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# Saints in Gilead: Robinson's Revisionist Calvinism and John Ames as a Reconciliatory Figure in American Congregationalist History

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Saints in *Gilead*: Robinson's Revisionist Calvinism and John Ames as a  
Reconciliatory Figure in American Congregationalist History

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### Saints in *Gilead*: Robinson's Revisionist Calvinism and John Ames as a Reconciliatory Figure in American Congregationalist History

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A Congregationalist by choice and a Calvinist by tradition, Marilynne Robinson has a theological background that significantly influences the development of her fictional characters, especially in her Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *Gilead*. Much has been written about Robinson's particular brand of Calvinism—by both Robinson herself and other literary critics—which tends to be far more hopeful about grace, agency, and the beauties of the natural world than traditional interpretations allow. Little, however, has been written about how the trajectory of Congregationalism as an organizational force in the national narrative influences the decisions of and relationships between her fictional characters.

*Gilead* depicts three generations of Congregationalist ministers whose personalities, preaching styles, and interpersonal relationships reflect and parallel the history of Midwestern Congregationalism in the United States from the abolitionist period to the mid-twentieth century—at which point, Robinson claims, Congregational influence all but disappeared. Robinson develops these characters in ways designed to dramatize and critique Congregationalism's various responses to the cultural and historical pressures of slavery, war, denominationalism, and the proper relationship between a minister and his congregation.

In the novel, John Ames III becomes a reconciliatory figure in a tradition fraught with interpretational extremes: the scriptural literalism of John Ames I and the scriptural relativism of John Ames II. He is not, however, a perfect balance of such interpretations, but rather exemplifies characteristics of “both and neither.” In depicting the three ministers this way, Robinson critiques, defends, and reshapes contemporary understanding of Puritan influence on American history just as she demonstrates how that history shapes the relationships among the characters.

Ultimately, *Gilead* is both a supplement to and an extension of Robinson's nonfiction writing, which also attempts to revise current interpretations of Calvinist thought and rekindle contemporary interest in early American religious influence.

Keywords: Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*, Congregationalism, Calvinism, Abolitionism

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Of course this thesis would never have existed had Gloria Cronin not introduced me to Robinson's work in the first place. This project is ultimately for her, for introducing me to *Housekeeping*, for giving me her copy of *Gilead*, and for believing in me from the beginning. Thank you.

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Evidence is always construed, and it is always liable to being misconstrued no matter how much care is exercised in collecting and evaluating it. At best, our understanding of any historical moment is significantly wrong, and this should come as no surprise, since we have little grasp of any present moment.

—Marilynne Robinson, *The Death of Adam*

In the thirty-two years since the publication of *Housekeeping*, Marilynne Robinson has given numerous lectures, participated in an increasing number of interviews, and written four nonfiction collections that address the various facets of Calvinist Puritan influence on contemporary thought, literature, and public behavior. Much of her work seeks to restructure what she sees as inaccurate and unproductive interpretations of Calvinist theology and Puritan influence in contemporary society. Although her nonfiction frequently demonstrates her tendency to write in the eighteenth and nineteenth century allegorical style common to the Puritans, with the publication of *Gilead* in 2005 she shifts that nonfiction style to fiction, a more familiar genre, in an attempt to reconstruct historical misunderstandings of the Calvinist Puritan tradition. Fiction often attracts a wider audience than nonfiction, for whom Robinson can critique, defend, and reshape the understanding of Puritan influence on American history by way of showing how that history shapes a particular character or fictional family. In *Saints and Postmodernism*, Edith Wyschogrod insists, “To lead a moral life one does not need a theory about how one should live, but a flesh and blood existent” (3). The character development of John Ames III, and that of his family, is as close as Robinson has come to creating just such a “flesh and blood existent,” and *Gilead* is ultimately a treatise on saintly living as much as it is a critique of contemporary perceptions of Puritan doctrines and lifestyle.

Through Reverend Ames, a third generation Congregationalist pastor who is witnessing the end of an era personally as well as professionally, Robinson constructs *Gilead* as an epistolary novel in which Ames functions as the lens through which she reviews and critiques two damaging interpretational extremes in nineteenth and early twentieth century American Congregationalist theology: theological literalism resulting in singularity of perspective and theological relativism that eventually denies the very visions and miracles it seeks to honor. Furthermore, Ames is Robinson's revisionist Calvinism personified. As the family historian he acts as a reconciliatory figure that leans back on his grandfather's liberal, literalist Christianity while incorporating the meticulous secular studies typical of his father's philosophic pacifism. His reconciliation, however, does not balance these competing versions of faith, but rather exemplifies the characteristics of "both and neither."

Ames's role should surprise no one familiar with the American Congregationalist tradition. As James Rohrer notes, "New England's Congregational establishment," out of which grows the Ames family's Midwestern Congregationalism, "had always been Janus-faced; it confronted the future while staring into the past" (9). The history of American Congregationalism is a complex tradition that directed the cultural and moral development of the country for more than four hundred years. Deeply rooted in Calvinist Puritanism, revised by fiery and intelligent sermons of Jonathan Edwards, influenced by the radical social reformer John Brown, and adhered to by members as diverse as Isaac Watts and Walt Disney, Congregationalism was, as Steven Peay says, "the predominant approach to church-life in the United States until the latter part of the eighteenth century" and continued to influence American society well into the twentieth century ("Congregationalism" 61). It is a faith that for much of its history resisted denominationalism, preferring instead to be thought of as a "way . . . defined by

covenant and relationship” between a collective community and Jesus Christ (Peay, “Essence” 124). Despite its effort to remain true as a lifestyle directed by biblical principles rather than by a set of creeds, Congregationalism experienced periods of conflict and decline after every major war in which the United States participated from the American Revolution, to the Civil War, to both World Wars. Due to tensions caused by unstable modes of organization, conflicting visions of scriptural interpretation, and a conflicting sense of the proper relationship between a pastor and his flock the tradition nearly disappeared completely in the middle of the twentieth century.

The earliest Congregationalists on this continent, of course, were not Americans at all—they were English Puritans seeking religious freedom and refuge from the state-sponsored religious strictures in the Old World. American Congregationalism grew out of this tradition, which initially developed in New England and eventually spread through the rest of the country. As Gaius Glenn Atkins and Frederick Louis Fagley explain, “The first principle [of Congregationalism] is that the only official Congregational church is a local congregation which enjoys complete autonomy; whatever organizations there are beyond the congregation . . . are only advisory organizations” (341). The autonomous nature of the Congregationalists both complemented and enhanced the sense of American individualism that had already been developing as explorers, profiteers, and pilgrims resisting government impositions on their faith arrived in the New World. As Peay points out, “As the Congregational movement helped to shape the American nation and its religious and moral identity, it was, in turn, shaped by the American experience” (“Congregationalism” 69). Robinson creates the fictional town of Gilead, Iowa, to demonstrate how such mutual influence functions in the Ames family drama.

Understanding the complex differences among the three generations of Ames pastors first requires an understanding of the basic concepts of their theological organization.



Congregationalists define their faith by covenant between the individual and Christ, the individual and the community, and the community and Christ, and, because everyone belongs to the body of Christ, all are equal and autonomous before Him. Each congregation elects a pastor, whose sole purpose is to serve the congregation. However, the congregation respects and defers to the pastor, looking to him for counsel and guidance and following his spiritual leadership. He is the one designated to perform the rituals that demonstrate individual and collective participation in the covenant relationship. While the covenant is spiritual, its holiness is recognized through physical participation in such rituals. June Hadden Hobbs explains, “The believer who participates in concrete behavior such as baptism or communion is participating in the life of Christ in a way that transforms intellectual understanding into immediate human experience” (250). The relationship between a pastor and his flock becomes holy as they engage in mutual service and shared sacred rituals.

Ultimately, the nature of the Congregationalist covenant allows the lay member in any congregation little individual influence in matters of church government. But when combined with others—either in the congregation as a voting entity, or with a pastor in sacramental exchange—the congregation exercises significant influence. Of course, the pastor is responsible to a board of trustees as well as to various committees within the local and regional congregations. Self-government can be risky, however, since human fallibility occasionally obstructs divine inspiration. Lisa Bailey reminds us that “Just because people want to justify things as God’s will does not make them so. Sometimes God is represented falsely by the church, and such representations come out of man’s inability to be pure” (269). Within these interstices of imperfection, the great tensions of Congregationalist theology manifest themselves most clearly. Historically, arguments concerning orthodoxy, scriptural interpretation, and the proper

exercise of authority between a pastor and his congregation have proven most troublesome to the cohesion of American Congregationalism in the long-term because they consistently resisted definition and denominationalization.

Although the relationships between the Ames pastors have been interpreted in a number of different ways, scholars have paid little attention to the role of cultural and historical influences on each man and his filial relationships. In *Gilead* the tension we see between the first two generations of Ames pastors exists, at least partially, because each man represents both a particular moment in Congregationalist history and a major interpretive impulse within the tradition. The relationship itself is unique insofar as it represents a peculiar moment in American Congregationalist history—the shift wherein loosely connected, autonomous congregations that after centuries of resisting denominationalism had experienced a denominational awakening and an institutionalized belief system and were returning to their original sense of self-governance. In *Gilead*, this shift into and out of denominationalism is paralleled by a corresponding shift in interpretive valence and political involvement, from literal to figurative and from activist to pacifist. On one end Robinson gives us Grandfather Ames (John Ames I)—a nineteenth century abolitionist, a biblical literalist, and a wild visionary. He is a personal friend of John Brown, and with his one eye single to the glory of God, as Christopher Leise suggests, “a bleaker form of Calvinism” (356). Robinson’s portrayal of Grandfather Ames highlights the strengths of the early Calvinist Puritans, but it also serves as a criticism of “the militancy of the New England tradition as well as its tendency to self-identify apophatically—that is, defining something by enumerating all the things it is not. . . . the eldest Ames is defined almost as much by what he rejects as by what he believes” (356). On the other side of the spectrum is Ames’s father, the ardent post-Civil War pacifist prone to biblical relativism who is appalled and horrified by the

outcomes of his father's visionary nature. This disgust leads him to deny modern visions entirely and to think of scripture in terms of principles to be lived peacefully. Often overlooked in criticism of Robinson's work, the father is perhaps the clearest representation of what happened to early twentieth century Congregationalism when it tried to decentralize itself once again. In one sense Grandfather Ames and his son can be understood, then, as polar opposites, the former embodying the tradition's absolutist perspective and the latter a reaction to such absolutism.

Although the characterization of the two pastors may initially appear simplistic, the complexity in their relationship is extrapolated through Ames's efforts to accurately represent their life experiences, particularly in moments of greatest tension. Robinson has suggested that "to make [characters] believable, you must always be aware of what they would or would not say, where stresses would or would not fall" ("Wondrous Love" 207). All of the Ames pastors satisfy Robinson's stipulations for creating believable characters because she has situated them so carefully in their respective historical moments. Grandfather Ames, for example, exhibits a potent mixture of New England orthodox influence, having been born and raised in Maine, and the Midwestern social gospel missionary experience. His wild visionary commitment to the abolitionist cause, coupled with his strict adherence to scriptural mandate and the immediate value of good works, accurately represents both the Edwardsean tradition from which he hails and the political turmoil of his generation.

His son, John Ames II, exemplifies equally believable characteristics in his denial of everything his father embraces—he, too, ends up defining himself apophatically. His life experiences take place almost exclusively in the Midwest, and his resentment and disillusion in the post-Civil war era, combined with his acceptance of early twentieth century German philosophy, separate him completely from his father's wild orthodoxy. Instead of rekindling his

vigor for righteous victory, Ames II is simply burned by what Bailey describes as the “fire that often represents annihilation of sinners and the painful loss of those who feel sin’s guilt and the loss of compassion that such destruction leaves behind” (268). His inner conflict mirrors early conflicted responses to certain social issues—witch hunting, for example—in the Congregationalist tradition, epitomizing what J. William T. Youngs calls “the religious psyche of a people who had lost confidence in themselves. . . . Less confident of their ability to create a perfect commonwealth, they were also less inclined to discover ‘witches’ in their midst” (68). Ames II’s lack of confidence in his father’s methods and motives ultimately leads to a lack of confidence in his own pastoral abilities.

Finally, Ames III becomes a believable character through his efforts to provide his young son with a useful, fair, and accurate family history, despite the unfortunate outcome of his father and grandfather’s strained mutual influence. Though his proximity to his forebears automatically puts his narrative reliability into question, Rebecca Painter claims that Ames’s “stories compel readers to contemplate the realities of loyalty, prodigality, and grace through a lens of reverent uncertainty” (“Loyalty” 321). That same sense of “reverent uncertainty” Ames possesses also provides readers with a clear vision of a man who takes both the promise of America (as a land of bravery, opportunity, and righteousness) and the promise of the gospel seriously.

Furthermore, that reverent uncertainty, juxtaposed with Ames’s personal knowledge of his progenitors’ character, may actually make Ames a rather reliable narrator in a very complicated story. As Christopher Leise reminds us, “Ames’s Christianity is specifically Calvinist—the remnants of the Puritans’ errand into the wilderness that Robinson sees as having ‘died early in [the twentieth] century’” (350). But more importantly, Ames’s Calvinism is Robinson’s Calvinism—a softer, more flexible version than what is commonly accepted. Her

revisionist perspective becomes evident in Ames's reflection upon Calvin's notion that "each of us is an actor on a stage and God is the audience. That metaphor . . . makes us artists of our behavior, and the reaction of God to us might be thought of as aesthetic rather than morally judgmental in the ordinary sense" (124). Robinson's revisionist Calvinism reaffirms the notion that personal experiences—familial, intellectual, spiritual, or otherwise—directly influence behavior, thus allowing Ames to be more flexible in his interpretation of each man's actions and behavior toward the other than if he were restrained by stricter interpretations of predestination and judgment.

While both men value strict adherence to scriptural instruction, Grandfather Ames is a literalist to the point of being pharisaical and possibly blasphemous. As a child, Ames had, as he recalls,

a certain acquaintance with a kind of holy poverty. My grandfather never kept anything that was worth giving away, or let us keep it, either, so my mother said. He would take laundry right off the line. She said he was worse than any thief, worse than a house fire. I believe he was a saint of some kind . . . He lacked patience for anything but the plainest interpretations of the starkest commandments, "to him who asks, give," in particular. (31)

Despite her efforts to prevent Grandfather Ames from stealing hidden money or food, Ames's mother was incapable of fooling the old man. Ames muses, "he could see through anyone and anything. Except, my mother said, drunkards and ne'er-do-wells. But that wasn't really true either. He just said, 'Judge not,' and of course that's Scripture and hard to contradict" (33). Furthermore, Grandfather Ames claimed to have received literal visits from Christ, almost since childhood. Such visits inspired his participation in the abolitionist surge that represented yet

another facet of the puritan “errand into the wilderness,” and his militant adherence to the idea that blessing was gained by suffering. To live by such creeds is physically and spiritually taxing, and ultimately causes Ames to admit, “The waters never parted for [Grandfather Ames], not once in his life, so far as I know. There was just no end to difficulty, and no mitigation of it. Then again, he always sought it out” (90).

Ironically, the very literalism Grandfather Ames espouses becomes the lynchpin for his son’s tendency toward figurative scriptural interpretation. Ames II sees his father as a version of what early Congregationalists called “enthusiasts.” Enthusiasts were those who paid equal respect to personal spiritual experiences as they did to scripture. Some argued that “Enthusiasts,” as Rohrer explains,

. . . believed without any rational proof or scriptural warrant that their inner dreams, visions, and impulses were direct operations of the Holy Spirit. They foolishly bestowed upon their subjective impressions, critics charged, an authority equal to the Bible. They arrogantly claimed to have received clear communications from God which were not vouchsafed to other Christians, and presumed to possess a familiarity with the divine will which many sincerely pious folks lacked. (75)

Such doctrinally unfounded experiences unsettles and frustrates Ames’s father, who does not believe in literal visions or appreciate the effects of direct, immediate obedience to snippets of scriptural mandate. He is particularly alarmed by how such beliefs affected his father’s participation in both the war and the abolitionist cause. In fact, their differences concerning the role of war and peace in fulfilling scriptural mandate is perhaps the starkest example of where father and son simply become two reverends with competing ideas in the same theological tradition.

The Ames family history hinges on the argument concerning visions of war and peace that takes place the day Grandfather Ames walks out of his son's sermon and seeks "*preaching*" at the "Negro church" (84). Ames II inquires as to whether his sermon offended the old man, then takes note of the disappointment in his father's voice when he relates that he had listened to a sermon on loving your enemies.

"You sound disappointed, Reverend."

My grandfather put his head in his hands. He said, "Reverend, no words could be bitter enough, no day could be long enough. There is just no end to it.

Disappointment. I eat and drink it. I wake and sleep it."

My father's lips were white. He said, "Well, Reverend, I know you placed great hope in that war. My hopes are in peace, and I am not disappointed. Because peace is its own reward. Peace is its own justification." (84)

Ames II's hostile defensiveness is ironic at best, for he does not speak peacefully to his father, he is not free from disappointment, and he certainly does not seem to be enjoying the rewards of peace. In the contest for theological power both reverends ignore what the scriptures teach is the second great commandment upon which nearly all others depend: "love thy neighbor as thyself" (King James Version Matthew 22:39). Ames later declares "that the rewards of obedience are great, because at the root of real honor is always the sense of the sacredness of the person who is its object" (139). Lacking a sense of the sacredness in each other not only results in the two reverends dishonoring each other and disobeying foundational commandments (in Ames's father's case, a breaking of the fifth commandment—honoring father and mother), but also suggests their deep misunderstanding of Calvin's explanation of how the two great commandments function. In *When I Was a Child, I Read Books*, Robinson quotes Calvin, saying,

“[A]s God bestoweth his benefites upon us, let us beware that wee acknowledge it towardes him, by doing good to our neighbors whome he offereth unto us, . . . [and] gently make them partakers with us, as folke that are linked together in an inseparable bond”, then, adding, “From the depths of my heart, I say, Amen” (83). The failure to keep these commandments not only affects the family, but also each man’s respective congregation. Grandfather Ames loses a significant portion of his flock—both to the Methodists and through death—because he preached them into the war, and Ames II eventually abandons his church members altogether.

Ames’s careful reflections pertaining to the greatest points of conflict between the two men—literal versus figurative interpretations of scripture and the rewards of war and peace—indicate that his sympathy for their differences does not rob him of the impulse to condemn their administrative failures as clergymen. One pastor’s impulse to provide his flock with an Old Testament, fiery vision of righteous justice might draw a clear dividing line between the zealous and the doubtful, but it ultimately leaves him without much of a congregation at all. The other, seeking peace, unity, and harmony, ultimately becomes so disillusioned with the world as it is that he deserts his flock and his vocation completely. In the end, neither manages to faithfully work within the bonds of the Congregationalist covenant.

In Congregationalist theology the relationship between a flock and its pastor is, in principle, not a hierarchical relationship of instruction and obedience but rather a covenant relationship between spiritual and ecclesiastical equals, with Jesus Christ the focus of worship. Steven Peay explains,

The covenant was thus seen to be first a covenant of works and subsequently a covenant of grace. . . . As the covenant of works could not be kept by human beings, who have shown themselves consistently unfaithful, it had to be replaced



by a covenant which could be kept by One who is everlastingly faithful. . . . Christ, then, is the primary agent of the covenant of grace and the One who provides assurance to the believer . . . The covenant is not simply an individual act, but is . . . involved in the gathering of the church which is the result of entering into this relationship. (“Essence” 128-29)

Thus, there are two key points to the central idea in Congregationalism: first, those that are part of the covenant answer directly to Jesus Christ—not to a pastor, not to a bishop, not to another human being. Second, that covenant is collective, which indicates that the governing body in the physical church should be the congregation, not the pastor. It was, after all, the congregation who extended the call for a pastor. Upon acceptance, and then ordination, the covenant bound the pastor foremost to serve the saints who called him (Rohrer 17). So a pastor not only answered for himself to the Lord, but he also answered to the people who called, ordained, and then followed him. Unfortunately, this congenial theology of collective self-government works better in theory than in practice, particularly in the cases of Ames's grandfather and father. Both men claim to answer to Christ alone, but both also fail to fully represent the collective aspect of the covenant as each answers to Christ *alone*. They are aware of and concerned for the “people,” but instead of letting the needs of the congregation lead their preaching, they take it upon themselves to decide what those needs are and how to best address them. In the process, both men exhibit a common failing: the inability to recognize their truest relationship to the body of Christ, which requires personal faithfulness and obedience to the Lord’s commandments, and authentic care for the spiritual welfare of other individuals bound by the same covenant.

At one level, the conflict between Ames's father and his grandfather is personal and idiosyncratic—the contingent result of time and circumstance and family dynamics. Michael

Vander Weele notes, for example, “there are many other reminders that wilderness and blessing can be social as well as personal—drought, the Spanish influenza, wars we can identify with, broken relationships. Most times they are both personal and public” (231).<sup>1</sup> But at another level, their differing perspectives are representational in the sense that they correlate almost directly with the trajectory of Congregationalist goals and beliefs at the time. The grandfather represents a tradition of pre-Civil War Congregationalist abolitionists beautifully described by Ames. He writes of them,

[My grandfather] was the most unrepentant human being I ever knew, except for certain of his friends. All of them could sit on their heels into their old age . . . They had no flesh on them at all. They were like the Hebrew prophets in some unwilling retirement, or like the primitive church still waiting to judge the angels. . . . They had been to Lane and Oberlin, and they knew their Hebrew and their Greek and their Locke and their Milton. Some of them even set up a nice little college in Tabor. . . . Still, they were bodacious old men, the lot of them. (49-50)

These men took part in the one moment in American history when Congregationalism thrived at its fullest: when local churches banded together nationwide for social causes—notably the cause to end slavery. Samuel Pearson explains that while previously hesitant to set doctrinal or institutional boundaries, from the mid-1830s through the Civil War “Congregationalists came to have a self-image characterized by belief in what one of its adherents termed a free church and a free gospel for *free* men” (85 emphasis added).<sup>2</sup> Supporting the abolitionist movement became a reference point for Congregationalist churches, a boundary that formally separated them from the Presbyterians and other denominations. Once the tradition returned to its former commitment to local congregational autonomy, that solidarity slowly dissipated.

By the 1950s, the time in which Ames is living out his final days, Congregationalism was a denomination that had all but faded away. Margaret Bendroth observes, “In the world of religion . . . success comes not by accident but by conscious design. It requires vision, energy, and, above all, focus. The reluctance of our congregational forebears to define a key set of doctrines, a standard for exclusion, even just a denominational logo, seems deeply, even somewhat tragically, shortsighted in retrospect” (124). Just as the eldest Ames enacts the pre-Civil War Congregationalist vigor, his son enacts the post-Civil War whimper of the movement. In resisting the violence and misery of the war years, he distances himself from everything he associates with it—including his family, his father’s congregation, and his faith.

Like his father before him, Reverend Ames II believes in the importance of strict adherence to scriptural instruction. However, his abhorrence for the fruits of his father’s visionary lifestyle causes him to retreat to the other end of the interpretational spectrum. Ames describes his father as “a man who acted from principle . . . [and] faithfulness to the truth as he saw it. But something in the way he went about it made him disappointing from time to time” (6). Ames II abandons his father’s congregation in favor of the Quakers not because he finds their doctrine so appealing, but because he finds his father’s extremism so repulsive. He steers his children away from the idea that the Lord might appear to them, not because the Lord couldn’t, but because Ames II does not approve of the effect such visions may have had on his father’s behavior—and he certainly does not want his children following in their grandfather’s footsteps. Ironically, his efforts to distance himself fully from his father actually pull them ideologically closer together in the most unfortunate ways. In what Daniel Muhlestein describes as one of Robinson’s “canny double gestures . . . [a] recurrent combination of mythic figuration and historical transformation” typical of her style (72), Grandfather Ames has only one eye—a

Civil War battle wound of which he seems to be inordinately proud. On the one hand, his missing eye is a physical representation of his devotion to what he thought a righteous cause. On the other hand, it represents his blindness to the suffering of his congregation as a result of his brilliant visions. Like his father, Ames II is also blinded—not to suffering, but to his responsibility to his congregation as he denies the possibility of such visions. Both failures come as a result of apophatic self-identification, both men defining themselves against the other.

Because they define themselves primarily by identifying what they are not, both elder Ames pastors end their days in theological and vocational ruin, having negated the necessity of multiple perspectives within the Congregationalist tradition. While, as Lincoln memorably reminds us, “A house divided against itself cannot stand” (par. 1), it is difficult to be part of the body of Christ and expect everyone to share an identical vision. Harmony and unity are key points of the Congregationalist belief system, and in order to maintain such unity the members of each congregation are to respect and value the diverse talents of the rest—always remembering that they are autonomous beings moving toward the same goal. If members value their own personal views at the expense of others, they effectively separate themselves from the covenant. Robinson has commented elsewhere that “those who disagree with my understanding of Christianity are Christians all the same, that we are members of one household,” acknowledging that “this is difficult . . . owed in part to the fact that I have reason to believe they would not extend this courtesy to me” (“Wondrous Love” 209). Such perspective accurately represents both pastors, though Ames’s father eventually suffers the most permanent damage, as he finally forsakes his faith—and to some degree, his family—altogether.

Both Grandfather Ames and his son are deeply committed to certain aspects of the Congregationalist covenant. However, as Ames observes, “right worship is right perception”

(135), and while his progenitors share a passion for enacting proper worship, each overlooks important covenant principles, leading to pastoral ruin. Although one part of the conflict between Ames's grandfather and his father is a function of their self-centered worship, another part is a consequence of their differing responses to the most literal aspect of divine communication: a personal visitation from Christ. In addition to being a biblical literalist, Grandfather Ames is also a visionary literalist—a sort of wilderness prophet; yet, it is a sort of vision that ultimately leads to the demise of the tradition he represents because in seeking to maintain it he steps beyond the boundaries of Christ's way of life. He claims repeatedly that Jesus has visited him personally over the years. Ames recounts, "My grandfather told me once about a vision he'd had when he was still living in Maine . . . Someone touched him on the shoulder and when he looked up, there was the Lord, Holding out His arms to him, which were bound in chains" (49). This vision resulted in a burning conviction of the need to go to Kansas and join the cause of the abolitionists, which the grandfather did. Other visions followed, and with each successive experience the grandfather learned that the Lord required immediate action and unflinching devotion. These experiences created a man *obsessed* with violent and immediate obedience where the ends justified the means and "being blessed meant being bloodied" (36). Not surprisingly, such perspective leads Grandfather Ames to a misinterpretation of commandments that ultimately results in breaking them; because in the body of Christ all are of equal worth, and injury to one is injury to all. For example, his tendency to steal from his family and neighbors in order to help the destitute directly undermines the command to give (and, by implication, to not take or steal). Ames makes no secret of his grandfather's stealing habits, and while not a direct accusation, he does suggest that his grandfather likely killed a union soldier. Robbing Peter to

pay Paul in this instance may be forgivable or attributed to madness, but murder is murder—and in the eyes of Ames’s father, it is inexcusable.

This visionary violence and extreme filial disappointment not only creates an enormous gulf in the relationship for the rest of both reverends’ lives, but also initiates a generational trajectory of abandonment between fathers and sons. Ultimately, the reality of visions becomes a point of such intense tension that it finally leads to a permanent break in the family. Ames recalls the exchange, beginning with his grandfather’s lament:

“And that’s just what kills my heart, Reverend. That the Lord never came to you. That the seraphim never touched a coal to your lips—”

My father stood up from his chair. He said, “I remember when you walked to the pulpit in that shot-up, bloody shirt with that pistol in your belt. And I had a thought as powerful and clear as any revelation. And it was, This has nothing to do with Jesus. Nothing. Nothing. And I was, and I am, as certain of that as anyone could ever be of any so-called vision. I defer to no one in this. Not to you, not to Paul the Apostle, not to John the Divine, Reverend.”

My grandfather said, “So-called vision. The Lord, standing there beside me, had one hundred times the reality for me that you have standing here now!”

After a minute my father said, “No one would doubt that, Reverend.”

And that was when a chasm truly opened. Not long afterward my grandfather was gone. (84-85)

Mutual disappointment finally draws the line between a man disappointed in war and a man unable to find peace because of it. Grandfather Ames was the first to physically abandon his family. However, despite multiple disappointments and more than his share of pain, it was he

who ended up being the most faithful to his cause. Betty Mensch asserts that his violent selflessness makes him the one who “stands out as a compelling image in all of his righteous fervor” (226). He died and was buried in the very land where Lord sent him to begin with. On the contrary, Ames’s father ultimately leaves Gilead, following his older son, Edward, in exchanging faith and family for German philosophy and personal doubt. Because Ames II succumbed to faithlessness in the end, Ames’s disappointment with him is the greater of the two.

The mutual disappointment Ames’s father and grandfather experience opens a space in which Robinson attempts to reconcile the interpretational impulses at the extremes of American Congregationalism. She fills that space with a character that inherits both extremes, but whose experience is singular enough to allow him to embrace an entirely different strand of it. John Ames III does not represent a perfect balance of his father and grandfather, but ultimately becomes the personification of “both and neither.” He is evidence that for Robinson, as Painter suggests, “there is no taking of sides in this narrative between those who would fight and those who refuse to on principle—just respect and compassion for both” (“Virtue” 97). Although such respect and compassion are characteristic of Ames, who repeatedly expresses loyalty, admiration, and love for both of his progenitors—without skimping on the details of weakness, mistakes, or prejudices associated with each man—Robinson does appear to take sides to some degree. Ames, acting again as a lens through which Robinson defends and critiques the tradition, admires and aligns himself with his grandfather’s tradition even as he admits the social and generational turmoil it generated.

The first indication that Ames privileges his grandfather’s tradition is his sharp response to Jack Boughton’s suggestion that Ames received his identity from his father. He responds, ““My vocation was the same as my father’s. I assume that if I’d had another father entirely the Lord

would still have called me.’ I’ll admit I’m a little touchy on that point” (169). There is clear evidence of Ames’s Calvinist tradition as it concerns his unchangeably God-given calling—predestination would suggest as much. But while Ames insists on the divinity of the call, he does acknowledge that he inherited a vocation. Much like any Congregationalist pastor, he would have difficulty drawing a difference between the two, partly because the call to be a pastor was also extended by a congregation as a job offer. The Congregationalist understanding of the covenant relationship deeply influenced the role of the pastor within the local community. Larry Ingram explains, “the pastoral role is loosely articulated, being defined more in terms of goals than means” (44). Additionally, though lacking the formal protection of denominational leaders in hierarchical structures, which potentially made a pastor more vulnerable in his efforts to successfully influence the flock, the pastor still became “the most powerful individual in the congregationally organized church . . . [due to] the pressures placed on the clergyman by the congregation and by his own self-image” (46). So, while Ames is a pastor like both his father and grandfather, he perceives his personal calling as moving him beyond their realm of influence. He explains, “I knew perfectly well . . . that the Lord absolutely transcends any understanding I have of Him, which makes loyalty to him a different thing from loyalty to whatever customs and doctrines and memories I happen to associate with Him. I know that . . .” (235). His loyalty to, and relationship with, God is wholly separate from anything he has learned from his progenitors, and his responsibility to his congregation is completely his own.

Despite his insistence that his calling would have come despite his family tradition, Ames cannot escape the reality of generational influence on his vocation. Hobbs proposes that “Each descendent can be transformed by knowing the types before him predict what he may become” (247). Acknowledging his vocational heritage, Ames himself pays direct homage to his



grandfather:

I'll tell you, if my grandfather did throw his mantle over me, so to speak, he did it long before I came into this world. The holiness of his life imputed a holiness to mine, or to my vocation, that I have tried to diminish as little as I could. I have tried to be careful of my reputation and also of my character. I have tried to keep the Gospel before me as a standard for my life and my preaching. (204)

It is difficult to separate culture and context from divine influence in a vocational calling.

Scripture and personal inspiration are certainly involved, but the weight of human example and expectation cannot be ignored. For example, as a preacher Ames harkens back to Jonathan Edwards in many of the same ways his grandfather does. Both share Edwards' passion, his respect for divine revelation and visions, and a deep social awareness. For Grandfather Ames, however, that social awareness specifically manifests itself as abolitionism, while for Ames it is the quiet and consistent generosity extended to his congregation in the years following the first and second world wars. Nevertheless, in both cases it is a manifestation of Edwards' early concerns for the communal success of his parishioners. Furthermore, like both Edwards and his grandfather, Ames's sermons tend to be intense in both topic and delivery. He explains, "A good sermon is one side of a passionate conversation. It has to be heard in that way" (45). Ames's sermons become the tangible evidence that Ames has lived life passionately, if somewhat more conservatively than his grandfather.

Although Ames and his grandfather share a passion for truth and righteous living, Ames exhibits a much softer interpretation of the Calvinist Puritan tradition. In many ways he is even more closely aligned to both John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards than is his grandfather.

Robinson explains that "Calvinism encourages a robust sense of human fallibility, in particular

forbidding the idea that human beings can set any limits to God's grace. . . . God alone judges, and the hearts of mortals can be known truly only by him, in the light of his grace" ("Onward" 47-48). Similarly, according to Mensch, Edwards believed that "presuming to know the heart of another was blasphemy equal to presuming to know God" (235) and argued that "if we only had eyes to see . . . we would 'know' that creation itself was designed to express boundless love. . . . This universe, correctly 'seen' as love, thus had a 'logic deeper and more beautiful' than any supposedly 'deserved' personal harm or benefit" (Edwards qtd. in Mensch 236). Ames's attention to the natural world, his predilection to reading—secular philosophy in particular—and his inclination to self-doubt are surely products of his family circumstance. However, his unique combination of such characteristics separate him from his father and grandfather as much as they connect him to them. Like Calvin and Edwards, Ames is reluctant to pass judgment on either his father or his grandfather for their behavior toward one another. He painfully recalls watching his father preach "about Abel's blood crying out from the ground, and I'd wonder how he could speak about that the way he did. I had so much respect for my father. I felt certain that he should hide the guilt of his father, and that I should also hide the guilt of mine. I loved him with the strangest, most miserable passion when he stood there preaching . . ." (85). Ames recognizes that, as Mensch suggests, "sin and separation are intertwined" (238), and that both men are guilty of sin against the other. Consequently, he is able to remain loyal to his father even as he privileges his grandfather's tradition.

Ames's loyalty to his father is the second indication that although he responds to the polarities by becoming "both and neither," Ames is not equally both or equally neither. Never in the novel does Ames fully subscribe to his grandfather's lifestyle, nor does he accept as right every choice in the old man's history. As a result, Ames feels keenly both the expectation and

the disappointment his grandfather has in him. “That eye of his always seemed to me to be full of expectation and disappointment, both at once, and I began to dread the moments when it would fall on me” (174). As a child he felt there was “a sort of sacredness just to the right” of his grandfather, and he was shocked when the reverend was treated unkindly (98). Yet, he admits that he was occasionally embarrassed by the old man’s eccentricities. Consequently, Ames never specifically inhabits his grandfather's political and theological space, which causes a certain degree of discomfort in their relationship. He explains, “The old men called people who failed to embrace the great cause ‘doughfaces.’ There is a lot of contempt in that phrase. They were harsh in their judgments. With reason, I believe” (174). Ames recognizes that while his grandfather ultimately exerts the greater gravitational pull on him—and while they share an inclination to traditional Edwardsean and Calvinist doctrines—he is neither as militantly devoted nor as divinely attended to. Furthermore, despite his ecclesiastical dedication to scriptural orthodoxy, he remains loyal, obedient, and respectful to his father: reading the same philosophy, exercising cautious judgment, and serving by his side.

Perhaps the experience that solidifies Ames’s good opinion of his father is their desperate pilgrimage to Kansas to seek out his grandfather’s grave. Their literal “errand into the wilderness,” taxed father and son physically, emotionally, and spiritually, but was nevertheless critical to Ames II’s efforts to make peace with his father. Ames explains, “It grieved my father bitterly that the last words he said to his father were very angry words and there could never be any reconciliation in this life” (10). That grief drove him to take his young son to Kansas on foot only to clean up an old graveyard and clear off a barely recognizable grave. Before leaving, Ames recalls that his father “bowed his head and began to pray . . . asking the Lord’s pardon, and his father’s as well” (14). Ames interrupts that prayer by kissing his father’s hand and asking him

to look at the moon. There in the desert they witness a gorgeous exchange between the setting sun and the rising moon, and the beauty surrounding his father's final resting place brings Ames II comfort.

While Ames speaks of the pilgrimage to Kansas fondly, it does not substitute for his father's abandonment later in life. Abandonment is clearly a heavy subject for Ames, who is old and sick, and aware that he is not far from being forced to leave his own wife and child. Feeling helpless and upset about his situation and frustrated with the presence of Jack Boughton—who has also abandoned a child—in his family's life, Ames writes a vindictive sermon about fathers who abandon their children. While Jack interprets the sermon as a direct comment on his past, it is just as likely that Ames was preaching about the effects of paternal abandonment in his own life and the effects his son will suffer.<sup>3</sup> Long after leaving Gilead himself, Ames's father returns only twice—once for his daughter-in-law's funeral and again to try and convince his son to leave as well. Deeply insulted, Ames writes,

He thought he could excuse me from my loyalty . . . as if it were just some well-intended mistake he could correct for me . . . all he accomplished was to make me homesick for a place I never left. I couldn't believe he would speak to me as if I were not competent to invest my loyalties as I saw fit. . . . I have mentioned loneliness to you, and darkness, and I thought then I already knew what they were, but that day it was as if a great cold wind swept over me the like of which I had never felt before, and that wind blew for years and years. My father threw me back on myself, and on the Lord. (235-36)

Such disappointment in his father is the shadow that covers the lens through which Ames sees both his history and the future of his own family. He watched both his grandfather and his father

leave and never come back, and admits to his own son, “I truly suspect I never left because I was afraid I would not come back” (234). His bitter disappointment with his father’s errors motivates Ames to say of his grandfather, “I believe the old reverend’s errors were mainly the consequence of a sort of strenuousness in ethical matters that was to be admired finally” (90). The implication being, of course, that his father lacked such ethical strenuousness and was, therefore, not admirable—or at least not worthy of emulation. Ames’s response to the two men is complicated by the fact that in addition to responding personally—as a son and a grandson—he must also respond as a minister. Moreover, we cannot forget that he is writing this epistolary work as a sort of sermon for his own son, and must shape each anecdote so that it is both truthful and instructive. At the end of the book Ames tells his son, “There are a thousand thousand reasons to live this life, every one of them sufficient” (243), and that “hope deferred is still hope. . . . I’ll pray that you grow up a brave man in a brave country. I will pray you find a way to be useful” (247). To some extent, it is a work designed to ameliorate the unavoidable pain that will accompany the physical abandonment of his own child, and leave him with hope for the future.

The combination of shame, love, disappointment, and admiration Ames feels for his father and grandfather shape his understanding of the relationship between memory, visions, and sainthood—the most significant indication of his reconciliatory function. Ames is nothing if not familiar with the consequences of devotion to or denial of literal visions. After the devastating disagreement that fractured his father’s and grandfather’s relationship, Ames recalls that his grandfather “left a note lying on the kitchen table which said: No good has come, no evil is ended. That is your peace. Without vision the people perish. The Lord bless and keep you” (85). Ames saves that note all of his life. Because Grandfather Ames’s departure represents the ending of a particular era within Congregationalist history, Ames’s saving the note indicates both his

respect for the past and his understanding that it must be consulted if the tradition is to survive into the future. Although he never claims to have experienced the same kind of literal visions common to his grandfather, he is in awe of them—and he is not impressed with his father’s uncomfortable dismissal of them. He remarks, “I truly believe it is waste and ingratitude not to honor such things as visions, whether you yourself happen to have seen them or not” (97). By accepting the *possibility* of visions, Ames maintains a degree of his grandfather’s passion even as he exemplifies his father’s rationality. Ultimately, Ames ends up validating his grandfather’s visionary nature without identifying with it. He does this by fusing the nature of visions with the nature of memory. He explains, “Sometimes the visionary aspect of any particular day comes to you in the memory of it, or it opens to you over time . . . I believe there are visions that come to us only in memory, in retrospect” (91).

For Ames, memory is the conduit through which visions pass, and certain memories become the touchstones against which Ames measures his life experiences. One such vision is the memory of receiving what he views as “communion” from his father. He had accompanied his father to a community service project involving the tearing down of an old church, which took place in a sudden rainstorm. His father, covered in ash from the bonfire, fed Ames a bit of sooty biscuit—nothing more. Yet, Ames recalls,

I remember my father down on his heels in the rain, water dripping from his hat, feeding me biscuit from his scorched hand, with that old blackened wreck of a church behind him and steam rising where the rain fell on embers . . . It was so joyful and so sad. I mention it again because it seems to me much of my life was comprehended in that moment. Grief itself has often returned me to that morning, when I took communion from my father’s hand. I remember it as communion, and

I believe that's what it was. . . . I can't tell myself what [that day in the rain] has meant to me. But I know how many things it put altogether beyond question, for me." (95-96)

This experience would hardly qualify as “visionary” for Ames’s literalist grandfather, and his pragmatic father would likely dismiss it as merely his effort to give his child something to eat. But Ames has reshaped this memory in such a way that it functions as a vision that fulfills one of the significant goals of Congregationalism: becoming part of the body of Christ through ritual. Hobbs explains, “The believer who participates in concrete behavior such as baptism or communion is participating in the life of Christ in a way that transforms intellectual understanding into immediate human experience” (250). Ames believes that “it is religious experience above all that authenticates religion, for the purposes of the individual believer” (145), and Barbara Weightman describes a sacred place as “an ordinary place made extraordinary through ritual” (67). Ames’s memory of receiving a sooty biscuit as communion not only acts as a vision that drives his spiritual life, but also functions as a ritual that tied him to his life (both spiritual and temporal) in Gilead.

Ames’s understanding of the relationship between memory and vision tie him to his father’s and grandfather’s Calvinist tradition as certain as it distinctly distinguishes him from them. His father was finally so pragmatic about the world that he destroyed the mystery and beauty in it that Calvin idolized. On the other hand, his grandfather’s definition of visions was far too limited. Ames admits, “He may, so to speak, have been too dazzled by the great light of his experience to realize that an impressive sun shines on us all” (91). Robinson says that “the soul appraises what the mind integrates” (*Absence of Mind* 115), which is precisely the point of view that allows Ames to believe in the possibility of literal visitations from Christ—even

though he hasn't experienced them—and still be every bit as edified by the ordinary rituals that become miraculous with time and in memory.

Although Ames is generous in his definition of what constitutes a vision, he is somewhat ambivalent concerning the definition of saintliness. While he repeatedly refers to his grandfather as being a “saint,” he never ascribes that title to his father or to himself. This may be due to the fact that, as Hobbs explains, “hagiography usually describes an immediate experience of Christ’s presence in the life of a saint” (251). Although the Ames pastors are Congregationalists, and Ames and his father both sought to live according to their understanding of the truth, neither of them was blessed with the Lord’s physical presence as the grandfather was. Consequently, Ames hesitates to equate the quality of his life to someone who has experienced a personal, literal visit from the Lord. Furthermore, he would be aware of the Congregationalist view concerning encounters with the divine. Youngs explains that in such an encounter

God is remote and hidden from people; . . . Second, in any human encounter with God there is an element of surprise, riveting a person’s attention to a new reality; . . . third, the relationship between God and human institutions is unstable; faith requires the creation of images, institution, and doctrines, but these representations of God become empty without the continuing presence of the Lord. (35)

This is not to say that Ames does not feel the Lord’s continuing presence, but rather that he experiences that presence in a manner far different than his grandfather. He claims, “I am one of those righteous for whom the rejoicing in heaven will be comparatively restrained. And that’s all right” (238). He is willing to acknowledge his goodness, but he resists the notion that he is any more righteous than the average religious man.



Ironically, this sense of humility is precisely the standard for saintliness he uses when applying the term to members of his congregation or others whom he admires. When a woman in his congregation peacefully passes away, Ames says of her, “I am full of admiration for her. She’s given me a lot to live up to, . . . These old saints bless us every chance they get” (57). Ames frequently reflects on the wonder and holiness of simple kindnesses or natural beauty or the extraordinary nature of ordinary experience. In fact, his perception of holiness is as much Robinson’s as is his Calvinism. Robinson defines personal holiness as “openness to the perception of the holy in existence itself and, above all, in one another. In other words, it is not my belief that personal holiness—sanctity, as the theologians call it—inheres in anyone in isolation or as a static quality” (“Onward” 43). Again the allusion to the second great commandment suggests that regardless of whether one is a visionary in a literalist sense or in a more ordinary sense, saintliness is less a matter of personal visitation from the Lord than it is a broader version of good people doing their best to bless the lives of others—friends, family, neighbors, and enemies alike. A good personal relationship with Christ is impossible in the Congregationalist covenant if members of the covenant fail to bless each other. This is why both Grandfather Ames and his son were so bitterly disappointed: in failing to fulfill the commandment to love thy neighbor they were unable to experience full satisfaction in their relationship to Christ.

Although Ames consistently privileges his grandfather's stern vision over his father's modernist ambiguity, his identity is ultimately of his own making. Through Ames, Robinson also affects a partial reconciliation between Congregationalism's past and the present, which partakes of both without becoming the mirror image of either. Ames draws on the past to make sense of the present and to point toward various possibilities for future development within the tradition.

Not surprisingly, the resulting reconciliation is neither complete nor without contradiction—Ames writes a fiery, jeremiad-style anti-war sermon that drops in the stove, he believes in visions he has never experienced, and he carries the remnants of abolitionist sympathies even as he fails to fully participate in the great cause. This uneven mixture of reconciliation and contradiction is perhaps inevitable, given the historical conditions depicted in the novel. However, the reverence and respect with which Robinson utilizes a character like Ames to reconcile the dangers inherent in any vision that rejects multiple perspectives, and steps beyond covenant participation within a community, suggests that, indeed, there really may be balm in Gilead. In *The Death of Adam* she writes, “The antidote to fear, distrust, self-interest is always loyalty. The balm for failure or weakness, or even for disloyalty, is always loyalty” (89). John Ames III is the “balm in Gilead” for his family both past and present. He tells his young son, “It is one of the best traits of good people that they love where they pity” (186). Ames’s love for his father and grandfather extends far beyond his pity for them, which not only makes him a good person, but also qualifies him as a contemporary saint.

Ames is a deep and complex character, but he is also the representation of the most current phase of Congregationalist thought and practice. His careful, devoted retelling of his family history portrays as honestly as possible the ways in which culture and history combine to influence generational interpretations of how theology should transfer into social experience. It also reads much like a softer version of a Puritan jeremiad directed at contemporary American religious culture. Ames’s epistle to his child is clearly written to a man—not a boy. Ames’s child is seven years old in 1956 (the year in which Ames begins his extended letter), and as Rebecca Painter observes, that would make him roughly the age of our current national leadership (“Virtue” 95). Ames’s reverent uncertainty concerning his past, present, and future is both a

lamentation of what happens when we ignore the commandment to love God through serving our neighbors and a warning of what might be if we fail to correct our national moral course.

Robinson's essays frequently compare and contrast contemporary moral and sociopolitical issues with those from history, and warn that our failure to remember the past will lead our current society to a morally destitute future. She explains, "Unless we can reestablish peace and order as values, and learn to see our own well-being in our neighbor's prosperity, we can do nothing at all for the rain forests and the koala bears" (*Death of Adam* 253).

*Gilead*, then, serves as a different stage from which Robinson can call the nation to repentance. Fiction frequently has more staying power than an essay because it creates a space wherein readers are shown the consequences of actions, rather than informed of them. Ames is a remnant of a smoldering tradition whose vision of a covenant community (which had been generally sustained since the Puritans first arrived in the New World) has dimmed, a tradition in very real danger of perishing. *Gilead* is Robinson's effort to inspire a rekindling of the best aspects of the Congregationalist covenant into national virtues. Because Calvin and the early Puritan tradition have been so grossly misunderstood by both the scholarly community and the culture at large, it is a difficult task. As Robinson wryly observes, "Contempt for the past surely accounts for a consistent failure to consult it" (*Absence of Mind* 29). *Gilead* is one of the devices with which Robinson attempts to provide a renewed sense of vision and a renewed dedication to keeping the first two great commandments, resulting in a renewed dedication to the community-centered goals of the Congregationalist covenant. John Ames III is the character whose life serves as a "flesh and blood existent" for how to do it (Wyschogrod 4).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Weele's paper offers a list of historical events, public documents, cultural history, and public interpretations of public events one might consider when doing further historical literary criticism of this novel.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Pearson's article, though dated, provides a clear, condensed history of Congregationalism's shift from being a collection of autonomous churches to a specific denomination within America's religious pluralism. It sheds light not only on the historical context of the Ames family history, but also on the historical context for the relationship between Ames and Boughton as ministers in friendly but distinct denominations.

<sup>3</sup> Ames decides early in the week to preach on the story of Hagar and Ishmael. The idea came to him while praying, and he explains, "The story says that it is not only the father of a child who cares for its life, who protects its mother, and it says that even if the mother can't find a way to provide for it, or herself, provision will be made. At that level it is a story full of comfort. That is how life goes—we send our children into the wilderness. Some of them on the day they are born, it seems, for all the help we can give them . . . But there must be angels there, too, and springs of water. Even that wilderness, the very habitation of jackals, is the Lord's. I need to bear this in mind" (118-19). This line of reasoning is clearly a result of Ames's anxiety about his family's survival after his death. Furthermore, he has no reason to anticipate Jack's Sabbath attendance, and though Ames admits that he strays from his text more than he intended, and that some of his extemporaneous remarks may have been influenced by Jack's presence, he also feels it was "considerable egotism on his part to take my words as directed at him only" (131).

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