

***‘Taste and see that the Lord is good’ (Ps. 34:8):
The Continuity and Transformation of the Spiritual Senses Tradition***

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The Spiritual Senses Tradition: Origen and Scripture

There is a tradition in Christian East and West dating back to at least Origen of Alexandria (c. 185-c.254) that human beings have the capacity to see, hear, smell, taste and touch God or spiritual and ineffable realities given that they possess a special organ or organs: the spiritual senses.¹ Thus Origen writes about seeing God with the ‘eyes of the mind’, hearing divine instructions with ‘spiritual ears’, ‘smelling [...] with no sensible organs of perception’, a ‘taste that feeds on living bread that has come down from heaven’ and finally he describes a ‘sense of touch for handling the word of life.’² For Origen there existed certain divine senses of the inner man as for every external organ of sense of the external man there existed a corresponding sense in the inner man. He elaborates this teaching of the divine sense of the inner human being through an exegesis of the notion in Paul of the ‘inmost self’ (Rom. 7:22) and the ‘inner nature’ of humanity (2 Cor. 4:16). He even quotes an ancient Greek non-Septuagint version of the Old Testament Proverbs 2:5 that ‘You shall find a divine sense.’

¹ The most easily accessible study is the landmark work, *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God on Western Christianity*, eds. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012) but see Mark McInroy, *Balthasar on the Spiritual Senses: Perceiving Splendour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). The following work is forthcoming: *Sensing Things Divine: Towards a Constructive Account of Spiritual Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press forthcoming). (See description:

<https://www.academia.edu/25251043/Sensing_Things_Divine_Towards_a_Constructive_Account_of_Spiritual_Perception_eds._Frederick_D._Aquino_and_Paul_Gavrilyuk> (last accessed: 28 May 2016).

² For discussion see Mark J. McInroy, ‘Origen of Alexandria’ in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God on Western Christianity*, eds. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), pp.20—35 at 21 and I am indebted to this in what follows.

Origen was simply inspired by the Bible. The Psalms of the Old Testament (or the Hebrew Bible) speak of how one is called to ‘taste and see that the Lord is good (Ps. 34:8). In the New Testament, Jesus says in the Beatitudes that ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’ (Mt. 5:8) and Paul says that Christians or saints are the ‘sweet aroma of Christ to God’ that is sensed by the saved and the perishing (2 Cor. 2:15). Finally, again in the New Testament, the writer of the First Epistle of John says that the saints who knew Christ have heard, seen with their eyes, looked upon and touched with their hands the very divine Word of Life that is ‘from the beginning’ (1 Jn 1:1).

After Origen: from Diadochos of Photiki to Symeon Metaphrastis

This notion of the spiritual senses is variously understood in Christian history in both East and West ranging from the physical senses having a spiritual modality so that they can perceive the unperceivable or that there exist special spiritual versions of the five senses. After giving further examples from ancient and medieval Christian writers I will discuss two modern examples from Christian East and West. The first writer is the celebrated Russian saint, spiritual teacher and monastic, Seraphim of Sarov (1754 (or 1759)-1833), who holds a place in the Christian East akin to Francis of Assisi. His visions of the divine involving seeing uncreated light, hearing words from spiritual beings with which he converses and smelling ineffable spiritual realities. These are very much in continuity with the earlier theological tradition. But I then want to look at the transformation of this tradition in Romanticism. In particular, we see it in the poetry, philosophy and theology of the great English poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) who at certain points understood the imagination as a form of the spiritual senses.

The earliest position we see in Origen can also be seen in Diadochus of Photiki (400-c.486 AD) who is an important Eastern Christian spiritual writer from what is now Northern Greece. He distinguishes between the 5 senses of the body that impel one almost violently towards what attracts them and the ‘perceptive faculty of the intellect’ that, he tells us, ‘tastes the divine goodness’ and leads us towards ‘invisible blessings.’ Everything, he argues, longs for what is akin to itself. The soul, being bodiless, desires heavenly goods while the body, being dust, seeks earthly nourishment. One only can come to ‘experience immaterial perception’ if we refine our material nature. In fact, the perceptive faculty natural to the soul and implanted by the Holy Spirit was originally one but it split apart at the Fall of humanity from Eden creating a schism between the physical senses and the perceptive faculty of the intellect. One can only reach the unity of perception prior to the Fall, unifying the senses with the intellect and so perceiving the unperceivable using the spiritual senses, once we have abandoned the corruptible life—allowing all appetites of the physical senses to wither away through self-control--in the hope of eternity. Once this happens then the intellect, as free from worldly care, ‘act[s] with its full vigor so that it is capable of perceiving ineffably the goodness of God’ and it communicates its joy to the body too.³

The perceptive faculty of the intellect is paralleled by the physical senses. The intellect, when healthy, is able to discriminate accurately ‘between the tastes of different realities’ and can perceive the wealth of God’s grace and does not choose the illusion of grace coming from the devil. So too the physical sense of taste, when healthy, can unfailingly choose between good and bad food and knows by

³ Diadochus of Photiki, ‘On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination: One Hundred Texts’ in *The Philokalia*, trans. G. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware, 4 Vols [5th forthcoming] (London: Faber & Faber, 1979-1995), sec. 24-25, Vol. 1, p.259 [For Greek: *Philokalia*, 5 vols., ed. Archim. Epifania Feodoropulosa (Athens: Astir/Papadimitriou, 1957-1963)].

experience what each thing is. Likewise the intellect when it has triumphed over the flesh ‘knows for certain when it is tasting the grace of the Holy Spirit; for it is written: ‘Taste and see that the Lord is good’ (Ps. 34:8).’⁴

But ancient Christian writers not only spoke of a spiritual capacity to taste the ineffable but also spoke of other spiritual senses such as sight and smell. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) in North Africa, perhaps the most influential western Christian religious thinker of the pre-modern period, is known for his frequent recourse to imagery of the spiritual vision of the soul. He speaks of a ‘hidden sun’ pouring into our ‘innermost eyes’ the ‘beaming light.’ This light is, of course, God Himself who illuminates the soul that desires Him with its whole heart. He is ‘all the truth that we speak’ even though we pause before viewing the light in its full glory ‘because our eyes, recently opened, are not yet strong enough.’⁵ We see another example of the spiritual senses in Theodore the Great Ascetic, a 9th century Syriac bishop from Edessa in Turkey near the Syrian border. Theodore writes of the ‘fragrance of a holy soul’ which like a ‘costly aromatic oil’ though kept inside a vessel has a smell that pervades a whole house. So too the spiritual smell of the holy soul ‘beloved of God, when given out through all the senses of the body, conveys to those who perceive it the holiness that lies within.’⁶

As mentioned earlier, there are different accounts of how one can perceive the divine. Perhaps the most common is to say that there are two orders of senses: one for the body and one for the soul. We see this in the important Church Father for both East and West (a key source for Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)), the Syrian John of Damascus (670-750) who lived in Mar Saba Monastery near Jerusalem. He identifies

⁴ *ibid.*, sec. 30, Vol. I, p.261.

⁵ Augustine, ‘De Beata vita’ in Matthew R. Looatens, ‘Augustine’ in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God on Western Christianity*, pp.56-70 at 61.

⁶ Theodore the Great Ascetic, ‘A Century of Spiritual Texts’, sec. 88, Vol. II, *The Philokalia*, p.33.

the senses of the body as sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch and they are paralleled by the soul's senses (also called faculties): intellect, reason, opinion, fantasy and sense-perception. For both the soul and the body there are unique sets of virtues and vices depending on the mode. Thus for the soul there is the five cardinal virtues--courage, moral judgment, self-restraint and justice—and for the body there is a longer list of virtues including self-control, fasting, hunger, thirst, staying awake etc.⁷

We get the same “two track” account of the spiritual and bodily senses in Symeon Metaphrastic who was a 10th century Byzantine Spiritual writer known for his collection of saints' lives. He has a slightly different list of the soul's senses which are now understanding, spiritual knowledge, discrimination, patient endurance and compassion. Symeon Metaphrastic is concerned with ‘the rational, discriminative and directing aspect of the soul’, discerning between good and evil by the will of the soul preserving the body ‘free from the vitiation of the senses’ becoming scattered into thoughts in the world and so turning to ‘base concerns and pleasures.’⁸

If the soul's senses receive the gift of the Holy Spirit one will be like the five wise Virgins in Jesus' Parable in the Gospel of Matthew (25:1-13) who, awaiting the return of the Bridegroom who is Christ at the end of the world, took flasks of oil for their lamps with them. These virgins were ready for his return at midnight and then went in with him to the marriage feast (i.e. the Kingdom of Heaven). Yet, Symeon Metaphrastic tells us, if these spiritual senses are ‘left imprisoned in their own nature’ not receiving the oil of grace of the Spirit then they are like the five foolish virgins in the same parable who brought no oil to trim their lamps, tried unsuccessfully to borrow some from their wise counterparts then went off to buy it at the dealers, and when the Bridegroom came they were locked out of the feast and knocking at the door

⁷ John of Damascus, ‘On the Virtues and the Vices’, Vol. II, *The Philokalia*, p.334.

⁸ Symeon Metaphrastic, ‘Paraphrase of the Homilies of St Makarios of Egypt’, IV: The Raising of the Intellect, sec. 64, Vol. III, *The Philokalia*, p.313.

they cried out for him to let them in and he said, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you’ (Matt. 25:12). Symeon Metaphrastis describes such people as ‘children of the world and subject to the wrath of God.’⁹

Hesychasm and the Spiritual Senses

We have a sort of union of the two sets of inner spiritual and outer bodily senses in later spiritual writers of the 10th century onwards often called hesychastic. Now hesychasm (from the Greek *hesychia* or stillness/quietude) is the main monastic movement in Eastern Christianity or Orthodoxy whose roots can be traced back to spiritual practices of the monks of the Egyptian desert of the 3rd and 4th century (e.g. Anthony the Great (c.251-356)). It now forms the major trajectory of Eastern Orthodox spirituality as practiced by lay, monk and cleric alike. It focuses on the practice of “mental prayer” or the “prayer of the heart.” This is the same thing as the “Jesus Prayer” which runs as follows: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner!’ In reciting the prayer one is encouraged to remove images from one’s mind and so the tradition of hesychastic prayer is often called ‘imageless prayer.’ The material describing this sort of prayer tradition from the 4th to 15th centuries was collected together in the 18th century in a 5 volume work published in Venice in 1782 by the monks, Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain (1749-1809) and Makarios of Corinth (1731-1805). It was subsequently translated into Slavonic in 1793 and then in Russia, Romanian, French and multiple other modern languages right down to English translations most recently.¹⁰

⁹ *ibid.*, sec. 65, Vol. III, *The Philokalia*, p.313.

¹⁰ For an introduction see most recently *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, eds. Brock Bingaman and Bradley Nassif (Oxford/NY: Oxford University Press, 2012) and Christopher Johnson, *The Globalization of Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer: Contesting Contemplation* (London: Continuum, 2010).

Usually, the prayers are counted off on black prayer ropes composed of many small knots—anywhere from 10-20 to hundreds. These prayer ropes are a common item in Eastern Orthodox or Eastern Christian piety and can be seen worn by both the average believer and bishops. The Roman Catholic tradition of the rosary is a later medieval spiritual tradition which is certainly not alien to this Eastern tradition but quite different as the emphasis is on mentally contemplating Christian mysteries (often involving holding religious images in the imagination) whereas the Eastern practice involves a certain shedding of discursive or abstract reason (*dianoia*) including all symbols, imagery and (ironically) eventually language itself.

It is believed that through the constant repetition of the Jesus Prayer that it will eventually through divine grace ‘descend’ from the mind to the heart. The heart is often identified with the *Nous* or spiritual mind/intellect which understands divine truth immediately by means of intuition or a “simple cognition” often identified with vision. *Nous* is often opposed to discursive or abstract reason (*dianoia* or *ratio*). Once the prayer ‘descends’, in this manner, it is said one will become ‘pure prayer’ or one will ‘pray ceaselessly’ (as Paul says in I Thessalonians 5:17) and enter into a state of complete silent impassibility or *hesychia*. In this state, the practitioner of the prayer, who is usually but not necessarily a monk, sees all things as infused with the divine energies of God. It is usually accompanied by a vision of those energies as uncreated light. In the 14th Century, a movement of Hesychasts arose on Mt Athos (a country of monasteries in Northern Greece that has experienced a great revival post-1991 with the break up of the Soviet Union) whose primary advocate was the hesychastic writer and bishop Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) who in its defense elaborated the distinction (latent in earlier Christian Fathers of the 4th and 5th century) between the

unexperienced essence of God and the experienced energies of God which pervade the world.

Palamas, in the famous ‘Hagioritic Tome’ of 1340 drafted by him and signed by the leading monks of Athos and the local bishop, argues that the intellect perceives one light which is uncreated and the senses another created light. Sight and intellect, he says, do not ordinarily perceive the same light, but each ‘operates to the limit of its nature in what is natural to it.’ Now the saints are those possessed of spiritual ‘grace and power’ and they can uniquely see both created and uncreated light with the ‘sense of sight and with the intellect’ in a union which ‘surpasses both sense and intellect.’¹¹ We see the very same theology of the spiritual senses and a description of an experience of seeing uncreated light with the eyes of the intellect and the bodily eyes in the poetry of the important spiritual writer and hesychast Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022). In this poem he addresses God concerning his vision:

How shall I describe, Master, the vision of your face,
how shall I tell the unutterable contemplation of your beauty?
How shall the sound of a tongue contain what the world does not contain,
how could anyone express your benevolence?
For sitting with the light of a lamp shining on me,
and illuminating the gloom and darkness of the night,
I seemed to be occupied with reading in the light
as though I were examining the sayings and considering the syntax.
And so as I began, Master, meditating on these things,
suddenly You appeared from above, much greater than the sun,
and You shone from the heavens down as far as my heart, (2 Cor 4:6)
but all other things I saw as being in the depths of darkness,
but in the middle was a shining pillar, splitting the air completely, (Ex 13:21)
extending from the heavens all the way to me, wretched one.
Immediately I forgot the light of the lamp;
I was not aware that I was in the house;
it seemed I was sitting in the air of darkness.
Moreover, I was utterly oblivious even of my body;
I was saying to You and now I say from the depths of my heart:
Have mercy on me, Master, You alone, have mercy on me, (Ps 56:2)
[...] Oh awesome wonder seen

¹¹ Gregory Palamas, ‘The Declaration of the Holy Mountain in Defense of Those who Devoutly Practice A Life of Stillness [The Hagioritic Tome]’, sec. 6, Vol. IV, *The Philokalia*, p.424.

doubly with the double eyes of both body and soul!¹²

Much of this sort of theology comes together in Nikitas Stithatos (c. 1005-c.1090), a Byzantine mystic and hesychast and follower of Symeon the New Theologian. He distinguishes (as earlier writers did) between the five higher spiritual senses (intellect, reason, noetic perception, intuitive knowledge, and cognitive insight)¹³ and the five bodily senses but you now see a sort of unification entering into theological understanding. He says that among the bodily senses, sight and hearing possess a certain ‘noetic quality’ (from *Nous*=intellect/spiritual mind/heart) and are more ‘intelligent and masterful’ than taste, smell and touch which are ‘mindless and gross [...] more animal-like’ and must wait on the higher senses to be properly directed.¹⁴ He says that if you refer the bodily outer senses to the spiritual inner senses

exposing your sight to the intellect, the beholder of the light of life, your hearing to the judgment of the soul, your taste to the discrimination of the intelligence, your sense of smell to the understanding of the intellect, and relating your sense of touch to the watchfulness of the heart - you will lead an angelic life on earth; while being and appearing as a man among men, you will also be an angel coexisting with angels and spiritually conscious in the same way as they are.¹⁵

Through the intellect, in union with sight, one can then behold ‘the light of divine life’ receiving the knowledge of God’s ‘hidden mysteries.’ Through the soul’s faculty or spiritual sense of judgement, in union with hearing, ‘we winnow in the light of this knowledge the thoughts that arise within the heart, distinguishing the good from the bad.’ Through the spiritual sense of discrimination, in union with taste, ‘we savor our conceptual images’ accepting those ‘of virtuous and vigorous stock’, rejecting some that are bitter in taste entirely while transforming others into ‘sweet

¹² Symeon the New Theologian, *Divine Eros: Hymn of St Symeon the New Theologian*, trans. and ed. Daniel K. Griggs (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2010), Hymn 25, ll.1-20, 60-61, pp.194-196.

¹³ Nikitas Stithatos, ‘On the Practice of the Virtues: One Hundred Texts’, sec. 10, Vol. IV, *The Philokalia*, p.81.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, sec. 7, Vol. IV, *The Philokalia*, p.80.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, sec. 8, Vol. IV, *The Philokalia*, pp.80-81.

nourishment for the soul.’ Through the understanding, in union with the sense of smell, we can smell the ‘spiritual unguent’ or perfume of the grace of the Holy Spirit. Finally through watchfulness or spiritual attentiveness of the heart, in union with the sense of touch, ‘we consciously perceive the Spirit, who refreshes the flame of our desire for supernal blessings and warms our spiritual powers, numbed as they have been by the frost of the passions.’¹⁶

Yet it might be thought that this sort of thinking on the spiritual senses disappears in the early modern period. I want to show that this is certainly not the case but that it is creatively rethought according to the needs of the time as we can see through two examples: (1) Seraphim of Sarov (1754 (or 1759)-1833) and (2) Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834).

(1) Seraphim of Sarov: Early Modern Hesychasm and the Spiritual Senses

First, we shall look at a more traditional mystical example which is in direct continuity with the Eastern hesychasm we have just described and in fact inspired by it. This is the celebrated Russian spiritual teacher Seraphim of Sarov (1754 (or 1759)-1833) who knew and was formed in the monastery by the body of literature from the *Philokalia* we have just surveyed above.¹⁷ Seraphim is an enormously popular figure in Eastern Christianity having a cultural significance akin to the West’s Francis of Assisi.

To gain some sense of how the traditions of the Spiritual Senses we have just surveyed were transformed by Seraphim we need to look at his *vita* or saint’s life. Seraphim was born in Kursk in central Russia in the mid-18th century. In his late teens, after a visit to a spiritual teacher at the famous Caves Monastery in Kiev, he

¹⁶ *ibid.*, sec. 10, Vol. IV, *The Philokalia*, p.81.

¹⁷ See Helen Kontzevitch, *Saint Seraphim, Wonderworker of Sarov and His Spiritual Inheritance*, trans. St Xenia Skete (Wildwood, California: Saint Xenia Skete, 2004) and Lazarus Moore, *St Seraphim of Sarov: A Spiritual Biography* (Blanco, Texas: New Sarov Press, 1994).

went to Sarov Monastery that was then situated in the midst of dense virgin forests in the central European portion of the Russian Empire. After nearly seven years of monastic training (consisting of obediences in the monastery and learning to practice the hesychastic method of prayer in conjunction with reading the literature in the *Philokalia*) he was tonsured as a monk and in the years that followed he was ordained as deacon and priest serving the monastery. During these years he is said to have had various visions of Mary accompanied by the Apostles, angels and finally of Jesus himself. During one such vision as a deacon serving in the church, he says that all of a sudden he was ‘illuminated by a ray of light, as it were from the sun’ and in the light he saw Christ in glory surrounded by angels ‘as many as a swarm of bees.’¹⁸ This light imagery, as we have seen earlier with medieval hesychastic literature, is quite common but it pervades the accounts of Seraphim’s teaching where God is often described as fire, the sun and light.¹⁹ We are likewise told that if we are to receive the eternal light of God and ‘feel’ it with our ‘hearts’ we must turn from visible and sensuous things and plunge the mind into the heart and cry out to God with the Jesus Prayer.²⁰ Furthermore, it is claimed regularly by his disciples that he was illuminated by uncreated light sometimes accompanied by the saints.²¹

After fifteen years of monastic life, Seraphim was blessed by his abbot to retreat into the solitude of the wilderness. He then spends ten years as a solitary living alone in a hut in the woods living off the land, traditionally befriending animals (this is common in hermetical literature dating back to the late antique period) and living a

¹⁸ Seraphim Chichagov, *Letopis’ Serafimo-Diveevskogo Monastyria Nizhegorodskoi gubernim Aradatovskogo uezda* [*The Chronicles of the Seraphim-Diveyev Monastery in the Ardatov region of the Nizhegorod province*] (St Petersburg: M. M. Stasiulevich, 1903) (I am citing from an unpublished translation by Anne Shukman with a foreword by Met. Kallistos Ware—used by permission), Chap. IV, p.58 [p.56].

¹⁹ *ibid.*, Chap. VI, p.105 [p.113], p.106 [p.114], p.112 [p.122], pp.115-116 [p.126].

²⁰ *ibid.*, Chap. VI, pp.115-116 [p.126].

²¹ *ibid.*, Chap. 10, pp.270ff. [pp.323ff.], Chap. XIV, p.298 [p.362] and Chap. XV, p.319 [p.389].

rigorous rule of hesychastic prayer interspersed with study of the Bible and spiritual and hagiological literature. But his quiet life was broken after a decade by two robbers who found him and beat him senseless leaving him crippled and permanently bent in body. After a return to the monastery for recovery for five months, he retreated again to the wilderness where for about 4 years with the exception of short respites he kneeled on a large stone in the woods praying for the world, which as he famously said, was ‘riven with wars’ (this period is the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars). The superior of the monastery then dies and there is an attempt to get Seraphim to be the abbot but he turns this down and instead remains another four years in the wilderness until his legs were so weakened that he had to retreat to the monastery where he remained in seclusion another five years. Finally, after over twenty years of hermetic life and strict asceticism, he, in a famous pattern in Eastern monasticism dating back to Anthony the Great in the 4th century, suddenly emerged from his retreat after a vision and begins a ministry of spiritual guidance for thousands of lay people as well as monastics who visited him for spiritual direction: ‘After a further vision of His Most Pure Mother [Mary] had appeared to Fr Seraphim in 1815, the Lord God ordered him no longer to hide his lamp under a bushel but to open the doors of his enclosed cell, and to be available and visible for everyone.’²² Important in this work was his direction of and service until his death (in his 70’s in 1833) to a community of nuns in the area, called the Diveyevo Convent.

The most famous account of Seraphim’s spiritual teaching is ‘A Conversation of St Seraphim of Sarov with Nicholas Motovilov Concerning the Aim of the Christian Life.’ We can see in this famous story, an early modern reenvisioning of the late antique and medieval literature we discussed above. In this work, Seraphim has a

²² *ibid.*, Chap. VII, p.134 [p.149].

dialogue in the middle of winter in the woods deep with snow with a disciple, Motovilov (1809-1879), a merchant and landowner who wrote the first life or *prima vita* of Seraphim. Seraphim begins the conversation by saying that God has revealed to him that Motovilov wishes to know the aim of the Christian life. He says that prayer, fasting, vigils and all other good Christian acts such as alms giving are not the aim of the Christian life but are simply a means to its main end: ‘to acquire the Holy Spirit of God.’²³ He says to Motovilov, appealing to his experience as a merchant, that Christians in acquiring the Spirit which is grace giving and eternal are like smart business people who acquire money as capital for future investment. Virtuous acts performed for the sake of Christ confer on them the grace of the Holy Spirit which enters their souls just as selling earthly goods attains capital for the businessman. The fire of the grace of the Holy Spirit which is like light ‘prepares in our soul and body a throne for the all-creative presence of God’ just as Paul says the human being becomes a ‘temple of the living God’ quoting Leviticus ‘I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people’ (2 Cor 6:16; Lev. 26:12).²⁴ This inevitably leads Motovilov to ask how and where he can see the Spirit if to acquire it is indeed the point of the Christian life and if it is like light. If good deeds in which the Spirit is active are visible then can the Spirit be seen? And more bluntly Motovilov asks: ‘How am I to know whether He is with me or not?’

Seraphim says that humans have wandered from the state of the early Christians which was a spirit filled state akin to Adam in Eden, who saw, walked and held conversation with God as one senses another man. The passages in the Bible that speak of God appearing to men and humans seeing Him need not be strange but

²³ ‘A Conversation of St Seraphim of Sarov with Nicholas Motovilov Concerning the Aim of the Christian Life’ in *The Spiritual Instructions of Saint Seraphim of Sarov*, ed. Franklin Jones (Los Angeles: The Dawn Horse Press, 1973), p.42.

²⁴ *ibid.*, pp.44-45, 46.

should be taken literally: ‘Men saw God and the grace of His Holy Spirit, not in sleep or in a dream, or in the excitement of a disordered imagination, but truly, in the light of day.’²⁵ After his resurrection, Jesus gave to his Apostles by breathing on them the Holy Spirit, who is the light which enlightens all men, which had been lost by Adam and this is available once again to all in the Church in baptism through ‘The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.’²⁶ The Apostles, Seraphim claims, ‘were consciously aware of the presence in themselves of God’s Spirit.’ Yet Motovilov is still not convinced and he asks how he can recognize the ‘true manifestation’ of the Spirit.²⁷ Here Seraphim then takes Motovilov firmly by the shoulders he too can see and experience the divine Spirit as he, Seraphim, sees him all the time: ‘We are both together, son, in the Spirit of God! Why lookest thou on me?’ Upon being touched by Seraphim, Motovilov claims he immediately saw Seraphim and then himself shining with uncreated divine light:

‘I cannot look, father, because lightning flashes from your eyes. Your face is brighter than the sun and my eyes ache in pain!’ Father Seraphim said: ‘Fear not, my son; you too have become as bright as I. You too are now in the fullness of God’s Spirit; otherwise you would not be able to look on me as I am.’ [...] I looked in his face and there came over me an even greater reverential awe. Imagine in the centre of the sun, in the dazzling brilliance of his midday rays, the face of a man who talks with you. You see the movement of his lips and the changing expression of his eyes, you hear his voice, you feel someone grasp your shoulders; yet you do not see the hands, you do not even see yourself or his figure, but only a blinding light spreading across several yards around and throwing a sparkling radiance across the snow blanket on the glade and into the snowflakes which besprinkled the great elder and me.²⁸

Seraphim tells Motovilov that he had been praying ‘mentally’ to God that Motovilov might see ‘clearly with bodily eyes’ the descent of the Spirit upon them, the light of the glory of God.²⁹ Motovilov then claims that though they are sitting in the snowy woods in the middle of winter that he feels a warmth akin to a bath-house

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.47.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.48 (quoting Baptism rite).

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.51.

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp.51-53.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.52.

when water is poured over hot stones and steam rises off them in a cloud. He also smells an unearthly fragrance much sweeter than that he smelt as a child with his mother in the 'best fashion-shops in Kazan.' He is told that not only is he seeing and feeling the Holy Spirit but he is smelling the 'fragrance of God's Holy Spirit.'³⁰ Seraphim concludes by saying that the Kingdom of God is within them as the Spirit dwells within them: 'The grace of the Holy Spirit shines forth and warms us, and, overflowing with many and varied odors into the air around us, regales our senses with heavenly delight, as it fills our hearts with joy inexpressible.'³¹

We thus see in the literature on Seraphim an early modern recasting of the Spiritual Senses tradition. What distinguishes it from the earlier literature is that it now is dramatized in the life of a particular cult of the saint and it is articulated using the imagery of early capitalism.

(2) S. T. Coleridge and the Romantic Reenvisioning of the Spiritual Senses

I will now turn from the Christian East to the West with an example of how the Spiritual Senses tradition was not only rethought in a monastic context in the early modern period but also Romanticism rethought the Spiritual Senses tradition in its pursuit of a special poetic organ that raised the artist to the level of a spiritual seer or prophet. The artist in Romanticism becomes a sort of substitute for the holy man or saint having special unique powers. These powers are now seen not as just a result of the Spirit or grace but primarily through the creative organ of the Imagination or 'vision.' The Imagination becomes identified with the Divine Spirit which is reimagined as a Universal reality that goes beyond the particularity of Christian dogma and seizes the gifted artist whatever his religious and cultural background might be.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.55.

³¹ *ibid.*, p.56.

Here we shall look at the work of the great English Romantic poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834). Coleridge is perhaps best known today for his poetry, especially the long poems, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) and *Christabel* (1816) and the visionary fragment, 'Kubla Khan' (1816). He published *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) with his friend the even more famous English poet, William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and the beginning of English Romanticism is usually dated from its first edition. Yet Coleridge was a polymath and besides his classic work of English literary criticism, *Biographia Literaria* (1817), he wrote countless volumes of philosophy and theology drawing on German Idealism (especially Kant, Jacobi and Schelling) but also the Church Fathers and Anglican Divines whose writings he quotes at length. Thus much of the literature on the Spiritual Senses that Seraphim encountered in the monastery, Coleridge encounters within the academic study and the university.

Coleridge said of his own thought that if he had a 'system' it was 'the only attempt that I know ever made to reduce all knowledge into harmony.'³² He then asserts, revealingly, that his system opposes no other system but manifests the truth in each one, and how what was true in each system 'in each of them became error, *because it was only half the truth*':

I have endeavoured to unite the insulated fragments of truth and frame a perfect mirror. I show to each system that I fully understand and rightfully appreciate what that system means; but then I lift up that system to a higher point of view, from which I enable it to see its former position where it was indeed, but under another light and with different relations; so that the fragment of truth is not only acknowledged, but explained. So the old astronomers discovered and maintained much that was true, but because they were placed on false ground, and looked from the wrong point of view, they never did—they never could—discover *the* truth—that is the whole truth. As soon as they left the earth—their false centre—and took their stand in the Sun—

³² S. T. Coleridge, *Table Talk Recorded by Henry Nelson Coleridge (and John Taylor Coleridge)* [TT], 2 Volumes, Volume 1, ed. Carl Woodring, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. 14, Gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn, Bollingen Series LXXV (London/Princeton: Routledge/Princeton UP, 1990), 14: I, (11 September, 1831), p.248.

immediately they saw the whole system in the true light—and their former station remaining—but remaining a part of the prospect.³³

This passage is helpful in emphasizing two fundamental aspects of Coleridge's work. First, he sees his work, like Kant whom he may be echoing here,³⁴ as part of a new Copernican revolution which views the world of objects through the structures of consciousness and not vice versa. However, even more importantly, Coleridge applies this Kantian intuition to the divine supersensible objects of Reason, which are quite distinct from those of the fleshy Understanding.³⁵ Coleridge argues throughout his work that by faithfully pondering the structure of consciousness—insofar as 'Reason, Faith must be a Light, a form of Knowing, a Beholding of Truth'--one is vivified, and this life can be traced to one's Reason or indwelling Logos which is 'co-eternal and one with the Holy Will', and this life is the light of men (John 1:4).³⁶ He then makes a further connection between reason and the 'philosophic imagination' which in one mode he identifies with the 'inner sense' that can perceive suprasensible objects.

Second, the passage above tells us that Coleridge's system is, and this is its great strength, by its very nature, eclectic and synthetic. It takes fragments of truth, from often opposed systems, and, by re-contextualizing them, viewing them from the new true ground of consciousness, it attempts to forge a new higher unity which explains or acknowledges their difference without negating their particularity. However, Coleridge's system's greatest strength is also its greatest weakness insofar as in drawing on so many diverse sources, from Jeremy Taylor to Schelling, its drive

³³ *ibid.* pp.248-249.

³⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [=Pure Reason], trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: MacMillan, 1953), Bxv.

³⁵ Coleridge, S. T. "Essay on Faith." (1820), *Shorter Works and Fragments* [=SW & F], 2 Volumes, Volume 1, eds. H. J. Jackson and J. R. de J. Jackson, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. 11, Gen. Ed. Kathleen Coburn, Bollingen Series LXXV (London/Princeton: Routledge/Princeton UP, 1995), I: II, p.839 [pp.833-844].

³⁶ *ibid.*, 844.

for unity is lost in the expression of the particularity of each of its different fragments of truth. Put more simply, Coleridge's larger point is often lost in his explanation of his many much smaller ones. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that Coleridge's thought changed so radically from his time at Jesus College, Cambridge (1791-1794) where he first thought of becoming a Unitarian minister³⁷ to his later assertion of the centrality of the Trinity in Christian thought.³⁸

Understanding, for Coleridge, like Kant before him, is a generalizing power of particular impressions or sensations (in Coleridge's language, 'notices' and in Kant's language, 'appearances') received from Sensibility and Imagination under a concept or, in Coleridge's language, a 'name.'³⁹ Understanding, Coleridge writes, 'is truly and accurately defined in the words of Leighton and Kant, a Faculty judging according to Sense.'⁴⁰ Thus Understanding is discursive, always refers to some ultimate authority (sc. Reason) and is the Faculty of Reflection.⁴¹

It is with his articulation of Reason that Coleridge departs from Kant with the ideational elevation of the distinction between Reason and Understanding or re-examination, so typical of his system, of an idea from the true stand of truth where consciousness becomes aware of its ground in the Logos. First, like Kant, he distinguishes between pure/speculative or '*scientia* Reason' and '*practica* Reason.'⁴²

³⁷ *Biographia Literaria* [=BL], eds. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. 7, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983), I, pp.114-115, 136-137.

³⁸ *Aids to Reflection in the Formation of a Manly Character on the Several Grounds of Prudence, Morality, and Religion: Illustrated by Selected Passages from our Elder Divines, especially from Archbishop Leighton* [=AR], ed. John Beer, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. 9 (London/Princeton: Routledge/Princeton UP, 1993), Sp Aph B II, comm., pp.184-188 and see Coleridge, 'The Trinity' (1833-1834), *SW & F* 11: II, pp.1510-1512; Mary Anne Perkins traces the change to February 1805, after reading "Horsley's Letters in Rep. to Dr. P.," when he suddenly realized the "awful truth [...] No Christ, No God!" (*The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London, 1957) ii, §2448 as cited in Mary Anne Perkins, *Coleridge's Philosophy: The Logos as Unifying Principle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p.16; cf. Coleridge, *AR*. Sp Aph B II, comm., p.184).

³⁹ *AR*. Sp Aph B VIIIb, comm., p.232.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, Sp Aph B VIIIb, comm., p.232.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, Sp Aph B VIIIb, comm., p.223.

⁴² *ibid.*, Sp Aph B IX, comm., p.249.

Sciential Reason, and here he follows Kant, is the ‘*Light within me*’,⁴³ that is, the faculty by which one unifies the manifold of concepts, which order the appearances of Sensibility and Imagination, in order to conclude various ‘universal and necessary truths from particular and contingent appearances.’⁴⁴ Kant argued that the ideas of Reason were merely regulative logical postulates not constitutive of experience. In other words, God could not be experienced so it was irrational to speculate theologically in regard to his existence other than as a postulate of Reason in its practical employment. Coleridge begs to differ and it is out of this disagreement with Kant about the constitutive character of Reason’s Ideas that his most creative and most obscure (!) religious thinking is born. It is here precisely that he creatively rethinks the Spiritual Senses tradition in a Romantic mode with the artist as the new holy man or visionary.

Practical Reason, for Coleridge, becomes the ‘faculty’—although much more than merely a part of the ‘intellectual equipment’ of man--by which one perceives the apparently unperceivable. Ideas, then, under practical Reason are not only regulative but *constitutive* as well.⁴⁵ To be constitutive an idea of practical Reason no longer merely converts particular ideas to ultimate ends of the free will⁴⁶ but becomes the source and means by which one experiences the insensible but wholly rational life of God as Word. Reason is fixed, it appeals only to itself as the ground and substance of the truth and is pre-eminently ‘contemplation.’⁴⁷ By ‘contemplation’ Coleridge means

⁴³ *ibid.*, Sp Aph, prelim., p.142.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, Sp Aph B IX, comm., p.249.

⁴⁵ As early as 1816, Coleridge questions the distinction: “Whether ideas are regulative only, according to Aristotle and Kant; or likewise CONSTITUTIVE, and one with the power and life of nature, according to Plato, and Plotinus [...] is the highest *problem* of Philosophy, and not part of its nomenclature” (*The Statesman’s Manual: or, The Bible, the Best Guide to Political Skill and Foresight. A Lay-Sermon Addressed to the Higher Classes of Society. Lay Sermons [=SM]*. Ed. R. J. White. The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Vol. 6 (London/Princeton: Routledge/Princeton UP, 1972), Appen. E, p.114.

⁴⁶ *AR Sp Aph B IX, comm.*, p.249 and see Appendix D, p.469.

⁴⁷ *ibid.* Sp Aph B VIIIb, comm., p.223.

that Reason is an intellectual power which intuits what is inconceivable by Understanding as it is non-sensible and cannot thereby be rendered expressible except by paradox (e.g. “Before Abraham *was*, I *am*” (John 8:58)), for the function of the Understanding is to conceive or render the sensible expressible.⁴⁸ Understanding is the carnal mind of Paul (Rom. 8:7) in contradistinction to the spiritual mind (Rom. 8:6).⁴⁹ Reason, as spiritual mind, is consequently ‘*Intuition* or *immediate* beholding’ of truths not only mathematical but ‘Objects supersensuous or spiritual.’⁵⁰ It is, then, much closer to Sense (as in the Spiritual Senses) than to Understanding insofar as it is ‘a direct Aspect of the Truth, an inward beholding, having a similar relation to the Intelligible or Spiritual, as SENSE has to the Material or Phenomenal.’⁵¹ Therefore, Reason is *Nous* as the Source of Ideas and Absolute Truth in logic and reality.⁵² In short, it is Mind/Logos or finite rational spirit bearing infinite Spirit: ‘Reason is then the *Spirit* of the regenerated man, whereby the Person is capable of a quickening inter-communion with the Divine Spirit.’⁵³ If Reason is the bearer of the divine Spirit then what of Faith? In an early important essay on Faith, he identifies the rational intuition of the divine by practical Reason with Faith: ‘Reason, Faith must be a Light, a form of Knowing, a Beholding of Truth.’⁵⁴ By pondering the inner Logos, made known in Jesus Christ,⁵⁵ one is given life which is ‘co-eternal and one with the Holy Will’ of the Trinity.⁵⁶ Faith in God, for Coleridge, is an immediate supersensible perception of God that is God’s own perception of Himself and thus runs into the danger of pantheism by collapsing the Creator into the created:

⁴⁸ *ibid.* Sp Aph B VIIIb, comm., p.233.

⁴⁹ *ibid.* Sp Aph B Xa, intro., p.259; cf. “Essay on Faith.” *SW & F*, II: II, pp.841, 844.

⁵⁰ *AR* Sp Aph B VIIIb, comm., p.234.

⁵¹ *ibid.* Sp Aph B VIIIb, comm., pp.223-224 and see Sp Aph B, Aph. II, comm., note 23, p.166.

⁵² *ibid.* Sp Aph B Xa, intro., p.259.

⁵³ *ibid.* Sp Aph B VIIIb, comm., p.216. Also see Sp Aph B I., comm., pp.157-158 and XX, note. 340.

⁵⁴ ‘Essay on Faith’, *SW & F*, II: II, p.844.

⁵⁵ *AR*, Sp Aph B XVIII, [a brief citation then Coleridge’s own words], pp.310-312.

⁵⁶ ‘Essay on Faith’, *SW & F* II: II, p.844.

With *what* mind wouldst thou come before God, if not with the Mind of Him, in whom *alone* God loveth the world? [...] Oh! take counsel of thy Reason! It will show thee how impossible it is, that even a World should merit the love of Eternal Wisdom and all-sufficing Beatitude, otherwise than as it is contained in that all-perfect Idea, in which the Supreme Spirit contemplateth itself and the plenitude of its infinity—the only-begotten before all Ages! the beloved Son, in whom the Father is well pleased.⁵⁷

Coleridge's scheme, using Kant's thought as well as the Spiritual Senses tradition as a springboard for an artistic and universalist mysticism, was immensely fruitful, if not intellectually cohesive and original because it produced his vision of the Imagination, which fuelled both his literary criticism and his poetry. Thus we shall briefly show how Coleridge's thinking on Faith, Reason and the Spiritual Senses was efficacious in his imaginative life. Famously, in his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge presents a fragment of a total theory of the Imagination.⁵⁸ He distinguishes three 'faculties' that are relevant to the Imagination: primary and secondary imagination which he marks off from Fancy, which merely reproduces by memory the definition of things.⁵⁹ First there is the primary Imagination which is the universal human agent of perception and which is a repetition in finitude of God's infinitely creative I AM. This form of Imagination uses images to crystallize the world around us in imitation of the creativity of the Divine Mind.⁶⁰ The primary Imagination is not unlike the Kantian synthesis of reproduction in imagination where apprehended representations, often in the form of images, are ordered in a sequence in the memory.⁶¹ If we were to map this on to our earlier discussion we could say that Coleridge is here speaking of the intellectual ordering of the data received from the five senses of the body which are framed to take in objects that correspond to them in the world.

⁵⁷ *AR*, Sp Aph B XVIII [a brief citation then Coleridge's own words], p.312.

⁵⁸ *BL* I, 13, pp.304-305.

⁵⁹ *BL* I, 13, p.305.

⁶⁰ See Paul S. Fiddes *Freedom and Limit: A Dialogue between Literature and Christian Doctrine* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer UP, 1999), p.28.

⁶¹ Kant, *Pure Reason*, A120-124, pp.143-146 and B181, p.183.

Second, Coleridge speaks of the secondary Imagination that echoes the primary Imagination but exceeds it insofar as its creativity does not merely crystallize images of creation but ‘dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate [...] it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead.’⁶² The secondary Imagination resembles here the Kantian description of Imagination employed by reflective judgement in an aesthetic function. This is a productive cognitive faculty, free from the law of association and any definite concept but having its own purpose and law,⁶³ which creates another nature which steps beyond nature (i.e. the representation of the aesthetic idea) out of the material lent to it by nature.⁶⁴ Secondary Imagination is both a ‘magnifying power’ in that the poet, artist, saint and theologian can see more deeply into the heart of reality (‘His gifted ken can see/ Phantoms of sublimity’)⁶⁵ as well as a reconfiguring power (‘My shaping spirit of Imagination’)⁶⁶ in that through the manipulation of symbols a new world is created in which the isolated fragments of truth are lifted up into a higher synthesis without in any way negating their particularity. Thus Imagination is a faculty that both unifies and particularizes in the

⁶² Coleridge, *BL*, I, 13, p.304.

⁶³ Kant uses oxymorons to bring across this idea: “free lawfulness” or “purposiveness without an end” (*Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 5:241, p.125).

⁶⁴ *ibid.* 5:314-315, pp.192-193, 5:240-242, pp.124-125 and 5:343-344, p.219; Kant describes it in a famous paragraph: ‘One can call such representations of the imagination ideas: on the one hand because they at least strive toward something lying beyond the bounds of experience, and thus seek to approximate a presentation of concepts of reason (of intellectual ideas), which gives them the appearance of an objective reality; on the other hand, and indeed principally, because no concept can be fully adequate to them, as inner intuitions. The poet ventures to make sensible rational ideas of invisible beings, the kingdom of the blessed, the kingdom of hell, eternity, creation, etc., as well as to make that of which there are examples in experience, e.g., death, envy, and all sorts of vices, as well as love, fame, etc., sensible beyond the limits of experience, with a completeness that goes beyond anything of which there is an example in nature, by means of an imagination that emulates the precedent of reason in attaining to a maximum; and it is really the art of poetry in which the faculty of aesthetic ideas can reveal itself in its full measure. This faculty, however, considered by itself alone, is really only a talent (of the imagination)’ (*ibid.* 5:314, pp.192-193).

⁶⁵ Coleridge, ‘Apologia Pro Vita Sua’ ll. 7-8, *Coleridge: Poetical Works [=PW]*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (Oxford/NY: OUP, 1988), p.345.

⁶⁶ ‘Dejection: An Ode’, VI. l. 86, *PW*, p.366.

process of creating a new world. Coleridge seems to identify secondary imagination with the ‘philosophical imagination’⁶⁷ or ‘Imagination in its largest definition’ which he takes to be ‘the Inner Sense’,⁶⁸ that is, the power of ‘self-intuition’ which allows one to understand the symbol opening one up to a spiritual world beyond the outer senses. Here he speculates about the Spiritual Senses saying that

all the organs of sense are framed for a corresponding world of sense; and we have it. All the organs of spirit are framed for a corresponding world of spirit; tho’ the latter organs are not developed in all alike.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Coleridge, *BL*, 12, p.241.

⁶⁸ ‘The Limitations of a Philosophy of the Understanding [c.1821]’, *SW & F*, 11: II, pp.902-905 at 903.

⁶⁹ Coleridge, *BL*, 12, p.242 and compare: ‘He [great Uncle] treated the subject of ghosts and dreams at great length, and said there was a difference in the credibility to be attached to them. Dreams had nothing in them which was absurd and nonsensical, and though most of the coincidences may be readily explained by the diseased system of the dreamer and the great and surprising power of association, yet it was impossible to say whether or not an inner sense did not exist in the mind, which was but seldom developed, and which might have power of pre-sentiment. All the external senses have their correspondents in the mind; the eye can foresee before an object is distinctly apprehended, why should not a corresponding power of the soul? The power of prophecy might have been merely a spiritual excitation of this dormant quality; hence the seers often required music &c. Every thing in nature had a tendency to move in cycles, and it would be a miracle if out of such myriads of cycles moving concurrently, some coincidences did not take place. No doubt many such happen in the day time, but then our senses drive out the remembrance of them, and render the impression hardly felt; but when we sleep the mind acts without interruption. Terror produces them and the imagination; which creates such a picture out of a small particle. In St Paul “speaking with tongues” means the speaking with the tongue without consciousness. 1. Cor.’ (Coleridge, *TT*, Vol. 1: 1 May 1823. pp.52-54), ‘And let not these distinctions be charged on the writer, as obscurity and needless subtlety; for it is in the nature of all disquisitions on matters of taste, that the reasoned must appeal for his very premises to facts of feeling and of inner sense, which all men do not possess, and which many, who do possess and even act upon them, yet have never reflectively adverted to, have never made them objects of a full and distinct consciousness’ (‘The Principles of Genial Criticism [1814]’, *SW & F*, 11: I, pp.350-386 at 362-363) and ‘The inference is evident, though Plato commonly leaves it to his reader’s own reflexion: namely, either that all reasoning is a mere illusion, and that the simplest noticing and recording of phaenomena, with the art of arranging the same for the purpose of more easy recollection, constitutes the whole of human knowledge and the sole legitimate object of the human intellect, or [that] there must exist a class of truths to which the measures of time and space and the forms of quantity, quality, and contingent relation are not applicable. And that hence the contradictions beforementioned were the natural and necessary result of the misapplication of an organ to an object, as if a man were to substitute a microscope for an ear-trumpet, or argue on the laws of colours from facts obtained by the exercise of the touch. But even this is palliative, and <an> inadequate expression of the absurdity. For the different senses, though different in specie, are not wholly heterogeneous: there are not only analogies between them, but what Lord Bacon calls common vestiges; their ultimate ~~impressions~~ ~~converge~~ effects converge. But not so with spiritual objects, it being understood that by the term “spirit” in this instance I mean no more than the expression of that which cannot be brought under the measures of Time and Space, ~~Not~~ by any supposed immeasurable magnitude or innumerable series of successions, but as being wholly alien from the form of the sense, as space, for instance, in opposition to an inch or a mile, or as drops in the ocean. In fact the least reflecting minds, if only they have not been hardened by predetermined adherence to a system, find no difficulty in admitting this heterogeneity in the relations of space, and feel the full absurdity of applying them to their own moral being. There are few indeed who would require any argument for laughing at the question [of] how many grains the conceptions and images contained in the mind of Shakespeare ~~were heavier~~ weighed, compare with the sum total of the same in the mind of a ~~stock-jobber~~ country gentleman; or whether a ~~man~~ Anthony’s love of Cleopatra was north west or south east of his respect for Octavia’ (*Opus*

Coleridge repeatedly argues throughout his writings that one can sense the spiritual world including the divine through the Mind/Reason and Imagination is but one more part of this power: ‘The pith of my system is to make the Senses out of the Mind—not the Mind from the Senses, as Locke etc.’⁷⁰ Reason gives one access to ‘Truths above Sense’ which have their ‘evidence in themselves’⁷¹ and in this way it is the very same Spirit Seraphim of Sarov spoke of giving one access to God’s grace: ‘Reason is then the *Spirit* of the regenerated man, whereby the Person is capable of a quickening inter-communion with the Divine Spirit.’⁷² The artist or visionary for Coleridge has become the new saint or mystic perceiving the unperceivable.

Both forms of Imagination can be seen at work throughout Coleridge’s famous poem ‘Kubla Khan’ but specific examples will bring across the ideas more clearly. On the one hand, the primary Imagination, can be seen above all in the opening of the poem, which recreates in a poetic context the germ of description found in the prose of ‘Purchas’s Pilgrimage’, with its lush rush of images whereby the palace and garden is recreated as a whole by the ‘sinuous rills’ of the lines of verse.⁷³ On the other hand, the secondary imagination can be seen in the final lines of the poem where the poet, inspired by the vision in his poem of the maid, asserts his poem as Kubla’s paradise (i.e. the pleasure-dome, caves etc.) created in both the imagination of the reader by the dulcimer like verses of the poem and in each of the actual words describing the spiritual paradise which comprise the poem as paradise: ‘Could I revive within me/
Her symphony and song,/ To such a deep delight ‘twould win me,/ That with music

Maximum, ed. Thomas McFarland assisted by Nicholas Halmi. The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Vol. 15 (London/Princeton: Routledge/Princeton UP, 2002), Fragment 2, pp.185-186).

⁷⁰ *TT*, 28 July 1832 p.312.

⁷¹ *AR Sp Aph B VIIIb*, comm., p.216

⁷² *AR Sp Aph B VIIIb*, comm., p.217.

⁷³ ‘Kubla Khan: Or, A Vision in a Dream. A Fragment’, Intro. ll. 12-13 and poem l. 8, *PW* p.297 [pp.295-298].

loud and long,/ I would build that dome in air,/ That sunny dome! those caves of ice!/
And all who heard should see them there.⁷⁴ The secondary Imagination is endlessly creative both in terms of its capacity to sense a spiritual world but then to recreate that world sensibly in the poem itself. Its creation never ends and the poet, as a maker, a visionary and new saint never ceases forming some new, rich and strange world in his verse.

Whereas Fancy is like a mirror held up to nature, Imagination is like a lamp producing light.⁷⁵ In Imagination, the Understanding, as a generalizing faculty which nevertheless does not negate multiplicity, is perfected and becomes Reason or a form of intuition, Spiritual Senses, a ‘living power’, which sees through the intuition of ideas, God in itself and God in the world.⁷⁶ Such intuition is a harmonization or shaping of reality where clarity of spiritual vision is united with depth and the fullness of each thing given in Sensibility is united with the comprehensiveness of the Understanding.⁷⁷ Coleridge, as a new poetic holy man, writes of the Divine speaking in the human soul⁷⁸ (“strong music in the soul [...] This beautiful and beauty-making power”)⁷⁹ but this would seem to be at the cost of man’s mind merging with the Mind of God when the “mist” or illusion of difference of man from God “defecates to a pure transparency” and “There Reason is, and then begins her reign!”⁸⁰ Indeed, in another poem on the Delphic adage, ‘Know Thyself!’, he concludes by collapsing

⁷⁴ *ibid.* poem ll. 42-48. *PW*, p.298

⁷⁵ Fiddes, *Freedom and Limit*, p.28.

⁷⁶ Coleridge, *SM*, Appen. C, p.69

⁷⁷ “The completing power which unites clearness with depth, the plenitude of the sense with the comprehensibility of the understanding, is the imagination, impregnated with which the understanding itself becomes intuitive, and a living power” (*ibid.*, p.69).

⁷⁸ “so shalt thou see and hear/ The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible/ Of that eternal language, which thy God/ Utters, who from eternity doth teach/ Himself in all, and all things in himself./ Great universal Teacher! he shall mould/ Thy Spirit, and by giving make it ask” (Coleridge. “Frost at Midnight.” ll. 58-64. *PW* 242 [240-242]).

⁷⁹ Coleridge. “Dejection: An Ode.” V. ll. 60, 63 *PW* 365.

⁸⁰ Coleridge. “Reason.” ll. 1-4. *PW* 487.

self-knowledge into God-knowledge: “Ignore thyself, and strive to know thy God!”⁸¹
 Freedom in such a process of poetic possession is the seizure of man by God in the immediate intellectual/imaginative vision of ultimate reality—viz. God. In Coleridge’s imaginative vision, God views Himself in man’s vision of God. God’s revelation and self-consciousness are one and the same:

To the Will Absolute, the One, the Good!
 The I AM, the Word, the Life, the Living God!
 Such symphony requires best instrument.
 Seize, then, my soul! from Freedom’s trophied dome
 The Harp which hangeth high between the Shields
 Of Brutus and Leonidas! With that
 Strong music, that solliciting spell, force back
 Man’s free and stirring spirit that lies entranced.
 For what is Freedom, but the unfettered use
 Of all the powers which God for use had given?
 But chiefly this, him First, him Last to view
 Through meaner powers and secondary things
 Effulgent, as through clouds that veil his blaze.
 For all that meets the bodily sense I deem
 Symbolical, one mighty alphabet
 For infant minds; and we in this low world
 Placed with our backs to bright Reality,
 That we may learn with young unwounded ken
 The substance from its shadow. Infinite Love,
 Whose latence is the plenitude of All,
 Thou with retracted beams, and self-eclipse
 Veiling, revealest thine eternal Sun.⁸²

This is a bold transformation, on Coleridge’s part, of the Spiritual Senses tradition as well as Kantian ethical practical Reason and Imagination employed aesthetically into a fundamental intuition of ideas as truly constitutive of reality, for he unites at once religious and artistic intuition (‘It is wonderful, how closely Reason and Imagination are connected, and Religion the union of the two’)⁸³ in a totalising vision of reality where God speaks directly to the soul of Himself.

⁸¹ Coleridge. “Self-Knowledge.” I. 10. *PW* 487.

⁸² Coleridge. “The Destiny of Nations.” II. 5-26. *PW* 131-132 [131-148].

⁸³ *The Friend*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke, 2 Volumes, Volume 1, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. 4 (London/Princeton: Routledge/Princeton UP, 1969), II, p.203n.

Conclusion: Coleridge and Seraphim of Sarov: Continuity and Transformation of a Tradition and Possible Asian Analogues

In the early modern West, increasing rationalism and the dominance over nature through technology drove thinkers and artists to seek for a spiritual organ that transcended creation and exalted certain heroic imaginative individuals above the crowd. Coleridge reenvisioned the Spiritual Senses tradition in light of the Romantic need for a unique individual—the artist as the new holy man or saint—who was called to commune with the invisible powers, God and the imagination being ultimately akin if not one reality. Such prophets could call a world that had lost its power through its getting and spending back to nature and the power and spirit of the imagination as a finite image of the infinite Spirit. In the Christian East, the spiritual senses maintained their traditional place in the practices of prayer and contemplation of the spiritual life, but the monks that exemplify them came to have a role in modern society of calling back those lost in the confusion of modern life to a more meditative path using the emerging language of capitalism.

We do not have the space to pursue this matter here, but the Spiritual Senses tradition of Christian East and West may have possible analogues in Chinese and other Asian cultures. Thus, in the Northern line of Ch’an Buddhism (in Japan: Zen) in texts from the late 8th and early 9th centuries there is a distinction made between ‘pure mind’ (*ching-hsin*) and the ‘defiled mind’ (*jan-hsin*).⁸⁴ The defiled or false mind is ruled by the ‘six thieves’ of the sense organs or six consciousnesses which arouse ‘three poisons’ (anger (*dosa*), craving (*raaga*) and confusion (*moha*)) that lead to evil karma within the myriad realms of being. This leads away from seeing Suchness or

⁸⁴ See Robert B. Zeuchner, ‘The Understanding of Mind in the Northern Line of Ch’an’, *Philosophy East and West*, 28.1 (Jan. 1978), pp.69-79.

the Absolute and thereby to an Awakening to reality. To awake one must either discard the three poisons and the six thieves of thieves turning the true mind or, as some writers claim, one must control the senses thereby 'purifying' them. Here we overcome all dualism between minds (false/defined and pure/true) and reach a non-thinking state of awareness free from forms with cleansed senses serving one's 'original pure mind.' One then 'sees' things as they truly are ('Suchness'), being freed from suffering and concepts which distort objects and this is the Ch'an Buddhist path of wisdom and spiritual freedom just as we saw that within Christianity (differently interpreted) a vision of 'God' or 'reality' came through the Spiritual Senses. Yet much more research needs to be done to unpack such suggestive ancient analogues to the Spiritual Senses tradition in Christianity in East and West before we can turn to see if there are Asian religious early modern analogues.

Returning to our two authors. Coleridge could be said to be a sort of spiritual father for his age paralleling Seraphim of Sarov but one in a new modern Romantic mode. But perhaps Seraphim is simply a version of Coleridge, a artistic adept of the Spirit dispensing wisdom to all those who turn to him whose imagination, his keen spiritual senses, gave him access to not only his own soul but the Holy Spirit itself. Let the reader interpret them for himself and come to their own historical conclusions on the continuous transformation of an intellectual tradition.