

Leon Nieścior

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw

ORCID 0000-0003-4988-9667

Integral Communication with Listeners in Origen's Four Homilies on Psalm 76(77)

Abstract: A recently discovered collection of 29 Origen's homilies on the Psalms was published in 2015. Origen delivered them in the last years of his life. We find there speculations on the borderline between philosophy and theology, which Origen never abandoned. Do they not violate the canon of homilies? Are they not dominated by a theoretical, intellectual factor? To answer these questions, the author poses a broader question in his article, namely, about the nature of communication with listeners. Did Origen, as a homilist, appeal in an integral and balanced way to all human faculties: reason, imagination, will, feelings and senses? The article has a character of a survey of the issue, since four homilies to Ps 76(77) are the subject of its analysis.

Keywords: Origen, Psalm 77(76), patristic exegesis, patristic homily, patristic preaching

In 2015, based on the 12th century manuscript, a collection of Origen's 29 homilies on Psalms, previously discovered at the Munich State Library, was published. The homilies, known in one-third of this collection from the Latin translation of Rufinus of Aquileia, are all the more valuable because they are the last work of the Alexandrian. He wrote them before his arrest and death as a confessor.¹

Many articles devoted to this discovery and to selected formal and theological aspects of the homily have already been published. I pointed them out in the article on the first homily on Ps 76.² The subject of my current attention are all four homilies to this Psalm.

¹ See Perrone, *Codex Monacensis Graecus*, 17–25.

² See Nieścior, "Theological Themes," 63–82.

A homily, according to its type, is some form of contact with listener or reader. Considering the indicated homilies in terms of content and form, I will look at the multifaceted nature of this contact. In the homilies, a careful selection and balance of various planes of communication with listeners are noted, which seem to form an integral whole.³ Are we really dealing with an integral communication with listeners (readers)? We want to take into account all elements of his nature that are essential to this kind of communication. If so, how does Origen make it a reality?

1. The participation of the human logos in the Logos of God

Origen aims at making the addressee of his homilies participate with his whole nature in the proclaimed Word of God. That is why he appeals as much as possible to all his faculties: reason, imagination, will, feelings and senses.

Our author is a theologian of the Logos, so the participation of the listener's mind (logos) in the Logos of God remains an essential subject of his homilies. Origen, like others, calls reason, ἡγεμονικόν, the "leading faculty" of man. If man participates in the mystery of God, it is first through his mind. In this spirit, the Alexandrian alludes to Psalmist's nocturnal meditations. When we experience insomnia, instead of wasting time, we can, like the Psalmist, devote ourselves to meditating on useful things.⁴ The Psalmist, who meditates and proclaims the works of God, invites us also not to talk about insignificant things, about impressions of the theater or circus, but about God's things.⁵ Referring to the example of Anna offering her son Samuel to God (1 Sam 1:11), as opposed to the Gentiles sacrificing irrational beings, Origen asks what we are to offer to God. We can offer to the Eternal Logos our logos, that is, our mind and thought.⁶

³ On the preaching of Origen in general see Lienhard, "Origen as homilist," 36–52.

⁴ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:7*, I, 10 (GCS.NF 19, 309–310).

⁵ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:13*, II, 4 (GCS.NF 19, 319).

⁶ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:2*, I, 2 (GCS.NF 19, 294–295).

The very process of conversion to Christianity is captured by the Alexandrian in the category of knowledge. The Psalmist's words, "Now I have begun" (Ps 76:11), provide him with an opportunity to discuss various kinds of origins in the faith. One may say such words on the various routes to the Christian faith, namely when one has acceded to it either from paganism or from Judaism or from Ebionitism based on Judaism. These words also apply to the more general situation where one goes from darkness and ignorance to a certain clarity of mind and understanding, or from lack of some ability to possess it. Likewise, an orthodox Christian may say of himself that he is just beginning, if one was ignorant beforehand, and then, say, one met a certain teacher who explained the truth and then began to understand it.⁷

This, long as for the homily, argument on the various kinds of beginning shows the preacher's concern for a good beginning in faith which consists in solid knowing to which a good teacher grossly contributes. By the way, Origen points out the causes of the unorthodoxy of many communities. Commenting on Ps 76:11, he reaches out to a serious problem that troubled the Church at that time and did not pass the milieu of his activity by, both in Alexandria and in Caesarea.

One can notice a gradation in cognition, the participants of which the commentator of the Psalms wishes to make his listeners. It includes various degrees both of cognition itself, as well as of the beings cognised. With regard to the first gradation, Origen exposes his listeners to the whole spectrum of truths, from the elementary knowledge proper to candidates for baptism to truths of mysticism or theological speculation. As for the second gradation, the objects of Alexandrian attention are beings of various degrees, ranging from inanimate to purely spiritual beings, who stand highest in the hierarchy of creatures. Angelic powers are a particular object of his interest. Speculations on them, for example the reading of Gen 1:7 in

⁷ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:11*, II, 1 (GCS.NF 19, 313–314); the role of the teacher in the initiation of faith in other homilies of Origen to the Psalms is discussed by, Perrone, "Origen's Interpretation of the Psalter," 139–152.

an angelological key, is for Origen not pure theorising, but a search for truth accompanied by prayer.⁸

The place of angels in the hierarchy of created reality is determined by our commentator in the context of his research on the deity, which he undertakes in reference to Ps 76:14: “What god is great as our God is?” He gives a lecture on the various meanings of the word “God.” He must have had a broader audience since he addresses his homilies also to catechumens. While preparing for baptism, he explained some basic issues. The One God gave birth to the Eternal Word, the Logos, which is God. Certainly, we cannot call “gods” pagan idols or the demons hiding behind them. People who participate in this Logos, in a sense, can also be called “gods.” The celestial bodies, the sun, the moon and the stars have a majesty that is peculiar to them and received from God. It can be inferred that of the created beings, angels contain the greatest deity element.⁹

The Alexandrian perceives in the elements of the waters, recalled by the Psalmist, an image of the powers of heaven. He identifies the waters of Ps 76:17, which “saw God,” with the waters of Ps 148:4, “which are above the heavens.” They are not located in any of the heavens enumerated by St. Paul in 2 Cor 12:2 but above them. These waters are the angelic powers. In reference to Gen 1:7, the author places them “above the firmament” of the sky, in contrast to the waters which are found “under the firmament.” These lower waters represent the powers of darkness. The Spirit of God hovers over the upper waters, and over the lower waters, or better, over their depths – Satan.¹⁰ In a Neoplatonic spirit,¹¹ Origen states that the division into good and evil powers became apparent at the creation of the material world, when different beings separated from the One. Similarly, referring to Jewish and partly Platonic views, which assume the existence of guardian spirits, he is convinced that particular angels are connected (συνέζευκται) with a given human being, and the rank

⁸ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:17*, III, 1 (GCS.NF 19, 326–329; Trigg, 266, n. 18).

⁹ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:14–15*, II, 5 (GCS.NF 19, 320–323).

¹⁰ Such a view finds resonance in future centuries and is still represented in the 7th century by Anastasius the Sinaite (*Hexaemeron anagogicarum contemplationum libros duodecim*, III, 1).

¹¹ See Trigg, 266, n. 18.

of a guardian angel depends on the spiritual rank of a human being. In the same way evil spirits can bind themselves to a human being.¹²

Is the image of the waters only the image of invisible beings? Reflecting on the dynamic power of the elements described in Ps 76:17: “The waters saw you and were afraid, the abysses were disturbed, multiple reverberation of waters,” Origen develops the theory of the animation of nature. He believes that these physical powers are animated (ἐψύχωνται) and governed by rational spiritual powers. Guided by philosophical assumptions, he is convinced that any body that moves must have a soul.¹³ Thus, heaven, earth, sea, and rivers are animate beings. If pagans bring sacrifices to rivers which they consider literally deities, they are wrong, but if they believe that certain powers such as nymphs live in the rivers, then they are right. All these elements were originally subjected to good powers, that is, to angels who, by managing the earth, air and water, prevented them from being harmful to people. As a result of man’s sin, evil power took over the air, which has changed and can become a seedbed of plague or other misfortune. The names of these elemental beings are unknown, but the man calls them after the elements themselves. These elements tremble before their Creator, who has them under his authority and can chastise them, as Jesus rebuked the wind in the sea (Matt 8:26).¹⁴

Likewise, the Psalmist’s words about voicing clouds (Ps 76:18) inspire the commentator to speculate about the heavenly elements. Clouds can be called the righteous people, lifted from the earth with their bodies. If there are rational powers governing the seas, rivers, earth, vegetation and the life of all living creatures, then there are also powers governing the clouds, and therefore having power over thunder, lightning and rain. These are the angelic beings to which the Psalmist points. Their authority is subject to God’s providence and fulfils its plans to some extent, even whether it is the authority

¹² See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:17*, III, 1 (GCS.NF 19, 329); Origenes, *De oratione*, XI, 5. Origen made his contribution to the patristic teaching on the guardian angel. See Leemans, “Angels,” 52; Trigg, 265, n. 7, 266, n. 17.

¹³ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:17*, III, 2, (GCS.NF 19, 330); Origenes, *De oratione*, I, 7, 3; Origenes, *De principiis*, III, 1, 2; Plato, *Phaedrus*, 245c-e; Trigg, 267, n. 24.

¹⁴ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:17*, III, 2, (GCS.NF 19, 329–334).

of good or evil angels. For example, thunder caused by the actions of demons can scare people away from evil, and caused by the actions of the Lord's angels may scare the demons themselves.¹⁵

There are other speculations in the homilies under consideration. The "aeonic years" of Ps 76:6 seem to indicate the successive eras following the passing of this world, in line with speculation of the transformation of the worlds until all is fulfilled.¹⁶ Likewise in his reflection on the Psalmist's question in Ps 76:8: "The Lord will not reject unto the eons?" there is an echo of the theory about the final return of everything to God, that is, about *apocatastasis*.¹⁷

There is no doubt that our author did not avoid investigations going far beyond the statements of the commented Psalmist. How did such speculation relate to the genre of homily he chose for his commentary on the Psalms? Did they not break its convention? How did they affect the audience: interested and attracted or rather shocked and discouraged? According to the English translator of the homilies, most of the listeners probably did not understand speculations trying to locate the celestial powers in the cosmos.¹⁸ Origen himself testifies that some listeners were bored during his sermons.¹⁹ However, it would be anachronistic to expect him to fulfil the same requirements that are imposed on homilists today. Homilies were not always given during the Eucharist, but on certain days when the Eucharist was not celebrated, they became the main focus of the congregation.²⁰ In addition to the preacher of God's Word, it echoes in Origen the Greek teacher of truth, διδάσκαλος, who has something of the philosopher in the modern sense of the word.²¹ As a philosopher, however, he also escapes certain patterns. He practised philosophy not for its own sake, but as an instrument with which he wished to attract an

¹⁵ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps.* 76:18, III, 4, (GCS.NF 19, 337–340).

¹⁶ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps.* 76:6, I, 9, (GCS.NF 19, 308–309).

¹⁷ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps.* 76:8, I, 10 (GCS.NF 19, 311–312).

¹⁸ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps.* 76:17, III, 1 (GCS.NF 19, 326–329).

¹⁹ See Origen, *Comm. Gen.* X, 1; XI, 3; Rusch, "Preaching," 177.

²⁰ See Stanula, "Homiletyczna działalność," 8.

²¹ See Rusch, "Preaching," 178.

educated audience to Christianity and to induce conversion.²² This was his primary aim.

We do not have sufficient data to answer the above questions, which in turn lead to other questions: Were the homilies written the same as those that Origen actually delivered to his audience? Perhaps in the written version we are dealing with transformed homilies, expanded with speculations? But if they were indeed preached, the question is: to what audience? His audience could consist of both simple people and those educated in knowledge or faith.²³ In Caesarea, where the homilies were probably delivered, there was no shortage of people seeking and familiar with Greek philosophy. As some have pointed out, a feature of the school led by Origen in Caesarea was the integration of philosophy with theology, so that philosophy was not an appendix but a necessary part of the intellectual formation of disciples.²⁴

Certainly, the intellectual element is very strongly present in Origen's homilies. Since we are examining the integrity of the preacher's communication with listeners, we ask whether this cognitive element does not dominate, marginalizing other aspects of preaching. We may find the answer to this question after analyzing other contents of his homilies.

2. Imagination at the service of sacred knowledge

One is free to ask about the role of imagination in Origen's interpretation of Psalms. This power is closely related to the mind of man. In the homilies under consideration, the preacher basically does not comment on the above aspect. He probably takes the use of imagination for granted. Meanwhile, he eagerly refers to its products, i.e., images, and with their help he wants to access to the imagination of listeners. He doesn't exclude this spiritual faculty and doesn't want to omit anything that might be useful for the listener's perception of his word and might speak to their human nature in all its integrity.

²² See Duncan, "The New Christian Rhetoric," 88–104.

²³ See Rusch, "Preaching," 177.

²⁴ See Jacobsen, "Conversion," 150.

The imagination finds rich nourishment for itself in Sacred Scripture, especially in such books like the Book of Psalms, full of poetic representations and images. Origen harnesses the imagination to the work of the mind. In such an effort, the allegorical method of interpreting the Bible becomes useful. It is the Holy Spirit who gives man the ability to find deep, great and unknown things in the words of Sacred Scripture. Origen admits that the Holy Spirit in His generosity can make someone discover in God's Word something even more wonderful than he had discovered.²⁵ With His help, one can find supernatural truths also in psalmic images.

Before we indicate the specific images from the Psalms to which Origen refers in his allegories, let us point to examples of a similar spiritual interpretation of persons and events which, although not directly related to the Psalms, are mentioned by the author when explaining the Psalms. He understands the events of the Old Testament allegorically, looking in them for the Logos who was present in history even before His Incarnation. These are the works done by the right hand of the Most High, mentioned by the Psalmist in Ps 76:11–12.²⁶ “The sons of Jacob and Joseph” (Ps 76:16) are Christians who imitate deeds of these patriarchs. The stones from which God is able to raise up the sons of Abraham (Matt 3:9) are foolish and unfeeling pagans. God is able to make them His sons in Christ.²⁷ Hannah offers Samuel to God, becoming an image of sacrifice that man makes as a rational being (1 Sam 1:11).²⁸ Zechariah who named his son “John” is an image of the pious attitude of a man who does not so much remember God as contemplate His presence (Luke 1:63–64).²⁹

In the homilies we have considered, Origen refers primarily to the image of storm and mighty waters. For example, the trembling of the earth under the blows of lightning (Ps 76:19) is for him a picture of the shock caused by the coming of the Saviour on the world. A certain

²⁵ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:19*, IV, 3 (GCS.NF 19, 346).

²⁶ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:12*, II, 3 (GCS.NF 19, 316–318).

²⁷ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:16*, II, 7 (GCS.NF 19, 325).

²⁸ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:2*, I, 2 (GCS.NF 19, 294–295).

²⁹ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:3*, I, 6 (GCS.NF 19, 305).

earthquake is also made by every eloquent word of the man who participates in the wisdom of the Logos.³⁰

The Alexandrian looks for symbolism in the phenomenon of lightning, which illuminates the world during a storm (Ps 76:19). It is the Apostles, teachers of the Eternal Word and the righteous who are like lightning, because they bring light to others through their ideas and works (Isa 14:12; Matt 5:16). Even our enemy, Satan, was once a light and then fell to the ground like a lightning bolt (Luke 10:18). His fall remains a warning and an encouragement to practice moderation, glorify and worship God, and be permanently dependent on Him. If someone loses the need for God, sooner or later one will suffer and learn that although everything seemed to be fortunate, ultimately it was so with God's help.³¹

Searching for symbolism in the sound of thunder, which the Psalmist associates with the roar of a wheel turning in a cart (Ps 76:19), Origen refers to Ezekiel's vision (Ezek 10:10–12). In it, he sees the image of God who, like a charioteer, drives a chariot carried by cherubim. Further, in the spirit of Ptolemy's cosmology,³² he speculates about the symbolism of the circle, which expresses the circular character of the movement of all things or the sphericity of celestial bodies. Similarly, holy beings could be represented by a circle because, imitating the spherical sky, they have no "corners" in them. Their posture and prayer are simple and ascend to heaven along its arch. Meanwhile, the course of the prayer of hypocrites willing to "stand and pray on the street corners" (Matt 6: 5) is not continuous and straight, but crooked and closed, and therefore does not lead their souls to heaven. Origen links cosmological arguments with the nickname "sons of thunder," assigned to John the Evangelist and his brother James (Mark 3:17). For John heard "seven thunders" (Rev 10:4), that is, the spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, honour and fear spoke to him (Isa 11:2).³³

³⁰ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:19*, IV, 5 (GCS.NF 19, 347).

³¹ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:19*, IV, 4 (GCS.NF 19, 346–347).

³² See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:19*, IV, 2 (GCS.NF 19, 343; Trigg, 280, n. 24).

³³ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:19*, IV, 3 (GCS.NF 19, 345).

The waters which “saw” God “and trembled” (Ps 76:17) represent the powers of heaven, both good and bad, who fear God for different reasons. At the same time, the Alexandrian reflects on the fear of God. Even if someone perfected himself, one would still need help and an ally in God, because one would be faced with all the more conspiracy against oneself by opposing powers. The righteous is not sure if one will not fall. So everyone is to practice the fear of God. Even if love removes fear (1 John 4:18), it is only fear of a certain kind. Forces that are opposed to God fall into fear and raise a meaningless scream like depths that make a roar when moved (Ps 76:17), while forces that ally with God remain silent and calm, and their voice is understandable and meaningful.³⁴

The author combines the words of Ps 76:17: “The waters saw you, God” with the words of Jesus’ blessing directed to people of pure heart (Matt 5:8). These “waters” consist of people who are supposed to see God by seeking a pure heart or for heavenly powers already seeing God through inner purity.³⁵ In this spirit also Eusebius of Caesarea, a diligent reader of Origen, sees in the clouds bringing rain the Apostles and Evangelists proclaiming the Gospel.³⁶

For Origen, the nomenclature used to describe the sea routes is significant: “Your road is in the sea and your paths are in many waters” (Ps 76:20). The “road” refers to the march of Israelites across the Red Sea, while the “path” refers to the march across the Jordan or the many ways through which God leads to salvation. Anyway, they all have something of God’s mystery in them, also – the future ones. Nevertheless, they are cleared and safe, for their guide is no longer Moses, but the Saviour Himself.³⁷ In this perspective, the image of maritime elements does not serve to terrify listeners, but to awaken their confidence in “the fullness and perfection of God’s care.”³⁸

The convention of the homily was particularly useful in appealing to the imagination of listeners. Origen also used biblical commentary,

³⁴ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:17*, III, 3 (GCS.NF 19, 142–143).

³⁵ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:17*, III, 1 (GCS.NF 19, 326).

³⁶ See Eusebius Caesariensis, *Comm. Ps. 76:17* (PG 23, 897).

³⁷ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:19*, IV, 5 (GCS.NF 19, 348–349).

³⁸ Bardski, “Symbolism,” 88.

primarily to explain a text and the truth contained therein. In comparison with it, homily reached more to the emotional and sensual side of listeners (readers) in order to move and make them participate in the truth.³⁹ The impact on the imagination was very important in this respect.

3. Other faculties at the service of conversion

Without doubt, the homilies of Origen contain much moral and spiritual content. Origen had to deal with listeners who, whether as catechumens or as believers, had faith to a greater or lesser degree. He did not lose sight of his essential aim, namely, to induce further conversion and a deeper relationship with God, and thus both in terms of morality and piety. In addition to the liturgical and exegetical dimensions, his preaching had a prophetic character, namely by showing the relevance of the text being explained to the personal lives of his hearers (readers).⁴⁰ On this plane, he appealed to such elements of human nature as the will, conscience, feelings or senses.

Explaining what it means in Ps 76:3 to seek God with one's "hands," Origen makes an interpretation relating to various aspects of human life. Searching with hands means seeking Him through actions, and therefore through conduct. Through the elementary virtues of justice, temperance, fortitude and wisdom, God is sought in an elementary way. We are also looking for Him through prayer, stretching out our hands to Him. He is searched for – intellectually, truthfully, unlike heretics, who do not truly seek Him and therefore do not find Him.⁴¹ Seeking God has an intellectual, moral and spiritual dimension.

The Psalms are first and foremost a prayer to God. Therefore, they become of great help in forming Christian piety. In his homilies on Psalms, Origen creates a small school of prayer and encourages his audience to turn to God. From the introduction to Ps 76:1, Origen concludes that Asaph is the author of the Psalm dedicated to Jeduthun,

³⁹ See Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 160.

⁴⁰ See Lienhard, "Origen as homilist," 36–37.

⁴¹ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:3*, I, 4 (GCS.NF 19, 297–298).

who is to praise God with it.⁴² Some receive the grace from the Holy Spirit to write the Psalms, and others – to recite them and praise God.⁴³ Commentary on the next verse (Ps 76:2): “I cried out with my voice to the Lord, with my voice to God, and he attended to me,” the Alexandrian begins by the statement that these words could be our words.⁴⁴

Referring to Ps 76:2, he points to the difference between righteous people with a pure sight who call on the Lord and experience that God is inclined to their request, and imperfect people who do not have insight into the spiritual life and are unable to say whether God listens to them or not. In the situation of anguish, darkness, loss of a loved person or a precious thing, the righteous man looks to God all the more for help, while many are overwhelmed by sorrow, do not raise their hands to God and do not call upon Him.⁴⁵ In sorrow, a person does not listen to the words of the comforter, while then one must remember God even more in order to be comforted by Him.⁴⁶

For our theologian, the Psalms become an excellent tool to shape morality and piety. In the moral parenthesis, he refers primarily to the conscience and will of his listeners, wishing to drag them as much as possible to the side of good. In one of the most beautiful passages of the homily, he shows his audience, many of whom have just renounced paganism, that God worked miracles in their lives (Ps 76:15). After all, they went from idolatry to the confession of the One God. Abandoning impurity, adultery, theft and plunder, they began to practice the cardinal virtues of temperance, justice, prudence and fortitude. Being blind and lame, they began to see and walk (Matt 11:5).⁴⁷

In charting the fundamental Christian path, Origen has a word of instruction for those who have been on it for a long time and struggle with everyday faults or imperfections. A Christian is often overwhelmed with anger and wants to repay with the same evil that

⁴² See Origenes, *Hom. Ps.* 76:1, I, 1 (GCS.NF 19, 294).

⁴³ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps.* 76:2, I, 2 (GCS.NF 19, 294).

⁴⁴ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps.* 76:3, I, 3 (GCS.NF 19, 297).

⁴⁵ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps.* 76:3, I, 3 (GCS.NF 19, 296–297).

⁴⁶ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps.* 76:3, I, 6 (GCS.NF 19, 302–303).

⁴⁷ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps.* 76:15, II, 6 (GCS.NF 19, 324).

one has experienced, or suffers and, consequently, carries a grudge against God and His Providence. Yet, in the spirit of Ps 76:5, one restrains his thought and tongue, struggles against it, remains silent and shows patience.⁴⁸

The senses are also involved in the process of conversion. The phenomenon of thunder prompts the preacher to imagine the sound of the chariot on which God travels the world (Ps 76:19). God gave man the senses, such as hearing, sight or taste, so that, learning and admiring God's works, one would come even closer to the Creator. The sound of the thunder is supposed to wake one up from sleep and numbness to contemplate God's works.⁴⁹

Recognizing the value of sensual cognition, the Alexandrian indicates the primacy of mind over senses. God has given us a higher authority, namely the mind, so that we can judge things subject to our senses with its help. Meanwhile, man, having from God the ability to do his own works and craft, concentrates too much on these things and inclines to idolatry. It is with our mind, not our senses, that we can see God – as long as the mind becomes pure. Most people, however, cannot see Him: their minds are not clear because of various faults, attachment to created things, or the cares of this world.⁵⁰

Commenting on the Psalms, our author emphasizes the importance of the psalmody, which prompts him to reflect on the good use that, in an act of certain consecration, man makes of his voice in prayer. Then one goes on to consecrate the voice in general, to use it according to God's purpose. Then, in turn, one goes to the full consecration of man, to return again to the partial sacrifice, this time to the mind that must be given to God, and then to the senses, such as sight or hearing. By involving the audience in the reality he describes, Origen at the same time sets certain limits to this participation. Referring to Ps 76:2, he states that most people do not offer their voice to the Lord, and only the righteous do.⁵¹

⁴⁸ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:5*, I, 8 (GCS.NF 19, 307).

⁴⁹ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:18–19*, IV, 1 (GCS.NF 19, 341–342).

⁵⁰ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:18–19*, IV, 1 (GCS.NF 19, 341–342).

⁵¹ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:2*, I, 2 (GCS.NF 19, 294–296).

In the same way, for example, the sight can be offered to God. Whoever does this, does not go to horse races, theatrical performances or cruel hunts, but directs his gaze toward heaven and the Creator of everything. He looks at creation, people and things, not for his own gain, but for the benefit of others.⁵²

4. Man and Christ-God in the Psalms

Although our exegete comments on the book of the Old Testament, he is convinced that the Saviour who brings the New Covenant is already present on its pages. We have already seen above with Origen's typology, which makes us see a Christian book in the Psalms. There is a certain balance between anthropo- and theocentrism. In Psalms interpreted christologically, theocentrism becomes Christocentrism.

In the very God, portrayed in the Psalms, Origen specifically sees the second Divine Person⁵³. In his opinion, the God whom the Psalmist addresses in the words: "You are our God who performs marvels" (Ps 76:15) is God the Father and Creator, but also the Son, the Saviour, who rose from the dead and heals blinds or lames.⁵⁴ The "power" which God "made known among the peoples" (Ps 76:15) is Christ, who is "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24). The right hand of the Most High, which changes the initial state, according to Ps 76:11, is Jesus Christ. The Son of God remains the "arm" with which God redeemed "His people" (Ps 76:16).⁵⁵ In the typological interpretation of Ps 76:4, the God who brings comfort to those who remember Him in distress is Christ who blesses the sad (Matt 5:4).⁵⁶

Origen interprets many of the psalmic images typologically and refers to Christ. The path that leads through the sea is Christ-Logos, and the sea is the man who accepts Him as his Path (John 14:6). The

⁵² See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:2*, I, 2 (GCS.NF 19, 295–296).

⁵³ On the Christology of Psalms in Origen see L. Perrone, "Aspetti dottrinali," 209–242.

⁵⁴ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:15*, II, 6 (GCS.NF 19, 324).

⁵⁵ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:16*, II, 7 (GCS.NF 19, 325).

⁵⁶ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:3–4*, I, 6 (GCS.NF 19, 302–303).

“holy way” of God is Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). All these terms express an aspect of what He can be in us.⁵⁷

The “arrows” falling from heaven (Ps 76:18), by which the Psalmist understands lightning, are for our commentator an image of holy men and providential events. The “arrow” chosen and sent from God is Christ, but also holy powers, angels and holy people, such as prophets, who penetrate the minds of other people with their words. It is remarkable to be wounded by such an “arrow.” It takes place, for example, when someone, without being instructed in the Christian faith, approaches the Logos, becomes catechumen, and then Christian, enlarging the community of the Church. Anything that serves to discipline a man falling into sin and to lift him from his fall can also be an “arrow.”⁵⁸ We find a similar and rich metaphor of the “arrow” in Eusebius of Caesarea.⁵⁹

Christ, discovered by Origen in the Psalms, is the centre of the saving economy. By presenting Him in such an approach, Origen wanted Him to occupy a similar place in the lives of his listeners (readers). His reflection on seeking God “with one’s own hands” (Ps 76:3) allows us to distinguish the entire spectrum of the human search for God in Christ: from the intellectual, through the moral, to the spiritual. Seeking Him with our mind and finding Him, we finally offer the sacrifice from our logos to the Eternal Logos, who accepts it, transforms it, divinizes it and gives it for further use.⁶⁰ Seeking God through prayer, we are united with Christ and we follow Him in the mystery of the cross on which He spread His hands and interceded for the whole cosmos.⁶¹

Zechariah’s decision to choose a name for his son shows to the Christian exegete the way of christological interpretation of Scripture, and to the Christian as such a way of approaching God. Commenting on Ps 76:3–4, Origen states that Zechariah, by God’s will, did not want to give his son his own name, but gave the name “John.” “Zechariah”

⁵⁷ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps.* 76:13, II, 5 (GCS.NF 19, 320).

⁵⁸ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps.* 76:18, III, 5 (GCS.NF 19, 338–340).

⁵⁹ See Eusebius Caesariensis, *Comm. Ps.* 76:17 (PG 23, 897–898).

⁶⁰ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps.* 76:2, I, 2, (GCS.NF 19, 294–296).

⁶¹ See Origenes, *Hom. Ps.* 76:2, I, 4, (GCS.NF 19, 299–300).

signifies the memory and “John” – the coming of God. After all, John was not to present God as a God from the past, who should be remembered, but God from today, who comes into the world as the Saviour. Yes, and we are to move from remembering God to contemplating His presence in Christ.⁶² Likewise, the exegete transcends the purely historical approach to the Old Testament and looks for the good news about the coming Messiah in it. One useful tool for this purpose becomes the etymology of names, which has been the subject of speculation in both Judaism and Hellenism, including Stoic philosophy.⁶³

Conclusion

Certainly, the rhetorical and philosophical formation that Origen received in Alexandria played its part.⁶⁴ In his homilies to the Psalms we find something of a world harmony close to Greek ideas, which consists in symmetry and balancing the various elements of one whole. In the homilies on Ps 76 we also find an aspect of this harmony, and therefore of its integrity.

Homily is a kind of conversation with the audience. The homilist reduces the distance to the listener, looks for levels of understanding and a positive influence on him. He appeals to all his nature, which is equipped with reason, will, feelings and imagination. These faculties participate respectively in the intellectual, moral and spiritual order. The preacher of the Word strives for the community with his listeners and common share with them in the goods defined by these orders. Desiring a certain change in their attitudes, i.e., their conversion or their fuller return to God, he affects all the above-mentioned elements of nature.

In cognitive order, the homilist strives for a better understanding of the truth by them. He tries to explain less understandable things in more detail. He does so by using abstract concepts, but also images, often taken from the Bible. It is not without reason that he has been

⁶² See Origenes, *Hom. Ps. 76:3–4*, I, 6, (GCS.NF 19, 304–305).

⁶³ See James, *Learning the Language*, 43.

⁶⁴ See Torjesen, “Influence of Rhetoric,” 13–25.

called “the first Christian biblical scholar and homilist.”⁶⁵ Images help understand abstract truths. The homilist does not avoid certain speculations, counting on the intelligence of the audience. By linking theory with practice, he eagerly shifts from intellectual inquiry to moral precepts. He presents moral truths as close to the lives of the audience. Within the moral order itself, he maintains a balance between criticizing evil and praising good. He focuses longer on the more difficult moral requirements in order to convince his audience of them. The element of moral and devotional formation remains in balance. The whole teaching is permeated with the spirit of piety which is imparted to the listener and makes them remain in a living relationship with God through various kinds of prayer. Origen’s homilies become a school of prayer.

As we can conclude from Origen’s homily, the integrity of man and his spiritual activity cannot be fully realized in himself. The full completeness of his being and acting occurs in relation to God, who in Christ gives him His fullness. Origen maintains a Christocentrism based not so much on the frequent invocation of the name of Christ, but on showing all reality in such a way that the listener himself confesses who is the Lord and Saviour of all.

It is worth emphasizing the variety of prediction used by the homilist. Just as the eyes of a wanderer do not get tired of the road, because the perspective and landscape in front of him are changing, so the listeners must have been interested in the homilies of Origen, who delved into a specific truth, then widened the horizon, changed the subject, then returned to the first one again. Sometimes he used an image, sometimes an allegory, sometimes an etymology of the word, sometimes a lecture of theory, sometimes a parenthesis, sometimes he stigmatized sin, sometimes he delivered a laudation of virtue. He learned a lot from the Book of Psalms itself, full of poetic dynamics and various means of expression.

⁶⁵ Lienhard, “Origen as homilist,” 36.

Integralna komunikacja ze słuchaczami w czterech homiliach Orygenes do Psalmu 76(77)

Abstrakt: W 2015 r. został wydany niedawno odkryty zbiór 29 homilii Orygenes do Psalmów. Orygenes wygłosił je w ostatnich latach swego życia. Natykamy się w nich na spekulacje z pogranicza filozofii i teologii, z których Orygenes nigdy nie zrezygnował. Czy nie naruszają one kanonu homilii? Czy nie dominuje w nich czynnik teoretyczny, intelektualny? Żeby odpowiedzieć na te pytania, autor porusza w artykule szerszą kwestię – charakteru komunikacji ze słuchaczem. Czy Orygenes jako homilista odwoływał się w sposób integralny i zrównoważony do wszystkich władz w człowieku: rozumu, wyobraźni, woli, uczuć i zmysłów? Artykuł ma charakter sondażu zagadnienia, ponieważ przedmiotem jego analizy są cztery homilie do Ps 76(77).

Słowa kluczowe: Orygenes, Psalm 77(76), egzegeza patrystyczna, homilia patrystyczna, kaznodziejstwo patrystyczne

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