

The Servant Parish Project: Strengthening Our Ministry to the Poor and Suffering

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Chapter 1 Introduction: The Servant Parish, Seeking Justice

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This project is a contribution to the literature of encouragement. Specifically, this project represents an effort to encourage Orthodox parishes to strengthen their support of the poor, the sick, and the suffering. And if other non-Orthodox Christian communities largely embrace an Orthodox understanding of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, then this present study is for them as well.

Holy Scripture loudly and clearly commands the Christian to serve those in need of mercy and material help. Those who deny that compassion of this sort is a requirement of the baptized cannot with any credibility call themselves a Christian. Disagreements about the details might arise, but the direction of the Lord's instructions is clear: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."¹

Still, Orthodox parishes are better known for the peculiarity of their piety than for the strength of their humanitarian service. Although every Orthodox Christian knows what to do, in a general sense, it is still the case that Orthodox parishes are not among the leaders in the community on matters relating to poverty, suffering, and basic justice for the mistreated. In North America, Orthodox parishes largely stand apart, allowing other Christian traditions to take the lead. One might incorrectly conclude from this that Orthodox Christianity has nothing special to add to the general conversation in the wider culture about correcting injustice. One might even suspect that Orthodox Christians are vulnerable to a kind of pietism that leads them to greatly emphasize the life of prayer over the life of active compassion. This project begins by strongly protesting any such criticism.

If ministry to the poor and suffering is largely dormant in Orthodox parishes, this is so because of correctable conditions at the local level. Perhaps the parish is overfocused on the "three B's" of bills, budgets, and buildings. Perhaps the parish is simply unsure how to open

¹ John 13:34.

itself more widely to the needs of the community. Perhaps the parish lacks able leadership. Whatever the cause, the cure is nearby. Orthodox Christianity is not silent on the matter: “Go and do likewise” says Christ at the end of the parable of the good Samaritan.²

And we can go and do likewise because our Lord has done so already. As in all things, our good guide is Jesus Christ. At the heart of this project is the conviction that Orthodox Christology does not just flower into right worship (*doxologia*), it also flowers into loving service (*diakonia*). What the typical Orthodox parish needs is some help in recovering the Church’s vision of the connection between Christian belief and Christian living. Perhaps every Christian knows “what to do” in the moral sense, but not every Christian knows why these are the good things to do. Understanding the “why” alongside the “what,” however, is the key to strengthening parish ministry to the poor.

This chapter will introduce the concept of a “servant parish.” The introduction begins, however, with a realistic reflection on the general health of Orthodox Christianity in North America. The reflection will raise some alarms, but it will also point out that the Orthodox Church is strongly positioned to take some huge leaps forward in the years to come.

1. *Orthodoxy in North America: Hope or Hype?*

Orthodox Christianity in North America is at risk of becoming one of the greatest underachievers in the history of the Church. Reliable statistics on historical trends in the United States are hard to find, but recent research by Alexei Krindatch and others has confirmed the following two statements:

- (1) The number of Orthodox Christians in North America is a great deal smaller than is typically self-reported by the various Orthodox jurisdictions.³
- (2) Any growth in the number of Orthodox Christians in North America over time is mostly negligible.⁴

² Luke 10:37.

³ In 2010, Krindatch estimated that the total population of Orthodox Christians, both Eastern and Oriental, is about 1,044,000. Eastern Orthodox Christians, of all jurisdictions, as a subpopulation number only 799,400. These figures are much lower than, say, the total of 2 million self-reported by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America alone (whose actual 2010 population was 476,900) or the 1 million by the Orthodox Church in America (whose actual 2010 population was 84,900). See Alexei Krindatch, “2010 US Orthodox Christian Census,” <<http://www.hartfordinstitute.org/research/2010-usorthodox-census.pdf>>, August 1, 2019.

Before Krindatch’s research, Mark Stokoe and Leonid Kishkovsky similarly noted in 1995 that the larger numbers often self-reported by Orthodox jurisdictions could not be correct since, according to recent census data, Orthodox Christians represent less than 1% of the total United States population, making 2 million the most reasonable generous estimate. See *Orthodox Christians in North America (1794 - 1994)*, page 5, <<https://oca.org/cdn/PDFs/dept-archives/orthodox-christians-na.pdf>>, August 1, 2019.

In the data that describes religious life in America, the “One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church” has never amounted to more than a statistical blip, representing year in and year out an unimpressive share of the United States population (about 0.25%). The researcher Amy Slagle observes that “Orthodox Christianity typically receives little more than an honorable mention in most traditional histories of religion in America.”⁵ And given the stubbornly flat growth of its population over time, the Orthodox Church will have trouble shaking this “also ran” reputation.

But it was not supposed to be this way. In the second half of the twentieth century, an exciting enthusiasm filled the Orthodox world. There was the sense that the Orthodox Church was beginning to shed its tired image as an old-world holdover and to press its claim as “the” Church in North America, poised to bring the apostolic preaching of Jesus Christ to a new vineyard, ripe for harvest. Waves of new clergy, nurtured by dynamic seminaries, breathed life into flagging parishes. Mission churches were opened. Increasingly, worship was offered in English. Accessible books about the Orthodox faith were written and published. And Orthodox parishes began to welcome adults, families, and sometimes entire congregations into the fullness of the faith. Orthodoxy was no longer wrongly viewed as an immigrant eccentricity. Word was getting out, and North Americans of all backgrounds were becoming Orthodox Christians.

These first sparks did not lead to a “big bang.” After what was arguably a period of robust growth, Orthodoxy has settled into a pattern that is considerably less dynamic. For

⁴ Michael Namee provides a useful summary in “Historical Census Data for Orthodoxy in America “ <<http://orthodoxhistory.org/2010/10/11/historical-census-data-for-orthodoxy-in-america/>>, August 1, 2019. The United States Census Bureau conducted a census of all religious bodies in America in 1906, 1916, 1926, and 1936. Here is a summary of the data.

Year	Orthodox	Total US population	Orthodox, as % of US Total
1906	129,606	84.5 million	0.1%
1916	249,840	102 million	0.25%
1926	259,394	117.4 million	0.22%
1936	348,025	128.1 million	0.27%

In 1947, the *Christian Herald* attempted another similar census, but in this case the various Orthodox jurisdictions were asked to self-report their membership totals. The total found by the *Christian Herald* was 702,273, which no doubt is a number that cannot be trusted. But even if the total Orthodox population in the United States doubled between 1936 and 1947, this means that between 1947 and 2010, the total Orthodox population only increased by another 97,127, while the total US population moved from 144.1 million to 309 million. Expressed as percentage of the total US population, the population of Orthodox Christians declined from 0.5% in 1947 to 0.26% in 2010.

⁵ Amy Slagle, *The Eastern Church in the Spiritual Marketplace: American Conversions to Orthodox Christianity*, (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 8.

certain there are pockets of admirable success here and there. Church plants have become stable and life-giving assemblies. Moribund parishes have experienced rebirth. Individuals have been transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ expressed through Holy Tradition within the Orthodox Church. But if we ignore some of the splendid trees for a moment, it is hard to deny that the forest looks much more stressed than predicted. Each Orthodox jurisdiction is concerned to solve the bedeviling dynamics of decline. Each bishop is aware of at least a handful of parishes (if not more) that struggle to stay open. Some dioceses in North America have fewer people than even a single Baptist congregation in the nearest big city.

Orthodox Christianity in North America is at a crossroads. Two paths seem open at the moment. For certain there is the path of ignominious decline. Like a first-round pick that never plays a single game, the Orthodox Church might someday be viewed as an underachiever who could not find a way to translate his talents from draft lottery to playing field. But the other path is the path we always hoped for: the path that leads to new life in Christ for the hundreds of millions who hunger for the spiritual riches that have been handed to us, through the ages, by our Lord himself, through the Apostles.

Not everyone would agree that the Church in North America is facing the critical choice just described. But that is where this project begins. Either we are doing the Lord's will, or we are under judgment, and it is worth returning again and again to the question, "But are we in fact doing the Lord's will?" In the rest of this first chapter, I will argue that, yes, we are doing so, but only incompletely. At the same time, I will be careful to point out that we are not so far from eliminating this incompleteness and becoming the good and faithful stewards needed by Christ in the vineyards of North America.

As mentioned, the Orthodox Church was poised to witness a big bang of sorts in the closing decades of the twentieth century. The preparation laid down by our missionary saints in the preceding centuries was carried valiantly toward the goal line by episcopal and seminary leaders in the cold war era. But in recent years, we fumbled. The explosive growth of Orthodoxy—its outsized impact on a wider culture that is dying for an experience of the Kingdom—did not materialize as many expected. And worse, we seem beset by a sticky morale problem: many now wonder whether Orthodoxy is too exotic, ambitious, or demanding to be embraced by North Americans.

This project will argue that the anticipated big bang was not a bad prediction. The expansion of the mission is merely a bit delayed. Moreover, the momentum built up during the cold war era was no illusion. The enthusiasm among Orthodox Christians was not misplaced—neither then, nor now, in fact. Yes, we could steer the Church down a pathway to impotence if we are not careful. And yes, a course correction is needed so that the better path is rejoined. But the correction is not a jarring and painful one.

The good news is that for several decades the Church in North America has moved strongly in the direction of "good Liturgy." Our churches succeed admirably at opening the kingdom to all who liturgically "draw near in faith and love." The bad news, however, is that

we have neglected to work just as strenuously on what several Orthodox writers call “the liturgy after the Liturgy.”⁶

The dynamics of the liturgy go beyond the boundaries of the eucharistic assembly to serve the community at large. The eucharistic liturgy is not an escape into an inner realm of prayer, a pious turning away from social realities; rather, it calls and sends the faithful to celebrate “the sacrament of the brother” outside the temple in the public marketplace, where the cries of the poor and marginalized are heard.⁷

The Church breathes us in so that we might encounter Christ in the mysteries of prayer and worship. But the Church also breathes us out, so that—in the powerful words of Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos—each of the faithful might “continue a personal ‘Liturgy’ on the secret altar of his own heart, to realize a living proclamation of the good news ‘for the sake of the whole world’.”⁸ Archbishop Anastasios urges us to remember that the eucharistic Liturgy and the “liturgy after the Liturgy” depend on one another.

Without this continuation the Liturgy remains incomplete. Since in the Eucharistic event we are incorporated in Him who came to serve the world and to be sacrificed for it, we have to express in concrete *diakonia*, in community life, our new being in Christ, the Servant of all. The sacrifice of the Eucharist must be extended in personal sacrifices for the people in need, the brothers for whom Christ died. Since the Liturgy is the participation in the great event of liberation from the demonic powers, then the continuation of Liturgy in life means a continuous liberation from the powers of the evil that are working inside us; a continual reorientation and openness to insights and efforts aimed at liberating human persons from all demonic structures of injustice, exploitation, agony, loneliness, and at creating real communion of persons in love.⁹

The Church still needs to answer this call to serve the “liturgy after the Liturgy” with the same joy and vigor that characterizes the full bloom of its worship life. This is the work that remains to be done. Without this additional work, the Church will remain disconnected from the wider world and, tragically, will become susceptible to repeating past patterns: in time, the beauty of “our liturgy” will fade and become unrecognizable as an expression of the gospel to the wider world that only knew us as an isolated, inward-looking group.

⁶ Coined in 1975 by Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, the expression “the liturgy after the Liturgy” was popularized especially by Father Ion Bria. See, for example, the essays in *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 1996).

⁷ Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy*, 20.

⁸ Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Mission in Christ's Way*, (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010), 95.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 95–96.

This project is an effort to call the Church in North America to honor the commandment given again and again in Holy Scripture to “do good, seek justice.”¹⁰ We do many things well in the Orthodox Church, as we will review below. No one proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ as we do, but it is not enough to proclaim the good news to others. Like Christ himself, we must also *become* good news for those who suffer. This is the one thing we still struggle to do well. We honor the commandment to love God with all that we have (Deuteronomy 6), but we must work harder at fulfilling the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves (Leviticus 19). This is what holds us back as the Church in North America.

2. *The Stubborn Persistence of a Spiritual Crisis*

This project is not about the work of Fr Alexander Schmemmann, but Fr Schmemmann long ago put his finger on a problem that still endangers Church life in North America. It is useful to begin by reviewing Schmemmann’s diagnosis of this problem, and to review his strategy for solving it.

Fr Schmemmann wrote these words in 1965, at the dawn of a period of vigorous and inspired work on behalf of Orthodoxy in America.

At the risk of shocking many good people I cannot, in all honesty and sincerity, conceal my firm conviction that Orthodoxy in America is in the midst of a serious spiritual crisis which endangers its very existence as Orthodoxy.¹¹

From someone like Fr Schmemmann, whose legacy is full of profound and impassioned explorations of the joy and beauty of Orthodox Christianity, these words might seem out of character and unduly dark. But in many ways the whole of his pastoral and academic career is best seen as an all-out attempt to move the Orthodox Church away from the brink to which, to his eyes in 1965, it stood so perilously close. The joy and beauty of Orthodoxy are captured with such power by Fr Schmemmann precisely because joy and beauty are the weapons that will defeat the forces that give rise to the “spiritual crisis” which concerns him so gravely.

The crisis to which Fr Schmemmann points in 1965 is a widespread necrosis within the Church where what was once alive is now remanded to the charnel house of dead aspirations. In America, in the twentieth century, Orthodoxy is widely considered “impossible” by the clergy and laity alike. The life-giving demands of liturgical and personal prayer have been reduced to a Sunday-only obligation. Gone is the holy rhythm of continual preparation and fulfillment. In its place is the minimalism of fitting church into a prescribed hour in an

¹⁰ Isaiah 1:17.

¹¹ Alexander Schmemmann, “Problems of Orthodoxy in America: III. The Spiritual Problem,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (1965), 171–193, at 171. Hereafter the article will be referred to in the text of the paper as “The Spiritual Problem.”

otherwise churchless week. Gone is the canonical and humanitarian vision of the Church, one designed to make us perfect even as our heavenly Father is perfect. In its place is the new conviction that the historical vision of the Church amounts today to, at best, an obsolete overreach. At worst, the Church's call to worship and holiness is suspected to be something dehumanizing—orthogonal to the more enlightened vision of a humanity that is healthy, wealthy, and wise.

The crisis, of course, is a symptom. The cause of the crisis according to Fr Schmemmann is secularism. Because of secularism, the possible has become impossible. The way of the Cross, lived alongside Christ in his Church, is in danger of being completely discarded in favor of a more accommodating cultural outlook in which potential sources of meaning are both multiplied and leveled. The multiplication occurs as more and more parts of human experience and culture are viewed as autonomous—as having meaning and possessing truth apart from any connection to Christ and his kingdom. The levelling occurs as more and more we accept the idea that each human person can “make meaning” by assembling a basket of values that are choiceworthy according to personal preference.

It is important to emphasize that secularism according to Fr Schmemmann is not the *rejection* of faith and religious conviction. Secularism is the outlook that faith is but one of many potential and autonomous sources of meaning and value for the human being. Faith has its place, potentially, in the life of an individual. Nevertheless, at best, faith is but one gadget in the tool box for constructing a “meaningful” life. The spiritual crisis to which Fr Schmemmann points in 1965 is caused by the acceptance of secularism, even among Christians.

Fifty years after the publication of “The Spiritual Problem,” can we say that Orthodoxy has averted the crisis described by Fr Schmemmann? For certain there are times and places where the Holy Spirit has enlivened both persons and communities to measure the worth of all things according to God's own life and intentions. This has always been the case, no matter whether life in the wider Church can be called flowering, decadent, or something in between. But the more recent publication of *A Secular Age* by Charles Taylor makes a powerful case for the claim that secularism, largely as Fr Schmemmann understands the term, is the defining feature of the present age in Europe and North America.¹² In his magisterial review and interpretation of the intertwining cultural trends between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, Taylor has drawn the academic world's attention to the problem which long concerned Fr Schmemmann.

And within the Church, the attitude remains pervasive that, though inspiring, the Orthodox vision of life in Christ is an impossibility which must be scaled down to something more compatible with the aspirations and sensibilities of twenty-first century North Americans. The “spiritual problem” of Orthodox Christianity addressed by Father Alexander in 1965 remains even today a crisis that “endangers its very existence as Orthodoxy.”

3. *The Incompleteness of Our 'Yes' to the Kingdom*

¹² Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). See also the helpful summary provided by James E. Smith in *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Press, 2014).

But the crisis can be averted. And to avert the crisis, we do not need a new strategy, one that differs from the work begun by Father Alexander. His basic project, described in this section, was not ineffective, but merely incomplete. We have more work to do, as we will see.

Fr Schmemmann famously told Father Thomas Hopko (also in 1965) that when he someday dies, the memoriam written for his burial should summarize his life as “two ‘nos’ and one ‘yes’.”¹³ The first ‘no’ emphasized by Fr Schmemmann is the ‘no’ we must say to secularism, as described above. The second ‘no’—strange as it may sound—is the ‘no’ we must say to religion. By this, Schmemmann means religion in the reduced and thin sense of “help.” As secularism more deeply informs the general cultural outlook, faith becomes just one more way of helping the human person achieve fulfilment, defined in terms largely disconnected from the life of God. When the wider culture is secular, faith does not disappear. Faith reduces to religion as help. Religion becomes one more tool, no better or worse than all the others, for helping the human being overcome all his perceived problems.

The ‘yes’ tirelessly emphasized by Father Alexander is a ‘yes’ to the kingdom. It is a ‘yes’ to the redeemed life of this fallen world which we can now experience within the Church because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. It is a ‘yes’ to eschatology—to the experience of the Kingdom which is both already and not yet. It is a ‘yes’ to the life which God offers, not just on Sunday morning, but which is made available each moment and in each place. Wherever we may be, we can breathe the air of the kingdom—we can touch the joy of communion with Christ, we can be quickened by the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit.

In “The Spiritual Problem,” Fr Schmemmann points to specific ways we must once again say ‘yes’ to the kingdom. In the parish in particular, he notes that our goal should be to restore the experience of God—the experience of the reality that we are not of this world, so that as Christians we might go into the world and do the work which righteousness requires.

"My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God . . ." (Ps. 42:2) : this and only this is religion. And the parish as parish, i.e., *as Church* has no other task, no other purpose but to reveal, to manifest, to announce, this Living God so that men may know Him, love Him and then, find in Him their real vocations and tasks.¹⁴

This restoration of the parish must occur on three levels, argues Fr Schmemmann. First, there must be a restoration of the experience of God in the liturgical life of Orthodox parishes. The second level of restoration is educational—the Orthodox faithful must learn, not just what the services “mean” and “do,” but also how the Holy Spirit has guided the Church to express its timeless faith in Christ in the past so that the Church can better discern how the gospel must be proclaimed anew today. The third level is the level of mission: the Church must rediscover the

¹³ Thomas Hopko, “Two Nos and One Yes.” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 28 (1984): 45–48.

¹⁴ Schmemmann, “Spiritual Problem,” 187-188.

nature of her calling to be good news to the world around it—her mission “to help God's work wherever it is to be helped.”¹⁵

One can make the case that since 1965 the restoration called for by Fr Schmemmann has occurred on the first two of these levels. In the half-century since the publication of “The Spiritual Problem” there has been an explosion of fruitful work within liturgical theology, led by Fr Schmemmann and his colleagues and students, that has helped the Church in North America to regain the vision that, in the first place, the Church is a worshipping Church. And at the level of education, the track record is also encouraging. At the start of the 1960s there were very few English-language resources available to set forth the story and teachings of Orthodox Christianity, but since then an expanding bibliography of titles has inaugurated a swell of interest in learning more about Orthodoxy so that, today, there is an impressive constellation of resources for communicating the Orthodox message. Hundreds if not thousands of books have been published by a growing number of Orthodox presses, supplemented by a vigorous inter-jurisdictional effort by a number of players to ensure that the internet is populated with podcasts, videos, and lectures that can “be all things to all men.”¹⁶ And many parishes faithfully organize retreats and lectures in the hope of deepening the world’s awareness and understanding of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

To be sure, liturgical and educational renewal needs to continue, but progress on those levels is evident. Still needed, however, is work on the third level. Perhaps the main reason the critique expressed by Fr Schmemmann in 1965 still sounds so timely in 2019 is that the Orthodox Church has yet to achieve parallel gains in restoring its missionary character. In particular, as Father Alexander urges, it is the local parish where this rebirth must take place. The local eucharistic community must find and dedicate itself to its true calling. Such a calling has nothing to do with the conventional parish concerns of ethnicity and solvency. Neither is the Church’s calling fully captured by the obligation to “hatch, match, and dispatch,”¹⁷ all according to the approved canons and fee schedules. The purpose of the Church is to enable each Christian to fulfill the twin summaries of God’s good law: to fulfill the commandments to love God with all that we have, and to love the neighbor as ourselves.

But it is the mission of loving the neighbor that is missing, or severely underdeveloped, in most Orthodox parishes in North America. Renewing our commitment to this mission is critical if we hope to recover the Church’s sense of missionary calling and, thereby, to help deal a fatal blow to the controlling presence of secularism over our identity as Orthodox believers in Jesus Christ. Our ‘yes’ to the kingdom will remain incomplete until parishes across North America rededicate themselves to “the liturgy after the Liturgy” —to the biblical commandment expressed time and again to seek justice.

This project begins with the conviction that a new effort is needed to complete the project Fr Schmemmann first sketched in 1965, and which he pursued with such force in his

¹⁵ Ibid, 190.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 9:22.

¹⁷ To “hatch, match, and dispatch” is to celebrate the rites of baptism, marriage, and burial.

ministry. The Church is now called to stay on target, and to complete the 'yes' which Fr Schmemmann urged us to say to the kingdom of Christ. The renewal of parish life, in particular, has not been ineffective; it is merely incomplete. With power we now say 'yes' to the kingdom liturgically, and we also say 'yes' to the kingdom with tremendous vigor at the level of catechesis and education, having enjoyed something of a golden age of Orthodox scholarship and apologetics for several decades. But that third 'yes' is still needed: to ensure that the experience of God is available to all, the parish must recover its "missionary character," as Father Alexander writes. "And by this I mean primarily a shift from the selfish self-centeredness of the modern parish to the concept of the parish as *servant*."¹⁸ The parish must learn once again to serve God, and both the clergy and the faithful must kill the prevalent attitude that "each parish must first take care of itself":

If a man says "I won't help the poor because I must first take care of myself" we call it selfishness and term it a sin. If a parish says it and acts accordingly we consider it Christian—but as long as this "double standard" is accepted as a self-evident norm, as long as all this is praised and glorified as good and Christian at innumerable parish banquets and "affairs", the parish betrays rather than serves God.¹⁹

Restoring the full experience of God in the Church will remain an unreachable goal until the land is populated with servant parishes.

4. *The Servant Parish Project*

The goal of this project is to help parishes recover this "missionary character" of "parish as servant." As Fr Schmemmann cautioned in 1965, it is still too easy to view the parish as the recipient and beneficiary of our labors. The reverse must be the case: the parish must be viewed as agent, not recipient—the agent which delivers the kingdom to others. The parish must not be the passive object of our efforts to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Rather, the parish must be the subject which acts decisively and sacrificially in love on behalf of others, indeed "for the life of the world."

Specifically, this project is dedicated to helping parishes become servants of those whom Christ calls "the least of these my brethren."²⁰ If our liturgical life is the primary way we express our love of God, then compassionate action on behalf of the weak and the afflicted is the primary way we express our love of the neighbor. Arguably, we do the first quite well, but too often our efforts to respond to the suffering of others come up short. But this compassionate

¹⁸ Schmemmann, "Spiritual Problem," 190.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 190–191.

²⁰ Matthew 25:31–46.

reflex is precisely the element that is still lacking in Fr Schmemmann's vision of an Orthodox parish that says 'yes' to the kingdom.

There are many terms associated with the sort of compassionate ministry to which we are called. The best term is the biblical word 'justice.' The person or nation of justice is one that does not ignore or contribute to the suffering of the weak and neglected, but which is moved by love to stand with those who suffer and to extend mercy, fellowship, and relief where possible. This project maintains that the "parish as servant" is the parish which seeks to honor to commandment in Isaiah 1:17 to "seek justice."

5. *"Come and See" Evangelism is Only a Half Measure*

Thanks to the tireless and inspired work of so many in recent decades, the joy and beauty of the kingdom has never been within such easy reach to so many. The quality of Orthodox scholarship and evangelism, the heightened beauty of worship and iconography, and the accessibility of patristic and monastic guidance—all this and more has opened up the typical Orthodox parish so that all the world might more readily see the light of Jesus Christ as savior and redeemer. The North American scene is a frustrating yet ebullient riot of "ways to be Orthodox." With its many overlapping jurisdictions and their corresponding pieties, the Church in North America is less and less saddled by the bad baggage of ethnicity and, remarkably, is creating a version of multiculturalism that is perfect for a melting pot continent. The Churches of Russia and Constantinople might never resolve the ancient disagreement over Chalcedon 28, but here in the "barbarian lands" it is a relief to see that Orthodox Christians can take a break and see the humor in our competing answers to questions concerning head scarves, facial hair, and whether candles are for the nave or narthex.

There is a playfulness that is fun to see in our increasingly pan-Orthodox context. It is part of the process that, God willing, will yield a genuinely "North American" Orthodox Church in the decades (or centuries) to come. And together with the very serious business of honoring God with worship that makes the kingdom accessible for those who hunger and thirst for it, there is joy that is so easy to touch in the typical Orthodox parish. The joy has always been there, of course, but so much good work has been done to uncover and deliver that joy with greater ease throughout the Church.

For this reason, Orthodox Christians are quick to endorse what we might call the "come and see" model of evangelism and parish life. When the disciples of John the Baptist wished to know where Christ was staying, the Lord invited them by saying "Come and see."²¹ When the skeptic Nathaniel doubted whether Jesus really was the one spoken of by Moses and the prophets, Philip responded in the same way, "Come and see."²² And largely this is the general strategy by which we offer Christ to the world. Rather than take the gospel into the world, either by word or by deed, we have become convinced that the surest way to enlarge the

²¹ John 1:39.

²² John 1:46.

Church in North America is to get more people to enter our churches and to read our books (or listen to our podcasts, or view our lectures). We feel strongly that the Church still has the power to take away one's breath, even as it did in the tenth century when the Kievan emissaries reported to Prince Vladimir that in Constantinople "we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth."

The "come and see" strategy of evangelism and parish life is a natural response to the good and ongoing work by those, like Fr Schmemmann, who have helped so many to find once again the fullness of the experience of God and his kingdom. It is evidence of their success that we so easily adopt the "come and see" vision of life in the kingdom—when you find something good, you want to share it. But in one important way, the Church in North America is now a victim of this success. It is absolutely essential to underscore the joy and beauty of worship—this is the main way by which we restore the experience of God, as Fr Schmemmann urges. It is essential, but it is not enough. An encounter with the risen Christ outside the four walls of a parish church is "like unto it"—just as the love of neighbor is "like unto" our unbounded love of God. It is not enough to get new people in the door. It is not enough to grow the arsenal of podcasts and videos. It is not enough to spotlight our iconography, sharpen our apologetics, or to improve the quality of Orthodox preaching and teaching. These are important, but only as the right leg is important to the left leg. The "come and see" method is not enough. It must be supplemented with a parallel strategy inspired by Christ's words at the end of the parable of the good Samaritan to "go and do likewise."²³

If the Servant Parish Project had a slogan, it would be Mark 3:14: "And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach." Christ desires to share himself with us. He desires intimacy with his disciples. But he also desires to send us out so that we might share this same divine life with everyone we meet. There is an essential connection between the eucharistic Liturgy and the "liturgy after the Liturgy." By the first, we receive the kingdom. By the second, the world receives the kingdom. We are the critical agents in God's divine economy, gathered by Christ and then sent out by him so that he might be present through us to all the world.

6. Overview of the Project

It is time to complete our 'yes' to the kingdom. In particular, it is time to work hard at restoring the missionary character of the Orthodox parish by replacing the false ideal of "serving the parish" with the vision of "the parish as servant" just as Fr Schmemmann urged in 1965. To that end, this project is devoted to answering two key research questions:

- (1) How should Orthodox Christians think about the commandment found throughout scripture to honor "justice" (Isaiah 1:17, Amos 5:24, Micah 6:8, Luke 18:1–8)?

²³ Luke 10:37.

- (2) What strategies can Orthodox parishes pursue to create “servant parishes” actively engaged in ministry, in particular, to the poor and suffering?

What follows is a brief sketch of the objectives and purposes of the research that follows.

As Orthodox Christians, we all know the basic moral requirements. We all know what we “should do.” But we don’t necessarily have a good understanding of why we are supposed to do these things. Until we do—until we can make “justice” make sense from an Orthodox point of view—the idea of a “servant parish” will seem like an alien addition to Orthodoxy.

There is an analogy with Orthodox worship. Before receiving the fruits of the modern Liturgical Movement, Orthodox Christians knew what “to do” in worship—the mechanics and choreography of worship were learnable forms of behavior. But a deeper understanding of the meaning of worship had long ago been lost. To “liturgics,” we then added “liturgical theology.” We augmented our knowledge of what to do in worship with an understanding of why things are done this way.

A similar augmentation is needed in connection with the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself.” And so to “morals,” we still need to add “moral theology.” We need to set forth the reasons why justice itself is an expression of our Orthodox faith in Jesus Christ, and not just an extra-credit add-on for those so inclined. Such a moral theology—such an explanation of justice from an Orthodox point of view—will do to morals what liturgical theology did to liturgics: it will create a new urgency among the faithful to embrace and participate. At a minimum it will greatly reduce the excuses for neglecting ministry to the poor and suffering.

What does such an “Orthodox moral theology” look like? It looks like Christ. In other words, an Orthodox explanation of justice, if it is to matter, must make clear that justice is an indispensable asceticism, chosen in love, through which the human being becomes more and more like the Savior we confess to be King and God. Through compassion, we become like the One “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself (*εαυτον εκενosen*), taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.”²⁴ Saint Athanasius the Great proclaims that Christ “indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God,”²⁵ but the Apostle Paul reminds us of the true measure of our theosis: Christ expresses his divinity through extreme humility. His *theiotés* is manifested or made real by his *kenosis*.

And as for Christ, so also for us. Serving those who suffer is a pathway to salvation. This is not a simple-minded story of salvation by works. It is instead the outline of an Orthodox moral theology, one which reveals compassion and selfless love to be the very mechanism through which we become by grace what God is by nature. Kenosis—the kind of divine humility displayed by Christ on Cross—makes union with Christ possible. Selfless love is not

²⁴ Philippians 2:6–8.

²⁵ Saint Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, (Crestwood, NY: Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996), 93.

the end result of sanctification—it is not the special power of the holy few—but is rather the askesis through which more and more we both experience and participate in the life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Justice is not merely a this-world concern. Justice is eschatological. It once again births Christ into the world through the human heart, revealing the truth of Christ’s words that “the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”²⁶

This quick description of an Orthodox moral theology will be developed further in the final chapter of this study. And once in place, such an account of justice from an Orthodox point of view will help the individual Christian to locate compassionate ministry to the poor and suffering among the many other treasures of holy tradition that provide us with an experience of the kingdom itself. To our knowledge of “what we should do” we will have added a valuable understanding of *why* these are the good things to do.

After addressing the question of “why” we will then move to practical questions related to “how.” Once an Orthodox moral theology is set forth, we can begin to explore strategies for creating servant parishes in which a vibrant liturgical life and a vibrant life of social action are inseparable. These strategies will be based partly on scriptural and patristic sources, but also on empirical data collected through survey-based field work designed to explore and quantify the following among Orthodox Christians: (1) basic attitudes toward social action, (2) sources of personal beliefs about social action, and (3) actual and potential sources of motivation for increasing personal involvement in social action. With insights from the past and present, this project will conclude by developing a new model of ministry that can be adapted by parishes to local circumstances. The model, in brief, is built around five basic priorities: communicate, connect, comfort, correct, and chrismate. These are the “five Cs of the servant parish.” Using them, Orthodox Christians can restore the missionary character of the Orthodox parish in the way envisioned by Fr Schmemmann, by replacing the false ideal of “serving the parish” with the vision of “the parish as servant.”

²⁶ Luke 17:21.