

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

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## **Chapter 4 The Missionary Character of the Servant Parish**

1. *Overview of the Chapter*
2. *The Orthodox approach to missions (incorporation vs. incarnation)*
3. *How to say 'Yes' to the Kingdom, Step 1: Realize that the Liturgy is not enough*
4. *How to say 'Yes' to the Kingdom, Step 2: Realize that the "liturgy after the Liturgy" is no less crucial*
5. *Interlude: Echoes of "'Yes' to the Kingdom" in a Faraway Place*

### *1. Overview of the Chapter*

In chapter 2, we explored the subject of ministry to the poor and suffering from the perspective of Scripture. In chapter 3, we did so using patristic sources. It is time, in this chapter, to review the relevant contemporary literature associated with Orthodox approaches to the command from God to "seek justice" for those in need.

One candidate for such a body of contemporary literature would be the Orthodox version of what is sometimes called the "social justice tradition" within Roman Catholicism. The fact of the matter, however, is that there is no such well-developed social justice tradition within Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Unlike our siblings in the Roman Catholic Church, we cannot point to a body of systematic approaches, on biblical and theological grounds, to questions related to the relationship between the individual and society. The Orthodox cannot promote anything remotely equivalent to the well-defined corpus of "Catholic social teaching," based on the firm footing of conciliar statements, papal encyclicals, and curial research. Here and there Orthodox writers have asked the question "Well, what *would* an Orthodox social justice tradition look like?" For now, the question remains hypothetical.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A literature is beginning to take shape, however. Orthodox writers have of course been concerned with correcting human injustice since the birth of the Church. The third-century patristic text *Apostolic Tradition*, for example, sets forth the requirement that those who are chosen for baptism "should be examined ... whether they honored the widows, whether they visited the sick, whether they were thorough in performing good works," and whether they did so over the three-year duration of the catechumenate (Hippolytus of Rome, *On the Apostolic Tradition* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 105-106). As Thomas Talley notes, "This suggests that an important dimension of catechetical formation was the development of patterns of responsibility within the Church" (*The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, (New York: Pueblo, 1986), 164.) And of course the patristic period as a whole provides many such examples. In the bibliography below, see for example William Walsh and John

This chapter will focus, not on literature related to the question of justice, but on literature related to missions. To be sure, like justice, “missiology” is also a topic that needs greater systematic attention from Orthodox theologians. But the literature that does exist forges an important connection to the subject of ministry to the poor and suffering. In particular, how the Orthodox Church understands its mission in the world is inseparable from the commandment to “seek justice.” Reflecting on what “missions” means from an Orthodox point of view will provide important insights for parishes that seek to strengthen their commitment to compassionate ministries.

Chapter 4 will unfold as follows. In section 2, we will explore the question “What is the mission of the Church?” by contrasting two models: the traditional model adopted within most Protestant traditions, and the model which is more consistent with the actual movement of

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Langan, “Patristic Social Consciousness—The Church and the Poor”; the historical survey by Fr Demetrios Constantelos, *Byzantine Philanthropy and Social Welfare*; and the many essays in Susan Holman, ed. *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, some of which were cited above in chapter 3.

But in recent decades there has been a more concentrated effort by Orthodox writers to reflect on both the Western social justice tradition and on the question of how social action is connected to living an Orthodox life. One catalyst for this new attention by Orthodox to questions of justice is no doubt the legacy left behind by saints such as Maria Skobtsova and Elizabeth the New Martyr. (See especially St Maria’s *Essential Writings*; Fr Sergei Hackel’s biography *Pearl of Great Price: The Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova, 1891–1945*; and St Elizabeth’s letters in the biography *Grand Duchess Elizabeth of Russia: New Martyr of the Communist Yoke*.) According to Michael Plekon (“Towards a Theology of Social Ministry,” *Handmaiden* 13 (2009). Retrieved from: <<http://store.ancientfaith.com/towards-a-theology-of-social-ministry/>>, August 1, 2019) the theologian Paul Evdokimov was one such writer, moved by the witness of St Maria, his fellow emigre. Evdokimov himself was deeply committed to ministry to the poor, and his writings are also part of the spark that has led to greater recent interest in Orthodox social action:

But eschatology is a two-edged sword. It is never enough to speak of the end of the world if this means a kind of passivity or a theological obscurantism and indifference to our world. The eschatology of the Bible and the Fathers is explosive, demanding solutions in this earthly life in connection with the Apocalypse, and the deepest meaning of our present crisis is that the visible judgment of God is upon the world and the Church (“The Church and Society,” In Michael Plekon and Alexis Vinogradov, eds. & trans. *In the World, Of the Church: A Paul Evdokimov Reader*, (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 73–74).

A growing number of writers have since followed in the footsteps of St Maria, St Elizabeth, and Evdokimov. See, for example, Fr Stanley Harakas, *Let Mercy Abound: Social Concern in the Greek Orthodox Church*; Olivier Clément, “Orthodox Reflections on ‘Liberation Theology’”; Michael Oleksa, “The Holy Spirit’s Action in Society: An Orthodox Perspective”; John Couretas, “Conflicted Hearts: Orthodox Christians and Social Justice in an Age of Globalization”; Stephen Hayes, “Orthodoxy and Liberation Theology”; as well as the many excellent essays in MJ Pereira, ed., *Philanthropy and Social Compassion in Eastern Orthodox Tradition*. The earlier 1970 review “Social Justice in Russian Orthodox Thought” by Hélène Iswolsky is also helpful. It is especially encouraging to see that concern for justice and compassionate action is even addressed in a recent general survey such as Fr John McGuckin’s *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to its History, Doctrine, and Spiritual Culture* (see chapter 7, “Orthodoxy and the Contemporary World”).

Orthodox Christianity through time and space. An important goal in the Orthodox approach to missions is the involvement of new individuals, not just into the life of worship, but into the active life of the Church and its new assemblies.<sup>2</sup> This “active life” is more expansive than mere church membership and cultic participation. Orthodoxy does not seek new “servants of the parish.” Rather, the Church desires to establish “servant parishes” wherever it spreads. The active life of the Church also includes pursuing concrete responses to needs in the surrounding community. In sections 3 and 4, we will further describe this approach to missions by reflecting on the interplay between the “two Liturgies” of the Orthodox Church—the eucharistic Liturgy celebrated inside the assembly, and the “liturgy after the Liturgy” celebrated outside the assembly through sacrificial and compassionate service to those in need. Finally, in section 5, we will explore an interesting convergence between Orthodox missiology and recent missiology endorsed by a growing number of evangelical Protestant pastors and theologians within the “missional church movement.” This is an approach to missions that shares much in common with the Orthodox vision, and important insights for Orthodox parishes can be gathered by reflecting on the experiences of our Evangelical brothers and sisters.

## 2. *The Orthodox approach to missions*

Missiology is a research field with a large literature. The Church’s “theology of missions” is a shifting assortment of perspectives and imperatives that is influenced by the theologian’s own time, place, and Christian tradition. There is no single answer to the question “What is the mission of the Church?” There is instead a complex collection of assumptions and emphases in conversation with one another. Sometimes these competing missiologies align nicely, essentially using different language to describe the same kind of ecclesial activity. And sometimes the competitors are truly orthogonal, approaching basic issues in rather incompatible ways.

For certain, most thinking about missions begins with the Lord’s words at the end of Matthew:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."<sup>3</sup>

The Great Commission makes it clear that the general movement of the Church is a movement outward. There is a message to be preached to those who do not yet know the Apostolic tradition, and the Church is enjoined to get busy and “go therefore” to the nations. But the

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<sup>2</sup> James Stamoolis, *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1986), 52-56.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 28:18-20.

Great Commission is powerful precisely because it is short. And being short, it contains little detail to guide implementation. Christ does not append a manual or a blueprint with which we might carry out the program he commends. And as one might expect in the absence of completely clear marching orders, “what missionaries do” has varied over the history of the Church. Consequently, theological reflection on what missionaries do—the discipline of missiology—has inherited this same variety.

At the risk of painting the landscape with overbroad strokes, it is useful for our purposes to distinguish two general approaches to the question of the Church’s missionary activity in the world. One approach is the approach of *incorporation*. On the “incorporation approach” to missions, the goal of the Church’s missionary activity is to enlarge the Church by adding new members. The non-Christian is made into a Christian, or initiated somehow into ecclesial life. The number that counts, to be more concrete, is the number of individuals who move from, say, the category “unbeliever” to the category “believer.” The incorporation approach is strongly represented by those traditions which assume that evangelization is an activity that emphasizes personal conversion and discipleship, often through preaching designed to proselytize. The goal of “mission-as-proselytism” is to unite individuals to a church body that already exists, so that they might have a saving and sanctifying encounter with Jesus Christ. On this approach the Church moves outward to reach people.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The mission-as-incorporation approach has not been the dominant framework for organizing missionary activity over the whole history of the Church, but for certain it has been the dominant framework over the last several centuries. I am following here the analysis of David Bosch in his *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991). There, Bosch divides the history of the Church into six epochs and describes how the Church’s understanding of its own missionary activity leaps from “old paradigm” to “new paradigm” over time. The epoch that covers the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is shaped by the emergence of Protestant Christianity and, more broadly, by the rise of the Enlightenment and its entangled values of individual autonomy, rational inquiry, faith in progress, and colonial expansion. In this period, the Church moves outward alongside emerging empires, and so the missionary imperative in this epoch is largely to transplant what works “here” (in the Protestant West) to those places “there” that lack the favored forms of sanctification, affluence and influence. Because of the emphasis on personal conversion, rational inquiry and colonial expansion, missionary activity in this period is not concerned with “incarnating” the Church organically in new contexts with special respect for local language, culture, and custom. Rather, the church is convinced moreso by the goodness of directly transplanting “what is here” to “what needs to be there,” according to paternalistic and colonial assumptions that often favor inculturation over incarnation. Pragmatically, the result is missionary activity that seeks assimilation or incorporation (my term): non-Christians “over there” are convinced to become just like Christians “over here” through strategies and programs aimed at personal conversion and, subsequently, personal allegiance to the mother Church (or fatherland) that underwrites the missionary.

The above is a broad but fair description of historical trends. But it is worth exploring Bosch’s methodology as well, for clarity’s sake. Bosch uses the terms “paradigm” and “paradigm shift” because he sees value in adopting a framework devised by the philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn for explaining theory change in the physical sciences. In his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), Kuhn argues that theory change (for example, discarding Aristotelian physics and adopting Newtonian physics) is not a gradual process governed by rational rules of falsification or confirmation. Rather, it is a “gappy” movement in which it is necessary here and there to

A second approach emphasizes, not incorporation, but *incarnation*. On the “incarnation approach” it is the local assembly that has value in the first place. And where local assemblies do not exist, they should be established and nurtured. It is good if non-Christians become Christians and join the local assembly, but this sort of conversion is hoped for as a blessed consequence of the primary goal of extending Church life to those places where messianic communities do not yet exist. The number that counts most on this approach is the number of new communities that are planted—or incarnated, or birthed in a new place—and which then offer church life to all and any who might so desire it, at some level or other. On this approach the Church moves outward to reach un-Churched communities, inviting others to join and participate in response to their encounter with Christ inside a worshipping community. The Church is not a launching pad for evangelistic preaching designed to convert the unbeliever. The Church is the locus, the holy location, in which the individual may be confronted by the saving presence of Jesus Christ—sometimes through preaching and teaching, but also through worship, sacramental encounter, and direct experience.

The basic difference between mission-as-incorporation and mission-as-incarnation emerges sharply when one asks the question “What is the value of planting new churches?” On the incorporation approach, new church plants are valuable for instrumental reasons: new assemblies are means to an end—they help to facilitate the sort of personal conversions that are the true goal of missionary activity. In fact, new church plants are not strictly speaking a necessity since, after all, it is possible on this approach for conversion and discipleship to take place through one-on-one encounters in the mission field apart from community and fellowship. The driver of conversion is often the charisma of the individual evangelist and the strength of his or her message, not the charisma of the local assembly.

On the incarnational approach, new church plants are valuable, not instrumentally, but intrinsically. A new assembly is the goal, because without the assembly, it is impossible for others to meet and to be met by Christ. What drives conversion and discipleship are the charisms of the life which is offered by the Church as the Body of Christ through the local assembly. On this approach, new church plants are a necessity.

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speak of leaps of faith, radical conversion, and value change. Old theories in the physical sciences are replaced by new ones according a process that is at times unavoidably non-rational, requiring on occasion a revolutionary break from looking at things one way to looking at things in a new way that is “incommensurate” with established norms, meaning that there is no middle ground on which partisans (or even a third party) might compare the competing theories in a fully meaningful and objective way. The movement from a physical theory to its successor is closer in form to a political movement that discards one regime in favor of another based on radically different assumptions and values.

Does it make sense to describe change in *missiology* using Kuhn’s framework, a framework developed specifically for explaining theory change in the physical sciences? I am agnostic. As Bosch convincingly describes, mission theology *does* change. But whether, say, missiology in the patristic period is “incommensurate” in Kuhn’s sense from missiology in the Enlightenment period does not take away from the accuracy of Bosch’s historical descriptions, that the dominant perspective since the Enlightenment views missionary activity as activity whose main goal is to incorporate new members through preferred methods of personal proselytizing and inculturation.

Although Orthodox Christianity lacks a well-defined tradition of reflecting on missiology in a systematic way, it falls quite squarely into the second camp, mission-as-incarnation. To be more clear: the Orthodox Church grants priority to “incarnating new assemblies” over “incorporating new members.” Orthodox Christianity, as it has moved outward from Jerusalem into the unchurched world, has no identifiable tradition of embracing those strategies of proselytism that aim rather narrowly at conversion for conversion’s sake. Instead, Orthodoxy has placed priority on the eucharistic community, emphasizing its primacy in mission work. Through the Church, life is offered, and unbelievers are invited.

Petros Vassiliadis offers a useful contrast between the Orthodox approach (incarnation of assemblies) and the approach based on proselytizing the unchurched (incorporation of individuals), one based on how the two approaches understand the Great Commission in different ways.<sup>5</sup> He writes that contemporary Protestant support for proselytism is often based on a reading of Matthew 28:16–20 that is sharply individualistic. The emphasis is placed by many Western Christians on “making disciples” while it is taken away from the command to baptize the nations in the name of the Holy Trinity. Vassiliadis writes that on this more selective reading the Great Commission envisions, not the continuation of Christ’s divine work, but the transition from a passing era to a new one—from the age of Christ’s mission to the age of human mission. But this is not the vision of the Great Commission, at least not when understood alongside the entirety of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The gospel books speak of God’s *ongoing* activity, through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Disciples are made, yes, but this disciple-making is part of ceaseless Trinitarian life, experienced in and through the pentecostal body.

Petros Vassiliadis links this human-centered reading of the Great Commission, and the emphasis on proselytism that comes from it, to some serious social and historical ills:

As a result, our Christian mission adopted an expansionist attitude in the past, and in some places, imperialistic tendencies also found their way in, thus eroding the spiritual character of the churches’ mission. In addition, our scandalous divisions have resulted in a denominational antagonism, which in turn has led to proselytizing attitudes transplanting the old-fashioned theological debates and practices from Europe to non-European missionary areas.

Isolating the Great Commission from the rest of Scripture and then emphasizing the activity of “making disciples” has, too often and too easily, been mixed up with secular forms of expansion. Expanding the church has become a powerful strategy for expanding the regime, and for exporting the regime’s supporting culture. Missionaries, on this approach, become a new kind of foot soldier for the nation-state with imperial ambitions. Worse than this—worse than wedding mission to imperialism—proselytism has been used by Christian brothers against other Christian brothers. To diminish the influence of a competing Christian denomination, for

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<sup>5</sup> Petros Vassiliadis, “Mission and Proselytism: An Orthodox Understanding” in his *Eucharist and Witness: Orthodox Perspectives on the Unity and Mission of the Church* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), 29–48.

example, it becomes necessary to send out “our missionaries” so that we might make disciples “like us.”<sup>6,7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A brief word about the problem of inculturation. Writers on mission often note the historical association between proselytism and imperialism, as Vassiliadis himself has done in the article just cited. When a state aspires to become an imperial or colonial power, it places a priority on exporting and imposing its own culture on the target colonies. Among the forms of life imposed on the colonized are the religious vision and practices of the imperial regime. The missionary sent abroad to convert the unchurched does not necessarily seek to adapt the gospel to the culture already present and lived among them. In fact, adaptation runs in the other direction. The proselyte adapts to what the missionary offers. The issue of inculturation—how the missionary will strive to express the Christian faith in a new context—is largely ignored except for whatever changes may be expedient to incorporate native populations into this new outpost of an expansionist church now on native soil. Such expedient missionary activity might include basic and uncritical translation of Scripture or catechesis material. And of course the missionaries give their clientele other, more material reasons for embracing membership: perhaps food, infrastructure, or other “civilizing” advances. But these are bribes, not genuine attempts to inculturate the gospel appropriately in a new context among new hearers.

It is important to note that the Orthodox Church is not immune to this same sort of deafness to genuine inculturation—to missionary activity that puts Christ and his gospel first, and which hopes to exclude all forms of cultural and political imperialism. Orthodoxy can be guilty of “spiritual imperialism” if it is not careful. (The term is Metropolitan Georges Khodr’s, cited below.) For example, as the Orthodox Church continues to move into cultural settings far removed from its Mediterranean and Slavic strongholds, the question arises: should Orthodox communities be established in Japan, Kenya, or Guatemala by exporting to them liturgical patterns and styles that are very much conditioned still by medieval Byzantine or Slavic cultures?

This chapter on missiology is not concerned with the important question of inculturation, but the issue is important to acknowledge and to revisit. Metropolitan Georges Khodr, for example, writes that “true mission laughs at missionary activity” as it is often envisioned, seeking instead to avoid “spiritual imperialism” by working hard to embrace Paul’s *logos spermatikos* Christology at Mars Hill and to ensure that we honor the presence of Christ already present and at work in especially non-Christian cultures. (“Christianity in a Pluralist World: The Economy of the Holy Spirit” in Vassiliadis, *Orthodox Perspectives on Mission*, 118, 122.) Similarly Metropolitan Emilianos Timiadis urges “There is no place in the church of God for liturgical uniformity, cultural domination, colonialism, brutal conformism or a uniformity forcibly imposing worship and theological expressions upon others” (“Unity of Faith and Pluralism in Culture. A Lesson from the Byzantine Missionaries,” *IRM* 74 (1985), 243.)

Indeed, Orthodox missiology should always hear the eucharistic celebration in concrete terms, as Kosmas Ngige Njoroge writes (“Incarnation as a Mode of Orthodox Mission: Intercultural Orthodox Mission—Imposing Culture and Inculturation” in Vassiliadis, *Orthodox Perspectives on Mission*, 242):

The inculturation process starts when a community starts functioning as an indigenous or local church. To be local means the Church has taken roots in a given place with all its cultural, natural, social, and any other characteristic that constitutes the life, values and thoughts of the people involved. This is practically illustrated in the Eucharist, where people as the Body of Christ offer to God all that is “his own,” “*Your own of your own we offer to you.*”

Njoroge’s particular question about the mission to sub-Saharan Africa should be a template for all efforts to establish eucharistic communities in new mission fields (“Incarnation,” 249):

Vassiliadis laments that this pain of imperialism could have been avoided “had the *trinitarian dimension* of the church’s mission been emphasized.”<sup>8</sup> For instance, John 20:21–22 is no less important than the Great Commission in Matthew:

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

The Incarnation is not an event located in the distant past. It is an ongoing reality for the Church. So also is Pentecost. Christ does not pass on his mission as an inheritance, for the heirs to do with as they wish. Rather the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit continues through the Church. Luke, no less clearly, describes the inauguration of Jesus’ ministry in explicitly Trinitarian terms:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.<sup>9</sup>

Yes, the Church has a mission to make disciples, but this disciple-making must always take place where Trinitarian life abounds. Where the ongoing communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit cannot be experienced, there can be no new disciples, at least not ones made by human hands.

And so proselytism—the goal of growing the church by incorporating new members into established communities—is a thin vision of something quite fuller. According to the New Testament witness as a whole, the goal of mission, in the first place at least, is not to add

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Every culture in this world is God’s creation. Whenever a new culture and a new people are transformed, it is a new Pentecost; we have therefore to let these new people of God express the joy of this Pentecost in their own ways, in their own worship. For us Orthodox, so we believe, the Church is first of all a worshiping community; worship coming first, doctrine and discipline second. How then do we expect the Africans to get into the depths of Orthodox worship if all its structures and textures have been brought from the cult of Byzantine culture? In other words, how do we expect Africans to express their joy at Christ’s resurrection without dancing and clapping? Would they ever get this joy nourished through chanting the eight tomes of Byzantine hymnology? All the church arts and iconography, music and liturgical vestments are foreign. Liturgical services and prayers, symbols, gestures and movements are not yet imbued with what is African. How then can we Africans speak of the inculturation of Orthodoxy today?

<sup>7</sup> The issue of inculturation from the Orthodox point of view is explored in a masterly way by Fr Michael Oleksa in *Orthodox Alaska: A Theology of Mission*, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> Vassiliadis, “Mission and Proselytism,” 34, emphasis in original.

<sup>9</sup> Luke 4:18–19.

members. The goal is to work alongside Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, making an experience of Trinitarian life a possibility for all who desire. “In fact, Christian mission can be justified only if we conceive our missionary task as the projection in human terms of the life of communion that exists within the Holy Trinity.”<sup>10</sup> In a striking summary of the Orthodox view, Vassiliadis writes that “the subject of mission is not the individual believer, the missionary or even the church as an impersonal corporate entity—rather, it is the triune God.”<sup>11</sup> He quotes Bria to underscore this important difference between the Christian east and west:

Trinitarian theology points to the fact that God is in God’s own self a life of communion and that God’s involvement in history aims at drawing humanity and creation in general into this communion with God’s very life. The implications of this assertion for understanding mission are very important: mission does not aim primarily at the propagation or transmission of intellectual convictions, doctrines, moral commands, etc., but at the transmission of the life of communion that exists in God.<sup>12</sup>

And since this life of communion is experienced most fully within the Church as a eucharistic community, the Church’s mission is to create new communities where “the life of communion that exists in God” is proclaimed so that others might say ‘yes’ to the kingdom in their midst.

For the Orthodox, the priceless goal is not the addition and incorporation of new members into a body that already exists. The goal rather is to allow that body to spread and establish itself concretely in places where it does not yet have a local presence. Such a goal is not based on a misplaced glorification of the local parish. This would be idolatry. Rather, the multiplication of parishes through space and time is the battle plan by which the Church acts on its wider vision of allowing the glory of God to fill the whole universe.<sup>13</sup> Because the “redeeming work of God does not end in the redemption of humankind, but extends to the redemption of the cosmos” a special emphasis is placed by Orthodox Christianity on the missionary force of worship itself, centered as that worship is on the liturgical life, and especially the eucharistic life, of the local assembly.<sup>14</sup> To be sure, the conversion of unbelievers is central to this wider vision of cosmic redemption through Jesus Christ, but the conversion of unbelievers is only a part of this vision. It is “for the life of the world” that Christ gives himself

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<sup>10</sup> Vassiliadis, “Mission and Proselytism,” 34.

<sup>11</sup> Vassiliadis, “Mission and Proselytism,” 34.

<sup>12</sup> Bria, *Go Forth in Peace*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Stamoolis, *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today*, 52.

<sup>14</sup> Stamoolis, *Ibid.*, 51. In his characterization of Orthodox missiology in 1984, Stamoolis relies heavily here on the work of Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos. See especially “The Purpose and Motive of Missions” in *Mission in Christ’s Way*, (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Seminary Press, 2010), 41-64.

up to death.<sup>15</sup> His eucharistic sacrifice on the Cross, through which “joy has come into all the world,”<sup>16</sup> is not just the *message* which the Church works to proclaim, it is also the *medium* of the message. The good news of salvation through the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is not just preached, it is experienced continuously by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit within the worshipping community, to the glory of God our Father.

For this reason, “the immediate aims of mission” for the Orthodox Church include “the establishment of a local church in which the people can worship God in the light of their own natural gifts and characteristics, giving to the Church universal their distinctive contribution to the praise of God.”<sup>17</sup> The goal is not “spiritual colonies” that impose a mother and often alien culture on people and places that already have cultures of their own.<sup>18</sup> In fact, “the repeated emphasis [by Orthodox missionaries] on the use of the vernacular and the establishment of an indigenous clergy bears witness to the desire, if not the outcome, to have the church become incarnate in the life of the people.”<sup>19</sup> Establishing new assemblies, adapted to the forms of life already present among the unchurched, becomes the launching pad for reaching the larger goal of filling all creation with the glory of God.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> From the Anaphora of John Chrysostom at the Eucharistic consecration of the bread and wine in the Divine Liturgy of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

<sup>16</sup> Divine Liturgy, Hymns of Thanksgiving after Holy Communion.

<sup>17</sup> Stamoolis, *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today*, 53.

<sup>18</sup> Stamoolis, *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>19</sup> Stamoolis, *Ibid.*, 53-4.

<sup>20</sup> In recent paragraphs we have been quoting from Stamoolis’s summary of Orthodox missiology. Stamoolis himself has largely been presenting the views of Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, as mentioned in a previous footnote. But it is important to point out something possibly misleading in Stamoolis’s work. Following Yannoulatos, he correctly identifies establishing new local churches as the immediate goal of missions, but Stamoolis then switches sources (he begins quoting from N.A. Nissiotis, as does Yannoulatos in his original paper) but in doing so Stamoolis reaches the conclusion that “service” is not really an essential part of missions (*Ibid.*, p. 54). After endorsing Yannoulatos and agreeing that the glory of God is the ultimate goal of missions, Stamoolis seems to reduce “the glory of God” to the inner transformation of the unbeliever, leaving one with the impression that proselytizing has everything to do with the true aim of missions, but that compassion in the name of Christ has no essential role.

It is worth pointing out that this conclusion cannot be supported by Yannoulatos’s original paper. To take an example, Yannoulatos says there: “Incorporation into Christ must not, of course, be understood as an inner, mystical flight from the world, which finds its expressions in the setting up of closed congregations, but as the starting-point for an active participation in the work of God, which is directed towards the recapitulation of all things in Christ, to the glory of the Father. The doxology of the redeemed must also echo beyond the limits of their own community and fill the universe” (*Mission in Christ’s Way*, 54).

Enlarging on this theme of the expanding “doxology of the redeemed,” Yannoulatos says that “mission is to cooperate ‘in the Holy Spirit’ for the sanctification of all things ... We become ‘God’s co-

Jesus is the Son of God and savior of the world (*cosmos*). Ultimately, an encounter with the risen Lord is what confers grace and eternal joy. Protestant Christians, especially those in evangelical traditions, typically maintain that such an experience of Christ is mediated by information—by the testimony of a believer, by the preaching of an evangelist, by the explanation of an apologist, or by the tailored presentation of a Christian witness seeking proselytes. To put it somewhat overbriefly: on the approach adopted by many evangelical Protestants, first the mind is converted, and then conversion visits the entire person. On this view, the Church is the *result* of evangelization. Mission is the work of incorporating new members, of adding additional believers to the one body of already-established believers. As the number of converts grows, the Church grows. As new individuals are convinced of the truth of the information proclaimed by the Church, the Church expands.

This vision of mission-as-incorporation, as we are emphasizing, is not the Orthodox vision. As Father Edward Rommen points out, the Orthodox Church takes for granted that the gospel is a person, and rejects the framework of “gospel as information.” More specifically, the gospel is a person whose presence is directly experienced within the sacramental life of the worshipping, apostolic community.<sup>21</sup> For this reason, the local eucharistic assembly is not the

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workers’ in a broader sense, participating in the development of the unity, peace and love towards which God’s plan is directed ... Christians study and share in the works of their Father and their first-born brother, ‘in the Holy Spirit.’ These are not only works of salvation, but also of creation ... In this perspective, we can include as an indirect goal of the Christian mission, everything that may help a people (and man in general) to develop all the possibilities received from God and to become truly themselves; including for example: education, works of civilization and social progress. These aims, of course, are second in importance and urgency to the preceding ones; nevertheless they have their own value and distinctive tones to add to the doxological symphony that the universe is called to offer to God” (56).

<sup>21</sup> Rommen first develops this idea in *Get Real: On Evangelism in the Late Modern World*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 2010), especially 180-223. This is a book-long attempt to contrast the idea of “gospel as information” with “gospel as Person.” Rommen identifies the widely-shared assumption of “Gospel as information” as a defining feature of evangelism in the late modern world. Most Protestant Christians hold this view in particular as a result of their historical connection to religious movements inspired by the Enlightenment values of freedom, self-definition, and personalistic approaches to matters of belief and verification.

Rommen offers a clearer account of the Orthodox view of “gospel as Person” in *Come and See: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective on Contextualization*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 2013). At the end, Rommen helpfully summarizes the basic principles of Orthodox missiology as follows (194-196):

1. The gospel is a Person.
2. The evangelistic task is to introduce the person of Christ.
3. The Church is the focal point of that activity.
4. The sacraments are the privileged place of Christ’s presence in the world today.
5. The core invitational context [that is, the life of the Church] needs to be established.
6. The invitational context has to be projected onto the fields of human presence [for example, new assemblies have to be established appropriately and where appropriate].

passive beneficiary of evangelization—something that grows as conversion takes place outside the community. The local assembly is not the *result* of evangelization. It is rather the location and agent of evangelization. Christ commanded the Apostles to make disciples of the nations by first *baptizing* them. This is a liturgical and sacramental experience of union with Christ, and by definition such an experience takes place within the worshiping community. Moreover, the Lord promises that he will be with his Apostles “even to the close of the age.” Where there is baptism, and where this baptism conforms to the preaching and teaching of the Apostles, there also is the saving presence of Jesus Christ. The local parish on this view is indispensable to the mission of the Church. Through the local parish, the Church presents Christ. To make disciples of all the nations, the Church must “go therefore” and establish itself among the unchurched. It must be birthed into new places in ways that can be celebrated and welcomed by new people groups. As a result of such an incarnation, baptism becomes possible. It also then becomes possible to teach the nations to observe all that Christ has commanded.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. *How to say ‘Yes’ to the kingdom, step 1: realize that the Liturgy is not enough*

In the previous section we explored the question of what distinguishes the Orthodox approach to missions from approaches more closely associated with western Christian traditions. In this section, we move from questions of *what* to questions of *how*. Accepting that Orthodox missiology grants priority to “incarnating assemblies” over “incorporating members,” how then does church growth happen? How then does a parish acquire and nurture

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7. The witness needs to be “spiritualized” [that is, the faithful must “develop and maintain an advanced state of spiritual maturity” (196)].

Recently, Rommen has emphasized the role which theosis plays in Orthodox soteriology. Given that theosis cannot be separated from participating in the holy mysteries, it follows that the local eucharistic assembly plays a central role in the missionary activity of the Church. “The church is ... the core invitational context of mission. Knowing where Christ can be found, the faithful invite, without hesitation, those who do not yet know him to come and see, to meet him personally. Once that meeting has taken place the individual can be invited to enter into a saving relationship with him and become one of the faithful, at which point this evangelistic cycle begins again. So the real missionary potential of the church lies not in special organizations or programs but in the eucharistic assembly of the local churches themselves.” See Edward Rommen, “A Sacramental Vision Approach” in Craig Ott, ed., *The Mission of the Church: Five Views in Conversation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2016), 91.

<sup>22</sup> The discussion of missiology in this chapter is a limited one, and later we will explore a collection of articles by Orthodox theologians that focuses tightly on the specific issue of mission and its connection to social action. It is important here, however, to acknowledge a real treasure in the literature, one that should not fly under the radar as a resource for Orthodox Christians interested in missions. For an excellent review of historical examples and theological trends associated with Orthodox missionary activity, see Stephen Hayes, “Orthodox Mission Methods: A Comparative Study,” ThD diss., University of South Africa, 1998, <<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/43176116.pdf>>, August 1, 2019.

the sort of “missionary character” urged by Fr Schmemmann as an antidote for the creeping secularism that threatens to reduce religion to just one more option among the countless many for constructing a “meaningful life” as defined subjectively by the beholder? How do we make the modern Orthodox parish an heir of the tradition established by the pentecostal Church first birthed in Jerusalem?

To answer these how-questions, we begin with a snapshot of the pentecostal Church depicted in the *Acts of the Apostles*.

And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him." And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.<sup>23</sup>

There is persuasion, yes, but in the context of a worshipping community in which Trinitarian life is available to all. The Father already calls, and now offers entrance into divine life. Souls are added, yes, but they are added by baptism, for the purpose of participating in the Trinitarian life that is already incarnate there in Jerusalem. All souls, both new and old, devote themselves to the Apostles' teaching (*didache*), fellowship (*koinonia*, genuine community life, not mere social fulfilment), the breaking of bread (*klasia tou artou*, the agape meal and concluding Eucharist), and “the prayers” (*tais prosevchais*, or the corporate and liturgical prayers that mark both late Jewish and early Christian worship). The vision here is not one of imposing salvation—as if the Gospel is a hammer for the skulls of the hard-headed. The first church rather *nurtures* salvation—a salvation that already germinates because of the Father's call. Conversion is not mind control or any sort of mental trick. Conversion is a matter of timely and compelling invitation. Peter does not hypnotize or bully 3,000 souls into the Church. Rather, Peter speaks a welcomed word and offers an irresistible form of life, one recognized by his hearers as something they need, as something that moves them closer to the God that calls them.

Church growth, ideally, follows the pentecostal pattern. Out of an incarnate local assembly, an abundance of Trinitarian life overflows—a life defined by apostolic faith (*didache*), mutual love and support (*koinonia*), eucharistic celebration (*klasia tou artou*), and ongoing worship (*tais prosevchais*). This life is then offered to all. And as the Orthodox church sings at the feast of Pentecost, the Lord can then draw the world into the net of Christ, who enlivens the apostolic church by sending down the Holy Spirit who can “reveal the fishermen as most wise.” There is no pure reliance on persuasion alone as a missionary method, at least not verbal persuasion based on argument and apology. Instead the Church relies on the power of invitation, in particular on inviting the baptized to live out a Christian calling in the midst of others. This is a form of persuasion in a manner of speaking, but only in the sense that one can allow actions rather than words to do the talking. And of course, it presupposes an established and healthy local eucharistic assembly.

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<sup>23</sup> Acts 2:38–41.

But back to the pressing questions of *'how?'* How does the Church incarnate new assemblies among the unbaptized (or “reincarnate” itself, so to speak, and renew its mission) so that Trinitarian life is offered to all as a timely and compelling invitation? How do we say ‘yes’ to the kingdom so that we may recover and elevate the missionary character of the local parish?

The Christian calling, in the first place, is a calling to worship—in particular, to worship within a messianic community of the baptized that reveals the kingdom and weds us to Christ. In his analysis of Orthodox missions, Bosch points to the importance of “early Eastern theology, where an ever-stronger accent was put on ecclesiology. The conviction gradually grew that the church was the kingdom of God on earth and that to be in the church was the same as being in the kingdom.”<sup>24</sup> And so from the earliest centuries, the life of worship itself had a missionary role. Orthodox worship pointed to and revealed Christ, but at the same time Orthodox worship pointed to itself as the place where Christ and his kingdom are most fully experienced on this side of the general resurrection. To say ‘yes’ to the kingdom, one must say ‘yes’ to the Eucharistic liturgy in particular. To “spread the good news” it is necessary, therefore, to spread the Church.

But worship is not enough. If worship alone sufficed, the Acts of the Apostles would have emphasized a shorter list of devotions among the first Christians: it would have celebrated dedication to *didache* (teaching), *klasia tou artou* (bread breaking), and *tais prosevchais* (the prayers)—to essentially the traditions and celebrations that surround and support eucharistic worship inside the assembly. But the list mentions four devotions, not three. Also included is *koinonia*, or the “fellowship” expressed through mutual love, support, and outreach. *Koinonia* is no less central to the missionary force of Trinitarian life experienced within the local assembly.

In other words, the Christian calling is not limited to participation in worship. In the second place, there is an outward movement of Christians into the world so that God’s love might reconcile all the cosmos to himself through Jesus Christ. The Church invites so that the Church might send. Jesus calls disciples so that he might send Apostles. “And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach.”<sup>25</sup> This dual focus of the Christian calling is reflected in the eucharistic Liturgy itself, where the faithful are first gathered by Christ and then commanded by Christ to depart, to be his hands and feet in the wider world. Bosch uses a quotation from Fr Alexander Schmemmann to summarize the paired emphases of Orthodox worship: “The Eucharist is always the End, the sacrament of the *parousia*, and yet, it is always the beginning, the starting point: now the mission begins.”<sup>26</sup> To say ‘yes’ to the kingdom, it is also necessary to say ‘yes’ to life alongside Christ in the world. The eucharistic Liturgy combines the Lord’s great invitation to “come and see” (John 1:37–39) with his urgent exhortation to “go and do likewise” (Luke 10:36–37). And in this commandment to “go and do

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<sup>24</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 212.

<sup>25</sup> Mark 3:14.

<sup>26</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 215. He quotes from Alexander Schmemmann, “The Missionary Imperative in the Orthodox Tradition,” in G. H. Anderson (ed.), *The Theology of the Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1961), 254.

likewise," the Liturgy is *no less missionary* than when it extends the more familiar invitation to "come and see."

To spread the good news, one must therefore spread the Church for these two reasons. First, the Church is the place—complete with a street address and a telephone number—where the kingdom can be found. And second, the Church is the place from which the kingdom can be launched into the unchurched world around it.

#### 4. How to say 'yes' to the kingdom, step 2: realize that the "liturgy after the Liturgy" is no less crucial

Despite our focus on missions in this chapter, the present project is not a contribution to the literature of Orthodox mission theology. In fact, in this section, the field of missiology begins to overlap quite strongly with our main focus in the Servant Parish Project. Our goal in the project is to help parishes move strongly in the direction of establishing deep commitments to serving the poor and suffering in their midst. The goal is to restore the ideal of "parish as servant" by helping parishes recover what Fr Alexander Schmemmann called their "missionary character." The reader now knows a little bit more about what the missionary character of an Orthodox parish involves. The mission of Orthodox Christianity is "church-centered" with a dual focus.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, there is the liturgical life of the parish, with its recurring climax in the Divine Liturgy, in which the kingdom is revealed to those who gather. On the other hand, there is the witness of sacrifice, love, and mercy in the world carried on by those empowered by the Eucharist to love as Christ loves, even to death on a Cross,<sup>28</sup> and "for the life of the world."<sup>29</sup>

The Church becomes the mystical Body of Christ—truly *is* the Church—when it worships, and when it serves. For this reason, Orthodox writers on missions in recent decades have spoken of the interplay between two coequal "liturgies" in the Orthodox Church. There is on the one hand the eucharistic celebration on Sundays and feast days in the Divine Liturgy of the Orthodox Church. This is "Liturgy" with a capital-L. There is, on the other, the ongoing celebration of Christ's life-giving sacrifice through compassionate ministry to those in need of mercy and relief. This is the "liturgy after the Liturgy."<sup>30</sup> The eucharistic Liturgy and the liturgy of compassionate ministry cannot be separated. Each is an essential part of the Church's mission, and each is an essential part of the Church's missionary activity in the world.

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<sup>27</sup> "In Orthodox thinking mission is thoroughly *church-centered*" (italics in the original). Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 212.

<sup>28</sup> Philippians 2:8.

<sup>29</sup> Divine Liturgy of John Chrysostom, Anaphora.

<sup>30</sup> As mentioned in chapter 1 above, the expression "the liturgy after the Liturgy" was coined in 1975 by Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos. It was popularized especially by Father Ion Bria.

The dynamics of the [eucharistic] 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.<sup>31</sup>

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’.”<sup>32</sup>

Yannoulatos himself writes about both the ultimate and immediate purposes of Christian mission. The ultimate mission is God’s mission, and God’s ultimate purpose “is the ‘recapitulation of all things’ (Eph 1:10) in Christ and our participation in the divine glory, the eternal, final glory of God.”<sup>33</sup> Yannoulatos does not say that human beings are “called simply to know Christ, to gather around Him, or to submit to His will; they are called to participate in his glory.”<sup>34</sup> And since at Pentecost we are sent by Christ, even as Christ is sent by the Father, it follows that God’s mission becomes Christ’s mission, and Christ’s mission becomes our mission. We are called to be glorified with Christ (*syndoxasthinai*) he writes.<sup>35</sup>

The immediate purposes of the church, those that serve the ultimate goal of mission, are these three concrete steps:<sup>36</sup>

1. Preach the gospel, particularly the gospel of cosmic transfiguration through sharing life with the glorified Christ, “realized through the sacraments.”
2. Establish the “local Church” which respects the identity of each “particular people of God” and allows them to glorify God in their own voice
3. Allow the “doxology of the redeemed” to “echo beyond the limits of their own community and fill the universe.”

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<sup>31</sup> Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 1996), 20.

<sup>32</sup> Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Mission in Christ’s Way*, 95.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 46, pointing to Romans 8:17, 1 Peter 5:10, Romans 9:23, 1 Corinthians 2:7, among others.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 51–54.

With steps 1 and 2, the incarnation of a new eucharistic community is inaugurated. But with step 3, it is completed. And step 3 is the initiation of service in love for the suffering brother and sister.

Our inner union with Christ compels us to be actively present in the history and development of society as our Lord, who is working in history and is also the Lord of history. We must have a positive attitude, not characterized by a superficial enthusiasm to impose the Kingdom of God by social and political means, or by anxiety and pessimism at the prevalence of sin and faithlessness.<sup>37</sup>

Instead, we must be at work in the world realizing the kingdom is with us proleptically, as both “already” and “not yet,” and that the Incarnation of Christ has ignited the evil one to release an avalanche of destruction as a despairing response to his categorical defeat. “Redemption has already been achieved “in Christ”; the powers of darkness are decisively surrounded and the enemy, without doubt, has been totally defeated, but in desperation he still casts his last arrows.”<sup>38</sup> And so we have an ongoing, immediate purpose to pursue: “there are still the wounded, the dead, and the gloom of battle. We are still in the transitional period of ‘not yet’.”<sup>39</sup> Thus step 3: our life of worship must spill out into the world as a river of mercy, surging with the joy of the kingdom, that then washes away even the last stink of misery released by Death, already in its own death throes, as a final yet futile protest to its conquest by Christ.

Fr Ion Bria further explores and develops the insights of Yannoulatos, popularizing as we have noted before Yannoulatos’s expression of “the liturgy after the Liturgy.” He offers a powerful critique of any Orthodox piety that turns inward with a singular focus on individual holiness.<sup>40</sup> In particular he indicts any interpretation of the Liturgy that limits the Liturgy to serving personal sanctity alone. This approach to the Liturgy is guilty of becoming “disconnected from authentic Orthodox ecclesiology.”<sup>41</sup>

It is urgent, therefore, that we rediscover the initial *lex orandi* of the Church in its cosmic, redemptive and eschatological dimensions. Behind this static and individualistic understanding of the liturgy we must recover its dynamic nature and power. It edifies and fulfils the Church as the sacrament of the Kingdom; it transforms us, the members of the Church, into the *witnesses* of Christ and his co-workers.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>40</sup> Bria, “The Liturgy after the Liturgy,” in Vassiliadis, *Orthodox Perspectives on Mission*, 49.

<sup>41</sup> Bria, Ibid., 49.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 49.

Bria also attacks those who warn incorrectly against “horizontalizing the Christian message” and against allowing it to become a servant to social and political causes. The focus of his criticism is the emptiness and impotence of the kind of Christian witness that then results.

The Orthodox have often proposed a way of life that cannot be translated into action in society. They place the social order and secular issues into the hands of the state and the political parties.... They have ignored the social and political consequences of *theosis* (deification) and disregarded the historical concretization of Eucharistic spirituality. In so doing, they interrupt the flow of the liturgical act, breaking off *diakonia* at the end of worship, at the door of the church.<sup>43</sup>

But *diakonia* must extend to the suffering outside the Church, if the Church is to remain truly the Church. *Diakonia* is part of the *koinonia* to which the Church is devoted in Acts 2:42. This fellowship is not contained by the walls of the church, but extends to the whole world.

At the *koinonia* around the holy table in the liturgy, there is a vision of God inviting all humanity to participate in his precious celestial gifts. Here is another essential connection: the sharing of one bread and one cup together within the Church must have its counterpart in the life of the community. As we share the same Eucharistic bread, we must also share our food and existence with our neighbors. St John Chrysostom spoke about the liturgy that takes place outside the temple, where the altar raised by the poor people must be reinstated by the Christians. It is the “sacrament of the brother,” the brothers of Christ, and the poor.<sup>44</sup>

*Koinonia* is the “opposite of exclusion,” he writes. It requires “concern about poverty, marginalization and suffering.”<sup>45</sup> And the Eucharist empowers the Christian to be witnesses in the world this way. “To strengthen the diaconal role of the worshipping community scattered for daily life ... the Eucharist has to become ‘pilgrim bread,’ food for missionaries, nourishment for Christians involved in social and moral struggles.”<sup>46</sup>

Father Emmanuel Clapsis also emphasizes the holy rhythm which defines the Eucharistic celebration. Since Pentecost, Christians are breathed in and breathed out by the Church. “The life of the early Christian community has been shaped by a two-fold orientation: towards the world in a movement of *diastole*, and towards God in that of *systole*.”<sup>47</sup> Clapsis urges us to neither confuse nor separate these two “orientations,” and he laments that too often

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 53–54.

<sup>47</sup> Emmanuel Clapsis, “The Eucharist as Missionary Event in a Suffering World,” in Vassiliadis, *Orthodox Perspectives on Mission*, 61.

mission and liturgy are treated in isolation from one another, breaking their essential connection. "Disunity between worship and mission is contrary to the experience of the apostolic church,"<sup>48</sup> and also contrary to Scripture "which confirms as an indisputable fact that there is an indissoluble link between worship and service to others, especially to the poor" (Amos 5:15–21; Isaiah 1:13–14, 16–17; Isaiah 58:3–7; Jeremiah 7:2–12, 21–23; Matthew 9:13; Hosea 6:6.).

In the Eucharist, the faithful become the living expression of Jesus Christ and therefore participate in his saving mission in the world. They are sent out on mission that includes the liberation of humanity by putting into motion the construction of that new world for which Christ gave his life in love. This means we can no longer celebrate the Eucharist with eyes closed to the needs of the poor and downtrodden. Commitment to Christ in the Eucharist carries with it a commitment through Christ to the poor of this world.<sup>49</sup>

Eucharist is the fuel of *koinonia*, and *koinonia* cannot be separated from *diakonia*, in love. "Consequently this implies that action for justice constitutes an integral element of the Church's mission in the world."<sup>50</sup> The Eucharist is a revelation of the profound human solidarity that marks the kingdom of heaven, and so it also reveals all human beings as my brother or my sister, even "the stranger in need and ... the enemy." Clapsis describes the eucharistic celebration as an "unmasking," but one that far too often fails to impact our "ecclesiastical consciousness" and Christian vision:

The light of the Eucharistic liturgy projected upon life unmasks as inhuman and false any life reduced to excessive and egoistic accumulation of material goods, oblivious to the needs of the neighbor, and any mentality of consumption without the joy of sharing. In the Eucharistic vision is also a judgment on any oppression of the neighbor, since justice, peace, love and service to the neighbor are the only basis for true relations among people and nations.<sup>51</sup>

Clapsis urges the reader to restore what has been lost, and to restore the rhythms of *diastole* and *systole* that define true Church life and which follow from God's own activity in this world. He makes a plea for "consciousness raising" to restore the missionary implications of our eucharistic theology. What the faithful become in the Liturgy, he writes, "is not unrelated to what they do outside the church building."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Clapsis, *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

Petros Vassiliadis deepens the critique of separating mission and liturgy.<sup>53</sup> He places the blame on losing what he calls our “proleptic spirituality” linked to the radical eschatology of the early Christian communities.<sup>54</sup> We no longer see mission and Liturgy as connected because we have lost the sense of Liturgy as a sign and presence of the kingdom, first inaugurated by Christ’s passion and anticipated as an eternal reality once Christ returns in glory. Vassiliadis does not place the blame on changes associated with Constantine’s imperial favor which allows the Church to pass from prey to power broker. Instead he locates the problem in a gradual shift that begins later in the Byzantine period away from a spirituality focused on the emerging kingdom and towards a spirituality that focuses on individual sanctification and healing. Proleptic spirituality, in time, has been replaced by “therapeutic spirituality.” The biblical and apostolic emphasis on the proleptic spirituality of the Church as the “already and not yet” eschatological kingdom of God has been lost, and we have slid into a thin, individualistic, and cathartic understanding of worship and mission. “The Church's spirituality is now directed not in bringing about synergistically and proleptically the Kingdom of God, but toward the salvation of the souls of each individual Christian.”<sup>55</sup> Lost is the vision of our corporate entry in to the kingdom. Lost is our understanding of the Church as an icon of the eschaton.<sup>56</sup> Lost is the early Church’s “understanding of its mission ... to [be] an authentic expression in a particular time and place of the eschatological glory of the Kingdom of God, with all that this could imply

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<sup>53</sup> Petros Vassiliadis, “Eucharistic and Therapeutic Spirituality,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 42 (1997): 1-23.

<sup>54</sup> Vassiliadis develops this in greater detail in “Towards a Eucharistic Understanding of Mission. Russia Facing Evangelicals,” <[https://www.academia.edu/1918452/Towards\\_a\\_Eucharistic\\_Understanding\\_of\\_Mission\\_Russia\\_Facing\\_Evangelicals](https://www.academia.edu/1918452/Towards_a_Eucharistic_Understanding_of_Mission_Russia_Facing_Evangelicals)>, August 1, 2019: “It is almost an assured result of modern theological scholarship (biblical and liturgical) that the Eucharist was ‘lived’ in the early Christian community not as a Mystery cult, but as a foretaste of the coming Kingdom of God, a proleptic manifestation within the tragic realities of history of an authentic life of communion, unity, justice and equality, with no practical differentiation (soteriological and beyond) between Jews and gentiles, slaves and freemen, women and men (cf. Gal 3:28). This was, after all, the real meaning of the johannine term ‘eternal life,’ and St. Ignatius’ expression ‘medicine of immortality.’ According to some historians, the Church was able a few generations later, with the important contribution of the Greek Fathers of the golden age, to come up with the doctrine of trinity, and much later to further develop the important distinction between substance and energies, only because of the eschatological experience of *koinonia* in the Eucharist (both vertical with its head, and horizontal among the people of God, and by extension with the entire humanity through the Church’s mission) of the early Christian community, an experience which ever since continues to constitute the only expression of the Church’s self-consciousness, its *Mystery par excellence*.”

<sup>55</sup> Vassiliadis, “Towards a Eucharistic Understanding of Mission,” 8.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

for social life.<sup>57</sup> And unless we can restore the eschatological vision of our eucharistic celebration, the slide into greater secularism will only accelerate.

Secularism for Vassiliadis is not the denial of faith. Like Schmemmann, Vassiliadis understands that secularism is the movement toward deflating the kingdom as the source of truth and value. Secularism is the outlook that reduces religion to “mere help” for human beings who are now instructed to go and make a meaningful life by choosing without guidance from an infinity of options that, in the right combination, will bring health, wealth, and happiness. Therapeutic spirituality is a sign of secularism, and it threatens to transform the Church into an ahistorical and spiritualized version of itself, tricking even faithful Christians into thinking that faith in Christ is in the first place about personal purification rather than about participating in the new creation of the eschatological Kingdom. Proleptic spirituality correctly understands that in the Eucharist we experience the future and intended unity of all human beings, glorified with Christ in his eternal Kingdom. And without it, the trend is not just toward spiritual feebleness, the trend is toward extinction.

The future of humanity without doubt depends on such a perspective of unity and communion. The survival of the human race for which the Son and Word of God came to earth ‘that they may have life, and have it more abundantly’ (Jn 10:10) is based on unity: ‘I in them and Thou in me, that they may be perfectly one’ (Jn 17:23).<sup>58</sup>

Restoring the missionary force of the Eucharist is critical, and “it is essential to return to forms of proleptic spirituality.... This is the only way to overcome secularism, because secularism is not the denial of the world and history, but the denial of their sanctity.”<sup>59</sup> By keeping mission and Liturgy united, the Church consecrates the world and ennobles every human being. Allowing mission and Liturgy to remain separated, however, makes the Church complicit in the expanding desecration of God’s good creation by the forces of destruction.

Orthodox mission theology, as we have seen, is based on a desire to incarnate the local Church by establishing eucharistic communities that can offer an experience of Trinitarian life. Part of what makes mission incarnational is that Christian communities become for others what Christ became for all of us, a total sacrifice in love for the sake of the brother or sister. This happens liturgically of course—Christ’s sacrifice for us is both singular and eternal, presented to us continuously in the eucharistic Liturgy. But this also must happen through the “liturgy after the Liturgy,” since the *koinonia* of the pentecostal community is expressed through both the *systole* of breathing the baptized in for worship and the *diastole* of breathing them out for compassionate ministry, or *diakonia*. Christ’s love for the world must become our love for the world.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 22–23.

This theme of mission after the manner of Christ is developed by Athanasios Papathanasiou in *Future, The Background of History*. There, Papathanasiou argues that for mission to be incarnational, it must be kenotic. *Kenosis* is the biblical term that describes the loving action by which Christ empties himself (*eavton ekenosen*) for the salvation of the world.<sup>60</sup> Papathanasiou writes that this total love for the other, without regard for self, is the only way for mission to follow in the steps of Christ. The outward movement of Christ's mystical body must display the same kenosis that was the hallmark of his own life and ministry. Otherwise, mission is doomed. "Every attempt at an incarnation without kenosis results in new forms of colonialism."<sup>61</sup> Papathanasiou points out that kenosis in particular is expressed in terms of being a *stranger*, and of mission therefore being an experience of expatriation. "The ecclesiastical person becomes a stranger and, at the same time, a friend of strangers. That is, he becomes a friend of the different, the alien, the homeless, the marginalized."<sup>62</sup> He notes that kenosis and expatriation form the great theme of the request by Joseph of Arimathea on Holy Friday to Pilate for the body of Christ:

Give me this stranger, who has been alienated by the world since he was a baby; give me this stranger, who is hated by his fellow countrymen and put to death by them like a stranger; give me this stranger, whose death is so strange to me; give me this stranger, who knows how to welcome the strangers and the poor.<sup>63</sup>

Papathansiou then states boldly, "mission is an opening-up to strangers and the rejected."<sup>64</sup> And this turn toward the stranger and the rejected is not, ironically, so that we might give, but so that we might receive. When our love touches the stranger and the rejected, deliverance does not move in one direction only. Through love, we do not give Christ to the poor and suffering so much as we *receive* Christ in the poor and suffering.

Mission is an opening-up to strangers and the rejected. Why? A properly expected answer would be: "In order to invite them to Christ." However, the answer should proceed further. When we meet these people, we find Christ, since he explicitly identified himself with them (Matt 25:35-40). The missionary is wrong if he deludes himself that he "occupies" Christ and so can use him as an export product. More than that, he misses Christ altogether, insofar as he (the missionary) does not serve the strangers and does not stand in solidarity with the broken.... However strange it

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<sup>60</sup> Philippians 2:7.

<sup>61</sup> Athanasios Papathanasiou, *Future, The Background of History* (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2005), 112.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

may sound, when the missionary addresses himself to others in order to preach Christ to them, at the very same moment he meets, in the faces of those others, the one whom he preaches.<sup>65</sup>

Mission that embraces Christ's same kenotic love, especially for "the least of these my brethren," experiences the truth of the blessed paradox that "whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."<sup>66</sup> As Papathanasiou explains, "expatriation, is at the same time, repatriation."<sup>67</sup>

##### 5. *Echoes of 'yes' to the kingdom in a faraway place: The missional church movement*

As Orthodox Christians we benefit from the life and work of those like Father Alexander Schmemmann who consistently call the Church to recover its hunger and thirst for the kingdom of Christ. To the extent that we hear the warnings about secularism, and to the extent that we recover the experience of God in our life of worship and service, Orthodox Christianity will not be an impossibility in America. Orthodoxy will instead become the cradle of holiness in which all are nurtured by the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. But it is worth noting that other Christian traditions in North America later raised concerns similar to those expressed by Father Schmemmann in 1965. In their own ways, these Christian communities have articulated the clear need to return to something which in recent years, they feel, has been lost—a vision of the Church's mission in which the kingdom, both already and not yet, plays the central role. Orthodox Christians who desire to say 'yes' to the kingdom can learn from the work which has been undertaken in parallel outside the Orthodox Church in recent decades.

Most notably, Evangelical Christianity had its own "Schmemmann moment" in the late 1980s and 1990s. By many measures, Evangelical communities were among the healthiest in the nation. Most every major city in the United States could boast of being home to at least one megachurch, and most megachurches were growing at impressive rates from year to year. Typical at such a church was a large physical plant, housing two or more event spaces designed for a variety of worship services on a sliding scale between traditional and informal. Beyond worship halls, large congregations might also offer gyms, recreation centers, coffee bars, hotel accommodations, office and classroom space, and of course an audio-visual infrastructure of blockbuster proportions used to support the extreme and always growing multi-media needs of contemporary worship.

The problem to some was that this model of ministry was overtly catering to the Sunday-only crowd. It has been labeled by some as the "attractational" model of ministry.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>66</sup> Matthew 18:5.

<sup>67</sup> Papathanasiou, 115.

<sup>68</sup> This term is used, for example, by pastor and author Brandon Hatmaker, *Barefoot Church: Serving the Least in a Consumer Culture*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011). See also Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im,

Resources, personnel, and planning aim to bring ever-increasing numbers through the doors, and of encouraging the sort of stewardship that can sustain the acquisition of whatever is new and needed according to the changing preferences of the members. To some, this looked good on the surface, but was this really “Church”? Historically, the Church cannot be viewed as endorsing an attractional model. Instead, the Church pursued its mission of bringing “kingdom life” to those not yet in possession of it. In other words, the Church did not favor a model of ministry that was attractional, but which was “missional.” It did not seek to cater to the Sunday-only crowd. It sought to expand the opportunities of putting others into contact with the kingdom of Christ, which could be experienced proleptically (as both already and not yet) in the Church.

In the 1990s, Evangelical leaders began to articulate an understanding of Church life which became known as the “missional church” movement. By the 2000s, the missional church movement was a major player in Evangelical ecclesiology, although the label “missional” never achieved a single, focused meaning.<sup>69</sup> However, a defining feature of the missional model is an embrace of the call to be sent into the wider community. Not always, but in many cases, a missional church is one engaged in social action—the active pursuit of righteousness and justice in the wider community in support of those whom Christ called “the least of these my brethren.”<sup>70,71</sup>

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*Planting Missional Churches*, (Nashville: B&H Books, 2016), chapter 2; Craig van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile, *The Missional Church Perspective*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 4.

<sup>69</sup> For a recent, useful, and brief review of the development of missiology from the “missional church” point of view, see Ed Stetzer, “An Evangelical Kingdom Community Approach,” in Craig Ott, ed., *The Mission of the Church: Five Views in Conversation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016). Stetzer is a central figure in the movement, and his article nicely captures the wide scope of the term “missional.” The central emphasis in the movement is that mission is a defining feature of the church, and the movement “outward” cannot be neglected without endangering the identity of the Church as Church. As an Evangelical Christian, liturgy does not play a role in his mission theology or his understanding of “kingdom,” and he places a heavy emphasis on mission as bringing salvation to others through a knowledge of Christ, but he does acknowledge the growing awareness of evangelicals that Christ’s own “missional manifesto” (Luke 4:18-19) involves ministry to “the hurting” (111).

Stetzer writes, “If the church joins God in his kingdom work, then it must also join Jesus on his mission to serve the hurting. From the text of Isaiah, Christ lists groups of marginalized people: the poor, the captives, and the blind. Some believers today would use the word *justice* to talk about this work; others prefer *acts of mercy*. Either way, they are joining in Jesus’s mission. Evangelicals are rediscovering—and rightly so—the need for proclaiming freedom to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and good news to the poor. ... One thing that the church cannot miss is that the kingdom came into our world and is not just an otherworldly hope for the future” (111).

<sup>70</sup> The literature on the missional church movement is extensive, but also consistently frustrating. A major event in the movement was the publication of *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* in 1998, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), a collection of essays co-authored as a group by Darrell L. Guder (project coordinator and editor), Lois Barnett, Inagrace T. Dietterich, George R. Hunsberger, Alan J. Roxburgh, and Craig Van Gelder. In it, a vision of the “missional church” is developed with a great deal of theological and sociological care, but a clear commitment to ministry to

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the poor is only endorsed quickly and without any similar thoroughness in the brief section “Breaking Bread Together: Cultivating Communities on Gratitude and Generosity” (163-166). Published twelve years later, van Gelder and Zscheile’s *The Missional Church in Perspective* attempts to look back on Guder’s *Missional Church*, to help clarify matters of terminology, history, and later trends in “missional” missiology. It is, like its predecessor, a rather academic work (without case studies or strategies), and sadly provides little additional reflection on ministry to the poor in missional church life. Ironically, the one explicit passage on engaging the poor—and discovering that “God is there”—begins with an inspirational anecdote about Mother Teresa (150), who stands far outside the Evangelical tradition.

Craig van Gelder’s *The Ministry of the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007) follows a similar pattern. A theologically dense (one might say opaque) discussion of “spirit-led” ministry, discernment, decision making, leadership, organization, growth and development which also includes the conventional yet quick bow in the direction of social ministry (44-45).

For certain, the leading writers in the Evangelical missional church movement underscore the important connection between the Church’s basic identity and its call to serve the poor, as the above titles and authors in fact do. But as we noted, that connection is often briefly stated and rarely developed.

Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo are not associated with the academic wing of the missional church movement, but for certain they have influenced Evangelical pastors who have rejected the “attractional” models of ministry for those “missional” models that seek to achieve what Stetzer calls the balance between “Gospel proclamation” and “Gospel demonstration.” Their influential writings include: Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010); Campolo, *Red Letter Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008); Claiborne and Campolo, *Red Letter Revolution* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012).

Progressivism among Evangelical Christians is an overlooked movement, of which Claiborne and Campolo are arguably part. For an excellent recent study of earlier figures (such as Jim Wallis) and their legacy, see Brantley Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

In-the-trenches pastors who look to the missional church movement for guidance also find inspiration in the writings and research of George Barna. See his *Revolution* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2005) and *Churchless: Understanding Today’s Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2014).

<sup>71</sup> This is a good place to offer a brief review of a few works by Ed Stetzer, a leader in the missional church movement, and author of a large number of publications on creating missional parishes. Arguably, Stetzer’s understanding of “missional” is still based on the proselytizing ideal of communicating a saving knowledge of Christ and planting churches in order to reach the lost. Stetzer’s approach is one based very much on the incorporation model, even if it does disavow the strategy of creating “relevant” churches designed to attract new members through novel worship and fellowship offerings. If you search his works, you will find much talk of love and its demands, but rarely does Stetzer spotlight compassionate ministry to the suffering (for its own sake) as a mark of missional church life. In *Compelled by Love: The Most Excellent Way to Missional Living*, for example, Stetzer and Nation explore the central role that love plays in churches devoted to moving outward into the world, but in 220 pages he includes only a single mention of an actual ministry to the suffering. Ironically, he mentions ministries to unwed mothers and to alcoholics established by Jerry Falwell (84-85). Surely an evangelical Christian who is committed to serving the poor as Christ commanded can (a) find more than one brief example of such ministry worthy of including in a book on being compelled by love, and (b) can find

The stories emerging from missional church Evangelicals are moving. The stories involve pastors of large and successful churches, earning very secure and attractive salaries, but who nevertheless grew disillusioned with catering to the Sunday-only crowd for a variety of reasons. Some dared to start congregations based on radically different principles. For example, Austin New Church in Austin, TX was founded by members on the commitment to live on no more than 50% of what the congregation receives in offerings and donations.<sup>72</sup> The remainder is given to the poor. And instead of sinking energy and personnel into programs designed to attract new members, the focus is placed rather on connecting present church members with the needs of the wider community.

The spirit of the missional church movement very much resembles the spirit which animates the wider project of Father Schmemmann to say ‘no’ to secularism and religion but ‘yes’ to the kingdom. The attractional model of ministry acquiesces to secularism—it admits that faith is one but one attractor in the market place of autonomous sources of meaning and value—and it attempts to make faith choiceworthy by appealing to forms of persuasion designed to tempt the consumer. With its orientation to pleasing the Sunday-only crowd, traditional megachurches and those inspired by them are content with playing the role of “helper” for the human being attempting to cope with life. By contrast, missional churches are committed to uniting worship and mercy—they are committed to both proclaiming good news to others, and to becoming good news to them as well. By and large, evangelicals who identify with such a missional ecclesiology would agree with the two ‘nos’ and one ‘yes’ of Father Schmemmann.

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figures other than Jerry Falwell to offer his readers as an example of “tell-and-show” love in which “church [is] a combination of Billy Graham and Mother Teresa” (85).

The emphasis on serving the poor is only slightly more emphasized in Stetzer’s major work, *Planting Missional Churches* (second edition), coauthored with Daniel Im. This is an admirably detailed and comprehensive manual on starting new churches in a variety of ministry contexts. And it does say unambiguously that “throughout Scripture we find that God is constantly calling us to concern for the widows, the orphaned, the blind, the poor, and others who are on the margins, left out, or ignored. So I think it’s only appropriate, or better yet *essential*, that Christians live in the light of Jesus who came to save the hurting” (248-249). Stetzer also endorses the balance that Jesus struck: “Jesus went. He preached. He looked. He cared. He ministered. Repeat” (249). And yet it is discouraging to discover that this is *all* Stetzer says about ministry to the suffering in a comprehensive manual—400 pages long—for planting “missional churches.” Missing are the carefully conceived and field-tested ideas for striking this balance between “Gospel proclamation” and “Gospel demonstration” which Stetzer painstakingly sets out in connection with just about every other aspect of birthing new church communities.

To his credit, Stetzer provides more encouragement to the mercy-minded Evangelical community in his *Subversive: Living Agents of Gospel Transformation*. Still, if ‘subversive’ entails ‘seeking justice’ to the reader, then *Subversive* will be a disappointment. Yes, there are clear statements endorsing ministry to the suffering (57, 172-173), and yes there are even a few brief examples of missional churches and organizations that take social action seriously (68, 173-174, 216), including his own church (182-183), but there is by comparison virtually no extended reflection on or development of the biblical, theological, or practical supports that might guide a church into action.

<sup>72</sup> Hatmaker, *Barefoot Church*.

We mentioned in chapter 2 that Orthodox Christians are not so different from our evangelical brothers and sisters.<sup>73</sup> Too often we also rely uncritically on an attractional approach to mission, placing an emphasis on the “Come and see” strategy while neglecting the “Go and do likewise” form of evangelism that is also commanded by Christ. A fuller review of missional church literature by evangelical authors is beyond the scope of this project, but I would like to include in the record, so to speak, the following modest proposal.

In a gesture of brotherly affection and in a spirit of humility, Orthodox Christian leaders should reach out to leaders within the Protestant missional church movement, expressing a desire to hear their stories and to learn what might be useful for a similar Orthodox project of wedding mission to social action. Ecumenical dialogue can be a fruitful next step in the war against secularism and its degrading influence on the willingness of Orthodox Christians in North America to say ‘yes’ to the kingdom. Evangelical communities who have married ministry and social action have done so in order to make “kingdom life” available those around them.

And this kind of ecumenical meeting would truly be a dialogue. The Orthodox would come to the table with gems of their own to offer their evangelical co-laborers. There is of course the rich history within the Orthodox Church of examples of men and women who have answered the radical call to minister to “the least of these my brethren.” Ancient saints such as Basil the Great and John Chrysostom are obvious candidates for fruitful study together, but so also is the work of more recent saints such as Maria of Paris and Elizabeth the New Martyr who very much wedded eucharistic life with ministry to the suffering. But more than the holy men and women of the Church, Orthodox Christians can also offer the growing literature by contemporary Orthodox missiologists (such as Yannoulatos, Bria, Vassiliadis, *et al.*, reviewed above) who maintain that it is impossible to disassociate mission and social action. As we have labored to show so far, the biblical, patristic, liturgical, and historical records attest clearly to the inseparability of mission and mercy in parish life. It would be a joyful and profitable collaboration to explore this more deeply with our Evangelical allies.

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<sup>73</sup> Section 3A, “Justice is Liturgical.”