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REVIEW

Predrag BUKOVEC,
Die frühchristliche Eucharistie
(Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum
Neuen Testament 499), Tübingen 2023

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Reviewer

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Review

Predrag BUKOVEC, *Die frühchristliche Eucharistie (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 499)*, Tübingen 2023

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With *Die frühchristliche Eucharistie (The Early Christian Eucharist)*, Predrag Bukovec presents a revised version of his multiple award-winning dissertation in Liturgical Studies *Mahl und Mähler: Die frühchristliche Eucharistie (1.–3. Jahrhundert)*, which was completed at the University of Vienna in 2019. The fact that this work was included in a series on Biblical Studies already indicates that it is guided by interest mainly in historical and philological research. On the other hand, issues of contemporary liturgy, even possibly narrowed to the Roman Catholic context or to current ecclesiastical fields of discussion do not play a role.

The comprehensive study is composed of four parts: 1) a concise introduction into methodology, state of research and research interest in the context of changing paradigms (1–20); 2) a detailed analysis of the New Testament evidence with special consideration of the so-called “Words of Institution” (21–160); 3) a presentation and commentary of the sources on the Christian Eucharist in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, the most extensive part and undoubtedly the heart of the present work (151–466); 4) finally a synthesis of the findings (467–513). A preface, a bibliography, an index of sources (biblical and non-biblical), and an index of subjects complete the work.

In the first chapter, *Die frühchristliche Eucharistie: Paradigmen im Wandel (The Early Christian Eucharist: Changing Paradigms)*, Bukovec introduces the history of research and its paradigm shifts. The study is closely connected to the author’s preceding first dissertation from 2017 (*Der Einsetzungsbericht und die Genese des Eucharistischen Hochgebets, The Words of Institution and the Genesis of the Eucharistic Prayer*) as well as to

his ongoing research project *Zu den Ursprüngen der Taufsalbung (On the Origins of the Baptismal Unction)* (12). Already at this point, Bukovec's critical consciousness, which permeates the entire work, becomes obvious. The author is always concerned to avoid hasty conclusions – especially too far-reaching historical conclusions about the period before the Crucifixion:

Diese Untersuchung hat nicht das Ziel, die Fragen nach der Historizität des Letzten Abendmahls und seines Ablaufs zu klären. Eine liturgiehistorische Untersuchung kann immer nur im kirchlichen und damit nachösterlichen Raum ansetzen, da es ohne Tod, Auferstehung und Geistausgießung keine Liturgie geben kann. (12)

Bukovec constantly assumes the communion paradigm as a cult etiology (15, cf. also the evidence for *Kultätiologie* in the index of subjects). Already a cursory glance at the footnote apparatus of the introductory chapter shows the author's superior knowledge of academic literature, which developed during his work on his thematically not too distant first dissertation.

The second chapter, *Der neutestamentliche Befund (The New Testament Evidence)* presents the relevant biblical passages. There is a special focus on the institution of the Eucharist in the Last Supper and its historical reconstruction, whereby Bukovec clearly points out the limitations of this research:

Die mündliche Überlieferung der Einsetzungsworte vor ihrer schriftlichen Aufzeichnung im NT ist nicht unmittelbar für uns greifbar. Mit den nt. Zeugen haben wir gleichsam Schlaglichter vor uns, die ein Resultat vorangegangener Tradierung sind. Dieser Umstand zeigt sich bereits daran, daß sich schon bald mindestens zwei Stränge etabliert haben (Paulus/Lk und Mk/Mt) [...] – zu einem Zeitpunkt, der noch vor der Verschriftlichung liegt. (159)

In addition to the accounts of the Lord's Supper in Mark 14, Matt 22 and Luke 22, the study is also devoted to 1 Cor 10–14, the context of Luke-Acts, John 6, and – remarkably – the institution of the New Covenant in Heb 9 (115–126). At the end of this chapter, Bukovec places a reconstruction of the "relative chronology" (150–160), which once again elaborates

the function of the institution narratives as early Christian cult etiology (esp. 151–153).

The third chapter *Die Eucharistie im 2./3. Jahrhundert* (*The Eucharist in the 2nd/3rd Centuries*) is a commentary on the relevant sources outside and after the New Testament. This constitutes the heart of the study, which is devoted in detail to the *Didache*, Justin Martyr, the (Pseudo-)Ignatian letters, Irenaeus of Lyon, various Gnostic sources, the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles and related texts, the *Didascalia*, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage, and the so-called *Apostolic Tradition*. Bukovec reports on the state of historical research in each case, including questions of authenticity, offers the respective texts with German translations in excellent graphic design and – instead of imposing an uniform analytical grid on all texts – outlines peculiarities, special features, and open questions about each of the sources. Summarising the findings is hardly possible under these circumstances; Bukovec himself refrains from a concluding reflection on these chapters. However, some examples may be mentioned: Sunday as an occasion for the Eucharist (especially in Justin [189–207] and in the Acts of Thomas [376]), the incarnational understanding of the change of the Eucharistic species in Justin (203–204), the connection of the Eucharist to the monepiscopate in Pseudo-Ignatius (212–217), which became so influential in the history of its effects, as well as the disgusting Eucharistic parodies attributed to the rival groups of Epiphanius of Salamis which he called Gnostics (315–318).

The concluding fourth chapter *Die Liturgie der Eucharistie bis zur Standardisierung* (*The Liturgy of the Eucharist up to its Standardisation*) has a systematising character. Bukovec summarizes his observations on terminology – noteworthy here is the cautionary note not to overvalue the term “Lord’s Supper” as an early Christian designation of the Eucharist (468). He discusses the scheduling of the Eucharist: Alongside the baptismal Eucharist, there is early, but by no means consistent evidence for Sunday as a regular occasion for the Eucharist (470). He summarized the sources on presiding at the Eucharist from the New Testament apostles to the established episcopate with the support of deacons (471–472). He details the meal elements of bread, chalice, mixed wine, water, dairy products and honey (473–474). Then he refers to the liturgical patterns in the distinction of *symptotic* and *missal* types (475–489) and to the Eucharistic

prayer with its role of orality and with the distinction of *Didache* and *epi-cletic* types (489–509). Finally, Bukovec discusses the Words of Institution as a document of foundation and as a theological point of reference (509–513).

With *Die frühchristliche Eucharistiefeyer* Predrag Bukovec presents an outstanding study that will be an important reference for future research. Particularly meritorious is the combination of theological questions with philological skills. This reviewer does not presume to pass judgement on the quality of the translations of the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic, and Ethiopian sources, as he is for the most part far less familiar with these languages than the author is. In any case, Bukovec' clear preparation of the source texts and their translations provides significant services for further liturgical and philological research.

Bukovec' knowledge of the academic literature is outstanding, as evidenced by a total of 1231 footnotes which are very often further comments on the state of research or the history of research: Pages on which fully elaborated argumentative footnotes take up more space than the actual continuous text are by no means rare (e.g. 5, 29, 231, 325, 339). Conspicuous and meritorious are the many places where Bukovec cautiously, but precisely warns against hasty conclusions (e.g. 13–20, 159–160). Even if – or precisely because – the study proceeds consistently in a historical outline, it also implies the questioning of overly simplistic retractions of the (present-day) ritual patterns of the Christian Eucharistic celebration to a supposedly easy and undoubtedly ascertainable foundational will of Jesus.

Bukovec' insights – for example, on the distinction between Paul/Luke versus Mark/Matt or on the distinction between sympotic and missal types – are not revolutionary. The merit of the work lies rather in the bringing together of the various New Testament and early Christian sources, connected to the associated research history. Unfortunately, the work ends somewhat abruptly: Even if chapter 4 has a summarising character overall, one would have expected some kind of concluding remarks at the end of the book.

The short title of the work *Die frühchristliche Eucharistie* is extremely charming. It says everything that is necessary, even without any specification in a bureaucratic-technical subtitle. One notices Bukovec' great pleas-

ure in an elaborate vocabulary. Theological terminology is constantly assumed to be familiar: This is not surprising in a treatise at this academic level, but perhaps some sort of reading aid would have been useful here and there to make the book a little more appealing for a readership from other disciplines such as History, Philosophy, or Classical Studies. The spelling sometimes seems unnecessarily antiquated, e.g. the use of German spelling rules from before 1996 or the capitalisation of pronouns referring to Jesus (e.g. 15, 57). The abbreviation Heb (instead of Hebr) is unusual for the Letter to the Hebrews in German theology.

The index of subjects contains only 83 lemmas (partly supplemented by sublemmas), but these are wisely chosen and provide excellent orientation if one wants to trace a certain aspect across the book. In addition, rarely occurring terms such as *Banganarti*, *Elchasai*, or *Maranatha* are also included. Whether it would have been necessary, however, to include *Einsetzungsbericht* (*Words of Institution*), *Eucharistie*, and *Mahlemente* (*elements of meal*) separately in the register is a moot point. Limiting the entries to the sublemmas might have saved redundancies.

In *Die frühchristliche Eucharistie* Predrag Bukovec provides comprehensive insights into the earliest history of the Christian Eucharist based on the available sources. Thus, he positions himself in liturgical-historical research in the border area to New Testament Studies and Classical Philology, at the same time with special interest in Eucharistic theology. This implies both christological and ecclesiological issues and digs deeper than many recent church-political and aesthetic controversies. The high purchase price of the book may unfortunately have a deterrent effect on some parts of the target audience, but the reviewer nevertheless strongly recommends it to anyone in Liturgical Studies and related fields.