Artikel

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The Theological Use of Eating and Drinking Metaphors in Origen’s *De Principiis*

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**Abstract:** This article focuses on the theological use of the eating and drinking metaphors in Origen’s *De principiis*. The work is organized in three parts: 1. Physiological convictions regarding eating and drinking, where it is briefly shown how Origen understands this process in a biological approach; this is important because these convictions operate as assumptions within which the Alexandrian constructs his theology. 2. Methodological remarks about the semantic field of *eating* or *drinking*, at a level both biblical and cultural; this is important in order to justify the use of these metaphors in theological contexts. Finally, 3. Theological uses of the metaphors, which demonstrate how Origen uses these metaphors to explain and/or clarify important theological issues.

**Keywords:** Origen, *De Principiis*, Theology, eating and drinking

The present work is set within the wider research background of my doctoral dissertation in which I examine the theological use of metaphors of eating and drinking, present throughout Origen’s works. It is a significant topic1 because the

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use of these metaphors, as we have been able to verify, is not only abundantly present in the works of the Alexandrian, but above all because their usage allows him to deal with topics which are relevant to his theology such as the spiritual progress of the rational beings, the participation of the rational beings in the divine life, the intellectual communion of humanity and, even the relationships between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The following pages focus on the use of these metaphors in De principiis.² Twenty-one occurrences of the metaphors occur;³ some of them are certainly more

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² The critical edition used is Samuel Fernández, Orígenes: Sobre los Principios [Fuentes Patrísticas 27; Madrid, 2015]). The English translation used is Origen, On First Principles (trans. George W. Butterworth [Christian Classics; Notre Dame, 2013]). Although there are several critical problems with the text of De principiis, these problems are not particularly relevant for the present issues: Rufinus makes textual changes that are significant at a theological level only in highly polemical issues. Additionally, the recently published Homilies on the Psalms offer a much more positive assessment about Rufinus' translation. In any case, there are two texts studied here (4,3,1 and 4,3,2 [868,3–878,2 F.]) where the Philocalia's Greek text is available: the paper's comments are based on the Greek version. A good and condensed consideration about the critical—and the consequent theological—problems in De principiis can be found in Anders-Christian Jacobsen, Christ, the Teacher of Salvation: A Study on Origen's Christology and Soteriology (Adamantiana 6; Münster, 2015), 62–64.

³ The list of quotations of De principiis which this article elaborates upon is exhaustive, leaving out only one use of the metaphor: Origenes, De principiis 2,9,6 (ed. Fernández, Sobre los Principios [see note 2], 482,11–14). In this passage, the verb nutrio is applied to “favour the insolence of the heretics” through the silence of the things of God; the passage’s relevance, in my opinion,
relevant than others. It is necessary to say that, in any case, these metaphors in the work analysed here are present less frequently than in other Origenian works: for example, in his *Commentary on John*, eating and drinking metaphors occur 103 times, or in the *Homilies on Genesis* 47 times.

However, this lower occurrence does not necessarily imply a lesser significance for the metaphors studied and can be understood in the light of the less symbolic and more technical manner that the argumentative strategy of *De principiis* has, compared with an explicitly exegetical intention of the biblical works—both commentaries and homilies. In those genres there is a more obvious and natural environment for metaphors or, as in many cases, Origen is explicitly commenting on biblical texts that deal with eating and/or drinking themes.

The reduced presence of the studied metaphors has a counterpart in a thematic level: the typical Origenian topics, such as the taste⁴ and the spiritual senses⁵ argument, or the explanatory analogies of the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are absent. The reason for these important silences could be due to the argumentative strategies of a work like *De principiis* (it is more technical, and trying to present Christianity to people who do not share its symbolic-biblical matrix).

would be better explored in a more comprehensive study of that verb, which I hope to address in my doctoral research. The complete list of *De principiis* texts used here is: 1,1,7; 1,1,9; 1,3,8; 2,1,4; 2,9,6; 2,10,4; 2,10,6 (two metaphors used); 2,11,2; 2,11,3; 2,11,4; 2,11,7; 3,2,2 (two metaphors used); 3,4,4 (two metaphors used); 3,6,3 (two metaphors used); 4,3,1; 4,3,2; 4,4,6. It is important to note that none of these texts are classified under *food* in von Balthasar’s Origenian anthology, cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Origen, Spirit and Fire: a Thematic Anthology of His Writings* (trans. Robert J. Daly; Washington, 1984), 258–267.

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This paper has three parts. The objective of this arrangement is to reveal in an orderly manner the theological use that Origen makes of the metaphors of eating and drinking.⁶

The first part shows Origen’s physiological convictions regarding eating and drinking. Knowing these convictions is essential: Origen understands the material world as a reflection of the spiritual one and, therefore every detail of this world,⁷ in an analogical way, is an opening to spiritual realities.⁸ Of course, this understanding of the human being and its physiological functions is not original to the Alexandrian but comes from the common philosophical and medical convictions of his time. Origen systematically integrates these convictions harmoniously and regularly throughout his exegetical exercise. He emphasises different aspects according to the argumentative needs. The limits of the application of this metaphorical approach will not be treated here.⁹

The second part offers some methodological remarks on the semantic field of eating or drinking, at a level both biblical and cultural. Even though these methodological indications would be better proved from a comprehensive study of the rest of Origen’s works, the usage of these metaphors in De principiis is enough to show their importance. The metaphors’ relevance is linked mainly to the freedom with which Origen uses the metaphors to illustrate not only biblical texts, or theological doctrines whose context makes its application expected, but also to other texts and doctrines where its appearance is completely spontaneous.

Finally, the last section describes the concrete application of a theological reading of the metaphors in De principiis. Particularly in this text, Origen uses the metaphors to illustrate two topics: a) the spiritual progress and the ultimate state, and b) the sin and its healing. Although the textual evidence supporting this scheme is of a limited focus, however, considering other Origenian works,

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⁶ This *dispositio* can be applied in a very natural fashion to Origen’s works: this order derives from Origen’s works and the tripartite scheme shown here (1. Physiological convictions, 2. Methodological convictions, and 3. Theological convictions), reflects both Origen’s hermeneutical procedures and his anthropology.

⁷ Origen remarks: *Observa singula quaeque, quae scripta sunt. In singulis enim, si qui scit in altum fodere, inveniet thesaurum, et fortassis etiam, ubi non aestimatur, latent mysteriorum pretiosa monilia* (Origenes, *Homilia in Genesim* 8,1 [GCS 29, 77,15–17 Baehrens]). This paper will show that the same detailed attention given to the Scriptures is also paid to the corporeal realities.

⁸ With this issue, the principle formulated by Origen in *Dialogus cum Heraclide* 11 (SC 67, 78,17–19 Scherer), concerning the homonymy between the names of the ἔξω and ἔσω ἄνθρωπος is key: ὁμωνύμως πᾶσι τοῖς σωματικοῖς ὀνομαζόμενα οὐ σωματικά, ἵνα τὰ μὲν σωματικά ἐν κατὰ τὸν ἔξω ἄνθρωπον, τὰ δὲ ὁμώνυμα τοῖς σωματικοῖς κατὰ τὸν ἔσω.

⁹ This is because an analysis of this kind requires an overview of the entire work of Origen, which exceeds the limits of this paper.
we can say, after having read and classified all Origen’s works,\textsuperscript{10} that the panorama found in \textit{De principiis} is thematically representative both of use and of the application of the theological sense of the eating/drinking metaphors, even when some issues are missing, such as those indicated above.

1 Physiological convictions about eating and drinking

The first observation is a very elementary one: eating and drinking are proper human acts. That is to say, the ability to eat or drink is inherent or appropriate of flesh and blood, as Origen remarks when he calls some beliefs about the resurrected life too materialistic.\textsuperscript{11} Eating and drinking as proofs of true humanity come to have such an important weight at an argumentative level so as to reappear in the \textit{Homilies on Leviticus} as proof of the authentic humanity of Christ.\textsuperscript{12}

Since for Origen hunger and thirst as well as the sexual impulses correspond to bodily needs,\textsuperscript{13} it is not reasonable to blame foreign forces\textsuperscript{14} for such impulses. As it is possible to say that, as creatures, human beings have no positive impulses other than God’s grace, this entails that the body’s natural desires for food and drink are not negative.\textsuperscript{15} Rather those impulses express our creatural condition.

This remark has important implications because, according to the Origenian conviction about the correspondence between the κόσμος αἰσθητός and the νοητός,\textsuperscript{16} these bodily needs are a reflection of corresponding spiritual needs. But before examining this topic further, let me begin by showing how Origen describes these bodily needs:

So, too, when we think of the flesh as inciting a man to lust, while a better counsel opposes this sort of allurement, it must not be supposed that there is one life acting in opposition to another, but that the conflict is due to the nature of the body, which is striving to empty out and exhaust the places filled with seminal fluid. Neither must it be supposed that it is any opposing influence or the life of another soul which excites thirst in us and impels us

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} This broader study, as has been noted, is the subject of my doctoral dissertation.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Cf. Origenes, \textit{De principiis} 2,11,2 (518,1–520,29 F.).
\item \textsuperscript{12} Cf. Origenes, \textit{Homiliae in Leviticum} 9,2 (GCS 29, 419,13–421,16 Baehrens).
\item \textsuperscript{13} Cf. Origenes, \textit{De principiis} 3,2,2 (674,12–680,4 F.).
\item \textsuperscript{14} Cf. Origenes, \textit{De principiis} 3,4,4 (732,23–736,22 F.).
\item \textsuperscript{15} Cf. Origenes, \textit{De principiis} 2,11,4 (522,22–526,22 F.).
\item \textsuperscript{16} Cf. Manlio Simonetti, \textit{Origene Esegeta e la sua Tradizione} (Letteratura Cristiana Antica Nuova Serie 2; Brescia, 2004), 29.
\end{itemize}
to drink or which causes us to become hungry and urges us to take food; but just as these things are alike desired and evacuated through natural movements of the body, so also the moisture of the natural seed collecting from time to time in its appointed regions strives to find an issue and outlet.\textsuperscript{17}

This text, which is explicitly about bodily processes, describes the nourishment cycle in this way: human beings need to eat and drink and, corresponding to this need, they seek to procure food and drink. This nourishment enters into the human, quenching hunger and thirst, and the intestines do the following work: digest and eliminate. These physiological convictions and the observations that Origen makes about material eating and drinking are a premise consistently present in his argumentation, and are not argued or deepened: they constitute an assumption in his thought, along with the analogy mentioned above between the sensible world and the noetic.

However, the food process, clearly and succinctly explained above, offers up further avenues of exploration: according to Origen, why do human beings need to eat and drink? Is a simple reference to God’s will enough of an explanation? Additionally, what happens inside the human being with the foods that he or she consumes?

In \textit{De principiis} 2,1,4 Origen, wondering about the rational structure of corporeal nature,\textsuperscript{18} makes a key remark for this paper’s subject: “It is evident from the observation of ordinary things that bodily nature admits of diverse and various changes; to such an extent that it can undergo every kind of transformation.”\textsuperscript{19} This context affirms variety and mutability as part of corporeal nature; indeed, mutability is a reflection of the flux. To better explain this topic of flux, it is necessary to read the \textit{Commentary on John}, where Origen clearly states:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{17} Origenes, \textit{De principiis} 3,4,4 (734,14–24 F.; trans. 307–308 B.): Ita et cum putatur caro ad libidinem provocare, consilium vero melius huiuscemodi incitamentis resistit, non putandum est vita esse aliqua alia, quae adversum alienam resistat, sed natura corporis, quae repleta sativi humoris loca evacuare gestit atque deplere; sicut nec contraria aliqua virtus aut vita alterius animae putanda est, quae nobis excitat sitim et provocat ad bibendum, vel quae esurire facit et iritatum ad cibum; sed sicut haec naturalibus motibus corporis vel adpetuntur vel evacuantur, ita et naturalis seminis congregatus per tempus in suis locis umor expelli gestit et abici.
\textsuperscript{18} Cf. Fernández, \textit{Sobre los Principios} (see note 2), 333 (note 25).
\textsuperscript{19} Origenes, \textit{De principiis} 2,1,4 (332,11–13 F.; trans. 96 B.): Ex rebus ipsis apparat quod diversam variamque permutationem recipiat natura corporea, ita ut possit ex omnibus in omnia transfigurari. Cf. Origenes, \textit{De principiis} 3,6,7 (786,8–9 F.) for an interesting comparison: the invisible nature changes by its own mind and decision, which is driven by free will, while the corporeal nature changes in a substantial way (\textit{substantialem recipit permutationem}) as the merits of things demand, which in the case of the corporeal nature of rational beings implies a proportionality between the use of free will and the consequences of its use.
\end{quote}
The non-needy (ἀνενδεής) does not need food, and what needs food is not non-needy. It is clear, then, that who eats does not eat without needing food, but because he needs it and is obligated. Bodies, being by nature subject to flux, they nourish themselves with food, completing the place of what flowed.20

The text continues pointing out that the same relation of necessity exists in the case of the incorporeal beings, although of another type of food, which I will not deal with now.21 This text of the Commentary on John is cited because it clarified a consequence that can be deduced from the multiplicity and mutability of matter, as also indicated in the text from De principiis: all material body, which has to persist in its materiality for a time, flows; and as it flows, it has two options: to precipitate to its rapid dissolution, or to avoid and/or postpone its dissolution through food.

This replacement through food does not mean an alienating process, that is, a process that turns us into something else, but rather the opposite: “whatever it is that we take as food, it turns into the substance of our body,”22 that is to say, a process is generated in us through which a substance that we eat—whether vegetable or animal and in many ways different from what we materially are—becomes ourselves. This pre-emptively contradicts Jean Brillat-Savarin’s famous aphorism: “Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es.”23 We are not what we eat, rather what we eat becomes what we are.24

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21 Cf. Crouzel, Origène et la “Connaissance Mystique” (see note 1), 167.

22 Origenes, De principiis 2,1,4 (332,17–19 F.; trans. 96 B.): quod per cibum sumpserimus, in corpore nostri substantiam vertitur; food also, as a material reality, is subject to mutation.

23 Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, Physiologie du Goût (Hamburg, 2012), 15. This is a facsimile edition of the original (Paris, 1848).

24 In this regard, Penniman points out that “the dominant image of Origen’s pedagogical theory is that of ingesting a text in order to become more like it” (Penniman, Raised on Christian Milk [see note 1], 112). This understanding (i. e. I eat → the food is assimilated in my body → I become which I have eaten), in my opinion, implies both an alienating process and an objectivity of the text that are not Origenian. Concerning the alienation, cf. my interpretation of the passage Origenes, De principiis 2,1,4 (332,17–19 F.): quod per cibum sumpserimus, in corpore nostri substantiam vertit, and concerning the objectivity of the text, consider my interpretation of Origen’s doctrin of ἐπίνοιαι, which is also applied regarding the use of eating and drinking metaphors speaking of the Logos, as opposed to Penniman’s interpretation: the Logos can take the flavors and nutritive values each creature needs in his or her stage of spiritual progress (cf. for example Origenes, Contra Celsum 4,18 [GCS 2, 296,29–297,28 Koetschau]; Origenes, Commentarii in Canticum Canticorum 1,4,13–15 [GCS 33, 104,7–105,2 Baehrens]; Origenes, Commentarii in Iohannem 1,131; 19,39 [26,22–27; 305,25–33 P.]).
Behind this notion is a conception of matter of derivation, first in Aristotelian, and, later, in Stoic thought:\(^25\) “by matter we mean that which underlies bodies, namely, that from which they take their existence when qualities have been applied to or mingled with them: ... heat, cold, dryness, wetness.”\(^26\) These four qualities in various mixtures constitute bodies in their diversity. This will be confirmed, later, in book 4 of *De principiis*, where Origen, rejecting the idea of an uncreated matter, asserts matter’s composite character from the elements and their interrelationships, stating that “from the food of men or of animals the substance flesh comes into existence and that the seminal moisture is changed into solid flesh and bones.”\(^27\)

This humoral consideration of matter has a consequence for the understanding of the feeding and of the alimentary processes and the cycles of health/illness in its relationship with the foods. Here a decisive author is Galen, who consolidates a very old tradition regarding the concept of health, which he considers properly Hippocratic: healthy is what maintains the dynamic balance between influences that are opposed; on the contrary, sickness is the lack of this balance.\(^28\)

With this notion, then, the natural impulse towards foods and drinks suffers a rational corrective: considering that the person’s natural state is health, food must follow the norm of reason because: “in the body an abundance of eatables or food that disagrees with us either by its quality or its quantity gives rise to fevers differing in kind and duration according to the degree in which the combination of noxious elements supplies material and fuel for them.”\(^29\) This implies that at the physiological level, beyond the appetite which we already define as an instinctive or natural tendency, each person must practice a discipline regarding


\(^{27}\) Origenes, *De principiis* 4,4,6 (950,18–21 F.; trans. 425 B.): *De escis vel hominum vel animalium probavimus substantialiam carnis existere vel humorem seminis naturalis in carnem solidam ossaque converti.*


eating or drinking that does not exceed the limit of the need (which is in direct relationship with the flux), or that does not threaten the model. Although it is not explained in De principiis, it is possible to relate to the balanced diet with respect to the balance of the qualities of the food, in the broader context of the humoral medicine.

2 Methodological convictions about the metaphorical use of eating and drinking⁴⁰

Having described the convictions that I have called physiological regarding the Origenian discourse about eating and drinking, it is necessary to show the methodological convictions Origen is operating under. This approach is relevant since we know that Origen is an exegete with a fine and coherent method, who applies a certain hermeneutical ratio only when he finds justification for such an application.

In the specific case of the eating and drinking metaphors, De principiis does not include many methodological indicators; however, the few texts that I discuss are completely consistent with other Origenian works where there are more frequent or clear methodological indicators, such as in the Commentary on the Letter to the Romans.³²

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³⁰ These methodological remarks represent a way to understand the theological use of metaphors from the eating and drinking semantic field developed from a systematic reading of Origen’s works (although here only applied to De principiis). I have focused only on these two metaphors but perhaps this method can illuminate the study of the theological use of any metaphor. In any case, this would require further investigation.

³¹ While the diverse needs of the different audiences of Origen’s exegetical exercise require different approaches at the methodological level, nevertheless his writings display a sensitive and systematic approach with an expertise and thoroughness to his philological analysis and a determination to interpret the whole of Scripture; regarding this, cf. Simonetti, Origene Esegeta e la sua Tradizione (see note 16) 17–18; Karen Jo Torjesen, Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Structure in Origen’s Exegesis (PTS 28; Berlin, 1986), 59 and 98. However, this systematic quality of Origen’s thought which I refer to does not apply to the difference that exists between Origen’s exegetical theory, as described in Origenes, De principiis 4,2–3 (824,1–926,18 F.), and its application throughout his work.

³² Cf. Origenes, Commentarii in Romanos 3,4 (SC 539, 106,1–120,10 Brésard/Fédou). This Commentary is significant, because it displays a methodological approach to the Scripture that Origen also applies to other contexts, such as a popular saying, as we will show immediately.
The following text contains some remarkable elements that define the direction of Origen’s methodology:

This is the meaning they give to the saying “The wisdom of the flesh is enmity against God”; not that the flesh really has a soul or wisdom of its own, but just as we are accustomed to say by a peculiar use of language that the ground is thirsty and wishes to drink water,—where we certainly use the word “wish” *not in a literal but in a peculiar sense*, as if, again, we were to say that a house wants rebuilding, and many other similar expressions—so, too, must we interpret the phrase “wisdom of the flesh,” and the saying, “the flesh lust against the spirit.”

Origen here is analysing the claims of those who argue that the soul and the flesh are not two vital principles. In the Latin version of the highlighted phrase, “not in a literal but in a peculiar sense”, he introduces two technical rhetorical terms: *abusive* (i.e. καταχρηστικός) and *proprie* (i.e. κυρίως). These terms are useful in his analysis of a metaphorical use of thirst and drinking-phrases present in a common expression of his time to refer to the state of the earth in a drought, something like “the earth suffers ‘thirst,’ and wants to ‘drink’ water.”

This metaphorical use of common phrases from contemporary popular sayings also correlates to Origen’s reasoning concerning the food precept, or taboo, against consuming vulture or gryphon meat present in both Lev 11,13 and Dt 14,12 (LXX). Origen’s reasoning or argumentation is based on this food precept as a cultural fact: although it is prescribed that vulture or gryphon should not be eaten, this prescription is, to a certain extent, very unnecessary, as no one in his or her right mind would eat the flesh—even in the largest famines—of these wild, violent, carnivorous animals that even go so far as to eat people alive or dead with the tyrannical use of their strength. These characteristics are so clearly opposed to the disposition of the birds that we grow and eat, which are domesticated,

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33 Origenes, *De principiis* 3,4,4 (736,4–12 F.; trans. 308 B.): Hoc modo etiam illum adserent, quod dictum est: Sapientia carnis inimica est deo, non quo vere animam habeat caro vel sapientiam proprium, sed sicut abusive dicere solemus et sitiare terram et velle eam bibere aquam (hoc utique, quod dicimus velle, non proprìe sed abusive proferimus, velut si dicamus iterum quia domus reconponi vult, et alia multa his similia), ita et sapientia carnis accipienda est vel quod dictum est quia “Caro concupiscit adversum spiritum.”

34 Cf. Origen’s conclusion: *De principiis* 3,4,3 (732,17–22 F.) and Fernández, *Sobre los Principios* (see note 2), 733 (note 29).

35 Cf. Origenes, *De principiis* 4,3,2 (872,12–878,2 F.). The passage we are referring to here is only present in the Greek text. About this, Fernández states that “El inicio de este párrafo ha sido resumido—casi eliminado—en la traducción de Rufino, por motivos de prudencia” (Fernández, *Sobre los Principios* [see note 2], 873 [note 99]).
clean and granivores. Thus the food precept, as a cultural fact, is at best redundant, at worst ridiculous. With this reasoning, Origen starts to show the *defectus litterae*, which obliges one to interpret the precept in an anagogical manner.

Another of Origen's methodological findings regarding food is found in *De principiis* 1,1,9, where he remarks that “the names of the organs of sense are often applied to the soul,” so “too we speak of the soul as being able to use teeth, when it eats and consumes the bread of life who comes down from heaven.” This is a clear consequence of the analogical correspondence between the κόσμος αἰσθητός and the νοητός—as mentioned above, every aspect of our sensitive world carries a symbolic value, which is referred to the intelligible.

The application of this cosmological principle to the organs of sense has a very important success in Origen's theology, especially in the systematization of the spiritual senses theory, whose presence in *De principiis* is minor, perhaps reduced to the theme of seeing God, treated in 1,1,9. Here, although Prov 2:5 is present—and this text will be fundamental in the Origenian argument about this issue (mainly because, following Clement, Origen reads αἴσθησις instead of ἐπίγνωσις, as we find in LXX)—there is no further development. In this regard, the text of *De principiis* 1,1,7 may be more important. This text indicates that a sensible substance is particularly ordered to each corporeal organ of sense. Although this idea is not elaborated upon here, the analogical correspondence running through Origen's thought suggests a complement to it as regards the intelligible world: to each spiritual sense an intelligible substance is specially ordered.

This proposed complement is possibly confirmed in another text where the term *teeth* appears: *De principiis* 4,3,1. Here Origen clearly shows the *defectus litterae*.36

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36 We have received this vivid characterization from *Epistula Aristeae ad Philocratem* 146–148 (BSGRT, 41,18–42,18 Wendland). Cf. Origenes, *Homiliae in Leviticum* 7,7 (392,16–393,4 B.).

37 In Origenes, *Homiliae in Leviticum* 7,5 (385,21–388,17 B.), in a text with a clear food-context, Origen states that an anagogical interpretation of certain precepts makes them worthy of the divine majesty, while its literal interpretation is so outrageous or absurd, that he himself would be ashamed to profess that God has given such laws. This scandal that provides the literal sense, and that obliges an explanation worthy of God, is called *defectus litterae*. A further explanation can be found in Mark Sheridan, “The Influence of Origen on Coptic Exegesis in the Sixth Century: The Case of Rufus of Shotep,” in *Origeniana Octava. Papers of the 8th International Origen Congress Pisa, 27–31 August 2001* (ed. Lorenzo Perrone; Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 164; Leuven, 2004), (1023–1033) 1028–1030.

38 Origenes, *De principiis* 1,1,9 (162,9–10 F.; trans. 18–19 B.): *Frequenter namque sensibilium membrorum nomina ad animam referuntur.*

39 Origenes, *De principiis* 1,1,9 (162,13–14 F.; trans. 19 B.): *Sic et uti eam posse dentibus dicimus, cum mandit et comedit panem vitae.*

40 Origenes, *De principiis* 1,1,7 (154,20–158,7 F.).
terae behind the literal meaning of Scripture. Discussing the tree of life and the eating of its fruits, our author asks:

And who is so silly as to believe that God, after the manner of a farmer, “planted a paradise eastward in Eden,” and set in it a visible and palpable “tree of life,” of such a sort that anyone who tasted its fruit with his bodily teeth would gain life; and again, that one could partake of “good and evil” by masticating the fruit taken from the tree of that name?41

Not only is there evidence in this text about the absurdity of a material understanding of the tree of life and the material sense of the process of eating from it (both methodological considerations), but other possible (theological) readings are also glimpsed, though somewhat hidden in the letter. The corporal teeth have an intellectual counterpart and these intellectual teeth give to the text the possibility of expressing its intellectual meaning. In the same way that material feeding allows material life, spiritual nourishment allows spiritual life; chewing and eating, in this same sense, implies that we come to possess as our own those qualities which are eaten and, in the case of the tree of life, these qualities are good and evil.

This text proposes issues that have far more explicit treatments in other Origenian texts. It works very well as a hinge between what has been treated so far (the physiological and methodological convictions that determine, in De principiis, a theological reading of eating and drinking metaphors) and the last part of this paper, where the proper theological application of these metaphors is presented.

41 Origenes, De principiis 4,3,1 (868,3–870,3 F.; trans. 383–384 B.): Τίς δ’ οὕτως ἠλίθιος ὡς οἰηθῆναι τρόπον ἀνθρώπου γεωργοῦ τὸν θεὸν πεφυτευκέναι παράδεισον ἐν Ἐδὲμ κατὰ ἀνατολάς, καὶ ξύλον ζωῆς ἐν αὐτῷ πεποιηκέναι ὁρατὸν καὶ αἰσθητόν, ὥστε διὰ τῶν σωματικῶν ὀδόντων γευσάμενον τοῦ καρποῦ, τὸ ζῆν ἀναλαμβάνειν καὶ πάλιν καλοῦ καὶ πονηροῦ μετέχειν τινὰ παρὰ τὸ μεμασῆσθαι τὸ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἄριστου λαμβανόμενον; For this passage we have both Latin and Greek text; the most important thing to note is the Latin translation of two important verbs in the Origenian eating and drinking vocabulary: percipio for ἀναλαμβάνω, and capio for λαμβάνω, which indicate Rufinus’ meticulous work as a Greek-Latin translator.
3 Theological application of the metaphors of eating and drinking

The theological fields of application of eating and drinking metaphors in *De principiis* are limited. Beyond the texts discussed so far, their presence is reduced primarily to two issues: 1) on the one hand, spiritual progress and a characterization of the ultimate state, and 2) sin and its consequences, on the other. I will begin with the former.

Origen draws on multiple metaphors to represent the spiritual life and its evolution. Progress is fundamental in Origen’s theology since it seems to be the reflection of his notion of the relations between the Father, the Logos and the Holy Spirit, applied to rational creatures whose free will is decisive for their condition. In this regard, the use of multiple images related to directionality (up/down or forward/backwards, among others) is not surprising.

In the particular case of metaphors related to the field of nourishment, an example appears when Origen considers the material body and its vital process: the paternal semen becomes child acquiring consistency in the mother’s womb, based on the material provided by the mother and the food that she assimilates (ἐπισυνάγω); then the child grows bodily to become an adult from the abundance of food and “after the process of growth has reached its limit we use food not in order to grow but as a mean of preserving life within us.”

So, then, in the same way that our body needs—and therefore desires—food and drink, God has granted us an analogous need and spiritual desire: “[as] our body by its nature desires food and drink, so our mind cherishes a natural and

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42 Clearly there are theological consequences that can be extracted in every text hitherto discussed (an example can be found in the above-mentioned text about the intellectual teeth), but a deeper analysis requires a consideration of all of Origen’s works; my intention here is more modest.


44 Cf. Origenes, *Commentarii in Iohannem* 20,3 (327,18–328,5 P.). We have recourse to the *Commentary on John* because this consideration is absent—but assumed—in *De principiis*.

45 Origenes, *De principiis* 2,11,7 (538,11–14 F.; trans. 192 B.): *quam crescendi ad mensuram sui fuerit expleta procuritas, utimur cibus iam non ut crescamus, sed ut vivamus et conservemur in vita per escas*. 
proper longing to know God's truth and to learn the causes of things.” Origen here configures an explicit analogic ratio between the growth, desire, food and beverages of the body, with the growth, desire, food and beverages of the mind. This is also a consequence of a theology where the focus is on participation: all rational beings exist because they participate in the existence derived from the Father. Eating and drinking metaphors are functional well in this regard because they denote participation; the only one who does not need to participate to exist is the Father because he is not-needy nor derived from another.

Origen offers this food process as a parallel with the spiritual life in an important text, where the metaphor is not only explicitly applied to spiritual progress, but also valuable for methodological considerations. Facing the problem of the literalist reading of eschatological eating, Origen proposes a spiritual interpretation of food:

So, too, I think that the mind, when it has come to perfection, still feeds on appropriate and suitable food in a measure which can neither admit of want nor of superfluity. But in all respects this food must be understood to be the contemplation and understanding of God, and its measures to be those that are appropriate and suitable to this nature which has been made and created.

In this way, an understanding of the ultimate state is drawn from the metaphors of eating and drinking, which is opposed to any literalist interpretation of the

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47 Penniman has noted the connection between the growth of the body and of the mind: “It turns out that the growth of the rational nature is dependent, at least in some important respect, upon the state of the bodily nature. The ‘structure of the bodily parts,’ as instruments for the formation of the mind, must be properly formed before the mind can put them to use,” Penniman, *Raised on Christian Milk* (see note 1), 116. This observation is useful to illustrate how corporeality is important for Origen and also reflects in detail on Origen’s application of metaphors from the sensible body. About Origen’s attitude toward the body cf. also Noel, “Nourishment in Origen’s on Prayer” (see note 1), 481.

48 Cf. Origenes, *Commentarii in Iohannem* 13,219 (259,17–21 P.). It is necessary to clarify that Origen assigns different ways and degrees of participation to the rational beings. In this context, the participation of the Logos and the Holy Spirit is completely different from the participation of created beings: the former is eternal and direct, the later not eternal and is mediated by the Logos and his ministers.

49 Origenes, *De principiis* 2,11,7 (538,14–19 F.; trans. 192 B.): *Ita arbitror et mentem etiam cum iam venerit ad perfectum, vesci tamen et uti propriis et competentibus cibis cum ea mensura, cui neque deesse aliquid debeat neque abundare. In omnibus autem cibus hic intellegendus est theoría et intellectus dei, habens mensuras proprias et competentes huic naturae, quae facta est et creata.*
resurrection. The saints in the definitive life also eat and drink, and their foods are truth and wisdom, and their drink is the cup of divine wisdom; these foods provide a nutrition that renews the mind to the image and likeness of God in its entirety and fullness as it was before the fall, “when it had no need to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

Now, it has been argued that the fundamental importance of free will in Origen’s theology allows an eminently dynamic vision of the spiritual life. In this


51 Represented by the bread of life.

52 Cf. Origenes, De principiis 2,11,3 (522,1–522,21 F.). This is an important text and outlines other issues such as the spiritual progress reflected in the intermediaries that provide food. This issue, however, is not seen as frequently in De principiis as in other texts of Origen. In this regard, given the specific nature of this work about De principiis, I have declined to delve into issues that necessarily require reference to other Origenian works (for example, Origenes, Commentarii in Iohannem 13,219.221 [259,17–21.25–30 P.], cited in the note 56).


54 Penniman states that the process through which a person derives meaning from the Scripture, metabolizing in her or his body its words, “results in an antinomy that Origen himself does not fully resolve: on the one hand, food sometimes indicates distinct classes to which Christians are relegated. On the other hand, it sometimes outlines progressive stages through which each Christian must pass.” The “milk” (as a lower kind of food), then, “remains a permanent limitation of creaturely life,” Penniman, Raised on Christian Milk (see note 1), 112–113, cf. 120 and 133, where he asserts that “Origen introduces into the symbols of milk, vegetable, and solid food an element of ontological fixity derived from differences within the social strata.” In my opinion, this interpretation severely mischaracterizes Origen’s spiritual progress theology: against the Gnostics, he underlines insistently on the creatures’ free will, and from this fundament he discusses all his theology, especially the issue of the Logos’ ἐπίνοια, as can be deduced from Origenes, Commentarii in Iohannem 1,119–276 (24,23–49,2 P.), cf. particularly 1,124 (25,16–20 P.), where γίγνομαι is used to stress the progress of the one who does not need it anymore—μηκέτι—the inferior ἐπίνοια. The pedagogical role of the Logos and all its implications for Origen’s christology and soteriology are key here: cf. Jacobsen, Christ, the Teacher of Salvation. A Study on Origen’s Christology and Soteriology (see note 2), 312–315. It is necessary to emphasize the strong dynamism of Origen’s theological anthropology, which is maybe one of its more distinctive features. Here Penniman is following Richard P. C. Hanson, Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen’s Interpretation of Scripture (Richmond, 1959), 214, who calls Origen a rationalist, and asserts that there is “no passage in Origen’s work which suggest that the simple and uneducated believer can attain to the higher knowledge.” Cf. Origenes, Commentarii in Iohannem 6,257 (158,30–159,8 P.), which illustrates the dynamicity of Origen’s spiritual progress theology. Here Jesus is coming to a person who is called προκόπτοντα καὶ βελτίονα γινόμενον (159,3–4 P.). Paul and Judas are also used by Origen in an anti-gnostical argument: cf. Fernández, Sobre los Principios (see note 2), 331 (note 143).
vein, the Alexandrian, when speaking of the definitive life, exhorts his reader not to let oneself fall from contemplation because of some satiety of good—that is God. He proposes a continued increase and expansion of the desire (one might say “hunger”) of God, which is accompanied by an “ever greater ardour and greater [reception] capacity” by the creature of God’s grace.\textsuperscript{55} This is because the rational creatures will never stop needing the food of the Father, who is the only one not in need (ἀνενδεής) and self-sufficient (αὐτάρκης ἑαυτοῦ).\textsuperscript{56}

The second—and final—theological application of the metaphors is found in Origen’s interpretation of the sin and its consequences. In this context, a correspondence to his physiological convictions again is present: in the same way as the excess of food, or a harmful quality of this, sickens the body with a feverish state—which is directly proportional to the quantity and/or quality of the food consumed—the soul also suffers sickness. This inflammation or boiling is a curative punishment, which consumes the sin. This fever can manifest in diverse ways, both in its quantity and in its quality, as analogous to the aforementioned feverish state brought about an excess of food.\textsuperscript{57}

This inflammation caused by the excess of food—or by the bad quality of food—does not have a value in itself but rather in its effects. This is made explicit later, when relating this illness with the medicinal action of God: “God our physician, in his desire to wash away the ills of our souls, which they have brought on themselves through a variety of sins and crimes, makes use of penal remedies of a similar sort, even to the infliction of a punishment of fire on those who have lost their soul’s health.”\textsuperscript{58} This medicinal action of God is represented by the cup

\textsuperscript{55} Cf. Origenes, \textit{De principiis} 1,3,8 (240,1 F.): \textit{semper ardentius et capacius}; also the previously cited Origenes, \textit{De principiis} 2,11,3 (522,1–21 F.). Concerning this text, Cécile Blanc writes “de même l’âme, arrivée à sa perfection, continue à s’alimenter en fixant sur Dieu le regard de son intelligence. Car non seulement dans la vie présente mais aussi dans la vie future Dieu la nourrit des mystères de sa sagesse et de sa science,” Blanc, “Les Nourritures Spirituelles d’après Origène” (see note 1), 15.

\textsuperscript{56} Cf. Origenes, \textit{Commentarii in Iohannem} 13,219.221 (259,17–21.25–26 P.), which explicitly applies these attributes to the Father in a intratrinitarian food context: Καὶ οὐκ ἄτοπόν γε λέγειν μὴ μόνον ἄνθρωπος καὶ ἀγγέλους ἐνδεεῖς εἶναι τῶν νοητῶν τροφῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν χριστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ· καὶ αὐτὸς γάρ, ἵνα ἀπὸ τὸν πατρὸς τοῦ μόνου ἀνενδεοῦς καὶ αὐτάρκους αὑτῷ. … Οὐκ ἄτοπον δὲ καὶ τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα τρέφεσθαι λέγειν.

\textsuperscript{57} Cf. Origenes, \textit{De principiis} 2,10,4 (502,26–506,5 F.).

\textsuperscript{58} Origenes, \textit{De principiis} 2,10,6 (508,13–17 F.; trans. 179 B.): \textit{medicum nostrum deum volentem diluere vitia animarum nostrarum, quae ex peccatorum et scelerum diversitate collegerant, uti huiuscemodi poenalibus curis, insuper etiam ignis inferre supplicium his, qui sanitatem animae perdidierunt?} Cf. an interpretation of this text, from a medicinal theology perspective, in Samuel Fernández, Cristo Médico, según Orígenes: la Actividad Médica como Metáfora de la Acción Divina (Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 64; Roma, 1999), 189–190. Concerning the purification and
of wrath, which is beneficial for the health of souls, by provoking vomiting, a process also associated with eating or drinking.\textsuperscript{59}

Through the introduction of the food metaphor, Origen deals with a notion of a God who punishes by situating the sufferings—both of this life and those of hell—into a context where his physiological convictions are at work. Similarly, these convictions influence his notion of salvation and free will, as I pointed out at the end of the first part of this article. The punishments and sufferings are not the aim of this process, rather they express God’s mercy, because, like a physician, he applies some painful treatments and gives at times bad-tasting medicine which is necessary for the patients to recover their health.\textsuperscript{60}

Eating and drinking metaphors allow Origen to express multiple aspects of his theological thought. Starting with the intra-Trinitarian relationships, passing through the relation between the rational creature and God, and arriving at the relationships between rational creatures themselves: everything can be discussed or expressed in this metaphoric manner. In doing this, Origen demonstrates close attention to the sensible world since this may open up insights into the spiritual world. This is possible because theological language is always analogic, even when expressing some of the highest realities. If one, like Origen, takes seriously the correspondence between the κόσμος αἰσθητός and the νοητός, this study of how metaphoric language allowed Origen to study such higher realities can suggest further present theological possibilities and argumentative strategies. Above all, Origen reminds his readers that material realities are not the opposite to the spiritual ones, but rather their metaphors.

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\textsuperscript{59} Cf. Origenes, *De principiis* 2,10,6 (510,1–9 F.).

\textsuperscript{60} Cf. Origenes, *De principiis* 2,5,3 (400,3–406,4 F.).