2 The Beginnings of a Christian Doctrine of the Spiritual Senses before Origen

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What Are 'Spiritual Senses'? Starting with Origen

When Origen wrote his response to Celsus' attack on Christianity, one of the challenges that he had to deal with was: Did Jesus *really* see 'the apparition of a bird' (φάσμα ὄρνιθος) flying out of the air onto him at his baptism, and did he *really* hear a voice from heaven making him to be the Son of God?[1] (*Cels.* 1.41) It was a challenge, essentially, to Christians' appeal to sense perception as a mode of knowing, both for Christ and, implicitly, for those baptised in his name.

Origen suggests that this line of argument might have carried some force in the mouth of an Epicurean or some other kind of materialist philosopher. Such people might well doubt the story about the apparition (φάσμα) of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. But Celsus placed it in the mouth of a Jew. And Jews, as Origen points out, believe all sorts of miraculous things. Ezekiel and Isaiah are great visionaries, and Jesus is surely more credible than they, since he is known to have done a great many more good things. In any case, the doctrine of providence relies on trust that true impressions come in dreams – so why not waking also?[2] If Ezekiel said that he saw the heaven opened, we are not to envisage that the sky actually was rent apart rather than that Ezekiel had the experience of an impression of that kind. To interpret biblical visions as if they were describing events in the physical, material realm rather than apparitions is simple-minded naivety (*Cels.* 1.43–48).

It is at this point in the argument that Origen introduces what has come to be treated in modern scholarship as a *locus classicus* for his doctrine of the spiritual senses as a distinctively Christian mode of knowing.

[1] ἔστι δ' ὁ Ἰουδαῖος αὐτῷ ἔτι ταῦτα λέγων, πρὸς ὃν ὁμολογοῦμεν εἶναι κύριον ἡμῶν τὸν Ἰησοῦν· Λουομένῳ, φησί, σοὶ παρὰ τῷ Ἰωάννῃ φάσμα ὄρνιθος ἐξ ἀέρος λέγεις ἐπιπτῆναι. Εἶτα πυνθανόμενος ὁ παρ' αὐτῷ Ἰουδαῖός φησι· Τίς τοῦτο εἶδεν ἀξιόχρεως μάρτυς τὸ φάσμα, ἢ τίς ἤκουσεν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ φωνῆς εἰσποιούσης σε υἱὸν τῷ θεῷ; Πλὴν ὅτι σὺ φῂς καί τινα ἕνα ἐπάγῃ τῶν μετὰ σοῦ κεκολασμένων.

[2] Dillon (1986: 444) points out the Stoic origins of this account of oneiromancy.

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I give Chadwick's translation, which is often quoted in English-language discussions of the issue. The passage reads:

> Anyone who looks into this subject more deeply will say that there is, as the scripture calls it, a certain generic divine sense (θείας τινὸς γενικῆς αἰσθήσεως) which only the man who is blessed finds on this earth. Thus Solomon says (Prov 2:5): 'Thou shalt find a divine sense' (ὅτι αἴσθησιν θείαν εὑρήσεις). There are many forms of this sense: a sight (ὁράσεως) which can see things superior to corporeal beings, the cherubim or seraphim being obvious instances, and a hearing (ἀκοῆς) which can receive impressions of sounds that have no objective existence in the air, and a taste (γεύσεως) which feeds on living bread that has come down from heaven and gives life to the world (John 6:33). So also there is a sense of smell (ὀσφρήσεως) which smells spiritual things, as Paul speaks of 'a sweet savour of Christ unto God' (2 Cor 2:15) and a sense of touch (ἁφῆς) in accordance with which John says that he has handled with his hands 'of the Word of life' (1 John 1:1). (*Contra Celsum*, 1.48 (PG 11.749A–B, trans. Chadwick 1953: 44))

In this passage, Origen outlines an idea of the human being as able to discover a form of sense perception that is more divine than the ordinary kind and that structures people's experience of spiritual realities in five different sensory modalities.

In making this argument, Origen has shifted away from the more obviously visionary narratives of Ezekiel and Isaiah. Vision and hearing are treated somewhat vaguely, as too well known to need discussion. Taste, smell, and touch are backed up with examples from the New Testament, but Origen's attitude to the materiality of the New Testament texts is unclear. Is he using New Testament language to characterise immaterial, visionary experience, or does he intend us to think also of the material encounters with bread at the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:33), with apostles who are the savour of Christ unto God (2 Cor 2:15), and with the incarnate Word, whom John recollects (1 John 1:1)? Later in *Contra Celsum*, defending the doctrine of the resurrection, Origen suggests that the human being is capable of acquiring a full set of five sensory organs, which are analogous to those of the body, but differ from them, as superior and more divine. They can apprehend spiritual realities in five different sensory modes, though they do not need the body in order to do so (e.g., *Cels.* 7.33–34).

These passages in the *Contra Celsum* evoke ways of thinking and writing about Christian somatology and sanctification that recur across Origen's work.[3] However, he never writes a treatise to systematise something that he would call 'a doctrine of the spiritual senses'. His presentation depends on the exegesis of a handful of biblical passages, which he hooks onto his Greek

[3] Rahner 1932: 113–36.

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reading of Prov 2:5 (αἴσθησιν θείαν εὑρήσεις).[4] He employs the language and the concept in diverse ways. He never finally resolves the ambiguity as to whether or how the more divine sense perception may integrate experiences mediated through the body, such as eating the bread that came down from heaven or listening to the words spoken by Jesus. He envisages the possibility of people being able to attain to a single divine sense without being able to exercise all five.[5] It is only the truly blessed person, as indicated in the passage quoted, who enjoys the use of the full sensorium on this earth. Holy people such as Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Paul were of such a kind.[6] It is in commenting on Canticles that Origen makes most extensive use of the language spiritual sense perception.[7] In Origen's scheme of Christian development, Canticles belongs to the most advanced stage, for the most fully purified readers, who are most ready for encounter with God. Even they will only acquire use of the spiritual senses if God also grants it to them.[8]

I have begun with Origen because he is a crucial figure in the modern debate about 'the doctrine of the spiritual senses'. In that discussion, it has been influentially asserted that the doctrine *originated* with him, and this has shaped how scholars have approached the language of the spiritual senses in early Christian sources. In particular, it has led them to exclude all sources earlier than Origen, even the Bible itself. The next part of this chapter will show how and why this emphasis has arisen, and will argue that it is both historically and theologically problematic. The remainder of the chapter will turn to sources earlier than Origen, including both Clement, who was his predecessor in Alexandria, and selected portions of the Bible, from Paul, John, and Revelation. On the basis of these texts, I will seek to show how the study of the spiritual senses prior to Origen could give us a richer account of the origin and function of the early Christians' emphasis on spiritual senses as a mode of knowing.

Origen as the Originator of the Doctrine of the Spiritual Senses: From Karl Rahner to Paul Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley

Origen's centrality to the modern debate was established by Karl Rahner (1904–84) in an essay that was first published in French in 1932. Rahner's

[4] *Cels.* 1.48; 7.34; *Princ.* 1.1.9; *Fr. Luc.* 186.40–45; *Fr. Ps. ad* Ps 134:15–18. Rahner 1932: 116–17 notes Prov 2:5 and Heb 5:14 as crucial.

[5] Rahner 1932: 119–20, 125. [6] Rahner 1932: 120, 136. [7] Rahner 1932: 118.

[8] Rahner 1932: 132. Rahner's account of Origen is in Rahner 1932: 114–36. As the notes above show, I have substantially relied on his work in my account of Origen above.

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title, 'Le début d'une doctrine des cinq sens spirituels chez Origène', gave prominence to the idea that Origen introduced something new.[9] That something Rahner called a 'doctrine of the five spiritual senses'. He explained that religious experience, especially mystical experience, defies description, and so mystics have recourse to the language of sense perception. They speak of seeing, hearing, and touching spiritual realities. The Bible already uses the language of sense perception metaphorically – Rahner cites as examples Eph 1:18; 2 Cor 2:18 (*sic*[10]); Ps 33:9[11]; Acts 17:27; and Ps 84:9.[12] However, he suggested that we should speak of a 'doctrine of the spiritual senses only when these partly figurative, partly literal ('mi-figuratives, mi-réelles') expressions (to touch God, the eyes of the heart, etc.) are found integrated into a complete system of the five instruments of the spiritual perception of supra-sensible religious realities'. According to this definition, Origen seems to be the first to formulate a doctrine of the five spiritual senses. Rahner's seminal article is devoted to clarifying Origen's thought and its reception.[13] I have already drawn on it in my account of Origen above.

In recent years, there has been something of a renaissance of interest in the 'spiritual senses'.[14] The most ambitious architect of this renewed discussion has been Paul Gavrilyuk of the University of St Thomas in St Paul, Minnesota. He has organised a large-scale collaborative project around the spiritual senses, which is intended to produce a series of essay collections. The first of these, co-edited with Sarah Coakley, appeared in 2012 under the title *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*.[15] That first book aimed to give a historical overview of the theological tradition

[9] In this chapter, I focus on Rahner's original French publication. He later published an abridged form in German (in 1975); this was eventually translated loosely into English (in 1979).

[10] Rahner undoubtedly meant 2 Cor 3:18. [11] Rahner must be citing the LXX or Vulgate.

[12] Eph 1:18: πεφωτισμένους τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῆς καρδίας [ὑμῶν] εἰς τὸ εἰδέναι ὑμᾶς τίς ἐστιν ἡ ἐλπὶς τῆς κλήσεως αὐτοῦ; 2 Cor 3:18, ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντες ἀνακεκαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ τὴν δόξαν κυρίου κατοπτριζόμενοι τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν καθάπερ ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος; LXX Ps 33:9, γεύσασθε καὶ ἴδετε ὅτι χρηστὸς ὁ κύριος μακάριος ἀνήρ ὃς ἐλπίζει ἐπ᾽ αὐτόν; Acts 17:27, ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν, εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὕροιεν, καί γε οὐ μακρὰν ἀπὸ ἑνὸς ἑκάστου ἡμῶν ὑπάρχοντα; Ps 84:9, ἀκούσομαι τί λαλήσει ἐν ἐμοὶ κύριος ὁ θεός ὅτι λαλήσει εἰρήνην ἐπὶ τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς ὁσίους αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐπιστρέφοντας πρὸς αὐτὸν καρδίαν.

[13] Rahner 1932: esp. 113–14. [14] McInroy 2014; Coolman 2016; Michaud 2017.

[15] Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2012a. The next essay collection, *Sensing Things Divine: Towards a Constructive Account of Spiritual Perception* (ed. Frederick D. Aquino and Paul L. Gavrilyuk) is announced on Aquino and Gavrilyuk's academia.edu pages (accessed 1 August 2018). See also https://spiritualperceptionproject.wordpress.com (accessed 18 October 2022).

from its beginnings to the modern day. Following Rahner, they defined it as 'beginning' with Origen.

However, they did not follow Rahner in much else, and this is significant for how they steered a new course for the debate. One of their key moves in introducing the project was to open up the definition of the spiritual senses. Whereas Rahner had initially insisted on an integrated account of a *fivefold sensorium*,[16] Gavrilyuk and Coakley allowed that many theologians have something interesting to say about the spiritual senses even if they do not treat all five, indeed even if they only treat one or two, and unsystematically at that. They acknowledged that the sources have no uniform terminology; they may not use the word 'spiritual' at all; they may use the language of sense perception to describe the encounter with God, but without connecting it explicitly with soul, mind, or heart. By 'spiritual senses', Gavrilyuk and Coakley thus wanted to suggest no more than a 'non-physical mode of perception' by which the human encounters the divine. This is not dependent on a particular anthropology, pneumatology, or theology:

> The qualifier 'spiritual' before 'senses' is intended to indicate non-physical mode of perception, rather than to prioritize an anthropology in which 'spirit' is consistently differentiated from the other aspects of the self, such as body, soul, intellect or affect. A further variant is that some Christian authors link the language of spiritual senses explicitly to pneumatology, and thence to their trinitarianism, while others do not, or do so only very implicitly.[17]

With such a broad definition and flexible approach to spiritual senses, the way is open for the inclusion of many more theologians than Rahner had considered.

We might therefore begin to wonder why no sources *prior* to Origen were discussed. My reading of Gavrilyuk and Coakley is that they return to a restrictive definition of the spiritual senses when they consider the earlier material, and that this is at least partly because they understand the doctrine of spiritual senses as exegetical rather than as original to the biblical authors. The implication is that it is the province of systematicians rather than scriptural scholars. Gavrilyuk and Coakley acknowledge that meditation upon the scriptural text was crucial to the development of accounts

[16] Gavrilyuk and Coakley (2012b: 5) point out that Rahner did not in fact hold to this definition in his later work (or even in the later parts of the initial article) but moved towards interest in the 'unitive character' of spiritual perception.

[17] Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2012b: 2–5, quotation at 3–4.

of the spiritual senses, and that there are many expressions and even theologies in scripture that resonate with the doctrine. However, they declare that:

> Despite this wealth of material gleaned from scripture, it should be emphasised that *the Bible as such* offers no 'doctrine of the spiritual senses'. Most patristic authors attuned to our theme commonly offer their insights about spiritual perception when prompted by their favorite biblical passages. But for some early Christian theologians – and Origen is perhaps the first of them – the spiritual senses came to occupy *a distinct place in their theological anthropology*. This being the *systematic focus* of our volume, our collection necessarily starts with Origen.[18]

Two things are remarkable about this comment. Firstly, the notion of 'the *Bible as such*' and what doctrines are contained in it is difficult at the best of times. Secondly, the relative simplicity of this definition of spiritual senses stands in contrast to the earlier discussion: the doctrine of the spiritual senses is now defined in relation to an author's 'theological anthropology'. This sounds far more restrictive than before, when they were willing to include many authorities whose notion of the spiritual senses was unsystematic, diverse, and *not bound to a particular terminology, anthropology, pneumatology, or theology*.

If Origen were cited simply as an arbitrary starting point, then the question of where the doctrine began would be of no significance. But Gavrilyuk and Coakley are making him into a systematic starting point, as if he defined the *theological* beginnings of the doctrine, as well as connecting this with the grounds for programmatically excluding the Bible from consideration. To understand this move better, we need to look first at the treatment of Origen in the opening essay of Gavrilyuk and Coakley's volume (2012b), and then at the way its programme is realised within the larger discussion of the book.

Mark McInroy's piece on Origen begins the collection. It deserves close attention because if Origen is to be regarded as the first to articulate a real doctrine of the spiritual senses, then we need to understand what that means in terms of the Gavrilyuk and Coakley project. A key feature of McInroy's treatment is that he operates with a distinction between *metaphor* and *analogy* that became common in twentieth-century discussions of the spiritual senses. It should be noted at once that the language of 'metaphor' and 'analogy' is not being used in the way that we might expect within a rhetorical frame: in the spiritual senses debate, these terms

[18] Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2012b: 12 (emphasis mine).

are not identifying rhetorical tropes. Rather, they are used to distinguish occasions when Origen (or others) use the language of sense perception to mean 'understanding', such that it can be translated into the language of 'understanding' without losing anything significant in that translation. This is counted as a 'metaphor'; a commonly cited example is *Princ.* 1.1.9, where Origen explains that 'to see God in the heart' is 'to understand and know him with the mind'. 'Analogy', on the other hand, is used when there is a strong idea of organs of sense perception analogous to the corporeal ones, which are therefore part of a kind of spiritual somatology. An example would be *Contra Celsum* 1.48 (quoted above).[19]

In this context, the terms 'metaphor' and 'analogy' drive a wedge between rhetorical usage of the language of the spiritual senses and anthropological claims, where the spiritual senses are part of a theological anthropology. They underscore the possibility of a non-physical physiognomy and to discount language of spiritual sense perception that does not conform to this concept. They also tend to ossify the functions of comparative tropes, such that both 'metaphor' and 'analogy' cease to have the open-endedness that usually characterises them; 'analogy' acquires a specific referent; 'metaphor' becomes limited to essentially *dead* metaphors, where 'spiritual senses' simply *mean* understanding without remainder.[20]

This proves problematic. Origen uses the language of spiritual sensation in both ways and often intertwines them.[21] McInroy's chief interlocutor, John Dillon, explained this by positing a difference between early and late Origen: he thought that the spiritual sensorium was an offspring of the saint's senile mind and that his account of the spiritual senses was driven by the need to explain away awkward anthropomorphic passages of the Bible, which he would have done much better simply to describe as figurative.[22] McInroy disputes the evidence for a significant difference between early and late Origen; the distinction between metaphor and analogy he finds useful but insufficient, and he seeks to sharpen it by the addition of a further criterion. He turns to Augustin Poulain's descriptive manual of mystical experience, which was influential in the early twentieth century,

[19] McInroy 2012: 22–24.

[20] Gavrilyuk and Coakley (2012b: 6–7) point out that the preoccupation of distinguishing 'metaphorical' from 'analogical' language of spiritual perception is rooted in Aquinas' differentiation between 'analogical statements that are literally (*proprie*) true', and 'metaphorical statements that are not'. But this is not a conceptual distinction that Origen or other patristic authors were using.

[21] See McInroy 2012: 29–30, 34. [22] Dillon 1986: 444–49.

and which was cited by Rahner.[23] Following Poulain, he suggests that it is when the spiritual senses perceive God as *present* to them that they emerge as part of *theological anthropology*. By accentuating the difference between 'metaphor' and 'analogy' through a criterion of 'presence', McInroy indicates that the spiritual senses are primarily a problem of *theological anthropology experienced in direct mystical encounter*.

As the essay on Origen in a volume that makes Origen the programmatic starting point for the history of the theology of the spiritual senses, we might expect the rest of the essays to build on this opening definition. A perusal of the others, however, will swiftly show that this is not an account of the spiritual senses that they rigorously maintain.

Several contributors explicitly differentiate their subjects from Origen, because the analogy with the corporeal sensorium is transcended or rejected in their case.[24] For some, what is really at stake is the perfection of the corporeal senses to perceive more spiritually (e.g., Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus); for others, it is the perfection of the spiritual senses across a continuum (Pseudo-Dionysius); some theologians prioritise a single spiritual sense over the others (Maximus, Pseudo-Dionysius, Alexander of Hales, Nicholas of Cusa) and may envisage its function in ways that are not properly analogous to corporeal sense perception (Maximus, Pseudo-Dionysius). For some, Aristotle is as important as Origen in interpreting the spiritual senses (Nicholas of Cusa); for others, spiritual sensation is a thoroughly biblical discourse (Gregory the Great, John Wesley). Some doctrines of the spiritual senses accentuate the difference between body and spirit, but often the purpose is quite the opposite: The oxymoron of the 'spiritual senses' is intended to refuse that dichotomy, and to evoke how encounter with the divine overwhelms our usual categories of language and experience.[25]

[23] McInroy is more different from Rahner than he acknowledges. I find his gloss on Rahner 1932: 114 particularly misleading: Rahner writes, 'Il nous semble prudent de ne parler d'une doctrine des sens spirituels que lorsque ces expressions mi-figuratives, mi-réelles (toucher Dieu, les yeux du coeur, etc. …) se trouvent intégrées dans un système complet de cinq instruments de perception spirituelle pour les réalités suprasensibles religieuses.' McInroy (2012: 22) glosses, 'Karl Rahner writes that one may speak "properly" of a "doctrine of the spiritual senses" when one finds (1) a non-metaphorical use of sensory language in which (2) all five senses are used in "the spiritual perception of immaterial realities".' The second part of this is accurate, but to represent Rahner's comments on biblical expressions that are 'mi-figuratives, mi-réelles' as a criterion of non-metaphoricity I find misleading.

[24] Coakley 2012: 42–43 (Gregory of Nyssa); Gavrilyuk 2012: 99 (Pseudo-Dionysius); Aquino 2012: 107 (Maximus); Green 2012: 210–23 (Nicholas of Cusa).

[25] Coolman 2012b: 157.

In fact, the essays in the volume confirm plurality in accounts of the spiritual senses much more than a consistent systematic core to any such 'doctrine'. The issues that structure thought about the spiritual senses are diverse: attaining the beatific vision (e.g., Thomas Gallus, Bonaventure); asceticism to purify the senses and reform the self (Maximus, Gregory the Great); the *corpus mysticum* of the ecclesia, especially the perfection of senses in Christ the 'head' (Alexander of Hales); sacraments, especially baptism to initiate spiritual sense perception (Pseudo-Dionysius) or the Eucharist to maintain it (Alexander of Hales); the nature of the resurrected body (Augustine) or of the post-mortem body (Gregory the Great); or some combination of these. Some of the authors included in the volume treat the spiritual senses systematically as part of their 'doctrine' (e.g., Bonaventure); others simply mention them in ways that suggest their significance, but without systematising them (e.g., Gregory of Nyssa). Aquinas is included even though the point of the chapter is that Aquinas' 'more fully developed theological anthropology allows him to dispense with spiritual senses'.[26]

My purpose in emphasising this is not to denigrate the work in this book. On the contrary, the breadth is central to its purpose of mapping out the significance of the spiritual senses in Christian tradition. It also underpins the next stage in the project, where Gavrilyuk and Aquino will introduce a collection of studies that take a range of different disciplinary approaches.[27] Without such breadth, our understanding of the tradition would be utterly impoverished.

My point is rather that this breadth renders particularly inapposite the insistence on starting with Origen and on excluding the Bible as a relevant source in its own right. Origen cannot be a programmatic starting point if the tradition that is outlined so often departs from Origen's approach. And if what we are really looking at is often 'not … a consciously enunciated "spiritual senses *doctrine*" as such, but rather certain key phrases which signal … wrestling with the manifold epistemological issues of sensuality and its relation to the mind (*nous*) and soul (*psychê*)',[28] then it is surely

[26] Cross 2012: 177. [27] See n. 15 above.

[28] Coakley 2012: 45, on Gregory of Nyssa. Cf. Abraham 2012: 278, 'I take the spiritual senses tradition to be minimally constituted by the thesis that perception of the divine can be a legitimate ground for theological assertion. It is nicely captured in the beatitude "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" (Matt 5:8). More generally it posits that the reality, activity and nature of God are visible in, say, creation, the life of Jesus of Nazareth and the lives of the saints. So the core claim hinges on the possibility of perception of the divine. This

appropriate to consider the Bible as the earliest stage in the *Christian* history of this tradition. The way the tradition draws on (at least) Jewish and classical patterns of language and thought would be a further layer of study beyond that.

In the scope of this chapter, it is only possible to scrape the surface of this expansive field, but a small number of case studies can suffice to establish it as a part of the tradition of spiritual senses that would be worthy of further research. The aim is to do more than just show that there is further relevant material than has been taken into account before: simply having greater bulk of material is not in itself very useful unless the further sources change our perspective on the tradition itself. I want to indicate that they probably would do so if they received extended study. The discussion is in two parts. Firstly, I give a case study from Clement of Alexandria in order to show that there is a church father prior to Origen who is taking notice of the spiritual senses in a way that resonates strongly with some of the more established figures of the later tradition. However, Clement's emphases are also distinctive in interesting ways. Secondly, I give three examples from three different parts of the New Testament (Paul, the Fourth Gospel, and Revelation). This material is very different from Clement, Origen, and the medieval tradition. But it highlights something that is often lost in studies of the later tradition: At its historical and scriptural source, Christian thinking about the spiritual senses is thoroughly christological, and (I suggest) intimately bound up with faith in the incarnation and its consequences for humanity.

Before Origen: Spiritual Senses in Clement of Alexandria – The Case of Baptism

It has often been noted that Clement of Alexandria has the same peculiar Greek rendering of Prov 2:5 as Origen does: 'you shall find a divine sense perception' (αἴσθησιν θείαν εὑρήσεις).[29] For Origen, this phrase became the hook in his memory for storing an array of other texts that are the backbone of his so-called 'doctrine of the five spiritual senses'. Little has been made of its prior appearance in Clement, so this might

can then be extended to the denser claim that human agents are equipped by appropriate senses that discern the truth about God accurately.' The 'core claim' in Abraham's summary is far from the Origenist approach and is even articulated explicitly in biblical terms.

[29] *Strom.* 1.4.27.2.

seem an obvious way into studying the spiritual senses earlier than Origen. Indeed, it would be possible to hypothesise that Origen developed his account on the basis of a meditative reading of Clement.[30] However, if we are to understand Clement's approach to spiritual senses, we need to start with what is important to Clement, rather than approaching him via what matters to Origen. In this way, we can also hope to appreciate why studying spiritual senses before Origen is theologically as well as historically important.

Unlike in Origen, Prov 2:5 did not become a proof-text or a formula for Clement. If there is a single verse that most frequently drives his reflection on spiritual senses, it is probably St Paul's words about 'what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of a human being' (1 Cor 2:9).[31] However, Clement's attention to the spiritual senses goes beyond any one verse or even collection of verses. He often notices the eyes and ears in particular – either separately or together – as organs with a special role in the economy of salvation. They may be primarily instruments of cognition, affect, ethical agency, or discernment. They are picked out at moments that are critical in a person's Christian formation. Sometimes that coincides with structurally significant points in Clement's own literary work. Sometimes it appears in close conjunction with the idea of Christians as a new creation.

I focus on Clement's account of baptism in *Paed.* 1.6, since this is where he develops an extended account of how the eyes and ears are activated for gnostic vision and audition. If ever there were a passage where Clement might seem to have something like a *doctrine* of the spiritual senses, this would be it. That said, I do not agree with the approach to Clement that treats his work as if the way to the 'real

[30] In *Strom.* 1.4, Clement compares different kinds of wisdom, including those that have to do with sense perception and those that are more intellectual. His taxonomy is difficult to follow, since it involves a differentiation between *aisthêsis* and *synaisthêsis*, which, however, is complicated by Clement's attempt to align his analytic vocabulary with the somewhat different mode of expression in scripture. However, like Origen, he makes Prov 2:5 an important point of reflection; Clement even considers it in its wider context (Prov 2:3–7 and 3:23). Like Origen, he finds an analogy between sensual and intellectual perception, and he is able to use *pneuma aisthêseôs* in relation to both, and to find ways of qualifying or modifying *aisthêsis* that allow him to associate it closely with knowledge of immaterial realities, e.g., συναίσθησις, ἡ κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν αἴσθησις, ἡ ἐν θεοσεβείᾳ αἰσθήσις, ἡ εἰς θεοσέβειαν συναίσθησις. Clement explicitly invites his readers to search for hidden seeds in his 'notes' and farm them for gnostic insight. This complicated passage on the spirit of perception could plausibly have been well farmed by Origen so as to bear richer exegetical and theological fruit through Prov 2:5.

[31] *Protr.* 10.94.4; 11.118.4; *Paed.* 1.4.37.1; 2.12.129.4; 3.12.86.2; *Strom.* 2.4.15.3; 4.18.114.1; 4.22.135.3; 5.4.25.4; 5.6.40.1; 6.8.68.1; *Exc.* 10.5; *Quis div.* 23.3. References found with the help of Stählin's *Register*. Dubious 'allusions' omitted.

Clement' were through systematising the hints that he has left scattered. I do not think that the parts of his work that are incipiently systematic are more significant than the incidental things that come up again and again in passing.

However, baptism *is* a scenario where Clement gives special attention to the origins of what we might call the spiritual senses. He not only mentions the eye of the spirit but also explains the process by which it is activated for vision:

> Just as those who have shaken off sleep have immediately woken up on the inside, or rather just as those who try to draw the mist away from the eyes, do not supply themselves with light from the outside, which they do not have, but by (clearing away) the obstacle from the eyes they leave the pupil free, so too we who are being baptised – when we have rubbed away the sins that were casting the holy spirit in darkness in the manner of a mist – we have the eye of the spirit (ὄμμα τοῦ πνεύματος) unobstructed and bright, with which alone we see the divine (τὸ θεῖον ἐποπτεύομεν), when the holy spirit flows onto and into us from heaven (ᾧ δὴ μόνῳ τὸ θεῖον ἐποπτεύομεν, οὐρανόθεν ἐπεισρέοντος ἡμῖν τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος). This admixture of eternal radiance able to see the everlasting light, since like is dear to like, and what is holy is dear to that from which it is holy, which is properly called light, 'for you were once darkness, but now light in the lord' (cf. John 1:5).[32] (*Paed*. 1.6.28.1)

The 'eye of the spirit', then, has sins cleared away from it so that it can entertain the vision of the divine. Clement uses the emotionally charged mystery vocabulary of ἐποπτεύειν to suggest an epiphanic encounter. The sanctity of the vision is further marked out by the way it occurs: It depends first on the intromission of the Holy Spirit flowing onto and into the baptisand from heaven. Clement's complicated compound verb ἐπεισρέω for the Holy Spirit suggests an attempt to harmonise the gospel accounts of the spirit descending *onto* (ἐπ᾽ αὐτόν, Matt 3:16 // Luke 3:22 // John 1:32) or *into* (εἰς αὐτόν, Mark 1:10) Jesus, who is the explicit paradigm for the Christian's baptism.[33] Next, the vision is enabled through 'likeness'. The phrase τὸ ὅμοιον τῷ ὁμοίῳ φίλον ('like is dear to like') was a commonplace of Greek philosophical argument;[34] Clement reorients it through the scriptural vocabulary of divine 'holiness'. In baptism, likeness between

[32] Translation is my own, but with an eye on Choufrine 2002: 41, 82. Choufrine offers an excellent, detailed exegesis of this passage and its relationship to gnostic, Philonic, and Platonic material, as well as to the understudied works of Clement (the 'other Clement', as Bucur calls him).

[33] The curious Markan version was recently the subject of an excellent short study by Botner 2015.

[34] Rankin 1964: 59–61.

'what is holy' and 'what makes it holy' gives rise to the possibilities of perception.

This passage emphasises the 'eyes' alone. The preference for the eyes depends on the imagery of baptism as 'illumination', which is found in the New Testament and was already traditional by Clement's day. Nonetheless, the ears are sufficiently important that it is not long before Clement introduces how illumination is experienced in two ways, both as vision and as hearing. He writes first, 'gnosis is illumination, which makes ignorance disappear and inserts the ability to see clearly' (29.4).[35] Shortly afterward, he adds: 'gnosis rises up and flashes round the mind with illumination, and at once we hear as disciples, we who are without learning' (30.1).[36] His point is the same in both instances, namely that baptism brings about a way of knowing that is best understood as a form of sense perception. Like the miracles in the gospels, where Jesus' messianic role was to give sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, so here vision and hearing are granted all at once. There is no process of learning: the jingle μαθηταὶ οἱ ἀμαθεῖς underscores this. Perception is immediate apprehension; it neither requires nor entails discursive reason; it is grounded in experience. Where there is light, there is no darkness (29.4).

This emphasis on a particular Christian mode of knowing, which is best articulated as perceptual, is important for Clement's apologetic purpose. He wants to argue against the claim that there are different grades of Christian after baptism, some of them childish, others distinguished by superior gnosis. Clement holds that there is a real transformation and perfection in baptism itself. The gift of the Holy Spirit marks a new creation, parallel to God's initial act of 'breathing in something of his own' when he first made man (cf. *Paed.* 1.3.7.2). This is experienced as a renewal of embodied life, including an illumination to see and hear as disciples.

However, Clement also maintains that baptism is not the final end of the Christian life. The language of sense perception can articulate this experience of the 'not yet' as well. Paul says, 'Now we see through a glass darkly, but then we shall see face to face.' Clement explains that after purifying ourselves of fleshly thoughts, eventually we will have faces equal to the angels, and then shall see face to face. The text that he so often quotes, 'what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the mind of a human

[35] φωτισμὸς ἄρα ἡ γνῶσις ἐστιν, ὁ ἐξαφανίζων τὴν ἄγνοιαν καὶ τὸ διορατικὸν ἐντιθείς.

[36] ὅτι δὲ ἡ γνῶσις συνανατέλλει τῷ φωτίσματι περιστράπτουσα τὸν νοῦν, καὶ εὐθέως ἀκούομεν μαθηταὶ οἱ ἀμαθεῖς.

being', can underscore precisely the 'not yet' aspect of the Christians' current situation. There is only one ear that has heard it, Clement observes sagely, namely the one that was snatched up into the third heaven. But even that one was bidden to keep mum.[37]

The fact that baptism is the moment for contemplating the activation of the spiritual senses is consistent with the longer Christian tradition, where liturgical practice and material culture continually interacted with and influenced emergent epistemologies. Even prior to Clement, the senses were sometimes given special notice at baptism – Hebrews understands baptism as illumination and tasting the heavenly gift (Heb 6:4–5); Tertullian associates it with having the sins of our original blindness washed away (*Bapt.* 1.1);[38] some scholars have suggested that the Gospel of Truth may be a baptismal homily, in which case its list of *five* senses in this context is particularly striking.[39] The passage of Origen with which this chapter began also arose in discussion of Jesus' baptism, and the vision and audition of the spirit that he perceived there. Jesus' baptism was perceived as the type and pattern for all his disciples.

In later meditation on baptism, the doctrine of the spiritual senses is more fully developed. Gavrilyuk's essay on Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite underscores the role of baptism in Dionysius' reflection on spiritual senses.[40] Consider also the fresco from the Catacomb of Saints Marcellinus and Peter, dated to the fourth century (see Plate 2.1). The baptisand stands stark naked with a dove pouring water over him from a shell. His eyes and ears are particularly prominent, as if we were intended to recognise their significance in the baptismal rite. The hand placed on his head evokes the sense of touch, and the nose and mouth are also firmly outlined.[41] The motif of nudity suggests the experience of re-creation, as well as transition from one mode of corporeal life to another.[42]

[37] *Paed.* 1.6.37.1: «ὃ οὖς οὐκ ἤκουσέν ποτε» ἢ μόνον ἐκεῖνο τὸ ἐν τρίτῳ ἁρπασθὲν οὐρανῷ; Ἀλλὰ κἀκεῖνο ἐχεμυθεῖν ἐκελεύετο τότε. Pythagorean teaching on keeping silent characteristically used the term ἐχεμυθία. Clement cites Pythagorean practices of silence in *Strom.* 5.11.67.4, discussed in Mortley 1973: 201.

[38] Noted in Jensen 2012a: 113.

[39] Gos. Truth 30.17–30: 'And the Spirit ran after him, hastening from waking him up. Having extended his hand to him who lay upon the ground, he set him up on his feet, for he had not yet risen. He gave them the means of knowing the knowledge of the Father and the revelation of his Son. For, when they had seen him and had heard him, he granted them to taste him and to smell him and to touch the beloved Son' (trans. Attridge and MacRae, p. 101 in CGL 1). On the relationship between Gos. Truth and Clement's account of baptism, see Choufrine 2002: 27–68. On this passage in particular, see Choufrine 2002: 29–30.

[40] Gavrilyuk 2012: 91–101.

[41] Jensen 2011: 19–20, 112–15.

[42] Jensen 2011: 158–68; 2012b: 311–12.

The emphasis on the senses in art and text may remind us that the liturgy itself eventually came to incorporate ways of stimulating all the senses: vision, through the choreography of movement from dark to light and the use of torches; touch and smell through the laying on of hands and the anointing with scented oils; hearing, through the words of the liturgy and scripture; and taste, by the milk and honey that were given after emerging from the water. Baptism was a full-body experience of re-creation.[43]

Clement's interest in the senses at baptism, then, appears to be an early witness to a concern that became increasingly prominent in Christian tradition. His account of the spiritual illumination of eyes and ears is not just a figure of speech. It has a ritual context in ecclesial life; it is underpinned by a theology of new creation, a typology of Jesus' baptism, and a pneumatology of the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. From this arises a Christian somatology that is grounded in experience. The experiential ground does not stop Clement from giving a philosophical account of it, based in a phenomenology of perception; nor does its Christian character stop him from articulating it in a way that appropriates and transforms Greek discourse of mystery initiation, which also involved rites of sudden illumination, epoptic vision of the divine, and the reception of a verbal revelation at the same time.

This account of the passage on baptism, however, is one-sided unless we also take into account the imagery of the mother with which it is intertwined. In addition to the illumination of the spiritual senses, Clement also engages extensively with the idea of baptism as regeneration, and he dwells at length on the image of mother church suckling her Christian children; he pays close attention to the substance of the milk that nourishes them. This both contextualises and relativises the discourse of illumination of the spiritual senses. If anything, the image of the mother church and her suckling children seems to absorb Clement more than the image of the baptisand's newfound ability to see and hear. He seems to find it more emotively and rhetorically powerful, more compelling for detailed medical analysis, and to be closer to the heart of his personal experience of mystic wonder and adoration.

This juxtaposition with the imagery of the spiritual senses throws into relief some things that might otherwise pass unnoticed. Firstly, the spiritual senses tradition tends to emphasise the individual, whereas the image of mother church and her children, and the milky logos-mush that

[43] Jensen 2012a, 2012b.

nourishes them,[44] emphasises the community. Thus, it spotlights the role of institutional structures and their embodied ritual practices in the construction of epistemological discourse. Secondly, the image of the mother and her children relates to material reality in a different way from the imagery of the spiritual senses. There may be child-bearing women in church, but the church as an institution is not a maternal body. By contrast, every able-bodied baptisand has physical eyes and ears, which provide a direct corporeal correlate to the imagery of the spiritual sensorium. This difference is important for the way we understand the early Christian corporeal imagination. The image of mother church and her breast-milk is no less *real* to Clement than the image of the spiritual senses interwoven with it, even though it has no direct, isomorphic, material counterpart, and they do.[45] The modern discussion of the spiritual senses is often closely concerned with the relationship between material and immaterial realities; the terms of 'metaphor', 'analogy', and 'mysticism' each strive to frame that relationship in different ways. However, the corporeal realism of the mother church in Clement, which is juxtaposed and intertwined with the imagery of the spiritual senses, cautions us to be prepared for a more complex account of the significance of materiality in the tradition of the spiritual senses as well.

This brief study of Clement's interest in the spiritual senses, as it appears in his passage on baptism, is enough to underscore that the spiritual senses were important to Clement, in ways that are analogous to what developed in later Christian tradition. If one does not insist on a fivefold spiritual sensorium, then we definitely ought to begin earlier than Origen (and even if one does, then the Gospel of Truth should be taken into account). But more than that, we have seen that Clement draws our attention to the significance of the participatory, ritual experience of baptism at the heart of the tradition, its close association with the personal experience of illumination, and the communal experience of incorporation into the body of the church, nourished by *mater ecclesia.* This is a Christian reception and transformation of Greco-Roman experiences of mystery initiation and Platonic categories of intellectual illumination, which was already articulated in terms drawn from the mysteries by Plato himself. In the next section, we will turn to the New Testament to learn how some of the earliest sources in the Christian tradition reflected on

[44] ἀγαπητικὴ δὲ ὡς μήτηρ, καὶ τὰ αὑτῆς παιδία προσκαλουμένη ἁγίῳ τιθηνεῖται γάλακτι, τῷ βρεφώδει λόγῳ, 42.1.

[45] Christians came to understand the baptismal font as the womb of mother church: Jensen 2008.

non-physical dimensions of sensory perception – and, conversely, on sensory dimensions of perception of Christ.

Starting with Scripture: Spiritual Sensation and the New Testament Witness to Christ

The material in the New Testament has a different character from Clement's work. The purpose in this part of my paper is not to argue that the New Testament uses language in a way that is closely similar to the way Clement, Origen, or later theologians write of the spiritual senses. However, the biblical authors do show intentional engagement with the role of sense perception in response to experiences of God's work through Christ and/or the Spirit. The christological formation of their mode of knowing God involves new modes of thinking and talking about sensory experience. I shall give three brief case studies, drawn from three different genres in the New Testament.

*Paul's Letter to the Philippians: Love Abounding in Recognition (***Epignôsis***) and Sense Perception (***Aisthêsis***)*

Paul writes to the Philippians from prison. His opening address is very moving, as he portrays the love that he and his community share, and his own situation in bondage. In 1:9, he writes that he prays that their love might abound yet more and more in 'insight and all sense perception' (ἐν ἐπιγνώσει καὶ πάσῃ αἰσθήσει). The coupling of ἐπίγνωσις with αἴσθησις is striking, and closely relevant to our theme.[46]

Αἴσθησις is a standard term for sense perception: it was the term that featured in Origen's (and Clement's) version of Prov 2:5 (αἴσθησιν θείαν εὑρήσεις, 'you shall find a divine sense') – whereas the LXX as we know it has ἐπίγνωσιν instead (ἐπίγνωσιν θείαν εὑρήσεις, LXX Prov 2:5). Αἴσθησις occurs nowhere else in the New Testament; and the only other αισθ- stem is found in Heb 5:14, which refers to 'the perfect, who have their organs of sense perception (τὰ αἰσθητήρια) exercised by habit for distinguishing good from bad' (τελείων δέ … τῶν διὰ τὴν ἕξιν τὰ αἰσθητήρια γεγυμνασμένα ἐχόντων πρὸς διάκρισιν καλοῦ τε καὶ κακοῦ). This was Origen's other key

[46] Wainwright (2012: 225) mentions that Thomas Brooks (*c.* 1608–86) took special notice of *aisthêsis* here as signifying 'sense, not a corporal, but a spiritual sense and taste, an inward experimental knowledge of holy and heavenly things', which he called 'heart knowledge'.

scriptural text, along with Prov 2:5, in developing his so-called 'doctrine' of the spiritual senses.[47] At a lexical level, then, Paul's use of αἴσθησις resonates closely with what we know of Origen's texts for meditation on the role of the senses in knowledge of Christ. This makes it particularly interesting to ask whether Paul's choice of terminology is merely incidental, or whether he, too, is meditating on the role of sense perception in knowing Christ? On the basis of a contextual reading of Philippians, I suggest the latter is strongly probable.

Let us begin with the immediate context:

[8] μάρτυς γάρ μου ὁ θεὸς ὡς ἐπιποθῶ πάντας ὑμᾶς ἐν σπλάγχνοις Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ. [9] Καὶ τοῦτο προσεύχομαι, ἵνα ἡ ἀγάπη ὑμῶν ἔτι μᾶλλον καὶ μᾶλλον περισσεύῃ ἐν ἐπιγνώσει καὶ πάσῃ αἰσθήσει [10] εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τὰ διαφέροντα, ἵνα ἦτε εἰλικρινεῖς καὶ ἀπρόσκοποι εἰς ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ.

God is my witness how I long for you all in the bowels of Christ Jesus. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge[48] and all sense perception, to the end that you test things that differ, so that you may be pure and without stumbling till the day of Christ. (Phil 1:4–10)

By combining αἴσθησις with ἐπίγνωσις, Paul suggests that he is praying that the Philippians' love might abound in a form of knowledge that is *both* cognitive *and* perceptual. This mode of knowing is presented as a way of loving (may your *love abound in* epignôsis *and* aisthêsis). It is grounded in the experience of the Philippians and Paul bound in love for one another, even while Paul is in a situation of suffering (1:6–8). Paul hopes that it will be practised as a pattern of discernment until the day of Christ (1:10–11).

The incorporation of *sense perception* into this vision of love, insight, and practical discrimination, is significant in the context of Paul's epistle to the Philippians, because this epistle is marked by a concern for experiencing Christ in the body and through the body.[49] Already in the opening address, Paul portrays himself 'longing' (ἐπιποθῶ) for the Philippians 'in the bowels of Christ' (ἐν σπλάγχνοις Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, 1:8). This is a strikingly physical

[47] Rahner 1932: 116–17.

[48] ἐπίγνωσις is not a common word, and was not part of the Greek philosophical tradition, which favoured vocabulary of ἐπιστήμη for 'knowledge'. It suggests personal 'recognition' involved in 'knowing'; the Pauline epistles use it elsewhere in close connection with a way of knowing God and what pertains to knowledge of God (cf. Rom 1:28; 3:20; 10:2; 1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 1:13; Eph 1:17; 4:13; etc.).

[49] E.g., Fowl 2011 (though I think he overemphasises the category of 'witness'; the language of μαρτυρία is absent from Philippians).

inflection of his common phrase, 'in Christ' (ἐν Χριστῷ). Nowhere else does he use this form of that expression, or anything like it. It is arresting, and bold. It encourages us to think of Paul experiencing Christ's emotions of human longing for the community, and feeling it in his very bowels, as if they were Christ's own.[50]

In the next part of the letter, Paul wants the Philippians to know that what is affecting him has turned out for the advancement of the gospel, with the result that 'my chains have become manifest in Christ (φανερούς ἐν Χριστῷ) in the whole praetorium and among all the rest' (1:13). The adjective φανερός indicates manifestation to senses;[51] here it is applied to the chains. Paul is not stating the unremarkable fact that the chains are visible to bodily eyes, but the remarkable one, that they have become a site of revelation, for they are now 'manifest in Christ'. The tag 'in Christ' is as potent as it is widespread in Paul's oeuvre; here it points up how the chains are caught up in the economy of salvation. Paul is modelling a way of perceiving his chains in joy because they prompt everyone to speak about the gospel. He evokes the pain of his own situation – not only is he in chains, but some of the brothers put on a false front in the way they speak the gospel, since their underlying motivation is to stir up suffering for his chains (1:17). Paul's focus on the chains themselves suggests his own detachment from the experience of pain as he takes the part of an interested observer, seeing Christ proclaimed and rejoicing in that (1:12–18).

He portrays, too, his joyful confidence that Christ will be magnified in his body (μεγαλυνθήσεται Χριστὸς ἐν τῷ σώματί μου, 1:20). Here, he models another exercise of discernment concerning how this will happen – whether through life or death. Again, this requires sensitivity both to understand and to perceive the situation aright: he grounds his judgement in the experience of loving relationship and the desire for presence – his desire for presence with Christ and the Philippians' need for his presence to them for their advancement and joy in the faith. The discriminating exercise of love once again depends both on ἐπίγνωσις (personal understanding of God's work in Christ) and on αἴσθησις (perception of the body as the site where Christ is magnified, and sensitivity to the importance

[50] There has been extensive discussion of 'union with Christ' in Paul and the wider New Testament in recent years, but Phil 1:8 has received little attention. For example, it is not cited in either Campbell 2012 or Macaskill 2013. The σπλάγχνα were the part of the victim that were opened up in Greek and Roman sacrifice, but it is not used in this way in the LXX. Paul portrays himself and the Philippians as elements of a sacrifice later in the letter (2:17), though here he is focused on the emotion of longing.

[51] Bockmuehl 1988.

of perceptibility to the Philippians). It involves cognitive and perceptual awareness in Christian love.

In a fuller study, we could examine how Paul portrays further ways in which he is co-formed with Christ's experience of embodiment (3:10–11, 20), and how he uses the vocabulary of initiation in the mysteries to describe his breadth of experience of the material world (4:12). We could discuss how his life in the body is grounded in Christ's experience of embodiment from the divine form to the pattern of human life unto death, and then exaltation for the glory of God the father (2:6–11). We could explore how the Philippians are drawn into this economy of embodiment, where they are called upon to be Paul's fellow-imitators (3:17) and to put into practise what they have *seen* or *heard* in him (4:9; cf. 1:30). The letter offers considerable scope to develop a Christian ideal of embodiment grounded in discernment of God's activity in Christ, which presents itself to the mind as ἐπίγνωσις, to the senses as αἴσθησις, all within the frame of relationship as ἀγάπη. This is similar to the pattern of purification of spiritual sense perception to work in a proper relationship with the mind, which Frederick Aquino discerned in Maximus the Confessor.[52] The emphasis on interpersonal love in Christ is an important counterbalance to the emphasis on attraction to the divine lover in the medieval tradition of the spiritual senses, which leans heavily on the Song of Songs and the aspiration to beatific vision.[53]

Paul's treatment of sense perception in Philippians is not isolated in early Christianity. Its motifs are picked up in Heb 5:14, whose influence on the spiritual senses tradition is more widely recognised; here we find again not only the language of sense perception but also the idea of a Christian training in the use of the sensory organs until they become habituated to a right pattern of discerning good and bad. Paul's chains, so important in the sensual manifestation of the gospel in Philippians, became a widespread focus of meditation in Christian piety, and the material form – even in the imagination – anchored the Christian experience of hope and trust in relationship to Paul.[54]

By including Paul in our study of the origins of the spiritual senses, then, we can better perceive the significance of embodied, sensually perceptible experiences of suffering 'in Christ' at the start of Christian meditation on sensory modes of knowing.

[52] Aquino 2012.

[53] E.g., Coolman 2012b (Thomas Gallus); McGinn 2012: esp. 192–95 (Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St-Thierry).

[54] Heath 2016: 231–33.

The Fourth Gospel: Spiritual Senses in the Evangelical Curriculum

When Paul was in prison, he rejoiced that his chains were 'manifest' in Christ unto the advancement of the 'gospel' (Phil 1:12–18). The bodily facts might look like chains, but Christ was proclaimed insofar as they emerged as 'manifest in Christ'. The relation between bodily facts and spiritual insight here takes the form of an evangelical paradox. When we turn to the Fourth Gospel, we find a different kind of invitation to view bodily facts from a spiritual perspective.

According to John's Gospel, no one has ever seen God and yet the one who was in the bosom of the Father has made him known (John 1:18). The Logos was made flesh as Jesus Christ; he performed on earth what he saw his father doing, he spoke on earth what he heard his father saying, and so he made God visible, audible, and present to the sense of those about him (5:19–20; 12:49–50).[55] Blindness and vision took on a new meaning in this setting: those who had eyes were blind if they did not perceive God in Jesus (cf. 9:39–41). They might *see* Jesus corporeally, but a different kind of vision was needed, and if they lacked it, they were still blind.

The *Spirit* in John's Gospel abides with Jesus from the very start of his ministry (1:32) and he bestows it on his closest disciples after his resurrection (20:22). The role of the Spirit in enabling his disciples' better apprehension of him – sensually, cognitively, and affectively – is underscored in his special teaching on the Spirit in the farewell discourses. The whole section is prefaced by Philip's egregious failure to discern God in Jesus while he is present with them (14:8–11); it is only when he goes away that Jesus anticipates that the 'Spirit of Truth' will abide with them, and they will gain a fuller apprehension that is experienced at once as contemplative vision (θεωρεῖτε), cognition (γνώσεσθε), and as self-involving through life (ζήσετε), obedience (ἔχων τὰς ἐντολάς μου καὶ τηρῶν), and love (ἀγαπῶν ἀγαπηθήσεται, 14:19–21). John does not use the term 'spiritual senses', but his teaching on perception in the Spirit, and the contrast between that and perceiving Jesus without it, suggests that he has the concept of spiritual sense perception.

John emphasises vision and hearing most of all, but as Rainer Hirsch-Luipold has underscored, he also draws special attention to *taste*, *smell*, *and touch* at crucial points in the narrative. The *taste* of good wine at the wedding of Cana is at the very beginning of the public ministry (John 2);

[55] Wang 2017.

the *smell* of Lazarus' corpse marks the centre of the Gospel, as the public ministry gives way to the story of the passion (John 11–12); the *touch* that Thomas asked for and Jesus offered concludes his account of the commission of the disciples after the resurrection, at what seems to be the original ending of the Gospel (John 20). Hirsch-Luipold elucidates the function of this rhetorical emphasis on the senses by arguing that the Fourth Gospel is written from the perspective of those who came too late: hence its blessing is on those who have not seen and yet have believed (John 20:29).[56] The Gospel invites readers to enter imaginatively into the experience of Jesus' ministry, where God was made present to all the senses, and so to cultivate the art of sense perception that enabled the first witnesses to the resurrection also to believe.

This interpretation of John's emphasis on sense perception helps make sense of Clement's understanding of the relation between the gospels: Clement wrote of John the Evangelist that, 'when he saw that *the bodily facts* (τὰ σωματικά) had been revealed in the gospels, urged on by his acquaintances, God-borne by the spirit (πνεύματι), he composed a spiritual gospel (πνευματικὸν εὐαγγέλιον)' (Clement *apud* Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.24.7).[57] I suggest that Clement (like Origen after him) envisaged the Fourth Gospel as a later stage in the curriculum, giving a spiritual perspective on the 'bodily facts' that had been conveyed by the other three.[58] This highlights the way John gives insight into the manifestation of God through revelation to the senses. What is intended here is not that sense perception is left behind, but that it is now transformed through the Spirit, as the learner too transitions to a more spiritual stage of progress.[59]

John's Gospel, then, develops a Christian theology of narrative epiphany that makes sense perception central. As with Paul, his focus on spiritual sense perception is christologically oriented; John grounds it in his understanding of the incarnation and the gift of the Spirit. Unlike in Philippians, this mode of perceiving is cultivated primarily through imaginative reading about the life of Christ rather than through focused attention to the material conditions of a contemporary saint.

[56] Hirsch-Luipold 2017.

[57] τὸν μέντοι Ἰωάννην ἔσχατον, συνιδόντα ὅτι τὰ σωματικὰ ἐν τοῖς εὐαγγελίοις δεδήλωται, προτραπέντα ὑπὸ τῶν γνωρίμων, πνεύματι θεοφορηθέντα πνευματικὸν ποιῆσαι εὐαγγέλιον (Clement of Alexandria, quoted in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.24.7).

[58] Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 1.8.44–45; Hirsch-Luipold 2017: 42; see also Niculescu 2007. Clement himself, similarly, structured a curriculum that first trained baptised Christians in the habits of the body, sometimes with exempla drawn from the gospels (in the *Paedagogus*) and subsequently developed an ardently scholarly search for hidden wisdom (in the *Stromateis*).

[59] For grades of progress in Clement: Bucur 2006.

Alexandrian readers such as Clement and Origen recognised John's 'spirituality' as playing a crucial role in developing a reading programme for Christian formation: it assisted at the point of transition from recognition of the sense-perceptible realities to attaining a spiritual way of encountering those realities. When we consider this alongside Clement's and Origen's shared reading of Prov 2:5, we begin to discern that Origen's emphasis on the spiritual senses emerged in a distinctively Alexandrian tradition of Christian spirituality.[60]

Revelation 2–3: An Ear to Hear What the Spirit Says to the Churches

Paul and John, in different ways, both evoked the evangelical paradox of immanent revelation of God to the senses through or in Jesus Christ within the everyday material world. In Rev 2–3, we encounter a different kind of appeal to 'spiritual sensation', which resonates with the gospel tradition but engages more explicitly with the experience of transcending the material realm in a visionary encounter with the risen Christ. Revelation 2–3 contains seven letters to seven churches. The heavenly Jesus instructs John the Seer about what to write for the 'angel' of each church. Each letter closes with the formula, 'he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches' (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22), and then a promise is made 'for the one who conquers'. The *Spirit* speaks, but special notice is given to the organ of sense perception as necessary for hearing: '*he who has an ear*, let *him* hear'.

Commentators point out that this formula, 'he who has an ear, let him hear', is found in six variant versions across different strands of the early Jesus tradition. There is no verbally identical parallel to the formula in Revelation 2–3, but variants are found in the Synoptics, where it is closely linked with the parables, and in a range of apocryphal texts.[61] Scholars have debated its purpose, but focused especially on its *esoteric* or *paraenetic* function.[62] A few have rightly pointed out that it does not have the same function in every context in which it is used.[63] I focus here specifically on its use in Revelation 2–3, which is not identical to the Synoptics.

[60] Was Clement's and Origen's reading of Prov 2:5 distinctively Alexandrian, or should we think of the Septuagint as the truly 'Alexandrian' reading (ἐπίγνωσιν), and Clement and Origen's (αἴσθησιν) as an alternative? The provenance of LXX Proverbs has been debated; many scholars locate it in Alexandria, but Palestine has also been defended: van der Louw 2007: 335.

[61] In Gos. Thom. (six times), Acts of Thomas (once), Gos. Mary (twice), *Pistis Sophia* (ten times), and *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (four times): Aune 1997: 150–51.

[62] Esotericism: Dibelius 1910: 47; paraenesis: Räisänen 1973: 85–86. Both cited in Enroth 1990: 598.

[63] Enroth 1990.

Unlike in the Synoptic parables, what we are witnessing is the substance of visionary experience. John the Seer has described how he was himself in the Spirit on the Lord's day when he heard a voice behind him, turned to see the voice, and there was one like the Son of Man amid the lampstands (Rev 1:10–12). What John is hearing and writing down is the message from this exalted figure of the First and the Last, for the angel of each church. Whether the angel is a spiritual inhabitant of heaven, or a figure of authority on earth, remains debated,[64] but in either case what John is writing down is the substance of a message from heaven, received in the spirit, in a vision. The readers are invited into this imagination and asked to hear – if they have an ear to do so. The phrasing 'he who has an ear, let him hear' picks out the sensory organ. This is distinctively Christian. The Old Testament prophets cry to their audiences to 'hear the word of the Lord!'[65] but it belongs to Jesus' tradition to single out recurrently the ear that must play its part.

Furthermore, the *person* to be heard is explicitly designated 'the Spirit'. Exegetes suppose that this means Jesus himself, or else that Jesus is speaking through the Spirit to the churches.[66] In either case, the 'ear' by which they hear is cocked to the voice of the Spirit. This is not a form of listening that wholly abandons corporeal, bodily life, since what they hear concerns, in the first instance, their day-to-day life in their churches. Rather, it is a form of listening that is attentive to the Spirit's perspective on that life and thereby opens up the possibility of 'conquering' even within their embodied existence. We may recall the macarism at the start of Revelation, which was pronounced on 'the one who reads *and* on the one who hears the words of the prophecy and keeps the things written in it' (1:3). Such a person is blessed (μακάριος). The book of Revelation is thus written for a people whose blessedness is characterised by reading and hearing; it is no wonder that they are expected to have especially saintly ears. The 'ear' that hears the 'Spirit' is far from being a dead metaphor. The lack of precision in defining just what kind of ear and what kind of spirit points up unresolved tensions that characterise early Christian modes of knowing. Like Paul and John, the author of Revelation is grappling with the way Christian experience involves heightened sensory awareness of the Spirit; for John the seer, this starts out as a vision, but it has its *telos* in the daily life of the churches.

[64] Ferguson 2011. [65] Amos 7:16; Isa 1:10; Jer 2:4; 22:2; Ezek 6:3; 16:35; 21:3; etc.
[66] Aune 1997: 151.

Conclusion

This chapter offered a modest corrective to the monumental study of the spiritual senses by Paul Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley, concerning the beginning of the Christian 'doctrine' of spiritual sense perception. While they have done wonderful work in opening up the definition of the 'spiritual senses' in order to include a wider range of material from Origen onwards, I argued that they provided inadequate grounds for beginning only with Origen. The significance of this is not just that there is earlier material to consider (though it includes that). More importantly, the tradition is historically and even theologically misconstrued if the beginning is misidentified. Gavrilyuk and Coakley, like Rahner before them, treated Origen as normative, because he was perceived as first. But in their work, this only threw into relief how often other case studies in the tradition differed from Origen. It even drew attention to the way Origen himself failed to live up to the normatively Origenist account of the spiritual senses as a distinctive theological anthropology: parts of his language of spiritual sense perception had to be explained away as 'merely' metaphorical, but this was not satisfactory to any of his interpreters.

Our investigation of Clement as well as three biblical authors suggests a much broader perspective on the tradition from the first. Clement draws attention to the significance of baptism as the moment of activating the spiritual senses of vision and hearing through regeneration; Jesus' baptism was the type for Christian baptism, but the consequences of the ritual shifted attention to the 'body' of *mater ecclesia* who suckled her children, the baptised Christians. Paul noticed the language of αἴσθησις, and John developed a whole narrative theology of epiphany perceived through all five sensory organs. Both were acutely aware of the evangelical paradox of the manifestation to the senses of God's work in Christ: perceptible not to the *mere* physical senses, but rather to the sense perception that operated in conjunction with rational personal knowledge (*epignôsis* in Paul) or spiritual insight (*pneuma* in John), to involve people in a transformative mode of knowing, to abound in love (cf. Phil 1:8–9). In a visionary context, Revelation 2–3 noticed the ears of hearers, which alone can hear what the Spirit says to the churches. In all cases, the relation between spiritual and sensual is integral to how these authors apprehend Christ.

The significance of the incarnation and resurrection is particularly apparent in this early layer of the tradition: it is Jesus himself who manifests God's work to the senses in John, but it is the Spirit granted after the

resurrection that enables people to perceive it; it is Christ who is magnified in Paul's body, but it is the exaltation of Christ after his death that makes that meaningful; in Revelation, the Spirit that speaks to the churches is, if not Christ himself, still closely associated with the risen Christ who speaks to John the seer. This christological emphasis is at risk of receding if we study the spiritual senses tradition only from later sources and treat theological *anthropology* as the normative. It is not, fundamentally, anthropology but *christology* that grounds this doctrine, and the union with Christ that is made possible through the incarnation and resurrection and/or exaltation.

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