EARLY EUCHARIST IN TRANSITION?  
A FRESH LOOK AT ORIGEN

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1 Introduction

1.1 Methodological problems

Liturgiological investigations into the Eucharist in Origen¹ 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 liturgiological rereading of Origen’s texts seems appropriate.

¹ 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 (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.
1.2 The changed state of research


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 ele-