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978-0-521-76920-4 - The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity

Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley

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## *Introduction*

*Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley*

When a man's senses are perfectly united to God, then what God has said is somehow mysteriously clarified. But where there is no union of this kind, then it is extremely difficult to speak about God.<sup>1</sup>

Christian authors of all ages have used sensory language to express human encounters with the divine. In the Old Testament believers are enjoined to 'taste and see that the Lord is good' (Ps 34[33]: 9, 1 Pet 2: 3); the prophets and others 'hear the word of the Lord' (Isa 1: 10; Hos 4: 1); the beatitude promises that 'the pure in heart will see God' (Mt 5: 8); the apostle Paul speaks of receiving the vision of God 'face to face' (1 Cor 13: 12) and beholding 'the glory of the Lord as in a mirror' (2 Cor 2: 18); the faithful are said to inhale the 'sweet aroma of Christ' (2 Cor 2: 15); and the witnesses of the incarnation speak of 'touching with [their] own hands' the Word of Life (1 Jn 1: 1). These biblical passages seem to point to certain features of human cognition that make perception-like contact with God possible. But how precisely should these statements be construed? What implications do these claims have for theological anthropology? Do such statements imply peculiar modes of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching divine things?

As might be expected, the claim to have a special form of perception that makes direct human contact with God possible is both epistemologically and metaphysically problematic. While there is a general agreement that humans possess the five physical senses, there is no comparable consensus regarding other modes of perception. Moreover, the claim that God could be perceived by special senses seems to violate notions of divine transcendence and immateriality. After all, when attempting to look at God, one is 'looking at what cannot be seen' (cf. 2 Cor 4: 18, Heb 11: 27). As the creator, God is ontologically different from all ordinary objects of perception.

<sup>1</sup> John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, xxx, trans. C. Luibheid and N. Russell, *John Climacus: The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), p. 288.

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One may come to terms with these problems in a variety of ways. A sceptical strategy, embraced in most versions of modern rationalism and empiricism, would be altogether to jettison the claims to receive divine revelation or to have religious experience. Another strategy would be to emphasize that God in his self-communication brings it about that humans receive divine revelation without specifying the cognitive equipment enabling such a communication. Throughout history, accounts in which humans have received visions, locutions and other messages from the divine realm have been typically more concerned with conveying the content of such experiences than with analysing the cognitive makeup of human recipients. Theories of divine self-communication tend to focus on the properties of divine action, rather than on the features of human knowers that make the reception of revelation and religious experience possible. Nevertheless, numerous thinkers throughout Christian history have attempted to probe the conditions of the divine–human encounter further. In the process these thinkers have come up with various approaches, some of which could be subsumed under the general idea of spiritual perception, the subject of this volume.

#### THE VOCABULARY OF SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

The Christian vocabulary of non-physical perception is extremely fluid, sometimes exasperatingly so. The expression ‘spiritual senses’ (*sensus spirituales*) is first attested in the Latin translation of the works of Origen of Alexandria (c. 185–c. 254).<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that patristic authors did not attribute a focal significance to the expression αἰσθησις πνευματική (*sensus spiritalis*) and its equivalents. In contrast, in Western medieval theology the concept of the spiritual sense(s) came to be used more systematically.

For the purpose of this volume, ‘spiritual senses’ is an umbrella term covering a variety of overlapping, yet distinct, expressions in which ‘sense’ in general or a particular sensory modality (vision, audition, olfaction, touch or taste) is typically qualified by reference to spirit (e.g. ‘eyes of the spirit’, ‘spiritual touch’), heart (e.g. ‘ears of the heart’), soul (e.g. ‘eyes of the soul’, ‘hands of the soul’), mind or intellect (e.g. ‘mind’s eye’, ‘intellectual touch’), inner [man] (e.g. ‘inner’, ‘interior’ or ‘inward’ eyes, ears, etc.) or faith (e.g. ‘eyes of faith’, ‘ears of faith’). Taking Origen’s idiosyncratic

<sup>2</sup> Origen, *Commentarii in Epistulam ad Romanos*, 4. 5 (PG 14. 977D – 978A); *In Cant.* 1. 4 (PG 13. 97B); *Homiliae in Exodum*, 1. 4 (PG 12. 301A). Rufinus of Aquileia (c. 345–410), the translator of these and other works of Origen, commonly rendered his original rather freely. As a result, it is by no means certain that αἰσθησις πνευματική (or its equivalent) underlies *sensus spiritalis* in Rufinus’s translation.

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rendering of Proverbs 2: 5 ('thou shalt acquire a divine sense') as their point of departure, some authors also refer to this perceptual capacity as a 'divine sense' (αἴσθησις θεϊα) or a 'sense of divinity' (*sensus divinitatis*).<sup>3</sup> The above-mentioned expressions by no means exhaust a rich vocabulary of spiritual perception, but rather serve as points of reference.

At the same time it is not uncommon for Christian authors to use the language of sense-perception to describe divine–human encounter without qualifying the senses as 'spiritual' or correlating them with the soul, mind, heart and so on explicitly. Consider, for instance, the skilful way in which Augustine (354–430) draws on a vast array of sensation imagery in his *Confessions*:

You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours.<sup>4</sup>

Since by the time he wrote *Confessions*, Augustine shared a common view that God was immaterial, he did not intend to say that God was available to the physical senses in a way similar to material objects.<sup>5</sup> Some other form of direct cognitive contact with God is implied in this passage, perhaps analogous to but not reducible to ordinary sense-perception. Such relatively imprecise use of sensual language – sanctioned by scripture, yet open to the 'Messalian' interpretation that God could be perceived directly by the physical senses – has endured throughout the history of Christian theology. The range of terms describing different properties and modes of non-physical perception has remained fairly broad and fluid to the present day.

By having recourse to the notion of the 'spiritual senses' we thus neither wish to impose an artificial uniformity on diverse materials, nor ignore the acute methodological difficulties that the lack of precise terminology presents in a given author. In particular, our use of the plural form of the expression 'spiritual senses' is not meant to exclude or under-rate a single-mode or unitary conception of spiritual sensation found in some Christian authors. Moreover, 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

<sup>3</sup> Origen, *In Cant.* 1. 4; *Contra Celsum*, 1. 48; VII. 34.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *Conf.* x. 27. 38, trans. H. Chadwick, *Saint Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 201.

<sup>5</sup> As he makes clear in *Conf.* x. 6. 8.

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aspects of the self, such as body, soul, intellect or affect.<sup>6</sup> A further variant is that some Christian authors link the language of the spiritual senses explicitly to pneumatology, and thence to their trinitarianism, while others do not, or do so only very implicitly.

A final and additional difficulty is created by the fact that the expression 'spiritual sense(s)' is also applied in classic Christian literature to non-literal modes of interpreting *scripture*. Some, upon hearing about this research project, may therefore surmise that our subject has to do with the history of biblical interpretation. It should however be obvious to the reader by now that in this book we use the expression 'spiritual senses' to designate non-physical human perception, rather than the non-literal interpretations of scripture. While some ancient authorities connect the apprehension of the non-literal meaning of scripture with the exegete's spiritual perception, such a connection is not entailed in our use of the 'spiritual senses' as a general category.

KARL RAHNER'S DEFINITION OF THE 'SPIRITUAL SENSES  
DOCTRINE': AN EVALUATION

We give preference to the expression 'spiritual senses' in part because it has been adopted in most discussions of related phenomena over the last hundred years. The study of the spiritual senses in the twentieth century received its major impetus from an essay by Karl Rahner (1904–1984), 'Le début d'une doctrine des cinq sens spirituels chez Origène' (1932).<sup>7</sup> In this seminal work Rahner offered the following definition: 'It seems prudent to speak of a doctrine of the spiritual senses only when these partly figurative, partly literal expressions (to touch God, the eyes of the heart, etc.) are found integrated in a complete system of the five instruments of the spiritual perception of suprasensible religious realities.'<sup>8</sup>

Rahner's normative definition of what must count as a proper 'doctrine of the spiritual senses' has the distinctive attraction of clarity. In his article Rahner proposes to understand the spiritual senses on a close analogy with the five physical senses. For lack of a better designation, one could call such an account the 'five senses analogy' of spiritual perception. The physical

<sup>6</sup> It should be stressed, however, that there is a strong presumption against reductive materialism in the anthropology that includes the notion of the spiritual senses.

<sup>7</sup> For the discussion of various aspects of this important essay, as well as of Rahner's work in general, see esp. Chapters 1, 2, 9, 12 and 15 in this volume.

<sup>8</sup> K. Rahner, 'Le début d'une doctrine des cinq sens spirituels chez Origène', *RAM*, 13 (1932), 114, my translation.

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and spiritual senses could be understood as two different sets of powers or faculties, operating in tandem or separately, or, alternatively, as two states of the same fivefold sensorium directed at different aspects of the same object, or perhaps having different objects altogether. The ‘doctrine’ of the spiritual senses would then address the nature of the correlation between the physical and the spiritual senses, as well as the integration of the spiritual senses with other aspects of the self.

It should be noted, however, that in our judgement, Rahner’s definition of what must count as a proper doctrine of spiritual perception is unduly restrictive. Many ancient authorities had important things to say about spiritual perception, although they had not developed anything amounting to a ‘complete system’ or a body of ‘doctrine’ of the five spiritual senses. In fact, most if not all patristic authors, including Origen, to whom Rahner accords the role of the founding father of the spiritual senses ‘doctrine’, as a rule treat the subject of spiritual perception non-systematically. The accounts of spiritual perception that one finds, for example, in Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330–c. 395), Augustine (354–430), Pseudo-Dionysius (fl. c. 500), Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662) and Gregory the Great (c. 540–604) hardly amount to a ‘doctrine’ in Rahner’s sense of the term, although it would be a grave mistake to ignore their insights and influence.

More importantly, many Christian authors treat fewer than *five* ‘instruments of spiritual perception’ (Rahner’s expression): some focus exclusively on a single spiritual sense, such as sight or touch, for example; others variously combine spiritual modalities; still others stress the unification and simplification of the powers of the self as it draws nearer to God. For instance, Alexander of Hales (c. 1186–1245), Thomas Gallus (d. 1246) and Bonaventure (c. 1217–1274) aligned spiritual sight and hearing with the intellect (*intellectus*), and the remaining three spiritual senses with affectivity (*affectus*). Such a grouping recommends a twofold, rather than a fivefold, division of spiritual perception.

It also should be observed that Rahner himself did not feel constrained by his definition when he included in his survey Diadochus of Photike (mid-fifth century) – an author who emphatically speaks of a single spiritual modality only.<sup>9</sup> Besides, in his later work, particularly in his study of Bonaventure, Rahner was more concerned to emphasize the unitive character of spiritual perception than to justify the fivefold division of the senses, which he had come to consider ‘rather forced’.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 141–2. See G. Horn, ‘Les sens de l’esprit d’après Diadoque de Photicé’, *RAM*, 8 (1927), 402–19.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of Rahner’s treatment of Bonaventure, see Chapters 9 and 15 in this volume.

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## PRELIMINARY PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In defence of Rahner's normative definition of 'the doctrine of five spiritual senses', it could be observed that if a given author discusses only one perceptual mode, preferring to speak, for example, of 'intellectual sight', it is possible that such an author uses sight (or other sense) figuratively to refer to ordinary mental acts, such as imagination, reflection or understanding, rather than to a special mode of perception. It is true, of course, that in English and other languages, some verbs drawn from the sphere of sense-perception have become dead metaphors describing various forms of thinking. For example, we speak of 'seeing a point', 'having a point of view', 'viewing a hypothesis', 'envisioning a prospect', 'grasping a concept', 'embracing an idea', 'touching upon a subject', 'hearing what a person has to say' (in the sense of focusing mental attention), 'smelling trouble' and so on. In everyday discourse 'taste' commonly refers to aesthetic judgement. There appears to be no need to invoke a special mode of perception to account for these ordinary forms of reflection, imagination and judgement.

In this regard, it has become common in the twentieth century scholarship on our theme to distinguish between the 'analogical' and 'metaphorical' functions of the language of spiritual perception. Analogy obtains when the operation of the spiritual senses is described in terms akin to the operation of physical sensation. Metaphorical use can be assumed when no close similarity with the functioning of a physical sensorium is intended. Just what aspect of the self other than physical sensation such metaphors are meant to portray often has to be further specified. Without such a clarification, what is meant by 'metaphorical use' remains rather ambiguous, depending upon, among other things, a given scholar's theoretical assumptions about metaphorical language in general.<sup>11</sup> Still, in one important limiting case, the metaphorical use of spiritual perception implies that there is no special mode or faculty of perception required to account for experience being ascribed to the relevant senses.

It is by no means obvious, however, that *every* correlation of the senses with the intellect can be reduced to a metaphor depicting ordinary mental activity, such as imagination or understanding. It seems that the intellect

<sup>11</sup> Those who have wielded this distinction usually have Thomas Aquinas's treatment of the matter in *ST* 1, q. 13 at least in the back of their minds: analogical statements are literally (*proprie*) true, while metaphorical statements are not. But we should note that many of the authors in the spiritual senses tradition precede Thomas and are not familiar with his particular way of making this distinction; indeed, they may not be operating with a clear demarcation between analogy and metaphor at all.

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operates in a non-ordinary, indeed unique, way when God becomes the object of its vision. When Plato spoke of the contemplation of the Forms with ‘the eyes of the soul’ (ψυχῆς ὄμματᾶ) and the ‘sight of the mind’ (διανοίας ὄψις) he did not mean ordinary acts of imagining or reasoning. Rather Plato intended to describe a direct, perception-like apprehension of the intelligibles, including the good.<sup>12</sup>

Drawing on Platonic sources, Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE–c. CE 50) also referred to the faculty responsible for the vision of God as ‘the eyes of the soul’ (ὄμματᾶ/ὀφθαλμοί ψυχῆς), ‘the eyes of the mind’ (νοῦ ὄμματᾶ or ὀφθαλμοί) and the ‘eyes of understanding’ (διανοίας ὄμματᾶ or ὀφθαλμοί).<sup>13</sup> From the second century on this philosophical terminology found its way into the Christian vocabulary of spiritual perception to become towards the fourth century something of a commonplace. Intellectual vision or intellectual intuition, most especially in its application to the divine things, is both a mental act and a unique form of perception. Intellectual vision is a non-discursive mental act involving a direct cognitive contact with the object of contemplation. As the Cambridge Platonist John Smith (1618–1652) put it, ‘When reason once is raised by the mighty force of the Divine Spirit into a converse with God, it is turned into sense.’<sup>14</sup>

As a mental act, intellectual vision is less overtly tied to the body. The non-Christian Platonists as a rule treated embodiment as hindering, if not altogether blocking, the vision of the divine. Christian theologians ‘baptized’ the ‘Platonic’ version of intellectual vision with different results, tending to maintain an ambivalent attitude towards the role of the body in the contemplation of God. This ambivalence is already evident in Origen, who in some cases views embodiment as an impediment, and in other cases construes it as instrumental to the contemplation of God. For Pseudo-Dionysius, the height of mystical contemplation presupposes the rising above all cognitive powers in the ultimate unification and

<sup>12</sup> Plato, *Resp.* vii, 519B, 533D; *Symposium*, 219A; *Sophist*, 254A–B: ‘for the eyes of the soul (ψυχῆς ὄμματᾶ) of the multitude are not strong enough to endure the sight of the divine’, trans. H. N. Fowler, *Plato*, Loeb Classical Library, 123 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, and London: W. Heinemann, 1977), p. 403. Cf. Aristotle, *NE* vi. 12, 1144a 30.

<sup>13</sup> Philo, *De confusione linguarum*, 21, 92; *De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini*, 36, 69, 78; *Quod deterius potioris insidiari soleat*, 22; *De Abrahamo*, 58; *De mutatione nominum*, 3, 5, 37, 203; *De ebrietate*, 82; *De plantatione*, 22; *De virtutibus*, 11; *De specialibus legibus*, 1, 49, III. 2, 4, 6, IV. 140, V. 12, 16; *De praemiis et poenis*, 37; *Quod omnis probus liber sit*, 5; *De Providentia*, II. 9; *De posteritate Caini*, 8, 18, 118, 167; *De somniis*, I. 199; *De opificio mundi*, 71; *Legatio ad Gaium*, 2; *Questiones et solutiones in Genesim*, II. 34; *Questiones et solutiones in Exodum*, II. 51; IV. 8, 129. Cicero mentions in passing the expressions *oculi mentis* in *De natura deorum*, II. 45, and *oculus animis* at II. 161.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of this passage in J. Smith, see Chapter 13 in this volume.



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simplification of the self. By comparison, Maximus's incarnational vision is more comprehensive, with the body being more consistently integral to contemplation.

In the West, the fivefold division of the senses originates with Aristotle.<sup>15</sup> The Stagirite considered sight to be the 'chief sense'.<sup>16</sup> He also held that 'indirectly hearing makes the largest contribution to wisdom', since it serves as means of verbal communication.<sup>17</sup> Touch and taste he regarded as the senses that were essential to all animals.<sup>18</sup> Smell, taste and touch were judged to be more implicated in animal desires and passions than the remaining two senses.<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, who himself was not explicit or consistent on this matter,<sup>20</sup> was commonly understood to have sanctioned the following hierarchy of the senses, from the highest to the lowest: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch.<sup>21</sup>

The Christian spiritual senses tradition variously engages the 'Aristotelian' sensual hierarchy. Some Christian theologians show little awareness of, or interest in, a systematic ordering of the senses, whether physical or spiritual. When sight is assumed to be the highest spiritual sense, it is not always obvious whether this assumption is made for philosophical reasons or on scriptural grounds, or both. It is telling, however, that the eschatological culmination of the encounter with God came to be expressed predominantly in terms of the beatific *vision*, rather than, say, 'beatific olfaction' or 'beatific audition'. Aquinas summed up this tradition with a characteristic economy of words: 'the highest and perfect felicity of intellectual nature consists in the vision of God'.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>15</sup> C. Classen, *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993). Cultural anthropologists have recently argued that both the 'Aristotelian' fivefold division of the sense-modalities and the predominance of the language of vision to describe mental activity are culture-bound; see D. Howes (ed.), *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses* (University of Toronto Press, 1991). While this may be true in some respects, the conclusions of the present study are not affected by this observation, since we limit ourselves to the thinkers who within the Western Christian tradition shared the presupposition of the fivefold division of the physical senses.

<sup>16</sup> *De an.* III. 3, 429a. <sup>17</sup> *De sensu*, I, 437a 11–12.

<sup>18</sup> Taste for Aristotle was ultimately reducible to touch: see *De an.* III. 12, 434b.

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, *NE* x. 5, 1176a: 'Sight differs from touch in purity, as do hearing and smell from taste', trans. R. Crisp, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 191–2.

<sup>20</sup> For example, in *De sensu*, I, 441a he speaks of the sense of smell as being inferior to the rest of the senses. See S. Rosen, *The Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry* (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 119–26.

<sup>21</sup> For a survey of a Christian appropriation of the 'Aristotelian' hierarchy, see R. Jütte, *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2005), pp. 61–71.

<sup>22</sup> *Summa contra Gentiles*, III. I. 60. 2, trans. V. J. Bourke, *St Thomas Aquinas: On the Truth of the Catholic Faith* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1956), p. 199.



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Those Christian writers who took the Song of Songs as a point of departure for their account of the comparative value of the spiritual senses were however less constrained by the ‘Aristotelian’ ranking of the senses. Gregory of Nyssa, Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Bernard of Clairvaux and other mystical theologians at times freely reversed the ‘Aristotelian’ order of the senses by positing that in the mystical ascent spiritual hearing and sight were toppled by spiritual touch as the mode of perception implying a closer contact with its subject.<sup>23</sup> Augustine’s dictum ‘touch is the end of knowing’ aligns itself with this insight of mystical theology.<sup>24</sup>

The operation of spiritual taste was often treated within the framework of Eucharistic practices.<sup>25</sup> In the Latin sources wisdom (*sapientia*) was commonly taken to connote ‘tasted knowledge’ owing to its presumed etymological connection with taste (*sapor*).<sup>26</sup> In patristic and later sources spiritual smell was sometimes associated with spiritual discernment and discrimination, and taken as a paradigm of the ‘senses that are trained to discern good and evil’ (Heb 5: 14).<sup>27</sup>

With the Protestant Reformation’s emphasis on preaching as the main vehicle of communicating Christian teachings, the apostle Paul’s words that ‘faith comes from hearing’ (Rom 10: 17) were freshly appreciated. The iconoclastic impulses of the Reformation further led to increased reliance on audition, often at the expense of vision as well as other sensory modes of receiving the divine. To conclude, the ‘Aristotelian’ hierarchy of the senses, while undoubtedly influential, was deployed by Christian authors with considerable freedom and historical variation.

Another important item of Aristotelian psychology that Christian authors took on board was the notion of the ‘inner senses’. In the *De anima*, as well as in the corpus of writings commonly grouped under the Latin title *Parva naturalia*, Aristotle discusses the powers of the soul that convey the sensory input collected by the five physical senses to the mind. The medieval lists of the ‘interior’ or ‘inner senses’, based on Aristotle, count from four to seven such powers, including imagination, memory, estimation and ‘common sense’ (also called the ‘master sense’, which had

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *De an.* III. 1, 424b.

<sup>24</sup> Augustine, *De trin.* 1. 9. 18; cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* VI. 7. 34. 8–21; VI. 9. 10. 12–16.

<sup>25</sup> See B. T. Coolman, *Knowing God by Experience: The Spiritual Senses in the Theology of William of Auxerre* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), chap. 10; C. W. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987); G. Frank, “‘Taste and See’: The Eucharist and the Eyes of Faith in the Fourth Century”, *Church History*, 70 (2001), 619–43.

<sup>26</sup> Jütte, *A History of the Senses*, p. 69.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of spiritual smell, see S. A. Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 169–80.

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the function of integrating and creating awareness of the input of each external sense).<sup>28</sup> A special complication was created by the fact that, beginning with Origen, the spiritual senses were associated with the Pauline concept of the ‘inner person’ (ὁ ἔσω ἄνθρωπος)<sup>29</sup> and commonly called the ‘inner’ or ‘interior’ senses, whereas the physical senses were associated with the ‘outer person’ and called the ‘external senses’. Most medieval authors were aware of the difference between the homonymous notions of Aristotelian and ‘Origenist’ inner senses.<sup>30</sup> Other authors, for example, Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), attempted to integrate the two types of senses.

#### REPRESENTATIVE BIBLICAL LOCI OF THE SPIRITUAL SENSES TRADITION

The theme of the spiritual senses has been on the radar of Christian theologians since the second century. Much of the reflection on our subject occurs in the context of pondering scripture. What a given author does with the biblical material depends upon such factors as her cultural and ecclesiastical milieu, the range of religious practice and experience that she draws upon and her philosophical views (whether tacit or explicit), as well as the sensory vocabulary current in her time.

Since Philo, the story of Exodus came to be allegorically interpreted as the soul’s spiritual ascent to God. Philo’s Moses climbs Mount Sinai to receive a vision reminiscent of the illumination afforded to the philosopher of the *Republic’s* cave. Philo’s reading of Exodus came to inspire directly, or through shared exegetical *paideia*, such patristic authors as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius, among others.

Following in the footsteps of Philo, patristic authors – beginning with Theophilus of Antioch and Irenaeus of Lyons – would struggle with the already mentioned problem of how the invisible God, whose theophany was potentially lethal to human beings (e.g. Exod 33: 20; Gen 32: 30), could manifest Godself in a visible form. The Johannine emphasis that it was the incarnate Word who had made the knowledge of the Father possible

<sup>28</sup> S. Everson, *Aristotle on Perception* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). For other bibliographic references to the treatment of Aristotle’s theory of interior senses, see Chapter 12 below, nn. 5–7. For Augustine’s account of the Aristotelian inner senses, see Chapter 3 in this volume.

<sup>29</sup> Rom 7: 22 and 2 Cor 4: 16. Cf. Eph 3: 16 and the ‘hidden man of the heart’ of 1 Pet 3: 4.

<sup>30</sup> For example, Roger Bacon (c. 1220–1292) treats the ‘Aristotelian’ inner senses of imagination and common sense separately from the notion of the spiritual vision; see *Opus majus*, II. 5. 1. 2 and II. 5. 3. 1–2 respectively. On Bacon, see R. Carton, *L’expérience mystique de l’illumination intérieure chez Roger Bacon* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1924).