

Guroian, Vigen

The Bible in orthodox ethics : a liturgical reading

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3. *The Bible in Orthodox Ethics: A Liturgical Reading*

Stanley Hauerwas has suggested that one reason the use of the Bible in Christian ethics has not been wholly persuasive is that Christian ethicists and moral theologians have failed to interpret Scripture in its liturgical settings. "There is certainly nothing intrinsically wrong," writes Hauerwas, "with individuals reading and studying scripture, but such reading must be guided by the use of the scripture through the liturgies of the church... As Aidan Kavanagh has observed, 'the liturgy is scripture's home rather than its stepchild, and the Hebrew and Christian bibles were the church's first liturgical books.'"¹ Who would deny that within the large corpus of systematic and applied ethics hardly a glance is given to the liturgical contexts of Scripture in the church? In this chapter I want to take up Hauerwas's challenge to Christian ethicists and take a serious look at the liturgical settings of Scripture. A recovery of the church's biblical hermeneutics displayed in liturgy is essential for reclaiming an ecclesial Christian ethic.

A Methodological Gambit

Before beginning the constructive argument, I want to engage in a brief methodological gambit with the intent of offering some impressions of the contemporary discussion on the relationship of the Bible to Christian ethics and getting at what is at stake theologically in such talk.

1. Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980) p. 240n.9. Hauerwas's citation of Kavanagh is taken from *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (New York: Pueblo, 1978), p. xiii.

Some twenty-five years ago, Paul Lehmann published his valuable and often-cited systematic study *Ethics in a Christian Context*. In the opening of that book, Lehmann refers to the hermeneutical problem of understanding the relationship between the Bible and Christian ethics. He argues that modern biblical scholarship would seem to indicate that biblical ethics needs to be clearly distinguished from Christian ethics. He says that contemporary Christian ethicists have not paid sufficient attention to the hermeneutical issue or the methodological problems it raises. In Troeltschian fashion, Lehmann argues that a gulf was created between New Testament ethics and all subsequent Christian ethics by the delay of the parousia in the church's early experience. New Testament ethics was based on a presumption of the imminent return of Christ, whereas Christian ethics is the outcome of the church's subsequent efforts to define and work out what it means to be faithful followers of Christ with responsibilities in the world during the extended interim between the Lord's first coming and the fulfillment of his kingdom.²

In raising this distinction, Lehmann did not set out to deny the authority of the Bible in the ongoing life of the church. Nor did he deny that biblical ethic and Christian ethics can be- and usually are- closely related. Rather, he sought to address forthrightly modern questions about how the Bible can continue to be normative for Christian living. He determined that a successful solution would be possible only if Christian ethicists were serious about ecclesiology. For it is in the eucharistic gathering, he maintained, that the gap between the New Testament church and all subsequent Christian existence is bridged, in which the tension between New Testament ethics and Christian ethics is worked out.

I agree with Lehmann that the eucharistic gathering is the primary location in which Christians learn how to put the Bible to lively effect in their own lives and in the world. And, as I have indicated already, my goal is to explore how this happens and is important for Christian ethics. But I reject Lehmann's claim that Christian ethics differs from New Testament ethics as a consequence of the delay of the parousia. Christian ethics (which includes the ethics of the New Testament) is grounded in the fact that the Word has become flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14), leaving those who seek to become his disciples with the responsibility of imitating and following him with discernment in all times and circumstances until his return.

2. See Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (1963; rpt., Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1979), pp. 28-29.

Lehmann is not alone in thinking that the hermeneutical problem is somehow the key to doing Christian ethics responsibly. Earlier in this century, Reinhold Niebuhr raised the issue in his *Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (1935), and later James Gustafson in his well-known essay "The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics" worried about closing the gap between the knowledge of the meaning of the texts gained through biblical studies and the uses that Christian ethicists make of them.³ This concern has led still others to increasingly formalistic accounts of the uses of Scripture in Christian ethics. The search for the meaning of the texts in and of themselves has often led to a neglect of the kind of ecclesiological reflection that Lehmann called for. One notable exception is Thomas W. Ogletree, who, in *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (1983), insists that the ecclesial context of Scripture is a key to understanding how the Bible continues to be normative for Christian ethics.

Attention to ecclesiology has been even more pronounced in recent books and articles by John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and James William McClendon Jr.⁴ Unlike Lehmann, however, these authors do not take up the discussion of ecclesiology because they believe eucharistic community is crucial for bridging a gap between biblical ethics and contemporary Christian ethics. They emphasize not one but several ecclesiological contexts of Christian ethics, including liturgy, preaching, and *diakonia*. Study of the actual practices of the believing community is essential, these writers insist, for a fruitful exploration of the uses of the Bible in Christian ethics. They shift attention away from prevalent notions that there is a tension between New Testament ethics and so-called Christian ethics, and they minimize the importance for Christian ethics of correlative concerns about definitions of genre, conceptual tools (such as covenant, prophecy, or law), and the development and original meanings of texts. These theologians value

3. Gustafson, "The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics : A Methodological Study," *Interpretation* 2 (October 1979): 430-55. See also Gustafson's *Christian Ethics and the Community* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1971) and *Theology and Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1974).

4. See, e.g., Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids : William B. Eerdmans, 1972) and *The Priestly Kingdom* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, especially chaps. 2 and 3; McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1: *Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986); Bruce C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991); Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian life*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989); and Stephen E. Fowl and L. Gregory Jones, *Readings in Communion* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991).

the scholarly study of the Bible, but they strongly suspect that the sorts of questions that biblical scholars bring to the texts will seldom help to improve our understanding of how the church employs the Bible ethically as a guide for moral formation and Christian witness.

Yoder, Hauerwas, and McClendon reflect understandings of Scripture from the Anabaptist tradition. Paul Lehmann seems to see some connection between their position and that of Orthodox theologians. Early in *Ethics in a Christian Context*, he acknowledges that his way of doing ethics (in the light of the hermeneutical problem) is fundamentally different from that of either the Orthodox Church or “the so-called ‘sects.’” Initially he points to a sharp distinction between the Anabaptist and Orthodox approaches, stating that “the tension between New Testament ethics and Christian ethics is *more* acutely felt” in the so-called sectarian branch of Protestant Christianity than it is in the mainline Protestant churches, whereas among the Orthodox this tension is *less* acutely felt. But despite this difference, says Lehmann, neither of the traditions encounters the hermeneutical problem. He asserts that the Anabaptists make a more serious attempt than the mainline Protestant churches “to encourage the individual Christian as a member of a holy community toward as close an approximation to the ethical behavior of Jesus Christ as the conditions of a sinful world allow.”⁵ And he asserts that “the intimate connection between liturgy and life which marks the piety of Orthodoxy is designed to foster the direct implementation of the ethic of the Gospels in and through the ethics of the church.”⁶ Thus, if I understand him correctly, Lehmann maintains that although the Orthodox Church and the Protestant “sects” represent opposite poles of interpretation with respect to relationships among New Testament ethics, Christian ethics, and the *ecclesia*, they nevertheless evidence a kindred spirit in the extent to which neither finds it necessary to turn to the modern hermeneutical problem as a preface to or starting point for Christian ethics.

Lehmann seems content simply to let the situation stand in this way, as if the sizable Orthodox and Anabaptist exceptions to his approach were not significant. But it will not suffice to dismiss these exceptions with the argument that the Orthodox and Anabaptist traditions have somehow or other remained precritical in their reading and use of the Bible. Perhaps he is assuming that every use of the Scriptures that does not presuppose an inherent tension or break between biblical

5. Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context*, p. 42n.3.

6. Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context*, p.42n-3.

ethics and Christian ethics is precritical. But on what grounds can he make that assumption? There are other weaknesses in his analysis as well. For example, although Lehmann's description of the relation between Scripture, worship, and ethics within Orthodoxy is fairly accurate, Yoder's work would seem to indicate that the Christ-against-culture or the Bible-against-church model does not adequately capture the character of Anabaptist Protestantism as a living community of faith. The fact is that neither the Orthodox nor the Anabaptists have defined themselves in worship, evangelism, or communal organization in the terms prescribed by the hermeneutical problem that Lehmann and so many other contemporary Christian theologians believe is essential to understanding or doing Christian ethics. To the contrary, both traditions, albeit for different reasons, strongly insist that the Bible belongs to a particular community and that the use of the Bible in Christian ethical thought must reflect the ecclesial context of Scripture. Lehmann cannot simply dismiss the weight of these positions out of hand.

A Communal Hermeneutic

At one point in his posthumously published work *The Eucharist*, Alexander Schmemmann comments, "I daresay that the gradual 'decomposition' of scripture, its dissolution in more and more specialized and negative criticism, is a result of its alienation from the eucharist — and practically from the Church herself — as an experience of a spiritual reality."⁷ Significantly, Schmemmann makes this comment in the midst of a discussion of the Little Entrance of the Byzantine Liturgy. He insists that the liturgy is Scripture's home. But what do Schmemmann and Orthodox theology mean by this? Likewise, what does Schmemmann mean by the "'decomposition' of scripture"? I will deal with these two questions together in an effort to clarify the notion of the communal hermeneutic of the Orthodox Church.

Wayne A. Meeks helps to answer these questions in an intriguing article entitled "A Hermeneutics of Social Embodiment." Meeks suggests an alternative to what he depicts as two equally deficient and misleading ways of reading the Bible that have arisen from within New Testament studies. "One is a rigorously historical quest, in which all the early Christian documents alike, canonical and extracanonical, are

7. Schmemmann, *The Eucharist* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1988). p. 66.

treated as sources for reconstructing the diverse and curious varieties of the early Christian movement. The other way . . . cares not at all where the texts came from or what they originally meant; by purely literary analysis it wishes to help text and reader to confront one another continually anew."⁸ Meeks's alternative is to seek "to uncover the web of meaningful signs, actions, and relationships within which that text did [or does] its work."⁹ Put another way, biblical texts obtain their significant Christian meaning through the authoritative roles they assume within the church. Such meaning is grasped by observing and, even better still, by participating in those liturgical, preaching, and evangelical activities through which the church defines its social identity and pursues its communal goals. "Perhaps it is not too much to say that the hermeneutical circle is not completed until the text finds a fitting social embodiment," says Meeks.¹⁰ This is very near to what Schmemmann means when he laments the ill effects of the "rupture" between word and sacrament.¹¹

"The scriptures and the Church," wrote Schmemmann, have been reduced" to the category of two formal *authorities*, two 'Sources of faith' as they are called in the scholastic treatises, for which the only question is which authority is the higher: which 'interprets' which." In a move that established the norm in the West, the Reformers declared "holy scripture to be the supreme authority for teaching the faith." But how are we to determine the meaning of Scripture once it has been disembodied and removed from the liturgical context in which its meaning has formerly been explored and enacted by the community of believers? Sooner or later we will have to turn to "biblical science" for a determination of meaning, and when this happens, "the meaning of scripture is dissolved in a multiplicity of private" albeit "scientifically" governed theories or opinions. The reigning model of biblical interpretation becomes the autonomous interpreting self confronting the text with all the tools of the science. The individual located within the craft of biblical exegesis stands as an authority over Scripture. Schmemmann saw that the Orthodox proclivity is to react against this modern individualistic trend by insisting that the church is the definitive authority on Scripture. But this argument for the supremacy of

8. Meeks, "A Hermeneutics of Social Embodiment," *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986): 176.

9. Meeks "A Hermeneutics of Social Embodiment," pp. 183-84.

10. Meeks, "A Hermeneutics of Social Embodiment," p. 184.

11. Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, pp. 67-69.

ecclesial authority, he explained, has itself forgotten how Scripture becomes eucharistically incorporated. This embodiment is accomplished when the community of believers interprets the meaning of Scripture in prayer and in doxological and serviceable response to the preaching and eucharistic presentation of the word in the Liturgy." It is precisely through the sacrament that the word is interpreted," says Schmemmann, "for the interpretation of the word is always witness to the fact the Word has become our life. . . The sacrament is his witness, and therefore in it lies the source, the beginning and the foundation of the exposition and comprehension of the word."¹²

In fact, argued Schmemmann, the issue is not one of authority, still less of two competing authorities, Scripture and church (or Scripture, and tradition); rather, it is about truth and how that truth comes to life, how it is hypostatized (or enfleshed) in the communion of believers. From the eucharistic perspective, the Bible cannot be an authority over the community, because in the eucharistic assembly of God's Word the Word becomes flesh, the very flesh of those who have gathered around the gift offering, and in this way the community itself becomes the evangelical truth. Moreover, from this eucharistic perspective, the church is not an authority either, at least not in the sense of *auctoritas*.¹³

Contrary to the assumptions of Western textualism and individualism, the truth that the church becomes is not confined to the text but includes the response to the text and the enactment of that response by the community that receives it and uses it as Scripture. Tradition is in some real sense Scripture performed and embodied ecclesially. It is the communal action of receiving and proclaiming the gospel. Eucharistically speaking, therefore, neither the content of Scripture nor the content of tradition is confined to a text. From the standpoint of this eucharistic and communal hermeneutic, the prevalent Western model — namely, that two authorities, Scripture and tradition, are subject to interpretation by the autonomous intellect — is very questionable. The communal hermeneutic also obviates the need for what John E. Tiel has described as the "romantic paradigm" of the theologian, in which the church is presumed to depend on original and creative individual theologians who reconstruct the communal life of the church.¹⁴

12. Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, pp. 66, 67, 68.

13. See John D. Zizioulas, *Being in Communion* (Crestwood. N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), pp. 114-15.

14. See Tiel, "Theological Responsibility: Beyond the Classical Paradigm," *Theological Studies* 47 (December 1986): 580-82.

Nicholas Lash says much the same in his book *Theology on the Way to Emmaus*. Lash is particularly helpful in dealing with some of the thorny issues associated with such a description of the ecclesial employment and interpretation of the Bible. While he maintains that the “fundamental form of the Christian interpretation of scripture is the life, activity and organization of the believing community,” he insists that this emphasis does not remove the need for “experts” or their special skills. While it rejects individualism and the tyranny of private reason, it embraces fully the notion that those “who engage in the activity of reading a text bear personal responsibility for their reading.”¹⁵ The experts do have a role to play; it is simply the case that their role is subordinate to the actual “enactment” of Scripture by the believing community. Among other things, the experts have an important role to play in keeping the community of believers honest about the “script,” true not only to the spirit of its authors but to the tradition of interpretation.

***The Social Embodiment of Scripture:
An Example from the Byzantine Liturgy***

Let us return for a moment to Wayne Meeks’s observation that “perhaps the hermeneutical circle is not complete until the text finds a social embodiment.” Meeks proposes that “a hermeneutical strategy entails a social strategy Texts do not carry their meaning within themselves, but ‘mean’ insofar as they function intelligibly” — for example, insofar as they organize groups and establish their communal purposes — within specific contexts and histories. Meeks proposes a “strategy” that obliges the individual exegete to participate, “at least in the imagination” or empathetically, “with the kind of communal life which ‘fits’ the text.”¹⁶ But I do not see why, on the basis of Meeks’s analysis, this should not also apply to the interpretation of Scripture that occurs within the ecclesial community.

The question of how the beatitudes (Matt. 5:1-12 Luke 6:17, 20-23) belong to Christian ethics — especially Christian *social* ethics — has long been a point of controversy in the church. Meeks’s recommendations about a hermeneutic of social embodiment exposes the limita-

15. Lash, *Theology on the Way of Emmaus* (London: SCM Press, 1986), pp. 42-43.

16. Meeks, “A Hermeneutics of Social Embodiment,” pp. 183-84.

tions of the debate over this issue. Several of the positions that have been proposed concerning the ethical meaning and application of the beatitudes reflect the struggle of biblical criticism and biblical theology to come to terms with Jesus' sayings on the basis of literary form, historical criticism, biblical eschatology, or such concepts as law and gospel. Many of these approaches function to minimize the extremeness of the beatitudes and other parts of the Sermon on the Mount. Some have ascribed these sayings to an Oriental tendency to use byperbole for pedagogical purposes. Others have explained Jesus' radical teachings as an "interim" ethic fitted for the short time that he and the early church expected to pass before the kingdom came (or, alternatively, as a futuristic ethic for the eschatological kingdom itself). And still others have argued that the sayings reflect Jesus' effort to stress the interiority of the moral and religious claims that the Law implied but did not fully reveal. These interpretations all have some value in having opened up helpful perspectives on Scripture, and the best of them have struggled fruitfully with the recognition that there exists in the beatitudes a tension between, or perhaps a synthesis of, an ethic of rules and commands on the one hand and an ethic that is dispositional and eschatological on the other. Yet the hermeneutical strategies that these interpretations propose almost inevitably fail to consider that the beatitudes might *in fact* already have obtained viable meaning and embodiment in the believing community through its liturgical life and practice.

Charles E. Curran's interpretation of the beatitudes is illustrative of this pervasive short-sightedness:

The radical and seemingly impossible ethical teaching of Jesus is more than mere rhetoric. Jesus indicates the goal and direction that should characterize the life and actions of his followers. "Give to everyone who asks" is an impossible ethical imperative, but such a demand indicates the constant thrust that characterizes the life of the Christian. . . . Eschatological considerations introduce an inevitable tension into Christian ethics. The tension results from the fact that the reign of God in Christ is now present, and is going forward toward its fullness.¹⁷

Thus, according to Curran, the beatitudes make an actual and present claim on Christians because Jesus in his own life, death, and resurrec-

17. Curran, *Themes in Fundamental Moral Theology* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), pp. 15-16.

tion inaugurated the reign of God. Furthermore, they indicate the quality of that future mode of existence in God's kingdom that Christians hope for and to which Christians must conscientiously strive to orient their lives.

Curran does not provide his reader with any benchmarks of actual Christian practice in which this biblical eschatology is embodied, however. Instead, he shifts the focus from the ecclesial settings of the beatitudes as they relate to the church in sacrament and pilgrimage to certain moral issues affecting the secular order, such as war, women's equality, colonialism, and human rights. It is to these issues, he argues, that the radical teachings of Jesus are applicable. Presumably he is asking us to look for the embodiment of these teachings in such human struggles. Curran's original goal of holding biblical eschatology in tension with Christian ethics begins to sound like a religious version of a familiar ethical idealism with which Americans especially are quite comfortable. Precisely because Curran fails to identify the ecclesial and liturgical locations of Christian eschatology and the symbol of the kingdom of God, he risks leaving his readers with the impression that the evangelical counsels that he has described as radical demands are actually assimilable in culturally familiar moral ideals of benevolence and justice. Ironically, it is not far from this point to the kinds of cultural accommodation that Curran pointedly warns against and that he charges the Roman Catholic Church with having lapsed into.

Curran could have pursued another strategy to explain the significance of the beatitudes for the church. For example, he could have taken up the liturgical interpretation of the beatitudes on the Feast of All Saints. The origins of the present feast lay in several commemorations of martyrs from the days of the early church. One fifth-century Syrian celebration fell on Easter Friday. A similar Byzantine celebration fell on the octave day of Pentecost. In Rome a feast for All Martyrs and All Saints came just after Easter on the thirteenth of May. In all cases, the meaning of the commemoration was unambiguously paschal and messianic: they were occasions on which the fullness of Christ's victory over sin and death might be proleptically experienced. In the ninth century, the Latin Church moved the feast from May to the 1st of November, where it remains today. There, as the last major feast before Advent, it still invites a messianic interpretation: the feast is a proleptic and eschatological experience of the future kingdom inaugurated by the birth of the Christ child. The Roman Catholic lectionary juxtaposes Matthew 5: 1-12 with 1 John 3:1-3 and Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14, thus inter-

preting the beatitudes as constitutive of the character, disposition, and relationships of those who will be among the multitudes standing before the Lamb at his throne and in a resounding doxological hymn receive from Christ his new creation. This liturgical performance of Scripture lends an immediate concrete sense of personal and communal meaning to the beatitudes. They are illuminated as eschatological, yet also as morally transformative and definitive for Christian character and living.

In the Slavonic version of the Byzantine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the beatitudes are put to yet another important use that illustrates the full range of their ethical application by the church. In the Byzantine Liturgy, Matthew 5:1-12 is the text of the third antiphon of the Lesser Entrance. Historically, this beginning of the present liturgy belonged to the processional performed on appointed feast days. In Constantinople, for example, the procession led from Hagia Sophia to a stational church that bore the name of the feast or of that saint with whom a feast was associated. Alexander Schmemmann explains: "The singing of the antiphons took place during this procession and was completed at the doors of the church with the reading of the 'prayer of entrance,' and only then did the clergy and the people of God actually enter the church for the performance of the eucharist." Thus it is clear, says Schmemmann, that the Lesser Entrance not only "comprises the *beginning* of the eucharistic ceremony, but also the *entering* dynamic character of the ceremony the eucharist as *movement*" into the kingdom of God.¹⁸

The words of the first antiphon are from Psalm 103, describing the character of God. "Bless the Lord, O my soul: . . . Who forgiveth all thy sin, and healeth all thine infirmities. . . . The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, long-suffering and of great goodness." The accompanying prayer stresses the utter transcendence of this God, the fact that his love and mercy are of infinite measure and beyond all human comprehension. "O Lord our God whose might is ineffable, whose glory is inconceivable, whose mercy is infinite, and whose love toward mankind is unutterable. . . ." ¹⁹ The second antiphon is taken from Psalm 146 and depicts God as the agent of creation and redemption

18. Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, pp. 51, 52-53. The history and function of the antiphons give them a character that varies from one feast to another. My analysis here is restricted to the antiphons for ordinary Sundays.

19. From the *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church*, ed and trans. Isabel Florence Hapgood (Englewood, N.I.: Antiochian Archdiocese, 1975), p. 81.

who loves especially his chosen people, who in turn call on him as Lord and King. "Blessed is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, and whose hope is in the Lord his God; who made the sea, and all that therein is, who keepeth his promise forever. Who helpeth them to right that suffer wrong; who feedeth the hungry . . . : as for the way of the ungodly, he turneth it upside down. The Lord thy God, O Sion, shall be King forevermore." The prayer for this antiphon names the church as God's vessel of holiness in the world. "O Lord save thy people, and bless thine heritage. Preserve the fulness of thy Church: sanctify those who love the beauty of thy house."²⁰

In this liturgical setting, the beatitudes assume an utterly christological meaning, emphasizing holiness as a virtue for believers. The new humanity that God brings into existence through Christ is called to be holy. It is not that the kingdom of God is contingent upon the holiness of any creature; it is rather that those who would enter God's kingdom must be conformed to the likeness of the One who is holy in order to be fit for it. The first two antiphons function figurally and typologically, anticipating Christ and his new creation. The beatitudes are sure signs that the kingdom is present among us, because he who spoke them also fulfilled them in his life. Their utterance liturgically is intended to achieve the fulfillment of the kingdom that has been realized in Christ.²¹ Christ is the revelation of the kingdom in person. The rubrics for the antiphons instruct the deacon to stand before the icon of Christ as they are sung, holding his stole with three fingers of the right hand. This christological interpretation is deepened by the anthem that follows the second antiphon: "O Only begotten Son and Word of God! Thou who art immortal yet didst deign for our salvation to be come incarnate. . . Save us."²²

The entrance is completed and the beatitudes are sung as the deacon passes through the iconostasis onto the altar.²³ At the conclusion of the Lesser Entrance, the christological, social, and eschatological meanings of the beatitudes are joined. The beatitudes themselves are

20. *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church*, p. 82.

21. See Dumitru Staniloae, *Theology and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), p. 168.

22. *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church*, pp. 82-83.

23. In the current procession, the altar plays the role that the entire sanctuary played in the original Byzantine processions. Schmemmann explains that this substitution of the altar for the entire sanctuary "weakened the perception and experience of the 'assembly as the Church' itself as the entrance and ascent of the Church, the people of God, to the heavenly sanctuary" (*The Eucharist*, p. 59).

prefaced by the words "In thy Kingdom remember us, O Lord, when thou comest into thy Kingdom. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . ."24 This is followed by the great doxological hymn of the Trisagion: "O holy God, who restest in the Saints, who art hymned by the Seraphim . . . accept from the mouths of us sinners, the Thrice-Holy song, and visit us with thy beneficence.... Sanctify both our souls and bodies, and grant that we may serve you in uprightness all the days of our life." 25 Those who would enter the kingdom must bear the character of the One who is its Lord and who spoke and fulfilled the beatitudes in his life. This character is the product of both human striving and divine grace. At issue is obedience to Christ's command to "be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48) and the free gift of God's grace to those who believe in his Son.

Liturgically, the beatitudes are experienced as both moral imperative and eschatological promise. We need never run the risk of idealizing, spiritualizing, or otherwise disembodimenting them if we recall that they come to us as Christ's commentary on his own life, a life that led not only to the cross but to the resurrection. 26 The beatitudes are compelling for Christians not because they are precepts that are somehow or other metaphysically true but because Christ lived them. They are evangelical because he who taught and practiced them did so for our sakes. Those who in gratitude for this become his disciples must be for others what Christ is for them. We know that it is possible to live the beatitudes because the church exists.

The liturgical uses of the beatitudes point up the inadequacies of much of the debate over whether or how they belong to Christian ethics. The questions ordinarily raised in such discussions ignore the ecclesial and liturgical contexts in which the beatitudes obtain ethical force and eschatological significance for the worshiping community. In this sense, the ecclesial and liturgical employment of the beatitudes already answers questions of whether they are primarily elements of a personal ethic or whether they embrace a social vision. The Orthodox Church has interpreted the beatitudes as the very constitution of the kingdom of God. At the start of a sermon on Matthew 5:1-2, St. John Chrysostom asks, "What kind of foundations of His new polity doth

24. *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church*, p.83.

25. *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church*, p.85.

26. See Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, p.167. The idea here is that the words interpret Christ's conduct, and his conduct interprets the words.

He [Christ] lay for us?"²⁷ His answer is that this new polity is based on the beatitudes. Yet this constitution is not a founding charter or a set of theoretical statutes that can be abstracted from its original location in the church. It is, rather, the abiding presence of the One in whom the beatitudes have been revealed as the will of God. The goal of church polity, therefore, is to understand and do God's will in the world.

Biblical Typology and Christian Ethics

The preceding example of the use of the beatitudes within Orthodox liturgy leans heavily toward a figural or typological biblical exegesis. This kind of exegesis retains a strong sense of historicity and is attentive to the narrative locations of biblical passages as comparisons are drawn between biblical events or characters along a scale of time. It is often said that by contrast allegory abstracts texts from historical or narrative contexts and makes them speak for certain eternal truths or concepts. By pointing up the typological use of the beatitudes in the Byzantine rite, I have identified what is also judged to be the presiding form of biblical exegesis in Orthodox liturgy and tradition. Yet in doing so, I do not want to deny the legitimate use of the allegorical method in the Orthodox tradition.²⁸ Thus, although I refer to contemporary advocates of the typological method such as Hans Frei and George A. Lindbeck in my attempt to draw out the significance of typology for an ecclesially centered Christian ethics, I want to point out here that I do not concur in their belief that allegory is an unhelpful deviation from that norm, nor do I endorse narrative theologies that

27. Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, vol. 10 of the Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 1st series, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature, 1889), p. 91. Chrysostom hedged not a bit on the applicability of the beatitudes to all Christians. Addressing married people in a homily on the epistle to the Hebrews, he wrote, "And if these beatitudes were spoken to solitaries only, and the secular person cannot fulfill them, yet He [Christ] permitted marriage, then he has destroyed all men. For if it be not possible, with marriage, to perform the duties of solitaries, all things have perished and are destroyed, and the functions of virtue are shut up in a strait" (*Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews* in vol. 14 of the Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 1st series, ed. Philip Schaff [New York: Christian Literature, 1890], p. 402).

28. Much of Orthodox and ascetical and mystical theology is heavily allegorical. St. Gregory of Nyssa was a master of this form. A prime example is his *Life of Moses*. A good modern translation can be found in the Classics of Western Spirituality series - *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

pay little attention to the liturgical contexts of the church's biblical exegesis.²⁹

In any event, a retrieval of the typological method is in order. Anton Ugolnik's admonition to Orthodox who would engage in that task is pertinent. He understands all too well the Orthodox propensity to be merely reactive when challenged with the modern Western quandary over hermeneutics. Ironically, such Orthodox negativity works against a truly effective engagement of the biblical texts within contemporary Orthodoxy. "Let us assume, for a moment," writes Ugolnik, "that in response to the western hermeneutic we seize upon the figural interpretation of scripture, draw it from the liturgy and justify it as 'premodern.' In that very justification we cancel an assumption about time about which the figural mode is based."³⁰ The "return" to a figural use of the Bible, he argues, must be proactive. It must help contemporary Christians to conform their lives to the Christ in whom all such figural interpretation is founded.

This is the sense in which Georges Florovsky issued a challenge to the Orthodox and other Christians to regain their biblical minds.³¹ It is also the message of George A. Lindbeck when he explains that in New Testament times "typology was used to incorporate the Hebrew Scriptures into a canon that focused on Christ, and then, by extension, to embrace extrabiblical reality." Typology in its seriousness about the literal meaning of events or personages continues to provide "a powerful means for imaginatively incorporating all being into a Christ-centered world." Lindbeck cautions, however, that typology should not be used to help "believers find their stories in the Bible." Rather, Christians should be encouraged to use typology to "make the story of the Bible their story. The cross is not to be viewed as a figurative representation of suffering nor the messianic kingdom as a symbol for hope in the future, rather, suffering should be cruciform, and hopes for the future messianic."³²

29. This question of the relation of allegory and typology and the claim I make that within Orthodox theology the two do abide together defensibly as part of christian piety and practice is undoubtedly related to the whole matter of Platonism in Orthodox theology. The liturgies to which I refer include Platonic as well as allegorical elements. But I also maintain that the cited texts support my claim that the presiding method is typological.

30. Ugolnik, *"An Orthodox Hermeneutic in the West," St. Vladimir's Theological Review* 27 (January, 1983): 111.

31. See Florovsky, *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* vol. 1: *Bible, Church and Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View* (Belmont Mass.: Nordland, 1972), pp. 9-16.

32. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 117-18.

Some years back, biblical scholar James Barr questioned whether or to what extent this typological exegesis is useful for contemporary Christians. He was skeptical of the efforts of biblical scholars to rehabilitate typology, and he was especially critical of the renewed emphasis on typology by some in the *Heilsgeschichte* school of New and Old Testament studies (e.g., G. W. H. Lampe, Gerhard von Rad, and Martin Noth). According to Barr, the best argument these scholars had to offer in favor of typology was that it served to counterbalance the spiritualizing propensities of allegory. The *Heilsgeschichte* school identified a salvation history of divine events as the core of the Bible. But Barr argued that this typological approach was not consistent with the way that the authors of the New Testament and the early church read Scripture: ‘The character of the [New Testament] scene is not adequately described if we say that it is one in which a new saving event, or a representation of the older saving events, or a new turn of the *Heilsgeschichte*, is looked for; it is, rather, much more precisely one in which a Christ is expected, and in which the [typological] use of the Old Testament passages is heavily biased in this direction.’³³ But Barr found that this messianic and christological orientation was not sufficiently appreciated by the *Heilsgeschichte* school.

This debate among biblical scholars is not my primary concern here, however. Suffice it to say that in more recent years, Barr has expressed an interest in Hans Frei’s assertion in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* that figural or typological exegesis goes hand in glove with the biblical authors’ interests in weaving together a realistic narrative that, though history-like, is not wedded to the strict view of literality and temporal sequence of modern historiography to which the salvation history concept owes its inspiration and method of exegesis.³⁴ I suspect that Frei has shown Barr a way out of his earlier pessimism about finding an effective means of implementing typology to edify contemporary Christians.

In the history of Christianity there has been no better practitioner of the figural or typological use of Scripture than St. John Chrysostom. It is instructive to look at Chrysostom’s technique. The sermons he delivered as a priest in Antioch and later as Bishop of Constantinople draw relentlessly from biblical stories, juxtaposing in figural fashion

33. Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 133.

34. See Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), especially pp. 27-28, 173-75.

old and New Testament stories and characters with Christ as the lodestar. Chrysostom had a purpose — to transform the minds and the hearts of his listeners, people that he knew to be and often publicly accused of being) more pagan than Christian. Chrysostom was definitely not trying to translate the biblical stories into the idiom of the culture in order to solve the so-called social or moral questions of the day, nor did he translate these stories into symbols or cyphers through which the meaning of ostensibly universal human experiences might be grasped. Rather, he invoked these stories and events in order to get his listeners to regard and conduct themselves as participants in the Christianly normative world of the Bible.

One powerful example of Chrysostom's use of typology appears in his fourth sermon on Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16 : 19-31). The story itself makes use of the promise and fulfillment motif that is at the center of New Testament typology. When the rich man asks Abraham for permission to return from the dead to warn his five brothers about what will be awaiting them if they do not change their ways, he is told, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." For those who refuse to be attentive to the lives and words of Moses and the prophets, whom Luke presents throughout his Gospel as types of the Christ, even the miraculous resurrection of the dead will not provide sufficient warning of judgment and the great reversal that Christ brings about. On the other hand, the implication is that those who do pay heed to these Old Testament types and the Law will recognize Christ and obey his teaching.

Chrysostom draws attention to the special character of Abraham in this parable. "Abraham was hospitable. The rich man set's Lazarus with Abraham, in order that Lazarus also may convict him of inhospitality. For that patriarch hunted out those who were going past and brought them into his own house; but this rich man overlooked the one who was lying inside the gate."³⁵ The rich man, a Jew who calls Abraham "father" (v. 24), is supposed to have lived his life in the manner of Abraham. Chrysostom's unwritten "texts" In this connection are the baptismal rite and the eucharist, from which his congregation could recollect that they too were "offspring" of Abraham, meaning that God expected them to strive conscientiously to imitate Christ, in

35. John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catherine P. Roth (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), pp. 50-51. Later, Chrysostom also mentions Job as one whose "door was open to every comer" (Job 31:32).

whom God's promise to Abraham was fulfilled. "The poor man has one plea, his want and his standing in need; do not require anything else from him; but even if he is the most wicked of all men and is at a loss for his necessary sustenance, let us free him from hunger. Christ also commanded us to do this, when he said, 'Be like your father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust' [Matt. 5:45]."³⁶

The eucharistic context of this sermon cannot be overemphasized, however. In his first sermon on Lazarus and the rich man, Chrysostom deliberately alludes to the eucharistic table. He invokes the image of eating at the dinner table, mentioning how the rich man gorged himself while ignoring the starving man at his gate. And he admonishes,

As for you, my beloved, if you sit at table, remember that from the table you must go to prayer. Fill your belly so moderately that you may not become too heavy to bend your knees and call upon your God. Do you not see how the donkeys leave the manger ready to walk and carry loads and fulfill their proper service? But when you leave the table you are useless and unserviceable for any kind of work. . . . The time after dinner is the time of thanksgiving, and he who gives thanks should not be drunk but sober and wide awake.³⁷

As Michael G. Cartwright has helpfully pointed out,

The imagery of the Lukan parable, Paul's first letter to the Corinthians [chap. 10], the riotous gathering outside all created a rich associative setting within which Chrysostom addressed the Christians of Antioch. Festive tables outside the door, the tables at home, the table of the Lord before them, the table of the rich man's feast - the table to which Lazarus looked up with eyes of hunger and longing; all these "tables" become the multivoiced matrix within which the Gospel is proclaimed, heard, and responded to - in short, *enacted* in the context of community. Moreover . . . the sermon is itself set in the context of the pro-anaphora which prepared the faithful for the Eucharistic banquet.³⁸

36. Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, p. 52

37. Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, p. 27

38. Cartwright, "Practices, Politics and Performances: Toward a Communal Hermeneutic for Christian Ethics" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University), pp. 10-11. I owe Cartwright a special debt of gratitude for the help I received from his dissertation as well as from personal conversations and correspondence that helped to define the thematic content of this chapter.

It is against this background that Chrysostom forcefully insists in his second sermon that Christian prayer and good works should be directed first of all to the poor, to the likes of Lazarus. "For this reason Christ said, as He welcomed those who had acted [hospitably toward strangers and outcasts], 'As you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me' [Matt. 25:40]."³⁹ Abraham was hospitable, as was Christ after him, and Christ demanded the same of all who would identify their lives with him. This instruction prepared Chrysostom's congregation for his final radical prescription: "I beg you remember this without fail, that not to share our wealth with the poor is theft from the poor and deprivation of their means of life; we do not possess our own wealth but theirs." Those who would be nourished with Christ's body and blood must likewise be "nourishing Christ in poverty here and laying up great profit hereafter."⁴⁰

I recognize that Chrysostom's use of the Bible here is not the purest example of typology, which properly involves setting out type and antetype in explicit fashion. It is not that such "pure" examples are difficult to find in Chrysostom's vast corpus of New Testament homilies; indeed, his writings are replete with them. But I am interested in a broader definition of figural or typological exegesis than such examples would lead us to. Chrysostom knew the Bible well, and it is fair to say that he presumed that his congregation also would recall (if from no other source than his own preaching) what the Pauline epistles, in particular, say about Abraham as a type of the man of faith whose hope was in Christ. This recollection would have been reinforced by the eucharistic context of the preached word and a liturgical theology so deeply indebted to this typological claim as to leave no one uncertain that the one holy and eternal sacrifice of which Christ is both offering and offerer is the antetype (or fulfillment) of all the Old Testament sacrifices.⁴¹

Hans Frei describes figural exegesis as "at once a literary and a

39. Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, p. 51

40. Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, p. 55.

41. In the Anamnesis of the Byzantine liturgy of St. Basil, the celebrant prays, "Look upon us, O God, and behold this our service, and accept it as thou didst accept the gifts of Abel, the sacrifices of Noah, the burnt-offerings of Abraham, the priestly offices of Moses and Aaron, the peace-offerings of Samuel. Even as thou didst accept at the hands of the holy Apostles this true ministry, so also do thou in thy beneficence, O Lord, accept these gifts; that having been accounted worthy blamelessly to minister at thy holy Altar, we may receive the recompense of wise and faithful stewards, in the treeble day of the just requiting" (*Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church*, p. 99).

historical procedure, an interpretation of stories and their meanings by weaving them together into a common narrative to a single history and its pattern of meanings.“ He goes on to explain that this procedure means to depict a (biblical) world that lays claim to being “the one and only real world.” It becomes the duty of the Christian “to fit himself into that world . . . [and] to see his disposition, his actions and passions, the shape of his own life as well as that of his era’s events as figures of that stoned world.”⁴² John Chrysostom was an artful teller of the biblical stories. He painted his listeners into the world of the Bible. When in his sermon he describes the failure to share one’s wealth with the poor as “theft from the poor and a deprivation of their means,” he is not claiming possession of a rationally apprehensible, universalizable principle but rather is adding one more detail to the picture of the biblical world into which he invites his listeners. This is what makes the prescription so powerful and so difficult to reject for the listener who desires to belong to that world.

An Application: The Matter of Surrogacy

We have seen how John Chrysostom was an exemplary practitioner of a communal and typological hermeneutic. I have wondered on occasion how Chrysostom might have addressed the issue of surrogate motherhood and in what circumstances he would have found the opportunity to do so. As I read his homilies on marriage and family life,⁴³ I am repeatedly impressed by how his moral instruction is consciously founded in the stones of the biblical marriages (e.g., Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah) and familial relationships (e.g., Joseph and his brothers, Hannah and Samuel). The Orthodox rites of marriage richly allude to the biblical marriages that illustrate divine and human fidelity. And so I imagine that if Chrysostom were living today, he would locate a discussion of surrogate motherhood in a homily on marriage, with no apologies to his more pagan or secularly oriented parishioners. Surrogacy is an issue that needs a Christian response not primarily because the future of contract law is at stake or even the happiness of couples but because it denies the church’s understanding

42. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 2-3.

43. See especially *St. John Chrysostom on Marriage and Family*, trans. Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson (Crestwood, N. St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986).

of marriage as a "one flesh" unity with a vocation to expand and extend the kingdom of God into the lives of children and strangers.

Over the past decade we have heard much about surrogacy. The debate was prompted especially by the highly publicized "Baby M" case of the mid-1980s. In this case, the father's custody of a child born through a surrogate arrangement was contested by the woman with whom he legally contracted to conceive and give birth. The plea for custody of the child by Mary Beth Whitehead, the biological mother of Baby M, was denied by the New Jersey Supreme Court. William Stern and his wife were granted custody of Baby M, and Mrs. Whitehead received only visitation rights.

Within the body of literature on surrogacy published thus far, Christian ethicists have said surprisingly little of a theological nature. On the whole they have simply rehearsed the arguments of legal scholars, psychologists, and sociologists. Their position seems to be that the issue of surrogacy is mostly a matter of weighing certain legally guaranteed personal rights, calculating consequent economic practices or psychological effects and the like, and setting policy. I would not dismiss the importance of such considerations, but I think it is telling how little of this discussion *starts* from normative claims about the nature and the purposes of Christian marriage. One would think that from the Christian standpoint this is where the surrogacy issue is to be engaged. But perhaps this presumes a biblical mind that contemporary Christian catechism and seminary or graduate school training is no longer inculcating.

The Orthodox marriage rites place every new Christian marriage within the history of the biblical marriages in which God has shown his steadfast love and through which he has pursued his promise of redemption. Moral instruction about the meaning and purposes of marital life is gleaned from these stories. The great patriarchal and matriarchal marriages are recalled. Each new Christian marriage is set within the history of these biblical marriages, beginning with Abraham and Sarah and the divine covenant and culminating with the marriages of Zechariah and Elizabeth and Joseph and Mary, through whose offspring, John and Jesus, the promised kingdom of God breaks dramatically into human history. In this way marriage, the union of the two in one flesh, is defined as a primary form of participation in God's redemptive purpose — indeed, as an ecclesial event. A Christian marriage well lived, measured by the standards (and mistakes) of the holy marriages that have preceded it, is a proleptic sign of God's eschatological kingdom.

The story of Abraham and Sarah, which is always recalled in the Orthodox rites, is particularly informative in this regard because it specifically involves a case of surrogacy. God promises Abraham an heir, but as Abraham and Sarah age they begin to despair of having a child on their own and select Hagar to serve as a surrogate mother. The Orthodox marital rites present their adoption of this strategy as yet another failure of faith in the context of their marriage (along with Abraham's attempts to pass Sarah off as his sister in order to save his life and his household — Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18), actions that jeopardized rather than assisted the fulfillment of God's covenant promise. It is significant, however, that the biblical authors tell the story in such a way as to indicate that Abraham and Sarah made their mistakes with the intent of pursuing the larger soteriological purposes that they saw governing their lives. Abraham did not lie about his relationship with Sarah merely to preserve his own life, for example. Nor did he and Sarah turn to the surrogacy alternative merely because they personally desired children. The Orthodox Church honors the patriarchs and matriarchs as holy figures not because they lived faultless lives but because they learned their lessons well and struck the path to salvation. The same is expected of those who marry in Christ, the One whose relationship to the church the Old Testament marriages foreshadowed.

The presence of Hagar and Ishmael threatened the peace of Abraham's household and, thus all that God had sought to accomplish through it. The slave girl was emboldened to ridicule her mistress, who was unable to bear a child; and later, after Isaac's birth, Sarah grew jealous of Ishmael's presence and joint claim to the covenant. Ultimately, Hagar and Ishmael were expelled permanently from the household. There is good practical wisdom and psychology in these stories that Christians and Jews today ought not to overlook in their reasoning about surrogacy. But precisely because the Abraham and Sarah and Hagar stories are read and enacted liturgically in typological fashion as key elements of the biblical narrative of redemption culminating in the Incarnation, the Orthodox Church will derive from them an ethic that exceeds the measure of even this practical wisdom. In such a context, the Abraham and Sarah narratives, along with the other stories of patriarchal-matriarchal marriages, tell us that spousal union, motherhood, fatherhood, and children participate in purposes beyond the legal obligations and beyond the wishes and pleasures — of those who aspire to be parents, to conceive, give birth to, or raise children. The Byzantine rite makes this abundantly clear in the prayer of crowning:

O God most pure, the Creator of every living thing, who didst transform the rib of our forefather Adam into a wife, because of thy love towards mankind, and didst bless them, and say unto them: Increase, and multiply, and have dominion over the earth; and didst make the twain one flesh: and what God hath joined together, that let no man put asunder: Thou who didst bless thy servant Abraham, and opening the womb didst make him to be lather of many nations; who didst give Isaac unto Rebecca, and didst bless her in child-bearing; who didst join Jacob unto Rachel, and from that union didst generate the twelve Patriarchs; . . . who didst accept Zecharias and Elizabeth, and didst make their offspring to be the Forerunner; who, from the Root of Jesse according to the flesh, didst bud forth the ever-Virgin One, and wast incarnate of her; and wast born of her for the redemption of the human race; who, through thine unutterable gift and manifold goodness didst come to Cana of Galilee, and didst bless the marriage there, that thou mightest make manifest that it is thy will that there should be lawful marriage and the begetting of children: Do thou the same all-holy Master, accept the prayer of thy servants. As thou wert present there, so likewise be thou present here, with thine invisible protection. . . . Bless this marriage and vouchsafe unto these thy servants, . . . a peaceful life, length of days, chastity, mutual love in the bond of peace, long-lived seed, gratitude from their posterity, a crown of glory which fadeth not away.⁴⁴

Thus, Orthodox are encouraged to formulate decisions concerning surrogacy not just on the basis of considerations about its immediate effects on spousal relationships or its psychological impact on the parents and children involved but with a view to how the practice influences their understanding of marriage and child rearing and how it affects the mission of the Orthodox Church. They are called to make a decision about the moral permissibility or impermissibility of surrogacy in light of the faith, hope, and charity that the Byzantine prayer identifies as the virtues of the patriarchs and matriarchs and that belonged to the One whose blessings are beseeched for every married couple that believes in him. They will have to judge how surrogacy measures up to the standard that the church sets for marriage — that it be a one-flesh union bound up with the eschatological promise of God's kingdom.

44. *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church*, p.295.

***The Eucharistic Locus of an Ecclesial Hermeneutic:
The Pauline Model***

A central ecclesial usage of the New Testament writers is that of the "body," a gathered community that is obedient to the governance and rulership of the One whom it identifies as the founder of that community and the One in whom that community's identity is secured. I have argued, with help from Schmemann, Meeks, and Lash, that it is this body that carries the normative hermeneutic for Christian living and that the primary locus for that communal hermeneutic is the liturgy of the church. Through the example of the surrogacy issue, I have endeavored to show how that communal hermeneutic can be brought to bear on ethical practice. Now I want to conclude with an examination of how the typological and communal themes join to form a hermeneutical basis for an ecclesial Christian ethic.

St. Paul offers a model for this hermeneutic in 1 Corinthians 10-11 by typologically identifying the church with Israel. Speaking to certain controversies raging within the Corinthian community over church discipline and ethics, the apostle anchors his counsel with references to baptism and the eucharistic meal, reminding the Corinthians that through these practices they gain and sustain their identity as a peculiar community.

You should understand my brothers, that our ancestors were all under the pillar of cloud and all of them passed through the Red Sea; and so they all received baptism into the fellowship of Moses in cloud and sea. They all ate the same supernatural food, and all drank the same supernatural drink; I mean, they all drank from the supernatural rock that accompanied their travels — and that rock was Christ. And yet, most of them were not accepted by God, for the desert was strewn with their corpses.

These events happened as symbols [typoi] to warn us not to set our desires on evil things, as they did. (1 Cor 10:1-6, NEB)

Thus, according to St. Paul, the eucharist and baptism are the primal activities of remembrance through which the *ecclesia* discerns and defines its historical and spiritual relation to Israel, recognizes itself as the fulfillment of God's promise to redeem Israel, and prepares itself to become a people worthy of inheriting the kingdom of which the church itself is the eschatological and sacramental sign. On the basis of this *remembrance*, St. Paul draws authority and warrant for his admonitions and counsel to the Corinthian Christians. For Paul the issue was

not primarily whether the Corinthians were breaking certain theological, customary, or secular rules when they ate meat consecrated to an idol (1 Cor. 8:1-13), when women neglected to wear veils in worship (11:3-17), or when they broke up into factions at the common agape meal, the wealthier refusing to share what they brought with the others (11:17-33). Obedience to an external authority or ethical code is not the fundamental issue for the church when it gathers as a eucharistic community or seeks to extend its life to the rest of society. Rather, the full measure of Christian character and conduct is to be derived from a typological understanding of the saving events that extend back to ancient Israel and forward to the Incarnation. These events are what secure Christian identity. Properly interpreted, they serve as guides and teaching tools for following and imitating Christ faithfully (1 Cor 11:1). When, at the beginning of chapter 10, St. Paul links the identities of the church and Israel through baptism and its type (the crossing of the Red Sea) and the eucharistic meal and its type (the manna from heaven and the water from the rock) and then brings this typological way of narrating the Christian story into a critical conversation about current realities, he is, in fact, showing the Corinthian Christians how Christian ethics is done.

Later in chapter 10 (vv 14-18) and again in chapter 11 (vv 23-26), St. Paul directs the Corinthian Christians to the primary location of this remembrance and discernment. "So, then, dear friends, shun idolatry. I speak to you as men of sense. Form your own judgement on what I say. When we bless 'the cup of blessing', is it not a means of sharing in the blood of Christ? When we break the bread, is it not a means of sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, many as we are, are one body; for it is one loaf of which we all partake" (1 Cor. 10:14-17, NEB). The apostle's word on the subject is not sufficient: the Christians of Corinth must "form their own judgement." Through eucharistic worship and identification with Christ, they must discern whether it is proper either to participate in pagan worship or eat meat that has been dedicated to pagan deities. A general moral good is not what is at stake here; they must set their sights on the saving truth that is made available to all those who participate with belief in the eucharistic banquet. In the shared meal, the Word becomes flesh, the very body of those who have gathered in remembrance and praise of him who is their Messiah and Redeemer. Either the community itself becomes the evangelical truth or it does not. Participation in pagan worship is strictly prohibited because it is a denial of that truth and the refusal to become it. "Look at the Jewish people. Are not those who partake in the sacri-

ficial meal sharers in the altar? What do I imply by this? that an idol is anything but an idol? or food offered to it anything more than food? No; but the sacrifices the heathen offer are offered (in the words of Scripture) 'to demons and to that which is not God'; and I will not have you become partners with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the Lord's table and the table of demons" (10:18-21, NEB). This soteriological truth is not at issue in the purchase and consumption of meat consecrated in pagan sacrifices. Hence, a Christian must make the decision about whether to eat it on the basis of a concern about whether doing so would offend or harm other members of the Christian fellowship or whether it would create harmful divisions within the one body of believers (10:23-33; cf. 84-13). As Meeks has shown in his book *The First Urban Christians*, by using Scripture and the tradition as he does here and elsewhere in 1 Corinthians, St. Paul undertakes two important self-interpretive activities for the church: he clarifies the nature of the Christian polity and the social boundaries that separate Christian from non-Christian, and he defines the terms on which that polity can with integrity engage and bear witness to the larger society. I believe St. Paul is also teaching us that a liturgical reading of Scripture is sometimes also a more appropriately scriptural reading.

I should say in closing that in describing the eucharist as the primary locus of Christian ethics, I do not want to detract from the doxological significance of worship. I agree with Paul Lehmann, however, that "as the politics of God give to the eucharistic liturgy its occasion and significance, so the ethical reality of the *koinonia* gives to the celebration of the Eucharist its integrity."⁴⁵ The ethical character of the *koinonia* is rooted in the messianic promise. Christian ethics springs to life through the hope inspired by faith that this promise of redemption is fulfilled in and through the church. Christian doxology gives substance to this hope. It affirms that the God who has made the promise has also tabernacled among us (John 1:1-5, 14) and that he is now and ever has been the Lord and Judge of all creation. I do not know how else to understand the great eucharistic prayers of Orthodoxy that narrate the biblical story of creation, fall, and redemption in Jesus Christ. It is also powerfully dramatized at the close of the Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Church in its lection from the first chapter of the Gospel of John and recitation of Psalm 34. Here doxology combines with ethical instruction about the character of God as the

45. Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context*, p. 103.

Lord and Judge of creation: “Keep thy tongue from evil; and thy lips that they speak no guile. Eschew evil and do good, seek peace and ensue it.”⁴⁶ Geoffrey Wainwright sums it up when he states that the liturgy “is the locus in which the story of the constitutive events [of Christian existence] is retold in order to elicit an appropriate response in worship and ethics to the God who remains faithful to the purposes which his earlier acts declare.”⁴⁷

Conclusion

While I have sought in this chapter to address the role of the Bible in Christian ethics, I would not have that inquiry limited by academic arguments concerning the meanings and proper uses of texts or concerning the nature and legitimate concerns of Christian ethics. For in the last analysis, neither biblical scholars nor ethicists decide these questions: the churches decide them. In so many cases, when theologians and ethicists have allowed such questions to determine what they do, it has blinded them to the ecclesial context and liturgical performance of the Bible. I think a disquieting though largely unexamined awareness of this situation accounts for the strong attraction of narrative theology in recent years. The blinding formalism and constrictive conceptualism to which I am referring have had deleterious consequences for the use of the Bible in Christian ethics. Many have sought to mine the Bible for narrow and abstract pronouncements on specific issues or for statements that will substantiate the credibility of some concept such as justice or peace. Christian ethics is ever in jeopardy of becoming, or being mistaken for, someone else’s ethics when it drifts too far from singularly Christian practice.

As we have seen by looking at Chrysostom and St. Paul, there is another way to understand the relation of the Bible to Christian ethics. The Bible should not be reduced to a resource for moral decision making or an authority from which to address prized theological or cultural concepts. Rather, it must be allowed to define what is normative for how Christians behave, to serve as the image of what they as a community are to be. I have tried to show that the Orthodox tradition possesses a rich treasury of liturgies and rites in which the biblical world

46. *Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church* (New York: Delphic Press, 1950), p. 105.

47. Wainwright, *Doxology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 153.

with its images is powerfully narrated, enacted, and embodied communally. Such are the occasions — whether in ordinary worship, the great feasts of the church, or the sacraments and blessings of baptism, marriage, ordination, and burial — in which Christian identity and destiny are defined and secured.

It remains to be seen whether these ecclesial and liturgical renderings of the biblical world will be applied in an ethical way. Nothing less is at stake than a renewal of the scriptural mind, transcending all the formalisms, foundationalisms, narrativist theologies, and fundamentalism to which the Orthodox Church, like its sister churches, has been mightily attracted here in its new American home.

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