

Article

Returning to Spiritual Sense: Cruciform Power and Queer Identities in Analytic Theology

David A. C. Bennett 

Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Theology and Religion Faculty, University of Oxford, Oxford OX1 2JD, UK;
david.bennett@theology.ox.ac.uk

Abstract: In recent theological scholarship, there has been a wave of interest in the tradition of spiritual sense and marginal social identities within analytic and philosophical theology. In this article, I explore the theologies of spiritual sense in analytic theology (AT) to highlight part of the reason for the predominance of cisgender heterosexual voices in the field. Many feminist voices in AT express a common concern for a lack of integration between the mind, the body, and spiritual sense, which has enshrined the post-enlightenment cisgender heterosexual ‘man of reason’. Through an exploration of these feminist voices (Sarah Coakley and Michelle Panchuk), I argue that the field does not simply need more diverse voices but also voices of spiritual sense that undo a straight cisgender elitism. This elitism has kept the field from widely examining the anthropological questions of sexuality and gender, ethics, and theodicean dilemmas of desire and faith. By opening analytic philosophical approaches to spiritual sense, the field releases noetic control that has two consequential outcomes. Firstly, the field revalorizes pneumatology and ethics. Secondly, as a consequence of this, the field can see those who were previously unseen and heard, and, therefore, AT can develop into a sensing and thinking discipline capable of perceiving the queer or other in its midst. Spiritual sense and its priority for bodily and cruciform realities of suffering and desire can move the field from homogeneity to embracing the diverse ethical concerns of sexuality, gender, and race, and subaltern or queer subjectivities which are yet to be represented well in its midst. Using a distinctly neo-Augustinian approach, I argue that Augustine’s philosophy of the *amor dei*, with its emphasis on analytic clarity and inner spiritual sense, can redeem the eyes of AT’s heart.



Citation: Bennett, David A. C. 2023. Returning to Spiritual Sense: Cruciform Power and Queer Identities in Analytic Theology. *Religions* 14: 1445. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14121445>

Academic Editor: Derek A. Michaud

Received: 24 July 2023

Revised: 25 October 2023

Accepted: 9 November 2023

Published: 21 November 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Keywords: analytic theology; queer theology; systematic theology; suffering; theodicy; queerness; asceticism; Augustine; Origen; feminism; spiritual sense; gay Christian; sexual ethics; desire; affect

1. Introduction

In recent theological scholarship, there has been a wave of interest in spiritual sense and marginal social identities, particularly within analytic and philosophical theology. As this Special Issue observes, philosophical theology is overwhelmingly associated with cisgender heterosexual men. While we must be on guard in Christian theology against a lack of analytic discipline and a Feuerbachian projection of our human finitude onto God, Christian theology claims that God is known in the incarnation through our assumed humanity and the darkness of ostensible foolishness, weakness, and ‘queerness’.¹ In order to address the lack of queer representation in AT, I provide an account of how analytic theology (AT) can embrace the seemingly paradoxical theological practice of spiritual sense which provides what the enlightened “man of reason” lacks: the realisation that we are not isolated individuals but live in a web of “other” relations. By briefly appealing to the theological turn toward spiritual sense, I examine the relationship between analytic theology (AT) and queerness through the tradition of spiritual sense resourced by the incarnation.² I argue that the humanity which is assumed by Christ shares in our own diverse forms of alterity or queerness through the cross, where Christ identified with human alterity by being othered.³ Drawing on Augustine, I define spiritual sense in terms

of seeing through the eyes of the heart within the body of Christ the Church. Through the wisdom of the cross, the body of Christ is endowed with the intersubjective capacity to sense otherness or human queerness. Spiritual sense is, therefore, an integral part of a sound philosophical epistemology which claims to be Christian and confessional. I argue that, with the help of the theological tradition of spiritual sense, AT can develop into a sensing and thinking discipline capable of perceiving the queer or other in its midst.⁴ By briefly revisiting the recent theological turn to spiritual sense, I conclude that, without challenging superficial analytical reasoning that cannot sense otherness, AT remains blind to otherness because it is blind to an aspect of who God is in Jesus Christ.⁵

2. Embodied Knowing and the Analytic Assumption of Clarity: Spiritual Sense, Queerness, and Cruciform Power

I contend that part of the solution to AT's homogeneity lies in reconciling two strands: the liberation-based concerns of certain thinkers like Sarah Coakley, Michelle Panchuk, and Sameer Yadav, and the analyticity-based concerns of figures like William Wood or Oliver Crisp (Coakley 2008, 2013; Panchuk 2018; Yadav 2020; Wood 2021; Crisp and Rea 2009). A robust theology of spiritual sense can bridge these strands in the field through the Spirit's work of inclusion and holiness. A synthesis of inclusion and holiness provides AT with a dialectical way of interrogating and incorporating critical theologies (queer, disabled, black, feminist voices) without losing AT's priority for dogmatic rigor, clarity, and logical coherence. By testing critical theologies using analytical rigor and methods, both fields could be challenged and strengthened. Where AT would be typically nervous about critical theologies, the discipline of spiritual sense helps to perceive and value such voices. A synthesis of including and testing queer voices can help AT to see the hidden wisdom of God in darkness and otherness, as most intensely seen in the cross.⁶

Before we turn to listen to some of these voices, clarity about spiritual sense and queerness is warranted. I define spiritual sense in a similar way to James W. Jones who concludes that we mean two main things by it:

- (1) the sense of interconnection and relationship with the cosmos that is rooted in our interconnections through our bodies with the world around us that can expand into a sense of relationship with a more encompassing and transcendental reality; and (2) the proprioceptive sense of our own existence becoming more transparent to a divine source. In addition, the connection between embodiment and religious cognition is seen in the ways in which active, embodied religious practices impact cognition and understanding. (Jones 2019, p. 143)

Spiritual sense, then, is not defined as a strictly non-corporeal sense, but emerges from God's own knowledge of us as a proprioceptive sense (Jones 2019, p. 143). It also emerges from perceiving God's transcendence as we become more transparent to how God is present in the world and our neighbour, and, therefore, queerness or alterity (Perk 2023)⁷. A strong link exists between sensing queerness and sensing the revelatory significance of Jesus Christ. This interrelationship points to an inner capacity to identify with or compassionately engage what is other. I define queerness in a similar way to spiritual sense as an otherness which is known and formed intersubjectively between both God and human beings—an anthropological alterity which is yet to be uncovered but known in a proprioceptive way.⁸ When spiritual sense and queerness intersect, they provide AT with the capacity to reflect on areas such as the trauma and suffering of Christ and its relationship to that of socially marginal groups.

AT has produced some limited but important contemporary reflections on how experiences of suffering, trauma, oppression, and queerness impact religious epistemology.⁹ Michelle Panchuk, Michael Rea, and Joshua Cockayne have pointed out how experiences of rejection, oppression, and suffering often lead to the loss of faith and deconversion.¹⁰ However, I want to contend that these aspects of our humanity can, if analytic theologians receive them through a disciplined employment of the tradition of spiritual sense, represent

an essential gift for renewing AT in terms of: (i) a greater openness to prayer and sanctified reason through contemplation; and (ii) the virtue of understanding God and the social other through the darkening of our superficially rationalistic and other-blind knowledge.¹¹

Postmodern queer approaches need the challenge and critique of the strengths of the analytic approach, and yet analytic approaches often resist seeing those realities which require an apophatic turn.¹² Coakley represents a middle ground by pointing to a prayerful release of control and apophasis which produces a tested clarity, analytical rigor, and coherence.¹³ This prayerful and disciplined way to a reason-based clarity can lead to seeing queerness and testing it through reason, and, therefore, opening opportunities to restore the link between systematic and pastoral theology, but also analytic and critical theologies.¹⁴ Reforming AT with spiritual sense will lead to a mode of doing theology that is characterized by prayerful or contemplative life and the cruciform power of denying the self's more superficial sense of control and fear of difference.¹⁵

Elsewhere, feminist voices within analytic or philosophical theology share a common concern for a lack of integration between the mind, the body, and spiritual sense that enshrines the idolatrous (cisgender, heterosexual) man of reason who lacks this capacity. As Sarah Coakley corroborates:

... [To the man of reason] Jesus' vulnerability and anxiety in the face of the cross present a problem to be negotiated, not a narrative prototype to be philosophically explained. But the christological difficulties are, I believe, here sharpened even beyond what Cyril and his ilk confronted. For the sovereignly-free 'individualism' of the Enlightenment 'man of reason', is, when smuggled into christological construction, even more hard to square with the assumed notion of divinity inherited from the 'classical' tradition than the understandings of 'humanity' with which the Fathers themselves operated. Indeed, even the supposedly 'classical' view of God... shows suspicious signs of bearing the masculinist projections of writers already committed to an Enlightenment view of 'man'. He, too, is another 'individual', a very large disembodied spirit with ultimate directive power and freedom. (Coakley 2008, p. 26)

Coakley models how spiritual sense overcomes the construction of a masculinist idol inimical to the incarnate person of Christ, which cannot feel, show vulnerability, or compassionately sense otherness. As Sameer Yadav laments, "there is 'no discernible strand' of AT that contributes centrally to the current state of black or womanist theologies, more critical and revisionary feminist theologies, queer theologies, or any other radical social and political theologies" (Yadav 2020).¹⁶ William Wood, in line with Yadav, agrees that "an analytic theology of 'liberation' is possible while maintaining its central concern for clarity, cogency, and argumentative rigor".¹⁷ The question still remains as to how to achieve this goal.

In order to meet the objections of certain feminist or liberation critiques, AT must press its own assumed objectivity. As Panchuk and Rea describe:

Roughly, the concern is that analytic theorizing is committed not only to certain forms of realism (understood as the ability to express propositions that have objective truth values)... but also to the ability of the 'man of reason' to occupy an epistemic perspective approaching the God's-eye point of view—to 'see as God might see, [and to value] the abstract and universal knowledge into which the accidents of private history do not enter' (Russell 1957, p. 160). Haslanger calls this *assumed objectivity* (Haslanger 2001, p. 233). From this (imaginary) a-perspective, the privileged reasoner is tempted to assume that their act of observation has no impact on the phenomenon observed, and that the conditions to which they are accustomed are 'normal conditions'. Thus, when the man of reason observes a regularity, they are tempted to assume that these regularities point to features that flow from the nature of the thing observed rather than from

accidental features of the situation. Haslanger calls this kind of ‘naturalization’ *ideological objectification*. (Haslanger 2000; Haslanger 2017, p. 285)

By opening analytic philosophical approaches to spiritual sense and its epistemic effects, the field can release what Coakley describes as ‘noetic control’ and the effects of this kind of ideological objectification (Coakley 2013, p. 23). This control hinders AT from receiving deeper trinitarian revelation through the contemplative transformation which resists ideological idolatry and self-projection. This can be remedied by using a distinctly Augustinian incarnational approach which can help AT see beyond itself to what it is not (Lootens 2012, p. 59). William Wood has argued along similar lines that, while AT does not itself require formal acquiescence to a tradition, it has tended to attract reflection that understands doctrinal orthodoxy and analytic coherence as a form of evidence (Wood 2021, p. 153). To complement these ends and open the field up to a greater receptivity to alterity, Joshua Cockayne, David Efird, and Jack Warman offer a social epistemology of shattered faith whereby theodicy, particularly trauma and its effects, can be taken into account by AT (Cockayne et al. 2020, p. 123). They understand that the epistemology of faith involves intersubjectivity and, specifically, how “the actions of other people can cause a person to lose their faith in God” (Ibid, pp. 119–40).

While AT has these concerns, its inability to encounter LGBTQI+ people is what needs to be overcome. AT’s concern for avoiding superficial reasoning should endear it to queer subjectivities who can call forth further understanding. As Cockayne opines about LGBTQI+ trauma and the epistemology of faith:

We’re now in a position to connect the account of faith in God and union with him. . . with the question of how lesbian and gay Christians who undergo spiritually violent religious trauma can lose their faith in God. When lesbian and gay Christians are taught that their desire for same-sex relationships is sinful, they often experience a kind of psychic fragmentation whereby, though they desire such relationships, they desire not to desire them. This is a conflict in their first- and second-order desires, and a conflict that goes right to the heart of their identity. . . or there’s a dark side of corporate engagement with God which is rarely discussed by philosophers and theologians. And that’s what we’ve aimed to bring to light. . . Specifically, using religious texts and rituals, church members can shame one of their own, particularly a lesbian or gay Christian, to the extent that they come to lose their faith in God. Feeling ashamed, they no longer want the things that make up having faith in God—spending time with him, sharing their thoughts and feelings about important things with him, and wanting to have a relationship with him. They don’t want these things because they feel it’s not right, or it makes them feel bad about themselves, or they just can’t do it anymore. And so, church hurt really can cause a person’s deconversion. (Ibid, pp. 139–40)

In order for AT to see the ‘queer’ in its midst, analytic theologians need to wrestle with what lies at the heart of human knowledge of the other and, in turn, the trauma [LGBTQI+] people of faith can experience. By adding spiritual sense to its analytic values, AT can begin to see that revelation is given in a fallen finite world requiring the discipline of a theodicean maturity. This maturity requires spiritual sense in order to wrestle or struggle with corners of human experience which one does not know or comprehend, including the crucified God, Jesus Christ, who was othered and traumatized on the cross.

The embodied experience of trauma and the effects of a theodicean wrestle with one’s sexual or gender identity can paradoxically become a site of spiritual sense. When understood through Christ’s passion, queerness can open AT to a greater horizon of the reality of God which cisgender and heterosexual people do not always grasp in the same way. Without removing the central values of AT, I suggest that spiritual sense toward God and our human neighbour must buttress the discipline from a forensic dogmatism which produces other-blindness. For this reason, the absence of spiritual sense as a value

in AT can mean it fails to apply the full epistemic and anthropological implications of the incarnation, the communication between the human and divine natures of Christ, and its relationship to the inclusion of marginal social identities.

Within philosophical theology, a new burgeoning literature on embodiment, sense, and desire has appeared. Such a literature emerges from the rich vocabulary of spiritual perception in the Christian tradition.¹⁸ This budding interest in embodied realities within the Church's liturgies and worship, and the tradition of spiritual sense, appears as a door to comprehending queer and ascetical religious realities which are often covered over by the elevation of the 'strong' Christian philosopher.¹⁹ Christ's own cruciform alterity as the Son of God needs to be perceived by those concerned with a sanctified analytic capability, doctrinal acuity, or rational clarity. Christ's passion certainly is undermined by the post-enlightenment suspicion of affectivity and bodily realities. As Graham Ward argues, modernism has produced parodies of the 'redemptively erotic church' that have deprived us of the vision of union with God and those God seeks to radically include and call to holiness through the grace of the incarnation (Ward 2000, pp. 132–50). Spiritual sense could lend sight to AT through a more thoroughgoing integration of these implications of the incarnation.

A notable exception is the analytic philosopher Linda Zagzebski who has developed an 'omnisubjective' approach which prizes God's global capacity to know the experiences of human beings (Zagzebski 2013). What she terms as the 'omnisubjectivity' of God is anchored christologically in the incarnation (Zagzebski 2013, pp. 21–25). The incarnation reveals how God can know even bodily experiences which lay beyond the normative awareness of the majoritarian norm, such as queer experiences of desire, friendship, and *eros*. Such experiences are esteemed by the divine omnisubjectivity of God who apprehends our sufferings empathically through the human nature and suffering of Jesus Christ. Analytic theological approaches, then, can re-embrace the sensorial nature of God's 'omnisubjective' knowledge which invites AT to a deeper revelatory clarity. AT can develop the robust clarity of contemplation, prayer in the Spirit, and walking through suffering which an incarnational knowledge of God and a sanctified perception of the other requires.

In order for AT to free itself from the idolatrous post-enlightenment man of reason, it must not only open itself to perceiving queerness but also to God's omnisubjective care for each person which is found in the Trinitarian revelation of Jesus Christ. In order for AT to engage queerness, it needs to embrace a more integrated incarnational epistemology. It must resist a Cartesian dualistic account of rationality but embrace an Augustinian account which incorporates sensorial and bodily elements of perception, undoing body–mind dualism or sociological divides related to inclusion and holiness. Through a return to a distinctly neo-Augustinian approach, AT can reform itself through Augustine's account of the *amor dei*—the love of an embodied God—which prizes the interdependence of an analytical clarity of mind and the spiritual sense of the body and desire. Such an interdependence of the intellect and the body is vital not just for perceiving queerness but also for comprehending the revelation of God in the crucified Christ.

3. A Queer Christological Approach to Spiritual Sense through Cruciformity

At the heart of Christian theology is the crucified body of Jesus Christ. The very glory of God involves foolishness to superficial rational sense, prizing a deeper sense of reason within and beyond the initial darkness of the cross.²⁰ In a similar way, queer subjectivity looks abject to or competitive with the clear, logical, or analytically coherent. Like God's self-revelation in Christ, the queer requires a profound interrogation and, sometimes, an offense of our superficial reasoning. AT consists in largely normative voices trying to grasp at the queer. Often this has come across as facile 'allyship' which fails to understand the revelatory implications of queer desire, asceticism, embodiment, and the complexities of how LGBTQI+ people choose to engender their faith. Through a christological account of spiritual sense, AT can form itself through God's ultimate act of salvation—raising a socially abject and rejected human person from the dead. This 'alien' body is consubstantial

and hypostatically unified with the divine substance. Such divine solidarity revealed in the consubstantiality of Christ's human and divine natures is not just a bridge to rejected groups on the margins, but also calls on AT to open itself to the spiritual sense which can see God reconciling the world to himself through the cross. AT, then, necessarily involves an unknowing through the abject or from 'the darkness' of the other through which a greater cataphatic clarity can come.²¹ In philosophy, analytic approaches have been pitted against continental approaches and yet, in theology, alterity, the self, reason, and desire coalesce and are unified elements of incarnational knowledge of God and the other.

AT can lend a clarity which is often lost in continental approaches to theodicy. As Samuel Shearn has articulated in regards to theodicy and the problem of evil, AT, qualified by spiritual sense, can help to avoid the pitfalls of overly ambitious analytic approaches or the apophatic objection of sceptical theism to theodicy altogether (Shearn 2013, p. 459). AT has also sought a confessional orthodoxy which can probe deeper to a third way beyond the two extremes of overly ambitious and hyper-sceptical approaches to theodicy (McCall 2015, p. 127). AT has lacked a theology of spiritual sense which can bridge between the implications of the incarnation, the theodicean concerns of human beings, and the demands of analytic rigor.

AT does not, therefore, only need more diverse voices but also voices of spiritual sense that can undo the demands of a heterosexual or superficially rationalist elitism. By maintaining a superficial sense of reason or faith, this elitism profits from avoiding anthropological questions, ethics of embodiment and desire, and existential dilemmas of suffering and faith. As Paul Gavrilyuk and Frederick Aquino conclude:

Spiritual perception, as the tradition attests, is not straightforwardly activated by an external stimulus after the fashion of catching sight of a red traffic light, but is itself the fruit of a process of moral and spiritual change in the perceiver. So the final moral of this collection may be that, for all that academic research loves to wear the mantle of neutrality and impartial assessment, the principal and perhaps the only definitive way to evaluate the epistemic credentials of the spiritual senses tradition will be to follow the prescribed path of *askesis*, and to open oneself, in love and humility, to the possibility that what is not yet seen may finally make itself manifest, in so far as the eye of the darkened intellect can bear it. (Aquino and Gavrilyuk 2022, p. 232)

By opening analytic philosophical approaches to the tradition of spiritual sense and apophatic elements of knowing God and the otherness of marginal social identities, the field can see and value those groups which are yet to be inclusively represented in its midst. Spiritual sense and its priority for the apophatic or queer can move the field from homogeneity to embracing the ethical concerns of sexuality, gender, and race, and subaltern forms of asceticism which require deeper perception (Coakley 2022, pp. 153–76). Using a distinctly neo-Augustinian approach, I now turn to how AT can embrace the spiritual sense tradition through which God's holiness and otherness is perceived and known.

4. Augustine's Account of Spiritual Sense and Peregrine Humility: Perceiving Christ in the Pilgrim–Other

In Augustine's schema of the two cities, we see a profound grappling with liminality. We are always in via in the process of knowing God and the other. The two cities of Earth and God are defined by competing orders of love and desire. We exist as a mixed body of pilgrims who may or may not be oriented by God's love in Christ where the two cities are intermingled (Harrison 2000, pp. 192–213). Native to Augustine's two cities paradigm is the peregrine otherness or alterity of those persons who are truly oriented by God's love in Christ (Ibid, pp. 213–14). As Sarah Stewart-Kroeker opines, the love of God in Augustine reconfigures our peregrination whereby Christ, the logos-made-flesh, is present to us in a three-fold manner as: (i) the end goal of our pilgrimage; (ii) the fellow pilgrim alongside us; and (iii) the pathway under our feet (Stewart-Kroeker 2017, pp. 115–17). Christ is found in the otherness of fellow pilgrims who seem strange or unknown to our own experience

(Ibid, pp. 205–08). Christ becomes both the pilgrim–friend who comes alongside us by the Spirit but is also found in those who are radically alien, queer, or other to us (Ibid, p. 208). The peregrine humility of always being in via helps to avoid the ideological objectification of socially marginal identities. Such a peregrine humility recognizes that it is not yet possible for everything to be instantly clear. A more robust rational clarity is garnered as we progress on the inner pilgrimage of heart and mind in, with, and toward the crucified Christ.

In *City of God XIV*, Augustine equally affirms the importance of reason but not as competitive with emotion or desire, which, when transformed by Christ, can be affirmed as good through the incarnation.²² AT, then, would do well to follow Augustine’s model of integration. His model prizes the spiritual sense of the Holy Spirit who teaches the heart and mind the discipline of remaining oriented by the love of God among other misaligned orders of love. Spiritual sense involves both the internal perception of God but also the physical sense of the cruciformity of our own humility which imitates Jesus Christ.

Augustine understands that the entry of human sin into creation or the Fall has pitted the inner spiritual sense of the heart against the physical senses:

You see, you have ignored the eyes in your head, and raised the eyes in your heart. You questioned the eyes in your head, and what information did they give you? This one’s beautiful, that one’s ugly. You rejected them, turn down their evidence [*testimonium*]; you raised the eyes in your heart to the faithful slave and the faithless slave; you found the first to have an ugly body, the other a beautiful one; but you gave judgement and said, ‘what can be more beautiful than fidelity, what more misshapen than faithlessness?’²³

Literal sight and the sight of the heart are distinguished between the literal surface of an idea or object and the deeper reality of righteousness or faith. These two senses of sight in Augustine need to be reconciled because the body’s weight can pull the heart or inner person away from seeing the justice or beauty of God’s holiness within creation through Christ. I would argue that this beauty and wisdom is often hidden in queer lives analogously to how it is hidden in Christ.²⁴ As Augustine corroborates:

Our corruptible body weighs down the soul, and this earthly dwelling oppresses a mind that considers many things. At times we may in some measure scatter the clouds as our yearning draws on, and even come within earshot of that melody, so that by pressing forward we may conceive something of the house of God. Yet under the weight of our weakness we fall back into familiar things, and slide down again into our ordinary way of life.²⁵

For Augustine, this ordinary rationality must not be mistaken for the deeper analytical clarity or perspicuity of thinking. This ordinary rationality can be a way of resisting the peregrine humility which is a precondition for a sanctified rationality. AT can risk becoming analytic rationalism which simply falls back into our ordinary way of life, thereby missing the deeper wisdom of God found in and through the incarnation. As Oliver O’Donovan states, “The objective view can only be formed by one who occupies a subjective viewpoint. . . the only way to attain objectivity is to take note of more, not to take note of less or to take less note of what one first noted. . . Any fool can change his mind; the difficult thing is to enlarge it” (O’Donovan 2014, p. 56). Spiritual sense helps our rational or “normative” mental faculties to be joined with a renewed heart reoriented by the Holy Spirit to see God and the other. A subjective experience of alterity can be joined to a more objective analytical realm beyond itself through a reunifying of bodily and mentative sense through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

As Matthew Lootens describes in Augustine’s account of spiritual sense, “like the five husbands of the Samaritan woman, the soul is successively married to each of the five senses and is thus caught in an adulterous affair by forgetting her true husband, the *mens* or *intellectus*. Caught up in such a state, the soul is no longer the active agent in sensation but is compelled to sense by lust (*libido*)” (Lootens 2012, p. 67).²⁶ In Augustine’s frame, the

five senses and the inner sense of the Spirit must be kept in check by a renewed mind and the re-ordering love of God in the soul. When we are attuned to spiritual sense, we are able to perceive the other without hatred or exclusionary impulses. Queerness, conversely, cannot just be received, but must also be formed by a renewal of inner sense and the rigor and clarity of AT's intellectual discipline which seeks to marry the inner sense of the soul to the rational mind or intellect. AT is vital to avoid theologies of queerness or alterity becoming married to the lower sense of lust for power or the *libido dominandi* which seeks to blur our sight through a fallen order of love or justice. In a similar way to how Ryan Haecker exegetes Origen on spiritual sense, analytic sense resists the affective apparatus of our fallen rationality which often seeks an occlusion of bodily senses, the love of God, and scriptural exegesis (Haecker 2021, p. 124).²⁷ By baptizing an 'ordinary rationality', AT can fail to see the extraordinary gift in its neighbour and pilgrim—other where Christ is known in and through human alterity or queerness. Attending, then, to the doctrine of spiritual senses would be fecund ground for AT to help shape the pastoral and anthropological realities of the Church and include the pilgrim stranger often expelled by a quick desire for ordinary and other-blind clarity.

Augustine sees the final resting place and solution to both our limited reason and limited human identities as the restoration of the image of God through God's love in the body of the Church (Stewart-Kroecker 2017, pp. 115–17). To be in the image of God is to be a member of a mixed body, a pilgrim throng, oriented by God's love (Harrison 2000, pp. 198–202).²⁸ This body is Christ's and is animated by God's loving Spirit. Self and other are formed in this diverse body through the re-ordering power and love of God's verb, the incarnate Christ. Such an ecclesiological move will help AT to embrace forms of sense which initially seem alien or strange, but are, in fact, part of being a body graced by the Spirit of God (Chrétien 2002, p. 266). The absence of queer people in the analytic theological academy can be assuaged by this greater sense of a body which thinks and senses God together; a body of alien pilgrims which needs every part, particularly the queerest ones. Doctrinal clarity, rigor, and confessional coherence can come when we find that inner harmony of body and mind, leading to a contemplation of God and alterity which is not elitist but natural to the socially marginal. Augustine's philosophy of the *amor dei*, as AT should, prizes the sanctified clarity found through the wisdom of Christ crucified and, therefore, the holy, different, or other.

5. Conclusions: Thinking as a Body with Spiritual Sense: The Power of Queerness in Analytic Theology

Our discussion has shown how sensing and exploring queerness does not undermine the analyticity of AT but is essential to its growth through the tradition of spiritual sense. This mature analyticity can happen through a greater openness to prayer. The tradition of spiritual sense has deep resources to assist AT to break out of its limited homogeneity. These theological resources within AT can help to critically engage diverse fields of critical theory including sexuality, gender, disability, ethnically diverse, and black theologies. Prayer and contemplation can test and purge superficial reasoning. By darkening and confronting our more superficially rationalistic and other-blind knowledge, the action of God in prayer can help to free AT from its propensity toward superficial rational clarity to see and embrace the queer or other and develop a sanctified clarity.²⁹ AT can resist the superficial post-enlightenment man of reason through a return to the distinctly neo-Augustinian approach I have proffered. This constructive avenue can help AT find a more global and inclusive epistemology all the while enhancing its analyticity, rational depth, and faithfulness to confessional holiness. As Daniel Patterson argues:

By returning to Jesus' vocation that transgresses Edenic orders, we see that Jesus's life was not determined by physical ability. . . nor the direction of his mundane desires, nor the cultural climate that sought to devour him. . . Jesus is so taken over by the urgent presence of the kingdom that he could do no other than give himself entirely to it. This vocation of glorifying God as subjective bodies is never

easy, as Adam and Eve and Jesus experienced on different occasions and different gardens, but one that leads to embodied life now and in the end. (Patterson 2022, p. 100)

A closer attentiveness to the value of spiritual sense can help AT to overcome its other-blindness by being more robustly shaped by God's revelation in Christ crucified. Such a move bolsters AT's confessional strength and its capacity to dialogue with other faiths and epistemologies. By imitating Christ's own cruciform solidarity with all humanity on the cross, this 'christoform' way forward moves beyond making all truth reducible to a desire for clarity without requiring the discipline of learning spiritual sense (Jones 2007, pp. 110–14). Spiritual sense helps the eyes of AT's heart see the stranger or the queer in its midst through the deeper hidden reasoning within God's justice, truth, and beauty in Christ.

By enjoining analyticity and spiritual sense, AT can fruitfully address the pitfalls of: (a) the problem of ideological objectification which fails to perceive the queer or other; (b) the postmodernist circularity of critical theories; and (c) a lack of diverse representation in AT's midst. For these reasons, I have shown how combining the tradition of spiritual sense with AT's strengths can vitally renew and challenge not just AT but wider continental and critical approaches to theology. By opening fruitful opportunities for dialogue and critical engagement with continental and critical philosophies, AT can learn to see and love the other or alien through a deeper analytic contemplation of God. Alterity or queerness is no longer seen as an enemy to clarity or AT's values and ends, but part of the eyes of AT's heart being opened and formed by Jesus Christ crucified, the very wisdom of God.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Coakley (2015, p. 45); 1 Corinthians 18–30 (NIV), particularly: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world. For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. . . He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."
- ² While undertaking postgraduate studies in Analytic Theology (AT), I often found myself as a gay or queer student being told that I was not clear enough when theologically articulating certain aspects of the relationship between Christology and queerness. Also, my experience as an undergraduate cultural studies student who was formed in phenomenological approaches to culture left me perplexed when little deeper plumbing of continental resources was prized by AT. The incarnation is at the heart of how I now see the tradition of spiritual sense enhancing the younger field of AT: "At the heart of this set of traditions [of spiritual sense], then, is the attempt to do full epistemological justice to the radical implications of incarnation; that is what unites various strands." (Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2013, p. 18).
- ³ I define queerness here as a form of human alterity after the Fall, particularly the otherness which is generated from oppressive norms which cover over or seek to hide these forms of alterity due to social stigma, xenophobia, or a hatred of human difference. In New Testament terms, queerness is rejected through the misuse of the Law to exclude rather than to spiritually form all human beings by grace through faith. In Paul's epistles, particularly Romans and Galatians, the question of social stigma, alterity, and the inclusion of the Gentiles is right at the centre of the Gospel message. Wisdom is now defined as inevitably cruciform and other-centred. See also René Girard's *The Scapegoat* (Girard 1989, pp. 17–21).
- ⁴ Queer or queerness has three main layers: (i) denoting non-cis het LGBTQI+ identities; (ii) a resistance to the commodification of gay, trans, etc., identities or identity politics; and (iii) an academic term which refers beyond just LGBTQI+ alterity to any body or subjectivity which is covered over by a normative structure of power.
- ⁵ See Panchuk and Rea's 'Introduction' in (Panchuk and Rea 2020, pp. 1–20), which outlines the broader issues in philosophical theology and AT's relationship to marginalised social identities. I have focused this article on queerness and the tradition of spiritual sense and what it could provide to the problems outlined in the introduction. There are far broader questions which I do not have time to address but which are catered for and have been addressed in their volume. Note also Hereth and Timpe (2000).

These volumes do deal in passing with gay, trans, and other socially marginalised identities, but little with the philosophical continental aspects of queerness as a form of alterity.

- 6 Cf. Linn Marie Tonstad's critique (Chapters 2–3) of analytic theologian Sarah Coakley and queer theologian Graham Ward as too ascetical or cross-oriented in [Tonstad \(2016\)](#). See also Mark Wynn's view of a developed account of bodily, emotional, or sensory experience and our world-directedness inner senses which includes some phenomena-internal specification of the structure of intentionality that differentiates veridical appearances from illusory ones ([Wynn 2013](#), p. 112).
- 7 [Wynn \(2013, p. 112\)](#): Wynn's view of a developed account of bodily, emotional, or sensory experience and our world-directedness inner senses includes some phenomena-internal specification of the structure of intentionality that differentiates veridical appearances from illusory ones.
- 8 I distinguish divine holiness or alterity from queerness which is exclusively human. Human alterity needs the holiness of God to find rest and transformation from the fallen reality of the world. See Gertrude Perk's critique of Marcella Althaus-Reid's 'Indecent Theology' through Julian of Norwich: 'Julian's queering of such boundaries can interrogate Althaus-Reid's theology of creation, revelation, and the Trinity. In Julian's knots of coinherence-in-process, God and self entangle. The knots of mutual indwelling unfold and enfold the various agents. Furthermore, to Julian, amplifying Colossians 1.16–17, the entire created universe is contained in utero in pre-incarnate Christ before creation, whose humanity predates it (LT 53. 25–29, 58. 1–3). According to this line of logic, revelation in creation and the Incarnation flow from this original revelation of God in Himself. God unfolds Himself to embrace humanity, allowing for perpetual birth into the Godhead (LT 57.42). Althaus-Reid, in contrast, posits a cisheteronormative hierarchy of power in perichoresis (the running-between of the Trinity), imaged as a Trinitarian cisheteronormative marriage (Althaus-Reid 2000, p. 144). She also codes the Trinity as 'intrinsically male' (Althaus-Reid 2000, p. 19) ... Julian feels no need to postulate gendered violence in revelation. Instead, to her mind, *perichoresis* and creation consist of continuous birth from God, and into God. Julian's perichoresis becomes so plastic that humanity can be contained in it, while revelation demands human participation. In so doing, she seems to stand to lose her community, but actually fashions even more capacious communion with the church through the Trinity.' Cf. Sarah Coakley's feminist systematic theology where God's nature is held as beyond human gender by the Holy Spirit's non-gendered programme, corrective of masculinist idolatry and the overly dominant dyad of Father and Son which led to deficient depictions of the Trinity that shrink the dove or lead to 'new idolatries'. ([Coakley 2013](#), pp. 98–99; 208–15).
- 9 [Panchuk \(2018, p. 517\)](#): 'We can roughly characterize religious trauma as a traumatic experience perceived by the subject to be caused by the divine being, religious community, religious teaching, religious symbols, or religious practices that transforms the individual, either epistemically or not-merely-cognitively, in such a way that their capacity to participate in religious life is significantly diminished.'
- 10 ([Ibid; Cockayne et al. 2020](#)).
- 11 For a full treatment of the spiritual sense tradition, see the introduction in [Gavrilyuk and Coakley \(2013, pp. 1–19\)](#). Coakley and Gavrilyuk suggest that the spiritual sense tradition takes its origins from various classical and theological sources (Plato, Plotinus, Aristotle, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine) but was recapitulated by Karl Rahner and Hans Urs Von Balthasar, and has been resisted by many philosophers and theologians because of an association with ascetical and academic elitism, which I suggest needs to be re-evaluated via queerness. Coakley's next volume of her triadic systematic theology will involve an account of other-blind knowledge, particularly relating to blackness and racism. Contemplation will feature as a spiritual power to break superficial reason open to see the black or other in our midst.
- 12 "Introduction" in [Crisp and Rea \(2009, p. 29\)](#): 'According to Coakley, however, analytic work on the writings of mystical theologians tends to be insensitive to their apophatic character, which the continental tradition understandably celebrates. Moreover, she argues, the analytic tradition has not sufficiently appreciated the way in which the 'experiential turn' in contemporary religious epistemology is, effectively, a turn toward the exploration of stereotypically feminine ways of knowing.'
- 13 See the recent doctoral thesis which reappraises Sarah Coakley's model of asceticism through apophatic prayer in the Spirit and the need for a christocentric focus on the Markan account of Gethsemane as the foundation for our contemplative experiences in the Spirit ([Bennett 2022](#)).
- 14 Sarah Coakley on bridging systematic and pastoral theology through interdisciplinarity: 'Then, at last, it would become apparent that the interdisciplinary subtlety required of so much of the best work in theology that is girded for action requires more intelligence, verve, and imagination than a theology entirely spun out of taking thought. And if such theology is to prove its worth, it will be the first to acknowledge that its outworkings are embodied transformations, forms of prayer and witness that do not simply link to law and medicine, but have the capacity to energise and transform even them,' ('Can pastoral theology be saved? Reflections on the practice of theology inside the university and out,' accessed on 25 October 2023, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/can-systematic-theology-become-pastoral-again-and-pastoral-theol/10095582>).
- 15 Cf. Standpoint theory is appealed to here by [Panchuk \(2021\)](#) where 'some standpoints are better than others at getting at certain truths...' and the 'critical engagement of individuals thinking from multiple marginalized standpoints is better still'. ([Panchuk 2021](#)). As Pamela Sue Anderson states: "We must be able to make true claims... but our perception of what there is is potentially distorted or obscured by actual states of oppression, and these states of oppression can only be discerned by thinking from

the living of marginalized others. . . the role of standpoint, then, is to enable less particular thinking, that, ultimately seeks to transform unjust power relations,” (Anderson 2001, pp. 145–46).

Ibid, pp. 104–10. For a discussion of the gendered nature of this Enlightenment figure in his various forms, see Lloyd (1984, esp. chap. 3/5).

See also Michael Rea’s characterisation of analytic theological values: ‘P1. Write as if philosophical positions and conclusions can be adequately formulated in sentences that can be formalized and logically manipulated. P2. Prioritize precision, clarity, and logical coherence. P3. Avoid substantive (non-decorative) use of metaphor and other tropes whose semantic content outstrips their propositional content.’ Introduction to Crisp and Rea (2009, pp. 3–4). See also Trakakis (2007).

See two very different theological approaches to spiritual sense which could be contrasted for further research: Catttoi and McDaniel (2011); Aquino and Gavrilyuk (2022).

The gay Christian conversation involves different ethical convictions: [Side B] from priesthood or monastic life, (lay) celibacy, celibate friendships and partnerships, and [Side A] non-celibate, non-married but monogamous relationships, gay ‘marriages’. It is by no means homogenous, which is often wrongly assumed by straight scholars.

1 Cor. 18–30 (NIV).

See Coakley’s apophatic turn as ‘dark noetic slippage’ in 2013 (Coakley 2013, pp. 322–34, 325): ‘What is at stake here, at base, is a slow but steady assault on idolatry which only the patient practices of prayer can allow God to do in us: in the purgative kneeling before the blankness of the darkness which nonetheless dazzles, the Spirit is at work in this very noetic slippage, drawing all things into Christ and recasting our whole sense of how language for God works.’

(Augustine 1998), *City of God*, XIV, 9.

(Augustine 2014), *Sermon 159.3* (PL38.869); trans. Edmund Hill et al. *Sermons, The Works of Saint Augustine*, part III, vols. I–XI (1990–97) vol. v, p. 123.

(Augustine 2008), *Confessions* XVIII.viii.10–xi (12), trans. Henry Chadwick.

(Augustine 2000), *Exposition of the Psalms* xxx. S3. 6 (CCL 38. 467), trans. Maria Boulding et al. vol. xvi, p. 248; Colossians 2:2–3; 1 Corinthians 2:8.

(Lootens 2012, p. 67 citing Jo. Ev. Tr. XV, 19–22 (CCL 36.157–9))—*turpis cupiditas* leads to the soul’s disordered attachment to the senses and love for Christ heals the divide between ordinary sense and spiritual sense.

“... God can only be spoken of as absolutely simple [for Origen]. Yet, in its envelopment of bodies, the ‘spiritual sense’ (*aisthesis pneumatike/sensus spiritalis*) of the intellect reflects upon this divine light, and analyses the traces of scripture, even as it automates these analyses in the analytical demonstrations of systematic theology.” (Haecker 2021, p. 124).

(Harrison 2000, pp. 198–202); *City of God* XI. xv. 20.

(Haecker 2021, p. 125). For a full treatment of the spiritual sense tradition, see the introduction to Gavrilyuk and Coakley (2013, pp. 1–19). Coakley and Gavrilyuk suggest that the spiritual sense tradition takes its origins from various classical and theological sources (Plato, Plotinus, Aristotle, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine) but was recapitulated by Karl Rahner and Hans Urs Von Balthasar, and has been resisted by many philosophers and theologians because of an association with ascetical and academic elitism, which I suggest needs to be re-evaluated via queerness.

References

- Anderson, Pamela Sue. 2001. Standpoint: Its Rightful Place in a Realist Epistemology. *Journal of Philosophical Research* 26: 131–53. [CrossRef]
- Aquino, Frederick, and Paul Gavrilyuk, eds. 2022. *Perceiving Things Divine: Towards a Constructive Account of Spiritual Perception*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Augustine, Saint. 1998. *Augustine: The City of God Against the Pagans*. Translated by Robert W. Dyson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Augustine, Saint. 2000. *Expositions of the Psalms*. Translated by Maria Boulding, and John E. Rotelle. Hyde Park: New City Press.
- Augustine, Saint. 2008. *Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University of Press.
- Augustine, Saint. 2014. *The Works of Saint Augustine*. Augustinian Heritage Institute, New City Press edition. Translated by John E. Rotelle, Ray Kearney, Edmund Hill, Maria Boulding, and Roland J. Teske. Charlottesville: InteLex Corporation.
- Bennett, David. 2022. *Queering the Queer: An Exploration of How Gay Celibate Asceticism Can Renew and Inform the Role of Desire in Contemporary Anglican Theology*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK.
- Catttoi, Thomas, and June McDaniel, eds. 2011. *Perceiving the Divine through the Human Body: Mystical Sensuality*. New York: Palgrave.
- Chrétien, Jean-Louis. 2002. *Saint Augustin et les Actes de Parole*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Coakley, Sarah. 2008. *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*. Oxford: Blackwells.
- Coakley, Sarah. 2013. *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay ‘On the Trinity’*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coakley, Sarah. 2015. *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God*. London: Bloomsbury Continuum.
- Coakley, Sarah. 2022. Spiritual Perception and the Racist Gaze: Can Contemplation Shift Racism? In *Perceiving Things Divine: Towards a Constructive Account of Spiritual Perception*. Edited by Frederick D. Aquino and Paul L. Gavrilyuk. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Cockayne, Joshua, David Efird, and Jack Warman. 2020. Shattered Faith: The Social Epistemology of Deconversion by Spiritually Violent Religious Trauma. In *Voices from the Edge: Centring Marginalized Perspectives in Analytic Theology*, Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology. Edited by Michelle Panchuk and Michael Rea. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 119–40.
- Crisp, Oliver, and Michael Rea, eds. 2009. *Analytic Theology: New Essays in The Philosophy of Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gavrilyuk, Paul, and Sarah Coakley, eds. 2013. *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Girard, René. 1989. *The Scapegoat*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Haecker, Ryan. 2021. Restoring Reason: Theology of Logic in Origen of Alexandria. Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK.
- Harrison, Carol. 2000. *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity: Christian Theology in Context*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Haslanger, Sally. 2000. Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be? *Nous* 34: 31–55. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Haslanger, Sally. 2001. On Being Objective and Being Objectified. In *A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*. Edited by Loise M. Antony and Charlotte E Witt. Cambridge: Westview Press, pp. 209–53.
- Haslanger, Sally. 2017. Objectivity, Epistemic Objectification, and Oppression. In *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*. Edited by James Kidd, José Medina and Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. London: Routledge, pp. 279–90.
- Hereth, Blake, and Kevin Timpe, eds. 2000. *The Lost Sheep in Philosophy of Religion: New Perspectives on Disability, Gender, Race, and Animals*. New York: Routledge.
- Jones, Beth Felker. 2007. The Body Sanctified. In *Marks of His Wounds: Gender Politics and Bodily Resurrection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jones, James. 2019. *Living Religion: Embodiment, Theology, and the Possibility of a Spiritual Sense*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lloyd, Genevieve. 1984. *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lootens, Matthew. 2012. Augustine. In *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*. Edited by Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 56–71.
- McCall, Thomas. 2015. *An Invitation to Analytic Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press.
- O'Donovan, Oliver. 2014. *Finding and Seeking: Ethics as Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, vol. 2.
- Panchuk, Michelle, and Michael Rea, eds. 2020. *Voices from the Edge: Centering Marginalized Perspectives in Analytic Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Panchuk, Michelle. 2018. The Shattered Spiritual Self: A Philosophical Exploration of Religious Trauma. *Res Philosophica* 95: 505–30. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Panchuk, Michelle. 2021. Gender and Justice: Human and Divine Gender in Analytic Theology. In *T&T Clark Handbook of Analytic Theology*. Edited by James Arcadi and James Turner. London: T&T Clark.
- Patterson, Daniel. 2022. *Reforming a Theology of Gender: Constructive Reflections on Judith Butler and Queer Theory*. New York: Cascade.
- Perk, Godelinde Gertrude. 2023. In Loving Memory? Indecent Forgetting of the Dead in Continental Sister-Books and Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*. *Religions* 14: 922. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Russell, Bertrand. 1957. *The Problems of Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Shearn, Samuel. 2013. Moral Critique and Defence of Theodicy. *Religious Studies* 49: 439–58. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Stewart-Kroeker, Sarah. 2017. *Pilgrimage as Moral and Aesthetic Formation in Augustine's Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tonstad, Linn Marie. 2016. *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude*. New York: Routledge.
- Trakakis, Nick. 2007. Meta-Philosophy of Religion: The Analytic-Continental Divide in Philosophy of Religion. *Ars Disputandi* 7: 179–220. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Ward, Graham. 2000. *Cities of God*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Wood, William. 2021. Analytic Theology as a Spiritual Practice. In *Analytic Theology and the Academic Study of Religion, Analytic Theology and the Academic Study of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wynn, Mark. 2013. *Renewing the Senses: A Study of the Philosophy and Theology of the Spiritual Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yadav, Sameer. 2020. Toward an Analytic Theology of Liberation. In *Voices from the Edge: Centering Marginalized Perspectives in Analytic Theology*. Edited by Michelle Panchuk and Michael Rea. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Online.
- Zagzebski, Linda. 2013. *Omnisubjectivity: A Defence of a Divine Attribute. Aquinas Lecture*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.