (Aubier: Editions Moutaigne, 1959), 139-149, 177-187 (regarding Augustine), 198-219 (regarding Origen).

⁴) WALTER HILTON, *The Stairway of Perfection*, trans. M.L. DEL MASTRO (New York: Image Books, 1979), Book 2, chapter 14, page 220 (hereafter *SP*, 2.14; 220). (For Middle-English texts see Barbara E. WYKES, "Edition of Book I of 'The Scale of Perfection' by Walter Hilton" [Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1957], and S.S. HUSSEY, "An Edition from the Manuscripts of Book II of Walter Hilton's 'Scale of Perfection'" [Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1962]). — cf. AUGUSTINE, *Conf.* I, 1, 1. CCL 27, 1: "... fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te".

of Perfection describes the process by which the human person grows and moves toward God.

I

Our Augustinian canon charts progress in relationship to God in two different ways: first, in Book 1, according to three stages of contemplation⁵), and second, in Book 2, according to whether one is reformed in faith, reformed in faith and experience, or reformed in experience alone. Although the three modes of reforming do not correlate exactly with the three levels of contemplation, there are significant similarities between the two modes of charting our progress. The first stage of contemplation, attainable through reason, human teaching, and the study of Scripture, corresponds to a stage of gaining knowledge of God and spiritual things. Special grace is not necessary for this first stage of contemplation which can be achieved by anyone, even curious non-believers. In Book 2 Hilton describes the first stage as a stage of faith in which those reformed in faith "believe without spiritual experience in the forgiveness of sins"⁶). Although still battling the image of sin within themselves, they, now aided by grace, have confidence in their own reforming. Baptism removes original sin, and in the stage of reformation in faith the sacrament of Penance removes the actual sin hindering progress toward God⁷).

Intention plays a crucial role here⁸). If believers can confirm through introspection that they are firmly committed to keeping God's commandments (that, e.g., they are thoroughly turned away from mortal sin), that they have contritely confessed their infringements of God's commandments and have no intentions of repeating them, then they are reformed to God's image⁹). Although they may falter again,

⁵) cf. J.P.H. CLARK, Action and Contemplation in Walter Hilton, in: *The Downside Review* 97, n° 239 (1979) 258-274.

⁶) SP 2.11; 215; SP 2.10; 209; SP 2.7; 227.

⁷) "It is necessary that a soul first believe his own reforming, accomplished through the sacrament of Penance (even though he doesn't see it), and that he fully dispose himself to live justly and virtuously as his faith demands, in order that he may afterward come to this sight and this reforming in experience" (SP 2.11; 215). This seems to prefigure Luther's concept of the human person as *simul justus et peccator*.

⁸) cf. J.P.H. CLARK, Intention in Walter Hilton, in: *The Downside Review* 97, n° 326 (1979) 69-80.

⁹) cf. J.P.H. CLARK, Image and Likeness in Walter Hilton, in: *The Downside Review* 97, n° 328 (1979) 204-220.

occasional weakness will not disrupt their more basic desire to seek God. Even if they are in mortal sin and want to escape it, they must love themselves not as they are, but "as they want to be"¹⁰). Hilton advises the faithful to act as much as possible "as if" they are already reformed to God's image, assuming that with commitment, practice will begin to reflect belief.

The primary meaning of Scripture relevant to these early stages is the literal meaning: "By literal interpretation, which is the easiest and plainest, human nature is comforted"¹¹). Hilton commonly appeals to Scripture as providing models or exemplars, people like ourselves through whom we can understand something of the personal struggles of God's dedicated followers¹²). Although he draws from a wide selection of biblical texts, both from the Old and New Testaments, he does have, as was quite common, a definite preference for the Psalms, or the "writings of David", and a preference for the "writings of Paul". He appeals to David and Paul consistently to support his description of the soul's journey to God; while Jesus is the ultimate goal according to which we ought to model ourselves, David and Paul are intermediate models, people to identify with and who can offer extended examples of human persons' relationships to God¹³).

Frequently, Hilton refers to the words of David and Paul comforting the faithful. For example, in speaking of the image of the earthly human or of internal sin, Hilton writes:

Paul bore this image, often with great difficulty, for it was so burdensome to him that he cried out concerning it "O quis me liberabit de corpore mortis?" (Romans 7:24). Ah, who shall deliver me from this body (and image) of death? Then he *comforted* himself (and others too), saying, "Gratia Dei per Jesum Christum" (Romans 7:25). The grace of God through Jesus Christ¹⁴). (emphasis mine)

Hilton speaks of God in these early stages as "sending spiritual food"¹⁵), comfort in the form of Scripture's literal sense. Hilton also

¹⁰) *SP* 1.70; 159; cf. AUGUSTINE, *S.* 9.9. CCL 41,126: "... odit te dues qualis es, sed amat te talem qualem te esse vult... incipe primo bene velle et odisse te qualis es". *S.* 269, 15, 18. PL 38, 926: "Semper tibi displiceat quod es, si vis pervenire ad id quod nondum es".

¹¹) *SP* 2.43; 329.

¹²) E.g., *SP* 1.47; 127.

¹³) *Ibid.*

¹⁴) *SP*, 1.27; 95.

¹⁵) *SP*, 2.29; 271.

proposes Scripture-based prayer as crucial for the beginning stages of the journey to God: "The reason you pray is to make yourself able and ready, like a clean container, to receive the grace our Lord will freely give you"¹⁶). The most basic prayer is prayer derived from the Bible, and spoken according to set patterns, the Our Father, and the Divine Office¹⁷).

II

The second stage of contemplation (for which grace is necessary), consists principally in affection, the experience of finding more delight in praising and thanking God than in doing anything else¹⁸). Or, the next step in the process of reformation can be understood as the beginning stages of experiencing what was previously known by faith alone. The heart of the *Scale* concerns the movement from stage 1 to stage 2 of contemplation, that is, from knowledge of God to affection for God, from faith to experience. This happens when the intellectual pursuit of virtues is transformed into affective pursuit, when believers "love virtue because it is good in itself"¹⁹). Christological issues emerge: the faithful are conformed first to the image of Jesus the paradigmatic human person (or "Jesus the man", as Hilton calls him) when they develop virtues and particularly the twin virtues of meekness and charity. Meekness leads one to recognize that alone one is nothing; the corresponding virtue love then strengthens the perception of human nature's God-orientedness. In saying "I covet nothing but One, and that is Jesus", charity fills the emptiness left by the retreat of stark self-centeredness with the love of Jesus. Restoration of the image of Jesus the human person constituted by virtues defeats the image of sin, the "false, misruled love" of the self²⁰) constituted by vices. Hilton's parallelism is clear: to each vice constitutive of the image of sin there is juxtaposed a virtue constitutive of the image of Jesus²¹).

Hilton describes the alternative step of reforming in faith and experience in a similar way. In this stage, attained with special grace over a long period of time, Christians no longer perceive the image of

¹⁶) *SP*, 1.27; 95.

¹⁷) *Ibid*.

¹⁸) *SP*, 1.4; 66.

¹⁹) *SP*, 1.4; 74.

²⁰) *SP*, 1.78; 170.

²¹) *SP*, 1.86; 179.

sin within themselves²²). They experience the replacement of vices by virtues, the result of long spiritual labor aided by grace. This second level involves also a developing relationship to Jesus. At the first stage they loved Jesus through faith alone, "without grace-filled imagination or the spiritual knowing of God"²³). As believers progress and are reformed in faith and experience they begin to love Jesus "through faith and by imagining Jesus in His manhood"²⁴). Love arises from the experience of a deepening understanding of Jesus.

[T]his soul sees [God] in his understanding so that he is comforted and enlightened by the gift of the Holy Spirit with a wonderful reverence and a secret burning love, with spiritual savor and delight... This sight and this knowing of Jesus, with the blessed love that these give rise to, may be called the reforming of the soul in faith and experience, which I have spoken about²⁵).

Eventually, in this second stage individuals begin to contemplate Jesus spiritually as God and not simply as human: "he reverences God in man as Essential Truth, stands in awe of Him as Power, and loves Him as Goodness"²⁶). Here believers have progressed beyond reformation in faith — now in addition to believing the truth, they have come to understand something of Jesus as God. Although it is reforming in experience, to some extent it is still also reforming in faith because believers still lack the fullness of knowledge attainable only after this life²⁷).

In explaining the means for obtaining virtues Hilton suggests Holy Scripture, holy teachings, meditation, and prayer as resources to encourage and aid the faithful. He writes of the first type of prayer, "For a man at the beginning of his turning to God is rude, boisterous, and governed by the flesh... Therefore it seems to me that it would be more profitable for him to use this kind of prayer. He should say the Our Father and the Hail Mary and should read his Psalter and say other similar prayers"²⁸). At another point Hilton prescribes scriptural readings in the form of the Divine Office²⁹). This form is not surprising, of

²²) *SP*, 2.17; 227.

²³) *SP*, 2.30; 274.

²⁴) *Ibid*.

²⁵) *SP*, 2.32; 282.

²⁶) *Ibid*.

²⁷) *Ibid*.

²⁸) *SP*, 1.27; 96.

²⁹) *SP*, 1.27; 95.

course, since Hilton was writing to an anchoress committed to the religious life; he suggests prayers and readings associated with the religious community to assist her cultivation of religious experience. Scriptural readings, in one form or another, but particularly in the form of the Psalter, are a fundamental part of the process of the soul's return to God: believers appreciate the Scripture in different ways according to their different stages of spiritual development.

The moral meaning of Scripture guides the faithful in this second stage of contemplation and reformation in faith and experience. "By the morality of Holy Scripture the soul is informed about vices and virtues so that it can learn how to distinguish the one from the other wisely". Hilton adopts the moral interpretation of Scripture to spur believers on in the struggle to uproot vices and cultivate virtues. Interpreting Paul in 1 Cor. 15, for example, Hilton entreats his readers to recognize the need to conquer the image of sin before they can be reformed to the image of God.

St. Paul... speaks of this image, saying, "Sicut portavimus imaginem terreni hominis sic portemus imaginem caelestis" (1 Cor 15:49). [And we who have been modeled on the earthly man will be modeled on the heavenly man]. That means, if we want to come to the love of God, just as we have previously born the image of the earthly man, the first Adam (that is, the image of sin), so now we must bear the image of the heavenly man, Jesus (that is, the image made of virtues)³⁰).

Medieval moral, or tropological, interpretation of Scripture, focusing on the Bible's moral message, interprets Scripture as a dialogue between God and the soul. Our Augustinian canon reads Scripture as a special conversation with, or address by, God to the soul.

Don't be amazed because I call the forsaking of worldly love "darkness", for the prophet calls it this, saying to the soul, "Intra in tenebras, filia Chaldaeorum" (Isaiah 47:5). Go into your darkness, O daughter of Chaldee. This is you, O soul, who are like a daughter of Chaldee because of your love of the world, forsake it, and go into your darkness³¹).

This mode of interpretation bears out Hilton's conception of Scripture as a guidebook to lead Christians to God, to reform believers

³⁰) SP, 1.86; 179-180.

³¹) SP, 2.27; 265. Cf. J.P.H. CLARK, The 'Lightsome Darkness'-Aspects of Walter Hilton's Theological Background, in: *The Downside Review* 95, n° 319 (1977) 95-109.

to God's image, and to address individuals personally in their present states. Scripture as a form of conversation between God and human persons becomes even more important and intimate at the higher stages of spiritual development. But in these early stages the literal meaning of Scripture comforts believers, and the moral sense guides the process of weeding out vices and nourishing virtues.

III

The third stage of contemplation consists in a union of the first two, that is, in knowing and loving God perfectly (a state which cannot be fully attained until after this life). The cultivation of self-knowledge guided by an active search for Jesus leads further: first to greater understanding and love of the self on account of the virtues and justice God has given; and second, since human persons are mirrors in which God can be seen spiritually, self-knowledge leads eventually to an understanding and love of God³²). Once the full transformation to affection develops and humans both know and love God, then the trinitarian goal emerges³³). The final and guiding goal of image restoration is to recover the image of the Trinity (even though the faithful might not achieve it in this life)³⁴). The Augustinian triad of mind, reason, and will describes the image of the Trinity. As believers progress in contemplation, their minds, reasons, and wills are reformed, and the image of the Trinity is restored in them.

Unlike the third stage of contemplation which is partially obtainable in this life, believers cannot experience the third stage of reformation which no longer relies on faith but completely on experience, until after this life when they "see openly the face of Jesus in the bliss of heaven"³⁵). In this third stage of reforming "... the soul experiences through the spiritual sight of the Godhead in the manhood of Jesus"³⁶). Hilton frequently describes the God known to humans in the final stages of reforming as sovereign Goodness, sovereign Being and blessed Life, the source of all goodness³⁷). Interpreting John 20:17, the "Noli me tangere" passage, Hilton writes:

³²) *SP*, 1.92; 186.

³³) *SP*, 1.8; 71.

³⁴) *SP*, 1.45; 123.

³⁵) *SP*, 2.32; 284.

³⁶) *SP*, 2.30; 274.

³⁷) E.g., *SP*, 2.32; 288.

Since I am both God and man, and since the whole reason I must be loved and worshiped is because I am God, and since I have taken on the nature of man, for these reasons, make Me God in your heart and in your love, and worship Me in your Understanding — God in man, sovereign essential truth, and blessed life — for that's what I am³⁸).

The subject of scripturally-based prayer arises again in the last chapters of Book 2. Referring to the prayer of those advanced in the contemplative life, Hilton develops the third type of prayer mentioned in Book 1³⁹). Although the sources are the same as in the first type of prayer (he names once more the Our Father, the Psalms, and Divine Offices), the manner of praying has changed. The faithful no longer pray vocally but in "great stillness of voice and gentleness of heart"⁴⁰). The third kind of prayer which "emerges from the heart alone, without words" is possible only for those advanced in contemplation; it describes a way of being in which one can "almost continually pray, love, and praise God" in one's mind and heart⁴¹). Appealing to St. Paul, Hilton explains that with this type of prayer the soul is nourished through understanding and experiences a shadow of the love it will find in heaven: in the highest stages of contemplation knowledge and love are united.

At this stage, after maturation in self-knowledge, and when the grace of Jesus in Wisdom has come to us, two further spiritual meanings of Scripture emerge. The first is the mystical or allegorical meaning through which "the soul... is made ready to apply the words of Holy Scripture to Christ our Head and to Holy Church which is mystically His body"⁴²). The second is the heavenly or anagogical meaning⁴³). Now the soul, prepared by hard work, and assisted by grace, comes to understand the essential truth of the Holy Scripture, whether through reading, hearing, or meditating on it.

"By the mystical meaning of Scripture, the soul is illumined that it

³⁸) SP, 2.30; 277. Cf. AUGUSTINE, S. 243, 1, 1. 244, 2-3. 245, 2, 2-4, 4. 246, 4. PL 38, 1143-1144. 1148-1150. 1151-1153. 1154-1155. In Joh. Ev. 121, 3. CCL 36, 666. En. in pr. 58, 1, 10. CCL 39, 737.

³⁹) SP, 1.29; 98.

⁴⁰) SP, 2.42; 322.

⁴¹) Ibid. Cf. AUGUSTINE, En. in ps. 37, 14. CCL 38, 392. En. in ps. 119, 9. CCL 40, 1785.

⁴²) SP, 2.43; 329.

⁴³) Ibid.

may see the works of God in Holy Church and is made ready to apply the words of Holy Scripture to Christ our Head and to Holy Church, which is mystically his body"⁴⁴). The mystical interpretation of Scripture refers to the understanding of those who reach the third level of contemplation or of those increasingly reformed in experience. This allegorical sense points to the one-to-one correspondence between earthly images of Scripture and spiritual realities. It particularly designates taking earthly images to refer to the Church and to Christ. Progress in defeating vices and cultivating love of virtue awakens one to the church- and God-centered nature of reality conveyed through the mystical meaning of Scripture. One cannot perceive the pervasiveness of the ecclesial and Christocentric orientation of the world unless one has been prepared by the previous stages:

For the true "sun" does not show itself by special visitation in order to give a soul the light of understanding and perfect charity, unless the "firmament" has first been made bright and cleared of "clouds" — that is, unless the conscience has been made clear through the fire of burning desire for Jesus in this darkness which destroys and burns all wicked movements of pride, vainglory, wrath, envy, and all other sins in the soul⁴⁵).

Scripture's mystical meaning appears only to those who through grace and hard work have become friends of Jesus. Once the believer is transformed by responding to the moral address of Scripture, a new worldview develops and physical images are understood spiritually: "when the inner eye has been opened... giving us a small glimpse of Jesus, then the soul will easily enough transform all such words expressing physical images into spiritual understanding"⁴⁶). For example, in the story of the woman who has lost a coin, Hilton explains that "Jesus is the drachma you have lost, and if you want to find Him again, light up a lantern..."⁴⁷). In another example, a woman of Canaan who asked Jesus to heal her daughter symbolizes the Church asking Jesus for help for poor ignorant souls.

... the woman of Canaan asked our Lord for health for her daughter who was troubled by a devil, and our Lord was at first stand-offish because she was an alien. Nevertheless she did not stop

⁴⁴) Ibid.

⁴⁵) *SP*, 2.26; 257.

⁴⁶) *SP*, 2.33; 287.

⁴⁷) *SP*, 1.48; 128. Cf. AUGUSTINE, *Conf.* X, 18, 27. CCL 27, 169.

crying out until our Lord had granted her request and said to her, "Ah, woman! Great is your faith! Be it done as you wish!" And at that same moment her daughter was made whole. That woman symbolizes Holy Church who asks help from our Lord for simple, ignorant souls who are troubled with temptations of the world... And though it seems that our Lord is stand-offish at first because they are, as it were, alienated from Him, nevertheless, on account of the great faith and deserving of Holy Church, He grants her all she wills⁴⁸).

Once the believers' spiritual eyes are opened, the deeper meaning of Scripture emerges: what beginners would understand only in physical terms is revealed through mystical interpretation to have spiritual meaning.

IV

"The fourth, that is, the heavenly meaning of Holy Scripture, belongs to the working of Love alone; that's why I call it heavenly"⁴⁹). Anagogical interpretation is the fourth type of scriptural interpretation; it speaks of celestial realities, and refers to essential truths of heaven and of God. Once a person's spiritual eyes are opened in grace, she or he can be led by Jesus who begins to "speak more familiarly and more lovingly to the soul"⁵⁰). At some point, then, the person "perceive[s] in rest and in love the sweet sound of His [Jesus'] spiritual voice and is, as it were, ravished from the awareness of all earthly things"⁵¹). The believer begins to recognize the importance of the "working of love". In this situation, when the believer has passed beyond reflection on the world "the actions Jesus performs in the soul are done to make it a true, perfect spouse to Him in the intensity and fulness of love"⁵²). It happens sometimes, Hilton says, that this experience "comes without a special unfolding of Holy Scripture..."⁵³). At other times, though, along with this experience "various illuminations visit the soul through grace". We can see spiritually the beauty of angels, the nature of Jesus, and we begin "to perceive a little of the secrets of the blessed Trinity"⁵⁴). Love and knowledge of heavenly things are intimately connected here.

⁴⁸) *SP*, 2.10; 211.

⁴⁹) *SP*, 2.44; 333.

⁵⁰) *Ibid.*

⁵¹) *Ibid.*

⁵²) *SP*, 2.44; 335.

⁵³) *Ibid.*

⁵⁴) *SP*, 2.46; 340.

As Hilton describes it, Scripture's essential truth, revealed only to "those who love it and desire it with a meek heart"⁵⁵) is the experience and perception of Jesus as human and divine and of the trinitarian nature of God⁵⁶). At this stage Jesus' relationship to us is one of friendship. "And therefore, [Jesus] shows His secrets to him, as to a true friend who pleases him with love (rather than one who serves him through fear, like a slave)"⁵⁷). Jesus' Wisdom opens our eyes to the spiritual meaning of Scripture and our graced reading of Scripture enables us to see Jesus' power, wisdom, and goodness. The spiritual meaning conveys the Spirit of life to us; it offers "lifegiving food and delectable sustenance"⁵⁸).

Like the tradition, and again quoting from St. Paul, Hilton maintains that Scripture presents us with knowledge pertaining to salvation. "All that is written for our teaching is written that we might have hope of salvation through the comfort of writing... For the goal of this knowledge is the salvation of a person's soul in everlasting life..."⁵⁹). Through the heavenly understanding of Scripture, one can comprehend, among other things, the nature of rational souls, what Jesus does in humans, the nature of angels, and the Trinity⁶⁰).

V

In sum, then, the process of the soul's restoration to God can be understood as movement from knowledge of God, to love of God, to a state of both knowing and loving God. It is a movement from pursuit of vices to pursuit of virtues and can also be understood as a movement from faith to experience. First, persons are reformed in faith alone — they believe, in other words, although they do not fully understand. The process of growth in imitation of Christ and cultivation of meekness and charity is a process of growth from faith to experience and deeper comprehension of what our faith means.

[B]elieve without spiritual experience... and if [we] should first believe it, [we] will later experience through grace and understand

⁵⁵) *SP*, 2.43; 328.

⁵⁶) *Ibid.*

⁵⁷) *SP*, 2.43; 329.

⁵⁸) *SP*, 2.44; 330.

⁵⁹) *SP*, 2.43; 332.

⁶⁰) *SP*, 2.45; 335.

that it is true... Belief goes first and understanding follows after it⁶¹).

Hilton echoes Augustine's earlier formulation: belief precedes and understanding follows. The mystical way is the way of pursuing experiential understanding of what the faithful already know by faith. Hilton encourages his readers to cultivate reading and meditation on Scripture as a source of guidance, as a source of prayer and words to express love of God, and as a source of knowledge about themselves and God. Holy Scripture leads Christians to know what they can about salvation; it provides a source of inspired knowledge to those so graced and prepared to receive it. It comforts and brings great delight⁶²). Hilton's hermeneutic of scriptural texts testifies to his appreciation of the plenitude of scriptural meaning, and the very direct intersection between Scripture and the human person's relationship to God.

This discussion of Walter Hilton's use of the Bible, as an example of one medieval mystic, illustrates how intimately related Scripture is to the medieval mystical journey of the soul to love and knowledge of God. Scripture's literal meaning comforts and provides exemplars for beginners on the spiritual journey; its moral meaning shapes the believer's spiritual transformation; its mystical meaning reveals the God- and church-centered orientation of all reality; and its anagogical meaning nurtures divine intimacy for those advanced in contemplation. Herein lies the unity of our Augustinian canon's mysticism and exegesis: since in this life we can never be fully reformed or perfect knowers and lovers of God, we are in constant need of Scripture's encouragement and support as we travel the spiritual path.

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⁶¹) *SP*, 2.11; 215. Hilton draws here directly on Augustine's formulation in *S.* 118, 1 (PL 38, 672): "Praecedit fides, sequitur intellectus". See J.P.H. CLARK, Walter Hilton and "Liberty of Spirit", in: *The Downside Review* 96, n° 322 (1978), p. 66.

⁶²) *SP*, 2.43; 331.