

OUR SPIRITUAL SENSES

For Those of Us Who Weren't There

by

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Aurora, Colorado

2010

*The best and most beautiful things in the world
cannot be seen, or even touched,
they must be felt with the heart.*

Helen Keller

Painting on the cover by
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1602-1603)



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PREFACE

Thomas had difficulty believing without the sense of sight and touch. Since he had not been with the others, he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” One week later, Thomas was given the opportunity he desired. Jesus came and stood among the disciples, and looking directly at Thomas, said, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”¹ With the help of the physical senses of sight and touch, Thomas believed.

Do we have to depend on our physical senses to believe, or are there some spiritual senses that enable us to believe without actually seeing and touching the risen Christ? Paul Brand tells a story of man he names José, who seems to believe, even though most of his physical senses have been lost. Below is José’s story:

José’s body had suffered much damage from leprosy by the time he came from Puerto Rico to Carville for treatment. His insensitivity to touch was so great that, when blindfolded, he could not even detect whether someone had entered the room and held his hand. Touch cells and pain cells had fallen silent. As a result, scars and ulcers covered his hands, face, and feet, bearing mute witness to the unintentional abuse his body had endured without any sensation of pain. Mere stubs on his hands marked where fingers used to be.

Because pain cells in his eyes no longer alerted him when to blink, gradually José’s eyes dried out. That condition, aggravated by severe cataracts and glau-

¹ John 20:25-29 (NRSV).

coma, soon made him blind. My wife Margaret (who is an eye surgeon) told him surgery might correct the cataract problem and restore some vision, but she could not operate until inflammation of the iris went away. A terrible misfortune cut off José's last link with the outside world. In a desperate attempt to arrest the sulfone-resistant leprosy, doctors tried treating him with a new drug, and José had a rare allergic reaction. He lost his hearing.

Thus, at the age of forty-five José lost all contact with the world. He could not see nor hear if a person spoke. Unlike Helen Keller, he could not even use tactile sign language—the leprosy had dulled his sense of touch. Even his sense of smell had disappeared as the leprosy had invaded the lining of his nose. All his inlets from the world, except taste, had been blocked off. Weeks passed and we watched the effect on José as his mind began to accept the reality that it had lost all meaningful contact with a world of flowers and rivers and islands and people.

José's body responded with a pathetic reflection of what was happening inside: his limbs pulled inward toward his trunk, and he began curling into a fetal position on the bed. He would wake up from sleep and forget where he was. He did not know whether it was day or night, and when he spoke, he did not know if anyone heard or answered. Sometimes he would speak anyway, bellowing because he could not hear the volume, pouring out the inexpressible loneliness of a mind condemned to solitary confinement.

In such a world, thoughts go in circles and spirals, stirring up fears and suspicions. Is not madness the loss of perception of the real world? José's body coiled tighter and tighter on the bed. He was preparing for death in the same posture as his birth. Those of us on the staff would pass his room, pause for a moment at the door,

shake our heads, and continue walking. What could we do?

Margaret faithfully visited José. Unable to bear watching this otherwise healthy man self-destruct, she felt she must attempt some kind of radical treatment to restore at least part of his sight. She waited impatiently for the infection in his eye to improve enough to schedule surgery. Trying to follow government rules, Margaret faced a nearly insurmountable problem. Naturally, she must obtain “informed consent” forms for the surgery. But who would sign for José? No one could penetrate through his isolation even to ask him for permission to help. After painstaking research, the hospital staff finally located a sister in Puerto Rico, and the police department there visited her with a surgery release form. The illiterate sister marked an X on a paper, and surgery was scheduled at last, with faint hopes for success.

José, of course, did not comprehend what was happening as he was moved to a stretcher and wheeled to the operating room. He lay passive throughout the eye surgery. After a two-hour procedure, he was bandaged and sent back to his room to wait.

Margaret removed the bandages a few days later, an experience she will never forget. Although José had sensed some gross movement, and had probably reasoned someone was trying to help him, nothing had prepared him for what actually did happen. He got use of one eye back and could see again. As his eye struggled against the bright light and slowly focused on the medical people gathered around the bed, the face that had not smiled in months cracked into a huge, toothless grin. Contact had been restored.

... José made it known to us that he wanted his wheelchair parked at the door to his room all day long. He would sit there quietly, every few seconds glancing up

and down the long corridors of the leprosarium. When he saw another person coming, his face would break into that irrepressible smile.

Today, José has contact with the world. He insists on coming to our small church every Sunday, even though he can hear nothing of the service. With stubby fingers, he can barely grasp the control knob of his electric wheelchair, and his narrow tunnel vision causes him to bump into objects up and down the long corridors. But still he comes, regardless of the weather outside. Other attenders have learned to greet him by stooping down, putting their faces directly in front of his, and waving. José's wonderful smile invariably breaks out, and sometimes his bellowing laugh. Although he cannot see well, and cannot hear or feel at all, somehow he can sense the fellowship of that church. It is enough for him.²

The story of José teaches us that we need contact with one another to be human, but we also need contact with God to be *fully* human. While our physical senses are important, our spiritual senses are of the *utmost* importance. Without exercising them we are out of contact with God, and when we are out of contact with God, we will inevitably fall out of contact with one another. At one point José lost all of his physical senses but taste. I cannot imagine anything worse; and yet, the Psalmist uses this very word to describe the joy of experiencing God. "O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him."³ And again, he cries, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey in my mouth."⁴

² Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *In His Image* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), pp. 161-163.

³ Psalm 34:8 (NRSV).

⁴ Psalm 119:103 (NRSV).

As the sense of sight was restored to José, we need the restoration of our spiritual senses so that we cannot only taste the goodness of God, but so that we can also experience his very presence in our lives. With that presence will also come the guidance we need to become fully human, made in the divine image.

INTRODUCTION

Inlets of Spiritual Knowledge

Our spiritual senses have fascinated me for years, ever since I gave my mind, heart, and life to Christ shortly after midnight on September 1, 1958. What was most vivid to me that night was the appearance of the moon and the stars. They looked different. Before that eventful night, I saw the moon and the stars only with my physical sight; but after that night I saw them with my spiritual sight. My spiritual senses kicked in, and I began to soak up spiritual things like a dry sponge.

Over the years I have seen the two words “spiritual senses” used by a number of authors, but rarely have I seen a satisfactory definition. This is not a criticism, for I recognize how difficult it is to explain our spiritual senses to someone who is using them, much less to someone who is unaware of their very existence. What I intend to do here is define them, hoping that others will respond either positively or negatively to my definition, for I would truly like to have some clarity concerning the spiritual senses.

The best *brief* definition I have come across thus far is that given by Charles Wesley in his sermon, “Awake Thou That Sleepest,” which was delivered at the University of Oxford on April 4, 1742, less than four years after his spiritual senses were awakened.⁵ In that sermon Wesley talks about spiritual senses as being “inlets of spiritual knowledge.”⁶ While he may not define the spiritual senses themselves, he at least defines what they do, and that alone goes a long way in helping define what they are.

⁵ Charles Wesley had a religious awakening on May 21, 1738 in London, just a few days before his brother John had his awakening on Aldersgate Street on May 24, 1738.

⁶ Charles Wesley, *Awake Thou That Sleepest*, April 4, 1742, p. 28.

The Presence and Will of God

There is a practical reason for attempting to define our spiritual senses. If we can define what they are and can put them to use, then we will be able to experience the presence of God and discern His Will. That is what Jacob discovered at Bethel when he cried, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.”⁷ His spiritual senses had been awakened, even if he did not see any physical image of God. He did become aware of his presence, and that is the first function of our spiritual senses. Job takes things a step further. When his spiritual senses are awakened, he cries, “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.”⁸

In the New Testament the two most notable examples are those of Thomas and Paul. Thomas needed the aid of the senses of sight and touch to assist him to believe!⁹ His spiritual senses were awakened. In the case of Paul, the awakening begins with a light and a voice, accusing him of persecuting Jesus.¹⁰ Paul is then directed to Ananias who prays for him, and Paul’s sight is restored. With his spiritual senses awakened as well, Paul submits to baptism and instruction that takes years.¹¹

The spiritual senses were not given only to people who lived in biblical times. They have been given to us as well. If

⁷ Genesis 28:16 (NRSV).

⁸ Job 42:5 (NRSV).

⁹ John 20:27-28 (NRSV).

¹⁰ Acts 9:3-7 (NRSV). While Paul saw the light and heard the voice, his companions only heard the voice. In Acts 22:6-9, his companions saw the light but did not understand the voice.

¹¹ Acts 9:17-18 (NRSV) and Galatians 1:15-18 (NRSV). It takes a period of time for Paul’s spiritual senses to mature. This, I would argue, is true for all of us.

we are ever going to truly discern the Will of God, we will need to understand and exercise our spiritual senses. The task is not an easy one, as Leslie Weatherhead discovered during World War II, when he preached a series of sermons on the Will of God to his congregation in London. Weatherhead distinguished between the intended Will, the circumstantial Will, and the ultimate Will of God. In writing a workbook on Weatherhead's classic work, Rebecca Laird summed up six ways in which we discern the Will of God:

We cultivate friendship with God and discern God's will by listening to *conscience*, the inner voice that tells us what is right from what is wrong; *common sense*, the God-given ability to judge a situation through thoughtful assessment; *wise advice*, the insight of a friend who stands outside the emotional setting of our particular problems; *scripture and great literature*, the accounts of how God has led and upheld great men and women who have come before us; *the church*, the collective counsel of loving Christian people, both past and present; and *the inner light*, the knowledge that comes directly from God during prayer, meditation or soul searching. It is the "voice" of God that is heard in one's heart.¹²

In Laird's practical advice, gleaned from Weatherhead's classic work, we can find traces of our spiritual senses. While it may not have been their intention to define the spiritual senses, they at least allude to them. My purpose will be to name and define them.

¹² Rebecca Laird, *Leslie Weatherhead's The Will of God: A Workbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), p. 89.

The Role of the Mind

While I would like to suggest five spiritual senses, these will not be directly related to the five physical senses.¹³ Paul Brand and Philip Yancey explain why this must be the case: “The common catalog of five senses—sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell—hardly covers all that is taking place.”¹⁴ Brand and Yancey go on to describe the role of the mind (or brain) in interpreting both the physical and the spiritual senses. “The brain,” they say, “contains imagination, morality, sensuality, mathematics, memory, humor, judgment, religion, as well as an incredible catalog of facts and theories and the common sense to assign them all priority and significance.”¹⁵ All of them are, however, related to the mind, for the mind is the instrument God created in us to interpret the spiritual senses, just as the mind also interprets the physical senses.

Brand and Yancey then go on to call the brain, not the heart, the holy of holies.¹⁶ “God could not accommodate His language to human ears and His shape to human eyes more fully than by dwelling inside men and women.”¹⁷ We must presuppose that God speaks through the mind, but without the

¹³ The five physical senses are sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. While imagery might be used to refer to some of these senses, one cannot draw a direct parallel between the physical and spiritual senses. While I have chosen to define five spiritual senses, I have not tried to limit or expand the spiritual senses to equal the number of physical senses. I would be happy to increase the number or decrease it as I become convinced that in some cases I am talking about the same thing, or there is another spiritual sense that I missed.

¹⁴ Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *In His Image* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), p. 131.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 121 and 129.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

awakening of our spiritual senses, we will not discern his voice.

Five Spiritual Senses

I do not intend to limit the spiritual senses to five. It just so happens that as I have thought about them, I have come up with five spiritual senses. This is a coincidence. I have not tried to parallel them with the physical senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. One might, however, make a case for such a comparison. There are certainly Biblical images that can be used. Take for example, the following:

Sight: “I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty....” (Isaiah 6:1)

Hearing: “Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.” (Isaiah 55:3)

Touch: “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.” (Matthew 9:21)

Smell: “...your anointing oils are fragrant, your name is perfume poured out.” (Song of Solomon 1:3)

Taste: “O taste and see that the LORD is good.” (Psalm 34:8)

Tim Dearborn takes this approach and says, “Though our five senses aren’t in themselves adequate vehicles for encountering the invisible God, behind each is a spiritual sense that, when awakened, opens up for us the awareness of another world.”¹⁸ I do not, however, intend to move in that direction. The five spiritual senses I intend to name and describe have little or no connection with the five physical senses.

The spiritual senses, to use Charles Wesley’s definition, are “inlets of spiritual knowledge.” While there may well be more than five, I would like to suggest at least the following five

¹⁸ Tim Dearborn, *Taste and See: Awakening Our Spiritual Senses* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1966), p. 30.

spiritual senses: (1) rational sense, (2) common sense, (3) emotional sense, (4) moral sense, and (5) volitional sense.¹⁹ Other words might be used to describe *some* of these senses, such as reason, feelings, conscience, and freedom of the will. Common sense speaks for itself and does not need a simpler term.

The Wisdom of the Bible

Before proceeding to defining our spiritual senses, I would like to say something about the awakening of these senses. We cannot assume that just because everyone has them, that they are using them. Everyone can use them, but that does not mean that everyone is using them. Exercising our spiritual senses is not that difficult. All it takes is wisdom, in the biblical sense. In the Old Testament wisdom consists of three simple statements, found in a variety of places. These three statements are: (1) fear God, (2) keep the Commandments, and (3) shun evil.²⁰

Jesus certainly illustrates all three statements with his life and teachings. In regard to the Commandments, he combines Deuteronomy 6:4-5 with Leviticus 19:18 and says: "...the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. ... Love your neighbor as yourself."²¹

While we might like to change *fear* to *reverence* to make it more palatable, the Bible does not do this. Following the first two commandments, to have no other gods and to make no idols, God warns in Exodus 20:5-6 (NRSV): "...for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those

¹⁹ Free Will.

²⁰ Proverbs 9:10, Ecclesiastes 12:13, and Job 28:28 all state that the beginning of wisdom is the "fear of God." Ecclesiastes adds "keeping the commandments," and Proverbs adds "shunning evil."

²¹ Mark 12:29-31 (NRSV).

who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.” The God to be feared is also the God to be loved. The neighbor is also to be loved, but not only as we love ourselves. We are to love our neighbor as Jesus Christ has loved us.²² If we are not willing to exercise biblical wisdom, then our spiritual senses will lie dormant.

The Method of Early Methodism

Early Methodism attempted to exercise this biblical wisdom by writing into its *General Rules* the following threefold method: (1) First: By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced...., (2) Secondly: By doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men...., and (3) Thirdly: By attending upon all the ordinances of God.... This was their practical method used to awaken the spiritual senses. Members of the Methodist Societies met regularly in classes and bands to “watch over one another in love” and “to hold one another accountable.” The purpose was to awaken the spiritual senses, discern the Will of God, and “to reform the nation, particularly the Church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”²³

The Aim is Holiness

The word *holiness* gives us as much difficulty today as the word *fear*; but unless we are willing to aim at holiness, rather

²² See John 13:34. If we loved our neighbor only as we love ourselves, we might not have much of a reason to love the neighbor. There are many who do not know how to love themselves; therefore, we need someone like Jesus to teach us.

²³ *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols., ed. Thomas Jackson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979), 8:299.

than mere happiness,²⁴ our spiritual senses cannot be awakened. Happiness is a byproduct of holiness. If we aim at holiness, happiness will be thrown in. In Leviticus 19:2 (NRSV), God said to Moses, “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.’” Notice that this message was not just for religious leaders, but for the entire assembly of Israel. This is not an antiquated Old Testament commandment.

The Church is called to be the new Israel. In 1 Peter 2:9 (NRSV), we read, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”²⁵ When we are willing to practice biblical wisdom and aim at holiness, our spiritual senses will be awakened and we will begin to see and share that wonderful light.

²⁴ Another word that could be used here is “bliss.”

²⁵ See also 1 Peter 1:14-16 (NRSV).

1. OUR RATIONAL SENSE

*Let us now unite the two so long divided,
knowledge and vital piety.*

John Wesley

The first of the spiritual senses is our *rational sense*, which is *reason*. We are *rational* beings. This is not all that we are, but we are *rational* beings. The rational sense is one, but not the only one, of our spiritual senses. We may not know everything by means of reason, but we can know something.

Scripture

Let us begin with an Old Testament and a New Testament reference to the rational sense. The prophet Isaiah has a vision in which God enables him to see in his mind's eye. What he sees is the Holy One of Israel, whom, because of sin, the people have rejected. Sin prevents us from seeing the Holy God, but God is willing to forgive that sin so that we might see Him with the mind's eye, the rational sense. Isaiah 1:18 (NRSV) is the key verse. "Come now, let us argue it out, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." God calls upon his people to use their rational sense to get rid of that which is blocking one of their spiritual senses. That spiritual sense, however, can be used even before the sin has been forgiven.

In the New Testament we find Paul writing to the Church at Rome. In his letter he talks about the power of faith to transform life. At the same time he refuses to accept ignorance as an excuse for the lack of faith. In Romans 1:19-21 (NRSV), Paul addresses the unbeliever, saying:

For what can be known about God is plain to them [the unbelievers]²⁶, because God has shown it to them. Ever

²⁶ I inserted "the unbelievers" into the text.

since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened.

They should have been able to use their rational sense to discern the presence of God; but instead, they allowed sin to darken their minds, making it impossible for them to use their rational sense. It is their fault. God created them with a rational sense, but due to their idolatry, their rational sense became inoperable. Instead of worshipping the Creator, they worshipped things He created such as “mortal human beings or birds, or four-footed animals or reptiles.”²⁷

The Proofs of God

God expects us to use our rational sense, even when sin is present in our lives. He promises to forgive the sin, making it possible for us to reason more clearly. While we may not be able to know everything about God through our rational sense, there are some things that we can know. One of those things that we can know is that God exists. This is what the proponents of the various proofs for God were trying to affirm. The proofs of God were not trying to give a complete description of God. They were only trying to affirm that our rational senses concluded the existence of a God. One can find various lists of the rational proofs of God. Below is my list:

- 1. The Ontological Proof of God.** The rational argument for the Ontological Proof of God attempts to prove the *being* of God by reason alone. It was first put forth by Anselm (1033-1109 C.E.), who suggested that God is defined as something greater than anything else that can be conceived. Such a *being*

²⁷ Romans 1:23 (NRSV).

must exist, for if he did not, he would not be the greatest conceivable *being*. This is an abstract argument, not based on observation.

2. **The Cosmological Proof of God.** The Cosmological Proof for the existence of God is based on reason reflecting on observation. This argument was put forth by Thomas Aquinas (1225-74 C.E.), who drew upon the writings of Aristotle (284-322 B.C.E.). The rational argument suggests that everything has a First Cause. If there were not a First Cause, the whole process of causation would never have started. Therefore we reason that there is a First Cause, and we give the name of that First Cause “God.”
3. **The Teleological Proof of God.** Whereas the rational argument for the Cosmological Proof of God focuses on causes, the rational argument for the Teleological Proof of God draws attention to the evidence of design and purpose in the world. Just as a watch indicates a watchmaker (Cosmological Proof), so evidence of design and purpose points to a purposeful Creator (Teleological Proof). Both of these rational arguments are based on reason reflecting on observation. We observe the presence of a world and we conclude that there must be a Creator. We see design and purpose in that world, and we conclude that there must be a Creator
4. **The Moral Proof of God.** This rational argument for the Moral Proof of God asks, “What is the source of our moral values?” How do we make sense out of right and wrong? Even atheists and agnostics appeal to justice and fair play. The moral argument claims that our sense of moral values points to the existence of a personal, moral Creator, who has built into our moral make-up a sense of justice and obligation to others. The Moral Proof of God also draws its rational conclusion on the basis of observation. Not

only is there design and purpose in the world, but the God being proposed is also moral in His very nature.

Reason is the process of reaching logical conclusions from statements and facts which everyone understands to be true. This does not mean that we will all draw the same conclusion. When we look at a religious masterpiece, for example, we can all agree that someone painted it, but acknowledging the artist's work does not guarantee that we know the artist. The traditional proofs for God's existence have their limitation. By means of reason we can draw the conclusion that there is a God, but reason alone cannot help us to know that God. Jürgen Moltmann, in his *Theology of Hope*, writes:

The traditional proofs of God can be divided into three major groups: (1) the proofs of God from the world, from the cosmos or the history of reality, (2) the proofs of God from human existence, from the soul or from the self-consciousness of man's necessary ability and obligation to be a self, (3) the proofs of God from "God", the proofs of the existence of God, or of the quest of God, from the concept or name of God.²⁸

Even if one is convinced of one or more of the rational arguments for the Proofs of God's existence, none of them can make the invisible God visible. "Reason's last step," wrote Blaise Pascal, "is to acknowledge that an infinity of truth lies beyond it."²⁹ Pascal used reason to establish God's existence, but he understood reason's limits. Even reason has to take the step of faith, which can be summed up in Pascal's wager, which says: "...either God exists or he does not exist...What is your bet? The stake to be put up is slight or even nothing when compared to the prize to be won." Pascal cleared the way for

²⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, pp. 272-273.

²⁹ Roger Hazelton, *Blaise Pascal: The Genius of His Thought* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), p. 191.

“the reasons of the heart.”³⁰

The Options for a Wager

Obviously there are many options open to us, and some of us will even bet on Atheism. Anyone betting on Atheism must face the fact that throughout its history, the human race has believed for the most part in the existence of God (or gods).

Other options are Agnosticism, Pantheism, Monodeism, and Monotheism. Agnostics refuse to make the wager and claim that it is impossible to know whether or not God exists. They are open to the possibility, but do not believe that any of the rational Proofs of God are convincing. At the same time they do not deny the possibility of God’s existence. Pantheists believe that God and the world are one and the same. Pantheism comes dangerously close to confusing the Creator with the created world. Monodeists and Monotheists make a clear distinction between the created world and the Creator. They affirm that there is only one God

Even if one reasons and bets on the existence of One Universal God, there is still the question of whether or not God has anything to do with the created world. Those who deny that God has anything to do with the created world would be called Deists. Those who affirm that this God works within the created world would be called Theists. Most Jews, Christians, and Muslims believe that God acts in history, and so they would choose the Monotheistic option.

The Scientific Method

Perhaps the Scientific Method can help us. If God is at work in the history of His world, is there not some way to observe that activity? Let us look first at the Scientific Method:

First of all, it consists of the slow, tedious, painstaking process of *observation* and *comparison* of the data on the subject under consideration.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 192-193.

Then comes a second step, by which one comes to a *hypothesis* as to how and why these data are related. This is not done by reason, but by intuition and imagination. Paul Feyerabend, one of the most respected students of the philosophy of science, suggests that if we wish to produce creative scientists, the development of their imaginations is even more important than the development of their purely logical and rational capacities.

Once a hypothesis is framed we use our best powers of rational analysis and deduction to sketch out the implications of our theory. The painstaking observation and collection of detailed data are continued, often by scientific *experiment*.

When some of the data of experience do not agree with the theory that has been formulated, and these facts continue to appear, then a *new hypothesis* is required. And the whole process begins again. A new hypothesis is “dreamed up”; it is subjected to further testing according to the logical implications; there is further searching for the data that do not fit, and so the growth of knowledge goes on.³¹

From the way in which the Scientific Method operates, one can easily see that while reason plays a role, it is not the only actor. Before reason can act intuition and imagination must act. In Theology we might call this first actor *faith*. Faith and reason must work together, but faith is always the first actor, just as are intuition and imagination in the Scientific Method. Observation and comparison are also important actors. Just as intuition and imagination base their action on observation and comparison, so does faith. It takes faith to observe the activities of God in the world and to understand what he is doing.

³¹ Morton T. Kelsey, *Companions on the Inner Way: The Art of Spiritual Guidance* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), pp. 72-73.

Although the Scientific Method is helpful, it cannot by itself prove the existence or nonexistence of God. What we discover about the Scientific Method is that it is not entirely dependent upon the physical senses. Intuition and imagination are closer to the spiritual senses than they are to the physical senses. In the final analysis, even the Scientific Method operates on something very close to *faith*. Although reason does not operate by itself in the Scientific Method, reason is required to draw conclusions. The same is true in proving the existence of God.

The Weakness of Reason

There are at least two weaknesses to relying too heavily on the rational sense. First, we can use reason to prove whatever we want to prove. John Wesley suggested that if we were left to ourselves we would not reason our way into Heaven, but Hell. Ultimately, reason, by itself, is a rope of sand.³² This does not mean that Wesley was opposed to the use of reason. He included it in his four resources for doing theology. The four resources are scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Wesley states clearly that without reason we cannot understand the essential truths of Scripture. Reason, however, is not mere human intelligence. It must be assisted by the Holy Spirit if we are to understand the mysteries of God. Wesley's appreciation for reason not only preceded but extended far beyond Aldersgate. In 1741 he wrote of Martin Luther, saying:

How does he decry reason, right or wrong, as an irreconcilable enemy to the Gospel of Christ! Whereas, what is reason (the faculty so called) but the power of apprehending, judging, and discoursing? Which power is no

³² Quoted in Robert G. Tuttle, *On Giant Shoulders* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1984), p. 120. The same quote can be found in Robert G. Tuttle, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral—Not Equilateral" *Basic United Methodist Beliefs*, ed. By James V. Heidinger II (Anderson, Indiana: Bristol Books, 2000), p. 21. (Tuttle takes his quotes on Wesley from Wesley's Works, Vol. 1, p. 315.

more to be condemned in the gross than seeing, hearing, or feeling.”³³

The second weakness of reason is its inability to motivate, inspire, and transform life. Morton Kelsey puts it well:

Nothing is more sterile than religion that is pure thought. When we make religious faith a matter of logical deduction and try to attain certitude it becomes as dry as moon dust. Theologians of this kind talk about religion and spirituality, but they avoid an encounter with God.³⁴

We can use our rational sense to conclude the existence of God, but that is not enough. A God who is only inferred seldom transforms our lives. What we need in addition to a rational experience is a religious experience. We need the reasons of the heart, which have the power to transform us.

The Necessity of Reason

“The [physical]³⁵ senses,” wrote Augustine, “are the body’s gateway to the mind.”³⁶ The spiritual senses are the God’s gateway to our mind and spirit. The rational sense may not be the only spiritual sense, but it is one of them. Morton Kelsey explains why the early Church was so successful in dealing

³³ Quoted in Robert G. Tuttle, “The Wesleyan Quadrilateral—Not Equilateral” *Basic United Methodist Beliefs*, ed. By James V. Heidinger II (Anderson, Indiana: Bristol Books, 2000), p. 21. (Tuttle takes his quotes on Wesley from Wesley’s Works, Vol. 1, p. 315.

³⁴ Kelsey, *Companions on the Inner Way: The Art of Spiritual Guidance*, p. 40.

³⁵ I inserted the word “physical” into Augustine’s quote.

³⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, Book X, #10, trans. by Marcus Dods, D.D. (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), p. 217.

with a superior culture and powerful pagan religion:³⁷

One reason that the early Church proved so powerful as it stood against and conquered the ancient pagan world was that it not only outlived and outdied that world; it also outthought it. If the Church is to have the same effect upon our contemporary world it must know the deepest currents of the scientific world and outthink that world in the way the early church did.

John O'Brien tells the story of an Atheist, Gretta Palmer, who upon becoming a Christian went to Monsignor Sheen and said, "Let's not bother with the rational arguments for Catholicism. I'm prepared to admit now that the intellect is a blunt instrument incapable of dealing with the questions that disturb us most. For man has been reasoning since his experience began, and he has ended up in Hiroshima. Suppose you tell me about faith, all by itself, independent of the intellect." Monsignor replied, "You can't abandon your reason. That's the mistake the followers of Hitler made. That's the kind of thing that makes people believe that some man in Moscow, Idaho, is God, because he claims to be. Let me tell you what we Catholics believe, and if your reason rejects it, go away with my blessing. But I beg you, as a friend, don't throw in the sponge on using your intellect."³⁸

One of our spiritual senses is the rational sense. It cannot be used by itself, but we cannot do without it. It is one of those spiritual senses that can lead us into a religious experience, which was the second thing Gretta Palmer wanted to do without. After becoming convinced of the necessity for reason, Palmer said, "...I find it hard to believe...that the proper end of

³⁷ Kelsey, *Companions on the Inner Way: The Art of Spiritual Guidance*, p. 40.

³⁸ Gretta Palmer, "Escaping from an Atheist's Cell," in John A. O'Brien, *The Road to Damascus* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1951), pp. 45-46.

every life is the attainment of a mystical experience. That doesn't jibe with the way we have been brought up to think. So we'll leave out mysticism, please." The Monsignor convinced her that both reason and mysticism were necessary. After her conversation with Monsignor Sheen, she concluded, "Those two remarks show how far from Christianity I was that July. But by December I became a Catholic. I became a Catholic with no faint reservations, no intellectual holding back, no emotional desperation to drive me on. I became a Catholic because I was looking for the truth, and I had found it. It is that simple."³⁹

Conclusion

The rational sense helps us believe in the existence of God. It may not tell us everything about God, but it prepares us to interpret our faith to the world in a rational manner. Jesus is the head of the Church, and according to Philippians 2:5, that same mind that was in Christ Jesus is supposed to be in us. That mind is made up of more than the rational sense, and that is why we must move on to some of the other spiritual senses. Each one of them will have strengths and weaknesses, but together they move us towards a religious or mystical experience. Some unknown Christian saw the relationship of some of these spiritual senses and wrote the following:

It is a quickening of the conscience by the holiness of God; a feeding of the mind with the truth of God; an opening of the heart to the love of God; and a devoting of the will to the purpose of God.⁴⁰

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

⁴⁰ Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions* (Grand Rapids; Kregel Publications, 1990), September 13, p. 276.

2. OUR COMMON SENSE

*We review the past with the common sense,
but we anticipate the future with transcendental senses.*
Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

*Common sense shines with a double lustre
when set in humility.*
William Penn (1644-1718)

It has been said that all persons have been given the five physical senses of touch, taste, sight, smell, and hearing; but, the successful person has been given two more: horse sense and common sense.⁴¹ Actually there is no significant difference between horse sense and common sense. We shall define our second spiritual sense, that is common sense (or horse sense), as “practical judgment derived from experience rather than study.” Common sense differs from rational sense in another way. It draws conclusions from *common* experiences rather than from *logical* deductions. While an individual may exercise common sense, it is usually based on the agreement of more than one individual. That is why this spiritual sense is called “common.” It is the sense of humanity in general. *The American Heritage Dictionary* indicates that the English “common sense” comes from the Latin “sensus communis,” which means “common feelings of humanity.”⁴²

Scripture

When we look at the Old and New Testaments, we find plenty of things that seem to contradict common sense. In the Old Testament we find the story of Job, who loses everything, even though he has been faithful to God. His three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, all approach him with common

⁴¹ To my knowledge the source for this saying is anonymous.

⁴² *The American Heritage Talking Dictionary* (CD ROM Version), 1998.

sense answers to his predicament—Job must have sinned. That is the only thing that makes common sense. One should be rewarded for faithfulness and punished for sinfulness. At the end of the Book Elihu suggests that it may be moral discipline rather than punishment from God. No answer is given to Job's suffering, but as Job experiences the presence of God, he no longer seems to need an answer. That good and evil should fall on both the righteous and sinners does not make common sense.

In the New Testament we are confronted with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which seems to contradict almost everything we would call common sense. He begins with the Beatitudes, which pronounce blessings on the poor, the grieving, and the persecuted.⁴³ If that is not enough, Jesus continues by calling upon his disciples to turn the other cheek, love the enemy, and not worry about the source of their food and clothes.⁴⁴ God will take care of them. Common sense does not move us in these directions. What we have to call these things is the common sense of God, not of human beings. "Unfortunately," wrote Joy Davidman, "man cannot for long endure the common sense of God."⁴⁵ The Sermon on the Mount seems to contradict our human understanding of common sense. It is easy to understand why common sense is so frequently rejected as one of the spiritual senses.

Theology

In addition to the difficulty we have with Scripture, we also have some very practical theological problems with common sense and our theology of Grace. Grace seems to work against the grain of *what we consider to be* common sense. Lewis

⁴³ Matthew 5:3, 4, and 10.

⁴⁴ Matthew 5:39, 43-45 and 6:25-30.

⁴⁵ Joy Davidman, "Smoke on the Mountain," *Christianity Today*, Volume 30, No. 3.

Smedes names three kinds of common sense that deceive us.

1. **Hard-nosed common sense** will tell you that you are too wrong to meet the standards of a holy God; pardoning grace tells you that it's all right in spite of so much in you that is wrong.
2. **Realistic common sense** tells you that you are too weak, too harassed, too human to change for the better; grace gives you power to send you on the way to being a better person.
3. **Plain common sense** may tell you that you are caught in a rut of fate or futility; grace promises that you can trust God to have a better tomorrow for you than the day you have made for yourself.⁴⁶

If we are going to suggest that common sense is one of the spiritual senses, then we must face the problem that we have with common sense, for we do have a problem as illustrated by Scripture and Theology.

The Problem with Common Sense

Let us take a deeper look at common sense as one of our spiritual senses. On the one hand we hear people say that Jesus taught nothing contrary to common sense; and, on the other hand, we hear people say that everything Jesus taught contradicted common sense. Some will even attack both reason and common sense at the same time. Wherein does the truth lie?

First, to quote Will Rogers, "Common sense isn't as common as it used to be."⁴⁷ Common sense is not always used as God intended. Instead we use common sense for the sake of expediency, to get what we want. When common sense is in-

⁴⁶ Lewis Smedes in "How Can It be All Right When Everything is All Wrong?" (quoted by Martin E. Marty in Context), *Christianity Today*, Volume 37, Number 8.

⁴⁷ This quote was taken from *Christian Reader*, Volume 33, Number 1.

fectured with arrogance and sin, it no longer functions as one of our spiritual senses. Arrogance and sin act upon common sense like a spiritual cancer, blinding its vision.

One of the great devotional writers that saw this happening was Oswald Chambers, who made several criticisms of how arrogance and sin blinded the spiritual vision of common sense. In his devotional classic, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Chambers concludes: “Jesus sums up common-sense carefulness in a disciple as infidelity.”⁴⁸ This does not mean that Chambers sees no value in common sense. He recognizes that common sense is a gift from God; hence, he says:

Common sense is a gift, which God gave to human nature, but common sense is not the gift of His Son. Supernatural sense is the gift of His Son—never enthrone common sense. The Son detects the Father; common sense never yet detected the Father and never will.⁴⁹

The problem is that we tend to enthrone common sense, divorcing it from its spiritual source and function. What we do is to make “...common sense decisions and ask God to bless them. He cannot, it is not in His domain, it is severed from reality.”⁵⁰

How do we overcome the problems of arrogance and sin which, blind us to the vision of God? The answer is simple. We reject the kind of common sense that focuses on expediency and we connect common sense to eternal principles. That is what Job did. He knew that the common sense of Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu was faulty and he rejected it. He may not have known how to make contact with divine wisdom, but as he raised the questions, he found the answer. That answer is

⁴⁸ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour Publishing, Inc., 1963), p. 104. (May 23).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 162. (August 9).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42. (February 28).

given in the famous *Hymn of Wisdom*, where the author concludes: “Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.”⁵¹ The author of Proverbs agrees and warns: “Whoever wanders from the way of understanding will rest in the assembly of the dead.”⁵²

The Solution to the Problem

While we must admit to the problem that inflicts common sense, this does not mean that it has to be rejected as a spiritual sense. We just have to reconnect it to its proper goal, which is to focus on the eternal, not the expedient. What are the expedient goals on which we so frequently focus common sense? There are at least two—happiness and freedom. What we so often overlook is that these can only be the fruit of an eternal goal. These do not represent the wisdom more precious than diamonds. The proper goal of common sense is the holiness of God and the call to be holy as God is holy.⁵³ Only as our common sense is aimed at the holiness of God and his call to us to imitate that holiness will his marvelous light break through to us and to the whole inhabited world.

If arrogance and sin act as a cancer upon common sense, then humility enables common sense to penetrate the darkness and catch a vision of the eternal. Common sense certainly does not mean running with the crowd, as a couple of sayings concerning horse sense will illustrate:

Horse sense vanishes when you begin to feed your oats.

The fellow with horse sense doesn't trot with the crowd.

It takes a lot of horse sense to maintain a stable life.

Yet, common sense, can go haywire when we attempt to exer-

⁵¹ Job 28:28.

⁵² Proverbs 21:16.

⁵³ Leviticus 19:2; Matthew 5:48; and 1 Peter 1:15-16; 2:9.

cise it on our own. We need to be part of an accountability group that will keep us focused on the eternal instead of the expedient. Without an accountability group we tend to deceive ourselves, thinking that we are using common sense when all we are doing is exercising nonsense.

Common sense has a place among the spiritual senses, as long as it does not try to dominate them. When common sense is rejected as a spiritual sense it is usually because it has been perceived of as having human origins, but the origin does not have to be human. Common sense can have a divine origin. Augustine, in his *City of God*, refers to the divine origin that overcomes human arrogance, sin, and wisdom:

And now we have three incredibles, all of which have yet come to pass. It is incredible that Jesus Christ should have risen in the flesh and ascended with flesh into heaven; it is incredible that the world should have believed so incredible a thing; it is incredible that a very few men, of mean birth and the lowest rank, and no education, should have been able so effectually to persuade the world, and even its learned men, of so incredible a thing.⁵⁴

I refer to the above as common sense because the disciples of Jesus, and many other witnesses, shared in common those incredible experiences. They may not have been common to everyone, but they were common to them. They also caused them to focus on the eternal. Those incredible experiences transformed common sense into one of the spiritual senses.

Conclusion

Like our rational sense, common sense cannot be used alone, but it must be used, or we are not using all of our spiritual senses. Its importance in a spiritual sense was illustrated by Earl Palmer, whose alma mater, Princeton Seminary, honors a former student every year. One year they honored a pastor

⁵⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, p. 815.

from Seoul, Korea. His church had grown to 40,000 members and is the largest Presbyterian congregation in the world. During an interview with the pastor, someone asked, “How do you elect elders for a church of that size?” The room was filled with Presbyterian pastors, all of whom had the very difficult task of electing qualified elders. They waited anxiously for his answer. “Well,” said the Korean pastor, “we give an examination for prospective elders.” “What,” asked the interviewer, “do you examine them on?” “We examine them,” answered the pastor, “on four great topics. We examine them on Bible, Theology, and Church History.” Everybody nodded in agreement. When the pastor came to his fourth point, the audience roared. “And,” continued the pastor driving home his fourth point, “we also examine them on common sense.” Upon telling this story, Earl Palmer concluded:

I wish every church examined their elders and pastors on those four, especially the last! We certainly don't need hysterical Christians running around everywhere, do we? We don't need people putting out fires in the midst of a flood. We need people with common sense.⁵⁵

We not only need individuals with common sense, but we need congregations filled with small groups of people meeting together to sense the presence of God and to hold one another accountable, moving beyond the expedient to the eternal. That is the only way that common sense can function as one of the spiritual senses.

⁵⁵ Earl Palmer, “Teammates in Christ,” *Preaching Today*, Tape Number 146.

3. OUR EMOTIONAL SENSE

*Let those who are able
Listen to your voice speaking in their hearts.*⁵⁶
Augustine

In addition to the more intellectual spiritual senses, such as the rational and common senses, there is also the emotional sense—the heart. “We know truth,” insisted Pascal, “not by reason only, but by the heart.” “The heart has its reasons which reason cannot know.”⁵⁷

Scripture

In the Book of Job Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and even Elihu tried to reason with Job, without getting anywhere. Job himself tried to reason with God, but had no satisfaction, that is, until he was humbled before God. Then, says Job, “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you...”⁵⁸ This does not mean that Job heard and saw God with two of his five senses. Augustine concludes that, “...there is no reason why we should not understand this of the eye of the heart, of which the apostle says, ‘Having the eye for your heart illuminated.’”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, Book XI, Number 9, p. 260.

⁵⁷ Hazelton, *Blaise Pascal: The Genius of His Thought*, pp. 101-102.

⁵⁸ Job 42:5 (NRSV).

⁵⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, p. 862. The Pauline reference is Ephesians 1:18. The whole passage, however, includes verses 17-19: “I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

Paul Brand and Philip Yancey tell us how this could happen: “God could not accommodate His language to human ears and His shape to human eyes more fully than by dwelling inside men and women.”⁶⁰ One can only conclude that Job saw God not with any physical senses, but with his emotional sense, that is, with his heart.

This is also what Psalm 34:8 is getting at when the Psalmist challenges us with the words: “O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.” We do not taste and see with our sense of taste and sight. It is our emotional sense, the heart that enables us to taste and see. It also enables us to hear.

Jeremiah doubted the effectiveness of the heart as one of our spiritual senses. For example, in Jeremiah 17:9 (NRSV), the prophet says, “The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse — who can understand it?” But this is only a question. He goes on in Jeremiah 17:10 (NRSV) to quote God’s answer: “I the LORD test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.” Then in Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NRSV), the prophet proclaims the coming Covenant that God is going to make with his people:

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt — a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall

⁶⁰ Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *In His Image* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), p. 137.

all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

The Covenant is to be written in the heart and those who receive it will no longer have to be reminded of what it contains. Not only will they know it, but they will also know the Lord, who gave it.

In Matthew 5:8 (NRSV), Jesus proposes the heart as one of our spiritual senses. He says clearly: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” They will see God with their emotional sense, their pure heart. He himself will purify their hearts. The first example of this takes place immediately following his resurrection. He joins two of his disciples who are walking away from Jerusalem towards the village of Emmaus. They do not recognize him until he shares bread with them. Then, as he disappears from their sight, they reflect back on his sharing of scripture with them, and cry, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”⁶¹ In commenting on this story, Thomas À Kempis wrote:

Truly their great burning faith is a probable argument of Thy holy Presence; for they know verily their Lord in the breaking of bread, whose heart burneth so strongly in them by the presence of their Lord Jesus, then sacramentally walking with them. But verily, such affection and devotion, so strong fervour and love, be oftentimes far from me.⁶²

An Example from Christian History

One of the best-known examples from Christian history is

⁶¹ Luke 24:27-32. The complete story begins with Luke 24:13 and ends with Luke 24:35.

⁶² Thomas À Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1964), p. 291.

the “strange warming of the heart” of John Wesley. Wesley had his heart-warming experience at a Moravian Religious Society Meeting on Aldersgate Street in London on May 24, 1738. Although his spiritual senses were awakened, like Thomas À Kempis, he too experienced some problems with the emotional sense. When most authors refer to Wesley’s experience they quote the following:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate-Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change, which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

But there is more. Like Thomas À Kempis, Wesley has difficulty with his emotional sense. He feels that joy should be part of his heart-warming experience, but he notices that it is not, and so he says:

I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there, what I now first felt in my heart. But it was not long before the enemy suggested, “This cannot be faith; for where is thy joy?” Then was I taught, that peace and victory over sin are essential to faith in the Captain of our salvation: But that, as to the transports of joy that usually attend the beginning of it, especially in those who have mourned deeply, God sometimes giveth, sometimes withholdeth them, according to the counsels of his own will.⁶³

⁶³ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley on Compact Disk* (Franklin, Tennessee: Providence House Publishers), p. 103. This Compact Disk contains the unedited fourteen volumes of Jackson’s edition of *The Works of John Wesley*.

Nevertheless, Wesley began aiming his preaching at the emotional sense, the heart; but by 1751, Wesley admitted that he and his followers had made a terrible mistake.

All our preaching at first was pointed at the heart, and almost all our private conversation. “Do you feel the love of God in your heart? Does his Spirit reign there? Do you walk in the Spirit? Is that mind in you which was in Christ?” were frequent questions among us. But while these Preachers to the heart were going on gloriously in the work of Christ, the false Apostles stepped in, laughed at all heart-work, and laughed many of us out of our spiritual senses: For, according to them, we were neither to see, hear, feel, nor taste the powers of the world to come; but to rest contented with what was done for us seventeen hundred years ago. “The dear Lamb,” said they, “has done all for us: We have nothing to do, but to believe.” Here was a stroke at the whole work of God in the heart! And ever since this German spirit hath wrought among us, and caused many to rest in a barren, notional faith, void of that inward power of God unto salvation.⁶⁴

Both Thomas Á Kempis and John Wesley recognized the major problem with the emotional sense, which Jeremiah had pointed out. The emotion of the heart is indeed a spiritual sense, but it too, like the rational sense and common senses, can be corrupted. That is why Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”⁶⁵ In his *Imitation of Christ*, Thomas Á Kempis concluded: “He that loveth God with all his heart, dreadeth neither death, nor torment, nor judgment nor hell; for perfect love maketh a sure passage to God.”⁶⁶ Wesley could not have agreed with him more on this point and set out

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Volume 2, page 221.

⁶⁵ Matthew 5:8 (NRSV).

⁶⁶ A Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, p. 57.

to aim at holiness of heart and life. The emotional sense must aim at holiness if it is to see God.

The Arrogance of the Heart

Before we can examine how this emotional sense operates, we must first look at its major problem—arrogance. In addition to Jeremiah’s comment on the deceitfulness of the heart, we have many others. Let us look at just a few of them. “The proud,” wrote Augustine, “cannot find you, even though by dint of study they have skill to number the stars and grains of sand, to measure the tracts of constellations and trace the paths of planets.”⁶⁷ Augustine knew the arrogance of the heart from personal experience. He had been, and was, a scholar when he wrote these words. He continues, confessing, “...for the proud lie wounded at your feet, and I was separated from you by the swelling of my pride, as though my cheeks were so puffed with conceit that they masked the sight of my eyes.”⁶⁸ The difficulty is that the arrogant continue in their arrogance even when the solution to it stares them squarely in the face. “But some hold their heads so high in the clouds of learning,” wrote Augustine, “that they do not hear him saying *Learn from me, I am gentle and humble of heart; and you shall find rest for you souls.*”⁶⁹ Arrogance blocks the vision of God and distorts, if not kills, the emotional sense. A heart filled with arrogance and self-centeredness cannot see God.

“The human heart,” wrote John Calvin, “has so many cranies where vanity hides, so many holes where falsehood lurks, is so decked out with deceiving hypocrisy, that it often dupes

⁶⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, Book V, Number 3, p. 93.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Book VII, Number 7, pp. 143-144.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Book VII, Number 9, p. 145. The quotation from Jesus is taken from Matthew 11:29.

itself.”⁷⁰ “And one of the world’s greatest tragedies,” says A. W. Tozer, “is that we allow our hearts to shrink until there is room in them for little beside ourselves.”⁷¹ Arrogance is such a threat to the operation of the emotional sense that Jesus told a penetrating parable in which the religious, but arrogant, Pharisee experienced condemnation, while the sinful, but humble, tax-collector experienced the justification and may we suggest, the presence of God. Jesus concludes the parable saying “all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”⁷² Does this mean that there is no hope for the arrogant to use their emotional sense and experience a vision of God? As long as they hang on to their arrogance there is no hope, but the Good News is that God is constantly trying to break through their arrogance and self-centeredness.

If a great leader like Augustine could see the arrogance that was in himself, then we have no reason for denying that it might be in us. As long as it stays there, the light of our emotional sense will be dim if not extinguished altogether. In his *Confessions*, Augustine cried, “My soul is like a house, small enough for you to enter, but I pray you to enlarge it. It is in ruins, but I ask you to remake it.”⁷³ Augustine realized that God only came close to persons with humble hearts, and he knew that he lacked that humility.

The amazing thing is that God works on even the arrogant, hoping to humble their arrogance, restoring to them the vision of the heart. Two passages from Augustine’s *Confessions* illus-

⁷⁰ John Calvin, “A Calvin Treasury,” *Christianity Today*, Volume 37, Number 4.

⁷¹ A. W. Tozer, “The Root of the Righteous,” *Christianity Today*, Volume 34, Number 3.

⁷² See Luke 18:10-14.

⁷³ Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 1, Number 5, p. 24.

trate this point. In the first passage Augustine talks about how God broke through his arrogance:

Your goad was thrusting at my heart, giving me no peace until the eye of my soul could discern you without mistake. Under the secret touch of your healing hand my swelling pride subsided, and day by day the pain I suffered brought me health, like ointment which stung but cleared the confusion and darkness from the eye of my mind.⁷⁴

In the second passage, Augustine describes how his vision was restored and distinguishes it from the physical senses.

Under your guidance I entered into the depths of my soul, and this I was able to do because your aid befriended me. I entered and with the eye of my soul, such as it was, I saw the Light that never changes casting its rays over the same eye of my soul, over my mind. It was not the common light of day that is seen by the eye of every living thing of flesh and blood, nor was it some more spacious light of the same sort, as if the light of day were to shine far, far brighter than it does and fill all space with a vast brilliance. What I saw was something quite, quite different from any light we know on earth. It shone above my mind, but not in the way that oil floats above water or the sky hangs over the earth. It was above me because it was itself the Light that made me, and I was below because I was made by it. All who know the truth know this Light, and all who know this Light know eternity. It is the Light that charity knows.⁷⁵

If God could break through the arrogance of Augustine, there is hope for the rest of us. “For in my wounded heart,” said

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Book VII, Number 8, p. 144.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Book VII, Number 10, pp. 146-147.

Augustine, “I saw your splendour and it dazzled me.”⁷⁶

The Humility of the Heart

Humility, not arrogance, is our natural state. We were created in the divine image. It was arrogance that marred the image. Only as we move from arrogance to humility is the image restored. The way back is the way of grace, the gift of God, to be received by faith.⁷⁷

For Augustine both Scripture and Hymns pointed the way back, or should we say forward. At his conversion he heard the sing-song voice of a child say, “Take it and read, take it and read.” Augustine picked up a book containing Paul’s Epistles and his eyes fell on the passage: “Not in reveling and drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather, arm yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought on nature and nature’s appetites.” He had no reason to read further. “For in an instant,” he claims, “as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.”⁷⁸

In addition to Scripture, Augustine talks about hymns and how they helped to restore humility of the heart.

The tears flowed from me when I heard your hymns and canticles, for the sweet singing of your church moved me deeply. The music surged in my ears, truth seeped into my heart, and my feelings of devotion overflowed, so that the tears streamed down.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Book X, Number 41, p. 249.

⁷⁷ See Ephesians 2:8-10. This passage has three themes: grace, faith, and good works. In this brief passage, Paul outlines the way back to humility and the image of God.

⁷⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, Book VIII, Number 12, pp. 177-179.

But they were tears of gladness.⁷⁹

When Augustine talks about the influence of hymns, he gives credit to the Eastern churches, who used hymns during the time of persecution to revive the flagging spirits of the people during their long and cheerless watch.⁸⁰ He approved of hymn singing as long as the primary emphasis was on the words instead of the feelings of the heart. Augustine believed that the hymns helped the emotional sense to overcome arrogance. “Yet,” he wrote, “when I find the singing itself more moving than the truth which it conveys, I confess that this is a grievous sin, and at those times I would prefer not to hear the singer.”⁸¹

Frances R. Havergal included two lines in her famous hymn, “Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated Lord to Thee,” which describe the humility of the heart:

Take my heart, it is thine own;
It shall be thy royal throne.

When God gets into the heart, there is humility. We do not have to wait until he tries to break in. The heart can only be opened from the inside. It is far better to turn our hearts over to Him to be remade in His image. That will enable us to see Him with the heart, the emotional sense. Charles Wesley also describes the process in one of his hymns:

A heart in every thought renewed
And full of love divine
Perfect and right and pure and good
A copy, Lord, of thine.

Faith may be a decision of the mind, but it is also the response of the heart; and both are spiritual senses, which enable us to see, though not with the eyes, the glory of God. In his

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Book IX, Number 6, p. 190.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Book IX, Number 7, p. 191.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Book X, Number 33, p. 239.

sermon, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” John Wesley says:

[Faith is] a kind of spiritual light exhibited to the soul, and a supernatural sight or perception thereof. Accordingly, the Scripture speaks of God’s giving sometimes light, sometimes a power of discerning it. So St. Paul: “God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” And elsewhere the same Apostle speaks of “the eyes of” our “understanding being opened.” By this two-fold operation of the Holy Spirit, having the eyes of our soul both opened and enlightened we see the things which the natural “eye hath not seen, neither the ear heard.” We have a prospect of the invisible things of God; we see the spiritual world, which is all round about us, and yet no more discerned by our natural faculties than if it had no being: And we see the eternal world; piercing through the veil which hangs between time and eternity. Clouds and darkness then rest upon it no more, but we already see the glory which shall be revealed.⁸²

Faith is the eye of the heart. One cannot see by faith without the emotions swelling up within the soul.

Conclusion

Only the humble heart can see God. The arrogant heart is blind. But how and what does the humble heart see? First, all of the great commandments, including the Shema in the Hebrew Scriptures, show us how to see. They call upon us to love God first with the heart. As important as the mind is, it is always placed last. We are to love God with our heart, soul,

⁸² Wesley, *The Works of Wesley on Compact Disk*, pp. 46-47.

mind, and might (strength).⁸³ And what is it that we see? It is certainly not any physical image of God, but a spiritual one. Rational and common sense help us to see the handiwork of God all around us. By this vision we can conclude that God is our Creator. We see his hands, or his handiwork. With the humble heart we see deeper. We see the heart of God, which is revealed to us in the cross of Jesus Christ. Our emotional sense lets that revelation penetrate our darkness, enabling us to see into the heart of God himself.

⁸³ The Shema is the source of Jesus' Great Commandment on loving God and can be found in the Hebrew Scriptures. See Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; and Luke 10:27. Deuteronomy does not use the word "mind" at all.

4. OUR MORAL SENSE

*Order my footsteps by Thy Word,
And make my heart sincere;
Let sin have no dominion, Lord,
But keep my conscience clear.*
Unknown

The *moral sense*, which can be summed up by the word *conscience*, helps us to aim at holiness in heart and life. It does this by making us aware of the difference between right and wrong and warning us of the consequences of making the wrong choices. By doing this, conscience unifies us with God and with ourselves. To go against conscience is to injure our relationship with God and fracture the harmony within ourselves.

It is true that conscience can be misused or even abused, but it is still one of the spiritual senses. In his book, *Ethics in a Christian Context*, Paul Lehmann describes three kinds of conscience. There is the heteronomous conscience, which is oriented towards society's laws, rules, and principles; there is the autonomous conscience which is oriented on one's self; and, there is the theonomous conscience, which is oriented to the welfare or needs of the neighbor, where God is doing his humanizing work.⁸⁴ It is the theonomous conscience, which is the moral sense. Jesus included love for the neighbor in his great commandment.⁸⁵ Achieving holiness means that we have learned, with the help of conscience, how to love our neighbor. In the process of loving our neighbor, we also become con-

⁸⁴ Paul L. Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), p. 350.

⁸⁵ Mark 12:31 and John 13:34. In Mark 12:31, Jesus commands us to love the neighbor as we love ourselves, but in John 13:34, he commands us to love one another as he has loved us. This points us towards a theonomous conscience, enabling us to participate in God's activity in the world.

scious of the presence and activity of God.

Scripture

The prime example of going against the theonomous conscience can be found in Genesis 3:1-11, where Adam and Eve disobey God. They have been instructed not to eat of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden and they have been warned that the moment they do they will die. Now the tree in the middle of the garden is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.⁸⁶ Would this not be the origin of conscience—to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Why then are they forbidden to eat? Conscience is not simply the knowledge of good and evil. The main business of conscience, insisted John Wesley, “is to excuse or accuse, to approve or disapprove, to acquit or condemn.”⁸⁷ The purpose of conscience is to reject the evil and choose the good.

Eating from the tree did not give Adam and Eve a conscience. They already had one, but they were not using it. They heard the command of God and they decided to ignore it. In ignoring that command, they violated their conscience, fracturing their relationship with God, with one another, and with themselves. Following in the tradition of Paul, Wesley concludes: “...we may understand by conscience, a faculty or power, implanted by God in every soul that comes into the world, of perceiving what is right or wrong in his own heart or life, in his tempers, thoughts, words, and actions.”⁸⁸ Adam and Eve had been given a theonomous conscience, but they wanted an autonomous conscience. But rejecting God’s commandment didn’t kill them, did it? One might say, “Not yet!” What it did

⁸⁶ Genesis 2:17 (NRSV).

⁸⁷ John Wesley, “The Witness of Our Own Spirit,” *The Works of John Wesley on Compact Disk*, Volume 5, Sermon 12, p. 135.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

do to them is to make them feel naked and ashamed.⁸⁹ It was the beginning of their spiritual death. It created an eclipse between themselves and God.

In Jesus we have the rejection of both the autonomous and heteronomous conscience. This is best illustrated by his violating the Sabbath to attend to the needs of others. On the Sabbath, he allowed his disciples to pick the heads of grain and eat them and he healed those who were sick. When challenged, he answered: “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill it?” His critics were silent.⁹⁰ His conscience was not focused on the letter of the law, but its fulfillment.⁹¹ Neither self nor the Law was to be the focus of the conscience. The conscience was to be focused on God and his redeeming and liberating activity in the world. That is how a theonomous conscience works.

A theonomous conscience always respects those with weaker consciences. One example of this is Paul’s advice to the Christians in Corinth, who are free to eat any meat. He advises them to abstain from meat offered to idols so as not to wound the consciences of weaker Christians. Wounding their consciences would be a sin against Christ.⁹² Hence, Paul says: “All things are lawful,’ but not all things are beneficial. ‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other.”⁹³ Seeking the advantage of the other is one of the marks of a theonomous conscience. Another person that had his conscience focused on the needs of

⁸⁹ Genesis 3:10-11.

⁹⁰ Mark 3:4, but see Matthew 12:1-4, Mark 2:18-28, Luke 6:1-11, 13:10-17, 14:1-6, and John 5:1-18, 7:21-24, 9:13-15.

⁹¹ Matthew 5:17.

⁹² See 1 Corinthians 8:12-13 and 10:27-28.

⁹³ 1 Corinthians 10:23-24 (NRSV).

others was John Wesley. This was the reason why he taught against the drinking of alcoholic beverages, which at times even extended to the drinking of tea. Concerning tea, Wesley wrote:

After talking largely with both the men and women Leaders, we agreed it would prevent great expense, as well of health as of time and of money, if the poorer people of our society could be persuaded to leave off drinking of tea. We resolved ourselves to begin and set the example. I expected some difficulty in breaking off a custom of six-and-twenty years' standing. And, accordingly, the three first days, my head ached, more or less, all day long, and I was half asleep from morning to night. The third day, on Wednesday, in the afternoon, my memory failed, almost entirely. In the evening I sought my remedy in prayer. On Thursday morning my headache was gone. My memory was as strong as ever. And I have found no inconvenience, but a sensible benefit in several respects, from that very day to this.⁹⁴

Freedom Versus Responsibility

The theonomous conscience has at least two characteristics. It is free of self and the Law, but at the same time, it is responsible for the welfare of others and to the grace of God. Few scholars have made this as clear as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who begins by suggesting that “the call of conscience has its origin and its goal in the autonomy of a man’s own ego.”⁹⁵ In other words, the natural conscience, no matter how strict and rigorous it may be, is autonomous, seeking its own unity and self-justification. The difficulty is that no one can find unity in oneself; hence, we look for our unity in someone or something else. “Bonhoeffer offers the following example:

⁹⁴ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley on Compact Disk*, Volume 2, p. 17.

⁹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 243.

When the national socialist says, “My conscience is Adolf Hitler” that, too, is an attempt to find a foundation for the unity of his own ego somewhere beyond himself. The consequence of this is the surrender of one’s autonomy for the sake of an unconditional heteronomy, and this in turn is possible only if the other man, the name to whom I look for the unity of my life, fulfills the function of a redeemer for me.⁹⁶

Obviously many saw in Hitler their redeemer, just as many see their redeemer in the Law. In regard to the Law, Bonhoeffer attacks Immanuel Kant, who proposes a heteronomous conscience.

From the principle of truthfulness Kant draws the grotesque conclusion that I must even return an honest “yes” to the enquiry of the murderer who breaks into my house and asks whether my friend whom he is pursuing has taken refuge there; in such a case self-righteousness of conscience has become outrageous presumption and blocks the path of responsible action. Responsibility is the total and realistic response of man to the claim of God and of our neighbour; but this example shows in its true light how the response of a conscience, which is bound by principles is only a partial one.⁹⁷

A great change takes place when we move beyond autonomy (our own ego) and heteronomy (laws and principles) to the miracle of faith through Jesus Christ. We may look for unity within ourselves or within the laws and principles of society, but that unity can only be found by surrendering our ego to God, who forms our conscience. Bonhoeffer continues: “The origin and goal of my conscience is not a law but it is the living God and the living man as he confronts me in Jesus Christ. For

⁹⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 243.

⁹⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 245.

the sake of God and of men Jesus became a breaker of the law. He broke the law of the Sabbath in order to keep it holy in love for God and men.”⁹⁸

The heart of Bonhoeffer’s theonomous conscience can be stated simply: “Thus it is Jesus Christ who sets conscience free for the service of God and our neighbour.” Since God is active among suffering humanity, that should also be the focus of the theonomous conscience as well. Such a conscience will be set free of its own ego, laws and principles to be bound solely to Christ. In that relationship human laws and principles may be violated in the attempt to alleviate human suffering. This will cause some guilt to the conscience, but there is also grace. Bonhoeffer puts it as follows:

When a man takes guilt upon himself in responsibility, and no responsible man can avoid this, he imputes this guilt to himself and to no one else; he answers for it; he accepts responsibility for it. He does not do this in the insolent presumptuousness of his own power, but he does it in the knowledge that this liberty is forced upon him and that in this liberty he is dependent on grace. Before other men the man of responsibility is justified by necessity; before himself he is acquitted by conscience; but before God he hopes only for mercy.⁹⁹

Acting with freedom from his own ego and laws and principles, but with a focus on God and responsibility for others, Bonhoeffer chose to participate in the plot to assassinate Hitler. He did indeed violate both his autonomous and heteronomous consciences, but he did not violate his theonomous conscience. He tried to act responsibly, doing his best to love his neighbor, relying on the grace of God.

⁹⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, pp. 243-244.

⁹⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 248.

Seeing with the Conscience

If we sometimes have to break laws and principles to act responsibly, how do we know when we are acting with God? How do we see with our conscience? A number of people have raised this question throughout history, and so let us look at how some of them have answered the question. Let us look first at Augustine's answer in his famous work, *The City of God*:

For we have another and far superior sense, belonging to the inner man, by which we perceive what things are just, and what unjust—just by means of an intelligible idea, unjust by the want of it. This sense is aided in its functions neither by the eyesight, nor by the orifice of the ear, nor by the air-holes of the nostrils, nor by the palate's taste, nor by any bodily touch. By it I am assured both that I am, and that I know this; and these two I love, and in the same manner I am assured that I love them.¹⁰⁰

Augustine affirms the existence of a conscience, which can distinguish between things that are just and unjust. This sense of the just and unjust has nothing to do with the five physical senses. It is far superior to them.

John Wesley asked the penetrating question: "But how shall I know that my spiritual senses are rightly disposed?" If a person makes a mistake in this, Wesley continues, "...he may run on in endless error and delusion." Wesley then focuses on the importance of "a good conscience toward God" (a theonomous conscience) and the "voice of the Spirit."¹⁰¹ We know that we can rely on our conscience when we look beyond ourselves (autonomous conscience) and society (heteronomous conscience) for our cues, which result in the fruit of the Spirit.

¹⁰⁰ Augustine, *The City of God*, p. 372.

¹⁰¹ John Wesley, "The Witness of the Spirit," *The Works of John Wesley on Compact Disk*, Volume 5, Sermon 10, pp. 121-122.

By the fruits which he hath wrought in your spirit, you shall know the testimony of the Spirit of God. Hereby you shall know, that you are in no delusion, that you have not deceived your own soul. The immediate fruits of the Spirit, ruling in the heart, are “love, joy, peace, bowels of mercies, humbleness of mind, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering.” And the outward fruits are, the doing good to all men; the doing no evil to any; and the walking in the light, — a zealous uniform obedience to all the commandments of God.¹⁰²

It is not always easy to see the fruit of one’s actions, even when those actions are guided by the theonomous conscience.

Our theonomous conscience will always be bumping up against those who are operating from an autonomous or heteronomous conscience. E. Stanley Jones share’s an example of this in his devotional classic, *The Way*:

Conscience is a capacity to distinguish between right and wrong, but what it distinguishes as right and wrong is determined largely according to training. Conscience can be trained to approve diametrically opposite things. I asked a Hindu once what would happen if he would break caste and no one should know it. He replied that his conscience would trouble him. My conscience would trouble me if I kept caste! Our consciences have been trained to approve diametrically opposite things.¹⁰³

Violating an autonomous or herteronomous conscience will incur guilt. At this point we need to bring in the Golden Rule, which says: “In everything do to others as you would have

¹⁰² John Wesley, “The Witness of the Spirit,” *The Work of John Wesley on Compact Disk*, Volume 5, Sermon 10, pp. 121-122.

¹⁰³ E. Stanley Jones, *The Way*, p. 304.

them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.”¹⁰⁴ The theonomous conscience always focuses on the humanization of the neighbor. It does not focus on what happens to be the law at the time.

No one has offered better advice on how to see with the theonomous conscience than Mother Teresa, who said: “You need only ask at night before you go to bed, ‘What did I do to Jesus today? What did I do for Jesus today? What did I do with Jesus today? You have only to look at your hands. This is the best examination of conscience.’”¹⁰⁵ We must admit that the conscience is imperfect. There are times when it focuses on self-interest and there are times when it remains silent in the face of indescribable evil. It is, however, one of our spiritual senses; and, rightly oriented, can be the holy whisper of God assisting the other spiritual senses. When we have to go against the laws and principles of the time, we rely on the grace of God. In such times our theonomous conscience enables us to see the presence and activity of God in the world.

Conclusion

As we have seen, not just any conscience will do. Thomas À Kempis, in his *Imitation of Christ*, tells us why:

For they that follow their sensuality hurt their own conscience, and lose the grace of God. ...a clean conscience bringeth a man to a firm and stable trust in God.¹⁰⁶

The conscience must be trained, not by itself (the autonomous conscience), nor by society (the heteronomolus conscience), but by God (the theonomous conscience). The goal of the

¹⁰⁴ Matthew 7:12 (NRSV).

¹⁰⁵ Mother Teresa, “Jesus, the Word to be Spoken,” *Christianity Today*, Volume 31, Number 2.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas À Kempis, *Imitation of Christ* (Washington Square Press, Inc.: New York, 1964) pp. 4-5.

theonomous conscience is always the will of God in the world. This leads us to explore the final spiritual sense, the volitional sense, that is, the will. When our greatest desire is to imitate the will of God, light will be given and we will be enabled to see. Charles Wesley expresses the desire beautifully in his famous hymn:

I want a principle within
of watchful, Godly fear.
a sensibility of sin,
a pain to feel it near.
I want the first approach to feel
of pride or wrong desire,
to catch the wandering of my will,
and quench the kindling fire.

From Thee that I no more may stray,
no more Thy goodness grieve,
grant me the filial awe, I pray,
the tender conscience give.
Quick as the apple of an eye,
O God, my conscience make;
awake my soul when sin is nigh,
and keep it still awake.

Almighty God of truth and love,
to me thy power impart;
the mountain from my soul remove,
the hardness from my heart.
O may the least omission pain
my reawakened soul,
and drive me to that blood [grace] again,
which makes the wounded whole.¹⁰⁷

The original title of the above hymn was “For a Tender Con-

¹⁰⁷ *The United Methodist Hymnal* (The United Methodist Publishing House, Nashville, 1989), Hymn Number 410. Earlier versions of the hymn had “grace” instead of “blood” in the second last line. I prefer “grace.”

science.” The conscience has been described as the “principle within” or the “rudder of the soul.” If our conscience is to be a reliable spiritual sense, it will need to be informed of the things of God so that we might work with God in the world. In his defense against Felix, Paul cried: “I do my best always to have a clear conscience toward God and all people.”¹⁰⁸ If we allow God to develop our conscience, then our conscience will develop us. The alternative is moral disaster.

¹⁰⁸ Acts 24:16 (NRSV).

5. OUR VOLITIONAL SENSE

*Take my will, and make it thine;
It shall be no longer mine.
Frances R. Havergal¹⁰⁹*

The final spiritual sense could be placed first as the foundation of all the others, or last as the final arbitrator of the soul. It is the *volitional sense*, or *free will*. In his *Confessions*, Augustine wrote:

One thing lifted me up into the light of your day. It was that I knew that I had a will, as surely as I knew that there was life in me. When I chose to do something or not to do it, I was quite certain that it was my own self, and not some other person, who made this act of will, so that I was on the point of understanding that herein lay the cause of my sin.¹¹⁰

Free will is one of the characteristics of being made in the Image of God. With free will we are given the power to fulfill our lives by imitating God, or to destroy our lives by rebelling against Him. With free will we have the power to defy God's Will and bring misery on ourselves and others. The moment we recognize that we are free to do as we please, we also recognize that our free will causes us to sin against God, ourselves, and others. Free will is both the cause of our union with God and our alienation from God. It can serve us as one of the spiritual senses, or it can render us blind.

Scripture

The story of Adam and Eve is the classic illustration of

¹⁰⁹ Frances R. Havergal, "Take My Life and Let It Be," *The United Methodist Hymnal* (The United Methodist Publishing House: Nashville, 1989), Hymn Number 399.

¹¹⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. By R.S. Pine-Coffin (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1978), p. 136.

human beings made in the image of God, who use their free will to rebel against God's Will. Their rebellion results in sin, which mars not only their relationship with God, but with all of nature as well. They give all kinds of reasons for their disobedience, from blaming one another to blaming the serpent; but God holds both of them accountable for the misuse of their free will.¹¹¹ They both are forced out of the Garden where they could experience perfectly the presence and hear clearly the will of God. From now on, using their spiritual senses to experience God's presence and discern God's Will, would become more difficult, mainly because sin had entered into their lives. They destroyed their spiritual senses by using their free will to rebel against God's Will. Their physical senses overpowered their spiritual senses.

Another example of this is the story of David and Bathsheba. It happened late one afternoon as David was walking about on the roof. He saw "a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful." David inquired and discovered that she was the wife of Uriah, but this did not stop him from committing adultery with her. When he discovered that she was pregnant with his child, he tried to get Uriah to take responsibility for the pregnancy, but failing at that, he arranged to have him killed in battle.¹¹² Without Nathan's confrontation,¹¹³ David would never have written his confession and asked for cleansing:

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me,
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.

¹¹¹ Genesis 3:1-24.

¹¹² 2 Samuel 11:1-17.

¹¹³ 2 Samuel 12:1-14.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.¹¹⁴

David allowed his physical sense (she was very beautiful) to overthrow his spiritual senses (she's Uriah's wife). David exercised his free will, but not in accordance with the Will of God. He could go against the Will of God, but he could not control the inevitable consequences of his actions. Not even his repentance, confession, and prayer for a clean heart could do that. Nathan, however, was used by God to awaken some of David's spiritual senses. That's what prophets are for, to awaken our spiritual senses and move us to overcome our physical senses with our spiritual senses.

No one has had control over his spiritual senses like Jesus. Few of us would be able to discern the Will of God for us in suffering and death on a cross, but Jesus did. It was not something he wanted to experience, and he tested himself three times before drawing the conclusion that death on the cross was indeed the Father Will.¹¹⁵ The real test of spiritual discernment comes when God's Will crosses our own. Jesus demonstrated that the purpose of one's life is not to be happy or achieve pleasure and avoid pain, but to do the Will of God, come what may. When one's focus is on the Will of God, one's spiritual senses will be awakened.

Paul discovered this truth, even though he had a terrific struggle with his own will. He describes that struggle in Romans 7:15-25:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot

¹¹⁴ Psalm 51:10-12 (NRSV).

¹¹⁵ Matthew 26:36-46.

do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

It was not easy for Jesus, nor was it easy for Paul. Sin is what makes it difficult for the spiritual senses to rule over the physical senses. An important question, of course, must be raised here. Was Paul talking about his preChristian past, or about his experience as a Christian? Regardless of the answer, every Christian knows how difficult it is. If Jesus had difficulty in the Garden of Gethsemane, how can it be different for his followers? The solution lies in merging our will with the Will of God. In Romans 8:1-8, Paul shares how the Christian must do as Jesus did, focus on the Spirit and not the flesh:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the

flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

The Example of Augustine

Augustine, like Paul¹¹⁶ before him, struggled with that will. “So these two wills within me,” he writes, “one old, one new, one the servant of the flesh, the other of the spirit, were in conflict and between them they tore my soul apart.”¹¹⁷ Augustine expressed how rebellious the human will is when he wrote: “I was held fast, not in fetters clamped upon me by another, but by my own will, which had the strength of iron chains.”¹¹⁸ In early adolescence, Augustine used to pray, “Give me chastity and continence, but not yet.” Why did he offer such a prayer? He gives his answer in another prayer, in which he said: “For I was afraid that you would answer my prayer at once and cure me too soon of the disease of lust, which I wanted satisfied, not quelled.”¹¹⁹ Little did Augustine know at the time that he was blocking the vision of God, which he desired. As soon as he changed his attitude, the vision became possible.

Believing that sin blinded him to any possible vision of God, he prayed: “I have eyes only for you. I long, Lord, for your presence, for the soul that is blinded by wicked passions is far from you and cannot see your face.”¹²⁰ Then he discovered the value of confession. “For in my wounded heart,” he cried, “I saw your splendour and it dazzled me.”¹²¹ He did not have to

¹¹⁶ See Romans 7:21-25.

¹¹⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 164.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

make himself purer, only more humble. Only in humility could he exercise the kind of free will, which would enable him not only to see the invisible God with the eye of faith, but to experience Him as well. “My soul,” he concluded, “is like a house, small for you to enter, but I pray you to enlarge it. It is in ruins, but I ask you to remake it.”¹²²

King David’s will was to build a house for God, but it was God’s Will that David, and his descendants, would become a house of God.¹²³ In commenting on David’s mistake, Augustine writes: “For this house is built both by us through living well, and by God through helping us to live well; for ‘except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.’”¹²⁴ Augustine expands on this idea, making our hearts into God’s altar:

...for we are all His temple, each of us severally and all of us together, because He condescends to inhabit each individually and the whole harmonious body, being no greater in all than in each, since He is neither expanded nor divided. Our heart when it rises to Him is His altar...to Him we offer on the altar of our heart the sacrifice of humility and praise, kindled by the fire of burning love. It is that we may see Him, so far as He can be seen; it is that we may cleave to Him, that we are cleansed from all stain of sins and evil passions, and are consecrated in His name. For He is the fountain of our happiness. He the end of all our desires.¹²⁵

Discovering God’s Will

It is easy to confuse God’s Will for our own. Our will is

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹²³ See 1 Chronicles 17:1-15, but especially 17:10b-12.

¹²⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, p. 594.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

only free as long as it discovers and submits to God's Will, for we have been created in his image. To turn away from that image is not only an act of self-destruction; it also renders blind this spiritual sense. John Donne put it in one of his prayers:

Thou hast set up many candlesticks, and kindled many lamps in me; but I have either blown them out, or carried them to guide me in forbidden ways. Thou hast given me a desire of knowledge, and some means to it, and some possession of it; and I have arm'd myself with thy weapons against thee.¹²⁶

George MacDonald suggests that free will is not the liberty to do whatever one likes, but the power of doing whatever one sees ought to be done, even in the face of an overwhelming impulse to do the opposite. He illustrates the struggle that both Paul and Augustine went through in his famous Parable of the House.

Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Quoted in *The Harper Collins Book of Prayers* (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 1997), p. 127.

¹²⁷ Quoted in C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1952), p. 174.

The difficulty, however, is to discover the Will of God in our particular situation. If we knew how to discern the Will of God, we might at least aim at it, even if we missed the target. Our success in doing this depends upon our attitude. In the time of Augustine there was a saying being passed around which said: "Do as you please in despite of God." Augustine's response to that saying was: "Love God and do as you please."¹²⁸ That too can be misunderstood. If one loves God and does as one pleases, it is very important to understand the meaning and direction that love should take. It is also important to understand the context in which love will be applied. According to Jesus, we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves,¹²⁹ We are also to love one another as Jesus loved us,¹³⁰ and we are even to love our enemies.¹³¹ If our vision of God depends upon all this, how can we ever experience his presence? To answer this question, we must now turn to an analysis of the Will of God in a broken world.

The classic book written on the Will of God was written during World War II as the powers of evil marched through Europe and sailed across the South Pacific shedding blood along the way. Leslie Weatherhead preached five sermons on discovering the Will of God for his congregation at City Temple in London. The book, *The Will of God*, sold more than 800,000 copies and is still available in bookstores. It is indeed a classic. In it Weatherhead helps us first to think about who God is and what God desires for us so that we can better under-

¹²⁸ Quoted in *The Interpreter's Bible*, Volume XI (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1955), p. 223.

¹²⁹ Mark 12:30-31.

¹³⁰ John 13:34-34.

¹³¹ Matthew 5:43-48.

stand and discover the way God works in our lives.¹³² We need to do this if we are going to merge our free will with the Will of God, and in doing this, we will see by faith and experience the presence of God in our lives.

Weatherhead divides the Will of God into three parts. There is the Intentional Will, the Circumstantial Will, and the Ultimate Will. The first part refers to God's ideal plan for us, the second to God's plan within certain circumstances, and the third to God's final realization of his purposes.¹³³ Trouble arises when we use "the Will of God" to cover all three. What Weatherhead is talking about can be illustrated in his handling of the Will of God and the Cross of Christ. Let us examine why the cross became the Will of God, even though it was not the desire of Jesus.

1. **The Intentional Will of God is God's ideal plan for humanity.** "It was not the intentional will of God, surely, that Jesus should be crucified, but that he should be followed. If the nation had understood and received his message, repented of its sins, and realized his kingdom, the history of the world would have been very different. Those who say that the Crucifixion was the will of God should remember that it was the will of evil men."¹³⁴
2. **The Circumstantial Will of God is God's plan within certain circumstances.** "But when Jesus was faced with circumstances brought about by evil and was thrust into the dilemma of running away or of being crucified, then in those circumstances the Cross was his Father's will. It was in this sense that

¹³² Rebecca Laird, *Leslie Weatherhead's The Will of God: A Workbook* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1995), p. 7.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Jesus said, ‘Not what I will, but what thou wilt.’”¹³⁵

- 3. The Ultimate Will of God is God’s final realization of his purposes.** “The ultimate will of God means, in the case of the Cross, that the high goal of man’s redemption or, to use simpler English, man’s recovery to a unity with God—a goal which would have been reached by God’s intentional plan had it not been frustrated—will still be reached through his circumstantial will. In a sentence, no evil is finally able to defeat God or to cause any ‘value’ to be lost.”¹³⁶

If we see as our goal *merging our free will* only with *the Intentional Will of God*, then we will always fail, but if we can *merge our free will* with *the Circumstantial Will of God*, then there is hope for us. We shall have to use all of our spiritual senses to accomplish this. Weatherhead, in his fourth sermon, “Discerning the Will of God,” used some of what I have called “the Spiritual Senses,”¹³⁷ to help his congregation identify the Will of God. Identifying the Will of God is the first step to *merging our free will* with *the Will of God*, for we cannot merge what we do not understand or know. This task will require more than our free will to accomplish. It will require the application of all our spiritual senses, which will be the goal of our final chapter.

Conclusion

Our free will is part of God’s Sovereign Will. We have the human freedom to submit to the Will of God, or reject it. Our free will can take us closer to God or it can move us away from

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-63. He names *conscience* and *common sense*, but implies the *emotional sense* when he talks about the “inner light.” The *rational sense* is also referred to as *wisdom*.

God. It can open our eyes or it can blind us. The example of Augustine illustrates how difficult it is to merge our free will with the Will of God. In his *Confessions*, Augustine admits:

From my own experience I now understood what I had read—that the impulses of nature and the impulses of the spirit are at war with one another. In this warfare I was on both sides, but I took the part of that which I approved in myself rather than the part of that which I disapproved.¹³⁸

If controlling free will was difficult for Jesus, Paul, and Augustine, it will be just as difficult for us. The real test comes when we recognize that God’s Will for us is different from our will. When such times come, and they will come, to use Augustine’s phrase, our *will* will have “the strength of iron chains.”¹³⁹ At such times our spiritual senses will be called upon to overcome our physical senses. Here, Jesus was our example, who “...for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.”¹⁴⁰

We do not have a choice between exercising free will or not exercising it. This is what makes us uniquely human. The choice before us has to do with whether we will move closer to God in humility or farther away in arrogance. When we try to merge our will with the Will of God, most of the time we will be trying to merge with the Circumstantial Will of God.¹⁴¹ This

¹³⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 164.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁴⁰ Hebrews 12:2 (NRSV).

¹⁴¹ It is easy to identify the Intentional and Ultimate Wills of God. It may not be easy to conform to them, but they are easily identified. The Ten Commandments, the Great Commandments, and the Golden Rule give us insight into the Intentional and Ultimate Wills of God, but they are difficult to apply to the Circumstantial Will of God.

will always make things messy, as it did for Jesus when he faced the cross. Merging our free will with the Will of God means, as Thomas À Kempis put it, “the Imitation of God.” We were created in God’s Image so that we might imitate God’s Will. That’s what gives us full humanity and that’s what enables us to see God with the eye of faith and to experience the divine presence with the heart. Thomas À Kempis gives some very good advice in *The Imitation of Christ* when he says: “... that person is very well taught who forsaketh his own will and followeth the will of God.”¹⁴² Why is this the case? He continues: “It is a hard thing to leave evil customs, and it is harder to break our own will, but it is most hard, evermore to lie in pain and endlessly to lose the joys of heaven.”¹⁴³

We were created in God’s Image. We can only find fulfillment by imitating Him. It does not make any sense to worship the One we are unwilling to imitate.¹⁴⁴ The same holds for free will. We were made to obey God’s Will, and we can only have a vision of Him and experience His presence when we aim at merging our free will with God’s Will. He has made us for himself, and our hearts will be restless until we find rest in Him.¹⁴⁵ Exercising our free will in humility will enable us to see God. This is what the pure in heart do.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Thomas À Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, p. 9.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

¹⁴⁴ See Augustine, *City of God*, p. 264.

¹⁴⁵ Paraphrased from a quote of Augustine. The quote came from Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (Harper and Row, Publishers: New York, 1965), p. 274.

¹⁴⁶ Matthew 5:8: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” (NRSV) The same holds for those who imitate Christ and merge their wills with the Will of God. Our free will enables all of our spiritual senses to awaken so that we might become one with God. That is the beatific vision.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

*Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.
Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.
James 4:8, 10*

Two things are crystal clear to me. First, there are at least five, maybe more, spiritual senses; and we cannot rely on any one of them *alone* to discern the promptings and warnings of the Holy Spirit. All are needed. Second, we cannot discern the promptings and warnings by ourselves. We need others to keep us honest and accountable. The purpose of our spiritual senses is to enable us to discern the Will of God so that we can make an effective witness in acts of compassion and justice. Christianity, to quote John Wesley, cannot exist without both the *inward experience* and the *outward practice* of justice, mercy, and truth.¹⁴⁷ In the end we might also gain a vision of God.

Scripture

We began this study by defining the spiritual senses as “inlets of spiritual knowledge.”¹⁴⁸ Let us take a moment to look at the experience of the spiritual senses that stands as a model of the *inward experience* and the *outward practice*. It is the story of Moses approaching the burning bush.

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” When the LORD saw that he had

¹⁴⁷ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley on Compact Disk*. See John Wesley’s Sermon, “On Living Without God,” p. 353.

¹⁴⁸ Charles Wesley, *Awake Thou That Sleepest*, April 4, 1742, p. 28.

turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.¹⁴⁹

Moses saw that bush with his spiritual senses. Elizabeth Barrett Browning helps us to understand how this could happen.

Earth’s crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.¹⁵⁰

God had a purpose for Moses’ spiritual experience. It was to free his people, who were slaves in Egypt. Spiritual experiences are not just given for our own enjoyment. They have to do with a divine call.

Then the LORD said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”¹⁵¹

Moses was not particularly willing to go back to Egypt, where his life was now in danger. He had five excellent excuses:

¹⁴⁹ Exodus 3:1-6 (NRSV).

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *In His Image* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), p. 108.

¹⁵¹ Exodus 3:7-8 (NRSV).

1. Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?¹⁵²
2. If I come to the Israelites and say to them, “The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,” and they ask me, “What is his name?” what shall I say to them?¹⁵³
3. But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, “The LORD did not appear to you.”¹⁵⁴
4. My Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.¹⁵⁵
5. My Lord, please send someone else.¹⁵⁶

Do these excuses not sound like the ones any one of us would offer? In response to them, God promises to be with Moses, tell him his name, accompany his work with miracles, give him the skill to speak, and even offered Aaron to speak on his behalf. What is interesting is that as the story develops, Moses speaks for himself without needing Aaron.

In the New Testament the man God calls is Paul. Paul, like Moses, was not all that interested in his call. Instead, he was intent on putting an end to the Christian movement. It took a dramatic burning bush kind of experience to turn him around.

Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

¹⁵² Exodus 3:11 (NRSV).

¹⁵³ Exodus 3:13 (NRSV).

¹⁵⁴ Exodus 4:1 (NRSV).

¹⁵⁵ Exodus 4:10 (NRSV).

¹⁵⁶ Exodus 4:13 (NRSV).

He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”¹⁵⁷

Like Moses, Paul’s conversion was connected to a calling. For some time, Paul did not know what that calling was, but he finally concluded that he was to proclaim the Good News about Jesus Christ to the Gentile world. As Paul goes to Damascus to receive the first of his instructions from God, he is blind and humbled. In fact the Bible only names three persons in the Bible as being humble, and they are Moses, Jesus, and Paul. This does not mean that they are the only humble persons, but they are examples of what true humility is.¹⁵⁸ Now it may well be true that in each case Moses, Jesus, and Paul wrote about their own humility, but it might just be, that they discovered something necessary for the spiritual senses to work.

Arrogance and the Other Sins: That Which Blinds

Arrogance, the first of the seven deadly sins, blinds us to the vision and call of God. We don’t hear much about the Seven Deadly Sins today: Pride, Covetousness, Lust, Anger, Gluttony, Envy, and Sloth. That is because these medieval gentlemen have adopted aliases and new life-styles and “gone legit.” Pride’s new name is success; covetousness’ new name is lawsuit; lust’s new name is expression; anger’s new name is indignation; gluttony’s new name is the good life; envy’s new name is regulation; and sloth’s new name is freedom.¹⁵⁹ Arrogance attacks us in ways that we would never expect.

¹⁵⁷ Acts 9:3-6 (NRSV).

¹⁵⁸ See Numbers 12:3; Matthew 11:29; and 2 Corinthians 10:1.

¹⁵⁹ The Biblical Reference is Proverbs 6:16-19. I got the new names from Carl G. Croyder from Bethesda, Maryland. His list with a more detailed description was printed in *Harper’s Magazine*.

Both Thomas À Kempis and Augustine identified the things that blind us from the use of our spiritual senses. “You come close,” writes Augustine, “only to men who are humble at heart. The proud cannot find you, even though by dint of study they have skill to number the stars and grains of sand, to measure the tracts of constellations and trace the paths of planets.”¹⁶⁰ Thomas À Kempis adds: “Then saith our Lord again: I have taught Prophets from the beginning, and yet cease I not to speak to every creature; but many be deaf and will not hear, and many hear the world more gladly than Me, and more lightly follow the appetite of the flesh than the pleasure of God.”¹⁶¹ Clearly, arrogance is not the only thing that blinds us, but it leads the list.

Humility and Faith: That Which Awakens

The first step into faith is humility. Without humility faith is impossible. The arrogant person needs neither God nor others. Only the humble person recognizes the need for God and is ready to receive the gift of grace. Faith is what makes the spiritual senses operate. “To every other eye than the eye of faith,” wrote Rudolf Bultmann, “the action of God is hidden.”¹⁶² John Wesley tells us how it works:

Faith, according to the scriptural account, is the eye of the new-born soul. Hereby every true believer in God “seeth him who is invisible.” Hereby (in a more particular manner, since life and immortality have been brought to light by the gospel) he “seeth the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;” and “beholdeth what manner of love it is which the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we, “who are born of the

¹⁶⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, Book V, #3, p. 93.

¹⁶¹ Thomas À Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, p. 108.

¹⁶² Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Werener Barsch (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 197.

Spirit,” should be called the sons of God.¹⁶³

Prevenient grace, according to Wesley, is that grace which tries to awaken the spiritual senses. Arrogance keeps us from recognizing prevenient grace, but humility prepares us to respond with faith. Prevenient grace (the going before grace) works on the arrogant as well as the humble, but the arrogant cannot hear or feel it. In his interpretation of Wesley’s concept of prevenient grace, Theodore Runyon explains how it works:

What prevenient grace brings is the first stage in a re-awakening of the spiritual senses, and with it an opening up of the possibility of the genuine knowledge of God. Has not every Christian experienced the surprising freshness of a Scripture passage, a prayer, or a hymn heard many times before that suddenly comes alive? Such moments of breakthrough are “Spirit-filled.”¹⁶⁴

Prevenient grace leads us to confession of sin, which in turn leads us to a confession of faith, and finally to the confession of God’s glory and holiness. Thus, humility is required for the acceptance of God’s prevenient grace, which leads to the expression of faith (justification) and on to perceiving God with our spiritual senses.

Once we have found our spiritual senses, it is only natural that we would like to take the blinders off those who have not yet found them. This has certainly been the desire of all who have begun to see with their spiritual senses. Augustine shares his experience and the desire to share it:

We are enlightened by you, so that we who *once were all darkness* may now, *in the Lord, be all daylight*. How I wish that they could see the eternal light within us!

¹⁶³ John Wesley, “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” *The Works of Wesley*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁴ Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), p. 31.

Now that I had glimpsed it myself I fretted and chafed because I could not make them see it.¹⁶⁵

The Methods

I do not mean to leave the impression that the humble can find faith easily and the arrogant cannot find it at all. It is neither impossible for the arrogant nor is it necessarily easy for the humble. It is just that one must recognize one's arrogance and become humble to express faith, opening up the spiritual senses. At least the humble do not have to overcome their arrogance to proceed down the path to faith.

The first step is faith. Faith opens up the spiritual senses, but that does not mean that we can now see clearly. John Wesley compares our physical birth to our spiritual birth.

Before a child is born into the world he has eyes, but sees not; he has ears, but does not hear. He has a very imperfect use of any other sense. He has no knowledge of any of the things of the world, or any natural understanding. To that manner of existence which he then has, we do not even give the name of life. It is then only when a man is born, that we say he begins to live. For as soon as he is born, he begins to see the light, and the various objects with which he is encompassed. His ears are then opened, and he hears the sounds which successively strike upon them.

While a man is in a mere natural state, before he is born of God, he has, in a spiritual sense, eyes and sees not; a thick impenetrable veil lies upon them; he has ears, but hears not; he is utterly deaf to what he is most of all concerned to hear. His other spiritual senses are all locked up: He is in the same condition as if he had them not. Hence he has no knowledge of God; no intercourse

¹⁶⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, Vol. IX, #4, p. 188.

with him; he is not at all acquainted with him.¹⁶⁶

This is the state of everyone, whether plagued with arrogance, or blessed with humility. It truly is as Paul so well put it: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.”¹⁶⁷ There are, however, some things we can do to use our spiritual senses while we are still in the womb. Wesley continues:

But as soon as he is born of God, there is a total change in all these particulars. The “eyes of his understanding are opened;” (such is the language of the great Apostle;) and, He who of old “commanded light to shine out of darkness shining on his heart, he sees the light of the glory of God,” his glorious love, “in the face of Jesus Christ.” His ears being opened, he is now capable of hearing the inward voice of God, saying, “Be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee;” “go and sin no more.” This is the purport of what God speaks to his heart; although perhaps not in these very words. He is now ready to hear whatsoever “He that teacheth man knowledge” is pleased, from time to time, to reveal to him.¹⁶⁸

While we cannot know and see everything outside the womb, we can exercise the five spiritual senses: the rational, the common, the emotional, the moral, and the volitional. These spiritual senses at least prepare us for our spiritual rebirth by becoming inlets of spiritual knowledge that comes to us from outside.

In each stage of history we have identified how to proceed. In the Hebrew Scriptures they had a threefold method.

¹⁶⁶ John Wesley, *The Witness of the Spirit*, p. 70.

¹⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:10 (NRSV).

¹⁶⁸ John Wesley, *The Witness of the Spirit*, p. 71.

Fear God: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.¹⁶⁹

Shun Evil: Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.¹⁷⁰

Keep the Commandments: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone.¹⁷¹

We cannot continue without saying something about fearing God. Most of us have difficulty with this term. John Wesley throws some light on fearing God. “To sum up all:” he says, “the natural man neither fears nor loves God; one under the law, fears,—one under grace, loves him. The first has no light in the things of God, but walks in utter darkness; the second sees the painful light of hell; the third, the joyous light of heaven.”¹⁷²

The method does change in the teachings of Jesus. When he is asked which is the greatest commandment, he names the one on love, and he commands us to love with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. In regard to shunning evil, he gives both the commandment to love the neighbor as one would love oneself and the Golden Rule. Both are very positive approaches to what is necessary to see with one’s spiritual senses. Finally when he deals with the law, he states simply that he came to fulfill the law. He wanted us to aim at the intent of the law, not the letter of the law. Christians should not only obey just laws, they should go beyond the law.

¹⁶⁹ Proverbs 9:10 (NRSV).

¹⁷⁰ Job 28:28 (NRSV).

¹⁷¹ Ecclesiastes 12:13 (NRSV).

¹⁷² John Wesley, *The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption*, p. 108.

According to Jesus the method also had three aspects to it, but it was all positive.

Love God: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.¹⁷³

But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.¹⁷⁴

Love Your Neighbor: I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.¹⁷⁵

In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.¹⁷⁶

Fulfill the Law: Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.¹⁷⁷

The method in the New Testament is similar to the method used prior to the coming of Jesus, but everything is turned positive. The purpose of the Christian now is not to obey the law, but to aim at perfect love.

It was John Wesley who formulated a method to be followed if one wanted to be able to exercise the spiritual senses. He did this with the General Rules. Notice that they are not Laws. They are principles that help one to experience God and discern His will or call. The General Rules were very simple,

¹⁷³ Mark 12:30 (NRSV).

¹⁷⁴ Matthew 6:33 (NRSV).

¹⁷⁵ John 13:34 (NRSV).

¹⁷⁶ Matthew 7:12 (NRSV).

¹⁷⁷ Matthew 5:17 (NRSV).

and consisted of three main points, followed by explanation and detail.

Do No Harm: Avoid evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced.

Do Good: Do good as far as possible, as far as possible to all.

Attend the Ordinances of God: Attend all the ordinances of God, such as:

1. The public worship of God
2. The ministry of the Word either read or expounded
3. The Supper of the Lord
4. Family and private prayer
5. Searching the Scriptures
6. Fasting or abstinence

While Wesley's method may not appear to be as good as the one we have taken out of Jesus' time, it is based on Jesus' teachings.

The General Rules, for Wesley, was a guide for the Methodist Class Meetings, to which every Methodist had to belong. They were there to enable people who had little experience with church or religion. If love seems to be absent, it is because most of those early Methodists knew very little of the Christian faith. Wesley tried to help them by emphasizing that, "the only thing that counts is faith working through love."¹⁷⁸

The Goal

Having outlined the method, we must now turn to the goal of the Christian life. Having named the volitional sense as one of the spiritual senses, I will not name it as the goal. The goal can be none other than holiness. This is true for all three methods named above. In the Hebrew Scriptures, we have the holiness code, which begins with the following command: "Speak

¹⁷⁸ Galatians 5:6b (NRSV).

to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”¹⁷⁹ What holiness means is to be set apart, to be different from the world, to gain a spiritual perspective, to see with the spiritual senses what few others can see. Jeremiah predicted that this would happen:

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.¹⁸⁰

The goal does not change in the time of Jesus. Jesus places the emphasis on love in the Sermon on the Mount, where he insists that his disciples should love even the enemy.¹⁸¹ Jesus follows his command to love even the enemy with a strange statement. He says, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”¹⁸² What could this possibly mean? It helps to see the parallel statement in the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus

¹⁷⁹ Leviticus 19:2 (NRSV).

¹⁸⁰ Jeremiah 31:31-34.

¹⁸¹ Matthew 5-7, but look at Matthew 5:43-48.

¹⁸² Matthew 5:48 (NRSV).

says: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”¹⁸³ The motivating quality in everything Jesus did was compassion. Could he possibly mean perfect love?

The early Christians certainly believed that the goal was holiness or perfect love. In the time of 1 Peter, the church was facing persecution. The author of that letter writes to encourage them:

Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”¹⁸⁴

In times of persecution one needs one’s spiritual senses more than ever, and the author of 1 Peter knew that. He shared with them what the goal of their life needed to be: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”¹⁸⁵ Joy and happiness are the results, but never the goals. When Wesley talked about holiness, sanctification, or perfect love, he was talking about holiness of heart and life. He knew as did the prophets of old that without holiness no one shall see the Lord in His fullness. We may see as through a mirror dimly, but we have been given the spiritual senses to focus on holiness.

Exercising the Spiritual Senses

Upon the death of King Uzziah, Isaiah went into the Tem-

¹⁸³ Luke 6:36 (NRSV).

¹⁸⁴ 1 Peter 1:13-16 (NRSV).

¹⁸⁵ 1 Peter 2:9 (NRSV).

ple and there he experienced with his spiritual senses the holiness of God and God's call to him.¹⁸⁶ Worship can certainly be a place where we exercise our spiritual senses. Archbishop William Temple described worship as follows:

To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.¹⁸⁷

Notice that the mind does not have to shut down in worship. Both the mind and the heart operate together. Caryl Micklem even starts with the mind in one of his prayers:

Lord our God, help us to give our minds to you in our worship, so that we may listen to what you have to say to us, and know your will. Help us to give our hearts to you in our worship so that we may really want to do what you require from us. Help us to give our strength to you in our worship, so that through us your will may be done. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.¹⁸⁸

More, however, is involved than worship. Our spiritual senses can be awakened anywhere. They do not require a church or a moving worship service.

I do not mean to imply that exercising the spiritual senses apart from public worship will be easy. It requires the step of humility that leads to faith that leads to holiness. No one has described what will be required better than E. Stanley Jones, when he talks about discerning the will of God:

¹⁸⁶ Isaiah 6:1-13.

¹⁸⁷ Archbishop William Temple (1881-1944).

¹⁸⁸ Quoted from *The Complete Book of Christian Prayer* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1998), p. 342.

We believe that God will reveal His will, and hence will guide us through at least these ways: (1) Through the life and teaching of Jesus as recorded in the Scriptures. (2) Through the collective experience of the ages through the Church and society. (3) Through the counsel of good and intelligent people. (4) Through opening opportunities and needs. (5) Through the heightened moral intelligence. (6) Through conscience. (7) Through the Inner Voice.¹⁸⁹

“Sometimes He will guide us in one of these ways,” continues Jones, “more often by a conjunction of these ways. The latter is safer. But a caution is necessary. Do not expect guidance to be as explicit and plain as two and two make four.”¹⁹⁰ This is how the spiritual senses operate. They are never as clear as we might like them. That is precisely the reason why we need to be in a small group of committed Christians comparing notes on all five spiritual senses. Our purpose is to continually share with one another the insights we have discovered and to support one another on the spiritual journey.

In sharing our spiritual experiences we will be inspired. Tim Dearborn tells the following story:

One of the most insightful students to whom I’ve ever taught theology is a woman in Scotland who has been blind from birth. Her descriptions of the nature and character of God reflect profound insight and wisdom. Blinded in her natural sight, she has cultivated a spiritual sight that gives her true perception. The deepest hope of this woman is that one day she will be able to gaze upon God face to face. “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we will see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully even as I

¹⁸⁹ E. Stanley Jones, *The Way* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), p. 300.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

am fully known” (1 Cor 13:12).¹⁹¹

Some of the deepest theological insights come from those who are missing one of their physical senses. Because of the missing physical sense, they have to compensate by intensifying their other senses. Another such person was Fanny Crosby, who contributed many hymns to the Christian Faith. Her blindness actually intensified her spiritual senses. A well-intentioned minister once said to her, “I think it is a great pity that the Master, when He showered so many gifts upon you, did not give you sight.” Miss Crosby replied, “Do you know, if at birth I had been able to make one petition to my Creator, it would have been that I should be born blind.” “Why?” asked the surprised clergyman. “Because when I get to heaven,” she replied, “the first sight that shall ever gladden my eyes will be that of my Savior.” She also put that in one of her least sung hymns:

When my lifework is ended and I cross the swelling tide,
when the bright and glorious morning I shall see,
I shall know my Redeemer when I reach the other side,
and His smile will be the first to welcome me.

O the soul-thrilling rapture when I view his blessed face
and the luster of His kindly beaming eye;
how my full heart will praise Him for his mercy,
love and grace
that prepare for me a mansion in the sky.¹⁹²

Prayer is also necessary in the exercising of our spiritual senses. No one has combined prayer and the spiritual senses as Mother Teresa did. She used to pray every day, “Lord Jesus, when I encounter You today in Your unattractive disguise of the Irritating, the Exacting and the Unreasonable, may I still recognize You and say, ‘Sweet Jesus, what a privilege it is to serve

¹⁹¹ Tim Dearborn, *Taste and See: Awakening Our Spiritual Senses*, p. 55.

¹⁹² Quoted in Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990), p. 223. The hymn is “My Savior First of All.”

You today!””¹⁹³

Closing Prayer

Father, help us to worship you in spirit and in truth,
that our consciences may be quickened by your holiness,
our minds nourished by your truth,
our imaginations purified by your love,
our wills surrendered to your purpose;
and may all this be gathered up in adoration,
as we ascribe glory, praise and honour to you alone,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Quote in Tim Dearborn, *Taste and See: Awakening Our Spiritual Senses*, p. 105.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted from *The Complete Book of Christian Prayer* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1998), p. 341.

AFTERWORD

*I will never be quiet until
I can see, and feel, and taste God.*

Joseph Hall¹⁹⁵

I agree with Joseph Hall. I want to understand the spiritual senses as much as I can understand the physical senses. What I have done in this brief work is only the beginning, and I know that I need help in my spiritual journey. That's why I would like to invite your input and criticism. More than that I would like to have you name and define your understanding of the spiritual senses. This is why I'd like to share with you how to contact me.

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¹⁹⁵ Joseph Hall, *Meditations and Vows*, in *Christian Library* 4:109. C.F. Robert C. Monk, John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage (Nashville/New York: Abingdon Press, 1866), p. 71.

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