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"A Taste of What Desire Seeks": Sensing the Holy in Liturgical Life

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While the spiritual symbology of the various liturgical phenomena have been the subject of several classic commentaries in the Byzantine patristic tradition, as well as of several modern scholarly studies, research on the senses, materiality and their effects on the liturgical experience is only beginning to emerge.[1] Beyond the aesthetic wonder these phenomena aroused, they could also engender a mystical synaesthesia that invited the faithful to glimpse invisible beauty, sense the intelligible and experience immaterial illumination. Much has been written about the prayers, hymns, vestments and the physical design of the liturgical temple, the church building.[2] All these aspects have been examined in depth with regard to their theological interpretation, the history of liturgical tradition and their historical use.

However, is there a theological framework that underpins and illuminates the process of sense perception in liturgical life, with particular emphases not so much on the liturgical actions themselves, but the utility and indeed transformation of the bodily senses? This paper explores the early patristic period, highlighting the theological tradition that explains the manner in which our bodily senses are idealised as active participants in achieving this psychosomatic reality. The theological construct, "the senses of the soul" (τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς αἰσθητήρια), quite prevalent in the works of St Gregory of Nyssa, will be used as a starting point for exploring this process. After alluding to the senses of sight, smell, touch and taste, the paper will give particular emphasis to the sense of hearing, not just the organ of sound itself, the ear, but also the Orthodox liturgical 'organ' of sound par excellence: the human voice.

1 Béatrice Caseau, "The Senses in Religion: Liturgy, Devotion, and Deprivation," in *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Middle Ages, 500–1450*, ed. Richard G. Newhauser (London: Berg Publishers, 2014), 89–110; Susan Ashbrook Harvey and Margaret Mullett (eds), *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls: Sense Perceptions in Byzantium* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2017).

2 See, for example: Derek Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative and the Formation of Self in Byzantium* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Bissera Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010); Warren T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon: Liturgical Vestments and Sacramental Power in Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

The Spiritual Senses and the Divine Sense

In his letter *On Sickness and Health*, St Athanasius of Alexandria, after alluding to the five senses of the body and soul, described a divine sense that is awakened by compunction:

> Ἔστι τις μετὰ ταύτας καὶ ἑτέρα ἕκτη αἴσθησις, καθ' ἣν τῶν ναφῶν ἐφαπτόμεθα οἱ ἐφάπτεσθαι δυνάμενοι, περὶ ἧς εἶπεν Σολομῶν. καὶ θείαν αἴσθησιν εὑρήσεις, ἥτις καὶ ἐν κατανύξει καρδίας πολλάκις πέφυκεν γίνεσθαι.[3]
>
> There is, after these [five senses of body and soul], also another sixth sense, with which we who are able to touch partake of the untouchable, about which Solomon said, "You will discover a divine sense", and which often comes to pass in compunction of heart.

The spiritual senses and the divine sense of the human person undergo a curious journey in the history of Eastern Christianity.[4] While we could start with Origen and the Alexandrian milieu, exploring this notion of the divine sense and the soul's experience of the holy, investigating the twists and turns of the spiritual senses from early Christianity to Late Byzantium, this is not our intention. We will explore the theological framework that underpins and illuminates the process of sense perception in liturgical life and we will focus on patristic sources from the fourth century, particularly the Cappadocian Fathers. Indeed, Gregory of Nyssa's view of the spiritual sensorium as an embodied phenomenon becomes a point of departure for investigating how sensual apprehension can glimpse divine realities through the liturgical universe of the faithful.

In his first homily on the Song of Songs, the Nyssen argued that the sensuality of the Canticle teaches us that "there is in us a dual activity of perception, the one bodily, the other more divine [...] For there is a certain analogy between the sense organs of the body and the operations of the soul."[5] However, there is also a tension between bodily sense perception and the sensory powers of the soul. The Christian understanding of this tension is brought into focus in the famous dialogue between St Macrina and Gregory of Nyssa.[6] After considering the notion of the human person "as a kind of small cosmos", Macrina argues that the senses can "become interpreters of the omnipotent wisdom which is contemplated in the universe".[7] But she also warns that there are hidden things and by "hidden" she means "that which escapes the observation of the senses because in itself it can be known only by the intellect and not by sight." Gregory retorts:

> Ἀλλὰ τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ὑπερκειμένην σοφίαν διὰ τῶν ἐνθεωρουμένων τῇ φύσει τῶν ὄντων σοφῶν τε καὶ τεχνικῶν λόγων, ἐν τῇ ἁρμονίᾳ ταύτῃ καὶ διακοσμήσει δυνατόν ἐστιν ἀναλογίσασθαι· ψυχῆς δὲ γνῶσις διὰ τῶν κατὰ τὸ σῶμα δεικνυμένων τίς ἂν γένοιτο τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν φαινομένων τὸ κρυπτὸν ἀνιχνεύουσιν;[8]

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3 F. Diekamp (ed.), *Analecta Patristica, Orientialia Christiana Analecta* (Rome, 1938), 5–8.

4 For an overview, see Marcus Plested, "The Spiritual Senses, Monastic and Theological" in Susan Ashbrook Harvey and Margaret Mullett (eds) *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls: Sense Perceptions in Byzantium* (Harvard University Press, 2017), 301–312; Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (eds), *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). See also the work by Paul Gavrilyuk and Frederick D. Aquino on the Spiritual Perception Project, and their forthcoming publication, *Sensing Things Divine: Towards a Contemporary Account of Spiritual Perception* (Oxford University Press).

5 St Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Song of Songs*, trans. Richard A. Norris, Jr. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 35, 37.

6 Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993).

7 Ibid., 34.

8 *Gregorii Nysseni. De Anima et Resurrectione: Opera Dogmatica Minora, Pars III*, ed. Andreas Spira. GNO 3

> However, it is possible to carefully deliberate on the harmony and order of the nature of things, regarding the wisdom which transcends everything, through the use of both wise and skilfully arranged words. Who will be able to search out the knowledge of the soul through what is revealed through the body, regarding what is hidden, out of those things which are perceived by the senses?

Macrina responds:

> Καὶ μάλιστα μέν τοι […] τοῖς κατὰ τὸ σοφὸν ἐκεῖνο παράγγελμα γινώσκειν ἑαυτοὺς ἐπιθυμοῦσιν· εἰ κἂν ἡ διδάσκαλος τῶν περὶ ψυχῆς ὑπολήψεων αὐτὴ ἡ ψυχή, ὅτι ἄϋλός τις καὶ ἀσώματος, καταλλήλως τῇ ἰδίᾳ φύσει ἐνεργοῦσά τε καὶ κινουμένη, καὶ διὰ τῶν σωματικῶν ὀργάνων τὰς ἰδίας κινήσεις ἐνδεικνυμένη. Ἡ γὰρ ὀργανικὴ τοῦ σώματος αὕτη διασκευὴ, ἔστι μὲν οὐδὲν ἧττον καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀπονεκρωθέντων διὰ θανάτου, ἀλλ' ἀκίνητος μένει καὶ ἀνενέργητος, τῆς ψυχικῆς δυνάμεως ἐν αὐτῇ μὴ οὔσης. Κινεῖται δὲ τότε ὅταν ἥ τε αἴσθησις ἐν τοῖς ὀργάνοις ᾖ, καὶ διὰ τῆς αἰσθήσεως ἡ νοητὴ δύναμις διήκῃ ταῖς ἰδίαις ὁρμαῖς συγκινοῦσα πρὸς τὸ δοκοῦν τὰ ὀργανικὰ αἰσθητήρια.[9]
>
> Don't you see [...] if we desire to know ourselves, in obedience to that wise precept, the soul itself teaches us well enough what we should understand about the soul, namely that it is immaterial and bodiless, working and moving in accord with its own nature, and revealing its motions by means of the bodily organs. For the same arrangement of the bodily organs exists in the corpses of the dead, but the soul remains immobile and not activated by the psychic power which is no longer in it. It is moved when perception resides in the organs and intellectual power pervades perception, moving the organs of perception along with its own impulses as it chooses.[10]

The ways of knowing for Macrina require a harmony of spiritual and physical senses, a harmony that is based on a Christian anthropology that viewed humankind as created in the image and likeness of God, as the midpoint between things heavenly and things earthly.[11]

Seeing the Holy

This section of our paper will not examine the use of iconography or religious visual art of any sort, but will limit itself to the organ of seeing, the eye and the sense of sight, based on the harmonious synergy between soul and body that St Macrina alluded to earlier. The relationship between the physical sense perception of sight and spiritual sight was highlighted by Jesus himself in the Sermon on the Mount: "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness."[12]

In St John Chrysostom's commentary on St John the Evangelist's account of the healing of the man born blind, Chrysostom emphasises and expands on the supreme importance of the sense of sight:

> Of all creation, man is more honourable and of the parts of our bodies, the eye is more honoured. This is the reason He fashions the eyes in this way and not in a simple

(Leiden: Brill, 2014), 14. The English translation that follows is by the author.

9 *De Anima et Resurrectione*, 14.

10 Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, 37.

11 See chapters 8 and 16 of the Nyssen's *On the Formation of the Human Being*. A critical edition of Gregory's *On the Formation of the Human Being* has been foreshadowed by the editors of *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*. In the meantime, we have used the Greek text in PG 44, 124–256. Although the title of Gregory's treatise, *Περί κατασκευῆς ἀνθρώπου*, is commonly translated as *On the Making of Man*, this is neither an accurate translation, nor a reflection of Gregory's main theme.

12 Matthew 6:22–23.

> manner. For though it is small in size, it is more necessary than any other part of the body. And Paul explained this when he said, "And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body?" (1 Cor. 12:16)[13]

At this point Chrysostom chooses to expand on the theme of the close relationship between the physical eye and its power to illuminate the soul:

> Indeed, all that is in us is proof of the wisdom of God, but much more than the others is the eye; for it directs the whole body, it gives beauty to all of it, it decorates the face, it is the lamp of all its members. What the sun is to the world, is the eye to the body; if you put out the sun, you destroy and upend everything; if you take out the eyes, the feet, the hands and the soul, are useless. Knowledge is lost when the eyes are disabled, since it is through these that we know God. "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Rom. 1:20). Therefore, the eye is not only a light to the body, but before the body, to the soul. This is why it is built as a royal fortress, occupying the high position and presiding over the other senses.[14]

Therefore, the visual media our Church uses for worship can be likened to rays of knowledge. These media are not limited to icons, but include clerical vestments, the shape and structure of our worshipping spaces, if you like, the entire visual field of the worshipper. All of these combine to focus our physical eyes in the mode that Apostle Peter refers to in his First Epistle, who extols the powerful faith of the pilgrims he addresses his first Epistle to, that "though it is tested by fire, [*you*] may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him,* yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of *your* souls."[15]

Tasting the Holy

While for Aristotle taste may have been the lowest of the five senses,[16] Scripture portrays taste as intimately linked to the vision of the divine: "Taste and see that the Lord is good."[17] Taste can also become a source of divine inspiration. Not unlike the experience of the Prophet Ezekiel, St John the Evangelist hears a voice from heaven saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land [...] Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth."[18] This "hierophagy" sees John experience a supernatural meal that transforms him into a receptacle of divine knowledge.[19] In Byzantium, John, the beloved Apostle, is portrayed as imbibing wisdom from the chest of Christ while laying his head there during the mystical supper. Similarly, the *Menologion of Basil II* tells us that St Romanos the Melodist ingested a scroll the Theotokos gave to him in a dream and awoke with the gift of hymnody; there was an inscription entreating the *Theotokos Kyriotissa* to be filled "with the sweet drink of

13 Homily 56, PG 59, 304–310. The English translation is by the author.
14 Ibid.
15 1 Peter 1:7–9.
16 *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.10.
17 Psalm 33:9.
18 Revelation 10:8–9.
19 See Meredith J. C. Warren, *Food and Transformation in Ancient Mediterranean Literature* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2019), 59–74.

wisdom";[20] and St John Chrysostom portrayed tasting the Eucharist as transforming the believer's mouth into "doors of a temple which holds Christ."[21]

Taste also plays a key role in Gregory of Nyssa's *Homilies on the Song of Songs*. As Gregory enjoins an "erotic love" that desires the "beauty of the divine nature" and transforms "passion into impassibility", the sensual language of the Canticle becomes a medium of transfiguration for the passions and the sensorium. Quoting the words of the lover—"Come away from frankincense, my bride, come away from frankincense [...] come and pass through from the beginning of faith [...] from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards"—Gregory invites the faithful to see in these words the "wellspring of good things [that] always draws the thirsty to itself—just as in the Gospel the wellspring says: "If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37). In a daring statement, the Nyssen renders sense perception a launch pad for the perpetual ascent of the human person towards God:

> For in using these words, he sets no limit, whether to thirst, or to the urge to come to him, or to the enjoyment of the drinking. Rather, by the open-endedness of his injunction, he issues a continuing invitation to thirst and to drink and to be impelled toward him. To those who have already "tasted" and have learned from experience "that the Lord is good", the tasting becomes, as it were, an invitation to partake of yet more. On this account the invitation to come to him that has been offered, and that ever and again draws us to better things, is never lacking to the person who is journeying upwards.[22]

Gregory suggests the true realm of the senses exists in the soul's ever-intensifying desire for the Divine, which can only be felt when the yearning soul is "surrounded by the divine night" and experiences the "mystical kiss" of the lover of humankind: "when she separated herself from any kinship with evil and sought, in that mystical kiss, to bring her mouth to the fount of light, then she became beautiful and good, illumined by the light of truth and cleansed by water from the darkness of ignorance."[23]

According to Gregory, while the Song of Songs is a narrative that appears to incite fleshly desire, its true purpose is salvific, leading the soul to a nobler desiring of the Divine. Therefore, he exhorts his audience:

> […] since it is Wisdom who speaks, love her (ἀγάπησον) as much as you are able, with your whole heart and strength; desire her (ἐπιθύμησον) as much as you can. To these words I am bold to add, Be in love (ἐράσθητι), for this passion, when directed to things incorporeal, is blameless and impassible.[24]

For Gregory, this desire is not experienced in abstraction. It is through the sensorium of the body and soul that the faithful receive a foretaste of Wisdom and Power of God:

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20 See Bissera Pentcheva, "The Logos as Pregnant Body and Building" *RES. Anthropology and Aesthetics* 45 (2004): 232.

21 *Jean Chrysostome: Huit Catecheses Baptismales*, SC 50 (Paris, 1957), 159.

22 Homily 8, Norris 260, 261: ἀεὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἡ πηγὴ πρὸς ἑαυτὴν τοὺς διψῶντας ἐφέλκεται, καθὼς ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ φησὶν ἡ πηγὴ ὅτι, Εἴ τις διψᾷ, ἐρχέσθω πρός με καὶ πινέτω· ἐν τούτοις γὰρ οὔτε τῆς δίψης οὔτε τῆς πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁρμῆς οὔτε τῆς ἐν τῷ πίνειν ἀπολαύσεως ἔδωκεν ὅρον, ἀλλὰ τῷ παρατατικῷ τοῦ προστάγματος πρὸς τὸ διηνεκὲς ποιεῖται τὴν προτροπὴν καὶ τοῦ διψῆν καὶ τοῦ πίνειν καὶ τοῦ πρὸς αὐτὸν τὴν ὁρμὴν ἔχειν. τοῖς δὲ γευσαμένοις ἤδη καὶ τῇ πείρᾳ μαθοῦσιν ὅτι χρηστὸς ὁ κύριος οἷόν τις προτροπὴ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ πλείονος μετουσίαν ἡ γεῦσις γίνεται.

23 Homily 11, Norris 341, 342: ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ τῆς πρὸς τὸ κακὸν συμφυΐας ἑαυτὴν ἀποσπάσασα διὰ τοῦ μυστικοῦ ἐκείνου φιλήματος τῇ πηγῇ τοῦ φωτὸς προσαγαγεῖν τὸ στόμα ἐπόθησε, τότε καλὴ γίνεται τῷ φωτὶ τῆς ἀληθείας περιλαμφθεῖσα καὶ τὸ μέλαν τῆς ἀγνοίας ἀποκλυσαμένη τῷ ὕδατι.

24 Homily 1, Norris, 25.

> [...] all the prophets, in handing over their organs of speech to the Spirit that sounded within them, became sweetness as they poured the divine honey forth through their throat. Kings and common folk alike consumed it to their benefit. The pleasure of it did not check desire through surfeit; rather did it nourish longing by affording a taste of what desire seeks.[25]

However, taste can also be the cause of misfortune and tribulation. Just as, in ancient literature, Persephone was kidnapped and held captive in the underworld by Hades who "secretly gave her a sweet pomegranate seed to eat" thus binding her to the underworld, Adam and Eve were exiled from Eden for tasting the forbidden fruit. As St Gregory the Theologian tells us:

> The devil maintains constant hatred of the human race. For it was through his murderous agency when he fanned my human flame by his trickery that the first mortal came to taste evil and death (αἰὲν ἀπεχθαίρει μερόπων γένος. ἐκ δ' ἄρ' ἐκείνου γεύσατο καὶ κακίης πρῶτος βροτὸς ἀνδροφόνοιο, καὶ θανάτου, ῥιπίσαντος ἐμοὶ φλόγα οἵσι δόλοισιν).[26]

Taste and the passion of gluttony (γαστριμαργία) or the love of delicacies (λαιμαργία)—also known as the madness of the palate—united taste to pleasure and divorced the mouth from the holy. As Basil the Great warned, "pleasurable tastes must not be followed as the goal of food—the need that serves life is sufficient, with indulgence being shunned. For if we serve pleasure, it is nothing other than to make a god of our belly."[27] Indeed, in the medieval world, food and feasting were signs of status and wealth.

In stark contrast, for Gregory of Nyssa, the Eucharist is the ultimate experience of the delights taste can offer—the bliss of Paradise. Indeed, the mystagogical instruction that his homilies on the Song of Songs seek to impart are the eucharistic experience. Therefore, when the Bride shouts: "You who are close to me, eat! And you, my brethren, drink and be drunken!" She sets forth to those who have ears to hear the mysteries of the Gospel and the mystical supper Christ gave to his disciples.[28] When the faithful sang "taste and see that the Lord is good," they did so amidst a multisensory encounter, having engaged in various postures and gestures, and after seeing the divine drama of salvation that the rhetoric of preaching conjured, turning listeners into spectators. Homilies and hymns enkindled the senses and rendered materiality a liminal space where the liturgical experience of the Divine could unfold.

Scenting the Holy

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to revisit the work of Susan Ashbrook Harvey on the olfactory practices of early Christianity,[29] it agrees that the significance of incense, holy myrrh, and other hallowed scents in liturgical life, as mediators of the human–divine experience, has much to tell us about the religious culture of the faithful and the sacredness of the body. Gregory of Nyssa's Homilies on the Song

25 Homily 14, Norris 451.

26 *Carmina* 1.1.4, 48–50. C. Moreschini (ed.) *St Gregory of Nazianzus: Poemata Arcana* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

27 *Rule of Basil* 9.9-10, ed. Anna Silvas, *The Rule of St Basil in Latin and English* (Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press, 2013), 101.

28 Homily 10, Norris 325.

29 Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

of Songs also explore the theme of scenting the holy, which emerges in the first few lines of the Canticle: "And the fragrance of your ointments is better than all spices: your name is myrrh poured forth." (Song 1:3):

> [...] the Bride, touches on a higher philosophy. When she says *Your name is a perfumed ointment emptied out*, she makes it manifest that the divine power is inaccessible and incapable of being contained by human thought processes, for to me it seems that by this statement there is conveyed something like the following: that the Nature that has no boundaries cannot be accurately comprehended by means of the connotations of words. On the contrary, all the power of concepts and all the significance of words and names, even if they seem to have about them something grand and worthy of the Divine, cannot attain the nature of the Real itself. On the contrary, it is as if by certain traces and hints that our reason guesses at the Invisible; by way of some analogy based on things it has comprehended, it forms a conjecture about the Incomprehensible. For whatever name we may think up, she says, to make the scent of the Godhead known, the meaning of the things we say does not refer to the perfume itself. Rather does our theological vocabulary refer to a slight remnant of the vapour of the divine fragrance.[30]

Perhaps the Nyssen suggests here that the senses have a power to apprehend the Divine that is not given to words and concepts. While human language, concepts and names cannot attain the nature of the Real, sweet-smelling fragrance could unlock spiritual realities without the logic of words. During baptism, holy unction and other moments in liturgical life, the olfactory experience of the faithful intimated the mystery of Christ, the Bridegroom. While the materiality of the oil was one aspect of this olfaction, the fragrance poured out and the sweet smells it brought to life, was the other aspect of holy oil. The dual nature of this sensory experience pointed to the two natures of Christ himself.

Touching the Holy

It is not surprising that the Cappadocian Fathers use descriptive words of action, typically associated with physical displays of love, that is, kiss, embrace, intertwining, to make metaphorical allusions between the somatic sense of touch and the actions of the soul:

> There was a time when the Bride was dark, cast into darkness by unenlightened beliefs, by reason of the fact that the sun looked askance at her and by temptations scorched the seed that lay rootless on the rocks; when she did not guard her vineyard, being weakened by the forces waging their war within her; when, ignorant of herself, she shepherded the herds of goats instead of sheep. But when she separated herself from any kinship with evil and sought, in that mystical kiss, to bring her mouth to the fount of light, then she became beautiful and good, illumined by the light of truth and cleansed by water from the darkness of ignorance.[31]

The Nyssen likens the erotic turning of the soul to God, through the action of a "mystical kiss" with which it is enjoined with the "fount of light", a sort of anagogical antithesis to Judas Iscariot's kiss of betrayal.

St Basil, in a similar vein, drawing inspiration from the book of Ecclesiastes, likens the way through which wisdom "comes into contact" with the soul, as an embrace:

30 Gregory of Nyssa (Homily 1, Norris 39).

31 Ibid. (Homily 8), 265.

> There is also a certain touch sense of the soul, through which wisdom comes into contact with it, as if it is being embraced by the soul's own virtue. For it says, "love her…so that she may embrace you" (Proverbs 4:6-8). And again, from Ecclesiastes, "a time to embrace, and a time to draw far from embracing" (Eccles. 3:5). For on the one hand, bodies are polluted by unclean intertwinings between one another. But the soul, through its complete intertwining with wisdom, is filled with sanctification and purity.[32]

The tactile dimension of liturgical experience is yet another example of the significant role the body plays in a life of holiness.

Hearing the Holy

In the four senses covered thus far, we have shown that the activation of the bodily senses leads to an analogous reaction in the soul. St Gregory the Theologian, points this out in his Oration to "the frightened citizens of Nazianzus,"[33] interpreting a verse from the Book of Jeremiah, that, "'sensitive powers' presumably refers to the thoughts and stirrings of the soul, especially those that result from sense perception and tear into the just man, firing him up and rousing in him impulses that thanks to the ardour of the Spirit he cannot at all control." Further on, he establishes a link between the subtle virtue of being tender-hearted and the desire for what is "beautiful and good" (τὸ καλοκἀγαθον) pointing out that, "our eyes and ears are not limited to registering distress upon seeing or hearing something bad; thanks to our virtue of having a tender heart they also desire to hear and see good things as well."

But the utility of our worship does not lie in irrational displays of 'beautiful' sensory stimulation; this very stimulation is intertwined with the more reasoning or rational aspect of our worship. St Nemesios of Emessa, describes the gradation from irrational animals to the Rational Animal, the Human Being, within God's creating act by using the voice as a pivot-point:

> Again, when moving from the non-rational animals to the rational animal, man, He *(God)* did not construct this all at once, but first He endowed the other animals also with certain natural forms of understanding, devices and resources for their preservation, so that they appear near to the rational animals, and thus He projected the truly rational animal, man. In the same way, too, if you also investigate voice you will also find a gradual progress from the simple and undifferentiated vocalisation of horses and cattle to the varied and differentiated voice of crows and imitative birds, until He finished with the articulated and perfect voice of man. Again, He linked articulate speech to thought and reasoning, making it a messenger of the movements of the intellect.[34]

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32 Basil the Great, *On the Beginning of Proverbs*, Homily 12, PG 31, 385–424.

33 Oration 17. PG 35, 964–981.

34 Nemesius, *On the Nature of Man*, trans. Sharples and Van Der Eijk (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 39. The Greek text is as follows: πάλιν δὲ μεταβαίνων ἀπὸ τῶν ἀλόγων ἐπὶ τὸ ογικὸν ζῷον τὸν ἄνθρωπον, οὐδὲ τοῦτο ἀθρόως κατεσκεύασεν, ἀλλὰ πρότερον καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ζώοις φυσικάς τινας συνέσεις καὶ μηχανὰς καὶ πανουργίας πρὸς σωτηρίαν ἐνέθηκεν, ὡς ἐγγὺς λογικῶν αὐτὰ φαίνεσθαι, καὶ οὕτω τὸ ἀληθῶς λογικὸν ζῷον τὸν ἄνθρωπον προεβάλετο· τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς φωνῆς ζητῶν εὑρήσεις ἐξ ἁπλῆς καὶ μονοειδοῦς τῆς ἵππων καὶ βοῶν ἐκφωνήσεως κατὰ μέρος εἰς ποικίλην καὶ διάφορον προαχθεῖσαν τὴν τῶν κοράκων καὶ μιμηλῶν ὄρνεων φωνήν, ἕως εἰς τὴνἔναρθρον καὶ τελείαν τὴν ἀνθρώπου κατέληξε, πάλιν δὲ τὴν ἔναρθρον διάλεκτον ἐξῆψε τῆς διανοίας καὶ τοῦ λογισμοῦ ἐξάγγελον ποιήσας αὐτὴν τῶν κατὰ νοῦν κινημάτων. See M. Morani, *Nemesii Emeseni de natura hominis* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1987), 1–136.

The "perfect voice" may be a non-objectifiable sentiment, an unattainable goal, but the link he elucidates between the voice and rational thought is undeniable. The human power of speech is not simply an act of mimesis of the original Image, the Word, but is called to become the vehicle with which the inner stirrings of our own intellect are referred to God, especially in the liturgical act.

St Gregory Nyssen is able to marry the beautiful aspect of the voice together with its property of expressing the movements of the intellect in the following passage from the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*: "Now "fine words" are "honeycombs" (Prov 16:24), and the instrument of such rational speech is the voice, which originates from the throat." St Gregory then moves on to identify St John the Forerunner and Apostle Paul within this analogical context: "Perhaps, then, one will not be mistaken if one understands this term "throat" to signify the servants and interpreters of the Word, in whom Christ speaks. The great John the Baptist, after all, when asked who he was, called himself a "voice" (John 1:23) because he was the forerunner of the Word, and the blessed Paul gave proof of the Christ speaking in him (cf. 2 Cor 13:3), and, having lent Christ his own voice, he gave voice to sweetness." The throat, expounding spiritual truths with "the articulated and perfect voice of man" combined with the innate need to experience via the sense of hearing, that which is beautiful and good, enhances the longing, the nostalgia "of what desire seeks."

The chanter/chorister is not just a passive instrument suborned to centuries of liturgical tradition. Neither are they a means to re-enact the Divine Economy through beautiful sounds alone. After all, beautiful sounds can be experienced in a number of secular settings. They are called to lend their voice, their vocal cords, their throat, their lips their mouths to the Holy Spirit, the desire for which has already been engendered in their hearts. St John Chrysostom joins the inner expression of this desire to its vocalisation when interpreting Colossians 3:16: "in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

> St Paul says, from the grace of the Holy Spirit. Not only by the mouth, he says, but with reverent care. For this is what singing to God really is; singing by mouth alone is singing into the air, for the voice is dispersed indiscriminately through it. St Paul says to not show off when singing. And even if you are in the marketplace, you are able to turn towards yourself and sing to God, while no-one is listening.[35]

St Gregory Nyssen climaxes the passage from Song of Songs cited previously, with an exclamation: "How blessed are the members through whose contributions the whole body becomes desire!" The hymns we sing are not a simple reciting of dry, ancient 'religious poetry'. The singing, the chanting, the vocalisation during worship is a physical sign of the desirous movement of the Church Body, in both soul and body, one and all, to partake in an all-enveloping 'erotic' *epektasis* reaching upward in an eternal motion towards the Divine.

For Basil the Great, liturgical music was not the sensuous enjoyment of music, which could incite depraved passions, but a remedy for these passions and pedagogy for the soul. By mixing "the sweetness of melody with doctrine" and providing

35 John Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians*, PG 62, 364: Ἀπὸ τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Πνεύματος, φησίν. Ἀιδοντες ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν τῷ Θεῷ. Μὴ ἁπλῶς, φησὶ, τῷ στόματι, ἀλλὰ μετὰ προσοχῆς. Τοῦτο γάρ ἐστι τῷ Θεῷ ᾄδειν, ἐκεῖνο δὲ τῷ ἀέρι· διαχεῖται γὰρ ἁπλῶς ἡ φωνή. Μὴ πρὸς ἐπίδειξιν, φησίν. Κἂν ἐν ἀγορᾷ ἦς, δύνασαι συστρέψαι σαυτὸν καὶ ᾄδειν τῷ Θεῷ, μηδενὸς ἀκούοντος.

"a common surgery for souls," hymnody could edify the faithful and elicit blessed emotions. Of course, music could just as easily have aroused depraved passions:

> For passions, which are the offspring of servility and baseness, are produced by [the music of corrupt songs]. On the other hand, we must employ that class of music that is better and leads to the better, which David, the sacred Psalmist, is said to have used to ease the madness of the king.[36]

Similarly, Gregory of Nyssa suggested that liturgical singing is not the music of the lyric poets. Sacred song combines "the sweetness of honey" with "divine words" in a way that moderates the passions through the "proper rhythm of life" that leads to "the more sublime state of life."[37]

Concluding remarks

If there is a theological framework that underpins and illuminates the process of sense perception in liturgical life, it was not systematically developed by the early church fathers. However, they laid the foundations for what was to emerge later in Byzantium, foundations which hinted at the liturgical dimensions of sense perception. They set the tone by offering exegeses in either a literal or anagogical sense, of the rich scriptural tradition which refers to the senses. We have attempted to outline some of these in our paper, but we have gone further by drawing links between these analyses and the actual sensory media of worship. Furthermore, the liturgical theology that was to develop in the classic works of St Dionysios the Areopagite, St Maximos the Confessor and St Germanos of Constantinople, did not spring forth *ex nihilo*, but had antecedents in the earlier patristic theology on who the human person is, or rather who the human person is called to be, both in an earthly manner, but also in regards to her/his eschatological mode of being, which indeed, Orthodox worship enacts at every liturgical *synaxis.*

While we have focused on patristic texts in this presentation, liturgical life shaped the theology of these fathers and mothers of early Byzantium. It is in liturgical life that the interplay between the sensual and mystical—hymnody, incense, iconography, etc—echoes the bodily and divine modes of perception that Gregory spoke of as an analogy between the sensorium and the spiritual senses:

> We also learn, in an incidental way, another truth through the philosophical wisdom of this book, that there is in us a dual activity of perception, the one bodily, the other more divine—just as Proverbs somewhere says, "You will find a divine mode of perception." For there is a certain analogy between the sense organs of the body and the operations of the soul. And it is this that we learn from the words before us. For both wine and milk are discerned by the sense of taste, but when they are intelligible things, the power of the soul that grasps them is an intellectual power. And a kiss comes about through the sense of touch, for in a kiss lips touch each other. There is also, though, a "touch" that belongs to the soul, one that makes contact with the Word and is actuated by an incorporeal and intelligible touching, just as someone said, "Our hands have touched concerning the Word of life" (1 John 1:1). In the same way, too, the scent of the divine perfumes is not a scent in the nostrils but pertains to a certain intelligible and immaterial faculty that inhales the sweet smell of Christ by sucking in the Spirit.[38]

36 *Address to Youth. On how they might Benefit from Classical Greek Literature* (Sydney: St Andrew's Orthodox Press, 2011), 52. We have slightly modified the translation. For the Greek text, see PG 31, 581D.

37 Ronald E. Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 91–92. For the Greek text, see *St Gregory of Nyssa, In Inscriptiones Psalmorum: In Sextum Psalmum: In Ecclesiasten Homiliae*, ed. J. McDonough and P. Alexander, GNO 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 33–34.

38 Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Song of* Songs, 35, 37.

While Gregory talks about the spiritual senses, he does not argue for a dichotomy between these and physical sensorium. After all, the human person is the bridge of the sensible and intelligible worlds. In the words of St Macrina: "As we observe the whole universe through sensual apprehension, by the very operation of our senses we are led to conceive of that reality and intelligence which surpasses the senses."[39]

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39 Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, 34.

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