

THE LORD'S TABLE -
AN EVANGELICAL ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE

AN ESSAY IN
SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY

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BACKGROUND

The Evangelical Orthodox Church (EOC)¹ is probably one of the smallest parts in the body of Christ i.e the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.² As a small body- part our existence has been one of obscurity, barely noticed by more prominent members of the body. This has some pros and cons. Benefits include that we can be bold in stating what we hold to be true because we have little to loose and have some flexibility in the process of discerning truth. Caveats include not being invited to conversations with other parts of the body and the impacts of feeling isolated and unrecognized. I believe it is safe to say that we all desire to be seen, loved and part of communion. Hence the topic at hand. The EOC has always viewed herself as a part of, not separate from the Catholic Church, albeit with a distinctive personality

We believe this personality brings gifts of value for the rest of the body of Christ. We base this claim on our history of incarnating and marrying our evangelical heritage (Alliance, Associate Gospel, Evangelical Free, Mennonite etc) with an Orthodox theology. For forty years we have given witness that these two labels. “Evangelical” and “Orthodox” do not have to contradict each other at an incarnational level but rather they can aid one another to bring about the telos in one another.

We believe that the greatest gift that we can offer to the table (of conversation at this point) is that of being an “interpreter” between the different parts of the body.³ Being one of the few parts

¹ Please see www.evangelicalorthodox.org for more information.

²I will use an incarnational and allegorical language rather than a political one throughout this essay. I believe this kind of language is intrinsically bound to who we understand ourselves to be. It also avoids, to some degree, the scholastic trap of shutting down a conversation by defining meanings and words to their ‘end’ too early. It is also the kind of language that Christ Himself often used.

³ This essay is written with the blessing of our presiding bishop and will be submitted to our synod of bishop for their approval .

of the body that has lived with the labels, tensions and hopefully realities, of “Evangelical” and “Orthodox” for a period of time, we are able to offer aid in terms of understanding both “sides” of the East (Orthodox) and the West (Evangelical), to the Catholic Church.⁴ In the EOC the conversation between the two has turned into an incarnated reality. It is a reality hoped and longed for by many a scholar, theologian, and Christian.⁵ It is our hope that we can testify to the possibility that the two “labels” can co-exist in close proximity with each other. More than that, they actually need one another to find the fulness of their personhood and expression. This does not mean that we desire other churches to become like us. Rather we hold the hope that real peace and communion is possible for parties that seems far apart. Communion is revealed when distinguished personalities are able to communicate and interact without losing their personal identity and expression.⁶ We come before you fellow brothers and sisters as small and insignificant. We come as the least of these and we ask for your mercy. We come as a voice in the wilderness. I come, not as a scholar but as someone who is broken. I come as one recognizing that whatever good may come from the following words is not a result of any good work that I possess but as a consequence of God’s Holy Spirit working in and through broken people who acknowledges their utter dependence on Him.

⁴ If I could I would not use labels at all since we believe that many parts of the body have Orthodox understanding and Evangelical expression. For the sake of the written word and to reveal the problems before us we need to use labels and definitions. This being the case is part of the very issue of “locating” God’s mysteries in time and space. Jesus Christ being the only one able to do it with complete accuracy hence our unity must be found in Him.

⁵ I hope I am not superimposing my own opinion on persons like St Francis of Assisi, Thomas Aquinas, Thomas a’ Kempis, Luther, Melancton, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, C.S. Lewis, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, Louis Bouyer, , Pope John II, N.T Wright, Jurgen Moltmann, Bp. Kallsitos Ware and Dr. Bradley Nassif (to mention a few) when I suggest that they all had/have a desire for the Church to be One.

⁶ This idea is well developed and elaborated on by John D. Zizioulas in his book *Being as communion*, albeit within the confinements of the Orthodox definitions and understanding of Church.

Reading the essays about the Lord's table from the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist and Pentecostal perspectives I am struck by my own lack of eloquence and flow in both written and spoken language and that I have much to learn in this regard.⁷ However, this lack might be of unseen benefit since it introduces an aspect of the Christian witness that eloquent language of doctrine and definition often have a hard time encapsulating, namely the aspect of brokenness. I believe God uses the broken and weak things of this world to reveal His truth. You, the reader will have to discern if that is the case here.

INTRODUCTION

The theology about the Eucharist of the EOC anchors itself in the arrival of the Kingdom. To put it directly, the knowledge of God, theology,⁸ springs from being with Him in the Kingdom and partaking of His life.⁹ Much like our older and wiser canonical Orthodox brothers and sisters we believe that we enter the Kingdom as we partake of the Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist.¹⁰ It is the heavenly meal. Christ is the bread from heaven.¹¹ We believe that this entering into the Kingdom does not happen by way of assertion as much as it happens by way of recognizing that we, as persons, have lost our Godlikeness in the fall of Adam. We can only truly receive if we recognize that we are in need. In accordance with classic Orthodox theology we believe, contrary to the *language* of Calvin, that we have retained our image even though we also

⁷ Gordon T. Smith (editor), Contributions by Jeffrey Gros, John R. Stephenson, Leanne Van Dyk, Roger E. Olson and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Lord's supper, Five views*, 2008 Inter Varsity Press

⁸ "If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian." Evagrius Ponticus - *Treatise on Prayer*, 61.

⁹ John 15:5, John 17 NKJV

¹⁰ John 10:9, Hebrews 10:19 - 20 NKJV

¹¹ John 6:49 - 51 NKJV

would say that this image is marred. We come as broken (but not crushed beyond recognition¹²), we come as persons who recognize that without God we can not realize ourselves as persons. We come as a people recognizing that we need God's divinity to heal our marred humanity so that we can be incorporated in life for eternity. The Kingdom is here and it is yet to come. It is a divine reality that can not be encapsulated in human formula and reason. Yet, it is revealed in the flesh by Jesus Christ. As an eschatological reality, the Kingdom is both cataphatic and apophatic, experienced as an encounter in the current moment and as a mystery forever beyond our reach.

Throughout the history of the world, this recognition of one's own inadequacy to save oneself has expressed in many different religions, formulas, liturgies, and choreography. Everything from the evangelical "sinners prayer" to Roman Catholic penance has been used within the Church to formalize this understanding of ourselves as broken and dependent on God's mercy. The EOC would say that the choreography and the formula is of great value since it locates the sacramental reality in time and space hence making us able to encounter it. However, as long as it does happen in time and space, in the current moment, we are more relaxed about exactly how it happens than perhaps our brothers and sisters in the canonical orthodox Church. This pastoral approach to the economy of salvation and sacramental reality is something we believe is anchored in the joint testimony of Scripture as Tradition and in Tradition as expressed in Scripture. This intrinsic connection and correlation was evident in the Church at least for the first 400 years when She was visibly one communion.¹³ It is only later when the Church became a

¹² The only Christian theologian of repute who argued that the *imago Dei* itself was taken away *and* that the very substance of fallen humanity was sin was Matthias Flavius Illyricus. This view was repudiated in the formula of Concord deemed Manichean.

¹³ The Church has not been one communion since the Oriental Orthodox Church identifying as Miaphysite started to develop a separate communion in the 5th century based upon their Christological understanding. The Church was barely able to identify and agree upon the Scriptural canon in 398 ad in Carthage before it started to divide.

political power, that overarching formula and doctrine was deemed necessary and different interpretations and language of different formula eventually lead to the division of the Church.

We believe it is appropriate to begin with an emphases on acknowledging the reality we find ourselves in, our human predicament as it is, rather than with completeness/fullness in conversing about the Eucharist. We believe the Eucharist to be that which Jesus said it is, namely food.¹⁴ I will resist the temptation of attempting to describe what kind of food, and just take Jesus words at face value. 'This is My Body, broken for you.'¹⁵ Starting here is appropriate because our dependence on food and the world around us, even before the fall,¹⁶ implies:

- a) That we are not complete and always on a journey.
- b) That we live in relationship with the context in which we find ourselves. We are being sustained and built up with the literal interaction with the world around us. In food we incorporate the world around us into ourselves.¹⁷ We are intrinsically bound to creation. We cannot exist apart from it. We are communal beings. God gives us all of the plants of the earth to eat. God also symbolized freedom of choice in a meal. Adam's and Eve's rebellion, for independence and self-reliance, takes place without proper discernment. They fail to discern the food they are eating because they fail to trust God. They still need food but now the food is hard to come by and will only extend life for a certain time.

¹⁴ Luke 22:19, John 6:54 - 56, 1 Cor 11:24 NKJV

¹⁵ This is of course the very issue that we are conversing about. I resist this temptation for good reason. As far as I know, every attempt to interpret what Jesus *exactly* means in saying these words has sown the seeds of division in His body, the Church.

¹⁶ This has significant implications since God hosted us at His table before the fall. This would suggest that the table is not a response to the fall but a reality of un-fallen creation, how creation was meant to be.

¹⁷ Physics and biology have a lot to teach the Church about the literal interaction between entities in the revealed sphere of the world.

When we recognize our dependence on God and His creation it strikes at the root of Adam's rebellion. As we trust God what to eat and what not to eat the act of pride is counteracted. We do this not by legal formula but in a new, relational and transformative way as in humility we offer fruits from the toil of our hands. The curse of the land once again becomes the food in paradise through Jesus Christ. We, in a very literal way, become what we eat and we were created to become gods, (small 'g')¹⁸. In this regard, food becomes the universal remnant of reality as it was intended before the fall. Food reveals to us our dependence on God. Heavenly food, God Himself in Christ Jesus becomes for us the needed food for us to assume our intended purpose and reason for being. Recognizing our brokenness is necessary because it presents our reality. But brokenness is not the eschaton or *telos* (fulfillment, ultimate object or aim) of our journey. The *telos* of our journey and identity is Christlikeness. The mysterious, yet incarnated and relationally revealed eucharistic journey is one of re - membering (anamnesis) ourselves into the body of Christ in order to access the *telos* of eternal growth. In the eucharistic journey we lay hold of our created person in the current moment transforming the curse of the past into new life. We remember ourselves into Christ's eternal body because this is the only way to transcend time and transform the curse of the law. We re-member the second and glorious coming of Christ¹⁹ because He has fulfilled the purpose of time. In this mystery that goes beyond the human faculties of reason and reaches into a reality beyond our definitions for time and space, we

¹⁸ 1 John 3:2- 3, 2 Corinthians 3:17 - 18 , John 17:21 - 24, NKJV St Ireaneus bishop of Lyons (c. 130–202) "God became what we are in order to make us what he is himself." Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215), "Yea, I say, the Word of God became a man so that you might learn from a man how to become a god." St Justin Martyr (c. 100–165) insisted that in the beginning men "were made like God, free from suffering and death," and that they are thus "deemed worthy of becoming gods and of having power to become sons of the highest."

¹⁹ To use the words of the divine liturgy of St John Chrysostom: "Remembering this precept of salvation and everything that was done for our sakes: the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, *the sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious coming*. We offer You Your own from what is Your own, on behalf of all and for all."

glimpse the fullness of whom we are created to be. This process of going from cataphatic brokenness reaching towards the encounter of apophatic fullness, this divine darkness²⁰, used to be somewhat troubling for the EOC at the beginning of our journey. Christ came in the flesh, we can know Him! Why all this talk of mystery? As children of pragmatic evangelism, we were at first somewhat excited to let our assertiveness and methodology superimpose its characteristics on this mystical experience. We didn't want to let our cataphatic reasoning play second fiddle. We need to articulate what we believe, right? We need to understand God, don't we? We do, in our fallen state. In a fallen world we do need to defend the faith by way of asserting Truth in a loving way. We do need to make sense of things. That is a part of the mystery of Christ's incarnation. He revealed Truth as a real Person. But this overemphasis on articulation, this overt asserting of what we believe, was not part of Adam and Eve's reality before the fall. They lived as children in the garden of Eden, experiencing the love of God by relationship and proximity, not by defining who God was and is and how He is working. They knew Him intimately as a given. They lived with Him rather than talking about Him (even though they undoubtedly did that as well). The explanation was unnecessary until knowledge got redefined by the eating from the tree of knowledge. We find ourselves as persons living under the curse of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Now our modus operandi is to separate, segregate and pull things apart in order to recognize that the two hands of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,²¹ are at work in the world in order to redeem it from the curse of this very tree. We share this holistic understanding of the Eucharist as heavenly food redeeming the act of eating from the tree of knowledge with the canonical orthodox Church. The tree of death, the wood of the cross,

²⁰ St Gregory of Nyssa and St Dionysius the Areopagite developed a theology of 'Divine Darkness' where the mystery of God takes precedence and where silence and prayer, rather than reasoning, is emphasized.

²¹ St Irenaeus *Against Heresies Book 5 Chapter 6*

becomes the way to the tree of Life. We share so much of sacramental theology that it is hard to single out where we diverge and why we are not in full communion with them. But let me try to explain. It is in the recognition of the fall that I propose we differ somewhat from the canonical orthodox view about theology (knowledge of God) in general and about the Eucharist in particular. We recognize that in our fallen state we can only approach the fullness of the Kingdom through recognizing our brokenness, and not by asserting that we possess the fullness of truth.²² We recognize that God's Heavenly Kingdom is a current reality but that it is something that we can not have dominion over. It is not ours to rule on the earth, but to enter and be a part of. My understanding is that the Orthodox recognize this in their orthodoxy but the EOC has trouble encountering it in their orthopraxy or in their expression. The EOC differs from the canonical orthodox Churches in that we refrain from the claim of possessing the fullness of the Truth according to how we define truth. We believe there is something awry with saying:

“We possess the fullness of the Truth.”

“How do you know?”

“Because we possess the fullness of the Truth.”

It is this circular reasoning concerning Truth that often comes across from the canonical Orthodox even if that is not their intention. If this is the perception of the canonical orthodox by so many other denominations in the Body of Christ then maybe that is a signal that this is indeed to some extent, what is going on. In the EOC, though we often fail, we aim to invite Truth to fulfill us rather than claim ownership of it. I believe that the rigid ecclesiological definitions that have prevailed in the majority of the orthopraxy within Orthodoxy, springing out of a desire to preserve the Truth in facing persecution, (and maybe as a result of Western scholasticism that

²² Repent, and be baptized. Repentance occurs before baptism in the majority of Scriptural references. 2 Kings 5:13, Matthew 3:6, Mark:1:15, Acts 2:38, NKJV

often gets all the blame due to historical events.²³) have developed into laws that limit the effectiveness of the work of the Holy Spirit. It would seem that “the Church” with Her legislation determines where the Holy Spirit is rather than the Spirit determining where the Church is. The EOC believes that this is not an either-or question but rather that it is essential to recognize that leaning towards one or the other would be detrimental for a holistic view of ecclesiology and soteriology. If we understand the Church as being the body of Christ, Jesus hands, and feet in the world, then the Church is where the Holy Spirit is and the Holy Spirit is where the Church is because Jesus, with His body and the Holy Spirit, are inseparable. We must never try to separate Christ and the Holy Spirit with exercises of the mind. To do so is to reinforce and repeat eating of the fruit from the tree of knowledge. We must use our mind and our heart to point to the covenant of love that the Son and the Spirit live in. The two ‘hands’ of God the Father promote each other in the bond of love for the greater glory of God. Our Christology needs to be pneumatic and our pneumatology needs to be Christological.²⁴ It is in this bond of love between the Son and the Holy Spirit, springing out from the Father, that we need to approach the revealed mystery of the Eucharist if we hope to avoid a skewed and subjective view that singles out just one or two parts of the whole. The rigidity and structure of the Church are needed to locate Her in reality, to incarnate Her reality, but that can not come at the expense of limiting the Spirit to

²³ The prime example being the Sack of Constantinople in 1204. “Eastern Christendom has never forgotten those three appalling days of pillage... What shocked the Greeks more than anything was the wanton and systematic sacrilege of the Crusaders. How could men who had specially dedicated themselves to God's service treat the things of God in such a way? As the Byzantines watched the Crusaders tear to pieces the altar and icon screen in the Church of the Holy Wisdom, and set prostitutes on the Patriarch's throne, they must have felt that those who did such things were not Christians in the same sense as themselves... Can we wonder if the Greeks after 1204 also looked on the Latins as profani? Christians in the west still do not realize how deep is the disgust and how lasting the horror with which Orthodox regard actions such as the sack of Constantinople by the Crusaders.” Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, (NY: Penguin Books, revised 1980 edition), 69

²⁴ Contemporary examples of this concept would be Gordon T. Smith in his sacramental theology course at Regent College in the spring of 2016 as well as Peter Halldorf in his three books (Swedish only) *Andens Folk (The people of the Spirit)* 2006 Cordia Forlag, *Du brinnande Karelekslaga (The burning flame of love)* Cordia Forlag 2004 and *Drick djupt av Anden (Drink deeply from the Holy Spirit)* Libris Forlag 2010. The Cappadocian Fathers would probably be the most prominent defenders of this concept in Ancient Christianity.

our ecclesial definitions. Our Orthodoxy must not trump our ability to spread the good news to the broken and our going out with the good news must not sacrifice the integrity of our belief. We must gather around Christ (ekklesia) and His teaching to be able to spread it in a redeeming way to the brokenhearted. Our activity will always reflect our identity because we are sacramental. This manna from Heaven, Christ, has appeared in the physical because in a mystery, it brings the spiritual reality (reality itself), the Kingdom of Heaven into the revealed world. It will always be as impossible to explain the mystery of the Eucharist just as it will always be impossible to explain the humanity and divinity of Christ. If this is the case does it imply that the Eucharist indeed is His body and blood?

MEANING OF THE EUCHARIST

In terms of developing an articulated Eucharistic theology, we, like the canonical Orthodox are hesitant. How do we expound and explain the mystery of God without diluting its meaning? Without getting it wrong? Without causing division? How do we focus on one part and not deemphasize the other parts? We believe that we must enter the mystery of the Eucharist to be able to know anything about it since we believe that actual knowledge is more personal than cerebral, more relational than informational.²⁵ That being said we still need the words and the information to communicate that this mystery is available. We believe that the bread and the wine is the body of Christ. We can not explain exactly how, when and where. We can only believe and enter the mystery in faith. We can and do offer an answer to the question why: for the life of the world. We believe that the Eucharist contains life and as such re-minds us of all the

²⁵ If this is true it makes it harder to know and to be known because the understanding of the parameters of what it actually means to be known are different. If we generalize, the East seems to emphasize relational, experiential and communal knowledge while the West seems to emphasize a transactional, informational and cerebral understanding of what it means to know someone.

other sacraments in the Church. It contains baptism because we die to ourselves and find life with Christ at the table. It contains marriage because the Eucharist makes us one body with Christ and with His people. It contains confession because we ask His forgiveness so that we may approach the table in peace. It contains chrismation because we ask the Holy Spirit to anoint and seal the work of our hands and trust that He does so out of His great love for us. It contains ordination because the priest stands as an icon of Christ Himself. He submits his life to the order of the Kingdom. In the Eucharist, we bind ourselves (Sacramentum) to the Heavenly Kingdom in all aspects of life. While we say things like “real” presence or “very” body of Christ we must be careful that we do not imply that there might be some “unreal” presence or “other” body of Christ.²⁶ It is as defence that those terms have been and are being formulated.²⁷ We respectfully disagree with the Zwinglian understanding of a “spiritual only” presence in the bread and wine because we believe an understanding and a language like that pulls the physical and the spiritual apart without good reason. We do not believe that there is such a thing as ‘spiritual only’. Zwingli’s problem of Christ being present in the bread and the wine at the same time as He is present at the right hand of the Father in the Kingdom of Heaven which seems so logically troublesome, is not problematic if we approach the Eucharist as the meal in the Kingdom of heaven. We believe that we are approaching the throne of God when we approach the altar. Is not the core message of the gospel that we must repent for ‘the Kingdom of the heavens has come

²⁶ Thus hoping to avoid the problems of definition and language (*figura, veritas* etc) most evident in the controversy between Radbertus and Ratramnus in 844-845 ad but also encountered throughout the literature of St Ambrose of Milan and St Augustine.

²⁷ One example would be the Council of Trent in 1545 ad. Apologetics are undoubtedly necessary to defend the faith at times but maybe our conduct in “war” should not become our *modus operandi* in times of peace?

nigh to you',²⁸ Jesus Himself being the inaugurator and the King?²⁹ The throne of God has come to dwell among us, we are the temple for His Presence.³⁰ The locality of Christ is solved if we avoid separating the physical and spiritual into separate 'locations', defining them as separate realities and instead view them as two 'sides' of the same one reality. When we 'solve' the location of Christ we solve much of the issues surrounding the Eucharist as well. For the EOC the meaning of the Eucharist cannot be contained in words or formula since the Eucharist itself, in a mysterious way, contains the properties for our ability to express words; we believe it to contain life. We have come to know The Truth as a Person in Jesus Christ and that this Person, this God-Man's body is currently serving the world through His Church and that the Church is being constituted by the offering and reception of the gifts that Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit continues to provide in the Eucharist. It is in this encounter with the Word of God that the Eucharist, indeed the world itself, receives its meaning.

Is Christ really present in the bread and the wine?

Is Christ present in the world?

Is Christ present in our hearts?

Yes, we believe that He is present in a mystery (hidden way) which is revealed to the ones who believe. All the words used in trying to describe exactly how this is possible and the failure to do so only reinforces the mysterious nature of the Eucharist. Maybe an allegory would shed some light upon our belief. If Christ is the Head of the Church and the Holy Spirit the Breath (life) of this Church and the Church is the body of Christ, then we believe that the Eucharistic bread is

²⁸ Matthew 3:2, 4:17, 10:8, Mark 1:15, Luke 10:9 Youngs literal translation of the Holy Bible.

²⁹ Matthew 26:29, John 19:30 Jesus words of not drinking from the produce of the vine until He drinks it in the Kingdom of His Father would suggest that at the moment of death (John 19:30), at which point He drinks from the produce of the wine, would be the point where the reign of the Kingdom is ushered in hence He exclaims: "It is finished!"

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:9, 3:17, 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21 -22, Hebrews 3:6 NKJV

the food needed to sustain the body and the Eucharistic wine is the blood needed to function as such because they incorporate the spiritual realities of the Kingdom into the physical world.

PRACTICE OF THE EUCHARIST

When we eat of the bread and drink of the wine, we all agree that we partake of food and drink. When we give thanks and offer the bread and the wine, the very basics of human sustenance, and then eat, we still partake of food and drink. But now the food and drink is telos, because in offering the world with its gifts, we recognize that it is not ours. It is a gift. Instead of eating the God-given food out of rebellion we now eat it with thanksgiving, relationally and intimately knowing where it comes from.³¹ It is only when we receive it as gift that we can eat food and drink as it was intended from the beginning. This is why the practice of the Eucharist is a procession of thanksgiving as expressed in the work of the people i.e liturgy. Naturally, Christ says: 'This is my body', there can be no other words.³² This statement is a natural consequence of the fact that everything that is created, including bread and wine, is being created through and to Him by the power of the Holy Spirit.³³ He uses the most simple and readily available things of the earth to break the curse of one particular fruit. Throughout His life, Jesus brings the world back to the Father in a procession of thanksgiving culminating in His passion and resurrection. Our practice of the Eucharist must, therefore, reflect the life of Christ Himself. Ecclesiological rigidity and the pneumatological ineptness it breeds shapes laws surrounding the Eucharistic table that are exclusive in nature. What was meant to be presented as healing and salvation to the world by the Church, is now often being overtly protected by the structures that were once life-

³¹ Thus avoiding repeating the lack of discernment at the fall, (1 Corinthians 11:28 - 30 NKJV)

³² Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:24 NKJV

³³ John 1:3 NKJV

giving. Structures that were adequate for one period of time are revealed to be inadequate by the very fact that we do not share a common table. In many ways the Church has gone from offering Herself as a sacrifice for the life of the world, imitating Christ, to holding onto Her existence for dear life for the sake of Her own existence. We believe that God would still be God if there were no more Christians in the world. The zeal for preserving tradition (non-essentials) has in many ways obscured the proclamation of Tradition (essentials). How do we imitate the life of Christ to the point of reflecting His glory and revealing the Kingdom that He inaugurated? How do we integrate the journey to the destination with the destination itself? 'The Church always needs to change to remain the same.'³⁴ I believe that every generation needs to rediscover the grace and love of God in a personal way. Previous generations can hand down the faith, lessons learned and historical records but in terms of encounter, each generation needs to rediscover the mysteries of God to avoid nostalgia and pretension. In this regard, I believe we are different from the Canonical Orthodox Church. The EOC practices a pastorally discerned open table in order to lay hold of this living tension between structure and freedom, steadfastness and change. With a discerned open table you are forced to continually engage with the people and the sacrament on a relational basis. It forces tension and where there is tension there is life. We do not use the Eucharist as a converting sacrament. We recognize Christian baptism as the converting sacrament. It is in this given and received identity, as a part of the body of Christ, that we may receive the body and blood of Christ. It is as citizens in the Kingdom of heaven that we may receive heavenly food. Not because we deserve it, or have fulfilled a law or ritual but because as part of the body of Christ, it is the natural thing to do. We hold that the sacrament of baptism and eucharist are intrinsically linked where baptism is the beginning of a journey and the eucharist

³⁴ To use the words of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, the complicated part is of course at what pace and frequency it must do this?

the food that keeps us going on this journey. Without baptism, it would be very hard, if not impossible, to know just what kind of journey one is on. This pastorally discerned and open table is based upon our own recognition of falling short of the glory of God and it is in acknowledging this that we are able to see the table set before us in the Kingdom of heaven. None of us are worthy to partake but God reveals His grace to the ones realizing their unworthiness. Given that the table needs to be pastorally discerned in an authentic relationship we also believe that the size of the local congregation needs to be kept at a size where this is pragmatically possible. As the body and blood of Christ become a part of us it forms our identity, hence our liturgy (work) springs from the Lords communion table. We eat of the body to become the body. We continue to rely on an external source for an eternal purpose and the Eucharist is the re-minder and the actualization of this. We offer ourselves back to God in this work as a body, to be able to be constituted as such. Hence our identity and our action, our spiritual and our physical person, sacrament, and word, are bound together in who we understand ourselves to be as Church. We know God by intimate relationship and actual physical encounter in the sacrament of the Eucharist as proclaimed and communicated by intellectual comprehension in the synaxis. The journey becomes part of the destination, the destination becomes part of the journey. What this means in practice is that the Eucharist is celebrated every Sunday as we believe that if we come together as a body to pray and sing songs of praise we also ought to partake of Him that constitutes this very body that is coming together. It is a pattern that the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church followed for the first 400 years when it was visibly one.³⁵ It means that we can not isolate the Eucharist as a separate rite. It needs to take place in the midst of the life of the

³⁵ St Luke, Acts 2:42, Acts 20:7, OSB Pliny, *Epistle X*, 96; trans. by J.Stevenson in *A new Eusebius* (London:SPCK., 1968),14. Justin Martyr, *First apology*. *Early Christian Fathers*, 285-6, 287, *Christian Liturgy*, Frank C. Senn (Fortress Press Minneapolis) Chapter 3, 53 - 108

communion of believers. As Gregory Dix noted there is an identifiable, liturgical and catholic pattern of:

Liturgy of the Church	Examples in the Life of Christ
Gathering	Calling the twelve
Readings	Reading in the synagogue
Preaching	Sermon on the mount
Intercessory prayers	Praying for the disciples
Kiss of peace	Accepting Judas kiss
Presentation of bread and wine	Last supper/On trial
Great Thanksgiving	Last supper/On the cross
Fraction	Last supper/Crucifixion
Distribution and reception of Eucharistic gifts	Last supper/Death
Dismissal and sending ³⁶	Ascension ³⁷

The Eucharist (as well as the other sacramental actions) according to the table above, is located in the life of worshipping Church.

This pattern should not come as a big surprise for those who believe that the Church is Christ's own body in the world, by the Spirit, since Christ's own life is reflected in this pattern. If we do look, albeit with caution, at the Eucharistic element of the liturgy, remembering that it cannot be Eucharistic without the other parts of the liturgy mentioned above, we believe that there needs to

³⁶ Gregory Dix, *Shape of the liturgy*, Dacre Press Adam & Charles Black (London: First ed 1945), 38.

³⁷ The correlating events in Scriptures are not Gregory Dix but my own.

be certain words and structures in place so as to locate the mystery in such a way that we can actually perceive it and receive it with our senses. God wants to be known by us; that is the point... but since we believe that God cannot be exhaustively known by our reason, the words, and prayers that are surround the Eucharist formulate an environment that reminds us to approach the mystery in faith and freedom. We bind ourselves to a structure in order for the Holy Spirit to move freely so that we give the Holy Spirit the possibility to move in the structure and beyond the structure if needed. The paradoxical language of the Eucharistic prayers of the Church pushes us towards deeper relationship as we need time and encounter to understand more fully what God has in store for us. We re-member (anamnesis) ourselves into the body of Christ. We evoke the Holy Spirit to descend (epiclesis) because without the Spirit of Love no communion or relationship is possible. There is no Pentecost without the Incarnation and there is no Incarnation without Pentecost. It is the Holy Spirit that provides the life for the body of Christ. It is the body of Christ that provides room for the Holy Spirit to move. This being the case in our context has made us leery of polity in terms of fencing the table. We believe that each local parish needs to be structured in such a way that the clergy can have an ongoing pastoral relationship with the members of the Church so that the Lord's table can be properly discerned in love. There needs to be a real trust, a living hope, and sacrificial love among God's people if we hope to partake of the table with integrity. It is not as a legal requirement but as a necessity. Questions we believe are good questions to ask in regards to discerning/fencing the table are: What is your identity? Are you incarnating your identity in life? What is the most loving thing to do? What is at the eschaton of this development? The members that decide that they cannot partake of the table with integrity in love refrain from partaking and are ministered to. The nonbaptized are being encouraged to approach baptism. Church discipline must be used

sparingly if it entails fencing someone from the table and always with a redemptive purpose in mind and a heart of love. The EOC could ask our brothers and sisters in the Canonical Orthodox Church or the Roman Catholic Church to receive us and to come in under the apostolic succession in the form of a verified line of bishops that they undoubtedly possess. Many are curious why we don't. This way we, by their definition of Church and Sacraments, would be able to offer a "valid" Eucharist with all its regulations, doctrines, and laws. I believe the crux that makes us hesitant to ask them is that we do not know if it is life-giving to have a total trust in oneself to the point of knowing beyond any doubt where the fulness of the Truth abides. If all the rules and regulations are already in place we risk nominalism and missing life-giving conversations about the meaning and intent of these very laws. In essence, we believe that God's power and revelation through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit obviously can be found within the ecclesial framework and definition (i.e lineage of bishops as well as the other offices of priests, deacons, laity), but that He is not limited to that.³⁸ We recognize the apostolic succession of the canonical Churches but at the same time we are also asking the question: Is it not time for the canonical Churches to recognize the apostolic succession of the Churches that are preserving and living out apostolic faith? It is our aim that our practice of the Eucharist and the other sacraments would reflect that, finding a healthy and life-giving tension between structure and freedom, integrity and hospitality, rest and activity.

³⁸ Luke 3:8 and Hebrews 7 OSB implies that God is not bound by human (legal) succession.

WHAT IS NEXT?

We believe Eucharist to be symbol,³⁹ but that the meaning of symbol as well as many other words needs to be redeemed if the East and the West are going to be able to understand each other. It seems that the current embarrassment of the non-existent Eucharistic hospitality within the body of Christ is, to a high degree, a problem of language and communication.⁴⁰ We use the same words but interpret them in different ways. Was it a lack perhaps of communication and common language that caused the great schism and mutual excommunication in 1054?⁴¹ How do we recover a language of integrity for all so that we may get to know each other better? How do we share our hurts and confess our sins in a safe environment? We believe that the journey towards Eucharistic hospitality must in itself contain the attributes we hope to encounter at the table namely love, thanksgiving, and hospitality. Otherwise, the destination will forever elude us. To attain an understanding of each other's language and culture we need proximity and

³⁹ From the Latin: syn (together) + ballein (to throw). The sense evolution in Greek is from "throwing things together" to "contrasting" to "comparing" to "token used in comparisons to determine if something is genuine." Hence, "outward sign" of something. The meaning "something which stands for something else" first recorded 1590 (in "Faerie Queene"). <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=symbol> As a written character, 1610s.

The progress or decline of Eucharistic hospitality depends in large on how we come to understand this word. The EOC believes that the intention of a symbol is to bind together (sacramentum, bind with an oath) two (or more) entities/realities that may appear to be divided or separate. In regards to the Eucharist it is the spiritual (divine, heaven) and the physical (human, earth) realities that are being bound together. Symbol is not something depicted (photo) or something which stands for something else (representation) or something that points to something else (sign) but in our understanding rather something that covenants physical revelation with spiritual reality.

⁴⁰ The literal meaning of the combination of words in the Greek is: com (together) + union (one) + ation (action) "Being together as one is under way."

⁴¹ It is hard to determine the exact reasons for the great schism in 1054. A lack of trust, political influence and different languages and culture probably all played a part. It is note worthy that the way in which the two parts of Christianity separated from each other was by cutting each other off from the Eucharistic table. The reality of division today springs from this *sacramental* act. The sacramental reality off our existence is not something that can be cognitively chosen depending on our preferences but is a part of us whether we want it or not. It can be used for good or bad. In this case, this division has caused more division. In the West it has caused thousands of Churches to operate in an independent spirit. In the East, the Church has fallen prey to cultural pressure. The Orthodox say that they are One body but in all honesty that is not an incarnational reality between most of the autocephalous and autonomous Churches (it is even hard to reach consensus concerning their different statuses.)

relationship. Even though words and the interpretation of them point to a deeper communion by themselves they are not enough.⁴² We need to encounter each other as persons and see each other's faces. If words are not anchored and bound to something tangible, they remain cerebral and as such we will never interpret them in exactly the same way. I believe that it is only when we get to experience the reality they hold that we will be able to lay our individual interpretation aside for the benefit of communion. We need the altar to fully appreciate the pulpit. We need the pulpit to get to the altar. We do not lose our personality in this process. We find it by letting go of our individuality, reflecting the glory of the Trinity in Who's image we are created. We need to go from the Word (Logos) of the pulpit (synaxis) to the Logos (Word) on the altar (Eucharist). In partaking of the fulness of the Word we are able to offer this Word with integrity to the world broken and hungry for the Bread of heaven. In practical terms perhaps can the order of the work of the people, liturgy, help us? If we as Catholic Church⁴³ use this universally identifiable shape of the liturgy⁴⁴ we might discover that this pattern can aid us in a common procession towards the table and from there service to the world. Maybe the following procession might help in recognizing each other as part of the same body:

First, we must gather as Church. (Synaxis)

This is the first step. To be in proximity to one another for the purpose of coming before God. To get to know one another.

⁴² I believe this is the great obstacle to overcome in the current ecumenical process. How do we move from conversation to incarnation?

⁴³ I use the word "catholic" without the Roman (political) connotation trying to lay hold of the original meaning of the word: *Kata* (Gr) = "with respect to" *Holos* (Gr) = "Whole".

⁴⁴ Every local congregation of the Church has an expression and a shape to the work they do. It is fascinating how this work carries a lot of the same attributes, content, order and expressions albeit with different language, culture and personality throughout the world. If we take the time to relate to the different liturgies/orders of service that are taking place within the world wide Church we will soon discover that we have much more in common than not.

Second, we must learn from God's word and hear the Scripture.

It is in listening to the full testimony of the Scriptures that we will find our common ground.

Then, we must pray for one another and for the world.

In praying for one another our hearts will grow soft.

Further, we must extend Christ's peace to one another and forgive each other for the many offences throughout history.

We must offer our different gifts as denominations in honesty and truth, then leave them on the altar and trust that God will bless them since we in our brokenness cannot.

We must offer up thanks to the Lord for His gift to us. We must break, distribute and receive the body of Christ so that we can constitute it in the world as One Body so that the world may believe in the One Who sent us.

Finally, we must go out with the good news of that this bread, this life, is available to anyone who asks in sincerity and goes through the waters of baptism.

The current ecumenical process seems to be stuck somewhere before the kiss of peace. We do gather. We do learn from one another. We have a hard time forgiving each other for past sins and offences and therefore we are at a standstill in terms of understanding each other's language. Is it

time to forgive each other in faith? Is it time to approach the table together, trusting that the Father by His Son Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit are able to heal the schism(s). Is it time that we recognize that we are not able to heal our brokenness on our own through mental assertion and ecumenical formulas? Is it time to submit to the process of thanksgiving, forgive each other in the power of the Holy Spirit and partake of the table that is prepared for us in the Kingdom? Come, Lord Jesus, give us today our daily bread, Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven.

