

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

Father Theophan Whitfield

**Chapter 6
Building a Servant Parish**

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1. *Towards a new model of ministry*

There is a joke that Orthodox Christians like to tell about Scripture. The setting is an imagined conversation between an Orthodox believer and an evangelical Christian who is somewhat skeptical of Orthodoxy.

Evangelical: Orthodox Christians believe and do a lot of funny things, but only one question is important. Do you believe that every word in the Bible is true?

Orthodox Christian: Believe in the Bible? My friend, we wrote the Bible!

The joke helps to remind Orthodox Christians of something important: that until recently, the most authoritative voice on matters of Scripture was the Orthodox voice. The Orthodox Church does not simply look back on the writers of the New Testament (and by anticipation, the writers of the Old Testament) as the inspiring precursors of Orthodox Christianity. Rather, those authors are understood by the Church to be actual Orthodox Christians themselves. It is only in recent centuries that Orthodox Christians have abdicated this position of authority, allowing

much younger Christian traditions to imagine that they have privileged insight into Scripture as the word of God.

A version of the joke can be told which captures the spirit of the present project. Here, the conversation is between an Orthodox believer and a progressive Christian devoted to justice and activism.

Progressive: Orthodox Christians believe and do a lot of funny things, but only one question is important. Do you support ministry to the poor and suffering?

Orthodox Christian: Support ministry to the poor and suffering? My friend, we invented ministry to the poor and suffering!

The point is that Orthodox Christianity does not now arrive as a new partner to an independent conversation about Christian commitments to the poor and suffering. The point is that Orthodox Christianity cannot understand itself apart from its commitment to “go and do likewise” to those whom Christ calls “the least of these my brethren.” Apart from that commitment, the Church ceases to be the Church. The Church is birthed by the Holy Spirit precisely to celebrate both the Liturgy and the liturgy after the Liturgy, as these two coequal liturgies have been described in this study.

The problem of course is that many Orthodox Christians have forgotten this essential connection to the poor and suffering. And so to many, both inside and outside the Orthodox Church, it does in fact appear that Orthodoxy has to ante up and figure out how much it is willing to risk, if anything at all. In preceding chapters, the aim was to show that the Orthodox Church has to put everything into the game, so to speak. Ministry to the poor and suffering is not just an optional activity for the already-inclined. Such ministry is an axiom from which the rest of the Church’s biblical, patristic, and theological inheritance follows as logical consequences.

In this conclusion, the goal is to translate the insights of previous chapters into strategies for strengthening parish ministries to the poor and suffering. To start, we will return to a proposal first suggested in the opening chapter: that Orthodox Christianity is in need of a “moral theology” that can explain not just *what* the Christian is called to do, but also *why* she is called to do these things. A moral theology such as this will bring clarity, motivation, and encouragement to parishes that desire to move strongly in the direction of increased involvement.

Second, we will develop five principles for creating and guiding ministries that “seek justice.” These principles are based on the biblical, patristic, missiological, and empirical records explored in earlier chapters. And they are intended to be criteria that, if met, will help each Orthodox parish to recover what Father Alexander Schmemmann calls its “missionary character” of serving the world. As we stated in chapter 1, recovery by parishes of this missionary character is arguably the last undeveloped part of Father Schmemmann’s larger program of saying ‘yes’ to the kingdom and halting the advance of a secularism that reduces faith to but one of many autonomous and competing values for creating a meaningful life. The aimed-for moral theology and these five guiding principles represent a new model of ministry,

one for creating servant parishes dedicated to both the eucharistic Liturgy and to the liturgy that follows in the world—the liturgy of seeking solidarity with those in need of mercy and relief.

2. *A moral theology to guide the servant parish*

Compassionate ministry to the suffering is an undeniable part of the Christian's calling. But why is this so? More to the point, is there anything particularly *Christian* about the "mercy mandate" encountered so often in holy scripture and holy tradition? Or, is the commandment to seek justice a general human concern to which our faith in Jesus Christ contributes nothing essential or unique? Some might argue that ministry to the poor and suffering follows straightforwardly from the commandments to love found so often throughout the Bible. To be sure, compassion is birthed through love, but is it possible to say more? Is it possible to move beyond acknowledging good conduct, and to tell a deeper story about why such conduct is praiseworthy in light of the Orthodox understanding of the person and purpose of Jesus Christ?

This desire for greater clarity is worth indulging. For many Christians, the praiseworthiness of justice is self-evident because justice is a loving response to suffering, and Christians are called to love. But what if Christianity could say more? What if Christians could also provide a compelling account of our call to radical compassion that makes the search for justice, not just urgent, but also *inviting*? What if Orthodoxy has the resources to provide a fuller picture of ministry to the poor and suffering that makes justice, not just non-negotiable, but also *compelling*? Father Schmemmann wrote tirelessly of joy as the sign of the kingdom. And such joy is the hallmark of our eucharistic Liturgy precisely because Orthodox worship reveals the kingdom. But what if we could also tell a parallel story about the liturgy after the Liturgy—that serving "the least of these my brethren," no less than the Eucharist, is an act through which the kingdom also breaks into our experience, flooding all the world with the same eschatological joy released in worship?

Such a story would be a powerful tool for certain. It would encourage Orthodox Christians to pursue justice for the weak and marginalized with a greater sense of ownership, and with a clearer sense of how active ministry to the poor and suffering is connected to the gospel story of salvation through Jesus Christ.

In the first chapter of this study, we described this deeper story about compassion as a movement from "morals" to "moral theology." It is a movement beyond just knowing what one ought to do, and achieving as well a better understanding of why these obligations carry special weight. To bring greater clarity to the expression 'moral theology,' we used an analogy in chapter 1 with Orthodox worship. 'Liturgics' names the study of the actions and rites themselves through which we offer our worship. The one who is proficient in liturgics is the one who knows how to prepare and celebrate a given divine service. Beyond liturgics there is liturgical theology. 'Liturgical theology' names the study of the meaning and significance of the actions and rites. Liturgics teaches us how to celebrate a baptism, for example, and perhaps how the steps of the rite have changed over time. Liturgical theology teaches us that baptism is

the Christian's rite of initiation into the body of Christ through union—a union with Christ in a death like his, so that the Christian might be raised to new life alongside her Lord and Savior.

2A. *Lessons from scripture for an Orthodox moral theology*

In chapter 2, we emphasized a Christological reading of Matthew 25:31–46, one that stresses the question “who is Jesus Christ?” over the rival questions of “who is being judged?” and “what are the criteria used by the judge?” Often, these rival questions attract all the attention. And to be sure, Matthew 25:31–46 is parable that has consequences for both eschatology and ethics, but these consequences are secondary to the more profound truths revealed about the personhood of Jesus Christ. The Christology of the parable must be appreciated in the first place. Only then can we go on to understand the eschatological and ethical lessons of the passage.

The Christology of the parable of the sheep and the goats has many facets, as explored in chapter 2, but the central surprise revealed by Christ is his identification with “the least of these my brethren” to whom “all the nations” either did or did not extend compassion and mercy. Matthew 25 is a road map for finding Christ. The divine king who brings history to an end is to be found among those who hunger, thirst, and suffer. But Matthew also forges a strong connection between the Last Judgment and the Great Commission in Matthew 28, reminding us also that this same king will be found among those who preach the gospel. We pointed out that Jesus is present in his disciples (28:20), and that Jesus is present in the least (25:40). And so to follow Christ, to be his disciple, is *both to minister to and to become the least*—to identify with them, in love, so completely that self-regard gives way to selfless concern and mercy. Matthew calls his community to emulate Christ, even as he more deeply describes the person of Christ. Who is Jesus? He is the Christ who will reside with all who preach the good news, even as they become—like him—the “least” in the course of this missionary activity.

Based on the Christological reading of Matthew 25, the following emerges as the central idea of an Orthodox moral theology:

Through ministry to the poor and suffering, especially when paired with the evangelization mandate of Matthew 28, the Christian both encounters Christ, and becomes by grace what Christ is by nature.

Matthew 25:31–46 is a kenotic hymn which forges an identity between Christ and those in need of mercy and help. For the Christian, this fact about Christ leads in the second place to a fact about the goal of discipleship. Christ reveals his divinity precisely through his kenosis in love for the present and eternal welfare of his beloved. As for Christ, so also for us: we become like Christ as we also more and more extend relief and compassion, in love, to those in need, even if this requires that we too become more and more like “the least” we choose to love.

Orthodox Christians talk a great deal about salvation as theosis—about salvation as divinization, as becoming divine by God's grace. But theosis is not the power to walk on water, to levitate during prayer, nor to see the uncreated light. It is not measured by what we have, but rather by what we are capable of giving away. If Christ is the measure of all things—and if

Christ “shows us what it means to be God in the way that he chooses to die as a human being”¹—then theosis, if it is anything, is the capacity for loving kenosis, which is cited by the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2 as the root cause of Christ’s ultimate exaltation by the Father. To be sure, salvation is not achieved *because* we minister in love to the poor and suffering. Rather, *through* such ministry we become more and more like “the least” we serve and, in turn, more and more like our Lord who reveals his oneness with them in Matthew 25. Theosis is not a reward after the fact for those who seek justice for those in need. Seeking justice is the activity through which God shares his life, even as we lose our lives for the sake of Christ and his gospel (Mark 8:35).

Why is it important to strengthen our ministries to the poor and suffering? Important passages in Philippians 2, Matthew 25, and Matthew 28 begin to point the way. Through such ministries the parish becomes the body of Christ, not just inside the four walls of the church building, but outside those walls as well. In worship, the pentecostal grace of the descending Holy Spirit changes earthly bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. In compassionate ministry to others, especially when this ministry intersects with our commission to preach and teach, that same Spirit descends on us and changes us in the very same way. Theosis is the transfiguration of the human being into someone who loves as Christ loves, fully and without regard for self, even to the extreme humility of death on the cross. Seeking justice is one engine of this transfiguration. Compassionate ministry to the poor and suffering helps to complete our solidarity with Christ, because it deepens our capacity to love and to identify with those Christ whom Christ already loves with whom he already identifies. It is an askesis by which we learn to set aside our selfish wills and to love as Christ loves.

In chapter one we asked, “what does an ‘Orthodox moral theology’ look like?” The quick answer offered there was that such a moral theology should look like Christ. An Orthodox explanation of justice, if it is to matter, must make clear that justice is an indispensable asceticism, chosen in love, through which the human being becomes more and more like the Savior we confess to be king and God. As Paul emphasizes, equality with God is not demonstrated by holding on to something. Rather, it is revealed by Christ when he “emptied himself” (*evaton ekenosen*).² To become by grace what Christ is by nature, we must become capable of this same kenosis. And such a capacity is the product, God willing, of faithful practice. Serving those who suffer is a pathway to salvation, understood as theosis, or divinization by grace. Compassion is the very mechanism through which we become by grace what God is by nature. Kenosis leads to union with “the least,” and union with the least leads to union with Christ. Again: this union with Christ is not a reward for the good works of mercy and love. Rather, union with Christ—sharing eternal life with him, in the joy of the kingdom—is the outcome to which the transfiguring work of compassionate ministry naturally leads.

To summarize a bit, an Orthodox moral theology—an Orthodox explanation of justice—begins with a focus on three key passages of scripture.

¹ Father John Behr.

² Philippians 2:7.

(1) *Philippians 2:1-13*. Here, the Apostle Paul explains that Christ is “the least” on the basis of his extreme humility. Jesus is exalted by God precisely because “though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself (*evton ekenosen*), taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”³ Christ shows his divinity through kenosis, through love that “empties itself” for the sake of another.

(2) *Matthew 25:31-46*. Here, Christ identifies with “the least of these my brethren” who suffer privation in the many ways catalogued in the parable of the sheep and the goats. Christ’s kenosis described in *Philippians 2* is actively chosen, but there are “the least” for whom kenosis is a passive affair. Emptiness has been imposed upon them. Nevertheless, because they share extreme humility with Christ, Christ is found among them. Moreover, he chooses to be found among them. To encounter “the least” is to encounter Christ.

(3) *Matthew 28:12-20*. Here, Christ promises to be with his disciples always, even as they are commissioned to preach and teach to the nations. Interestingly, Christ does not use the language of identification, as he does in *Matthew 25*. But the missionary who is motivated by love—for God and for others—will naturally *become* “the least” even as he or she encounters and ministers to “the least” among the nations. In this way, Christ also identifies, in time, with those who serve him. They are divinized by their active love.

Christ is “the least” by nature. Human beings become “the least” by grace, either because kenosis has been imposed passively (when we suffer involuntarily) or because we choose kenosis as missionary disciples through ministry to the poor (when we offer to enter the suffering of others). This is not to say that to be sick or to suffer is a blessing, especially when this is not chosen. Our point, rather, is that grace is bestowed on all those who endure extreme humility since this is Christ’s own chosen vocation, for the life of the world. The grace is solidarity with Christ—of sharing life with the one who was obedient in love “unto death, even death on a cross.”⁴

This is what Paul means when he concludes

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.⁵

We “work out” our salvation, not by earning it, but by entering a process that by its very operation changes us by grace into what Christ our Savior is by nature—persons capable of love that never breaks fellowship with others out of self-regard. This sort of love *just is* what it means to be divine—love that moves among the persons of the Holy Trinity and then outward

³ *Philippians 2:6–7*.

⁴ *Philippians 2:8*.

⁵ *Philippians 2:12–13*.

into the cosmos by means of creation. The experience of ministry to the sick and suffering, when done correctly, is the experience of being saved.

2B. Lessons from the poverty sermons for an Orthodox moral theology

In the preceding section, we introduced the following basic claim for an Orthodox moral theology.

Through ministry to the poor and suffering, especially when paired with the evangelization mandate of Matthew 28, the Christian both encounters Christ, and becomes by grace what Christ is by nature.

The poverty sermons of the Cappadocian fathers explored in chapter 3 also support this basic moral theology. For certain there was the striking emphasis by Nyssa on exactly the central point, quoted already: “Mercy and good deeds are works God loves; they divinize those who practice them and impress them into the likeness of goodness, that they may become the image of the Primordial Being, pure, who surpasses all intelligence.”⁶ Christians want to become like Christ, and this “christification” occurs through mercy and good deeds.

But more than this, there was in the sermons of 369 an emphasis on being guided in all things by the “mother commandment” to love one’s neighbor. As Basil explained, rather concretely, the mother commandment must apply to money as well. Money is a form of love, and so love implies privation for the sake of the beloved. The disciple will embrace the possibility of poverty even as he or she seeks to provide relief to poor, since to love another as oneself means to keep no more for oneself than one gives to those in need. In ministry to the least, one joins their ranks. But of course in doing so, one becomes what Christ already is.

And to remind us that sanctity is measured by our relationship with other human beings, and not in the first place by our relationship to wealth or poverty, the Cappadocian fathers relentlessly gave a voice to the poor through the rhetorical device of ekphrasis. They are not to be regarded as the anonymous poor who exist so that we might grow in holiness. They exist so that they might love and be loved. The Cappadocian fathers urge their listeners to understand the suffering of others. They personalize the plight of the hungry and the sick. They uncloak the invisible poor through rhetoric, and likewise urge the faithful to enter the suffering that rages around them so that love might take root and grow.

To support the emphasis on creating personal connections with the poor, the poverty sermons often rely on what we called the “Nicene inference.” This inference moves very simply from the premise that Christ’s body is entitled to supreme dignity to the conclusion that *all* bodies are entitled to supreme dignity. The inference is “Nicene” since it presupposes the Christology of the Council of Nicaea in 325 that Jesus Christ is fully divine. His divinity confers undeniable nobility on the “form of a servant” he takes at the Incarnation. But this divinity also confers nobility on all who are united to this Christ, either in a chosen way through baptism and

⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Love 1*, 197.

on-going discipleship, or in an involuntary way through suffering and extreme privation. As Susan Holman recognizes:

In most early Christian texts, the poor exist primarily as a passive tool for redemptive almsgiving, a signifier by which the Christian donor may gain honor and divine reward. Relieving destitution is not usually defined in terms which recognize the recipients as fellow bodies in a divinely created material world of equals in the sight of God, as Gregory of Nyssa would later suggest.⁷

Love that connects the disciple to the poor is love that reveals the presence of Christ in both. This is why compassionate ministry to the poor and suffering is a priority for all Christians. It is part of the way we “work out” our salvation, where salvation is solidarity with Christ in all things. This is what the biblical witness suggests, and this is what patristic reflection on that witness also urges.

2C. *Lessons from missiology for an Orthodox moral theology*

In our review of recent Orthodox missiology in chapter 4, we explored the virtuous entanglement of worship and compassionate ministry. The “second liturgy” of serving the suffering brother or sister is coequal with the eucharistic Liturgy. *Diakonia* is non-negotiable, and without it, our *doxologia* is incomplete. Worse, if we neglect the liturgy after the Liturgy, we feebly strive to keep Trinitarian life an inside-the-walls experience when, in fact, the movement of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a relentlessly outward one. The mission of the Church is to incarnate new eucharistic assemblies so that pentecostal grace might be extended to all places and all times. As Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos writes, the “doxology of the redeemed” must “echo beyond the limits of their own community and fill the universe.”⁸ Otherwise, we set ourselves against the ultimate mission of God—the union of all things in Christ and the participation of all things in this final glory. Bria moves this line of thought forward when he criticizes those who “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.”⁹ Clapsis describes the Eucharist as an “unmasking” that condemns 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.”¹⁰ And

⁷ Susan Holman, *The Hungry are Dying*, 56.

⁸ Yannoulatos, *Mission in Christ's Way*, 51–54.

⁹ Bria, 50.

¹⁰ Clapsis, 63.

Vassiliadis torches the tendency in the Orthodox Church to replace its original “proleptic spirituality” —focused on the continuous and concrete emergence of the kingdom into this world— with an anemic “therapeutic spirituality” that keeps the individual believer focused exclusively on the inner condition of one’s own soul.

But the missiologist whose work translates almost directly into the sort of moral theology we are developing is Athanasios Papathanasiou. For mission to incarnational, he writes, it must be kenotic. In other words, church life must look like Christ, must become Christ. Anything less is a betrayal of our calling. Anything less, in fact, increases enslavement. “Every attempt at an incarnation without kenosis results in new forms of colonialism.”¹¹ For Papathanasiou, “Mission is an opening-up to strangers and the rejected.”¹² But this orientation to the stranger and the rejected is not so that we might “export” Christ to them, as if Christ were a product that we have and that others need. Rather, Christ is already present in them, as he explicitly teaches in Matthew 25. The irony, from a missiological point of view, is that we minister to the poor and suffering so that through them Christ might minister to us, creating in us the same capacity for true kenosis. “However strange it 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.”¹³ This is the key insight of an Orthodox moral theology. Through ministry to the poor and suffering, the Christian both encounters Christ, and becomes by grace what Christ is by nature.

But the endpoint of this transformation is not a bleak depersonalization of the missionary. The missionary loses her life for the sake of the Gospel, but in doing so she finds her life, as Christ promises. Yes, the experience of the missionary is “expatriation” —of becoming a stranger by identifying with the stranger. But in this, the missionary both encounters Christ and becomes Christ. As Papathanasiou explains, “expatriation, is at the same time, repatriation.”¹⁴ Life is found, true life. Through kenosis—selfless entry into the stranger’s experience—we are united with all things in Christ, and participate in the final glory that God will reveal in the fulness of time through his Son.¹⁵

2D. How Orthodox Christians should think about justice

A major aim of this project is the goal of exploring the virtue of compassion from a particularly Christian point of view, and by ‘Christian’ here we mean any tradition that accepts the basic Christology of the early Church and, specifically, the biblical and patristic witnesses

¹¹ Papathanasiou, *Future, The Background of History*, 112.

¹² Papathanasiou, 115.

¹³ Papathanasiou, 115.

¹⁴ Papathanasiou, 115.

¹⁵ Ephesians 1:10.

that are crucial to the debates surrounding the seven Ecumenical Councils recognized by the Eastern Orthodox churches. I contend that compassion is not just a pre-Christian virtue that happens to align with the moral vision of Christianity, although that is often how compassion is understood even within the church. Rather, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ changes compassion from something with universal appeal into something that is indispensable to the Christian understanding of salvation.

As we have emphasized before, this is not to say that this project aims to support a simple view of “salvation by works.” One does not earn a ticket into the kingdom through active ministry to the poor in the way that, say, wages might help one buy a Disneyworld vacation. Instead, compassionate ministry to the sick and suffering is the very sort of activity that *changes* the Christian. It transfigures the Christian, to be more precise. To use biblical language: compassion moves us from bearing the image of God, in some latent or potential way, to showing forth an actual likeness to God. This is the sense in which compassion “saves”—it requires acquiring the same sort of selfless love that characterizes the ministry of Christ. It is Christ’s kenosis—his voluntary self-offering in love for others—that captures, not simply what Christians are capable of, but what it means *to be* Christian, and of what it means to “become partakers the divine nature.”¹⁶

To say “Be compassionate!” is to produce an ethics, a moral code to govern conduct. But to explain *why* compassion is obligatory is to move beyond morals and into moral philosophy. In our case, it is to move into moral theology since the resources we rely on are from the Christian tradition. And a clear moral theology is a useful thing to anyone who desires or needs to explain why one’s particular moral code is to be favored above others. But to be clear: this project is not a contribution to apologetics. The positions and strategies supported here are not designed to convince non-Christians of anything. Rather, the goal is to preach to the choir, so to speak, and to alert *Christians* to the urgency and importance of entering into the suffering of others in love and solidarity.

We are using this one-sentence summary of an Orthodox moral theology concerned with the commandment to “seek justice”:

Through ministry to the poor and suffering, the Christian both encounters Christ, and becomes by grace what Christ is by nature.

Ministry to the poor and suffering is not a vocation reserved for an elite fighting force within the faith. It is for all Christians, because this is the vocation that defines what it means to be a Christian. Justice is sacramental: in pursuing it, we pursue Christ who has already identified himself with those in need of mercy and relief. In the poor and suffering, one encounters Christ. Conversely, by standing apart from the stranger and the rejected one also stands apart from Christ, which is the very opposite of God’s ultimate purpose of uniting all things in the eternal glory of his Son.

This moral theology is offered as an account of justice for practical reasons. It is designed to explain the importance of ministry to the poor and suffering, and to elevate the

¹⁶ 2 Peter 1:4.

“liturgy after the Liturgy” to its rightful place as a defining activity of a Christian life. Correcting injustice is not just a goal that happens to be Christian—it is part of the life in Christ offered through the Church and by which the kingdom is both revealed and experienced. By *systole*, as Clapsis writes, we are breathed in by the Church to participate in the eucharistic victory of life over death, and by *diastole* we are breathed out into the world to make this victory a concrete one to those who cannot yet taste the joy of the kingdom because of the lingering darkness ejected in futility by a defeated and dying anti-Christ.

Ministry to the poor and suffering is choiceworthy because through it the Christian moves from being created in the image of God into greater actual likeness with the one who became human so that human beings might become divine. This is the force of our eucharistic worship, and it is the force of selfless love for those in need of compassion and solidarity. The Christian is not called to grow in holiness and then get serious about ministry to the poor and suffering. The Christian is invited to grow in holiness *through* compassionate ministries to the stranger and the rejected.

Also, the moral theology explored in this project is offered as an encouragement to parishes. Ministry to the poor and suffering is not just one option among a menu of options for parishes to pursue. Parishes must be servants, as Father Schmemmann urges, especially if Orthodox Christianity hopes to reclaim its missionary character. The tendency for Orthodox Christian in particular to “serve the parish” needs correcting. The parish does not have outstanding needs to be fulfilled, but it certainly exists to fulfill the needs of others. The “servant parish” gives, rather than takes. It distributes, rather than attracts. And ministry to the poor and suffering, based on the active compassion of the faithful, is the essential feature of any such servant parish.

3. *The five Cs of the servant parish*

We now turn to developing practical strategies for strengthening ministry to the poor and suffering and, thereby, bringing greater completeness to Father Alexander Schmemmann’s wider program of saying ‘yes’ to the kingdom. In chapter 1 this greater completeness was described as pursuing Father Alexander’s goal of restoring the missionary character of the Orthodox parish, understood as replacing the false ideal of “serving the parish” with the vision of “the parish as servant.” So far in chapter 6 we have sketched the basic outline of a moral theology that can guide and inspire the servant parish in its outreach to the poor and suffering. This moral theology holds up ministry to the poor and suffering as the very sort of Christ-like kenosis that leads in time to the fullness of union with Christ. Compassion is the engine that drives theosis, so to speak. Through compassion we are brought into greater contact with Christ, who identifies himself with the abject. In addition, we become more and more like the abject in proportion to the degree that our love is like the self-emptying love of Christ. We serve the poor because that is where Christ is. And as we serve the poor, we become poor ourselves (potentially), participating in the very identity at the heart of the parable of the Last Judgment—the free substitution allowed between the personal presence of Christ and the personal presence of the “least of these” his brethren.

This moral theology can be translated into practical strategies for achieving Fr Schmemmann's more complete 'yes' to the kingdom. The servant parish is a parish that honors five basic principles in its ministry to the poor and suffering.

- (1) The servant parish communicates.
- (2) The servant parish connects.
- (3) The servant parish comforts.
- (4) The servant parish corrects.
- (5) The servant parish chrismates.

These are the "Five Cs" of the servant parish. Alongside Trinitarian life offered sacramentally through the eucharistic Liturgy, the servant parish will also offer this same life through the liturgy after the Liturgy. To do so, it must strive to communicate, connect, comfort, correct, and chrismate. We will develop each of these principles in turn.

3A. *Communicate*

The servant parish communicates. The servant parish must be unafraid to speak about the injustices that afflict its neighbors and surrounding communities. The model of truth-telling, without equal, is the Old Testament prophet. From our survey of Scripture in chapter 2, we explored the various functions served by the prophetic call to honor the poor, the stranger, and the unprotected. Like the prophets, a servant parish will be engaged in bringing to light the injustices so prevalent around us. The prophetic vocation is not dead. God still moves aggressively towards the human being,¹⁷ especially in support of the weak and neglected. The servant parish is an heir of the legacy founded by those like Isaiah, Amos, Micah, Hosea and the psalmists. It receives a double portion of the spirit that moved the prophets to announce God's favor for the poor.

As we explored in chapter 3, the Cappadocian fathers also exemplify the power of preaching about the centrality of social ministries. Through the poverty sermons, and through the work of bishops more widely in the later fourth century, the church was able to change the social imagination of the empire. "What is possible" shifted in the fourth century to include bold and innovative efforts, through new institutions, to address the needs of the historically excluded. Those on the margins in pagan culture were no longer disqualified from receiving mercy and relief from the larger institutions that might help them. Similarly, the Orthodox parish that emphasizes outreach to the poor and suffering in its preaching and teaching ministries represents a continuation of this Cappadocian revolution.

Orthodox missiologists likewise encourage prophetic truth-telling. Archbishop Anastasios reminds us that the first "immediate purpose" of the church is to preach the Gospel, particularly the Gospel of cosmic transfiguration through sharing life with the glorified Christ,

¹⁷ An expression used by Heschel and Tarazi.

“realized through the sacraments.”¹⁸ This is part of the “doxology of the redeemed” that must “echo beyond the limits of their own community and fill the universe.” He goes on to encourage, not just engagement, but joyful engagement. Compelled by our “inner union with Christ” we must become active “in the history and development of society as our Lord, who is working in history and is also the Lord of history.” Furthermore, “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.”¹⁹ The Christian worships at two altars: the holy table on which Christ offers himself through the Eucharist, and the “secret altar of his own heart”²⁰ in service to those who suffer. What unites these two tables is the spoken word that “proclaims the acceptable year of the Lord.” The servant parish must preach, inside and outside the walls of the church, as Christ did.

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.²¹

We must alert the world that “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.”²²

Those who participated in the project survey also confirm the important role played by communication and awareness-building.²³ When asked “How important is it for Orthodox clergy to preach and teach on topics related to wealth and poverty?” 83% of respondents selected either “Important” (21%) or “Very Important” (61%). At an even higher rate (92%), participants either agreed or strongly agreed that Orthodox clergy should encourage the faithful to take an active role in the community on issues related to poverty, homelessness, and hunger. Higher still (95%) is the rate at which they agreed or strongly agreed that understanding and then meeting the needs of the poor and suffering are very important to the identity of Orthodox Christians. Respondents also indicate that preaching by parish clergy is an important source of their beliefs about outreach to the poor and suffering (81% say that sermons are at least moderately important),²⁴ and they report that the more they know about the needs around

¹⁸ Yannoulatos, *Mission in Christ's Way*, 51–54.

¹⁹ Yannoulatos, 55.

²⁰ Yannoulatos, 95.

²¹ Luke 4:18–19.

²² Yannoulatos, 55.

²³ Appendix 3, “Attitudes about Ministry to the Poor and Suffering.”

²⁴ Appendix 4, “Sources of Beliefs about Ministry to the Poor and Suffering.”

them, the more likely they are to increase their financial assistance and volunteer support. All types of communication, in fact will have this positive impact: whether the learning takes place through sermons, presentations, episcopal letters, podcasts, or print media.²⁵

Pastors and educators must prioritize awareness-building in their preaching and teaching ministries. Sermons must connect the sacramental and spiritual power of Orthodox worship to the material relief that must be provided to those in need. Adult study groups and catechesis material must also forge a link between worship and service, between *doxologia* and *diakonia*. As Bria writes, “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.”²⁶ The first step in turning toward social realities, in response to our experience in the eucharist, is the step of communicating, of talking out loud about the forms of injustice afflicting the stranger and the rejected.

3B. *Connect*

The servant parish connects. And it does so, because Christ himself connects. Love is never abstract. As Scripture demonstrates repeatedly, love presumes personhood and relationship. The servant parish will not just communicate facts about injustice, but will learn first-hand from those who suffer. Compassion means to ‘suffer with,’ and so compassion requires a posture of humility and a strategy of learning and listening. This is doubly important when the servant parish is largely populated by people who enjoy relative privilege and comfort. The aim is to create a servant parish, not a “savior parish” —not a parish which believes the delusion that the power of evil must be matched by the counterpunch of virtue. There is only one savior, Jesus Christ. And this one savior identifies with the weak by becoming weak.

The patristic record also places a high value on personal connection with the poor and suffering. As we saw in chapter 3, Basil dismantles the usual approach to thinking about Christ’s encounter with the rich young man. The call to radical renunciation found in that passage is not best interpreted as a Christian mandate concerning wealth, but as a concrete way of expressing the more basic mandate concerning love of God and love of neighbor. Money is a form of love, and so if you love your neighbor as yourself, then you will give as much as you keep. Radical renunciation is really a byproduct of love at work in our midst. The main question then is not whether I have the right attitude towards wealth, but whether I have the right attitude towards people. And love is not love unless there is a connection between human beings. You can give money to the anonymous poor. You can be moved by the statistics describing poverty and suffering. But this is not love. Love presupposes a relationship through

²⁵ See Appendix 5, “Changing Behaviors.”

²⁶ Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy*, 20.

which joy and pain are shared. For this reason the Cappadocian fathers place an emphasis on detailing the personal misery of those who need our help. Through ekphrasis, they give voice to the voiceless, and provide a face to the faceless. They humanize the ones from whom love is withheld, so that genuine human kindness and affection might once again be kindled. Today, the servant parish must also emphasize the high priority of being connected to “the least of these my brethren.” It is not enough to write a check. It is not enough to pass out some sandwiches. It is important to be a human presence among those who suffer—to learn their names, to hear their stories, and to be moved by their distress.²⁷

Orthodox missiologists press the point strongly. “The sharing of one bread and one cup together within the Church must have its counterpart in the life of the community,” writes Bria. “As we share the same Eucharistic bread, we must also share our food and existence with our neighbors.”²⁸ Personal connection with all human beings, especially those who suffer, is the hallmark of the apostolic *koinonia* described in Acts 2, and *koinonia* is the “opposite of exclusion,” as Bria notes. *Koinonia* requires “concern about poverty, marginalization and suffering.”²⁹ Clapsis also warns against ignoring those who suffer, saying that “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.”³⁰ And such a commitment to the poor requires entering into relationships with them. Papathanasiou uses the language of friendship and fellowship to describe the Christian’s call: “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.”³¹

And the data reinforces the power of personal connection. “Meeting people at my parish who struggle with poverty, addiction, and violence” is ranked as likely (47%) or very likely (37%) to lead Orthodox Christians to increase their financial giving and volunteer service in support of “the least of these my brethren.” Only “a direct invitation from a friend to join them as a volunteer” ranks more highly as a motivation.³² Participants also identify personal relationships with the poor and suffering as an important (silver-medal) influence on present beliefs and attitudes about wealth and poverty.³³

²⁷ Brian Daley notes that in *On Love 2* “Gregory’s plea, throughout this homily, is that his hearers should show their compassion for these sufferers not simply by providing them with food and financial support, but by taking them into their homes.” Daley, “Building a New City,” 454.

²⁸ Bria, 51.

²⁹ Bria, 52.

³⁰ Clapsis, 62.

³¹ Papathanasiou, 114.

³² See Appendix 5, “Changing Behaviors.”

³³ See chapter 5, section 4D.

To restore the missionary character of the parish, Orthodox Christians must prioritize relationship-building in the community, especially with those who fall into the category of “the least of these my brethren.” Members of the parish might choose to work closely with non-profit partners in the community, volunteering their time and talents to supporting those they assist. Parishes should encourage their members to make personal contact with the poor and suffering, both those they might encounter during daily routines (while walking or driving to work, say) and those they must seek out and go to (shelters, soup kitchens, hospitals). Parishes should encourage parishioners to acquire new skills such as active listening and community organizing for the purpose of creating and strengthening relationships with others beyond the four walls of the church. “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”³⁴ Christ invites, offering his personal presence to those who are burdened. The servant parish must also offer this same invitation, for the same purpose.

3C. *Comfort*

The servant parish comforts. Of the Five Cs, this one is perhaps the most obvious. Still, there is more to providing comfort than one might realize. In the first place, yes, the servant parish should strive to be a place that extends mercy and relief to those who suffer. It must provide the food, drink, and clothes mentioned by Christ in his address to the sheep and the goats. The servant parish must become another Bethany, a “house of affliction” set-apart for respite, where the sick and suffering can find a place of consolation. Following the examples of those like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus of Bethany, the members of a servant parish will convert resources into relief, while at the same time maintaining a place of hospitality for all. When Jesus journeyed to Judea, it was at just such a house of affliction that he chose to stay.

But people are wounded in so many ways, and Dame Cicely Saunders, a pioneer of the hospice and palliative care movement, reminds us that pain is more than physical pain. There is also pain that is social, psychological, and spiritual.³⁵ And the servant parish must address the “total pain” of those who suffer, not just their physical distress. The servant parish should heed the fulness of a petition heard at most every Orthodox service, the one in which we pray for

A Christian ending to our life: painless, blameless, and peaceful; and a good defense before the dread judgment seat of Christ.

In this petition we pray for a death that is painless for certain. But beyond relief from physical pain we also pray for a death that is blameless (free of the social pain of estrangement and isolation), peaceful (free of psychological or emotional pain, such as mental illness and anguish), and a good defense before Christ as judge (free of spiritual pain, that is of pain caused

³⁴ Matthew 11:28

³⁵ See David Clark, “‘Total pain’, disciplinary power and the body in the work of Cicely Saunders, 1958–1967.” *Social Science & Medicine* 49 (1999): 727-736.

by our separation from God through sin). And so a servant parish must provide “total comfort” in response to the various dimensions of total pain which afflict the stranger and the rejected. The servant parish should remember that Christ praises the sheep for more than the food, drink, and clothes they provide. He also praises the solidarity, human presence, and fellowship they offer to those isolated by sickness and incarceration. He praises the relief they provide to social, psychological, and spiritual pain as well.

An impressive example of providing comfort to the afflicted is the “new city” founded and sustained outside of Caesarea by Basil in response to the suffering ignited by the famine of 369. This was a hospice that offered relief from total pain on a massive scale. Additional lessons for the servant parish can be learned from the example of the Basileias (see the next of the Five Cs below), but for now it is enough to acknowledge the power of the response provided by Basil to the suffering in his midst. Basil is not unique, of course. His efforts and teachings should be seen as a *consensus patrum*, summarizing the presence of deep and active compassion in all the fathers and mothers of the church.

Similarly, the missiologists we have reviewed each offer a version of the basic plea to honor and fortify the essential connection between worship and active compassion, between the eucharistic Liturgy and the second liturgy that follows among the suffering in our communities. If our union with Christ at the Divine Liturgy is not translated into comfort for the poor and suffering, then we have deflated both holy Scripture and holy tradition, and have tethered the kingdom to a rather short leash, one that keeps the kingdom and its joy within a radius that will never exceed the four walls of the church. But that is not the natural movement of Trinitarian life. Such life is regulated by the rhythms of *systole* and *diastole*, as Clapsis notes. We are breathed in by the Church so that we might be breathed out into the world, to experience the emerging joy of the kingdom in every corner of the cosmos.

The project data we have analyzed confirms the obvious. In chapter 5, we observed that participants overwhelmingly believe that active ministry to the poor is an important part of our calling as Orthodox Christians, with 96% responding that such ministry is either important or very important.³⁶ At rates just as strong, they believe that Orthodox clergy should be preaching and teaching on topics related to wealth and poverty, and encouraging the faithful to take an active role in the community on issues related to poverty, homelessness, and hunger. The results should be music to the ears of our missiologists: 95% of respondents either agree or strongly agree that doing so is “very important to the identity of Orthodox Christians.” But the data also points to some needed work. We made a distinction between types of ministry that require direct personal contact with the poor and suffering (“first-personal” ministries such as visiting inmates in a prison setting) and those that do not (“third-personal” ministries such as donating to a fundraiser or parish food drive). The forms of ministry most frequently chosen by participants were third-personal ones, and among the survey options that correspond to the first-personal ministries mentioned by Christ in Matthew 25, most of those ministries ranked fairly low in terms of frequency. This is a concern since it is conceivable that *physical* pain or deprivation might be adequately addressed through third-personal ministries (donations of

³⁶ Chapter 5, section 4C.

money or supplies will ultimately be delivered to those in need, for example), However, total pain is our target, and it is difficult to see how social, emotional, and spiritual comfort can be provided outside of direct personal contact with those in need. And respondents appear to recognize the shortfall, reporting in large numbers that Orthodox parishes are not in fact successful at ministering to the poor and suffering.

Orthodox parishes are not successfully ministering to those Christ calls “the least of these my brethren” in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46).

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
2 (1%)	7 (5%)	42 (29%)	58 (40%)	35 (24%)

In fact, as we noted in chapter 5, only 12% would strongly agree that one’s local town or city is a better place because of the work done by one’s parish to help those in need. Only 33% were willing to agree, and the remaining 58% either strongly disagreed, disagreed, or had no opinion. The data suggests that participants believe in Fr Schmemmann’s vision of the servant parish, but that they do not yet see their own parish moving concretely in the direction of the vision. Again, the opportunities to serve are not hard to find, participants say. And for certain there are Orthodox jurisdictions and organizations that attempt to inspire ideas and promote connections.³⁷ The problem it seems is execution.

3D. Correct

The servant parish corrects. Mitigation is not the only goal of the servant parish. Suffering is an effect—a symptom of deeper causes. The servant parish will also emphasize correcting the causes of injustice, not just easing the pain of those who suffer. The servant parish’s call is Abraham’s call. Abraham was chosen by God so that he “may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice” (Gen 18:19). The “way of the LORD” is expressed through his good, holy, and just law. When righteousness is kept, when we learn and abide by the wisdom of God, then we starve injustice of the fuel it requires—selfishness and apathy.

Returning to the lessons of Basil’s Basileias, for example, we learn that Basil did not aim solely at bringing relief to the suffering. He also addressed the systemic causes that gave rise to

³⁷ See for example the OCA’S extensive Parish Ministry Resources collection at <https://oca.org/parish-ministry>. One can also find opportunities to serve and donate through the websites associated with International Orthodox Christian Charities, FOCUS North America, and Project Mexico St Innocent’s Orphanage.

the human misery around him. His new city was not just an attempt to comfort the suffering. It was also an attempt to correct the conditions that produce suffering.

Should the servant parish aim, as Basil did, to create a new city dedicated to providing mercy and relief to suffering? Yes, it should. In a remarkable analysis, Timothy Patitsas argues strongly for viewing the Basileias as a model for contemporary efforts.³⁸ He takes the known facts about the Basileias and suggests that Basil's new city is a model of development that contemporary economics can learn from. In fact, Basil's insights have been independently underscored by a small set of theorists, including the pioneers of microlending, as effective strategies for fighting poverty. Given its structure, for instance, the Basileias prevent "capital hoarding" by the rich and "labor hoarding" by the poor. There is also, he claims, "no wasting of capital on abstract objects."³⁹ Instead, Basil requires "rather a steady gambling of the present by all parties on a brighter future."⁴⁰ Also, the small scale of the early Basileias "meant that people were helping other people they could see and get to know. Some spirit of mutuality could more easily arise under those conditions."⁴¹

Contemporary parishes are in a position to recreate much of this intimacy, and also a shared vision of this same "steady gambling of the present by all parties on the future." Moreover, parishes can further enfranchise the poor, inviting the poor to be donors and not just recipients. This is a point Basil himself emphasizes: "Are you poor? You know someone who is even poorer. You have provisions for only 10 days, but someone else has only enough for one day. ... Do not shrink from giving the little that you have; do not prefer you own benefit to remedying the common distress."⁴² The basic insight leveraged by Basil, Patitsas notes, is that "love repays love given, and it repays it with interest. This is the lesson that Basil's project offers ... to the contemporary fight against poverty."⁴³ The servant parish is an heir of the

³⁸ Timothy Patitsas, "Saint Basil's Philanthropic Program and Modern Microlending Strategies for Economic Self-Actualization," 267–286.

³⁹ Patitsas, 282.

⁴⁰ Patitsas, 282.

⁴¹ Patitsas, 282.

⁴² Basil, *Homily 8*, 83. On this same theme in Basil, see Denise Kimber Buer, "'Be not one who stretches out hands to receive but shuts them when it comes to giving': Envisioning Christian Charity when Both Donors and Recipients are Poor," in Susan Holman, *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*. "Exhortations to give alms, at least in some contexts, do not preclude the agency of the poor. In a context of widespread poverty, almsgiving has the potential to function as a system for providing mutual support. I am not seeking to romanticize poverty or to imply that all poor Christians were almsgivers or charitable donors; rather, I am offering a fresh way to address the invisibility of the poor in scholarship and ancient texts. Moreover, I have been challenging the binary rhetoric of donor/recipient and rich/poor by interpreting them in light of a material social context in which most early Christians lived economically marginal lives," 47.

⁴³ Patitsas, 282.

Cappadocian legacy. The servant parish is one that leads, not with ideology, but with love. As we saw in chapter 3, this is what allows Christianity to become a “new departure” in the fourth century, according to Peter Brown. And this is what allows Christianity to be this new departure continuously. “Christian social activists, meanwhile, have an additional offering to make [to general efforts on behalf of the poor]—the vision of a community where life begets life, and love begets love.”⁴⁴

In our review of recent Orthodox missiology, we concentrated on the central theme of connecting the eucharistic Liturgy to the coequal liturgy after the Liturgy on the “secret altar of our hearts” through compassionate ministry to the suffering brother and sister. Largely the writers we surveyed were concerned with theology, not so much with practical details and programs for implementation. And this is not a concern. In fact, ministry to the poor and suffering should always be a natural and easy option to pursue. The Orthodox faithful ought never to need to consult a theologian on how to feed the hungry or how to visit the sick. But correcting the causes of injustice is considerably more complicated than providing comfort to those who suffer. And as it stands, there is not much of an Orthodox literature to guide a parish that desires to change the systems that give rise to poverty and injustice—no blueprints for building a modern version of the Basileias.

What the servant parish can do, however, is partner with non-Orthodox church communities that are already engaged in the effort to correct. At the end of chapter 4, I included a modest proposal to begin a dialogue with those in the Evangelical missional church movement who are already thinking carefully about how to address the poverty and injustice around them. In a gesture of brotherly affection and in a spirit of humility, Orthodox Christian leaders should reach out, 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. The servant parish should always be open to working with Christian allies who also desire to labor for the kingdom which is “already, but not yet.” The servant parish should maintain a posture of learning, and be unafraid to try out new approaches and new solutions to the systemic problems that give rise to poverty, suffering, and all the phases of total pain that contribute to human misery. And if along the way we discover a new form of intercommunion with our non-Orthodox siblings—union with one another through communion with Christ in the liturgy after the Liturgy—then glory to God.

In the data, a concern for correcting the causes of injustice is addressed in chapter 5, section 4B. There, we reported responses related to experiences of *advocacy*, both inside and outside church-related venues. Advocacy is concerned not only with securing relief for those who suffer, but also with bringing greater attention to the deeper reasons and causes that give rise to suffering. As we noted, participants reported advocacy work at a rate of 83%. But on all issues, participants were more likely to engage in advocacy in secular spheres than in church-related spheres, by an average of 11%. Moreover, when the focus turned to issues connected to ministries mentioned by Christ in Matthew 25, it is noteworthy that no single issue attracted a majority of positive responses. For example, hunger and poverty issues were supported at the

⁴⁴ Patitsas, 286.

highest rate, but the rate using ecclesial/church-related platforms barely reached one-third of participants. Servant parishes should of course value advocacy work by its members whether that work takes place through the church or in secular settings, but by partnering with other, non-Orthodox Christians already pursuing important forms of social change, Orthodox Christians will be better positioned to learn from others and to contribute profitably to the wider conversation about social change and our Christian commitments. 'Synergy' is an overused word, but for certain this combination of efforts among all Christians seeking justice could create a whole that surpasses in value the sum of its parts. At a minimum, Christian communities who desire to strengthen their ministries to the poor and suffering will not be required to reinvent the wheel. Cooperation with missional churches in the Protestant tradition will yield a rich treasury of useful experiences and resources, and will do so much more quickly than if Orthodox parishes decide to go it alone.

3E. *Chrismates*

The servant parish chrismates. Ministry to the poor and suffering is inseparable from the evangelistic mission of the church. As we noted in the exegesis of Matthew 25:31–46 in chapter 2, the parable of the Last Judgment cannot be understood apart from the Great Commission. Matthew 25 and Matthew 28 are linked textually so that each points to the other. They are the twin engines that power the Church through space and time. And this is so because Christ identifies himself, not just with “the least of these my brethren,” but also with his Apostles and those who take up the apostolic mandate to baptize the nations. “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”⁴⁵ The *Acts of the Apostles* is a book-long testimony of the way the Church both preaches good news and becomes good news to those who suffer. Like Christ, the Church must also “preach good news to the poor.” We must “proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind.” We must “proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”⁴⁶ Evangelistic mission and mercy mutually enflame one another in the servant parish.

A lesson we learned from the Cappadocian fathers in chapter 3 is that compassion is the mechanism that gives rise to theosis. Ministry to the poor and suffering is not just an admirable but otherwise voluntary hobby for those who have been baptized into Christ. Rather, such ministry is the way we live out our baptism on a day to day basis. At baptism, we are united to Christ in a death like his sacramentally. In worship (especially Holy Week), we are united to Christ in a death like his liturgically. At our biological death, we are united to Christ in a death like his quite literally. But in between, the dying that unites us to Christ is the daily death of self-will and self-regard through active love in support of those who are “the least of these my brethren.”

Compassion is what perfects the Christian. It endows the baptized one with greater sanctity precisely because compassion allows each Christian to be “another Christ” to others.

⁴⁵ Matthew 28:20.

⁴⁶ Luke 4:18–18.

Ministry to the poor and suffering is critical to our ongoing formation as disciples of the Lord. And so the servant parish must also be serious about its proclamation of the Gospel, the evangelization of the unchurched, and the incarnation of the Gospel in new eucharistic assemblies. Without the baptism and chrismation of new Christians, the raw material in the system is missing, so to speak. The Church's job is to birth Christ in each person. This holy process begins with conversion, but is fulfilled in our struggle to love God and neighbor even as Christ has loved the whole world, even to death on a cross. When we say that the servant parish must chrismate, we have this wider project in mind of birthing Christ in each person.

Moreover, as we noted in Rousseau's discussion of the Basileias in chapter 3,⁴⁷ "all such references suggest that the 'new city' was seen as a centre of religious formation almost as much as a refuge for those in distress."⁴⁸ Basil himself understood active ministry to the poor as a means of participating in "Christ's polity." Lessons learned in such a school of compassion, so to speak, are lessons that can be learned in no other classroom. The pursuit of justice, on behalf of the poor and suffering, provides essential formation for the disciple who desires to become more and more like the Savior she serves. The servant parish must be open to inviting new members, and skilled at providing formation for the faithful through its preaching, teaching, and humanitarian ministries.

In chapter 4 we were largely concerned with elevating the importance of the Church's "second liturgy," and in our review there of recent Orthodox missiology we learned that disregarding the liturgy after the Liturgy imperils the Church's purpose and identity. But it is important to guard against deemphasizing our participation in the "first Liturgy" – the eucharistic celebration. In strengthening its ministries to the poor and suffering, the servant parish must always remember that Trinitarian life is defined by the basic rhythm of departure and return, of *diastole* and *systole* as Clapsis notes. Yes, we celebrate the capital-L Liturgy so that we might be enflamed by Christ's love to carry on the sacrifice of love among those in the world with whom Christ also identifies, but we celebrate this second liturgy in the world so that we might return to the eucharistic table with hearts that long even more deeply for the eschatological joy which Christ offers in the bread and wine. The movement is always cyclical. The Church breathes us in (to encounter Christ), so that it might breathe us out (to encounter Christ), so that it might breathe us in again, and so on. For this reason, the servant parish must always be vigilant in preparing Christians, both old and new, for participation in the eucharistic Liturgy. It must be serious about baptizing and chrismating new members who can then "receive the king of all" at both liturgies of the Church.⁴⁹

We noted above that the early Church viewed ministry to the poor and suffering as an essential part of Christian formation. The third-century 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

⁴⁷ Chapter 3, section 3.

⁴⁸ Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 144.

⁴⁹ From the Cherubic Hymn of the Divine Liturgy.

in performing good works.”⁵⁰ From our project survey, however, we learned that catechesis was a fairly weak influence on participant’s attitudes about outreach to “the least.” Only 27% of adult converts reported that the catechesis they received was either important or very important in shaping their attitudes to social action, and 46% judged the influence of their catechesis as either not important or slightly important. Of the 33 possible influences offered as options in the survey, catechesis was next to last. Only “sense of guilt” was judged less influential. Also near the bottom of the list were Orthodox resources on the internet (rank of 27), books and articles by Orthodox authors (rank of 28), and adult education classes at one’s parish (rank of 30). To restore the missionary character of the parish—to create servant parishes that minister in love to the stranger and the rejected—Orthodox catechists and teachers must do more than emphasize acquiring the “mind of the fathers.” They must help the faithful acquire the heart of the fathers, the hands of the fathers, and the feet of the fathers. The servant parish must emphasize the commandment to seek justice at all levels of formation, starting with catechesis.

4. *The temptation of Judas*

In earlier chapters, we harvested a large number of lessons from the biblical, patristic, missiological, and empirical sources that can help to strengthen our ministries to the poor and suffering. At the outset we described this project as a contribution to the literature of encouragement. In this chapter, the many lessons learned along the way were brought together for this very reason, to help Orthodox parishes translate the richness of reflection on justice into practical strategies for creating what we have called “servant parishes.” Inspired by the work of Father Alexander Schmemmann, this project urges the Orthodox Church to complete the program first articulated by him in 1965 for defeating the creeping effects of secularism that threaten to make the Orthodox vision of life an impossibility.⁵¹ His own tireless work, and the work of many also inspired by him, have helped the Church in North America to achieve a large number of the renewals identified by Fr Schmemmann for saying ‘yes’ to the kingdom. In our opening analysis, we argued that one important form of renewal has been neglected. Although exciting progress has been made in the areas of liturgical experience, Christian education, priestly formation, and evangelistic outreach, significant work is still needed to help parishes recover what Fr Schmemmann called their missionary character. “And by this I mean primarily a shift from the selfish self-centeredness of the modern parish to the concept of the parish as *servant*.”⁵² The parish must learn once again to serve God, and both the clergy and the faithful must kill the prevalent attitude that “each parish must first take care of itself”:

⁵⁰ *On the Apostolic Tradition*, 105–106.

⁵¹ Alexander Schmemmann, “Problems of Orthodoxy in America: III. The Spiritual Problem.”

⁵² Schmemmann, *Ibid.*, 190.

If a man says "I won't help the poor because I must first take care of myself" we call it selfishness and term it a sin. If a parish says it and acts accordingly we consider it Christian—but as long as this "double standard" is accepted as a self-evident norm, as long as all this is praised and glorified as good and Christian at innumerable parish banquets and "affairs", the parish betrays rather than serves God.⁵³

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

This project is offered as a start. It is hoped that the insights presented from the biblical, patristic, and missiological records will serve as inspirations on their own. But this last chapter develops a new model for organizing parish life so that parishes might move more strongly in the direction of offering Trinitarian life through the two coequal liturgies of the Church, our eucharistic worship and our "second liturgy" of ministering to those in need. The core of a needed moral theology is developed here—the idea that kenotic love is not the fruit of theosis, but is rather the very mechanism by which theosis and union with Christ is achieved. This idea should be freely and frequently deployed in the teaching and preaching ministries of the Church, so that the faithful might better understand the *sacramental* significance of love that is active in the world. And the "Five Cs" of the servant parish recently presented are principles by which the parish can strengthen its commitment to and involvement with efforts that seek justice for the suffering neighbor. How a given parish might satisfy the Five Cs depends largely on the details of local life—for example, the parish's socioeconomic setting, its access to possible non-profit partners, the gifts and backgrounds of its clergy and laity, and the forms of suffering that are particularly urgent there. But the five principles are attested criteria for deeper union with Christ through compassionate ministries to the stranger and the rejected.

Are there pitfalls that might derail the aspiring servant parish? There are many, from inadequate clergy leadership to self-centered parish cultures. But it is crucial to remember that Father Schmemmann urges us, not only to say 'yes' to the kingdom, but at the same time to say 'no' to secularism and 'no' to religion as help. By "religion as help" by Schmemmann means religion as *mere* help, as one of many available tools which might assist the human being as she addresses her problems and searches for personal happiness and satisfaction. Such religion is faith that has been broken off from the kingdom and scraped free of eschatological joy. Schmemmann himself often expressed suspicion about any form of religious life that could easily be viewed as "activist," worried that there was little solid ground to occupy between the "spiritualists" who cannot see the world and the "activists" who can only see the world.⁵⁴ Schmemmann urges us to remember that Christ offers himself for the life of the world, not for the *better* life of the world.⁵⁵

⁵³ Schmemmann, "Spiritual Problem," 190–191.

⁵⁴ See for example Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1963), 12-14.

⁵⁵ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 12.

Father Schmemmann is right, albeit a little overcautious. The surest way for the servant parish to become an activist parish in the way that concerns him is to isolate the renewal of “parish as servant” from all the other forms of renewal that are directed toward saying ‘yes’ to the kingdom and restoring an experience of God in everyday parish life. This must not be done, of course. The focus of the servant parish must always be a dual focus: on *both* of the liturgies through which Christ is revealed to the world. If social action is emphasized apart from our experience of the risen Lord in the worshipping community, then servant parishes will collapse into something worse than mere activist parishes. They will become *ideological* parishes—parishes that find ultimate value, not in the kingdom inaugurated by the Incarnation of the Son of God, but in political or economic systems that cannot be separated from the passing historical situations that give birth to them.

The “temptation of Judas” needs to be on our radar, no less than the material needs of those around us.⁵⁶ Judas allowed ideology to corrupt his commitment to Christ, forcing Christ to conform to his particular political values, rather than the opposite. The search for justice can easily be corrupted by ideology, jeopardizing the goodness of the servant parish project. In fact, there are many non-Orthodox traditions that have associated themselves with progressive political movements but which have, in the process, lost their voice as *Church*. This makes the typical progressive parish no less paternal and imperialistic than the Christian missionaries who sought to turn native North Americans into inapt copies of their European “saviors.” As Papathanasiou wrote, “every attempt at an incarnation without kenosis results in new forms of colonialism.”⁵⁷

Father Michael Oleksa provides a powerful sketch of the call to vigilance issued to the Church by the Holy Spirit as it lives in the fallen world. Reality is always mixed. The good and the bad grow together like the wheat and the tares in Christ’s parable. And so

every movement for justice, freedom, integrity and truth inevitably and unavoidably needs to be exorcised of its demonic elements, those that are antithetical to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The human search for peace, justice, freedom and equality, while derived from and inspired by the Spirit, needs also to be understood realistically, the limits of each clearly delineated. These are the theological tasks that the church must accomplish in every age.⁵⁸

And the Church will succeed in this task when it remembers to truly be the Church. If the Church is not authentically *the Church* (grounded on an experience of the risen Christ) then those outside the Church will have no reason to listen, no reason to welcome the Church’s voice to the conversation about justice.

⁵⁶ The expression “the temptation of Judas” is from Panteleimon Kalaitzidis, “The Temptation of Judas: Church and National Identities,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 47 (2002): 357–379.

⁵⁷ Papathanasiou, *Future, The Background of History*, 112.

⁵⁸ Michael Oleksa, “The Holy Spirit’s Action in Society: An Orthodox Perspective,” *International Review of Mission* 79 (1990): 331-337, at 334.

If the church does not take seriously its divinely commissioned task to proclaim the good news and celebrate the Lord's death and resurrection until he comes, but sees increasingly its primary mission in affirming and participating in the struggle for social justice, economic equality and political freedom in the world, no one will take seriously its pronouncements on even the latter issues. Only those who are interested in the church as Word and Sacrament will care about what it has to say about politics, economics or social reform.⁵⁹

If the Church chooses to neglect holy tradition in favor of associations that are this-worldly and irresponsibly innovative, then there is no longer any reason to listen to the Church since it no longer speaks *as Church*, but speaks merely as a religious version of an otherwise secular and temporal movement. This same vigilance must guide the servant parish as it seeks to say 'yes' to the kingdom by offering the life of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to the world through the coequal liturgies of *doxologia* and *diakonia*.

⁵⁹ Oleksa, 336.