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Early Eucharist in transition?

A fresh look at Origen

*Harald Buchinger, Vienna/Rome**

1 Introduction

1.1 Methodological problems

Liturgical investigations into the Eucharist in Origen are confronted with a number of methodological problems:

First one has to distinguish between testimonies of Alexandrian and Palestinian provenance; almost all relevant statements of Origen come from the time after his final move to Caesarea, and are therefore only of very limited advantage, if any at all, to the Alexandrian Liturgy of the early period (Schermann 1912, 33–96). Secondly, the majority of his writings is preserved only in translations of the late fourth century; from time to time is caution advisable in concrete formulations.

The principal obstacle regarding content lies, however, in the method of Origen himself: The spiritualizing principal trait of his hermeneutic makes it frequently difficult to distinguish Eucharistic-theological statements from more general theological reflections; ‘the few scholars who have plunged into the wealth of allegory and philosophical speculation ... have sometimes seen eucharistic allusions in places where others might hesitate to suggest them.’ (Bradshaw 2004, 107) The question of what is to be identified as Eucharistic, leads, to be sure, to circular reasoning with the preconception of what is assumed as theory and as praxis about the Eucharist in the third century. Since this preconception has significantly changed as of late, a liturgical rereading of Origen’s texts seems appropriate.

1.2 The changed state of research

The theological understanding of the Eucharist in Origen has, admittedly, been thoroughly reviewed in a number of smaller contributions (Camelot 1957, 130–139; Crouzel 1962b, 92–103; Jacquemont 1976; De Lorenzi 1987; Laporte 1995; Fernández 1998; Gramaglia 2000) and, above all, in the dissertation of Lothar Lies (Lies 1982); the last and until now only strictly liturgical monograph on the Eucharistic celebration according to the works of Origen comes, however, from the year 1942 (Grimmelt). Since then, the picture has been added to through some valuable investigations (Daniélou 1948, 74–79; Crehan 1950; Capelle 1952; Hanson 1961; Nautin 1961; Schütz 1984, 156–172; Bouley 1981, 138–142, Ledegang 2004); at the same time, the state of research into the Eucharist in the Early Church (Kretschmar 1977) has changed considerably. The more recent research, represented in the work of Paul F. Bradshaw (1999; 2002; 2004), Albert Gerhards (1982; 1992), Andrew McGowan (1999), Reinhard Meßner (2003, 418–439; 2005; 2006), Gerard Rouwhorst (1993), Robert F. Taft (1978; 1988; 1991; 1991–1992; 1992; 2000; 2003a; 2003b; 2004) and others, takes seriously on the one hand the indications of a large ritual and theological diversity in the literature of the first three Christian centuries – inclusive of the Apocrypha, which are no longer assessed as mere, possibly heterodox-regarded deviations from the alleged mainstream (Prieur 2004; Meßner 2005, 40f); on the other hand, the renewed discussion about the not-unproblematically so-named ‘*Traditio Apostolica*’ (Bradshaw/Johnson/Phillips 2002) has brought into question

* The material which in this article has to be presented with very limited documentation for editorial reasons will be discussed in much greater detail and with comprehensive references as well as ample quotations from the sources in my forthcoming book *Wortgottesdienst und Eucharistiefeier bei Origenes*, Münster 200█ (Liturgica Oenipontana), which will also contain some investigations into the Eucharistic theology of Origen. For the English translation of this paper my warmest thanks go to Dom Daniel Nash of Stift Klosterneuburg.

this presumed fixed star of the only supposedly pre-Nicene Eucharistic Prayer which stands in unambiguous formal continuity to Anaphoras of the later mainstream churches (Smyth 2007).

It is therefore no longer taken for granted as a starting point that already by the time of Justin, the ‘Mass-schema’ of the Eucharistic celebration had become a general standard; even after the separation from the actual meal, the rites of Bread and Cup must not everywhere similarly have coincided (Bradshaw 2004, 75f), and both their ordering and also the content of the chalice might have been prone to considerable variation well into the third century (McGowan 1999; Bradshaw 2004, 51–59). As a result, a common Eucharistic Prayer over both elements from the outset is also not to be assumed (Bradshaw 2004, 75f; 104f; 121–123). The few preserved testimonies as to the form, structure, and content of Eucharistic praying make it clear that conventions gained acceptance only slowly (Vogel 1980; Gerhards 1992; Bradshaw 2004, 116–138; Meßner 2005): That God the Father was the addressee of the Eucharistic Prayers in the early period is not universal, but it is striking that also Christ and the Holy Spirit were frequently addressed (Gerhards 1982). The integration of the Institution narrative at a time before the fourth century is increasingly put into question (Taft 2003; Bradshaw 2004, 11–23; 135; 140); exclusively epicletic prayers are as well attested as simple acts of thanksgiving, even if the inception, the form, the addressee and the object of the Epiclesis are to be evaluated with discrimination (Taft 1992; Bradshaw 2004, 124–128; Meßner 2005, 26–35). Explicit statements of offering and sacrificial metaphors (Hanson 1976; Frank 1978; Stevenson 1986, 10–37; Bradshaw 2004, 78–83) did not belong from the beginning to the fundamental elements of Eucharistic Prayers; the rise of the sacerdotal interpretation of the ordained presider goes along with the development of the sacrificial understanding (Bradshaw 2004, 85–87). Furthermore, even after the becoming independent of the Eucharistic liturgy, the question must be asked about its connection with a Liturgy of the Word as well as about its form (Bradshaw 2004, 69–75; 146f; Meßner 2006, 75–84). Finally, Paul F. Bradshaw has recently turned attention to the phenomenon of non-communicating attendance as well as to the opposite phenomenon of Communion outside of the Eucharistic celebration (Bradshaw 2004, 157 etc; cf. Taft 2003, 2f).

Following on this shifting of supposedly fixed grounds, and in the face of a growing sensibility for the variety of the liturgical development before the fourth century, the question is therefore newly posed as to how Origen should be classified in this altered system of liturgical and historical coordinates.

2 Origen and the Eucharistic practice of his time

2.1 Origen’s restraint in explicit statements about the liturgical performance

Even if one must not necessarily see Origen’s restrained statements in light of the disputed concept of an arcane discipline (Powell 1979, 5f; Jacob 1990), it is not a matter of doubt for him that the Mysteries of the church become accessible only to the Initiated:

‘Whoever is initiated into the mysteries knows the flesh and the blood of the Word of God. For that reason we do not want to linger over that which to the Initiated is known and which, to the Uninitiated, can not be accessible.’ (HomLev 9, 10)

Even in the homilies directed to Catechumens he is able to recall the *ecclesiastica mysteria*: ‘one need not discuss in detail that which is, through mere recalling, adequately understood.’ (HomLev 13, 3) The actual meaning of the rite, however, requires exposition: As with the mysteries of the Scripture, the reception and the carrying out of the Eucharist belong to those not easily explained ‘ecclesiastic customs, which while it is necessary for them to be carried out by all, their meaning/sense (*ratio*), however, is not clear to all.’ (HomNum 5, 1; cf. Bornert 1966, 60f) One looks to Origen, admittedly almost in vain, for concrete references to this ‘rite, according to which it (the Eucharist) is to be carried out’; his extensive remarks about the prayer of Christians in general (Perrone 2000; Buchinger 2003) help us only a little further. Where Origen alludes to unambiguous liturgical material, or hands down rules for the

internal structure or the external carrying out of prayer, he is not necessarily referring to the context of a Eucharistic celebration.

2.2 The shape of the celebration of the Eucharist assumed by Origen

Occasion

About the occasion of the Eucharistic celebrations Origen does not express his views explicitly. That the Lord's Day is marked by the celebration of the Lord's Supper may certainly be assumed (cf. HomExod 7, 5); it is clear on the basis of HomIsa 5, 2 that Sunday was dedicated to the memory of the Passion and the Resurrection (Rordorf 1962, 213–233; Cabié 1992, 49–51; Buchinger 2005a, 2, 784 with n. 2134) and that a greater number of people came together on it than did so on the other days of the week:

‘And because a crowd of people is present now because of Friday, and above all on the Lord's Day, which is dedicated to the memory of Christ's Passion – the resurrection of the Lord is celebrated namely not (only) once a year and not (also) every eight days –, beg the almighty God that his Word should come to us.’

Even if it is in no way proven, it seems probable, in the face of this parallel citation, that Friday was also set apart by a celebration of the Eucharist; unfortunately, Origen does not describe in a detailed way, even in Contra Celsum 8, 22, ‘what with us on the preparation days (= Fridays) and on the Lord's days ... occurs (τὰ περὶ τῶν παρ' ἡμῖν κυριακῶν ἢ παρασκευῶν ... γινόμενα)’. There is absolutely no evidence in Origen's works for the existence of a Eucharistic service on Wednesdays, the second weekday dedicated to fasting in the ancient Church.

Towards a linking of the celebration of the Eucharist with a Liturgy of the Word

Paradoxically, Origen, the first and the most prominent witness for the institutionalizing of a regular independent Liturgy of the Word in the early Church (Salzmann 1994, 430–438; Grappone 2001b; Buchinger [forthcoming]), gives no unambiguous testimony for the connection of the celebration of the Eucharist with a Liturgy of the Word (Schermann 1912, 35). The preserved homilies come principally from non-eucharistic, catechetically oriented assemblies during the week; none of them can be demonstrated to have been given on a Sunday, and for Friday (on which Origen preached, according to the testimony of HomIsa 5, 2) the celebration of the Eucharist – as presented – is not proven but only presumed.

There are, however, several bits of circumstantial evidence which point to a linking of the celebration of the Eucharist with a Liturgy of the Word: In the first place, the mention in HomLuke 7, that ‘you come in a festal mood / on the feast day to the house of the Lord (*ut festivi veniatis ad domum Dei*), and give ear to the reading of the word of God’, refers possibly to the imminent Sunday church attendance of his listeners; in this case, one would be further able to assume that in the corresponding assembly a Gospel pericope would be read out and interpreted. From other homilies in the same cycle, it emerges that a non-Gospel reading preceded, at least occasionally, the interpreted Gospel reading (HomLuke 12; HomLuke 14; HomLuke 31bis; cf. Buchinger [forthcoming]). It is, however, neither proven that a reading from the Gospel was always read on Sunday, nor is it, on the other hand, to be excluded that New Testament, as well as Old Testament scriptures, were read and interpreted as a *lectio continua* during the workday services. Every further reconstruction remains simply a projection of later conditions (Grappone 2001a; Buchinger [forthcoming]; *pace* Nautin 1977, 389–409).

If the Homilies on Luke would in fact derive from Sunday Eucharistic liturgies, one would be tempted to see in the final passage of HomLuke 39 an allusion to the following offertory: ‘Hence, let us rise up and pray to God to be worthy of offering him gifts that he can restore to us, and in place of earthly things bestow heavenly things on us.’ (ET J. T. Lienhard, FaCh 94, 162) However, since already the preceding homily develops the theme of offering and restoring of gifts in a merely exegetical way, Origen probably follows a custom which can be observed in many other places, namely to draw on a central theme of a homily in the latter's

final prayer (Rossi 2003). In any way, the liturgical and the homiletical aspect of the passage need not necessarily exclude one another.

Thirdly, Origen speaks of the Kiss of Peace, which, ‘at the time of the Mysteries in the Church’ would be exchanged (CoCant 1); further on, he locates its place ‘after the prayers’ (CoRom 10, 33; Thraede 1968/69, 152f; Taft 1978, 375–377; Phillips 1996, 21). Since the kiss of peace following the Eucharistic Prayer is attested to only in Rome and North Africa (Jungmann 1962, 2, 399–401), it would be completely implausible not to see in these prayers the Common Prayer of the Faithful, which regularly concluded the Liturgy of the Word; the mentioning of the Kiss of Peace in the Eucharistic celebration is, therefore, to be interpreted as indirect reference to its connection with a Liturgy of the Word.

Thus it can be assumed that in Origen’s community the Eucharist was linked to a liturgy of the Word, which would have consisted – as on days without Eucharist – of a reading, a homily, prayer and the kiss of peace. In consequence, the ‘Mass-schema’ of the Eucharist seems to have been established in Caesarea well before the middle of the third century.

The shape of the Eucharistic celebration and its elements

There is admittedly no single text which expressly proves the *emerging as independent of the sacramental action* out of the context of a meal-celebration; the entire architectonic, ritual and theological framework allows, however, no doubt that the Eucharistic Mysteries (on the terminology, perhaps only by Rufinus applied to the Eucharist, cf. Crouzel 1961, 30f with n. 10; 1962, 81–83) in Origen’s community were understood and celebrated as liturgy in the strict sense of the word, which clearly was separated from other, non-liturgical actions. Even if some individual formulations might have come only from the quill of the translator, the Church building in Origen appears, in various places, as a separate, spacious building (above all, see HomExod 12, 1; furthermore cf. HomJosh 2, 1; HomExod 2, 2; on the lost CoPhlm cf. Harnack 1919, 144f) with a raised Presbyterium in which the (bishop and) priests could sit around the altar (HomJudg 3, 2; for further evidence, see Buchinger [forthcoming]), whereas the deacons stood (CoCant 2; HomJer 12, 3). Even though the Christian altar is obviously not to be confused with the pagan altar (Ledegang 2001, 331f; cf. Contra Celsum 8, 17–20), it was decorated not only with the gifts of the faithful (HomJosh 10, 3), but ‘hallowed by the precious blood of Christ’ (HomJosh 2, 1).

Origen does not express himself about how the *offering of the Gifts* concretely occurred; he alludes only once to the Bread, ‘which is laid on the Table’ (CoMatt Ser. 85) although he makes it known that the Offering/Presentation (προσάγειν) is a fundamental act of the Eucharistic celebration (Contra Celsum 8, 33). Occasionally Origen speaks in the plural of ‘Breads’ (Contra Celsum 8, 33; cf. FragmCor 34). It does not become clear if the Eucharistic chalice was mixed or unmixed (HomJer 12, 2; CoMatt Ser. 127; cf. Grimmelt 1942, 74). Origen gives no hint that, in a clearly Eucharistic context, elements other than Bread and Wine were offered; it must remain an open question whether one may conclude from the mentioning of the altar in the invitation to offer the first fruits for the support of the clergy by Christians (HomNum 11, 2), that this custom might have been ritualized (Schermann 1912, 51f; Grimmelt 1942, 7).

In Origen there is no clue that more than *one single Eucharistic Prayer for both Gifts* would have been spoken, even if the opposite supposition cannot positively be ruled out. He speaks in the singular of the προσφορά (Dial. 4, 24, 27) and also of the ‘prayer (εὐχή), which over the matter of the Eucharist ‘is accomplished’, and of the ‘Word, which over it (the matter of the Bread) is spoken.’ (CoMatt 11, 14) If Contra Celsum 8, 33 says that we ‘who with thanksgiving and prayer . . . eat the Bread offered’, this double expression is to be regarded as a hendiadyoin, particularly as both expressions stand in the singular, and immediately beforehand Origen speaks only of the ‘thanksgiving’. Origen does not express an opinion about the direction in which the Presider prays; however it is to be presumed that the community faced towards the East:

‘... “And he will take from the blood of the calf and will sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat to the east.” (Lev 16:13f) Indeed, how the rite of atonement for men, which was done to God, should be celebrated was taught among the ancients. But you who came to Christ, the true high priest, who made atonement for you to God by his blood (cf. Rom 3:25?) and reconciled you to the Father (cf. Rom 5:10f?), do not hold fast to the blood of the flesh. Learn rather the blood of the Word and hear him saying to you, “This is my blood which will be poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins” (composite quotation; cf. Matt 26:28 parr). He who is inspired by the mysteries knows both the flesh and the blood of the Word of God. Therefore, let us not remain in these which are known to the wise and cannot be laid open to the ignorant. But do not take the statement that “he sprinkles to the east” (Lev 16:14) as superfluous. From the east came atonement for you; for from there is the “man whose name is east” (Zech 6:12), who became “a mediator between God and man” (cf. 1 Tim 2:5). Therefore, you are invited by this “to look” always “to the east” (cf. Bar 4:36) whence “the Sun of Righteousness” (Mal 3:20) arises for you ...’. (HomLev 9, 10; ET G. W. Barkley, FaCh 83, 199. On the orientation of prayer in Origen, cf. HomNum 5, 1; On Prayer 32. More generally, see Wallraff 2000.)

There exists no reason to doubt that the presidency of the Eucharist had been reserved to the higher clergy (Minnerath 2004, 283f; more generally on the presidency in Church according to Origen, see Buchinger [forthcoming]), even if Origen never explicitly speaks about this (in Eucharistic context, cf. only FragmJer 50, where no concrete rank is mentioned; on FragmLev 10, 9; HomLev 7, 1, see Vogt 1974, 41–43). The development of the three-tiered offices of deacon, priest, and bishop was concluded without any doubt (Vogt 1974, 3–6), and the sacerdotal understanding of the Christian priest was in its full development (HomJer 12, 3; Vilela 1971, 83–91; 110–112). In addition there were obviously various ministries which were also open to the laity (HomJosh 10, 3 generally mentions *officia*; HomNum 15, 1 and HomJudg 1, 1 speak about the lector; on non-liturgical offices, see Vilela 1971, 59f).

Beyond the Commentary on the pericope of the Last Supper (CoMatt Ser. 85), Origen does not speak about the *Breaking of the Eucharistic Bread*; he makes it clear, however, that the Church’s celebration of the Eucharist stands, in this respect, in continuity to the actions of Jesus (CoMatt Ser. 86).

Communion is a Rite characterized by the greatest reverence:

‘You, who are accustomed to take part in the divine mysteries know, when you receive the body of the Lord, how you protect it with all caution and veneration lest any small part fall from it, lest anything of the consecrated gift be lost. For you believe, and correctly, that you are answerable if anything falls from there by neglect.’ (HomExod 13, 3; ET R. E. Heine, FaCh 71, 380f)

It is worthy of note that, through other texts, frequent, presumably regular Communion within the Eucharistic celebration is attested as a matter of course (CoMatt Ser. 82; CoJohn 28, 4 § 30), whereas Communion at home is not proven in Origen. Homily 2, 6 on Psalm 37 (38) 19, translated by Rufinus, describes the ‘participation in the body of Christ’ as – and this is entirely to be understood in a spatial manner – ‘approaching the Eucharist’ (*Communicare ... corpus Christi accedens ad eucharistiam*; on On Pascha 1, 76 [P 25,-8--4], see Buchinger 2005a, 2, 881f; Buchinger 2005b); this is a clear indication for a progressing ritual development of the Eucharistic celebration.

The participation in the Eucharist requires not only the spiritual and ethical *preparation* (CoMatt 10, 25) which Origen describes in various biblical images (ascent to the Upper Room, in which Jesus, according to Mark 14:15par, celebrated the Last Supper: HomJer 19, 13; FragmEzek 18, 31; CoCant 2; CoMatt Ser. 79; CoMatt Ser. 86; Buchinger 2005a, 2, 644f; Show Bread of Lev 24:6–9 and 1 Sam 21,5–7: FragmCor 34; HomLev 13, 5; HomEzek 9, 5; preparation for the theophany of Exod 19:10f: HomExod 11, 7; girding of one’s loins at the Passover Meal Exod. 12:11: On Pascha 1, 105–109 [P 35, 29–37, 14]; see Buchinger 2005a, 2, 881f) and, with the support of 1 Cor 11:27–34, drastically accentuates (Hom 2, 6 in Ps 37 [38] 19; FragmJer 50; FragmCor 34; CoMatt 10, 24f; CoMatt 11, 14; CoJohn 32, 24 § 309; CoJohn 28, 24 § 27; HomLev 13, 5); it also demands preceding sexual abstention (Crouzel 1962a, 55f):

‘It is therefore necessary, that one be pure “from a woman” in order to take the Show Bread (cf. 1 Sam 21:5,7); is it not far more necessary that one be purer for receiving the greater Show Bread over which the

name of God, of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit has been invoked, so that he might receive the Breads truly to his salvation and not “to his judgment/condemnation” (1 Cor 11:34)?’ (FragmCor 34)

All the more is it required from the minister, who, ‘after the (sexual) uniting behaves indifferently to the impurity to be found in himself as he prepares to pray over the Bread of the Eucharist: thus one desecrates the Holy and commits a pollution.’ (FragmEzek 7, 22; on the metaphor of pollution, but without explicit reference to sexuality, cf. also FraggJer 50)

2.3 Origen and the Eucharistic Prayer

‘Conventions’ about the addressee of the Eucharistic Prayer

In his discussion with Heracleides and his Episcopal colleagues, Origen permits a valuable insight into his fundamental conception about the Eucharistic Prayer: for him it is clear that God the Father is the addressee of the προσφορά and Christ is the mediator, and that this convention is to be observed:

‘Oblation is constantly made to God the all-powerful through Jesus Christ by reason of his communication in divinity with the Father. Nor is it made twice but (once) to God through God. I will seem to speak daringly: in prayer it is necessary to respect the conventions ...’ (Dial. 4, 24–28; ET R. J. Daly, ACW 54, 60f; cf. Crehan 1950; Capelle 1952; Nautin 1961)

The reference to conventions (συνθήκαι) in Eucharistic praying must not necessarily mean a verbally fixed text; it documents, however, on the one hand a causal connection between the *lex supplicandi* and the *lex credendi* (Hanson 1961, 174; Bouley 1981, 140f; Driscoll 2002; see also CoMatt 11, 14), and on the other hand the obviously still to be found in flux building up of recognized conventions and, thereby, the not too long previously occurring changing of differing practices (Klinghardt 1996, 461).

In other places as well, Origen documents the wrestling about the in no way obvious position of God as the addressee of prayer, in regard to whom Christ is only assigned the role of the (high priestly) mediator of prayer (Laporte 1995, 28–42; Hermans 1996, 8–10): ‘One may pray to no created being, not even to Christ himself, but only to the God and Father of all, to whom even our Redeemer had prayed . . . it remains therefore only to pray to God, the Father of all, but not without the High Priest, who, “with an oath” (cf. Hebr 7:21) was appointed by the Father . . .’ (On Prayer 15, 1; cf. On Prayer 15, 4; 16, 1) The Apology against Celsus distinguishes in fact: ‘We worship (θεραπεύομεν) but one God, the Father and the Son’ (Contra Celsum 8, 12; ET H. Chadwick 460); ‘That is why we worship (σέβομεν) the one God and his one Son (!) . . ., bringing our prayers to the God of the universe through the mediation of His only-begotten Son. We bring them to him first, asking him who is a ‘propitiation for our sins’ (cf. 1 John 2:2; 4:10), to act as a high-priest (cf. Hebr 2:17) and to bear our prayers and sacrifices and intercessions to the supreme God.’ (Contra Celsum 8, 13; ET H. Chadwick 461; cf. also Contra Celsum 8, 26; 8, 34; 8, 37. For examples of such prayers, see HomIsa 1, 5; HomNum 11, 9) But Origen also admits to exceptions to this rule, ‘if we are capable of a clear understanding of the absolute and the relative sense of prayer’ (Contra Celsum 5, 4; cf. also Contra Celsum 5, 11; 8, 69 and CoRom 8, 4, the latter possibly being influenced by Rufinus). He defends not only the ‘faith of the common folk’, of which God approves as well as ‘the rational piety towards him of more intelligent people who send up their prayers to the Creator of the universe with thanksgiving, an offering of prayer which they make as by the mediation of a high priest who has shown to men the pure way to worship God.’ (Contra Celsum 7, 46; ET H. Chadwick 434) Even Origen himself gives not a few examples of praying to Christ (Bigg 1913, 226–231; Crouzel 1956, 117–119): in his work are found numerous more or less spontaneous invocations of Christ (invocations of Christ alone: HomExod 13, 3; HomLev 5, 5; HomNum 26, 3; HomJer 19, 14; HomEzek 3, 4; HomLuke 6; invocations of Christ and the Father: HomEzek 12, 5; HomLuke 15; invocations of Christ and the Holy Spirit: HomLev 1, 1; invocations of Christ, the Father and the Holy Spirit: HomNum 13, 5. On the prayer of HomIsa 5, 2 to Jesus the footwasher, see Russell Christman 1997). Finally, the marked limitation found in his discourse On Prayer that one may not even pray to Christ Himself, applies only for the prayer (προσευχή) in the narrowest terminological sense: the remaining three types of prayer, mentioned by 1 Tim 2: 1 – petition, intercession, and thanksgiving – ‘it is not inappropriate, even to offer to men . . ., if however, to these holy men it is to be offered, all the more is Christ to be thanked . . . and intercessions to be directed to him.’ (On Prayer 14, 6; cf. Riggi 1974. This is all the more true of other genres, as for example ‘hymns of praise’; cf. Contra Celsum 8, 67) From this, however, an Eucharistic Prayer directed to Christ in the terminological sense cannot yet be derived.

The Orientation of the community at prayer gives this a pronounced Christological perspective; the turning is directed towards ‘him, whose name is Rising’ (Zech 6:12), but, following

Origen, at the same time to him ‘who has become Mediator between God and Men’ (1 Tim 2:5). (HomLev 9, 10 as quoted above, p. ■)

Genre, form and content of the Eucharistic Prayer

It is more difficult to identify the genre, form and content of the προσφορά familiar to Origen (CoMatt 11, 14, as quoted above, mentions a ‘prayer’ and the ‘word’ said over the matter of the Eucharist). From the general reasoning of Origen about prayer – even about thanksgiving (cf. for example CoJohn 28, 6 § 39–42) – one may not, especially not automatically, infer about the praxis of Eucharistic praying of his time; neither the differentiation of the four types of prayer, which at the beginning of his discourse ‘On Prayer’ was derived from an exegesis of 1 Tim 2:1 (On Prayer 14, 2–6), nor the prayer structure developed at the end of the same document (On Prayer 33, 1–6) necessarily reflects concrete liturgical texts.

What is clear, on the one hand, is the *essential Eucharistic feature* of the prayer spoken over the gifts; it arises not only from the terminology (FragmJer 50; FraggEzek 7, 22; Hom 2, 6 in Ps 37 [38] 19; CoMatt Ser. 86; CoJohn 32, 24 § 310) and from the direct application of the Institution narrative to the liturgy of the Church (CoMatt Ser. 86; HomJer 19, 13; FraggEzek 19, 31), but is also expressly testified to by Origen:

‘We give thanks to the Creator of the universe and eat the loaves that are presented with thanksgiving and prayer over the gifts, so that by the prayer they become a certain holy body which sanctifies those who partake of it with a pure intention.’ (Contra Celsum 8, 33; ET H. Chadwick 476)

About the precise content of the Thanksgiving only suppositions can be employed. In defence against the accusation of ingratitude Origen defends the Christians with the indication of the fundamental Eucharistic attitude of the Christians and its sacramental expression; it is admittedly not clear, whether, and in what form, the enumerated motives for gratitude – the mighty deeds of God, his creation and his providence as well as the eschatological hope – were also explicit subjects of the Eucharistic Prayer:

‘We avoid being guilty of ingratitude to God who loads us with His benefits. We are His creatures and are cared for by His providence. Our condition is subject to His judgement, and we entertain hopes of Him beyond this life. Moreover, we have a symbol of our thanksgiving to God in the bread which is called “Eucharist”.’ (Contra Celsum 8, 57; ET Henry Chadwick 496)

On the other hand, an *epicletic element* is clearly identifiable. About the addressee and the form of the Epiclesis Origen expresses himself in a contradictory manner: on the one hand, he speaks of the ‘Bread, over which the name of God and of Christ and the Holy Ghost was called upon’ (FragmCor 34), thus of a Trinitarian Epiclesis (or an epicletic text in a broader sense, yet in some way invoking the Trinity). On the other hand, one wants to see an allusion to a Logos-Epiclesis in Origen’s position that the Eucharist is hallowed, according to 1 Tim 4:5, ‘through the Word of God and a supplication.’ (CoMatt 11, 14ter; cf. the report on research in Bouley 1981, 139 with n. 212)

Several arguments can be brought into play for a Logos-Epiclesis: First, it would fit well into the general view of the early history of liturgy (Taft 1992; Johnson 1995, 233–253). Secondly, the prayer for the coming and the appearance of Jesus belongs absolutely to Origen’s repertoire of praying (see above); admittedly, it remains unclear whether one may hear the echo of a Logos-Epiclesis when Origen is primarily speaking of the understanding of Scripture (HomIsa 5, 2; HomJer 19, 10f. 14; CoMatt Ser. 79; HomLuke 22). Thirdly, the accusation of Theophilus of Alexandria, cited by Jerome, would also fit in, according to which Origen would have denied that the hallowing of the Eucharist comes about ‘through the calling upon and the arrival of the Holy Spirit’ (*per inuocationem et aduentum sancti spiritus*; ep. 98, 13).

There are, however, several reasons to be critical about a Logos-Epiclesis: First, the historical credibility of this accusation suffers from the fact that it was raised one and a half centuries later, and out of a profoundly changed theological and liturgico-historical situation, and with polemic intention (Johnson 1995, 242f); furthermore, it is obviously false in its context,

where Jerome raises the same accusation with regard to the baptismal water: an invocation (ἐπίκλησις) of the Trinity over the baptismal water is repeatedly attested to by Origen (Auf der Maur & Waldram 1981, 79–83). Why should the accusation concerning the Eucharist contain a sting, when it proves to be untenable regarding Baptism? Secondly it is to be held that Origen gives the above-quoted clear indication of a Trinitarian Epiclesis in unambiguous Eucharistic context, and in a fragment preserved in Greek, whereas the grounds for a Logos-Epiclesis are indirect, vague, and ambiguous. Thirdly, Origen indeed attributes to the Spirit a crucial role in the Eucharistic Action: ‘We grasp the holy mysteries through the grace of the Holy Spirit, from whom everything that is holy, has been made holy.’ (HomLev 13, 6) Whether and when this conviction shaped a liturgical text is not apparent; at least a pure Logos-Epiclesis appears not very plausible for the reasons mentioned above.

The indication of the Eucharistic Prayer as προσφορά suggests, presumably, the existence of an explicit *statement of offering* (Dial. 4, 24. 27 as quoted above, p. ■). The term belongs not to Origen’s Eucharistic-theological vocabulary but was taken over from the tradition (Lies 1982, 158f; Hermans 1996, 84–89; Buchinger 2005a, 1, 200); it is to be assumed that an element in the obviously already established literary form (Lies 1982, 151f) corresponds to the genre-identification. Further details are not, to be sure, to be recognized.

Further structural elements of the Eucharistic Prayer are left to speculation, even if it is, particularly in Origen, not methodologically permissible to conclude their non-existence from the failure to mention liturgical customs. No trace of an introductory *Dialogue* is found in Origen (but cf. Taft 1988, 67; 77). It is no longer assumed that Origen knew the *Sanctus* as part of the Eucharistic Prayer, although his influence can clearly be identified in later Alexandrian anaphoras (Spinks 1991, 2–4; Taft 1991–1992, 89–95; Johnson 1996, 673–680; 2000); ‘Indeed, Sarapion’s sanctus-unit appears to be nothing other than the theological interpretation of Origen expressed in a liturgical form.’ (Johnson 1996, 680).

The anamnetic character of the Eucharistic celebration is, however, quite familiar to Origen (Schütz 1984, 161f; Lies 1982 passim, above all 162–165; 299–304; 313–318); he interprets the Show Bread ‘presented before the Lord as a memorial’ (according to Lev 24:7) in view of the liturgy of the Church (*ecclesiastica mysteria*) and in an express looking back to the Iteration command of 1 Cor 11:24/Lk 22:19 (on the latter, see De Margerie 1984, 53–56):

‘But if these things (i. e. Lev 24:5–9) are referred to the greatness of the mystery, you will find this “remembrance” (Lev 24:7) to have the effect of a great propitiation. If you return to that “loaf which descends from heaven and gives life to this world” (John 6:33), that shew bread “whom God set forth as a propitiation through faith in his blood” (Rom 3:25) and if you turn your attention to that “remembrance” about which the Lord says, “Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24f/Lk 22:19), you will find that this is the only “remembrance” which makes God gracious to men. Therefore, if you recall more intently the ecclesiastical mysteries, you will find the image of the future truth anticipated (cf. Hebr 10:1?) in these things which the Law writes. But there is not much more to discuss about these things because it is enough to be understood by a single recollection.’ (HomLev 13, 3; ET G. W. Barkley, FaCh 83, 237)

Whether an explicit *Anamnesis* was, therefore, already a fixed element of the Eucharistic Prayer does not become clear, and about its possible content one can only make suppositions.

Origen cites the *Institution Narrative* of the Last Supper in such differing versions that he, on the one hand, lets the frequent use of the text be recognized but, on the other hand however, no fixed liturgical formulation.

Words over the bread: *accipite et manducate* (CoMatt Ser. 86; HomLev 5, 8)
λάβετε, φάγετε (CoJohn 32, 24 § 305. 309)

Words over the cup: *accipite, et bibite ex hoc* (HomLev 7, 1)
bibite, quia hic est sanguis meus novi testamenti (CoMatt Ser. 86)
hic sanguis meus est, qui pro vobis effundetur in remissionem peccatorum (HomLev 9, 10)

λάβετε, πείτε, τοῦτό μου ἐστὶ τὸ αἷμα, τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐκχυόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, ὅσάκις ἐὰν πίνητε, εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. (HomJer 12, 2)
hoc facite in meam commemorationem (HomLev 13, 3)

It is remarkable that Origen speaks often of the ‘Cup of the New Covenant’ (FragmEzek 18, 31; HomJer 12, 2; HomJer 19, 13; CoCant 2; CoMatt 17, 33; CoMatt Ser. 79; CoMatt Ser. 114; CoRom 5, 1); this is a significant simplification of 1 Cor 11:25 / Luke 22:20.

The text-critical instability is most likely to be understood against the background of a catechetical – but hardly liturgical – tradition still in flux.

Origen testifies to the institutionalising of *Intercessions*, which will be found again in later liturgies; the closer liturgical context does not, unfortunately, thereby become clear. Firstly, he cites a portion of a regularly used prayer, which asks that God would grant to the faithful a share along with the prophets and the apostles:

‘Often in prayer we say, “Almighty God, give us the lot of the Prophets, give us the lot of the Apostles of Christ so that we may be found also with Christ himself.” But when we say this, we do not realize what we pray. For in effect we are saying this: “Let us suffer what the Prophets have suffered, let us be hated as the Prophets were hated, let befall us the kind of misfortunes which befell the Apostles.” For to say, “Give me a lot with the Prophets,” yet not suffer the pains of the Prophets nor want to suffer, is unjust. To say: “Give me a lot with the Apostles,” yet, truthfully speaking, not wanting to say, using Paul’s expression, “far greater labors, with countless beatings, far more imprisonments, and often near death” (cf. 2 Cor 11:23), and so on, is the most unjust thing of all.’ (HomJer 14, 14; ET J. C. Smith, FaCh 97, 149f)

It is worthy of note that Origen speaks of an at least content-wise rather established matter of prayer, if he does not even testify to a marked formulation (cf. the repeated introduction of the prayer as a quotation as well as its repetition in the following HomJer 15, 1); is it furthermore to be regarded as a sensational earlier bit of evidence for the intercessions of the anaphora – the text is widely seen in continuity to the Egyptian liturgy of St Mark (to be precise, the papyrus Strasbourg gr. 254; Cuming 1990, 114) – or a quote from a formulary for the general intercessions at the end of the Liturgy of the Word?

Secondly, Origen mentions that the Christians (in compliance with the command of 1 Tim 2:1f) offer prayers for the emperor and for the authorities (Contra Celsum 8, 73); when and how that exactly occurred, is not, however, to be seen (Schermann 1912, 45f, thinks about the Common Prayer of the Faithful, as he does in the case of HomJer 14, 14). Furthermore, it remains obscure if and how Origen’s frequently represented conviction of a communion of prayer (and meal; cf. Contra Celsum 8, 32) between the faithful and the angels (among other texts, cf. Contra Celsum 8, 34; 8, 36; HomNum 5, 3; 11, 9) might have found a liturgical expression in the Eucharistic celebration, particularly since no relevant bits of evidence are found in an unambiguous Eucharistic context (Monaci Castagno 2000, 11). Lastly, Origen is convinced that not only Christ and the angels, but also the souls of the departed saints unite themselves with the prayer of the Christians (On Prayer 11, 1; 31, 5); if this may be understood as an allusion to the diptychs of the dead in such an early period, has to remain open (*pace* Schermann 1912, 48; Grimmelt 1942, 53), because in Origen this conviction is never connected with the Eucharist.

It must likewise remain an open question whether from the prominent role of the Trinitarian *Doxology* in Origen’s rule of prayer (On Prayer 33, 1. 6) one may conclude a corresponding structural element of Eucharistic praying.

3 Conclusion: Origen and the transition to the liturgy of the imperial era

Looking through the citations from Origen about the Eucharistic celebration brings forth, as expected, no new data; it is not so much the picture which has changed, but its frame. If, however, one takes it as a starting point that documents of the pre-Nicene period are not from the outset to be interpreted in continuity to the unfolding of the liturgy in the imperial Christian period, Origen’s testimony gains new weight: and even if many questions of detail must remain open, it becomes clear that he testifies to developments which were later generally to be implemented, but for which there is little, if any, evidence at his time.

Thus can the connection of the Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharistic celebration probably be assumed, which has still not been unambiguously testified to among the North African

contemporaries of Origen (Salzmann 1994, 386–429, esp. 395; 399f; 404 on Tertullian; 438–440 on Cyprian), who thereby, and even with his admittedly sparse evidence about the Eucharistic praxis, becomes a valuable witness to the consolidating of the ‘Mass-schema’ of the Eucharistic celebration. A Eucharistic Prayer, which contains, aside from the Thanksgiving, an Epiclesis as well, and perhaps also an explicit statement of offering, is anything but obvious in the first half of the third century, though it was to become standard in the following century (cf. Bradshaw 2004, 136f: ‘The structural similarities between the Strasbourg Papyrus and seemingly earlier forms of the Eucharistic Prayers of Sarapion and of the *Apostolic Tradition* imply that one particularly prevalent form, at least from early in the fourth century onwards if not before, was the combination of praise and petitionary units by means of an “offering” or “thanksgiving/offering” formula linking them together’); and wherever the intercessions cited by Origen had their exact placement – it is quite possible that he is the first witness of intercessions being an integral part of the Eucharistic Prayer –, they are a valuable detail of early liturgical praxis of prayer.

Both Origen’s formal recourse to fixed ‘conventions’ about Eucharistic praying, as well as the rule tied to these conventions regarding their content – that the προσφορά is to be directed to the Father – confirm the picture gained from other sources, that both, at that time, were not yet taken for granted. The precious insight, which Origen furthered with his intervention in conversation with Heracleides, lets it be recognized as well that Origen was not only a witness of but also a protagonist of a Eucharistic praxis of prayer in a unity from rule of faith and rule of prayer. His influence, however, goes far beyond this well-known theological-liturgical engagement: on the one hand Origen embodies in his person the transfer of views and conceptions – not necessarily practices – between Alexandria and Palestine; on the other hand, his direct or indirect subsequent influence in motifs and formulations of later Eucharistic and Eucharistic-theological texts and in liturgical ordering is to be recognized, although these are, admittedly, not the object of this investigation.

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