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Review of Nathan P. Chase, *Eucharistic Praying in Ritual Context: From the New Testament to the Classical Anaphoras*, Alcuin/ GROW Joint Liturgical Studies 97/98, Hymns Ancient and Modern, Norwich 2024, III pp.

Nathan P. Chase (1990-2025) was one of the most prolific and promising young scholars in the field of liturgical studies. His vast erudition on all topics related to the liturgy of the early Church was impressive. Besides his mastery of the literature in the field, he had read the best of ritual theory and anthropology, archaeology, magic, theology, and papyrology. He also used a remarkable number of sources, including many beyond the usual suspects of liturgical studies. He furthermore possessed an admirable capacity to summarize his extensive knowledge, which allowed him to spot new connections and thereby redraw our fragmented picture of early Christian liturgy in more convincing ways. Reading his thesis in 2021 – which, among its many qualities, was nearly the first in liturgical scholarship to discuss Greek and Coptic magical papyri as witnesses for Eucharistic praying – I had the pleasant impression that he was bringing a breath of fresh air to the field of anaphora research. Nathan was quick and determined to share his numerous ideas with the scholarly community. During his tragically brief academic career he published an astounding number of 28 articles and six books, and many more are forthcoming posthumously. He even spent most of his prolonged battle against leukaemia on scholarly work – his last email to me, merely two weeks before his death, was about a common article, suggesting that now we should really get it done. His death at a tragically young age deprived liturgical scholarship of many more brilliant ideas and well-argued articles and books.

“Eucharistic Praying in Ritual Context”, the last book he published in his lifetime, is an epitome of Nathan’s qualities as a scholar. In an

accessible and enjoyable style, it offers a summary of the extensive recent scholarship on the early Eucharist and on the development of anaphoras. His main focus is on the social and ritual practice (what Christians did) instead of the theology (what Christian thought) and explores how various social and ritual factors might have influenced the remarkable genre of Eucharistic prayers. Instead of surveying the favourite questions of scholarship on Eucharistic praying – namely, when and where units such as the Sanctus, the institution narrative, or the intercessions entered the anaphora – he discusses the possible factors behind the introduction and the spread of these elements.

His survey begins with the social context of the Eucharistic meal. In Chapter 2, Chase summarizes in the extensive literature on Christian meal practices in the context of Greco-Roman and Jewish cultic and social meals, calling attention to practices other than the symposium: the cultic meals of religious associations and the *salutationes matutinales* of Roman clients. The same chapter discusses further aspects of the surrounding social realities: cosmologies, geography, economic factors such as food security, or identity formation, in particular the formation of a distinct Christian identity, and it discusses how these may have contributed to anaphoras. Moving from external forces towards in-church developments, Chapter 3 surveys the impact of the formation of ecclesiastic functions and the rise of moniscopacy, the increasing differentiation between Christian groups, the rise of lay movements such as monasticism and confraternities, and the growth of the communities. The literature on early Christian meeting places is also discussed in this context. Chase argues for the multiplicity of venues and traces the process of ritualization of these spaces and its impact on prayer.

Chapter 4 discusses how early Christians increasingly linked the presence of Christ to the Eucharistic food itself rather than the meal community. This motivated the use of transformation language and brought about a growing sense of unworthiness, which in turn provided

an impetus for the introduction of extensive requests for the remission of sins as well as communion decline. Chapter 5 looks at a diverse set of practices grouped, somewhat uneasily, under the notion of popular piety, such as magic and popular prayers, funerary practices, and the decline of martyrdom. Each of these are treated in a cursory manner. Associated with these is a brief and somewhat haphazard analysis of the impact of the legalization of Christianity on prayer.

Chapter 6 deals with two topics that have been in the forefront of liturgical scholarship, doctrinal development and the need for instruction. Here Chase summarizes the well-known arguments about the impact of dogma on liturgical language and about how the decline of catechetical instruction created the need for an educational aspect of liturgy. At the same time, he notes that the influence of the evolving Trinitarian theology on prayer was more limited and slower than generally thought. Chapter 7 then discusses the transition from oral, improvised prayers to written ones. Relying on theories of orality, Chase divides this transition into three stages: an oral period, in which the narrative structure of the prayer was formed; an emerging written period, in which model texts were written down but improvisation and extensive interventions were still possible; and a fully written stage. With the advent of written text and stable structures, new editorial techniques, such as agglomeration, interpolation, or conflation, can be observed for the first time. Once written, the anaphoras circulated in clerical (and lay) networks through letters, pilgrimage, monastic travel, and the gatherings of bishops at synods.

Towards the end, chapter 8 provides a brief overview of what can be known about the role of music and art in the celebrations. Music, though doubtless a fundamental part of Christian ritual, left few traces in the records. As for visual arts, Chase highlights the decorative program of the Red Monastery Church near Sohag, Egypt and the baptistery of San Vitale in Ravenna as examples of the close interplay between anaphoras and iconographic programs. A final chapter provides a neat

overview of the possible factors that influenced Eucharistic prayers. The book ends with a detailed suggestion for further reading.

This short book provides a useful and accessible summary on recent scholarship on the Eucharist as well as several original ideas. The topics covered are numerous, and extensive literature exists on most of them. Hence, by necessity, not everything could be explored to equal depth. The specialist reader might miss certain details or literature and can disagree with a few ideas or arguments. But, as this book so excellently shows, debates, discussions, and speculations are the very nature of scholarship on early Christian liturgy. Our sources are so scarce and our knowledge of causation chains so partial that, whenever drawing lines of influence or making connections between data, we oftentimes only draft a temporary image waiting to be deconstructed or modified. By summarizing such debates, this little volume also gives justice to how little we can actually know beyond doubt. My hope in God is that Nathan now knows all the answers. As for us, who only “see a reflection, as in a mirror”, we can thank God for his precious contributions to our understanding of early Christian liturgy during his brief but fertile career.

Ágnes T. Mihálykó