

III. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

THE INTERRELATION OF EUCHARIST AND MARRIAGE. THE MISSION OF THE PARISH IN FORMING COMMUNICANTS AND SPOUSES IN HOLINESS

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ABSTRACT. Orthodox parishes today must enable communicants and spouses to recognize how their communion with Jesus Christ calls them to a holy communion with one another. Eucharist and marriage both manifest a covenantal communion that changes the identity of the persons who participate in them from isolated individuals to participants in the Body of Christ. They also involve physical actions that transcend the merely physical in their significance, and thus resist the Gnostic tendencies of separating “body” and “person.” They both draw on the deep incarnational sensibilities of Orthodoxy. Sacrifice is central to both sacraments, as husband and wife wear the crowns of martyrdom as they offer themselves to one another and to the Lord, in whose offering they commune in the Eucharist.

Keywords: Orthodox, ethics, marriage, Eucharist, sex, sacrament

Eucharist and holy matrimony are foundational practices of the Orthodox Church, obviously celebrated with great frequency. Unfortunately, many communicants and spouses do not perceive their deep interrelation and profound spiritual significance. In a time when popular practices and attitudes concerning marriage and sexuality reflect contemporary cultural trends far more than Orthodox teaching, a crucial calling of the parish is to draw on the resources provided by these sacraments to enable husband and wife to make their common life a sign of the salvation of the world.

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The challenges in doing so are great. It is widely accepted today in western culture that marriage and sexuality concern nothing more than the consent of autonomous individuals to order their intimate and familial affairs as they see fit. The same may be said of religious affiliation, which serves the preferences of individuals for meeting their perceived needs in a spiritual setting that increasingly resembles a commercial marketplace. Trends in both areas underwrite an individualistic view of life for which God becomes irrelevant or an idol crafted in one's own image.¹

This paper makes three primary claims about the interrelation of Eucharist and marriage in response to these cultural dynamics.² *First, Orthodoxy understands Eucharist and marriage to enact covenantal communions that change the very identity of those who share in them.* Together with these new identities come obligations to fulfil the calling that participation brings. *Second, Eucharist and marriage involve physical actions that transcend the merely physical in their significance.* They thus contradict the Gnostic tendency to separate "body" and "person" so common in both past and present cultural sensibilities, especially with reference to sexuality. *Third, both sacraments share a common motif of sacrifice, as husband and wife wear the crowns of martyrdom in holy matrimony as they offer themselves and one another to the Lord with whom they commune in the Eucharist.* The interrelation of these holy mysteries concerns the fulfilment of the human person and, ultimately, of the creation itself in Christ.

The first theme of covenantal communion, which is shared by Eucharist and marriage, is present from the beginning of the biblical narrative with reference to the relationship between man and woman. The Genesis reference to marriage as a "one flesh" union concerns not merely the momentary joining of bodies, but the full personal union of two people, created as male and female in the image and likeness of God. Jesus Christ interpreted this passage in Matthew 19:6 with reference to the permanence appropriate to marriage: "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What God has joined together, let no one separate." References in the Old Testament to Yahweh as the husband of Israel, and of His faithfulness to her despite her infidelity, are surely more consistent with a view of marriage as

¹ Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 224, observes that "People do not gather in the churches to constitute the body of the Church, to manifest and realize the true life of the communion of persons; they come to satisfy their individual religious needs and pray as individuals, in parallel with the rest of the congregation, more alone perhaps than on the sports-ground or at the cinema."

² This paper draws on earlier treatments of these themes in Philip LeMasters, *Toward a Eucharistic Vision of Church, Family, Marriage, and Sex* (Minneapolis, MN: Light & Life Publishing Co., 2004), 52ff. For discussions of the relationship between Eucharist and marriage, see also John Meyendorff, *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 20-24; and John Breck, *The Sacred Gift of Life: Orthodox Christianity and Bioethics* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 93.

an abiding covenant than as a merely legal contract easily dissolved when a party does not meet its requirements. (Hos. 2:19ff.)

Since Christ compared the heavenly kingdom to a wedding feast with some frequency, and performed His first sign in John's gospel at a marriage banquet, commonalities between Eucharist and marriage should not be surprising. The covenantal nature of marriage is not arbitrary, but reflects the intimate union of man and woman as "one flesh." For example, in his response to the sexual libertines of Corinth, St. Paul argues that even casual sexual encounters with prostitutes accomplish this one flesh union. Sexual intimacy is so profound that he compares its gravity to joining oneself with Christ.

He asks rhetorically "Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For as it is written 'The two shall become one flesh.' But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him." (1 Cor. 6: 15-17) For St. Paul, profound matters of identity are at stake in all acts of sexual intimacy, for they concern our participation in covenantal relations with the Lord and with another human being.

Likewise, St. Paul stressed to the Corinthians that the Eucharist enacts a deep personal union both with Christ and one another in His Body, the Church. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ. Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." (10:16-18) Eucharistic communion with the Lord is so real that participating in it unworthily, "without discerning the body," brings judgment and even death. (11: 28-30) Even as we can profane the marital nature of intercourse by relations with prostitutes or other forms of promiscuity, we can profane the Eucharist by not being rightly in communion with the Lord and other members of the His Body, the Church. Such actions fall short of the covenantal nature of both sacraments. Those who perform them disorient themselves from the fulfilment of the salvific purposes God seeks to accomplish through these holy mysteries.

Since St. Paul presents both marriage and the Eucharist as such profound acts of union, it is not surprising that he uses the marital imagery of "one flesh" in Ephesians 5: 31-32 as a sign of the relationship between Christ and the Church. Likewise, in 2 Corinthians 11:2, he states that "I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband." Various church fathers make similar connections between marriage, Eucharist, and the Church. For example, after describing how the "one flesh" union of marriage includes husband, wife, and child, St. John Chrysostom notes that "Our relationship to Christ is the same; we become one flesh with Him through communion..."³ St. Nicholas Cabasilas also

³ St. John Chrysostom, "Homily 20," *On Marriage and Family Life*, Catherine P Roth and David Anderson, trans., (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997,) 51.

affirmed also that, through the Eucharist and the other holy mysteries, “Christ comes into us and dwells in us, He is united to us and grows into one with us” such that we “become one flesh with Him.”⁴ Such references indicate that the marital union of husband and wife is so profound that it is a fitting image for both the sacramental and ecclesial dimensions of the Christian life. As Vigen Guroian notes,

The Orthodox Church describes sexual intercourse as *synousia*, a term which means consubstantiality. Husband and wife are joined together as *one* in holy matrimony. They are an ecclesial entity, one flesh, one body incorporate of two persons who in freedom and sexual love and through their relationship to Christ image the triune life of the Godhead and express the mystery of salvation in Christ’s relationship to the Church.⁵

For man and woman to “express the mystery of salvation in Christ’s relationship to the Church” is to fulfil their primordial calling as those created in the image and likeness of God. Their communion with one another is to become a sign of their communion with the Lord in the Eucharist and the Church. They are no longer isolated individuals, but members of a “one flesh” union that joins them profoundly to the spouse, the Lord, and His Body.

A second theme connecting Eucharist and marriage is that they both involve physical actions, which have a significance that extends beyond the merely physical. As St. Paul instructed the Corinthians, even momentary physical joining with a prostitute results in a unity parallel in significance to one’s unity with Christ. The physical gestures of intercourse obviously have a decisive shaping role in the lives of people in so many ways, both for good and for bad. Simply to describe such actions with biological precision does not convey their full significance—spiritually, morally, psychologically, or socially. Indeed, such disparate acts as adultery, rape, incest, and faithful conjugal union are not distinguished merely by descriptions of bodily actions.

Likewise, an account of the physical movements involved in the Eucharist does not plumb the depths of their meaning. As Fr. Alexander Schmemmann taught, an absolute division of symbol and reality in sacramental theology is contrary to the experience of the Church, for the sacraments manifest, realize, and reveal what they symbolize. It is through participation in them that human beings participate in the life of God in a way that is both real and mystical.⁶ Paul Evdokimov made the similar point that the Holy Mysteries “do not merely give, but *contain*, grace and are *channels*; they are at the same time the instruments of salvation and salvation itself,

⁴ St. Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998), 60-61.

⁵ Vigen Guroian, *Incarinate Love* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 87-88.

⁶ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998), 135ff, 140-141.

as is the Church.”⁷ While the Eucharist involves the same physical capacities for eating and drinking as are used at any meal, its significance is nothing short of “one flesh” union with Christ in the heavenly banquet.

In a parallel fashion, it is impossible to separate with complete clarity the physical joining of husband and wife in intercourse from any other dimension of their shared life. Their physical union is inextricably entwined with the various dimensions of their relationship, including parenthood and the multi-layered aspects of their identity as a couple and members of a family. The physical symbol of their union manifests the reality of their marriage as persons at a deep level. Likewise, the eating and drinking of the Eucharist is an epiphany of true participation in the life of the Lord and His heavenly kingdom. This close identification is reflected in Christ’s teaching, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.” (John 6:53) In both marriage and Eucharist, physical gestures function as epiphanies of grace and full participation in the life of another. To regard them as anything less than manifestations of covenantal communion is to degrade their significance.

These claims reflect the Incarnational theology of Orthodoxy, as Jesus Christ is both fully divine and fully human. Divinity, then, is not a stranger to physicality, but joined with it in the Person of Christ. The God-Man performed many physical signs and gestures that conveyed the fullness of God’s kingdom for those enduring bodily struggles such as hunger, sickness, and even death. In this light, salvation is not an escape from physicality, but its fulfilment, restoration, and ultimate transformation in the heavenly reign.

As St. Paul taught, the Lord’s bodily resurrection is the “first fruits” of hope for the blessing of the entire creation, including its material aspects, in the eschatological Kingdom. (1 Cor. 15:20) In arguing that “the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord,” he appeals to Christ’s resurrection as the basis of our hope to also be raised up by God. In contrast to the Gnostic inclinations of his libertine opponents, St. Paul reminds the Corinthians that their bodies are both members of Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 6:15, 19). Since God intends whole human beings—body, soul, and spirit-- to participate in heavenly glory, how one lives in the physicality of the body plays a decisive role in one’s faithfulness to the incarnate Son of God, now risen and ascended bodily into heaven.

In this context, the body is neither intrinsically evil nor spiritually irrelevant. And given Christ’s use of the wedding feast as an image of the heavenly banquet, as well as the marital imagery of Revelation (e.g., 19:7-9, 21:2) for the consummation of all things, it is certainly not merely coincidental that the fulfillment of the relationship between man and woman has figured so prominently in the eschatological hope of Christianity from its origins. From the “one flesh” language

⁷ Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 124.

of Genesis to the marriage banquet of the Lamb in Revelation, God brings those created male and female in His image and likeness more fully into communion with Him and one another. Their “one flesh” union finds its fulfilment in the heavenly banquet in which husband and wife participate already as they wear the crowns of the Kingdom. They stand together in the unfolding narrative of the fulfilment of God’s gracious intensions for human beings to become participants in the loving communion of the Holy Trinity.

God’s salvation is the fulfilment, not the annihilation, of His good creation, including the physical dimensions of our existence. Especially with reference to marriage, Chrysostom taught that the desires of husband and wife for one another are not simply evil, but a dimension of human nature “still basically good after the Fall.”⁸ Because “Marriage is honourable and the bed undefiled,” Chrysostom chided husbands for excusing themselves from services after intimate union with their wives. He affirmed that God has created man and woman as “ontologically ideal counterpart[s].”⁹ Indeed, “husband and wife are one body in the same way as Christ and the Father are one.”¹⁰ Marriage provides a “safe haven” for the fulfilment of desire and the most intimate union of man and woman “to be a living image, or icon, of the marriage of Christ the Bridegroom with His Bride, the Church.”¹¹ Here the “one flesh” union of husband and wife finds its natural and eschatological culmination.

Physical hunger and thirst, together with the social and communal dimensions of table fellowship, also find their completion in the heavenly banquet in which communicants participate mystically in the Eucharist. Even as marriage plays a key role in the biblical drama, so do meals. The Passover *seder* is the Jews’ ongoing participation in the salvation of the Hebrew people from slavery and death in Egypt at the time of the Exodus. In the context of Passover, Christ reveals that He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. To eat His flesh and drink His blood is to participate in a new covenant of deliverance from death itself. The requirement of nourishment for physical existence becomes the basis for profound spiritual imagery, which underwrites the importance of bodily actions for matters beyond what they typically signify in this world. In the context of historic Christian faith, marital union and table fellowship both become channels of participation in God’s reign.

⁸ David C. Ford, *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. John Chrysostom* (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 1996), 47.

⁹ Ford, *Women and Men in the Early Church*, 51-54. See also Lawrence R. Farley, *One Flesh: Salvation Through Marriage in the Orthodox Church* (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2013), 93ff.

¹⁰ St. John Chrysostom, “Homily 20,” *On Marriage and Family Life*, 52.

¹¹ Ford, *Women and Men in the Early Church*, 67-68.

The third theme of commonality for the Eucharist and marriage is that of sacrifice. The connection is obvious with reference to the Eucharist in which communicants receive the Body and Blood of the true Passover Lamb. Participation in the spiritual sacrifice of the Eucharist calls and enables communicants to join themselves to the one offering of the Son as they lift up every dimension of their lives to the Holy Trinity for blessing and fulfilment.

Perhaps less explicit are the sacrificial themes of marriage, though they are also profound. For example, St. Paul teaches that spouses should “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” and that husbands should love their wives “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” (Eph. 5:21ff) In becoming “one flesh,” both spouses sacrifice the identity of autonomous individuals and enter into a joint ascetical struggle of dying to their self-centeredness out of love for the other. In this sense, Chrysostom notes that “it is possible for us to surpass all others in virtue by becoming good husbands and wives.”¹²

The challenges of offering their common life to the Lord-- in all its interpersonal, economic, and physical aspects—presents a myriad of a opportunities for spiritual growth to the man and the woman, both as unique persons and as a couple. Faithful marriage places their erotic love in a context directed toward the Kingdom, to the fulfilment of all human desire in union with the Holy Trinity. From the marriage service itself, in which husband and wife wear martyrs’ crowns of the Kingdom, their union is directed toward *theosis*, the fulfilment of their primordial calling together in the image and likeness of God. As Guroian comments,

God has intended from all eternity that she [the Church] and Christ should be united as Bride and Groom so that the world might be saved from sin and death. Christian marriage is a sign and foretaste of a world reconciled in Christ to God. That is no mere analogy, but belongs to the deepest symbolism that God has built into the fabric of his creation. God created and constituted man and woman as complementary beings who in union constitute a single humanity, a single Adam-Eve existence. In marriage, man-and-woman-together is a sacramental sign of the union of Christ and the Church.¹³

Christian marriage is an ongoing participation in the Eucharist, in the heavenly wedding banquet that manifests God’s salvation. The humble physical elements of bread and wine find fulfilment as the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist and become our participation in the life of heaven. Likewise, the intimate personal union of man and woman becomes in holy matrimony their entrance to the heavenly realm, their participation by grace in the life of the Holy Trinity as distinct persons sharing a common life and love. For human beings to do that requires profound asceticism as they become more fully communicants and participants in Christ’s sacrifice for the life of the world.

¹² St. John Chrysostom, “Homily 20,” *On Marriage and Family Life*, 57.

¹³ Guroian, *Rallying the Really Human Things: The Moral Imagination in Politics, Literature, and Every Day Life* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2005), 127.

Their ascetical offering helps to restore man and woman to their natural state in God's image and likeness. St. John of Damascus taught that "Repentance is the returning from the unnatural to the natural state, from the devil to God, through discipline and repentance."¹⁴ The return to the natural state is a process of the healing of the soul from slavery to the passions, which requires in marriage a sacrificial offering of both spouses in accordance with God's salvific purposes. There certainly is a difference between desire in accord with humanity's God-given nature and the passions that disorient and distort those desires. For example, Chrysostom observed that "The body has a natural desire, not however for fornication, or for adultery, but simply for sexual intercourse. The body has a natural desire not for gluttony, but simply for nourishment, and not for drunkenness, but simply for drink."¹⁵ The sacrificial offering of marriage directs those innate desires to their proper end of bringing man and woman more fully in union with one another and with the Lord.

St. Gregory Palamas describes insightfully the ascetical struggle of sacrifice:

Will not the passionate part of the soul, as a result of this [ascetical] violence, be also brought to act according to the commandments? Such forcing, by dint of habituation, makes easy our acceptance of God's commandments, and transforms our changeable disposition into a fixed state. This condition brings about a steady hatred towards evil states and dispositions of the soul; and hatred of evil duly produces the impassibility, which in turn engenders love for the unique Good. Thus one must offer to God the passionate part of the soul, alive and active, that it may be a living sacrifice.¹⁶

Such asceticism is neither an escape from nor a repudiation of the body, but instead the participation of the body—as well as the whole person-- in holiness. As Palamas noted, "so, too, in the case of those who have elevated their minds to God and exalted their souls with divine longing, their flesh also is being transformed and elevated, participating together with the soul in the divine communion, and becoming itself a dwelling and possession of God; for it is no longer the seat of enmity towards God, and no longer possesses desires contrary to the Spirit."¹⁷ While this statement arises from a monastic context, it is certainly applicable to those who live in the world, including married couples. Marital asceticism does traditionally concern restraint in matters of intimacy, but it is surely not limited to them. Through the many struggles of their shared life, husband and wife possess an almost limitless number of opportunities to deny themselves out of love for one another, their children, and family members. For example, Chrysostom advised married couples to

¹⁴ St. John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Bk. 2, Ch. XXX in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 9, 43.

¹⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily V on Ephesians* as quoted in Ford, *Women and Men in the Early Church*, 131.

¹⁶ St. Gregory Palamas, *The Triads* (Mahwah, NY: Paulist Press, 1983), 55, II.ii.20.

¹⁷ St. Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, 47-48, I.ii.1.

Pray together at home and go to Church; when you come back home, let each ask the other the meaning of the readings and prayers. If you are overtaken by poverty, remember Peter and Paul, who were more honoured than kings or rich men, though they spent their lives in hunger and thirst. Remind one another that nothing in life is to be feared, except offending God. If your marriage is like this, your perfection will rival the holiest of monks.¹⁸

Fr. Stanley Harakas observes that marriage and family provide the context “in which most Orthodox Christians...grow toward *theosis*.” Given the great challenges presented to holiness by difficulties encountered in family life, he notes that a relationship which images the loving union of the Holy Trinity is possible only when the spouses intentionally offer themselves to God as the “third partner” in the marriage. In such a context, husband and wife may “contribute to making the home—for parents and children alike—a workshop for growth toward *theosis*.”¹⁹

The common Orthodox ascetical practice of periodic abstinence from marital relations must be seen in proper context, for it does not imply that sexual union is sinful or should be repudiated by all married couples. Fr. John Chryssavgis notes that the petitions of the wedding service itself present chastity as “the integrity of the human person” open to the couple, not simply as physical virginity. In prayers that recall fertile married couples from the Old Testament and pray for similar blessings for the bride and groom, the service “shows no reservation towards sexuality, no trace of despicability, or even suspicion.”²⁰ From its first centuries, the Church has rejected Gnostic and Manichean condemnations of the goodness of the physical body, as well as of sexual union in marriage. St. Gregory the Theologian affirmed marriage with great rhetorical force:

Are you not yet wedded to flesh? Fear not this consecration; you are pure even after marriage. I will take the risk of that. I will join you in wedlock. I will dress the bride. We do not dishonour marriage because we give a higher honour to virginity. I will imitate Christ, the pure Groomsman and Bridegroom, as He both wrought a miracle at a wedding and honoured wedlock by His presence. Only let marriage be pure and unmingled with filthy lusts. This only I ask: receive safety from the Gift and give to the Gift the oblation of chastity in its due season, when the fixed time of prayer comes around.²¹

¹⁸ St. John Chrysostom, “Homily 20,” *On Marriage and Family Life*, 61-62.

¹⁹ Stanley Harakas, *Living the Faith* (Minneapolis, MN: Light & Life Publishing Co., 1993), 241-242, 245, 254.

²⁰ John Chryssavgis, *Love, Sexuality, and the Sacrament of Marriage* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2005), 25-26.

²¹ St. Gregory the Theologian, “Oration 40,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, Vol. 7, 365, as cited in Ford, *Women and Men in the Early Church*, 32-33. This discussion of marital asceticism draws on an earlier treatment of these themes in LeMasters, *The Goodness of God’s Creation: How to Live as an Orthodox Christian* (Salisbury, MA: Regina Orthodox Press, 2008), 25ff.

Marital fasting is a tool for directing the desires of husband and wife to God and for the healing of unhealthy passions. When couples agree to abstain from relations in order to devote themselves to more focused prayer for a period of time, they direct their desire for communion ultimately to the heavenly banquet of which their marital union is a sign. They recognize that even the most blessed marriage on earth does not manifest fully the “one flesh” union with one another and with God to which they are called. As H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., notes, the marital fast enables spouses to “seek enjoyment without being distracted by a self-indulgence that turns one’s heart from God...The goal is to delight in God’s creation without being mastered by this delight, to find in this enjoyment rightly taken an opportunity through which to pass beyond this enjoyment to His Kingdom...”²² The point is not legalism, but eschatological hope for greater participation in the life of God by the man and woman who wear the crowns of the Kingdom. Evdokimov notes on these matters that “the Church offers only elements for a basis of judgment. She exerts no constraint; her task is to free man [and woman] from all forms of enslavement in order to make him [and her]... free citizen[s] of the Kingdom.”²³

A parallel with the Eucharist is helpful here. Fasting from food does not imply that the fruits of the earth are evil. The problem is that corrupt human beings typically have unnatural attachments to food, drink, and other sources of pleasure. Fasting provides an opportunity to reorient one’s desires for fulfillment from the stomach to the Lord and to keep the blessing of physical nourishment in its proper place. Moreover, the innate human desires for food and drink are not evil in themselves. But they certainly are corrupted and play a paradigmatic role in the disintegration of humanity from the beginning of the biblical narrative. In the Eucharist, however, the very purposes of physical nourishment are fulfilled and restored, as bread and wine become our participation in the life and fellowship of heaven.

In order to feast rightly at the heavenly banquet, we must fast at times from lesser ones. Self-restraint with reference to physical appetites is necessary for the celebration of the Eucharist. The servers must certainly refrain from consuming the gifts before the service begins. The self-restraint of fasting from other food and drink in preparation for the Eucharistic feast does not imply that the desire to satisfy daily hunger and thirst are somehow sinful, but instead reorients our appetites toward communion with God and one another. As with marriage, some level of sacrifice is necessary in order to participate in the fullness of the blessings already foreshadowed in the world as we know it. While Eucharist and marriage do not call those who participate in them to abstain

²² H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics* (Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger Publishers, 2000), 243-244.

²³ Evdokimov, 176.

completely from the bodily pleasures of nourishment or intimacy, they do call for spouses and communicants to join their lives more fully to the one offering of the Son, which requires ascetical struggle in various forms. In both holy mysteries, humble human gifts become our true personal participation in the heavenly banquet.

The greatest challenges in integrating Eucharist and marriage are not theoretical, as the texts of the services and the writings of ancient and contemporary teachers describe them clearly. In our ever-changing world, however, it is difficult to form men, women, and youth in ways that enable them to embrace the deep connections of these holy mysteries. Perhaps a first step in that direction is to resist the division between “religion” and “real life” so commonly assumed in modern western culture. The conventional wisdom, adopted at least in practice by many Orthodox, is that the distinctive teachings of the faith amount to little more than sectarian idiosyncrasies that must be relegated to the private sphere, where they become matters of mere personal preference that have little to do with fulfilling the nature of the human person.²⁴

If Orthodox Christians are to make a credible witness to the new life of the Kingdom, they must be formed through their parishes and families to embrace a distinctive vocation. They must do so, not as a matter of arbitrary sectarian preference or escape from reality, but as a persuasive sign that the path they pursue is truly the salvation of the world. Parishioners must show in their own lives that Eucharist and marriage serve the healing of human brokenness, not simply religious ceremonies or antiquated customs.

In order for the laity to live out this vocation with integrity, clergy, catechists, and other teachers must instruct them on the deep interrelatedness of Eucharist and marriage. Since these holy mysteries are frequently celebrated and quite familiar to parishioners, there is no shortage of opportunities to challenge the laity to grow in their understanding of how they impact daily life. It is also necessary to identify and reject popular ideas and practices that corrupt the beliefs and behaviour of so many parishioners on questions of marriage, sexuality, and family. If the Church does not address these matters explicitly and effectively, it should not be surprising when the dominant ethos of our times influences parishioners profoundly and negatively.

Of equal importance is the need to present the ascetical dimensions of the Eucharist life and of marriage in ways that are not reduced to legalism or rote traditionalism. Since the matters at stake very much concern bodily appetites,

²⁴ The practices and trends of the larger society present temptations too strong to be resisted by simple appeals to preference or the curious habits of religious groups. It is one thing to affirm religious liberty in the social sphere out of respect for the freedom of persons to believe and worship as choose. It is another, however, to make secularism normative in a way that obscures the urgency of the Church’s vocation to call human beings to become more fully who God created them to be in His image and likeness.

parishioners will find strength in fighting their passions and reorienting their natural desires in holy ways through appropriate forms of self-denial with food and other sources of pleasure.

The Eucharistic theology of Schmemmann is helpful at this point, for he teaches that

the world to come in which we participate in the Divine Liturgy is our same world, *already* perfected in Christ, but not *yet* in us. And since God has created the world as food for us and given us food as means of communion with Him, of life in Him, the new food of the new life which we receive from God in His Kingdom *is Christ Himself*. He is our bread—because from the very beginning all our hunger was a hunger for Him and all our bread was a symbol of Him, a symbol that had to become reality... and all food, therefore, must lead us to Him.²⁵

Christ did not obliterate hunger, food, or the body. Instead, He fulfilled them, making them more real as channels of participation in the blessedness of the Kingdom. It is incumbent upon those who receive the Eucharist to display a life in this world which bears witness to Christ's divinization of the human being. Our participation in the Eucharistic offering is not limited to the service of the Divine Liturgy, but must permeate every dimension of our life in the world, including what secular society thinks of as the "real life" matters at stake in sex, marriage, and family. Otherwise, we have failed to embrace the truth that "Christ has *offered* all that exists... We are included in the Eucharist of Christ and Christ is our Eucharist."²⁶ Hence, Schmemmann claims that the calling of the priesthood is "to reveal to each vocation its priestly essence, to make the whole life of all men the liturgy of the Kingdom, to reveal the Church as the royal priesthood of the redeemed world."²⁷

Schmemmann teaches that the same is true of holy matrimony, for the entrance of bride and groom into the Church "does not merely symbolize, but indeed *is* the entrance of marriage into the Church, which is the entrance of world into 'the world to come', the procession of the people of God—in Christ—into the Kingdom." The glory of humankind as the king of creation in Genesis finds fulfilment in each new family blessed as "a kingdom, a little church, and therefore a sacrament of and way to the Kingdom."²⁸ The spouses' crowns of martyrdom reject the idolization of the family—and of romance, sex, social respectability, personal happiness and of other worldly values—and serve as signs of the ultimate reality in which their marriage enables them to participate.²⁹ The common

²⁵ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 43.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

vocation of human beings is also that of married people: “to follow Christ in the fullness of His priesthood: in His love for man and the world, His love for their ultimate fulfilment in the abundant life of the Kingdom.”³⁰

In a world with very different understandings of what marriage is about, Orthodoxy calls husbands and wives to live eucharistically. The Church today must discern how to form communicants and spouses who recognize and embrace the deep interrelation of Eucharist and marriage as signs of the salvation of the world. To do so is not only for the extraordinarily pious or merely a charming idiosyncrasy of a particular religious or ethnic heritage. It is, instead, an imperative that arises from our very nature as human beings in the image and likeness of God, who invites man and woman to dine at the heavenly banquet and to wear the martyrs’ crowns of those who find new life in His Kingdom.

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³⁰ Ibid., 94.

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