

Going Away Hungry: The Economics of Eucharistic Worthiness¹

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“The liturgy of the Eucharist...is the journey of the Church into the dimension of the Kingdom.”²

– Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

Introducing the topic of this essay is best done by recounting the otherworldly experience of my first Pascha. As a Protestant enquirer into the Orthodox Faith, I was experienced in the all-venerable potluck meal often attached to church services, but the Orthodox Paschal Feast was something else entirely. After standing for hours in a seemingly endless church service, one that began in somber tones and ended in exuberance, I could not help but see the morning meal that followed within the context of that liturgy. In the earliest years of Christianity, the Eucharist often preceded table fellowship. Likewise, our midnight Eucharist seemed to have extended itself into the basketfuls of meat and cheese and wine at the tables in the parish hall. As a teetotaling Protestant, the liberating moderate Christian ‘wine-induced merriment’ I witnessed that night reminded me of the words of Christ at the Last Supper, when he promised to drink of the “fruit of the vine” with his disciples when he had come into his Kingdom (Luke 22.18). Seeing the joy-filled body of Christ gathered together so early in the morning, one might have thought the Kingdom had already come.

If Father Schmemmann is right, then the Kingdom had certainly come. When we pray “Thy Kingdom come” before receiving Communion, we

¹ I am grateful to Joshua Davis for helpful feedback on early drafts of this essay.

² Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s, 1973), 26.

do not pray for the Kingdom to come sometime in the future. Nor do we pray for it to merely come spiritually into our hearts. The Kingdom is not spiritual; rather, it has bodies in it! So we pray “Thy Kingdom come” here, now, upon us, and in making “this bread the precious Body of thy Christ,” make us one with him. Though the Kingdom is not the church, for the church has sinners in it, the Kingdom makes us the church. In spite of our visible imperfections, nonetheless, the Kingdom reveals us to be the body of Christ. This study examines the economic implications of what it means for the Eucharist to make the Kingdom present us as the body of Christ. Because the present space affords no time for an exhaustive study of this topic, this study focuses specifically on the economics of the Kingdom within the context of Eucharistic preparation and Eucharistic worthiness.

When it comes to our preparation to receive, mostly we tend to think about individual, spiritual disciplines like fasting, confession, and prayer, while at the same time acknowledging that none of us is really worthy to receive the body and blood of Christ, but by the grace of God, if our hearts are right, the Eucharist is efficacious. Yet, when we look at where we get this concept of worthiness from in Scripture, it has almost nothing to do with individual, spiritual preparation. Preparation is less about what we do prior to Communion than what happens before, during, and after it. In Scripture, Eucharistic worthiness is corporate, bodily, and economic. Thus, it is from this biblical perspective that this study advances what is a rather strong claim: If our Communion does not contribute to economic equity in the body of Christ, it violates the reality that the Eucharist makes present in the church, and is, therefore, a scandal.

I know that the language of scandal is bold, perhaps even offensive, but in using this word I go no further than the Apostle Paul, who said the same thing about the Corinthians’ Eucharist. The Apostle Paul asserted that when Christians gather for Communion, it is “not...the Lord’s Supper” they eat, but “judgment.”³ So, this present thesis develops by

³ See 1 Corinthians 11.17-34, esp. 20 and 29.

exegeting this passage of Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, setting it in the context of his view of the church as the continuation of Jesus' ministry and evidence of the dawning of the Kingdom of God. The second section will present a standard claim that the Kingdom Jesus preached and embodied fundamentally involved a new economic order. The final section unpacks the liturgical and practical implications of Paul's condemnation for our context by exploring what it means for the Eucharist to make that new order present among us.

Eucharistic Worthiness in the Corinthian Church

Perhaps, no other passage of Scripture has contributed more to pious anxiety than what the Apostle Paul wrote about the Eucharist in his first letter to the Corinthians, "For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment upon himself (1 Cor. 11:29)." Paul threatens with serious consequences those who commune unworthily. They will be chastened with disease and possibly even death, which he indicates is a sign of divine grace, so that the unworthy communicant may turn and repent and not be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:30-32). Therefore, Paul writes, "let a man examine himself" prior to Communion, so as not to partake unworthily (1 Cor. 11:28). In the medieval period, Paul's admonitions to self-examination and threats of death and hell contributed to the infrequent Communion that in some places continues today.⁴ After all, given the risks involved in partaking of the body and blood of Christ, it seems reasonable even for the pious to want to be safe rather than sorry.

This anxiety probably owes much to the church fathers' interpretations of this passage. The extant interpretations universally focus on the need for the individual Christian to approach the cup of Christ in fear and trembling. Ambrosiaster said, "Paul teaches that one

⁴ According to *The Faith Communities Today and the Cooperative Congregations Study Project*, though priests report that the majority of their parishioners commune weekly, nearly a third commune only once per month (21%) or on major holidays (9%). It is worth noting that these figures are only priests' estimates and do not account for individual variation within congregations. Eleni Makris, "Learning About Ourselves: A Snapshot of the Orthodox Church in the Twenty-First Century," in *Thinking through Faith: New Perspectives from Orthodox Christian Scholars*, ed. Aristotle Papanikolaou and Elizabeth H. Prodromou, The Zacchaeus Venture Series (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's 2008), 352.

should come to Communion with a reverent mind and with fear, so that the mind will understand that it must revere the one whose body it is coming to consume.” Saint John Chrysostom, a devoted student of the writings of Paul, said that before the Eucharist one should be emptied of “profane lusts” like “those of the body, of money, of anger, of malice, and so on.” Therefore, “In your conscience, where no one is present except God...judge yourself, examine your sins...Correct your mistakes, and in this way, with a clean conscience, touch the sacred table and participate in the holy sacrifice.” Likewise, Saint Augustine says that to commune unworthily is to receive the body of Christ “in mockery (and) contempt.”⁵

Augustine’s forerunner, Cyprian of Carthage, interpreted reception of the Eucharist in light of the Decian persecution. Though not commenting specifically on this passage, like those church fathers quoted above, he links Eucharistic unworthiness to the personal sins one brings to the altar (in his context the sin of apostasy). Thus, in *On the Lapsed*, Cyprian recounts the fates of a number of unworthy communicants. One man received the body of Christ only to open his hands and find a cinder. When another woman who had secretly sacrificed tried to swallow the Eucharist, she immediately fell into convulsions. Perhaps, the most shocking story Cyprian tells, he claims to have witnessed himself. Unbeknownst to her parents, an infant had previously been given bread mixed with the leftover wine of a pagan libation. When the child was later given Communion, she cried and vomited it out because, Cyprian says, “In a profane body and mouth the Eucharist could not remain; the draught sanctified in the blood of the Lord burst forth from the polluted stomach.”⁶

Thus, the fathers and mothers of the church seem to be in rare, universal agreement that personal sins are what make one unworthy to commune. It is understandable, given their contexts, that they would stress this individualistic understanding of worthiness. Cyprian had

⁵ Gerald Bray, ed. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: 1-2 Corinthians*, ed. Thomas C. Oden, vol. New Testament VII (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1999), 112.

⁶ Cyprian, “On the Lapsed,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Albany, OR: AGES, 1997), 25-26.

to deal with the problem of apostasy and the threat that it created to his own authority, so he had reason to stress that private apostasy had public consequences.⁷ Facing more than a little marginal Christianity in an officially Christian empire, it is understandable why other fathers would have stressed self-examination and individual moral purity prior to receiving the body and blood of the Lord. Nor were they wrong to do so! I am not arguing that we should dispense with the prerequisites of fasting, confession, prayer and other spiritual disciplines prior to communing. Only, in saying that, we need to understand that this is not what Paul primarily meant by eating unworthily.

A rhetorical analysis of 1 Corinthians 11, that examines individual passages in light of the arc of the argument of epistle itself, suggests that Paul was less concerned with individual piety prior to Communion than he was with how members of the Christian community treated each other before, during, and after it. Because the modern Bible has chapters and verses (and now often “subject headings”), it is easy to isolate individual passages from one another.⁸ Nonetheless, 1 Corinthians 11.27-34 picks up on a theme that appears at least as early as chapter 6 and continues into chapter 12 (and probably through the rest of the epistle). In chapter 11, Paul defines eating unworthily as failing to discern the Lord’s body (1 Cor. 11:29). The question is which body?

Body language first appears in chapter 6, when Paul argues that the Corinthian who sleeps with a prostitute somehow unites the whole church to her. He asks, “Shall I...take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not (1 Cor. 11:15)!”⁹ A man (in this case) who sins with a prostitute sins “against his own body,” which implies at first glance that such a person harms himself. True as that may be, such a conclusion makes little sense in light of Paul’s previous point that sleeping with a prostitute actually harms the whole church,

⁷ J. Patout Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 25-50, 78-99, 132-50.

⁸ I am indebted to David Dault for his emerging work on how the material construction of Scripture shapes our interpretations of it. David Dault, “The Covert Magisterium: Theology, Textuality, and the Question of Scripture” (Doctoral Dissertation, Vanderbilt, 2009).

⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations are from the NKJV.

especially after he asks the following rhetorical question, “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own (1 Cor. 11:18-19)?” English translations with their singular “you” imply that our individual bodies are individual temples, but in the Greek the you (*ouk oidate*) is plural. The meaning of this verse, which is consistent with Paul’s point about individual sins having corporate consequences, is that the Corinthians collectively share a body. Thus, to correct this translation (with the slightly more advanced lexicon of the American South), Paul’s point is that, “y’alls body is the temple of the Holy Spirit...”¹⁰ The body the “John” harms is the church body. Thus, Paul has already introduced a theme that he makes explicit in 1 Corinthians 12.27, where he says, “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.” (Though it may only be a coincidence, it is interesting that the word for members is the same in both chapter 6 and 12.) In both cases, Paul dealt with practical issues, prostitution and factionalism (see 1.10-17 & 3.1-17), theologically, by stressing the point of ecclesial unity as one body. Indeed, this is how Paul deals with nearly every practical concern of the Corinthian church, from one Christian suing another, to an incestuous relationship between stepson and stepmother, propriety in worship, and even the resurrection of the dead.¹¹ Paul seems to locate the solution to all of these concerns in being united together by love in the one body of Christ.

If that is true, then it seems incredible to think that Paul is saying personal sin makes an individual unworthy to receive Communion. The body the Corinthians are to discern in 11.29 is certainly the body of the historical Jesus, made present in the bread and wine (thus verses 23-26), but for Paul the historical body is not separate from the ecclesial body. The body of Christ, which the Corinthians have failed to discern, is also themselves.¹² Otherwise, Paul’s condemnation of the Corinthian’s

¹⁰ A similar point is made in 1 Cor. 3.16 when Paul asks “Do you not know that you are the temple of God?” Again, the Greek *ouk oidate* is plural.

¹¹ 1 Cor. 6.1-11, 5.1-8, 14, 15.

¹² This point is debated among biblical commentators. Alan Johnson believes that the body the Corinthians are to discern is only the body of the saving Christ, not necessarily “mystically present” in the

behavior in verses 17-21 makes no sense. Unlike Chrysostom, Augustine, and Cyprian, Paul does not accuse the Corinthians of eating unworthily because of a lack of personal spiritual preparation. To see what he condemns we should examine this passage in its entirety.

Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.

Paul says nothing about fasting, confession, and prayer in this passage. The sins of the Corinthian church are much more serious than that, they are so serious that they actually nullify the Lord's Supper. Those who commit this sin do not "eat the Lord's Supper" (1 Cor. 11:21); they may eat a meal, but it is not a Eucharist. For Paul, the sin that nullifies Communion and makes it "not...the Lord's Supper" is economic. He says "there are divisions among you," and because of

elements, but the "saving significance" of Jesus himself. Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, ed. Grant R. Osborne, The I.V.P. New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 210. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, on the other hand, argues that the discernment is individual reflection upon one's worthiness to partake. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale, 2008), 446. I lack Fitzmyer's expertise, but this interpretation seems completely at odds with the point of the passage. Paul Sampley seems to me to offer the best reading when he says, "[I]n Paul's thought the body of Christ can never be separated from the members who by God's grace are incorporated into it. So 'discerning the body' is Paul's shorthand way of talking about an individual's assessment of two distinguishable but inseparable matters: how well one's life relates to Christ and how well one's love ties one to others who, though many, are one body in Christ." Johnson is partly correct, so is Fitzmyer, insofar as any act of worship involves some personal reflection. But if we are to take 12.27 seriously, the "historical" Christ cannot be separated from the "ecclesial" Christ in Paul's theology. J. Paul Sampley, "1 Corinthians," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 936.

these divisions, there is no Eucharist happening. What kinds of divisions are these that would nullify the church's Sacrament? Unlike previous chapters in 1 Corinthians, these divisions have nothing to do with who baptized, who is sleeping with, or who is suing whom. Rather, Paul goes on to point out that "one is hungry and another is drunk." Modern biblical scholars have surmised that at this point in church history, when the Eucharist was part of a larger meal that usually took place in the evenings, it was difficult for poor laborers to make it to church on time. When they finally arrived, they found that the wealthy Christians that did not have to work long hours had already eaten all the food. Consequently, the poor left the church still hungry after a long day's work whereas the rich left drunk.¹³

If Paul equated unworthy Communion with a lack of individual, spiritual discipline, either he says nothing about it, or whatever he did say the church did not deem important enough to include in the New Testament. For him, to say the church is the body of Christ is no metaphor. It was the ascended Christ extended into this world through his people, whom Paul expected to embody the new economic order of Christ's Kingdom, a Kingdom already dawning, of which the church was proof. Thus, the church was to be a different kind of community, one characterized by economic justice. To commune unworthily was to partake in a way that violated the new economy of the Kingdom of God.

The Economy of the Kingdom of God

In his epistle to the Galatians (Gal. 1.12), Paul says that he received the Gospel by a direct revelation from Jesus Christ, so it is safe to say that when Paul expected the Corinthians to treat the poor with dignity, he was probably on to something. The coming reign of God was a concept that predated the earthly ministry of Jesus. For a Jew of Paul's day, the Kingdom of God was a messianic concept that involved more than overthrowing Roman rule and reestablishing an independent nation of Israel. It also implied the establishment of a certain kind of society. In

¹³ See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 531-69. Also Sampley, 934. Fitzmyer, 434-35. Johnson, 205-06.

keeping with the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament, social and economic justice would especially characterize the New Israel. Thus the prophet Amos condemned the “religious feasts” and “assemblies” of the “house of Israel,” and instead said, “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never failing stream” (Amos 5.21-25).¹⁴ The death and resurrection of Jesus required his earliest followers to reevaluate their understanding of how the Kingdom of God would be established. As Wolfhart Pannenberg points out, they would have viewed the resurrection of Christ as the beginning of that Kingdom, which is why Paul called Jesus “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15.21).¹⁵ That Kingdom was yet to be imposed upon the world from above, but was being pre-established (in a sense) in the church below. We might say that the river of justice and righteousness had already begun to flow from the side of Christ, in this case back into his body: the church.

Thus the Kingdom of God was indissolubly bound up with social, economic justice in the here and now. Indeed, the Methodist theologian, M. Douglas Meeks, has persuasively shown that the entire history of the Old Testament can be read in theological socio-economic terms, and that the story of God (so to speak) can be read as one of economic solidarity with the poor. Both Meeks and the Anabaptist, John Howard Yoder, have highlighted many of the economic implications of the Gospel itself. I am highly indebted to them for the following observations, which help us to make sense of Paul’s condemnation of the Corinthians, because the Kingdom of God Jesus preached – and he embodied – was very much about eating, particularly who ate and who went hungry. Indeed, though it is often overlooked, Jesus’ ministry elevated economics as a fundamental indicator of the advent of the Kingdom.¹⁶

¹⁴ For what remains one of the best synopses of the prophetic emphasis on social justice in the Old Testament, see John G. Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*(Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 71-124.

¹⁵ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 350.

¹⁶ M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy*(Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), esp. 75ff. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed.(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 21-75. Also John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices*

The Gospel of Luke (which, it is interesting to note, tradition says was written by the physician-disciple of Paul) regularly accentuates the theme of poverty. According to the Magnificat, Mary the Theotokos understood what was happening to her quite obviously in economic terms. She “magnifies the Lord” because “He has put down the mighty from their thrones, // And exalted the lowly. // He has filled the hungry with good things, // And the rich he has sent away empty” (Luke 1.46, 52-53). The Incarnation of the Word was to bring not just an inversion of social values but also the very structures of society itself. The lower, laboring classes will be placed on top at the expense of those who have made their wealth out of them. This song surely includes Jesus himself, whose poverty Luke also takes pains to stress. When Mary made her way to the Temple for the dedication of her Son, and to make an offering for her “cleansing” in keeping with the Levitical code, she offered the sacrifice for poor people, “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,” (Luke 2.24) which Leviticus states is for those who are “unable to afford a lamb (Luke 12.8).”

Though one may overlook it, Jesus declared whom his ministry was principally for, and it was not only for us. After being tempted in the desert, Jesus entered the public sphere, beginning with his hometown, and announced himself, declaring (Luke 4.18-19),

“The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”

Some see this “acceptable year” as a reference to the Old Testament Jubilee, a year of debt-forgiveness that was probably never observed

of the Christian Community before the Watching World(Schottsdale, PA: Herald, 1992), 18.

in Israel, but nonetheless reveals the economic intentions of the God who commanded it.¹⁷ But even if it is not the case that Jesus declared a Jubilee, the passage has a great deal to say about the economy of the Kingdom. In the first place, the good news he preached was specifically for the poor. This is consistent with the song of his Mother. Therefore, it is in this context that we must interpret the subsequent lines of the proclamation. Most captives at the time were either political prisoners or in debtor's prison. It is only by a most incredible self-mollifying stretch of the imagination that we could possibly read this liberty and poverty in purely spiritual terms. The poor, the captive, and the oppressed are, for Jesus, one-in-the-same.

Not only was Jesus a poor man, who preached to the poor, but also he intentionally identified with them in his public ministry. As the adopted Son of a carpenter (according to Matthew 13.55 and Mark 6.3, who may have been more like a skilled laborer than a woodworker¹⁸) Jesus told parables that had situations and characters with which the poor could most easily identify. Jesus talks about sowing and harvesting and herding, of a woman who turns her house upside down to find just one lost coin, of a beggar whose wounds the dogs licked, of a widow who could not get justice, and of a man with more debt than he could ever hope to repay.¹⁹ All but one of the apostles of Jesus made his living by the sweat of his brow (and the exception, Matthew, disenfranchised himself to follow Jesus). We also often focus on how Jesus was an itinerant preacher, but what that really means is that Jesus was homeless, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head (Luke 9.58)."

And this, Jesus said, is what the kingdom looks like. The kingdom of God belongs to the poor (Luke 6.20). It is recognized where the sick are healed (Luke 10.9) and where demons are cast out (Luke 11.20).

¹⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans., Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 119-22. Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 21ff. Yoder, *Body Politics*, 17.

¹⁸ Richard A. Batey, *Jesus and the Forgotten City: New Light on Sepphoris and the Urban World of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 65-82.

¹⁹ See Luke 8.4-15, 15.1-9, 16.19-31, 18.1-8, Matt 18.21-3.

The Kingdom of God goes where Jesus goes. Thus, Christ admonished his disciples not to look for the Kingdom of God here and there but within them – “For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17.21). Though we often take this in a spiritual sense, as if the Kingdom were in our hearts, the genitive preposition should more properly be rendered “in the midst of” or “among.” The Kingdom of God is not “inside” each individual, but in the midst of us, wherever “two or three are gathered (Matt 18.20).” The kingdom of God is among us because Jesus is with us!

The Kingdom’s Economy in the Church’s Eucharist

The conviction that the Kingdom of God is present wherever believers gather under Christ is at the heart of an Orthodox theological understanding of Eucharistic liturgy. It is also why Paul saw the church as a sign of the dawning of that Kingdom, and why he expected an economic reordering of the Corinthian’s assembly, because economic justice is what the Kingdom of God was all about. Nonetheless, the question remains as to why he went so far as to say that showing even passive contempt for the poor nullified the Corinthians’ Eucharist? The answer to this question brings us back to the quote from Father Schmemmann that opened this essay, a statement worth repeating. “The liturgy of the Eucharist,” he said, “is the journey of the Church into the dimension of the Kingdom.” Paul had not worked out anything like a modern understanding of the presence of the Kingdom in the liturgy. But he did understand that the church itself was the site of the Kingdom’s proleptic unfolding – that the Kingdom had already begun, and the church was the proof! The Eucharist was a fundamentally economic feast because it was the Sacrament of the church’s constitution as that prolepsis, something that we eat and drink “until he (the Lord Jesus) comes.”

Father Schmemmann has employed the mixed metaphors of liturgical cycles constituting a linear journey to explain how the Kingdom of God made present in the sacrament that is the church becomes an integrating reference point for the life of the believer, in contradistinction to the disintegrating rush of modern life and its secular Gnosticism that wants to spiritualize the materials by which we, as material beings, construct

meaning for ourselves, turning them into mere symbols. There is an almost epectastic implication in Schmemmann's liturgiology, that reconciles the otherwise disparate metaphors of linearity and circularity, reminiscent of the never-completed, yet infinitely satisfying journey into the infinite God one finds in Gregory of Nyssa's theology.²⁰ For Father Schmemmann the Eucharistic "to and fro" that characterizes Orthodox liturgical life leads us evermore into the Kingdom of God because when we receive the Eucharist, kiss the chalice, and step away from the priest, we have already, in stepping away, taken our first step back to the Eucharist again; we have begun our journey back into communion with each other. The church does not lead us into an alternate reality that magically appears in the Eucharist, but calls a new world order to happen in the midst of us by presenting him who is the fulfillment of that Kingdom in the Eucharist as us, the body of Christ. "Thus" Schmemmann says, "the kingdom of God is the content of the Christian faith, the goal, the meaning and the content of the Christian life."²¹ The Kingdom becomes that goal, meaning, and content inasmuch as we are reordered, not by the hustle and bustle of our fast-paced, consumerist society (whose hurried pace often keeps us too distracted to consider the needs of its victims) but by the new economy of the Kingdom of God proleptically incarnate in our ecclesial body.

Thus, organizing life around the Eucharist is a journey into the presence of the Kingdom of God not only symbolically but also actually, because it is organizing life around each other; it is a journey into communion with each other. Though we Orthodox tend to adhere to a Cyrillian or Nyssen understanding of the Eucharist,²² whereby our individual bodies are transformed according to the new prototype

²⁰ See Gregory Nyssen, *The Life of Moses*, trans., Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1978), par. 219-55.

²¹ Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, trans., Paul Kachur (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's, 1987), 40.

²² Gregory Nyssen, "An Address on Religious Instruction," in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward R. Hardy and Cyril C. Richardson, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), par. 37. Cyril of Alexandria, "Interpretation or Comment on the Gospel According to John", Calvin College http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/cyrl_on_john_10_book10.htm (accessed 19 March 2010). See also Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, trans., John A. McGuckin, Popular Patristics (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's, 1995), 131-32.

of the resurrected Christ, the Eucharistic theology of the admittedly controversial Saint Augustine accurately describes our theology as well. “Be what you can see (on the altar),” Augustine said, “and receive what you are.”²³ Augustine identified the Eucharist with the one body of the people receiving.²⁴ For both Augustine and Paul the Eucharist was the sacrament of the unity of the church. In partaking of the Eucharistic body of Christ, the Spirit by whom “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts (Rom 5.5),” joins the ecclesial body of Christ to the heavenly body of Christ (its Head, seated at the right hand of the Father).²⁵ It is no different when we Orthodox offer these gifts “on behalf of all and for all.” We are giving what we have and who we are to God, not individually, but corporately, and we are receiving “these holy gifts” back transformed, including us. In receiving back these gifts – both the offerings and the ones making the offerings – which, by the power of the Holy Spirit called down in the epiclesis, have been transformed into Christ himself, we are united to God and to each other through them. This point of view is not necessarily at odds with a more Nyssan and Cyrilian understanding of the Eucharist. After all, being Orthodox we relish in holding together seeming contradictions, for in both cases there is the outrageous and even scandalous expectation that in consuming we become what we consume: the body of Christ.

The Kingdom is the content of the church because we encounter it in that body. If we systemically preserve the economic divisions that characterize this fallen world, we violate the communion that Communion is all about. This is not intended to suggest that looking through this “glass darkly” the church could fully realize the Kingdom of God. Though the church may journey into the dimension of the Kingdom, it is a journey of fits and starts. Nonetheless, this recognition has implications for how we conceive of our practice of the Eucharist

²³ Augustine, *Essential Sermons*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans., Edmund O.P. Hill, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: : New City Press, 2007), Sermon 272. See also 229N.

²⁴ Why he did not reach the same economic conclusion as Paul is something of a mystery, but can probably be attributed, again, to the times in which he was living.

²⁵ J. Patout Burns, “The Eucharist as the Foundation of Christian Unity in North African Theology,” *Augustinian Studies* 32, no. (2001).

and our “worthiness” (or “unworthiness”) to receive it. Paul did not condemn the Corinthians’ Eucharist as “not...the Lord’s Supper” because they showed outward contempt for the poor. That would too easily excuse most of us. He condemned them for acting as if the poor were not there, for ignoring them completely, and thus ensuring that they did not have what they needed. Unworthy Communion is feasting with Christ, yet allowing our sister or brother to starve at home. If our step away from the chalice is the beginning of our next step toward it, then our preparation must involve not only what we do before Communion, but also afterwards. Because good theology is lived theology, let me briefly speak in practical terms. Eucharistic worthiness requires opening our tables to those who have nothing good to eat. Both at home and at church the Eucharist is not a Eucharist if the poor are not specifically invited to share in the abundance of the Kingdom present among us. Eucharistic worthiness also requires we confess our apathy and pray for deliverance from it, that we ask God to make us see the poor among us and then to act upon that revelation. And when we fast, perhaps we should fast in the most ancient way recommended by the pastor of Hermas,²⁶ whereby we take what we will not eat and share it with those who fast every day. Thus, when it comes to Eucharistic worthiness, let us heed the prophet Isaiah (58.6-7).

Is this not the fast that I have chosen:
...to share your bread with the hungry,
And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out;
When you see the naked, that you cover him,
And not hide yourself from your own flesh?

Eucharistic preparation is not simply a negative discipline whereby we hedge back the world to focus on Christ. It is a positive discipline that bring us into encounters with Christ in the least of these by actively disenfranchising ourselves of our own excess in order to favor those whom Christ favors, and thus to show that we stand with those whom the good news of the Kingdom of God is all about.

²⁶ See “The Pastor of Hermas,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1998), Similitude V.3.