

The Patristic Roots of John Smith's "True Way or Method of Attaining to Divine Knowledge"

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Abstract

The literature on the Cambridge Platonists abounds with references to Neoplatonism and the Alexandrian Fathers on general themes of philosophical and theological methodology. The specific theme of the spiritual senses of the soul has received scant attention however, to the detriment of our understanding of their place in this important tradition of Christian speculation. Thus, while much attention has been paid to the clear influence of Plotinus and the Florentine Academy, far less has been given to important theological figures that also form a vital part of the tradition the Cambridge Platonists find irresistible. Similarly, scholarship on the spiritual senses has tended to ignore early modern Protestant developments in this tradition focusing instead on patristic, medieval, and later modern figures. In response to these oversights, the present chapter provides a close reading and analysis of the reception and modification of Origen of Alexandria's (185-252) doctrine of the spiritual senses in the "Discourse on the True Way or Method of Attaining to Divine Knowledge" by the Cambridge Platonist, John Smith (1618-1652). Although Smith accepted much of the doctrine as he found it in Origen his allegiance to modern notions of methodology, derived especially from Descartes, as well as his Protestantism, made taking the doctrine on authority or antiquity alone unacceptable. Smith therefore offered his own case for the spiritual senses, at once intentionally mimicking the Alexandrian's interpretive synthesis of Platonism and Scripture ("Origen as model") and echoing Origen's own words ("Origen as source"). Whereas Origen made spiritual sensibility intelligible by means of Middle Platonic thought, Smith's Neoplatonism provided the conceptual tools needed to make sense of biblical passages without suggesting a merely metaphorical meaning for sensory language concerning the awareness of spiritual realities. In this way, both tradition and innovation guide Smith's reformulation of the doctrine of the spiritual senses. In addition to demonstrating Smith's debt to patristic thought, this chapter also discusses his influence on such leading figures in modern theology as John Wesley (1703-1791) and Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). The chapter thus presents an important moment in the development of Christian speculation about the spiritual senses that begins to bridge scholarship on the Patristic and Enlightenment periods.

Introduction

In the chapel at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, among the more unusual sights in an otherwise properly plain, "Puritan" space, whose only images are of opened books, are a series of stained glass windows. Like St. Paul's in London, this Wren church too did not survive the Victorian love of interior decoration. Along the north wall, a series of panels depict great

ecclesial and educational organizers and systematic theologians, ranging from St. Augustine to John Harvard. Along the south wall, one finds a series of panels representing great figures in spirituality and mystical theology. The series begins with Origen of Alexandria and the second to the last is John Smith, the Cambridge Platonist. Origen and Smith, the windows tell us, have a connection. The Emmanuel College Chapel windows present vestiges in light and glass of an insight from a more romantic age, when resonance and intuition were important tools for the scholar.¹ And the windows are correct; there is a deep bond between Origen and Smith, a tradition unbroken by the fall of empires and the discovery of new worlds.

This essay explores a key aspect of that tradition. It provides an analysis of the reception and modification of Origen of Alexandria's (185-252) doctrine of the spiritual senses in the "Discourse on the True Way or Method of Attaining to Divine Knowledge," by John Smith (1616/8-1652).² Broadly speaking, and this is a matter of serious contention,³ the concept of the spiritual senses may be thought of as the idea that in addition to the physical senses the soul or

¹ For images see, "College Chapel Windows," Emmanuel College Website, <http://www.emma.cam.ac.uk/collegelife/chapel/windows/>, accessed November 1, 2008. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Dr. David Trobisch and the helpful comments of Professors Douglas Hedley and Sarah Coakley of Cambridge University. Mark McInroy, of Harvard University and more recently Cambridge, read and contributed clarifying comments on drafts of the essay. Finally, the Head Librarian of Queens' College, Cambridge, Ms. Karen Begg was instrumental in the research that made this essay possible. Any errors or infelicities that remain are, of course, mine.

² The best recent introduction to the Cambridge Platonists as religious thinkers is the volume in the *Classics of Western Spirituality* series by C. Taliaferro and A. Teply, *Cambridge Platonist Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004). The first section of Smith's first discourse in particular will be the focus of my treatment. This owes more to time and space limitations than limits in the potentially fruitful material, which can be found throughout the *Select Discourses*. The first few pages are noteworthy however, for what J. Worthington, the editor of the collection, describes as a wealth of "excellent Sense and solid matter well beaten and compacted and lying close together in a little room." J. Worthington, "To the Reader," in John Smith, *Select Discourses . . . By John Smith, late Fellow of Queen's College in Cambridge. As also a Sermon preached by Simon Patrick . . . At the Author's Funeral . . .* (London: F. Flesher, for W. Morden Bookseller in Cambridge, 1660), xii. A more complete discussion will be found in my dissertation, "Reason Turned into Sense: John Smith on Spiritual Sensation," PhD diss., Boston University, forthcoming.

³ For a fuller discussion of the complex and multivariate Christian tradition of speculation on the "spiritual senses" see the forthcoming collection of essays, *Perceiving God: The Spiritual Senses in the Western Christian Tradition*, edited by Paul Gavriluk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge University Press).

mind has additional faculties or powers for experiencing or encountering spiritual realities in a way that is analogous to the ordinary functioning of the physical senses.

The analysis offered here is twofold. First, an argument about the exegetical and hermeneutical roots of Origen's presentation of the spiritual senses is compared to a closely analogous approach found in Smith. Second, Origen is shown to have supplied an important source for Smith's conception and employment of the spiritual senses.

While the literature on the Cambridge Platonists always notes indebtedness on their part to Neoplatonism and the Alexandrian Fathers little discussion is to be found of the long theological tradition of the spiritual senses with the exception of J. C. English's article on "John Wesley's Indebtedness to John Norris."⁴ Such language is usually explained as merely evidence of the "Platonism" of the group without drawing out the way in which this concept has a long and fruitful life in Christian theology. Thus, attention is paid to the influence of Plotinus and the Florentine Academy but not to Origen, Augustine, Bonaventure, and other important theological figures that form at least as an important part of the tradition the Cambridge Platonists find irresistible.⁵

John Smith

While Origen needs no introduction in the context of a discussion of the spiritual senses, and certainly no apology, some explanation for drawing our attention to the work of the relatively unknown Smith is in order. Smith's significance lies in at least two areas. First, he offers an excellent window into the dynamics of early 17th century thought in science,

⁴ J. C. English, "John Wesley's Indebtedness to John Norris," *Church History* 60 no.1 (1991): 55-69.

⁵ See Taliaferro and Teply for a typical account of this relationship.

philosophy, and religion.⁶ Second, while Smith's memory continues today mostly as an ancillary curiosity or source of contextual (or rhetorical) leverage for the study of the more famous Cambridge Platonists, Ralph Cudworth and Henry More especially, in the more immediate aftermath of his brief career, Smith exerted a significant influence on many divines including Jonathan Edwards and possibly John Wesley.

Smith was an important source for the doctrine of the "sense of the heart" as developed by Jonathan Edwards. As Brad Walton has said, "all commentators since John E. Smith have recognized that John Smith's own discussion of the 'spiritual sensation,' presented in the first chapter of the *Select Discourses*, constitutes a clear anticipation of Edwards, and probably exercised a direct influence on his own thinking."⁷ References to the influence of Smith on Edwards abound in the literature on Edwards. Smith is connected to both the content of Edwards' views on the sense of the heart but also to his rhetorical style.⁸

In addition to his connection to the first great American theologian, Smith's influence can be traced to John Wesley, the founder of Methodism as well. John C. English tells us that Wesley's own doctrine of the spiritual senses owes much to his reading of John Norris, an "Oxford (Cambridge) Platonist," who was deeply influenced by Smith's circle, especially Henry

⁶ On the extraordinarily broad interests of Smith see J. E. Saveson, "Some Aspects of the Thought and Style of John Smith the Cambridge Platonist," PhD thesis, Fitzwilliam House, Cambridge University, 1956, and "The Library of John Smith, the Cambridge Platonist," *Notes and Queries* 203 (1958): 215-6.

⁷ B. Walton, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Affections and the Puritan Analysis of True Piety, Spiritual Sensation and Heart Religion* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 2002), 121. See also pp.137-8, 200, and 203.

⁸ See throughout the introductions and apparatus in the Yale edition of Edwards works as well as M. J. McClymond, "Spiritual Sensation in Jonathan Edwards," *The Journal of Religion*, 77 no. 2 (1997): 195-216.

More, in addition to Malebranche.⁹ Finally, one may note Brantley's contention of an affinity between Edwards and Wesley on the issue of the "spiritual senses."¹⁰

While Brantley and others are certainly correct about the influence of Lockean psychology on both Edwards and Wesley, the tendency within the literature to ignore the length and richness of the tradition of the spiritual senses, a tradition obviously known by both men, not the least through their mutual appreciation of Smith, has clouded understanding of the continuity of this ancient tradition well into the modern period. However, all of this marks out a more distant horizon that must elude for now. This essay can only address a very selective portion of Smith's appropriation of the past.¹¹

As will be demonstrated below, Smith accepted important elements of the doctrine of the spiritual senses as he found it in Origen but was too modern to take the doctrine on authority. Instead, Smith offers his own case for the spiritual senses, at once mimicking Origen's interpretive synthesis of (Middle/Neo-)Platonism and Scripture (as model), and echoing Origen's own words (as source). Smith used this twofold influence as the basis for his distinctly modern theological method that seeks to base all other theological work on immediately self-evident principles encountered through spiritual sensation. The essay thus presents a moment in the

⁹ J. C. English, 55-69.

¹⁰ E. Brantley, "The Common Ground of Wesley and Edwards," *The Harvard Theological Review* 83 no.3 (1990): 271-303.

¹¹ Some studies have looked in detail at aspects of the patristic influence on the Cambridge Platonists but they have not addressed the spiritual senses tradition. My dissertation will be the first to place Smith within this tradition and a projected second volume will seek to describe the continuation of the doctrine after the Cambridge Platonists. D.W. Dockrill's "The Fathers and the Theology of the Cambridge Platonists" (*Studia Patristica* 17:1 [1982]: 427-439) addresses the implications of Origen for Trinitarian thought in Cudworth. R. Lewis' "Of 'Origenian Platonism: Joseph Glanvill on the Pre-existence of Souls'" (*The Huntington Library Quarterly* 69/2 [2006]: 267-302) addresses the circulation of Origen's thoughts on the soul especially preexistence in the thought of Glanvill, More, Worthington, and others but Smith is not mentioned. In fact, while More may be an important source of Origen's ideas for Glanvill it is possible that More became attracted to Origen through Smith and other likeminded scholars.

historical development of the spiritual senses that begins to bridge the scholarship on the Patristic, Medieval, and Enlightenment periods.¹²

The discourse on the “True Way,” Smith’s first “Discourse” appears at the beginning of his only remaining work, the posthumously published *Select Discourses* (1660), selected and edited together by John Worthington in 1659 from various pieces, some given as sermons and some intended for publication in an unfinished volume. The bulk of the discourses were crafted as Smith exercised his duties as catechist at Queens’ College. In the *Select Discourses* Smith presents his Christian Platonism on various topics, ranging from method to the immortality of the soul, to prophecy and to several discourses on the nature of the Christian life, among others.

Smith’s first “Discourse” begins by making his intentions and his methods clear. Just as all other arts and sciences have as their basis and starting point some precondition or principle(s) upon which everything else depends so too with divinity.¹³ Divinity rests on and in fact is “a divine life” rather than a “divine science.”¹⁴ The principle for the intelligibility of divinity is “Spiritual Sensation” which unites the will, intellect, and the affections, says Smith, and this is the basis of his theological method.¹⁵ Smith’s intent here is to establish a firm foundation upon

¹² The case offered here is suggestive of Smith’s place in a tradition that stretches back to at least Origen of Alexandria but which cannot be limited to him. Smith is heir not only to Origen but also Augustine, Bonaventure, the humanistic and “platonic” climate of the Renaissance, the pieties of the Reformations, and the dawn of modern philosophy and science. It is difficult, if not impossible, to tease apart *fully* the influence of Origen and his associated traditions from Smith’s own combination of Neo-Platonism and the Bible. Furthermore, the readings of Origen and Smith offered do not pretend to be complete or to engage the full range of scholarship in this area. What is offered here is not a proof of the influence of Origen on Smith. Rather, what is offered is a highly suggestive double pattern. Origen as source and Origen as model are thus mutually reinforcing and only together can a case be made for the patristic, or specifically Origenist, roots of Smith’s doctrine of the spiritual senses.

¹³ Smith, 1-2.

¹⁴ Smith, 2.

¹⁵ Smith, 2.

which all his later work can stand. In this, his deep admiration for Descartes shines through.¹⁶ However, much of what Smith has to say about this method echoes from Origen.¹⁷

Origen as Model

Origen affirmed the existence of a set of five spiritual senses analogous to the physical senses located in the mind or soul, what Origen calls the “inner man,” which is distinct from the physical body and thus also from the physical senses. Origen largely developed his view based on biblical evidence and as a way of interpreting passages where the clearly non-sensible (i.e., spiritual, conceptual or intellectual) is said to be sensed.¹⁸

For I do not suppose that the visible heaven was actually opened, and its physical structure divided, in order that Ezekiel might be able to record such an occurrence... although such an occurrence may be a stumbling-block to the simple, who in their simplicity would set the whole world in movement, and split in sunder the compact and mighty body of the whole heavens. But he who examines such matters more profoundly will say, that there being, as the Scripture calls it, a kind of general divine perception which the blessed man alone knows how to discover, according to the saying of Solomon, You shall find a divine sense; and as there are various forms of this perceptive power, such as a faculty of vision which can naturally see things that are better than bodies, among which are ranked the cherubim and seraphim; and a faculty of hearing which can perceive voices which have not their being in the air; and a sense of taste which can make use of living bread that has come down from heaven, and that gives life unto the world; and so also a sense of smelling, which scents such things as leads Paul to say that he is a sweet savour of Christ unto God; and a sense of touch, by which

¹⁶ On the relationship between Smith and Descartes, see J. E. Saveson, "Descartes' Influence on John Smith, Cambridge Platonist." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959): 258-62, and "Differing Reactions to Descartes among the Cambridge Platonists," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 31 (1960): 560-7.

¹⁷ While it is not usually possible to demonstrate a clear line of influence directly to Origen (he makes very few direct references to Origen for example) Smith's understanding of the sensible nature of spiritual understanding nevertheless echoes the Alexandrian in important ways and in at least one critical case makes direct appeal to the Father of the spiritual senses.

¹⁸ Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition From Plato to Denys* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 66-7. This point is not without contention however. Several scholars have suggested that Origen's language about the spiritual senses is best understood as metaphorical either throughout his corpus or in one supposed stage or another in his developing thoughts on the matter. The received scholarly opinion on the issue is however that notwithstanding elements of metaphor here and there, Origen, by in large, does intend to speak of five spiritual senses that function analogously to the physical senses. See the work of Dillon, Rudy, and McInroy on this topic.

John says that he handled with his hands of the Word of life; — the blessed prophets having discovered this divine perception, and seeing and hearing in this divine manner, and tasting likewise, and smelling, so to speak, with no sensible organs of perception, and laying hold on the Logos by faith, so that a healing effluence from it comes upon them, saw in this manner what they record as having seen, and heard what they say they heard....¹⁹

Thus, for Origen the spiritual or allegorical reading of scripture suggests that references to sensing the divine are not literal accounts. In this way, Origen counters the ridicule of Celsus and other critics of Christian doctrine. At the same time, however, Origen is convinced that references to spiritual senses are not without literal meaning of some kind. That is, rather than reading these passages as *mere* metaphorical references to knowledge, or comprehension, Origen takes a sudden and unexpected turn by suggesting such passages refer to *literal* spiritual senses, actual spiritual capacities for perceiving the non-sensory.²⁰

While Karl Rahner is certainly correct about the exegetical provenance of Origen's doctrine, his claim that it is a conclusion based solely on scripture fails to convince.²¹ Beyond the possible incarnational or sacramental reasons for such a reading lies the possibility, suggested by Dillon, that Origen is drawing on previous and contemporaneous speculation about "a noetic correlate of sense-perception" found in Plato, Albinus, a Gnostic treatise (*Zostrianos*), Plotinus

¹⁹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I.48 (Crombie, trans.). This translation is taken from the *Ante Nicene Fathers* translation with corrections to match Chadwick in the reference to Proverbs 2:5. "Knowledge" has been changed to the misreading of the LXX that Origen actually gives, "sense."

²⁰ Some passages related to spiritual sensation do seem to be simply metaphorical for Origen but clearly not all. Some of Origen's reading of scripture seems to indicate an analogy between spiritual sense and physical sense. For a sample of the debate on this point see Louth, 66-7; J. M. Dillon, "Aisthesis Noete: A Doctrine of the Spiritual Senses in Origen and in Plotinus," in *Hellenica et Judaica*, A. Caquot, et al., eds. (Leuven; Paris: Peeters, 1986), 443-55; and G. Rudy, *Mystical Language of Sensation in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

²¹ K. Rahner, « Le debut d'une doctrine des cinq sens spirituels chez Origene, » *Revue d'ascetique et de mystique* 13 (1932): 112-45; English translation, "The 'Spiritual Senses' According to Origen," in *Theological Investigations*, XVI (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 89-103. The claim about the exclusively biblical source of Origen's doctrine is made on p.83 in the ET.

(*Enneads* VI.7), and Philo.²² Only if the spiritual senses have an initial air of plausibility can the move to read biblical passages allegorically, but not totally so, be justified.²³

Without some reason to suggest that such a thing is even *possible*, Origen should be expected simply to allegorize the language of sensing the divine out of the picture entirely. Since Origen does not do that, and instead affirms literally spiritual senses, and given that there was ample non-Christian speculation about spiritual sensibility in Origen's intellectual milieu, it seems likely that he asserts his view of the spiritual senses with a basically platonic philosophical and a Christian scriptural background in mind. Origen finds the spiritual senses in his reading of the Bible but he was able to find them because he already had access to the philosophic tools needed to "see" them. Origen's interpretation was thus likely given additional, and necessary, philosophical credence by a common tradition within the intellectual context Origen shared with Plotinus and others who also suggest similar intellectual senses.²⁴ Regardless of the specific methods employed, Origen's *concerns* are exegetical and, to that extent, Rahner is correct.²⁵

As we have seen, Origen draws on scripture and, if our argument based on Dillon's suggestion is correct, elements in the prevailing philosophical speculations of his day to advance

²² Dillon, 455; 454-5. To Dillon's suggestive, albeit speculative, list could be added the much more ancient tradition of the postmortem opening of the senses in order to interact with the gods found in the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* and numerous additional passages in Plato that speak of "intellectual vision" and inner "eyes" (e.g., *Republic* 519A, *Symposium* 219A, etc.) as well as other passages from Plotinus of particular interest to John Smith such as *Enneads* I.8.1, I.6.9, I.3.4, and VI.7.13.

²³ Dillon is far more nuanced in his discussion but I argue that he need not be in this area. This same kind of plausible warrant seems to be at work in other decisions of Origen to limit his allegorizing. For example, his numerous appeals to Old Testament signs for Christ only makes sense in light of a knowledge of Christ as that to which the allegory refers.

²⁴ The apologetic impulse in *Contra Celsum*, is made more clear by this suggestion as well.

²⁵ As Mark McInroy has pointed out, in following the suggestion of Dillon against the position articulated by Rahner, I am parting company with most observers since Rahner's influential treatment of Origen's doctrine of spiritual sense. While Rahner's approach makes Origen's thoughts on these matters seem more clearly "Christian," mine makes what Origen says more clearly intelligible.

the reality of the spiritual senses of the soul. In much the same manner, Smith appeals directly to scripture and the Neoplatonism of Plotinus as his “evidence” for the spiritual sensation upon which all theological understanding rests. Spiritual concepts are understood by being perceived, and this spiritual sensibility is thoroughly intellectual and therefore not physical, and yet, somehow, still best described by way of perceptual language. For both Smith and Origen the spiritual senses are capacities of mind and are both conceptual and perceptual. Perceptual in the sense that it is by means of these senses that purely noetic (purely spiritual) objects and conceptual in the sense that they have to do with realities that are by their very nature concepts or ideas not physically sensible things.

Smith is notable for his insistence that divinity is a practical, living enterprise.²⁶ Divinity is a “*Divine life*,” rather than a “*science*” conveyed by mere “*Verbal description*” because it has to do with things of “Sense & Life” and thus requires “Sentient and Vital faculties.” Smith here makes explicit his employment of Neoplatonism in the service of scriptural exegesis, and both in spiritual guidance, by combining Plotinus’ affirmation that, in Smith’s words, “Every thing is best known by that which bears a just resemblance and analogie with it” with the biblical principal, derived specifically from *Proverbs* chapter 10, that a good life is the prolepsis for coming to an understanding of divine things.²⁷

A little later, Smith introduces the sixth Beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:8) with a reference to Plotinus; “Divinity is indeed a true influx from that eternal light” but this light does not merely *enlighten*, but *enlivens* also. While the framework for

²⁶ See in the first instance Smith, p. 2 but the point is made repeatedly throughout the First Discourse and the whole of the *Select Discourses*.

²⁷ Smith, 2. Smith’s plotinian reference is to *Ennead* I.8.1. The biblical allusion is to Proverbs 10 (“the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”).

intelligibility here is borrowed from the light mysticism common to Plotinus and Origen (and others),²⁸ the authority for Smith's point lies with Christ, who connects "purity of heart with the beatific vision." In this way, Smith offers support for his claim that what is essential in theology is a practical, existential, and spiritually sensitive approach and not the study or composition of dry treatises.²⁹ In nearly the same breath, Smith returns to Plotinus and the imagery of light for the idea that just "as the eye cannot behold the sun . . . unless it hath the form and resemblance of the sun drawn in it" so too for the soul to "behold God . . . unless it be Godlike." This touchstone on the landscape of platonic intelligibility leads back again to scripture immediately, "and the apostle St. Paul, when he would lay open the right way of attaining to divine truth, saith, that 'knowledge puffeth up,' but it is 'love that edifieth.'" ³⁰

For Smith, no less than Origen, emotion and the will, especially love, play a central role in the directedness of our attention. When we strive after physical things, we are drawn by our love (or "lust) away from the inner spiritual realities and therefore we fail to love rightly that which is more valuable in itself (i.e., spirit not matter). When we direct our wills toward inner spiritual things, love plays a positive role in spiritual sensation. The spiritual senses are partly activated by, and partly cause and deepen, love of God possible through God's grace in creation and salvation. It is within the inner realm of the heart that the spiritual senses operate for Smith. In this, Smith differs slightly from Origen who stresses intellect with respect to the spiritual senses, but for both it is the inner person, the mind or soul, which is the locus of spiritual

²⁸ See Louth, 35-72.

²⁹ Smith, 2.

³⁰ Smith, 3. The Pauline reference is to I Cor. 8:1. The reference to Plotinus appears to be *Ennead* I.2.4.

sensation. However, like Origen, Smith finds his basis for spiritual sensibility in the Bible with the aid of a (neo-)platonian framework that helps to make it noticeable and plausible.

Three additional passages form the heart of Smith's affirmation of the reality and necessity of spiritual sensation. The first comes from Plotinus. After pointing out the uselessness of seeking divinity in books alone where it is "entombed" more often than "enshrined," Smith gives Plotinus as his source for the sentiment that one is to "seek God within" our "own soul" for God "is best discerned by an intellectual touch."³¹ This is not allowed to stand on its own however, and is buoyed within the same sentence by reference to the *First Epistle of John* (1:1); "we must 'see with our eyes, and hear with our ears, and our hands must handle the word of life.'" Smith adds to this that, "the soul itself hath its sense, as well as the body" and again within the same sentence goes on to say that it is for this reason that David recommends in the Psalm "not speculation but sensation" as the means of arriving at an understanding of divine goodness; "Taste and see how good the Lord is."³²

In this way, Smith follows Origen's hermeneutical approach (as suggested by Dillon) but as a late Renaissance Neoplatonist, Smith sees no reason to keep his reliance on a pagan philosopher implicit. Plotinus is for Smith a great teacher whose limits are overcome by the revelations of scripture but whom nonetheless supplies a sure and steady guide by supplying the context within which scriptural passages can be read in their most literal way possible.³³ Like

³¹ *Enneads* I.2.6 and V.3.17 seem to be the inspiration for Smith's reference here but as is often the case his reference is not exact and does not match the words of the passage so much as the likely meaning of it. This tendency will be important later in our discussion of Smith's use of Origen as a source. The phrase, "intellectual touch," is a key to the way in which spiritual sensation is concerned with a blending of the conceptual and the (in some sense) perceptual.

³² Smith, 3; Psalm 34:8.

³³ A good place to begin on the relationship between the Cambridge Platonists generally with the Italian Renaissance is Sarah Hutton, "The Cambridge Platonists," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008

Origen, Smith denies that there is biblical warrant for a vision of divine things with the physical eyes but his allegiance to a Neoplatonism open to the possibility of noetic sensibility allows him to affirm that these passages are not merely poetic devices.

Smith's initial presentation of the reality of spiritual sensation rests on much the same combination of philosophical plausibility and scriptural warrant that Origen relies on. The most significant difference in this regard seems to be the added level of expressly methodical concern in Smith. As an early, and in some respects uncritical, admirer of Descartes, Smith seeks to offer foundations for his theological work in ways that Origen does not, but Smith finds his foundations not in modernity, but in Origen's era. In other words, Smith was urged by his present to recover a past within the tradition of Christian Platonism, because this is a living tradition for him.³⁴

Origen as Source

As has been demonstrated, Smith seems to follow the example of Origen's creative combination of platonic plausibility and allegorical scriptural exegesis. This move on its own however only demonstrates that Smith is a Christian Platonist. His specific indebtedness to Origen is seen when one considers the way in which Origen acts not only as a model but also as a source for Smith's presentation of the spiritual senses. This indebtedness to Origen as source will in turn offer support for the preceding argument about Origen as model.

Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed., <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/cambridge-platonists/>, accessed October 30, 2008.

³⁴ Saveson (1955; 1959) points to the way Smith seems to think of the French Oratory, Descartes and Copernican astronomy as manifestations of a generally platonic philosophy. Smith owed copies of Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and *The Passions of the Soul* in addition to works on geometry and music (Saveson 1955, Appendix, 17). I gratefully acknowledge Dr. Saveson's permission to take a copy and cite his dissertation held by the Manuscripts Department in the University Library, Cambridge University.

Several specific elements in the theories of both figures might be discussed in this regard. For example, both Origen and Smith suggest that all human beings have a natural capacity for spiritual sensation as part of our original make up as rational beings. However in our earthly, sinful, fallen, life most people do not realize this potential. To actualize one's spiritual senses requires God's grace as well as personal effort and practice, essentially, moral behavior, philosophical training, reflection, prayer, scriptural study, and other spiritual practices.³⁵ Likewise, both ascribe to the spiritual senses the ability to perceive spiritual life and spiritual death.³⁶ Both Origen and Smith describe particular spiritual senses as taking for their objects various delightful manifestations of the Divine Logos.³⁷ Finally, both locate the spiritual senses within an inner person as opposed to the outer, and both suggest that one's attention to the external senses must decrease in order for the spiritual senses to increase.³⁸ All of these similarities are suggestive of Smith's debt to Origen; however, discussion here will be limited to their common apologetic use of the spiritual senses where Smith makes explicit reference to Origen.

From the very start of his first Discourse Smith is eager to show that theology has a kind of demonstration that is different from the pure ratiocination of the intellect, or the dry presentations of doctrines and proofs in books. For example, Smith tells us, "They are not alwaies the best skill'd in Divinity, that are most studied in those *Pandects* which it is sometimes

³⁵ Smith, 3, 8, 10-11, 12, 16, 21; Hans Urs von Balthasar, ed. *Spirit and Fire*, trans. Robert J. Daly (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), nos. 637-658, 674.

³⁶ Smith, 4-5, 7; Origen, *Cant. Co. 1*, in Balthasar, nos. 545, 547.

³⁷ Smith, 3, 7, 15, etc.; Balthasar, nos. 539-540, 604-693.

³⁸ Smith, 3, etc.; Balthasar, nos. 519-521, and 536. Origen follows St. Paul and platonic convention and Smith follows Descartes and what he takes to be the Christian tradition.

digested into, or that have erected the greatest Monopolies of Art and Science.”³⁹ A little later Smith adds, “We must not think we have attained to the *right knowledge* of Truth, when we have broke through the outward shell of words & phrases that house it up; or when by a *Logical Analysis* we have found out the dependencies and coherences of them with one another.”⁴⁰ Smith is here framing his presentation of the “True Way” in apologetic terms against a merely logical or intellectual approach to philosophy and theology. His opponents in this apologetic are the early modern Skeptics, various types of materialists, other “atheists,” and especially Christian scholastics.

In the midst of this apologetic Smith repeatedly points to the true method as that of a purified life and the awakening of a capacity for spiritual sensation which grants knowledge more akin to personal encounter than logical inference. This is the different kind of demonstration that Christianity has for Smith, proven not in the unaffected intellect calmly accessing the evidence but felt in a direct experience of God by the soul. It is in the midst of this apology that Smith makes his only direct appeal to Origen. “It is but a thin, airy knowledge that is got by meer Speculation, which is usher’d in by Syllogisms and Demonstrations; but that which springs forth from true Goodness, is *χειότερόν τι πασης άποδείξεως*, [*theioteron ti pases apodeixeos*, “an entirely divine proof” or “a more divine demonstration”] as Origen speaks, it brings such a Divine Light into the Soul, as is more clear and convincing than any

³⁹ Smith, 2.

⁴⁰ Smith, 8. To these quotations can be added: “The knowledge of Divinity that appears in systems and models is but a poor wan light” (Smith, 3). “All Light and Knowledge that may seem sometimes to rise up in unhallowed minds, is but like those fuliginous flames that arise up from our culinary fire, that are soon quench’d in their own smoke; or like those foolish fires that fetch their birth from terrene exudations, that doe but hop up & down , and flit to and fro upon the surface of this earth where they were first brought forth; and serve not so much to enlighten, as to delude us; nor to direct the wandering traveler into his way , but to lead him farther out of it” (Smith, 3-4). Others like this can be found throughout the first “Discourse” and indeed throughout the entire *Select Discourses*.

Demonstration.”⁴¹ Examination of Origen’s works, and the editions of Origen known to have been available to Smith, reveals that the “quote” here is most likely a paraphrase taken from *Contra Celsum* I.2.⁴² That Smith intends this passage specifically is indicated most strongly by the parallel intensions at work in both texts.

In *Contra Celsum* I.2, Celsus is critiqued for trying to apply the criterion of a “Greek proof” to Christianity and then Origen says, “Moreover, we have to say this, that the gospel has a *proof which is particular to itself*, and which is *more divine* than a Greek proof based on

⁴¹ Smith, 4.

⁴² In keeping with Smith’s general practice, the phrase is not attributed to a specific passage in Origen. Unlike most other quotations from Greek and Hebrew, this phrase has not been “Englished” by Smith’s editor (Worthington, iv-v). Apparently, Worthington judged a translation of this passage “was less needful” because of the surrounding text. C. A. Patrides translates the phrase, “more sacred than any evidence” (*The Cambridge Platonists* [London: Edward Arnold, 1969], 130). No edition of the *Discourses* has offered a specific citation for this phrase and the most recent abridged edition of the first “Discourse” offers only the suggestion that Smith may have in mind Origen’s *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Book X, 25, in which Origen, “discourses on the Divine light” (Taliaferro and Tepley, 218 n.378). This suggestion however seems to have more to do with the English phrases that follow Smith’s quotation from Origen and not the quotation itself.

According to the online *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, *θειότερόν* occurs 27 times in Origen’s corpus but this phrase is never given (<http://www.tlg.uci.edu/>, accessed March 11, 2010). A review of Origen’s works in the *Patrologia Graeca* (Migne) edition also reveals that the phrase in fact does not occur in exactly this form in Origen. Furthermore, according to *Origenes, Opera Omnia, Lexicum Proprium seu 'Concordances,'* (http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/1004/1001/local_general_index.html, accessed October 30, 2008), the word *θειότερόν* (*theioteron*) occurs only once (*Contra Celsum*, col. 00336 [1.31]) and this phrase is not there. Chadwick’s edition has, “something divine about him” (p.30) in this place. Similar forms of Smith’s Greek for “divine” and “proof/demonstration” do occur in *Contra Celsum* I.2 however, where the same sentiment, though not the exact phrase, is found. Apparently, Smith has paraphrased Origen from memory or less-than-exact notes. This is not at all unusual for Smith; the majority of his references in the first “Discourse,” except for the Bible, are of this sort.

It should also be noted that although the seventeenth century manuscript list of books from Smith’s library donated to Queens’ College Library upon his death in 1652 does not include Origen’s *Contra Celsum*, both Emmanuel (where he was a student) and Queens’ (where he was a fellow) had copies in a 1605 Greek and Latin edition. For Emmanuel College see S. Bush, Jr. and C. J. Rasmussen, *The Library of Emmanuel College Cambridge 1584-1637* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 [1986]), 146. The Emmanuel volume was removed sometime before 1693 when the current copy was donated by Sancroft. The volume was in the collection for the first year of Smith’s undergraduate studies in the College however. There was also most likely a copy, of the same edition, at Queens’ College when he became a fellow in 1644. See T. H. Horne, *A Catalogue of the Library of The College of St. Margaret and St. Bernard, Commonly Called Queen’s College in the University of Cambridge...* (London, 1827), 122. The edition in both cases was that of David Hoeschelius published in 1605 in both Greek and Latin (sequentially but with common pagination) and copious notes and apparatus. The Queens’ copy remains in the Old Library.

Additionally, Smith seems not to have owned a copy of Plotinus but the sheer amount of references to him suggest that Smith worked with College Library copies or those of others to a significant extent. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Karen Begg, Librarian of Queens’ College, Cambridge, in working with the remains of Smith’s personal library as well as the edition of *Contra Celsum* most likely used by him.

dialectical argument. *This more divine demonstration* the apostle calls a ‘demonstration of the Spirit and of power’ – of the spirit because of the prophecies and especially those which refer to Christ, which are capable of convincing anyone who reads them; of power because of the prodigious miracles which may be proved to have happened by this argument among many others, that traces of them still remain among those who live according to the will of the Logos.’⁴³

Likewise, Smith appeals to Origen in his own apologetic use of spiritual sensation. Immediately after his reference to Origen, Smith continues his attack on the “thin speculations” of logicians (both believers and non-believers).⁴⁴ In addition, Origen suggests that the prophets employ the spiritual senses and that there is a single spiritual sensibility that takes five forms later in book I at chapter 48.⁴⁵ Just as Origen relates the spiritual senses to prophecy as the means by which revelation is received by human beings so too does Smith. Chapters 2 and 48 are thus closely related for Origen and both play a role in defending the sensible language of scripture from outside attack.

While it would seem from these considerations that the spiritual senses are not *merely* metaphorical for Origen, it remains to be seen if they are rightly understood to be five in number or if they are merely so many ways of speaking of a single spiritual capacity or “intellectual

⁴³ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I.2 (Chadwick, ed.), emphasis added to show Chadwick’s English for the similar forms of the Greek offered by Smith as a “quotation” from Origen.

⁴⁴ What I am calling Smith’s “apology” runs the full length of the first numbered section of the first discourse (Smith, 1-13).

⁴⁵ Smith’s treatment of prophecy occurs in his discourse number six, “Of Prophecie” (Smith, 169-281). While in this essay the details of the discourse cannot be discussed, it can be said in passing that Smith’s theory of prophecy seems to operate via spiritual sensation in ways that parallel many Patristic sources including Origen and Gregory the Great in his *Homilies on Ezekiel*. I owe the observation about Gregory to George Demacopoulos.

sense” as Smith puts it.⁴⁶ In light of what Origen says about the inner and outer person however, it would seem that he indeed does intend to maintain that there are five distinct spiritual senses. This is important because it implies that there is something about the divine objects of these senses that could not be captured by a single noetic sense.

There is however no reason to affirm a strict opposition between one spiritual sensibility and five spiritual senses. Indeed, in *Contra Celsum* I.48 Origen suggests, in the midst of his discussion of the connection between the demonstration of the Spirit in prophecy and its connection to the five spiritual senses, that there is a single “general divine perception” but that this single spiritual sensibility takes many forms, which Origen gives as the five spiritual senses.

Smith seems to be in basic agreement on this point. However, he is far less interested in speaking of a full set of five spiritual senses than is Origen. Smith moves easily from talking about spiritual sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell, to speaking of a single spiritual sensibility, often called an “intellectual touch” and occasionally referred to as a sense of the heart.⁴⁷ Unlike Origen, Smith does not put forward a clear theory of five distinct spiritual senses with anything approaching consistency in regards to their objects or other particulars, but he does consistently speak of the spiritual senses as more than simply one. Divinity is best known through a spiritual sensation for Smith that may take a form analogous to any of the physical senses, in keeping with Origen’s statement in *Contra Celsum* I.48.

It seems probable therefore that Smith has in mind an arrangement very much like the one suggested by Origen where a “general divine perception” takes many different forms in

⁴⁶ Smith, 3.

⁴⁷ B. T. Coolman has shown a very similar arrangement in William of Auxerre who also poses both a single noetic sense and five spiritual senses as parts of this whole (*Knowing God by Experience: The Spiritual Senses in the Theology of William of Auxerre* [Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004]). Thus, it is not at all unprecedented within the tradition to speak this way. It should be noted however that I am not aware of any direct connection between William and Smith.

order that the plenitude of the divine nature may be more fully expressed. This would help account for the ease with which Smith can go from speaking of a single noetic sense, using sensory language as an analogy for knowledge, to multiple senses akin to the physical senses with different sensory objects within the spiritual realm. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that Smith is drawing on Origen's discussion in the first book of *Contra Celsum*.

Conclusion

This essay has shown that the Cambridge Platonist John Smith was influenced by the doctrine of the spiritual senses as expressed by its first systematic Christian exponent, Origen of Alexandria. Smith has been shown to follow Origen's practice as the basis for his own presentation of spiritual sensibility. Whereas Origen relied on Middle Platonism and scripture however, Smith relied on Neoplatonism (especially Plotinus) as well as scripture. It has also been argued that Smith is indebted to Origen for important elements in the content of his doctrine. Both employ spiritual sensibility in a presentation of the means by which one comes to a proper theological understanding and Smith makes explicit reference to Origen's apologetics as support for his own. Together this twofold influence is suggestive of a conscious appropriation of Origen's thought by Smith.

Although other lines of influence cannot be ruled out with absolute confidence, the cumulative case is strong. While Smith follows Origen's lead only briefly by the letter, and even then only as a paraphrase, in spirit Smith's debt to the Alexandrian is clear. Therefore, the Emmanuel College Chapel windows are correct. Smith *is* rightfully thought of as an heir to the legacy of Origen, and much of this inheritance is manifest in Smith's discussion of spiritual sensation.

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