

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

*This paper 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 early modern period in the "Discourse on the True Way or Method of Attaining to Divine Knowledge" by the Cambridge Platonist, John Smith (1618-1652). Smith accepted much of the doctrine as he found it in Origen but was too modern and too Protestant simply to take the doctrine on authority. Instead, Smith offers his own case for the spiritual senses, at once echoing Origen's own words (as source) and mimicking his interpretive synthesis of (Middle/Neo-)Platonism and Scripture (as model), that Smith used as the basis for his distinctly modern theological method which influenced John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards. The paper thus presents a moment in the development of the spiritual senses that begins to bridge the scholarship on the Patristic, Medieval, 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 did not survive the Victorian drive for 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 paper 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).<sup>2</sup> Broadly speaking, and this is a matter of serious contention, the concept of the spiritual senses may be thought of as the idea that in addition to the physical senses the soul or mind has additional faculties or powers for experiencing or encountering spiritual realities in a way that is analogous to the functioning of the physical senses.

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

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<sup>1</sup> "College Chapel Windows," Emmanuel College Website, <http://www.emma.cam.ac.uk/collegelife/chapel/windows/>, accessed November 1, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> 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* (London, 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.

While the literature on the Cambridge Platonists always notes indebtedness on their part to Neo-Platonism 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."<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

### *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 17<sup>th</sup> century thought in science, philosophy and religion.<sup>5</sup> 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

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<sup>3</sup> *Church History* 60 no.1 (1991): 55-69.

<sup>4</sup> See Taliaferro & Teply (2004) for a typical account of this relationship that ignores the place of the Christian tradition of the spiritual senses in the thought of the Cambridge Platonists.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

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.”<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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 More, in addition to Malebranche.<sup>8</sup> Finally, one may note Brantley’s contention of an affinity between Edwards and Wesley on the issue of the “spiritual senses.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> B. Walton, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Affections and the Puritan Analysis of True Piety, Spiritual Sensation and Heart Religion* (Edwin Mellon Press, 2002), 121. See also pp.137-8, 200, and 203.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> J. C. English 1991, 55-69.

<sup>9</sup> E. Brantley, “The Common Ground of Wesley and Edwards,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 83 no.3 (1990): 271-303.

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 paper can only address a very selective portion of Smith's appropriation of the past.<sup>10</sup>

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 which seeks to base all other theological work on immediately self evident principles encountered through spiritual sensation. The paper thus presents a moment in the historical development of the spiritual senses that begins to bridge the scholarship on the Patristic, Medieval, and Enlightenment periods.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> 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. DW 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 not Smith who isn't mentioned at all. In fact, while More may be an important source of Origen's ideas for Glanvill it is at least possible that More became attracted to Origen through Smith and other likeminded scholars.

<sup>11</sup> 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

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 a single 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.<sup>12</sup> Divinity rests on and in fact is “a divine life” rather than a “divine science.”<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> Smith’s intent here is to establish a firm foundation upon which all his later work can stand. In this, his

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Augustine, Bonaventure, the humanistic and “platonistic” 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.

<sup>12</sup> Smith 1660, 1-2.

<sup>13</sup> Smith 1660, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Smith 1660, 2.

deep admiration for Descartes shines through.<sup>15</sup> However, much of what Smith has to say about this method echoes themes developed from Origen.<sup>16</sup>

### Origen as Model

Origen affirms the existence of a set of five spiritual senses analogous to the physical senses largely on the basis of biblical evidence and as a way of interpreting passages where the clearly non-sensible is said to be sensed.<sup>17</sup>

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 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

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<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition From Plato to Denys* (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 M. McInroy on this topic.

effluence from it comes upon them, saw in this manner what they record as having seen, and heard what they say they heard. ....<sup>18</sup>

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.<sup>19</sup>

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.<sup>20</sup> 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 platonic speculation about "a noetic correlate of sense-perception" found in Plato, Albinus, a Gnostic treatise (*Zostrianos*), Plotinus (*Enneads* VI.7), and

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<sup>18</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I, 48. This translation is taken from the *Ante Nicene Fathers* series, vol. 4, 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."

<sup>19</sup> 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*, ed. A. Caquot, et al (Leuven, Paris: Peeters, 1986), 443-55; and G. Rudy, *Mystical Language of Sensation in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> 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.

Philo.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> Without some reason to suggest that such a thing is even possible, Origen should be expected to simply 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.<sup>23</sup> In any case, Origen's concerns are exegetical and, to that extent, Rahner is correct.

As we have seen, Origen draws on scripture and, if our argument based on Dillon's suggestion is a success, elements in the prevailing philosophical speculations of

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<sup>21</sup> Dillon 1986, 455; 454-5. To Dillon's suggestive, albeit speculative, list should 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*, (Dassow, Goelet, & Andrews, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead, the Book of Going Forth by Day: The Papyrus of Ani and the Balance of Chapters from the Theban Recension* [Chronicle Books, 1998], Chapter 1, Plate 6) 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.

<sup>22</sup> Dillon is far more nuanced than this in his discussion but I would 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.

<sup>23</sup> The apologetic impulse in *Contra Celsum*, is made more clear by this suggestion as well.

his day to advance the reality of the spiritual senses of the soul. Likewise, Smith appeals directly to scripture and the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus as his “evidence” for the spiritual sensation upon which all theological understanding rests.

Smith is notable for his insistence that divinity is a practical, living enterprise.<sup>24</sup> 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 Neo-Platonism in the service of scriptural exegesis and the use of 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.<sup>25</sup>

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 intelligibility here is borrowed from the light mysticism common to Plotinus and Origen,<sup>26</sup> 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

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<sup>24</sup> See in the first instance, 1660, 2; 1859, 1, but the point is made repeatedly throughout the First Discourse and the whole of the *Select Discourses*.

<sup>25</sup> Smith 1660, 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”).

<sup>26</sup> See Louth, 35-72.

approach and not the study or composition of dry treatises.<sup>27</sup> 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.’”<sup>28</sup> And it is within this inner realm of the heart that the spiritual senses operate for Smith. In this he differs from Origen who stresses the intellect with respect to the spiritual senses. However, like Origen, Smith finds his basis for spiritual sensibility in the Bible with the aid of a (neo-)platonic framework that helps to make it plausible and noticeable.

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.”<sup>29</sup> 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

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<sup>27</sup> Smith 1660, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Smith 1660, 3. The Pauline reference is to I Cor. 8:1. The reference to Plotinus appears to be to *Ennead* I.2.4.

<sup>29</sup> *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.

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.”<sup>30</sup>

In this way, Smith follows Origen’s hermeneutical approach, as suggested by Dillon, and as a late Renaissance Neo-Platonist 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.<sup>31</sup> Like Origen, Smith denies that there is biblical warrant for a vision of divine things with the physical eyes but his allegiance to a Neo-Platonism 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 the same kind of combination of philosophical plausibility and scriptural warrant that Origen, apparently, relies on. The most significant difference in this regard seems to be the added level of methodical thought 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

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<sup>30</sup> Smith 1660, 3; Psalm 34:8.

<sup>31</sup> 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 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/cambridge-platonists/>.

era. Smith is urged by his present to recover a past within the tradition of Christian Platonism, because this is a living tradition for him.<sup>32</sup>

### 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. Several specific elements in the theories of both figures might be brought out in this regard. Both ascribe to the spiritual senses the ability to perceive good and evil. Both describe particular spiritual senses as taking for their objects various delightful manifestations of the Divine Logos. Both locate the spiritual senses within an inner person as opposed to the outer, where the external senses must decrease in order for the spiritual senses to increase (Origen follows St. Paul and platonic convention and Smith follows Descartes and what he takes to be the Christian tradition). Finally, Origen and Smith emphasize the necessity of both personal practice and grace in the realization of the spiritual senses. However, discussion in this section will be limited

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<sup>32</sup> 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 quote from his dissertation held by the Manuscripts Department in the University Library, Cambridge University.

to their common apologetic use of the spiritual senses and Smith's explicit debt to Origen in this context.

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 digested into, or that have erected the greatest Monopolies of Art and Science."<sup>33</sup> 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."<sup>34</sup> 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" as well as a dry Christian scholasticism.

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

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<sup>33</sup> Smith 1660, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Smith 1660, 8. To these quotations could be added: "The knowledge of Divinity that appears in systems and models is but a poor wan light" (Smith 1660, 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 1660, 3-4). Others like this can be found throughout the first "Discourse" and indeed throughout the entire *Select Discourses*.

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 *Θειότερόν τι πασης ἀποδείξεως*, [theioteron ti pases apodeixeos, “a most divine demonstration”] as Origen speaks, it brings such a Divine Light into the Soul, as is more clear and convincing than any Demonstration.”<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Smith 1660, 4. I thankfully acknowledge the assistance of Dr. David Trobisch who helped with my translation of the Greek text given by Smith as Origen’s.

<sup>36</sup> In keeping with Smith’s general practice the phrase is not attributed to a specific passage in Origen. Unlike many other quotations from Greek and Hebrew this phrase has not been “Englished” by Smith’s editor Worthington (Worthington 1660, iv-v). Apparently Worthington judged a translation of this passage “was less needful” because of the surrounding text. No later 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 & Teply 2004, 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 *TLG* *Θειότερόν* occurs 27 times in Origen’s corpus but this phrase is never given. A review of Origen’s works in the *Patrologia Graeca* edition also reveals that the phrase in fact does not occur in exactly this form in Origen. Furthermore, according to the concordance of Origen’s works in *PG (Origenes, Opera Omnia, Lexicum Proprium seu Concordances,* [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/1004/1001/local\\_general\\_index.html](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/1004/1001/local_general_index.html)), 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. Migne does not of course include all of the Origen we now know of but he does include all of the Origen that could have been known by Smith. Similar forms of Smith’s Greek for “divine” and “demonstration” do occur in *Contra Celsum* I.2, 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 College and Queens’ Colleges 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 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

That Smith intends *Contra Celsum* I.2 specifically is also indicated by the parallel intensions at work in both Smith and Origen's 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 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."<sup>37</sup>

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.<sup>38</sup> 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

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(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.

<sup>37</sup> Chadwick 1980, *CC* I.2, emphasis added to show Chadwick's English for the similar forms of the Greek offered by Smith as a quotation from Origen.

<sup>38</sup> Smith's treatment of prophecy occurs in his discourse number six, "Of Prophecie" (Smith 1660, 169-281). While in this paper 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.

outside attack. 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).<sup>39</sup>

While it would seem from our consideration above that for Origen the spiritual senses are not merely metaphorical, 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 sense” as Smith puts it.<sup>40</sup> 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 kind of single spiritual sensibility, often called an “intellectual touch” and occasionally

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<sup>39</sup> What I am calling Smith’s apology runs the full length of the first numbered section of the first discourse (Smith 1660, 1-13).

<sup>40</sup> Smith 1660, 3.

referred to as a sense of the heart.<sup>41</sup> 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 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 order that the plentitude 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 metaphor for knowledge, to multiple senses analogous to the physical senses with different sensory objects within the spiritual realm. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that Smith is drawing on Origen's discussion in the first book of *Contra Celsum*.

### **Conclusion**

This paper 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. It has been argued, following the suggestion of Dillon, that what Rahner and others have attributed to a purely exegetical discovery, was in fact the result of a more complicated hermeneutic relying on platonic speculation about the possibility

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<sup>41</sup> B. T. Coolman (*Knowing God by Experience: The Spiritual Senses in the Theology of William of Auxerre*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004) has shown a very similar arrangement in William of Auxerre who also posses both a single noetic sense and five spiritual senses as parts of this whole. 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.

of noetic sensibility. In addition, Smith has been shown to follow Origen's practice as the basis for his own presentation of spiritual sensibility. Where Origen relied on Middle Platonism and scripture however, Smith relies on Renaissance Neo-Platonism and 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 a strong one. 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.

So 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.