

The Social Dimensions of Eucharistic Ecclesiology

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INTRODUCTION

I have been asked to speak on the social dimensions of eucharistic ecclesiology. I must admit, however, that when I first looked at the topic sent to me by our program director, I had misread the title. What I thought I saw on the schedule was, “The Social Dimensions of Eucharistic *Eschatology*.” This made me think all the same: first, what is the relationship between ecclesiology and eschatology? Second, is there such a thing as a *eucharistic eschatology* with social dimensions? And third, if there is, then how is it connected to the social dimensions of a *eucharistic ecclesiology*?

Rather than embarking on a tedious and unnecessary historical analysis of the origins and development of Christian ecclesiology and eschatology as both separate but also interrelated fields of study, all of which has been done elsewhere, I prefer to share a series of reflections based on my own past research in the field of liturgiology. In this way, I remain, as the old saying goes, “in my lane” without tangential deviation. At the same time though, I proceed to offer thoughts toward affirming that a sound eschatological ecclesiology is indicative of a likewise healthy eucharistic ecclesiology — and vice versa — and that the social dimensions of the one are in no part any different from the other.

In other words, my fundamental intention for this paper is one: to show that the Church’s eucharistic celebration within chronological time and space, in imitating the eschatological worship to the Triune God beyond time and space, cannot simply follow a vertical trajectory without horizontally uniting the world’s citizens through prayer, charity, service, and justice. If we

believe God is as present in His world as He is in heaven, it is incumbent upon the Church, in her eucharistic self-understanding and expression, to not only reveal Him sacramentally within the liturgy, but to be equally present on earth, to reveal Him to a suffering and hungry world.

The Social Dimensions of Eucharistic Ecclesiology

I should like to begin with an impactful and memorable story from the life of the great ascetic, St. Makarios of Egypt (c. 300-391).

Abba Makarios said, ‘Walking in the desert one day, I found the skull of a dead man, lying on the ground. As I was moving it with my stick, the skull spoke to me. I said to it, “Who are you?” The skull replied, “I was high priest of the idols and of the pagans who dwelt in this place; but you are Makarios, the Spirit-bearer. Whenever you take pity on those who are in torments, and pray for them, they feel a little respite.” The old man said to him, “What is this alleviation, and what is this torment?” He said to him, “As far as the sky is removed from the earth, so great is the fire beneath us; we are ourselves standing in the midst of the fire, from the feet up to the head. It is not possible to see anyone face to face, but the face of one is fixed to the back of another. Yet when you pray for us, each of us can see the other’s face a little. Such is our respite.” The old man in tears said, “Alas the day when that man was born!” He said to the skull, “Are there punishments which are more painful than this?” The skull said to him, “There is a more grievous punishment down below us.” The old man said, “Who are the people down there?” The skull said to him: “We have received a little mercy since we did not know God, but those who know God and denied Him are down below us.” Then, picking up the skull, the old man buried it.¹

This particular text is often quoted to indicate the efficacy of Christian prayer for the dead. It also draws a stark contrast between those souls who never knew Christ and yet participated in presumably demonic forms of worship, and those who avowedly knew Christ through baptism yet over the course of their lives denied or rejected Him. While these certainly are important considerations, I would prefer rather to focus on another section, namely, the nature of the suffering in hell and its temporary alleviation. In the story, the souls of the damned are prohibited from gazing upon each other’s countenance. The pagan priest describes this prohibition as “the face of one being fixed to the back of another.” In another rendering of this teaching, the souls of those

¹ *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers, The Alphabetical Collection: Macarius the Great*, 38. From website: <https://classicalchristianity.com/2011/10/21/st-macarius-and-the-skull/>. Accessed January 26, 2023.

condemned are tied back to back to each other, making it thus inconceivable for them to make eye contact. Yet, through the prayer of the Church, which renders Christ and His grace present to those even in the bowels of Hades, the intensity of the torment is temporarily lessened because these souls are soothed through the outpouring of divine love upon them.

I have often been fond of saying that the God of infinite righteousness and exceedingly great love does not condemn unrepentant sinners but, quite simply and out of respect for human free will, eternalizes the choices we have made in this life to the end. In this sense, it is man who passes judgment unto himself. In the spirit of C.S. Lewis' profound statement in *The Great Divorce*, it is man that locks or unlocks the gates of hell from the inside.

So, what does all this have to do with the social dimensions of eucharistic ecclesiology? I believe it is clear that blessedness or damnation is a derivative of how much we understand and honor the divine image and likeness (Genesis 1:26) in ourselves and others. If we can see the image of God in our fellow man and woman and respect them for it, then we are fulfilling the relational attribute bestowed upon us by God. In other words, we consent to having a relationship of mutual love and regard for them, and this brings both temporal and eternal benefits for them and for ourselves. A sound mentality that leads to sound behavior contributes to a better world, although it does not guarantee it if not enough people practice this correct thinking.

It is incumbent then upon us, as Orthodox Christians, to become the Body of Christ in the world by gathering liturgically as the Body of Christ in the world and receiving the Body and Blood of Christ for the life of the world. From its inception in the New Testament, the Church has been charged by Christ to love, to celebrate the Eucharist, and to catechize the world for the purpose of unifying human beings to Him through holy baptism, and — lest we forget — teaching subsequent generations these very commandments, to perpetuate divine grace through the ages.

What is the Church's primary mission if it is not to reverse the curse of the damned who cannot see eye to eye, who have chosen in this life to rebel against their innate capacity to love and even be loved, who have chosen to become utterly non-relational for personal gain?

Each periodic celebration of the Eucharist within history renders present, for the local community, the deifying presence of Christ, but it also reveals to the worshipper the cosmic dimensions of salvation, the historical and meta-historical extent of the Church's concern. St. Maximos the Confessor in his *Mystagogy* speaks of God's mystical activity in transforming each communicant through their reception of the Eucharist. The "invisibly present grace of the Holy Spirit' acts 'during the holy synaxis' of the eucharistic rite, in an altogether special way, 'changing and transforming and truly *reshaping* [each of those present] into a more divine state, conformably to his own self, and leading him toward that which is symbolized by the Mysteries being performed.'"² This gradual reshaping or realignment of man's nature to the divine necessarily includes envisioning oneself as the living and breathing expression of the Church in the world. In other words, reception of the Eucharist intends to have us see the world and our fellow human being through the eyes of Christ, worthy of being loved, being served, receiving justice, and being saved. The concern then is not only for their acquisition of temporal benefits — important though they may be — but of the eternal benefits that await all believers. To quote Maximos again, the divine Eucharist is ontologically and existentially transforming man, "... even if he is not aware of it...even if he is unable to see the depths of what is taking place, or to perceive that the grace which is indicated by everyone of the divine symbols of salvation is working within him, leading him in an order and sequence from things imminent to the final goal of all things."³

² Maximos the Confessor, *Mystagogy* 24, as quoted in Nikolaos Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology: Maximus the Confessor's Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity*. Trans. Elizabeth Theokritoff (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010), p. 15.

³ *Ibid.*

Man's mystical transformation, through his participation in and reception of the Eucharist, purposes to not only ameliorate, to solidify man's vertical relationship with God, but it aims to improve the conditions of the world around him and the state of his fellow citizens who share this world with him. Man is transformed in order to transform; he is initiated into the Body of Christ in order to become the Body of Christ for the other; he is made a "little Christ" in order to be Christ for those who do not know Him, or for one reason or another, have shunned Him. The vertical relationship in worship can only find its fulfillment, its deepest meaning, when the horizontal bar uniting us with the imperfect world is equally present. In this schema of the Cross, the sacrifice of love and mercy is born out of an ardent desire to first see the perfectly divine in the imperfectly human and then to embrace it through acts of charity and kindness, as Christ taught us to do. It is impossible not to recall the Chrysostomian adage that constantly reminds us, and often painfully: "If you do not find Christ in the beggar at the church door, neither will you find him in the chalice"⁴

Therefore, I propose that understanding the social dimensions of eucharistic ecclesiology means comprehending what impact the periodic celebration of the Eucharist for the Church can have for structured societies and cultures, both locally and globally. The transformation of the human mind and heart over to the precepts and expectations of Christ has the potential to generate God's grace and imbue the cosmos with sanctification through the "earthen vessels" of that portion of humanity that honors the divine treasure within them. The challenge, more often than not, is that not enough of our believers are on board, as it were, choosing rather to understand the reception of communion in a utilitarian sense, that is, as a personal achievement, the fulfillment of an individual goal, their attainment of personal sanctification without a regard for the world around them. To paraphrase the wisdom of the late Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, the moment the believer

⁴ John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty* ...

denies to *be* Church or remains oblivious that the Christian is to *be* the Church for the world, his life enters a “vicious circle” of existential unfulfillment with no end in sight.

The Social Dimensions of Eucharistic Eschatology

If we believe that the periodic eucharistic synaxis on earth reflects the eternal liturgy of praise in heaven and tunes into it when the faithful gather together to pray, then it holds that the social dimensions and concerns of the Church Militant on earth should be the same as those of the Church Triumphant in heaven. Better yet, I believe we may venture to say that the Church’s concern for the world derives from an eschatological vision that is far more potent experientially than words themselves can describe.

To illustrate my point, I wish to bring in St. Symeon of Thessaloniki (+1429), the final great liturgical commentator of the Late Byzantine period, who offers a stunning apocalyptic vision of the Kingdom of God within the Divine Liturgy. The image that is conveyed is one where the Church Triumphant and Church Militant appear in full communion with each other and with the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, who is enthroned in His glory at the center of the redeemed cosmos and at the threshold separating historical, or chronological, time (*χρόνος*) and eternity (*καιρός*).⁵ This sublime image is manifested to the celebrant upon his completion of the preparatory rite of the prothesis. Gazing down upon the paten now populated with the Lamb and the particles excised from the prosphora loaves, the priest is invited to behold the vision that Symeon did:

But let us also see how through this divine model and the work of the holy proskomide we perceive Jesus and His Church all as one, in the middle Him the true light, from whom the Church has acquired life eternal, illumined and sustained by Him. While He is in the middle through the bread, His mother [is present] through the particle on the right, the saints and the angels on the left, and below everyone who has believed in Him, the pious gathering.

⁵ For a discussion of the difference between *kairos* and *chronos* and their interdependent nature, see my book: Stelyios S. Muksuris, *Economia and Eschatology: Liturgical Mystagogy in the Byzantine Prothesis Rite* (Boston, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2013), especially pp. 95-100.

And this is the great mystery: God among men and God in the midst of gods, who have been made gods by Him who is God by nature and who was truly incarnated for them. And this is the future kingdom and the commonwealth of eternal life: God with us, both seen and partaken of....”⁶

There is an undeniable eucharistic eschatology here. The image is an apocalyptic one, quite reminiscent, in fact, of Revelation 4 and 5. The redeemed cosmos is envisioned as present before the sacrificed and glorified Lamb of God, and all believers, living and deceased, are gathered together before Him and *stand together with each other*. This fellowship which Symeon calls the “pious gathering” (*τὸ εὐσεβὲς ἄθροισμα*) is united now no longer on the basis of ethnicity or gender or political preferences or titles that one inherits or is assigned by other human beings in this life. Unity now is achieved on the basis of God’s love for all. Unity is realized on the basis of the common humanity and equality before God which all people share. Unity comes because of man’s faith in God and in his fellow human being, not to mention in himself. Unity is finally seen as the universal gift from God that human societies and cultures have shunned in their ignorance to compete against and discredit and defame each other.

The society God reveals in heaven as imaged in Symeon’s vision at the completed prothesis is a remarkable one. It serves as an icon of that which the Church on earth will eschatologically become and is even now in the process of becoming, to paraphrase Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon. A theocentric community organized around the risen Lord, cosmic space and time are suspended to allow every generation of believers, on both sides of the kingdom, to have access not only to God but also to one another.

⁶ St. Symeon of Thessaloniki, *On the Sacred Liturgy* 94 (PG 155.285AB). The Greek text reads: “Ἰδωμεν δὲ πῶς καὶ διὰ τούτου τοῦ θεοῦ τύπου καὶ τοῦ ἔργου τῆς ἱερᾶς προσκομιδῆς τὸν Ἰησοῦν αὐτὸν καὶ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν αὐτοῦ μίαν πᾶσαν ὁρῶμεν μέσον αὐτὸν τὸ ἀληθινὸν φῶς, τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον κεκτημένην, καὶ φωτιζομένην ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ συνεχόμενην. Αὐτὸς μὲν γὰρ διὰ τοῦ ἄρτου μέσον ἐστίν· ἡ Μήτηρ δὲ διὰ τῆς μερίδος ἐκ δεξιῶν· ἄγιοι δὲ καὶ ἄγγελοι ἐξ’ ἀριστερῶν· ὑποκάτω δὲ ἅπαν τῶν αὐτῶ πιστευσάντων τὸ εὐσεβὲς ἄθροισμα. Καὶ τοῦτο ἐστὶ τὸ μέγα μυστήριον· Θεὸς ἐν ἀνθρώποις καὶ Θεὸς ἐν μέσῳ θεῶν, θεουμένων ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ φύσιν ὄντως Θεοῦ σαρκωθέντος ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν. Καὶ τοῦτο ἡ μέλλουσα βασιλεία καὶ τῆς αἰωνίου ζωῆς τὸ πολίτευμα· Θεὸς μεθ’ ἡμῶν ὁρῶμενός τε καὶ μεταλαμβάνόμενος. . . .”

This eucharistic eschatology becomes the template, the very model that defines the social dimensions of the Christian Church's eucharistic ecclesiology. Wherever and whenever the Eucharist receives expression on earth, wherever and whenever it is celebrated, the entire human race, the entire cosmos receives the sanctifying grace of God that pushes further into areas corrupted by sin and failure. As when He was once within human history, the resurrected Christ fills the world in every age with His invisible, divine, and real presence and calls on all people to follow Him and His ways. His ways are interpreted in the light of the Holy Scriptures and within the context of Holy Tradition and are identified within society as mercy, compassion, charity, justice, righteousness, and peace. The Church's Eucharist, as witnessed in the *proskomide*, seeks to place the message of Christ's kindness and concern for the world's redemption at the center of human hearts, at the forefront of philanthropic organizations, governments, schools, and other public organizations in society that are formational and regulatory in scope.

Naturally, such a Christocentric approach inevitably draws the sharp criticism by skeptics, sadly, as being akin to religious fanaticism and demagogy. After all, what gives one religious group authority to speak for the rest of society? Nevertheless, I fear all too much that Christianity's very institutionalization — at least perhaps to the excessive degree that it has become now — may not have been the most ideal way forward. It is clear from the sources that the way of Christ for the nascent Christian community was known exactly as this — “the way” (*ἡ ὁδός*), and not the proverbial “new religion on the monotheistic block.” The Christian Faith speaks to the very heart of the human condition by the One who knows better than anyone else the human condition. One of the seemingly countless descriptive epithets the Church bestows upon Christ is the well-known *καρδιογνώστης*, or “knower of the heart.” Who better than God to know the human heart and mind, to know our strengths and weaknesses, and the fathomless expanse of our capabilities and resolve?

Orthodox Christianity is, therefore, the way forward for humanity — the religion that places as much faith in the goodness of humanity as it does in the sublimity of an all-powerful and all-loving God. And so in placing such trust in both God and man, in God’s constant engagement with man in this life, it is incumbent upon Holy Orthodoxy to see the divine in the human, to simultaneously remind the world of this reality, and to extend the grace of the kingdom of God throughout the cosmos, within societies and cultural settings — in short, to attain Symeon’s vision in the proskomide of “God among men and God in the midst of gods ... God with us, both seen and partaken of.” I believe this is the very foundation but also the very goal of a sound eucharistic ecclesiology vis-à-vis the Church’s social concern and outreach: namely, to recognize the need for sanctification in every context, especially outside of formal Sunday or festal worship, and to provide it diligently whenever and wherever it is missing.

Inclusiveness of Non-Orthodox Names at the Holy Prothesis: A Litmus Test for Gauging the Church’s “Effective” Presence in the World and Her Vision of Heaven?

This past October, I was invited by my *alma mater*, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Boston, MA, to present a lecture for the centennial celebration of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. The title of my presentation was: “‘Remember, O LORD, Us and Them’: A Call to Engage America Liturgically, from the Prothesis and Beyond.”⁷ The essential thrust of my paper was to rethink the Orthodox Church’s practice of commemorating only Orthodox names at the holy prothesis, an area of liturgiology that has fascinated me ever since the completion of my doctoral dissertation on the economical and eschatological significance of the prothesis rite. This reconsideration, following the close examination of historical, canonical, theological, and liturgical sources, was made by way of suggesting perhaps a more creative, unique manner of

⁷ To be published in a special issue of *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* this year.

liturgical engagement with the non-Orthodox world, one which would benefit both Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike.

As I made abundantly clear in my conference paper, I am not suggesting or encouraging by any means any form of open communion policy within the Orthodox Church. However, it still seems to me that the social dimensions of a eucharistic eschatology demand that the Orthodox faithful, clergy and laity together, see the potentially divine and good in all people regardless of religious affiliation. Such a vision of our common humanity, which takes under consideration our frailties but also our strengths and aspirations, can motivate us to engage them, at the very least, in a form of liturgical prayer that surpasses the generalized categories already familiar in the Great Litany and the intercessions of the familiar Byzantine anaphorae. Such personalized prayer would include the possible commemoration of their names in the holy proskomide.

Therefore, as I argue again in my conference paper, I do not know that there should be a direct correlation between sharing the common cup and sharing a place on the paten, given the reality that those Orthodox who are not admitted to communion due to a penance or temporary impediment, are still remembered at the prothesis. St. Symeon of Thessaloniki makes it clear, however, that communion and inclusion in the prothesis is strictly forbidden for the unrepentant and those openly sinning because judgment passes to them, as it does to the priest who accepts the bread offering knowingly from such individuals. He writes in his two important works, *On the Sacred Liturgy* and *Explanation of the Divine Temple*, respectively:

And there is no place here for unbelievers, let alone for the heterodox. “For what communion does light have with darkness?” [2 Cor 6:14] since, scripture says, the angels will separate out the evil from the midst of the just. [1 Cor 5:13] Therefore it is also not at all right for a priest to make an offering for a heterodox or make a commemoration of him; neither <is he permitted to do so> for those openly sinning and unrepentant. For the offering is to their condemnation, just as it is also for the unrepentant who receive communion of the awe-inspiring mysteries, as the divine Paul says. [1 Cor 11:29; Rom 14:23]⁸

⁸ Symeon of Thessaloniki, *On the Sacred Liturgy* (L) 105; PG 155.285B.

But if someone is actively sinful, has not rejected his sins and is unfit for communion, the sacrifice for him will be for his condemnation.⁹

It is clear that St. Symeon of Thessaloniki utilizes strong condemnatory language and pronounces judgment upon not only those heterodox (i.e. non-Orthodox Christians) and open, unrepentant sinners whose names are accidentally or deliberately commemorated at the prothesis, but also upon the priests who knowingly excise such particles for them and deposit them near the Lamb. The practice, for Symeon, is an abomination that procures punishment for the perpetrator since the implication is that it promotes an impropriety in his conception of the hierarchical structure and presumably “ridicules” his notion of the eschatological Kingdom.¹⁰ At best, one could surmise, in a sense, that Symeon is trying to “protect” such persons, as it were, from a greater divine “indictment” from God.

Two points here need to be made: (1) Symeon is no doubt reflecting an exclusionary practice of the early Church, by which the unbaptized and lapsed were turned away from the eucharistic assembly, since the earthly synaxis is meant to be a visual icon of the eschatological gathering of the righteous and holy, in which no one and nothing unclean is admitted. (2) This corresponding realism is explicated by Symeon’s interesting but vague reference to prior patristic dialogue regarding the particles and their significance. He writes: “Accordingly, a discussion has

⁹ Symeon of Thessaloniki, *Explanation of the Divine Temple* (E) 109; PG 155.749A. Symeon also cautions the priest about the ramifications of knowingly receiving a prosphora from active sinners. “Therefore the priest must be attentive not to accept a prosphora from just anyone wishing to give one, and not to make an offering on behalf of those who are actively <and> carelessly sinners, so as not to be condemned with them.”

¹⁰ This condemnatory language follows immediately on the coattails of the aforementioned central passage from L 94, in which Symeon envisions the eschatological Church centered around its Founder. It would seem that only God is left in the midst of those gods who have assimilated themselves into the ways of the Kingdom and are in direct union with the exalted Lamb. No doubt Symeon has in mind the apocalyptic passage from Matthew 3:12, which polarizes the righteous from the unjust: “His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” Symeon utilizes Pauline language to get his point across, asking: “‘For what communion [κοινωνία] does light have with darkness?’ [2 Cor 6:14] since, scripture says, the angels will separate out [ἐξαρροῦσι] the evil from the midst of the just” [1 Cor 5.13]. See Symeon of Thessaloniki, *On the Sacred Liturgy* (L) 105; PG 155.284B.

come down to us from the fathers that the offered particles provide great advantage, *for they are there in place of the persons for whom they are offered* [ἀντὶ γὰρ τῶν προσώπων εἰσὶν ὑπὲρ ὧν προσάγονται], and are a sacrifice offered on their behalf to God, just as the priest says in offering them: ‘Receive, Lord, this sacrifice.’”¹¹ Therefore, it would seem that the particles that represent those remembered can procure either benefits or punishments, almost mechanically it would seem, without perhaps considering the true inner moral state of said soul. Who apart from God, who knows the complications of each individual’s heart and mind, can discern between a willfully unrepentant person and the incapacitated will brought about by sin, which has debilitated him from repentance? Would not prayer at the prothesis prove beneficial for them, especially when offered before the sacrificed and glorified Lamb?¹²

Symeon’s strict prohibition in the prothesis of the commemoration of heterodox and those outside of the good graces of the Church, those “openly sinning” and “unrepentant”, clearly indicates a correlation between the interpersonal and ecclesial unity implied in the rite, which logically then effects a unification to the Lamb in the eschatological Kingdom. However, can the completed prothesis, as understood by the Byzantine mystagogue, honestly define the boundaries of the Church, the eschatological Kingdom on earth? If the prothesis is the image of the redeemed cosmos (or the cosmos still in the process of redemption), on what grounds is the heterodox, profane world, which consists of *those who strive for devotion or who have sinned and are repenting* (E108), any different from those who are *openly sinning and unrepentant* (L105), who are actively <and> carelessly sinners (E109) from within the fold? On what grounds are the former

¹¹ Symeon of Thessaloniki, *Explanation of the Divine Temple* (E) 107; PG 155.748C.

¹² This also raises the issue of whether God’s judgment can even be perceived as condemnatory to begin with, given His very nature as all-loving and all-merciful. In respecting man’s freedom to choose between good and evil, God would seem to eternalize in His unlimited power the consequences of one’s actions and disposition in life — that is, eternal salvation or eternal suffering. By giving man this privilege of choice, C.S. Lewis’ critical point in his short story, *The Great Divorce*, is affirmed, namely, that “the gates of hell are locked from the *inside*.”

excluded when they have done more to touch the heart of Christ than the hem of His garment, when, in fact, the imperfect and incomplete abound on both sides of the fence, on both sides of the proverbial church door, with sometimes completely different dispositions from each other?

I believe that the overarching ecclesiological question, with regard to the Church's social concern and ministry, is what are the boundaries of divine grace that the Church, through her Founder, has been charged to dispense either sacramentally or in prayer, judiciously and freely? I am inclined to think they are much broader than Symeon claims. The current execution of the prothesis rite with regard to the commemorations, at least in theory, reflects this conservative exclusionary mindset, but I also believe it runs contradictory to Christ's eschatological mission and, by extension, to the Church's vocation to evangelize and embrace the entirety of humanity.

Symeon of Thessaloniki's very conservative and circumscribed ecclesiology in his commentary on the preparatory rites raises numerous problems that require serious thinking and viable solutions from the Church, as this "exclusive" policy of commemoration has become the norm for Orthodox liturgists. And this policy of "selective exclusion" seemingly muddles the waters of the Eastern Church with regard to where divine grace begins and ends and to whom is given the injunction to be God's priestly steward over creation by way of "dispensing grace" in worship.

First, we are confronted with a series of contradictions. In the Divine Liturgy, the Orthodox Christians pray "for the peace of the whole world, for the stability of the holy churches of God, and *for the union of all* (*καὶ τῆς τῶν πάντων ἐνώσεως*)", but in the prothesis, only those of orthodox faith and polity are commemorated. How is it that we are inclusive in one part of the liturgy and not in the other? In ancient eucharistic anaphoras and litanies up through the first three centuries, Christians prayed for the pagan Roman Emperor by name and all civil authorities who often

persecuted them.¹³ And with regard to the union of churches, the expression implies *all of them*, in adherence to Christ's high priestly prayer to the Father in John 17:22, "that they may be one as We are one." Otherwise, it would seem that salvation can be denied those who never knew Christ or who knew Him not well enough. This places the priest or bishop into the precarious position of judge or vicar, handling God's work for Him without fully understanding the loftiness of God's ways and thoughts¹⁴ and His evaluation of each individual's life.

Second, is Symeon's completed prothesis an image of the entire Church or of the cosmos? Is there redemption outside the Church or only when this "dark" or "grey" area is assumed within the graces of the one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church? Is it fair to ask if the Church, as the expression of love incarnate, even has boundaries at all that include some but exclude others? Is the basis of such actions only doctrinal faith and moral behavior? And who outside of God can make such accurate assessments? Does not then the proskomide become an elite grouping of folks content that they have nothing to do with those horrible sinners outside the walls of the Kingdom (cf. Luke 18:11)?

Finally, I think there is a significant difference in how one understands the completed prothesis: is it, according to Symeon, the redeemed and perfected Church chosen from among the profane universe, or is it a real image of the imperfect cosmos in the process of becoming perfect (cf. Matthew 5:48)? This question is more important than it seems, for I believe it touches heavily upon the identity of the Christ as Redeemer and, consequently, the role of the Church as the

¹³ In keeping with the Pauline injunction in 1 Timothy 2:1-3: "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior." While peaceful coexistence with the heathen is Paul's primary intent, the text does not necessarily preclude the possibility of the conversion of the heterodox, as was often the case in history when the Apostles were under arrest and yet their example of faith and endurance led their persecutors to a converted life in Christ.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Isaiah 55:9: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

“extension of Christ through the ages.” If the prothesis only encompasses the saved, then can we say that the Roman Catholic or Protestant or Buddhist or areligious altruist is condemned to the fires of Gehenna while those religiously Orthodox within the fold, whose unseen yet dubious morals and sinful behavior that define their inner life, will be “conveniently” forgiven? Can Christ's role as *φιλόανθρωπος* ("lover of man") and *ἐλεήμων* ("merciful") and *δίκαιος κριτής* ("righteous judge") ever be altered on the basis of whom He judges? Are not these characterizations of Him constants rather than variables?

And then, what is the problem of grouping together the Orthodox with the non-Orthodox anyway on the diskos, especially when in truth we neither know definitively their eschatological outcome or ours? If exclusion implies suspicion and rejection, would this not contribute to our own prideful self-justification and thus impede our own salvation? And how would such an “impropriety” offend or corrupt the incorruptible God or even obstruct the salvation of others? One cannot embrace the world in theory and simultaneously remain xenophobic, not acknowledging our common humanity and refusing to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who, although different from us, still share our imperfections and struggles but also our aspirations.

CONCLUSION — AS IN HEAVEN, SO ALSO ON EARTH

In my concluding comments, I wish to state that it is clear how the social dimensions of Holy Orthodoxy’s eucharistic eschatology can only but derive from the Church’s vision of herself and the world at the completed prothesis. In other words, the social dimensions of a eucharistic ecclesiology are fundamentally based on a eucharistic eschatology, one that mirrors for the Church and her worshippers St. Symeon of Thessaloniki’s sublime vision of the One who is eternally God by nature in the midst of those in the process of becoming gods by grace. To offer the inverse of

the appropriate verse we encounter in the Lord's prayer, may we apply that vision of the heavenly realm to the earthly reality: *as in heaven, so also on earth*.

Can the prothesis as very image of the eschatological Kingdom be populated only by the "perfectly" Orthodox? What is the "fate" of the others and should we care? And if our attitude borders on the dismissive and apathetic, how does that justify a "place of honor" next to Christ? Sacramental division and exclusion cannot occlude our acceptance of others "unlike" us, who nevertheless share our common humanity, nor should they obstruct our attempts, even in liturgy, to "incarnate" ourselves into their very reality and to love them as God does through prayer, even at the prothesis.

With regard to establishing this all-important link between eucharistic ecclesiology and eschatology, as envisioned especially in the Church's rite of prothesis and chiefly in light of the Church's continued witness and ministry to the world, I wish to offer three suggestions or proposals for reflection, with the hope of further reflection and dialogue. First, I believe a more in-depth and prayerful study of the Church's understanding of her ecclesiology and sacramental boundaries of grace should be undertaken. Avowedly, the twentieth century has witnessed a most welcomed proliferation of ecclesiological studies and leadership, in the persons of our beloved Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon, and the late Metropolitan Maximos of Pittsburgh. Implementation of a more robust and discerning ecclesiology, Scriptural and Traditional, in "creative continuity with the past", which directs and is directed by the Holy Spirit's inspired movements in liturgical practice, is very much needed.

Second, it may be time for us to consider more seriously the transformation of the prothesis rite, as we know an exclusively privatized rite for the clergy, into a public service. Such a radical change would include its execution both before and, in part, during the Divine Liturgy. Public

access to the prothesis commemorations would certainly provide multiple benefits, most especially in aiding the local faithful not only to visually and audibly identify themselves as part of the divine economy — that is, their salvation within chronological time and their eschatological realization of the Kingdom — but also to see their connectedness with their fellow human beings as part of a greater whole, who likewise need divine grace for healing and wholeness, and who may yearn to cross the threshold of the sheepfold into the Church.

Finally, the historic occasion of the consecration of St. Nicholas Shrine at New York City's Ground Zero on July 4th by our beloved Archbishop Elpidophoros of America and the esteemed hierarchs and clergy and people in attendance, may become an exemplary venue, perhaps a pilot trial, for such a public rite. This unique building, which simultaneously serves as both a parish church and shrine — a living symbol of hope, peace, and resurrection — is now open for veneration, prayer, and quiet reflection to the millions of Orthodox and non-Orthodox who will eventually enter therein, “with the fear of God, with faith, and with love.” What a tremendous witness and ministry it would be to invite non-Orthodox to submit the names of loved ones for prayer, to be commemorated within the eucharistic assembly, in their presence or absence, so that they too may experience the embrace and healing grace of the Lord of all, Jesus Christ, to witness themselves in the company of the redeemed community of faith and to sense with them a strong degree of solidarity, which can eventually be brought to its perfection within the baptismal lavens of regeneration.

I pray that the twenty-first century will provide manifold opportunities for the Church to engage meaningfully with the world. Within Holy Orthodoxy, creative continuity with the past, and not innovation — an important distinction — is always the standard in our synergistic efforts with the Holy Spirit. Will our vision of the Church match what we may presume is God's non-

homophobic vision for the Church, namely, “God among men and God in the midst of gods”, a Kingdom of inclusion and love for all those who struggle and seek these higher gifts? The Church’s eucharistic ecclesiology in embracing the world and meeting its needs requires us to attain this same eschatological vision. Γένοιτο — may it be so!