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## THE ODOR OF THE SPIRIT AT PENTECOST

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**A**MONG the many conveniences for the textual study of Acts, provided in Professor J. H. Ropes's recent edition<sup>1</sup> are the Commentary of Ephrem Syrus and, printed opposite, quotations from the Commentary of Ephrem in a catena. Both the catena and the commentary are known to us only in Armenian, and in using the modern English or Latin rendering of them made by the late Professor F. C. Conybeare one realizes that we are two removes at least from the original Syriac.

The particular item to be discussed in this paper is fortunately so well attested that there can be no doubt of its genuine Ephremic character. In both the commentary and the catena, there are repeated references to a smell or fragrance at Pentecost. In the commentary we have three times reference made to the three external proofs of the fulfilment of the passage in Joel: (1) *vox superna et odor internus et linguae quae inter nos omnes loquuntur.* (2) *vox et odor omnesque linguae quibus iam ante vos loquimur.* (3) *et e voce quam audistis, et odore fragrantiae quem accipitis, et omnibus linguis quas loquimur et auditis.*<sup>2</sup>

In the fragments of the Catena occur no less than six references to the smell: (1) "A sweet smell exhaled from the violence of the wind

<sup>1</sup> *The Beginnings of Christianity*, edited by F. J. Foakes Jackson and K. Lake, Part. I. *The Acts of the Apostles* Vol. III. *The Text of Acts* by J. H. Ropes (1926).

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 396.

and filled all the house." (2) "And how did the wind fill the house? Evidently with a sweet odour and brilliant light." (3) "In various forms it appears, for not a wind and smell and light only, but tongues visible they saw, and these like fire, to indicate many persons through fire." (4) "The voice which came from heaven was audible to all citizens, and the smell which exhaled from the violence of the wind collected the many together." (5) "These same people whom the dread sound stirred and the fragrant smell led gathered together." (6) "And to us is witness the violent sound which resounded, and the sweet odour which exhaled, and the strange tongues we speak."<sup>3</sup>

There can be no doubt that the story of Pentecost as known to Ephrem referred to an odor. Whence came that smell into his thinking about Acts? This query is the cause of the following study.

The first suggestion that comes to our mind is that there was an addition of some sort in the underlying text. None of the variants in the passage in Greek or Latin (not even those of the Western Text with which Ephrem so often agrees) give any clue. Rendel Harris voiced this conjecture when he said, "We may suspect there was something in the text which provoked the comment about the sweet smell. Was it an assimilation to Isaiah vi. 'The house was filled with smoke,' viz. of incense?"<sup>4</sup>

It is perhaps some objection to this that the smoke at Isaiah's vision is not necessarily the smoke of incense. But should we adopt this suggestion we might then appeal to the fact that the passage from Joel quoted a bit later as fulfilled includes the words "blood and fire and vapour of smoke" (*ἀτμίδα καπνοῦ*). And the

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 397, 399. Of these six passages the second is headed Nyss-Ephrem, the third Nazianzen. "But Nazianzen is no more likely than the other Gregory to have had a reference to the odour of sanctity in his text of Acts, and we may suspect here the influence of Ephrem." So wrote Conybeare, but the present investigation makes it less certain that the idea could not have been held by the Cappadocian as well as the Syriac fathers.

<sup>4</sup> J. Rendel Harris, *Four Lectures on the Western Text of the New Testament*, London (1894), p. 38 note.

catena (unlike Codex Bezae) does not omit these words. But in Joel certainly, whatever we think of Isaiah, smoke is not the pleasant smell of incense.

If assimilation of Acts to another passage of Scripture is to be thought of, a better suggestion would be John 12 a. Again here we have a reference as in Isaiah and in Acts to the filling of the house: "The house was filled with the odor of the ointment" (τῆς ὀσμῆς τοῦ μύρου). It is the synoptic story of the anointing of Jesus. Among the additions of John's version of the incident is this sentence. It may be a vivid detail, but it may also be a symbolical item of deep meaning.

It is of course possible that without any influence from other Biblical passages the Greek and Syriac texts before Ephrem Syrus became interpolated. It is worth while, however, to see whether by any possibility the present text could give rise to the idea of an odor.

There is for example the Greek word *πνοή*. It is usually translated here 'wind.' Augustine and Cyprian have *flatus* and the Vulgate *spiritus* and certainly *πνοή* in current Greek ought to mean 'breath' rather than 'wind' (*ventus*). But what breath or breathing can be meant? Of course the winds are spoken of as having breath. One can speak of the *πνοή ἀνεμῶν* as in the Apology of Aristides V. 4 and 5, and of *ἡ πνοή τοῦ Ζεφύρου* in pagan Greek poetry. But *πνοή* alone meaning a wind or gust of wind is not common, to say the least.

Could not *πνοή* itself mean smell? On the whole this meaning seems no more far fetched than the usual one of 'wind.' Certainly secular Greek uses both verb (*πνέω*) and noun (*πνοή*) poetically of smell. The instances in the dictionaries are mostly from tragedy and comedy and are doubtless poetic. But in vernacular Greek poetic diction often becomes prose.

One could regard the *πνοῆς φερομένης* not as a genitive dependent on *ἦχος* but as a genitive absolute. In Syriac the *πνοῆς* would become the nominative (as it is in the Peshitto) and the subject of 'filled,' since it becomes the nearest antecedent. We could render our Greek: "then came suddenly a sound from heaven

while as it were a strong smell exhaled." I am not sure that *βιαίος* would be used of smells,<sup>5</sup> otherwise the translation might well have been that of Ephrem's Syriac. It will be observed that the 'exhaled' of his comments would thus go back to *φερομένης*.

It may be argued against this that Ephrem mentions both the wind and the smell, and hence cannot have gotten his smell from *πνοή*. But two possibilities exist. Perhaps his Syriac translated the difficult<sup>6</sup> *πνοή* by two nouns instead of one. It is a habit of translators to do just this with obscure or ambiguous words in their originals. Or perhaps the catena in mentioning both wind and smell is therein conflate, a combination of two commentators, or of the commentator and of the text as usually interpreted. It should be observed that the continuous commentary of Ephrem as distinct from the catena has no allusion to a wind at all, but only to the smell. Along with the voice and the tongues it is the principal phenomenon.

An alternative suggestion is that the change is due to a scribal error in the Syriac. If *πνοή* is to be understood as wind, the Old Syriac would doubtless use to translate it ܩܝܩܩ, ܘܫܘܩܩ, ܘܫܘܩܩܩ. But the word for smell in Syriac differs by but one letter: ܩܝܩܩ, ܩܝܩܩܩ. This is, for example, the word used in John 12 3. An interchange of these two words in the Syriac translation would explain the whole origin of the smell.

<sup>5</sup> It is not used of smells, for example, in Theophrastus, *De odoribus*, who enumerates the adjectives applied to smells (1 § 2) as *δριμύς, ισχυρός, μαλακός, γλυκός, βαρύς*. But *βιαίος* when once translated into another language might be appropriate to smells. Of course *βιαίος* and *φερομένης* both suit 'wind.' See H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (1910), p. 70, notes 4 and 5. Many illustrations of both verb and adjective in this connection can be found.

<sup>6</sup> I think *πνοή* in this passage may be called difficult. It is not so obvious as one commonly assumes in reading one's Greek Testament that here it means wind. I was puzzled by it before I knew of Ephrem's treatment of the passage. And I once played with the suggestion here that it meant a deep breathing. There is one other occurrence in the New Testament and in this writer at Acts 17 25 in the paronomasia *ζών και πνοήν*.

Whatever the extent to which the text of Acts offered an excuse for finding an odor at Pentecost, it is probable that Ephrem's reference is also affected by the existence of a recognized rôle for odors in the history of religion. On this subject we may turn to the comprehensive monograph of Ernst Lohmeyer, *Vom göttlichen Wohlgeruch*.<sup>7</sup> He has collected evidence for divine odors as found in the Greek and Roman mythology, in Egyptian religion, in Persian religion, in Judaism and to some extent in Christianity. The characteristic place of smell in the earlier religions he summarizes as follows:

Die Vorstellung vom göttlichen Wohlgeruch ist nicht eine besondere Anschauung einer bestimmten Religion, sondern eine allgemeine verschiedener antiken Religionen. Der Wohlgeruch ist in ihnen Merkmal göttlichen Lebens, Zeichen göttlicher Nähe, Form göttlicher Offenbarung. Die besondere Art und Gestalt, die die Vorstellung in den einzelnen Religionen gewonnen hat, wird durch die Art der Gottesanschauung bestimmt: wie in einem kleineren Bilde verdichtet sich in dem Duftsymbol das Wesen, der lebendige Hauch jeder Religiosität. Das Symbol hat in Griechenland seine menschlichste, sinnlichste und sinnvollste Deutung erfahren; in Ägypten ist es am engsten mit Opfergedanken und den Vorstellungen vom Leben nach dem Tode verbunden. In der persischen Religion ist es zu einem Bilde sittlicher Kräfte geworden.<sup>8</sup>

There are different parts played by the odor. Very general is the mention of a sweet smell at the appearance of the deity<sup>9</sup> (and conversely of an evil smell at the appearance of an unfriendly spirit or demon). Perhaps the most familiar passage is Virgil's description of the epiphany of Venus to Aeneas:

Dixit, se avertens rosea cervice refulsit,  
ambrosiaequae comae divinum vertice odorem  
spiravere.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften*. Philologisch-historische Klasse, X (1919), 9. Abhandlung.

<sup>8</sup> Lohmeyer, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. E. Pfister "Epiphany" in Pauly-Wissowa, Supplementband IV (1924), especially § 40, col. 316.

<sup>10</sup> *Aeneid*, I, 402ff. Cf. Ovid *Fast.* V, 375f. (327f.) of the goddess Flora:  
Omnia finierat; tenues secessit in auras.  
Mansit odor; posses scire fuisse deam.

Places that the god haunts<sup>11</sup> share this smell and of course the god's robes<sup>12</sup> or hair are redolent. The same ideas occur in Egyptian literature over a period of several millennia.

The aspect of divine nature presented by the odor varies. That it is a personal trait of a god, just as all men have an odor of their own, is a primitive idea. It is then simply a distinctive aroma.<sup>13</sup> This leads to the view that it is due to an anointing like the anointing of men with perfume. But of course the divine perfumes are unique, ambrosia and nectar, and of surpassing sweetness. By a natural suggestion or confusion the fragrant offering to the gods by men, whether of incense or of ointment or of oil, is regarded as commuted into the divine aroma.

The odor is a particularly satisfactory symbol for a god because of its real but refined sensory character. It is less tangible than hearing, as hearing is less tangible than seeing.<sup>14</sup> And while all three of these senses often share in the theophany, the coming and the going of the goddess, the margins of her visibility, are to be detected by smell rather than by sight.

<sup>11</sup> Plutarch, *De defectu orac.* 21, p. 421 B.

<sup>12</sup> Homeric Hymn to Demeter 231, 277 f. The same expressions occur in the gnostic *Acts of Thomas* 6. Satire and comedy, of course, follow suit, e. g. Aristophanes, *Pax* 525 f.; Lucian, *Ver. hist.* II. 5.

<sup>13</sup> At the first approach of the chorus of the Oceanids Aeschylus's Prometheus asks (lines 115 f.):

τίς ἀχώ, τίς ὀδμά προσέπτα μ' ἀφεγγής,  
θεόστυτος, ἢ βρότειος, ἢ κεκραμένη;

<sup>14</sup> There is conventional order of climax in Paul's question (1 Cor. 12 17):  
εἰ ὄλον τὸ σῶμα ὀφθαλμός, ποῦ ἢ ἀκοή; εἰ ὄλον ἀκοή, ποῦ ἢ ὀσφρησις;

Again quite recently the superior subtlety of the olfactory sense is being recognized. I quote one example. "Smell especially, perhaps the most atrophied of all the senses of man, shows signs of having once been in the main a time-dealing sense; everybody is familiar with its power in reviving the memory of the past; and I have heard a rumour of certain speculations in Germany to the effect that the human mind has missed a vast amount of interesting knowledge by trusting to sight rather than to smell as a means of finding its way through the universe." — L. P. Jacks, *Constructive Citizenship* (1928), p. 13.

Beauty, strength, moral character<sup>15</sup> may be suggested by the divine fragrance, and any of these may be thought of as transferred to man from god. In cases of such transfer the man is anointed or sprinkled.<sup>16</sup>

The immortality of the god is a natural aspect to indicate by smell. And this in turn converges with the odors of flowers that the pagans thought of as blossoming upon the graves of the departed and supplying for them the only life after death which men could know. Even some gods or heroes survived only like Narcissus in the fragrant flower. The odor of immortality converges, too, with the odors of flowers which in Greek and Latin literature mark the islands of the blest. And perhaps there is confusion between the odors of ointments or spices used for embalming the dead and the life of the dead.

The non-material character of deity in Jewish and Christian thought in some respects made the odor of deity less common there than in paganism. Neither the Old Testament nor the New signalizes the divine being's presence by odor. One who is not in either the earthquake or the fire will scarcely be touched with the hand or sensed with the nostril. But in various forms some of the motifs in other religions recur, partly no doubt due to these earlier cultures, though it is never easy to trace them to their source.

References to the fragrance of trees and flowers would be natural in any religion, but when they are used of the garden of Eden at creation or of the paradise that the saints are to enjoy hereafter, one may suspect that Jews and Christians have borrowed from pagan eschatology. The Book of Enoch, as we should expect, refers to such odors from the trees of the garden of Righteousness, or the trees that encircle God's throne, or the trees of life or of knowledge.<sup>17</sup> The summary of the story of creation in 2 Esdras

<sup>15</sup> In the Persian texts the fragrance of Ahriman is a fixed metaphor for morality, and a like fragrance has become an allegory for the living moral forces in man not only in Persian but in Mohammedan religion. Lohmeyer, pp. 22ff.

<sup>16</sup> Lohmeyer, pp. 12ff.

<sup>17</sup> Enoch 24 3ff.; 29 2; 30 2; 31 3; 32 1, 3, 4, all preserved in Greek.

mentions as created on the third day (5 44) fruit and flowers for taste and smell. As early as the Apocalypse of Peter we have like expressions in Christian writings.<sup>18</sup>

The terms of the fragrant garden appear also in more mystical or moral forms in the literature. For the former the Eleventh Ode of Solomon may be quoted:

I became like the land which blossoms and rejoices in its fruits.  
 And the Lord (was) like the sun (shining) upon the face of the land;  
 My eyes were enlightened, and my face received the dew:  
 And my nostrils had the pleasure of the pleasant odour of the Lord.  
 And He carried me into His Paradise  
 Where is the abundance of the pleasure of the Lord.<sup>19</sup>

For the apocalyptic writers, somewhat as in the Persian religion,<sup>20</sup> righteousness was the real meaning of flowers and their fragrance.<sup>21</sup> By allegorical use of the Song of Songs the metaphors of fragrance received reinforcement.<sup>22</sup>

Another influence leading to prominence of odor concepts in Jewish and Christian circles was sacrifice. While animal sacrifice was common in ancient religions, and while the odor caused by burning was thought of as affecting the gods as early as in the famous sacrifice following the Assyrian flood story,

The gods inhaled the odor  
 The gods inhaled the sweet odor  
 The gods gathered like flies above the sacrifice,<sup>23</sup>

the common Old Testament term, רִיחַ נְיִיחָה, 'the soothing odor,' which occurs in the parallel account in Genesis 8 21, and elsewhere

<sup>18</sup> *Rev. Petri*, § 5. For Methodius of Olympus and later Christian references to the odors of paradise, see Lohmeyer, *op. cit.* pp. 44ff.

<sup>19</sup> R. Harris and A. Mingana, *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon* (1920), Vol. II, pp. 266f.

<sup>20</sup> E. g. *Sacred Books of the East* XXIII, pp. 315, 343; XXIV, p. 30. A full list of Jewish and Christian references to "die himmlischen Wohlgerüche" is given in E. Bölden, *Die Verwandtschaft der Jüdisch-Christlichen mit der Parsischen Eschatologie* (1902), pp. 65-68.

<sup>21</sup> *Apoc. Bar.* 67, 6 = vi. 15, 6b Violet; cf. the Greek *Baruch Apocalypse* 12.

<sup>22</sup> References in Lohmeyer, *loc. cit.*, p. 41, note 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Gilgamesh Epic*, Tablet XI, lines 160-162.

as a fixed term,<sup>24</sup> doubtless kept alive in Judaism the connection of sacrifice with the sense of smell. Even more is this true of the Greek translation *ὄσμη εὐωδίας* (whence also the English 'sweet savor') where both words of the formula refer to the olfactory sense. It is the technical term in the LXX and in other Jewish Greek, and it is used metaphorically when moral equivalents for burnt sacrifices are referred to. Thus the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* says that the angels of the presence of the Lord offer to the Lord 'a reasonable sweet savor and a bloodless offering,'<sup>25</sup> and the Pauline letters use *ὄσμη εὐωδίας* of the gift of the Philippians conveyed by Epaphroditus (Phil. 4 18) or of the offering of Christ in death (Eph. 5 2). The use of *θυσία* or *προσφορά* connects these passages plainly with the sacrificial *terminus technicus*. Probably the same connection exists in 2 Corinthians 2 14 ff. where Paul says: "Thanks be unto God, who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ and maketh manifest through us the savor (*τὴν ὄσμήν*) of his knowledge in every place. For we are a sweet savor (*εὐωδία*) of Christ unto God in them that are saved, and in them that perish; to the one a savor (*ὄσμη*) from death unto death; to the other a savor (*ὄσμη*) from life unto life." The Greek terms are here, but the remarkably similar expression in Rabbinic sources about the law as both a balm of life to the obedient and a balm of death to the disobedient,<sup>26</sup> indicates that other fields of ideas have influenced Paul's expression here.

Above all, the incense offerings of Judaism emphasized the

<sup>24</sup> The other instances are mostly assigned to the law code of P. Cf. 1 Sam. 26 19: "If it be Yahweh that hath stirred thee up against me, let him smell an offering." Lev. 26 31 (H): 'I will not smell your soothing odors.' See the interesting discussion of the meaning conveyed by the term in G. B. Gray, *Sacrifice in the O.T.: its Theory and Practice* (1925), pp. 76ff., 82ff.

<sup>25</sup> Levi 3 6: *ὄσμήν εὐωδίας λογικὴν καὶ ἀνάιμακτον προσφοράν*. Cf. Paul, Rom. 12 1: *θυσίαν ζῶσαν . . . τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν*; Athenagoras *Supplicatio* 13 2: *ἀνάιμακτον θυσίαν [καὶ] τὴν λογικὴν προσάγειν λατρείαν*.

<sup>26</sup> Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum N.T.*, vol. III (1926), *ad loc.*

odor both of the literal cultus and of its metaphorical application. Not unknown to other religions, like the Egyptian, and the Greek, and the Roman,<sup>27</sup> it held a place of increasing importance in the developed Jewish ritual. Certain passages in Ecclesiasticus seem to reflect this aspect, though not without the admixture of the odors of trees and flowers as living in gardens<sup>28</sup> and their aromatic products as used in ointment and perfume.<sup>29</sup> When the incense offerings like the sacrifices are spiritualized they become 'the prayers of the saints.'<sup>30</sup> And the Christian apologists, in their usual depreciation of all, even the Jewish, ritual, assert that God is in no need of such things, "blood or the sweet savor from flowers or incense, being himself the perfect sweet savor without need and without lack,"<sup>31</sup> "for he is always full of all good things, having in himself all sweet savor (i. e. ὄσμῃ εὐωδίας) and all exhalations of fragrant things."<sup>32</sup> In such language non-pagan writers seem to approach the quite anthropomorphic pagan view of an odor of deity. Probably it is here merely the passing figure of a bold polemic. But from other angles also Jewish and Christian writers come near attributing odor to deity itself.

It is of course clear that the smoke or incense that fills the shrine is due to human initiative, but an easy step of imagination

<sup>27</sup> See the excellent article "Rauchopfer" containing much material relevant to our discussion, by E. Pfister in Pauly-Wissowa, Band IA (1914), coll. 267ff.

<sup>28</sup> The association of paradisiacal fragrance with the odors of sacrifice occurs also in Egyptian literature (incense) and probably in Greek, e. g. Pindar, *fragm.* 95 Boeckh = 106; 107 Bergk.

<sup>29</sup> Sir. 24 15; 39 13f. Greek; neither passage yet discovered in Hebrew. The first is throughout a simile of Wisdom, giving forth odors, which among others are like the fume of frankincense in the tabernacle (ὡς λιβάνου ἀτμῆς ἐν σκηνῇ). The combination of temple incense and of fragrant trees was in the second passage and doubtless elsewhere facilitated by the identity in Greek and the similarity in Hebrew of the words for frankincense and Mount Lebanon.

<sup>30</sup> Rev. 5 8; 8 3, 4. Cf. Psalm 140 2: κατευθυνθήτω ἡ προσευχή μου ὡς θυμίαμα ἐνώπιόν σου.

<sup>31</sup> Athenagoras, *Supplicatio* 13 1.

<sup>32</sup> Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* IV. 14, 3.

could attribute it to God himself.<sup>33</sup> The cloud at least is a sign of his presence, in the ark or in the temple. Could Yahweh not claim also the smoke of altar or table of incense? A striking passage in Josephus<sup>34</sup> seems to say so. When Solómon dedicated the temple and perfumed it with an infinite quantity of incense, "all the air round about was filled and the sweetness reached even those who happened to be farthest away and made known the arrival of God and his establishment in the place newly built and consecrated to him."

From a much more philosophic angle the gnostic and other early Christian speculation attained the concept of divine odor, though here we may suspect the reëmergence of primitive Gentile conceptions. In theosophical speculation the quality of divinity required some kind of pervasive metaphor, whether in distinction from matter or as a common characteristic of the several divine persons. For the former may be cited the repeated description in Hippolytus of the Sethians who bridged their dualism of light and darkness by the third element, the spirit. But the spirit is not like "a current of wind or a certain gentle breeze which may be felt, but just as if some fragrance (*ὄσμη*) of ointment or incense made out of a refined mixture,—a power diffusing itself by some impulse of fragrance which is inconceivable and superior to what one can express . . . And the fragrance of the spirit (*ἡ εὐωδία τοῦ πνεύματος*) is wafted onwards (*φέρεται*), occupying an intermediate position, and proceeds forth, just as is diffused (*φέρεται*) the odour of incense offerings (laid) in fire."<sup>35</sup> For the

<sup>33</sup> Cf. above p. 242. Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 80, explains the LXX *ὄσμη εὐωδίας* similarly: "the sweet smell of the sacrifice is not regarded as placating the anger of God at sin, but as a symbol of the pleasure of God in the due discharge of his service—a view which is represented by the paraphrase of the Targum which renders 'an offering which is received with pleasure before God.' Cf. Theod. *ὄσμη εὐαρστησεως*."

<sup>34</sup> *Antiquities* VIII. 4, 1, § 101, 102.

<sup>35</sup> Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium*, X, 11, 1-3 (edit. Wendland, p. 270); v. 19, 3f. (p. 116f.) is almost verbatim the same. I quote the English translation of MacMahon from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Buffalo (1886), Vol. V, p. 142.

latter we may refer to Basilides as described by the same opponent. I quote, without attempting to explain, one sample: 'Sonship' left the spirit. "not altogether deserted or separated from the Sonship; nay, (far from it,) for it is just as when a most fragrant ointment is put into a vessel, that even though the vessel be emptied of it with ever so much care, nevertheless some odour of the ointment still remains, and is left behind even after the ointment is separated from the vessel; and the vessel retains an odour of ointment, though it contain not the ointment itself. So the Holy Spirit has continued without any share in the Sonship, and separated from it, and has in itself, similarly with ointment, its own power, a savour of Sonship. And this is what has been declared: 'As the ointment upon the head which descended to the beard of Aaron.' This is the savour from the Holy Spirit borne down from above, etc."<sup>36</sup>

In both instances, it should be noted, the fragrance is of the Spirit. This brings us back towards the odor at Pentecost. But the idea is not the exclusive property of the heretics. The Mandaeen religion, which offers so many points of interesting comparison for New Testament problems, is one of the most profuse of the heresies in its use of odors in connection with divine beings. Since, however, the Spirit is for the Mandaeans not good but maleficent probably it has no fragrance in their records. Among orthodox writers the odor of the spirit occurs primarily<sup>37</sup> in two connections—at baptism and at martyrdom. The latter is familiarly known as the 'odor of sanctity' and is still a subject of belief in the Roman Catholic church. But it has a long ancestry.<sup>38</sup> Early occurrences

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 22, 13ff. (edit. Wendland, p. 199f.): Eng. trans. VII, 10, 105.

<sup>37</sup> One instance in Eusebius, though mentioned at the time of martyrdom, seems to be a general description of the life of Julian of Cappadocia, who is described as *πνέων αὐτοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος* (*De martyr. Palaest.* XI, 27, ed. Schwartz, p. 945). The longer Greek form (also original) reads *πνέων εὐωδίας ἁγίου πνεύματος* and similarly the Syriac *History of the Martyrs of Palestine* (ed. and trans. by W. Cureton, London (1861), p. 44).

<sup>38</sup> E. A. Stückelberg, "Der Geruch der Heiligkeit," *Schweizer Archiv für Volkskunde*, XXII (1919), pp. 203ff. (cited by Lohmeyer).

are the martyrdoms by fire quoted by Eusebius,—that of Polycarp,<sup>39</sup> and that of the martyrs at Lyons.<sup>40</sup> The full history of the conception we need not here consider. No doubt the use of spices at burial played some part in the idea.<sup>41</sup> Then God himself supernaturally bestows the same preservative that human ministrations normally supply. Another line of filiation may go back to the pre-Christian notions of the odors that mark survival of death. The saints are immortal and their immortality is conveyed to the nostrils of their friends at death or even earlier. Something of both notions is found in the saying of Ignatius that “the Lord received ointment upon his head, that he might breathe forth immortality to his church.”<sup>42</sup>

Baptism in Christianity lays stress on the Holy Spirit. But it also goes back to the use of fragrant oil. It is a chrism, and the odors of its ancestry are revived in the Christian idea of anointing

<sup>39</sup> *H. E.* IV., 15, 37 (ed. Schwartz, *Griech. christl. Schriftst.* IX, p. 348): *καὶ γὰρ εὐωδίας τσαύτης ἀντελαβόμεθα, ὡς λιβανωτοῦ πνέοντος ἢ ἄλλου τινοῦ τῶν τιμίων ἀρωμάτων*, also extant separately in Greek and Latin MSS. = *Mart. Polyc.* 15. Fifty years ago Harnack made this passage the basis of an illuminating discussion of the origin and meaning of the odor of Christ in the saints (*Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, II (1878), pp. 291–296). He connects it partly with the idea of the death of the martyr as an atoning sacrifice like the Old Testament *ὁσμὴ εὐωδίας*, partly with the idea of immortality.

<sup>40</sup> *H. E.* V, 1, 35 (*ibid.*, p. 416): *τὴν εὐωδίαν ὀδωδότες ἅμα τὴν χριστοῦ, ὥστε ἐνίοις δόξαι καὶ μύρω κοσμικῶ κεχρίσθαι αὐτοῦς.*

<sup>41</sup> See the passage just quoted. It does not seem to me likely that Lucian in *Peregrin. Proteus* 36 is parodying the Christian idea. He represents Proteus as scattering incense on the blazing pyre before he himself leaped into the flames. Attention may however be called to the Gospel stories of the anointing of Jesus not only after but before the crucifixion, Matt. 62 12 = Mark. 14 8 = John 12 7 and esp. vs. 3: *ἡ δὲ οἰκία ἐπληρώθη ἐκ τῆς ὁσμῆς τοῦ μύρου*. As with the incense at the temple, the offerings of man merge into the sensible expression of deity.

<sup>42</sup> *Eph.* XVII, 1: *ἵνα πνέῃ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀφθαρσίαν*. The context and contrast (*δυσωδίαν τῆς διδασκαλίας τοῦ ἀρχοντος τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου*) shows that the language is figurative. Ignatius does not need to explain to his readers the equivalence of ointment to immortality any more than he does the Pauline metaphor of the church as the head of Christ.

with the spirit. Indeed, before long the literal physical odors were applied, and besides water, ointment came into use.<sup>43</sup> Of course baptism as well as martyrdom was an earnest of immortality. And so Cyril of Jerusalem could address catechumens with the words: ἡδὴ μακαριότητος ὁσμὴ πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ᾧ φωτιζόμενοι· ἡδὴ τὰ νοητὰ ἄνθη συλλέγετε πρὸς πλοκὴν ἐπουρανίων στεφάνων· ἡδὴ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου ἔπνευσεν ἡ εὐωδία.<sup>44</sup>

Of the part played in medieval Christianity by the symbolism of odors I must not now speak.<sup>45</sup> Let us return to the story of Pentecost and see what suggestions our long digressions into wide fields of religious history have brought us.

It may be observed in the first place that our various texts, at least those in Greek, confirm the view that the wording of our Greek Acts readily lent itself to interpretation as "a strong odor was wafted abroad and it filled the whole house where they were sitting." Whenever the subject of odors appears in Greek

<sup>43</sup> On the separate sacrament of unction and the significance attached to the odors of the oil by the early gnostics see Lohmeyer, *op. cit.*, p. 41 note 2, and the very full treatment of "Ölsakrament" in W. Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (1907), pp. 297-305. The oil is oil of the tree of life. It gives to believers the heavenly odor that keeps demons away. The Clementine *Recognitions* I, 45 speak of its intended effect upon believers *ut et ipsorum lux luceat et spiritu sancto repleti immortalitate donentur*. The Marcosians called it *τύπον τῆς ὑπὲρ τὰ ὄλα εὐωδίας* (Irenaeus, I, 21, 5).

There is also some evidence of a use of incense at baptism in Moses bar Kepha. See R. A. Aytoun in *Expositor*, Oct. 1911, p. 343.

<sup>44</sup> Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 33, 322.

<sup>45</sup> There are numerous references to odors in mystic experiences in the records of the Dominican nuns in Switzerland, in Jacob Boehme, George Fox, etc. See for example: H. Wilms, *Das Beten der Mystikerinnen* (1916), pp. 148f.; Rufus M. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1914), p. 223. I content myself with one brief quotation from *The Book of Divine Consolation of the Blessed Angela of Foligno*: translated from the Italian by Mary G. Steegmann (London 1909), p. 168. After her first vision of the Lord she says: "From this time forth I was often aware of indescribable odours: but these and other things can I not explain, so great was the sweetness and joy which I did feel in them." Reference may also be made to a short statement by the present writer in *The Friend* (London), Vol. LXVIII (1928), pp. 604ff., on "Creation's Other Smell".

writing, then the verb πνέω is used naturally and easily. I limit my examples to odors connected with religion. Even to his invented goddess, Theoria, Aristophanes cries

οἶον δὲ πνεῖς, ὡς ἡδὺ κατὰ τῆς καρδίας,  
γλυκύτατον, ὥσπερ ἀστρατείας καὶ μύρου.<sup>46</sup>

The mouth of the oracle 'breathes forth' most sweetly,<sup>47</sup> so does the body of Alexander.<sup>48</sup> The bathing place of the bride Hera still 'breathes up' a fragrance.<sup>49</sup> Of the home of the blest we read that it 'breathes out' a soft and gentle aura,<sup>50</sup> or that a certain wonderful aura 'breathes about' those who approach it, sweet and fragrant, such as the historian Herodotus says blows from Araby the blest.<sup>51</sup> The trees which Enoch saw 'breathe' of the spices frankincense and myrrh.<sup>52</sup> When deity confers grace or beauty or health on mortals the same verb is used.<sup>53</sup> When Christ is anointed with ointment it is that he may 'breathe' forth incorruption on the church.<sup>54</sup> And at the martyrdom of Polycarp the witness felt as though frankincense or some other of the precious spices was 'breathing' forth.<sup>55</sup>

The noun πνοή or πνοίη appears, though less frequently, in the same connections. Lucian in his *De dea Syra* 30 speaks of

<sup>46</sup> Aristophanes, *Pax* 525f.

<sup>47</sup> Plutarch, *De defectu orac.* 21, p. 421B: ἡδιστον ἀποπνέοντος.

<sup>48</sup> Plutarch, *vit. Alex.* 4: τοῦ χρωτὸς ἡδιστον ἀπέπνει. See the whole discussion of the origin of Alexander's fragrance.

<sup>49</sup> Aelian, *Nat. animal.* 12, 30 ἐς νῦν ὁ χῶρος εὐωδῖαν ἀναπνεῖ.

<sup>50</sup> Plutarch, *De sera num. vind.* 22, p. 565F: ἐξέπνει δὲ μαλακὴν καὶ πρᾶειαν αὐραν ὁσμὰς ἀναφέρουσιν ἡδονῆς τε θαυμασίας καὶ κράσιν.

<sup>51</sup> Lucian, *Ver. hist.* 11, 5: θαυμαστή τις αὐρα περιέπνευσεν ἡμᾶς, ἡδέια καὶ εὐώδης κτλ.

<sup>52</sup> Enoch, *Greek Trans.*, 29, 2: δένδρα πνέοντα ἀρωμάτων.

<sup>53</sup> Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* 238: ἡδὺ καταπνείουσα. *Hymn. orph.* 84, 8: ὄλβον ἐπνείουσα καὶ ἠπιόχειρον ὑγίειαν. (*Hymn to Hestia*, cited by Lohmeyer p. 14).

<sup>54</sup> Ignatius, *Eph.* XVII, 1. For πνέω ἀφθαρσίαν cf. Irenaeus III, 11, 8 (speaking of the gospels): πανταχόθεν πνέοντας τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν. Cf. references in note 56.

<sup>55</sup> Eus., *loc. cit.* in note 39.

the ambrosial odor that greets from afar one that approaches the temple with its good breath (*πνοίνην*), a breath that clings to the garments as one departs. For Irenaeus *ὀδμὴ ἀφθαρσίας* and *πνοὴ ἀφθαρσίας* are interchangeable.<sup>56</sup> For the Spirit (*πνεῦμα*)<sup>57</sup> certainly the cognate *πνέω* and *πνοή* might well have seemed to an ancient writer appropriate.<sup>58</sup>

Of the verb *φέρεσθαι* also our examination of divine odors in Greek sources has given some examples. Hippolytus at least uses it repeatedly in his description of the odors, whether of the Spirit or of incense, in the systems of Basilides or the Sethians.<sup>59</sup> We have already quoted from the *Revelatio Petri* 5 *τοσοῦτον δὲ ἦν τὸ ἄνθος ὡς καὶ ἐφ' ἡμᾶς ἐκείθεν φέρεσθαι*.

Characteristic, too, of references to smell,—more characteristic than of references to sounds, as it is usually taken,—is the phrase in Acts 2 3, that it 'filled all the house.' Beside John 12 3, 'the house was filled with the odor of the ointment,' could be cited passages from Egyptian inscriptions as, '(the palace) was overflowed with the odor of the god,'<sup>60</sup> and from elsewhere.

The association of smell with the other two senses of sight and sound, as emphasized by Ephrem in the account of Pentecost, also occurs in other sources, indeed occurs so often of epiphanies that Lohmeyer can say: "Daraus wird die Einfügung des Wohlgeruches 'begreiflich'."<sup>61</sup> His examples are partly Greek and

<sup>56</sup> Iren. I, 4, 1 and I, 6, 1. So *ἐκπνοή* Eur. *Hipp.* 1438.

<sup>57</sup> Note the use of *πνεῦμα* itself nearly in this sense in Euripides' *Hipp.* 1391.

<sup>58</sup> And since the spirit is thought of as inspiring the prophets, Origen (*Philocalia*, ed. J. A. Robinson, p. 34) and Eusebius (*Dem. Evan. VIII. Proem.* 11; *G. C. S.* XXIII, p. 351 ed. Heikel) speak of the odor that breathes from the prophecies. So Hippolytus, *Comm. in Cant.* ed. Bonwetsch I, 366 calls *τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον* of 2 Pet. 1 19 'the fragrant word.'

<sup>59</sup> *Refutatio*, ed. P. Wendland, pp. 117, 7, 8; 200, 6; 270, 18, 19.

<sup>60</sup> Inscription on wall of temple at Deir-el-Bahari, cited by Lohmeyer, *loc. cit.*, p. 15 from Naville.

<sup>61</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 43, note 4. Harnack, *loc. cit.*, p. 295f. note, knew of the tradition of an odor at Pentecost from Lagarde's miscalled *διδαχὴ Ἀδδαίου* and makes this comment: "Man hat also in späterer Zeit den ἴσχος ὡσπερ

partly Egyptian, and he finds echoes of this tripartite division for the former in Paul (1 Cor. 12 17): *εἰ ὄλον τὸ σῶμα ὀφθαλμός, ποῦ ἢ ἀκοή; εἰ ὄλον ἀκοή, ποῦ ἢ ὄσφρησις;*<sup>62</sup> for the latter in a record of Memphitic theology which says "If the eyes see, the ears hear, the nose breathes the air, only so they bring it to the heart."<sup>63</sup> Evidently in several cultures popular psychology required the witness of three senses for the perception of deity.<sup>64</sup>

But aside from all verbal suggestions in the text, the odor at Pentecost has doubtless some connection with the widespread symbolism of odors in religion to which we have referred. If, as is possible, it appeared first or exclusively in the Syriac church it might be attributed to certain eastern cultural contacts. But which line of descent represents its real ancestry is uncertain. It would seem to be the old or revived motif of the mark of an epiphany and to serve the usual purpose of facilitating human recognition of the divine presence. The notion of anointing, with its connotations of fragrance, may also be responsible for it here.

It is not impossible that it owes its origin in part to Ephrem himself. There are appearances of the idea in Syriac sources of later date. In fact the following two passages were mentioned in a brief note by Eb. Nestle<sup>65</sup> in 1903 without his knowing anything of the evidence from Ephrem Syrus on Acts although this had been published previously by Rendel Harris. The passages are as follows:

The *Doctrine of Addai*, (or the *Doctrine of the Apostles*): And when Simon Cephas had spoken these things to his fellow Apostles, and

*φερομένης πνοῆς βιαίας*, welcher das ganze Haus erfüllte, in eine *ὄσμη ἡδέια* umdeuten zu müssen gemeint. So notwendig erschien bereits der 'Wohlgeruch' als begleitendes Zeichen einer überirdischen Manifestation."

<sup>62</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 5, note 1.

<sup>63</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 15 note 2, quoting from Erman, "Ein Denkmal memphitischer Theologie," *Sitzungsberichte d. Berl. Akad.*, phil.-hist. Klasse XLIII (1911), p. 939. For a Christian use of the triad see Origen, *Philocalia*, ed. J. A. Robinson (Cambridge, 1803), p. 34.

<sup>64</sup> There are many cases also of light and odor without sound.

<sup>65</sup> *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* IV, 272f., cf. VII (1906), 95.

reminded them, a voice of mystery was heard by them and a sweet odour which is strange to the world was diffused on them, and tongues of fire, between the voice and the odour, came down to them from heaven, and alighted and sat upon every one of them, and according to the tongue which each of them had received he prepared himself to go to that country in which that tongue was spoken.<sup>66</sup>

*The Book of the Bee* by Salomon of Basra: At the third hour of the holy Sunday of Pentecost, a mighty sound was heard, so that all men were terrified and marvelled at the mightiness of the sound; and the chamber was filled with an ineffably strong light. And there appeared over the head of each one of them (something) in the form of tongues of fire, and there breathed forth from thence a sweet odour which surpassed all aromas in the world.<sup>67</sup>

Further reasons for attributing the reading to Ephrem or at least to the tradition of the Syriac Church occur in some other

<sup>66</sup> English translation from the *Doctrine of the Apostles* in W. Cureton, *Ancient Syriac Documents* (London 1864), p. 25. The Syriac text is given *ibid.*, p. 25. The basis was two British Museum MSS. and the following named edition. A. P. Lagarde, *Reliquiae iuris ecclesiastici antiquissimae*, XIII, (Leipzig—printed in Vienna—1856), p. 90 gives his own Greek translation of the same passage. This is quoted by Nestle, *loc. cit.*, and others as doctrine of Addai because the heading of the whole and sub-heading of this first part were given as ἡ διδασχὴ Ἀδδαίου.

<sup>67</sup> English translation from *The Book of the Bee*, edited by Ernest A. Wallis Budge, (*Anecdota Oxoniensa*, Semitic Series, Vol. I. Part. II). Oxford, 1886, Chap. 47, p. 103; Syriac text, p. 210. A Latin translation of Syriac and Arabic text in J. M. Schoenfelder *Salomonis episcopi Bassorensis liber apis* (Bamberg, 1866), p. 76. The author's *floruit* was about 1222 A. D.

As another Syriac writer continuing the traditional exegetical tradition after Ephrem of the odor at Pentecost perhaps we may add Isho'dad of Merv who lived about 850 A.D. In his commentary on this pericope of Acts according to the English translation of Mrs. M. D. Gibson (*Horae Semiticae* X (1913), p. 7) he said: "Suddenly the sound of heavy thunder came and from the force of the sound, the inhabitants of Jerusalem were terrified, and there was seen above that upper room fire that was formed in the likeness of a burning ball; and a vapour of smoke and a soft wind blowing in the midst of the upper room and around it; and from that ardent flame there were distributed gifts in the form of tongues of fire." But in the original Syriac (p. 10\*) the adjective here translated 'soft' is ܦܚܘܢܐ which can hardly stand for βιαίος, but primarily and perhaps more commonly means 'sweet' or 'fragrant.' This passage illustrates how easily in the process of translation an odor can appear or can vanish from the text.

passages which, so far as I know, have not been cited in this connection. The important work, the *Diatessaron* of Tatian; at least in the form in which Ephrem commented on it, contained at the baptism of Jesus beside the voice from heaven, not only the light at Jordan, which reminds us of Justin Martyr, but also perhaps a statement that the odor of perfumes was wafted. Thus the familiar process of conforming the baptism of Jesus and Christian baptism has led to the recurrence of the same triple evidences of the senses at the Jordan as at Pentecost. The passage as quoted and translated from the commentary of Isho'dad of Merv on Matthew 3 15-17 by Mrs. Lewis reads:

And straightway, as the *Diatessaron* testifies, a great light shone, and the Jordan was surrounded by white clouds, and the Jordan stood still quietly from its course, its waters not being troubled and a scent of perfumes was wafted thence.<sup>68</sup>

Still further the harmonization of similar scenes carried the harmonist Tatian or his commentator Ephrem. The transfiguration scene is notoriously like the baptism scene, and Ephrem's comment reads, in the Latin translation of the Armenian:

Quum Moyses et Elias apparuisset, dixit Simon: *Si vis, Domine, faciamus hic tria tabernacula*. Quod dixit, quia illum montem a vexationibus Scribarum vacuum et quietum vidit et hoc ei placuit. Fragens in nares eius suavis odor regni pervenit et deliciis eum affect.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup> *Horae Semiticae* V (Cambridge, 1911), p. 27. (Syriac text, *ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 46). The marginal reference is to Gannat Busanne, p. 55. The same passage had been detected as Ephrem's and quoted in a slightly different wording in 1895 by J. R. Harris, *Fragments of the Commentary of Ephrem Syrus upon the Diatessaron* (1895), p. 43, and simultaneously by H. Goussen, *Studia Theologica*, fasc. I. "Pauca fragmenta genuina diatessaronica," p. 63.

The odor may be Isho'dad's or Tatian's rather than Ephrem's; The Armenian translation of Ephrem's commentary (Möisinger, p. 43; see note 69) has the light and the voice at baptism but not the odor.

<sup>69</sup> The translation is that of J. B. Aucher emended by G. Möisinger *Evangelii concordantis expositio facta a sancto Ephraemo doctore Syro* (Venice, 1876), p. 156. It is strange that Rendel Harris, though he quotes all other parts of this passage in his *Fragments of the Commentary of Ephrem Syrus*

Finally I may mention two further instances of an odor of the spirit in Syriac writers, for both of which I am indebted to my friend, Dr. C. H. Kraeling. One is from Ephrem again, but this time on still earlier analogies for Pentecost, the anointing of Saul and David:

In unctione Saulis regis, quanto suavior fuit odor olei tanto gravior fuit odor cordis . . . In unctione Davidis, fratres, descendit Spiritus in cor eius et grato implevit odore. Qualis olei talis cordis suavitas. Habitavit in eo spiritus psalmosque dictavit.<sup>70</sup>

The other is from Ephrem's predecessor, Aphraates, in a less definite context,—a comment on Isaiah 41 17—19, with a reference to 2 Cor. 2 14. The Latin column reads:

De infimis hominibus egressum est verbum et doctrina Spiritus, cuius fragrantia ut cupressi pulcherrimi suavis est.<sup>71</sup>

I cannot suppose I have said the last word on the odor of the Spirit at Pentecost. My object has been to state the problem and to get thereby the advice and help of my colleagues. I hope that they will follow the scent—if I may use the figure—and let us know what solution for the question seems the best, or even what further materials for its solution come to their attention.

*upon the Diatessaron* (1895), p. 63, and all the preceding passage on p. 43, neither there nor in the earlier work in which the odor at Pentecost is referred to (see note 4) calls attention to the parallelism between the three passages. The connection did not escape the late H. Goussen as his interesting notes (*loc. cit.*) testify.

<sup>70</sup> T. J. Lamy, *Sancti Ephraem Syri hymni et sermones*, Hymni in Festum Epiphaniae III, 16 (*Opera* Vol. I. Mechlin, 1882), col. 35, 36, Stanzas 15, 16. Cf. Stanza 21. The *unctio externa* and *interna* of Christian baptismal ordinals are under discussion.

<sup>71</sup> Aphraates, *Demonstratio* XX, 14, in *Patrologia Syriaca* Part. I, Vol. I, edit. by R. Graffin (Paris, 1894), col. 915f.