

**A Paradox of Unchanging Continuity and Ceaseless Creativity:
Liturgical Reform and Renewal in American Orthodox Christianity**

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*“There is no such thing as not worshiping. Everybody worships.
The only choice we get is what we choose to worship.”*
- David Foster Wallace¹

“The overwhelming majority of Orthodox people have no interest in the meaning of worship.”
- Fr. Alexander Schmemmann²

Introduction

There are three general groups of Orthodox Christians to whom liturgical reform and renewal mean anything. For the largest group, such terms don't matter much, if at all. To a second, smaller group, they are pejorative terms, tantamount to *heresy*, *heterodoxy*, and all that is *Western* and *anathema*. To a third and even smaller group, they are terms of hope and joy. I write my thesis as an unashamed member of this third, smallest group. My goal is to articulate in this essay that liturgical renewal and reform are both necessary to maintain the joy that pervades our worship and has always been a part of Orthodox tradition. Make no mistake, however, I realize that liturgical reform can have negative impacts on the Church if done carelessly or, to be more precise, haphazardly mandated from the top echelons of the hierarchy and forced upon the laity without their input. One need only to look at the Nikonian reforms in 17th century Russia. The great pain that they caused Orthodox Christians there is felt even today between the Church and the so-called Old Believers.³ Given that this is an integrative academic essay, I will utilize a range of interdisciplinary sources such as church history, liturgics, scripture, pastoral theology,

1. David F. Wallace, *This is Water, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, About Living a Compassionate Life*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009), 105.

2. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1966), 31. Emphasis mine.

3. Paul Meyendorff has a great book called *Russia, Ritual, and Reform* that chronicles the events and personalities of the Nikonian reforms, which was a reform by Moscow Patriarch Nikon to force the Russian Orthodox Church to align more to Byzantine and Greek liturgical practices and away from the organic Slavic practices that were widely accepted among many in the Russian Church. The reforms ended up causing a schism in the Russian Orthodox Church. The Nikonian Reforms would go down as one of the more tragic consequences of poor implementation of reform that, understandably, cause much angst today when liturgical reform is mentioned, particularly in Slavic Orthodox circles.

dogmatics, and patristics to help articulate my thesis that liturgical reform and renewal are an Orthodox tradition that has kept the Church's liturgical worship at the center of its identity and that theology and liturgy are intertwined and cannot be separated. How we pray is how we know God—through experience, worship, and faith.

Note that I use both liturgical *reform* and liturgical *renewal* interchangeably—I do this deliberately because I believe they both speak to the same truth, although some scholars make a distinction between the two words. I argue that liturgical reform and renewal are constantly required (and should be encouraged) by Orthodox Christians to keep the Church from becoming, on one far end, ossified and fundamentalist in its worship, and on the other far end a gratuitous appropriation of popular culture and politics—akin to all the various nondenominational megachurches of modern-day America. Either way, one must always be vigilant, thoughtful, cautious, and deliberate when taking on any kind of liturgical reform.

In this essay, I will explore some major themes of the liturgical theology of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, as well as how he shaped a kind of liturgical renewal in American Orthodoxy that continues to this day. I call his approach to reform *the cautious approach*. I will also examine some of the contemporary issues that affect American Orthodox worship and attempt to address some helpful, albeit perhaps controversial, solutions. Finally, I will examine what I call the *wholesale approach* to reform found at the New Skete Monastery in Cambridge, NY, where I had an opportunity to spend a week this summer, and which is frankly the impetus for why I chose this topic. One thing I have come away with after researching this topic is that Orthodox liturgical reform is a paradox of unchanging continuity and ceaseless creativity.⁴

4. The phrase “the paradox of unchanging continuity and ceaseless creativity” is not mine but taken from a saying of Metropolitan Savas of Pittsburgh in Alkiviadis C. Calivas, “Liturgical Renewal in Orthodox Theology and Liturgical Praxis in Relation to the Sacrament of the Divine Eucharist,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 61, nos. 1–2 (2016): 53.

What, How, and Why?

What exactly is liturgical renewal and reform? Former Holy Cross Professor of Liturgics Alkiviadis C. Calivas wrote that “liturgical renewal is the process by which one seeks to recover the authentic tradition of the Church’s worship, while the reform, revision, modification, or adaptation of the liturgy is the means by which this tradition is incorporated into the liturgical rites and the cultures of the people who worship now.”⁵ Note that he makes a distinction between renewal and reform; I see them as equivocal. Therefore, my definition of liturgical renewal or reform as *a deliberative process that aims to discern a more authentic tradition of worship whether through revision, modification, addition, subtraction, or adaptation of a current liturgical praxis*. This can be done at the parochial or the higher ecclesiastical levels of the Church. It could involve a simple updated translation of the parish Divine Liturgy rubrics or at a Pan-Orthodox Council where canons are produced (or deleted) that affect major liturgical changes (e.g., the restoration of married bishops). The point is that it can be something simple or complex, but make no mistake, liturgical renewal and reform have been important parts of Orthodox Holy Tradition dating back all the way to the founding of the Church at Pentecost.

Liturgical renewal serves a few important purposes. It “seeks to change the routine and monotonous acts of worship into active and intelligent participation, so that the liturgy thus practiced may arouse the slumbering faith of people and give new power, energy, and efficacy both to prayer and to works.”⁶ In a simpler sense, liturgical renewal strives to bring joy into the communal worship of God through sacramental participation. Nobody articulated this better than

5. Aliviades Calivas, “Liturgical Renewal and Reform: Some Theses” in *Fossil or Leaven: The Church We Hand Down*. (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2016), 39.

6. Calivas, “Liturgical Renewal in Orthodox Theology,” 55.

Fr. Schmemmann in the 20th century. I would go so far as to argue that Schmemmann's theology is really a theology of joy, because joy radiates throughout his works. In his best seller, *For the Life of the World*, he wrote, "Christianity was the revelation and the gift of joy, and thus, the gift of genuine feast...this joy is pure joy because it does not depend on anything in this world and is not the reward of anything in us. It is totally and absolutely a gift, the 'charis,' the grace. And being pure gift, this joy has transforming power...it is the seal of the Holy Spirit on the life of the Church—on its faith, hope, and love."⁷

The most basic aim—the why—of liturgical renewal is to engender greater participation in the liturgical life of the Church, namely the Divine Liturgy, by all the faithful (clergy and laity alike). Calivas aptly stated that "genuine liturgical creativity seeks to release the treasures of tradition from paralysis."⁸ Without creativity and liturgical zeal, the Church veers to withdraw into itself and become ossified in its worship and paralyzed in its communion with the world. Stated another way, without liturgical reform and renewal, we would have no liturgy today. The liturgy of the first century in Palestine would be incoherent and irrelevant for us in 21st century America without two millennia of reform and renewal. Without reform, the Church stagnates and ossifies. Church scholar Pantelis Kalaitzidis observed this trend during the decline of Byzantium:

Caught for years between Roman hostility, Protestant missionary zeal and the aggression and rage of the conquering Muslim world—especially the Ottoman Turks—Orthodoxy gradually began to barricade itself in, ossifying and fighting to survive and conserve its faith and tradition. Following the end of the Byzantine world...in the 15th century, the most urgent priority for Orthodoxy was not development, renewal, or reformation but simply to survive and maintain historical continuity; furthermore, it had to find a way to resist the siren call of Uniatism and prevent forced conversion of its

7. Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 55. In the book, the word "joy" appears 128 times.

8. Calivas, "Liturgical Renewal," 52.

members to Catholicism and especially Islam: for Islam, by the 15th century, was already the major power in the East.⁹

On the flip side, there are instances where historical unrest within the Church has produced some magnificent reform. The turmoil of Iconoclasm (726-842) led to the Studite Reformation in the 9th century; arguably the greatest reform in Orthodox Church history with the restoration of iconography, the expansion of the Church into the Slavic lands, and an immense development of monasticism, such as the community of Mount Athos. History has served as both an obstacle and a catalyst for liturgical renewal within the Church. Some of the greatest reformers themselves were persecuted initially for their efforts. As Calivas pointed out:

The great Fathers of the Church, who retained unbroken the orthodox ecclesial tradition during critical periods, innovated with their theology and were accused by their adversaries as innovators and modernists (Athanasios the Great, Symeon the New Theologian, Gregory Palamas). They, however, did not limit themselves to the preservation of that which they received, but lived the mystery of the incarnation of God, and they innovated, in order to give witness to the simple and unadulterated Gospel of the Church.¹⁰

Also, if I may add to this list St. John Chrysostom — a liturgical reformer *par excellence* — also was excommunicated and exiled from his prestigious post as Archbishop of Constantinople to the Cappadocian region by the Byzantine empress. Brilliant minds are often the target of the masses in power.

The Great Myth of Liturgical Immutability

Some Orthodox Christians take comfort in the myth that the Divine Liturgy has undergone no change whatsoever in the history of Christendom. This myth is perpetuated constantly. Take for example, on Pascha 2011, the TV show *60 Minutes* aired an episode in

9. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “Challenges of Renewal and Reformation Facing the Orthodox Church,” *The Ecumenical Review* (2009): 151.

10. Calivas, “Liturgical Renewal and Reform,” 44–45.

which correspondent Bob Simon was allowed to visit the Holy Mountain (Mt. Athos) and film his interviews with the monks there. It was a historical moment for Orthodoxy in America. In one segment, Simon was interviewing Fr. Iakovos, an American born Athonite monk. To a question about the history of the divine liturgy, Fr. Iakovos replied, “you have to understand, the words that we’re saying in today’s liturgy are the same words that Christ was saying, are the same words from the first, second, third, and fourth century...and nothing has changed in Orthodoxy since then—it’s the only branch of Christianity that can make that claim.”¹¹ For some, it was a proud moment for Orthodoxy, but for the few of us who study liturgical theology, it was cringeworthy and completely erroneous.

If you were to attend three liturgies: a 1st-century one in Antioch, the Hagia Sofia during the 7th century Byzantine Empire, and the Russian Orthodox Church in the 15th century, you would come to the conclusion that each liturgy represented a different Church or denomination; but in the Orthodox Church, diversity in unity is especially apparent in worship. Paul Meyendorff noted that “more recent scholarship has shown that in fact early Christian worship was far from uniform...multiple traditions evolved into just a few rites...despite this, many on the popular level continue to hold onto the belief that there was a single, pristine Christian liturgy. In fact, there has been from the very beginning a tremendous variety in liturgical practice, even at a time when the Church was united.”¹²

The truth is that the further back in history one searches, the more different styles and rites of liturgies one finds. Paul’s epistles display an abundance of different liturgical styles: the Galatians seemed to revert back to Jewish forms of worship,¹³ while the Corinthians were

11. CBS, *60 Minutes: The Monks of Mount Athos*, aired April 24, 2011.

12. Paul Meyendorff, “Origins of the Eastern Liturgies,” *St. Nersess Theological Review* 1, no. 2 (1996): 214.

13. Gal 3:1–5.

reverting back to pagan worship mixed with speaking in tongues.¹⁴ Meyendorff concluded that “if there is one lesson to be learned from such a brief historical overview, it is that liturgical uniformity has never been the rule within the Church. There has always been variety in practice...unity can be achieved only if this legitimate diversity is respected.”¹⁵

Jesuit scholar Robert Taft, in his seminal book *The Byzantine Rite: A Short History*, defines five periods of Byzantine Rite (Chalcedonian) Church history that each underwent significant liturgical reforms. Quoting him directly, he breaks them up as follows:

1. The paleo-Byzantine or pre-Constantinian era [pre-325AD], about which we know little;
2. the ‘imperial phase’ during the Late Antique or patristic period, especially from the reign of Justinian I (527–565) and his immediate successors, creating a system of cathedral liturgy that lasted until sometime after the Latin Conquest (1204–1261), thus overlapping with phases 3–4;
3. the ‘Dark Ages’ from 610 to ca. 850, and especially the struggle against iconoclasm (726–843), culminating in the Studite reform;
4. the Studite era itself, from ca. 800–1204;
5. the final, neo-Sabaitic synthesis after the Latin Conquest (1204–1261).¹⁶

Taft’s short book is packed with a lot of information, some of it a bit too truncated and perhaps outdated, but nonetheless essential for any study of Byzantine liturgics. One critique of his book I argue is that the so-called Orthodox diaspora created a sixth period of reform from the late 19th century up until present time). The diaspora consisted of Orthodox Christians fleeing persecution from their home countries (Greece, the Balkans, and the Russian empire being notable 20th century examples) and relocating to Western democracies. This diaspora led to a

14. 1 Cor 12:ff

15. Meyendorff, “Origins of the Eastern Liturgies,” 219.

16. Robert F. Taft, *The Byzantine Rite, A Short History*. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 18–19.

blending of Orthodox national cultures with non-Orthodox cultures, and ultimately widespread liturgical reform within America particularly, a blending of Eastern Orthodox Christians in Western America. America is not without its own set of liturgical problems, which I will address later in this paper. Now is a good place to turn our attention to the work of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann and the role he played during this crucial time in American Orthodox history.

Fr. Schmemmann: His Vision, Theology, and Legacy

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983) was born in Estonia during the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution. He emigrated to Paris initially and taught Church History at the Saint Sergius Institute while becoming an ordained priest in the Orthodox Church. During this time, he earned his degree at the University of Paris. At the behest of his mentor, legendary scholar Fr. Georges Florovsky (whom he had a falling out with over disagreements this aren't relevant to this essay), he and his family moved to New York and ultimately started what would become St. Vladimir's Seminary as well as the autocephalous Orthodox Church in America (OCA). He received numerous honorary doctorates, including one from Holy Cross. He also served as an official Orthodox observer during the Vatican II council in Rome—an experience that I believed helped shape his vision of ecumenical relations with caution and care, as he saw that Vatican II perhaps became too extensive in its original aims of reform once the theory, which spread worldwide was implemented in practice.

Nicholas Denysenko, a scholar and deacon in the OCA, described Schmemmann's cautious approach to liturgical reform, saying that “despite his reservation of advocating specific liturgical reforms, there is ample evidence to suggest that he was the chief catalyst not only for liturgical reform, but also for an entire generation of clergy whose pastoral service marked a paradigm

shift in the liturgical life of American Orthodoxy.”¹⁷ Paul Meyendorff, son of Fr. John Meyendorff (a close friend of Schmemmann), stated rather equivocally that “it is Schmemmann who is credited, or blamed, for many of the liturgical changes that we in America have experienced in recent decades.”¹⁸ It is outside of my scope to go into the shortfalls of Schmemmann’s legacy, but there are plenty of conservative Orthodox critics who saw him as too Western to be Orthodox, along with progressive (usually Catholic or Protestant) detractors who thought that he didn’t pay enough attention to political causes such as the civil rights movement.

Nonetheless, Schmemmann was a brilliant visionary and leader, as well as having many other talents. He didn’t let his Baltic-turned-Soviet-refugee background resent the relative comforts and freedom of the USA, nor did he sulk about the affairs in his home country, unlike his friend and confidant Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn, whom Schmemmann also eventually had a falling out with. He was always forward looking—always seeing what’s possible and striving to make that happen. He wasn’t a liturgical progressive, as is sometimes thought, rather, he was moderate and balanced overall. It is my opinion that he was most pessimistic on liturgical reform in the years following Vatican II, but in later years, his tone and stance softened. In a 1969 essay on liturgical reform—4 years after the end of Vatican II—he specifically noted a tone of pessimism:

The real problem then is not that of ‘liturgical reforms’ but, first of all, of the much needed ‘reconciliation’ and mutual integration of liturgy, theology, and piety. Here, however, I must confess my pessimism. I do not see in Orthodox theology and in general in the Orthodox Church even a recognition of that problem and it is clear

17. Nicholas E. Denysenko, *Liturgical Reform After Vatican II: The Impact on Eastern Orthodoxy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 112–113.

18. Paul Meyendorff, “The Liturgical Path of Orthodoxy in America,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 40, nos. 1–2 (1996): 49.

to me that unless a problem is recognized its solution is either impossible or there will be a wrong solution.¹⁹

He knew that liturgical reform could damage the Church if taken too far—a lesson he learned witnessing Vatican II.²⁰ His goal was to create a true American Orthodox Church—one that surpassed ethnic distinctions and was organically created with English services, modern architecture (no Hagia Sofia domes), and contemporary worship in mind without forsaking any parts of Orthodox Holy Tradition. He managed to do this of sorts—he (along with the help of some distinct hierarchs and theologians) - did help establish the autocephalous OCA in 1970 from the control of the Moscow Patriarchate.

The basis of his liturgical outlook was greater lay participation in the Church. This included more congregational singing, ongoing catechism (not just for those converting but for everyone on a continuing basis), restoring the joy in worship, frequent communion, a general approach to the liturgy as a thanksgiving to God (the root word for eucharist, in Greek, is thanksgiving), to name a few. Allow me to quote at length a beautiful thesis of his vision in his magnum opus, *The Eucharist*:

I am convinced that the genuine revival of the Church begins with *eucharistic revival*, but in the fullness of this word. The tragic flaw in the history of Orthodoxy has proven to be not only the incompleteness but, I daresay, the absence of a theology of the sacraments, its reductions to western schemes and categories of thought. The Church is not an organization but the new people of God. The Church is not a religious cult but a *liturgy*, embracing the entire creation of God. The Church is not a doctrine about the world to come but the joyous encounter of the kingdom of God. It

19. Alexander Schmemmann, "Liturgical Theology, Theology of Liturgy, and Liturgical Reform," St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly 13, no. 4 (1969): 220.

20. One of my favorite of Schmemmann's rants: "We find, on the other hand: those obsessed with making liturgy more 'understandable,' 'relevant,' and 'closer to the people.' Here the set of fixations and of means considered: remove the iconostasis, read all prayers aloud, shorten the services, abolish everything which is not related to 'togetherness', introduce congregational singing, translate everything into the most popular and plain kind of English, fight any 'ethnic' custom etc." in Schmemmann, "Liturgical Theology," 222.

is the sacrament of peace, the sacrament of salvation and the sacrament of the reign of Christ.²¹

Nothing irritated Schmemmann more than the bifurcation of creation into categories of *sacred and profane*—to him, all of God’s creation was sacred and should be offered back to Him through thanksgiving, embracing the entire creation of God.²² The culmination of this thanksgiving was in the Divine Liturgy and participation of the Eucharist—the hallmark of Schmemmann’s liturgical theology. Paul Meyendorff commented that “the eucharist, therefore is both the locus and source of the Church’s life. This was the vision that Schmemmann was to champion for the rest of his life, striving constantly to translate this principle from theory to practice.”²³

Schmemmann coined the term *homo adorans* (worshiping human) when he spoke about human beings: “*homo adorans*: the one for whom worship is the essential act which both posits his humanity and fulfills it.”²⁴ He goes on to conclude with the following:

man [is] an essentially worshipping being, for it is only in worship that man has the source and the possibility of that knowledge which is communion, and of that communion which fulfills itself as true knowledge: knowledge of God and therefore knowledge of the world – communion with God and therefore communion with all that exists.²⁵

The two quotes I placed at the beginning of this paper were not randomly chosen—one from author David Foster Wallace and the other from Schmemmann—both speak to this notion of *homo adorans*. Worship, for all human beings, is inevitable. We were created to worship. This is

21. Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1987), 242.

22. 1 Tim. 4:4 “for everything that God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.”

23. Paul Meyendorff, “The Liturgical Path of Orthodoxy in America,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 40, no.1–2 (1996), 50.

24. Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 118.

25. *Ibid.*, 120.

why liturgy is so central to Orthodoxy identity, especially the Divine Liturgy and the eucharist. The question, of course, is what we choose to worship, as David Foster Wallace noted, a theme that runs throughout the entire bible and makes complete sense because making the choice is the first commandment of both the Old and New Covenants.²⁶ For Schmemmann, one cannot divide theology from worship—liturgical theology is lived theology in the Patristic sense of the word. To quote Evagrios the Solitary (345–399): “if you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian.”²⁷ The Patristic understanding of a theologian isn’t one who knows things about God, a true theologian know God Himself, personally. Schmemmann’s calling was to elucidate the meaning of liturgy to the public: both as a professor at St. Vladimir’s Seminary, a public intellectual, writer, and parish priest. The reason for my quote by Schmemmann at the beginning of the paper was that many Orthodox Christians know how to worship – they can recite the prayers, hymns, antiphons – but the meaning behind all of this is mostly lost. It was his mission to correct this – to give meaning to liturgy for people to recognize not just its aesthetic beauty but its theological elegance and fulfillment as their role of *homo adornans*: worshipping people, giving God worship with joy and thanksgiving. One of Schmemmann’s favorite biblical quotes (found throughout his personal journals, which were published in 2000) was “brethren, rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice...but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”²⁸ If there is any biblical verse to sum up Schmemmann’s liturgical theology, it is this one.

26. Exodus 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before me,” and Matthew 22:37–38 “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.”

27. Evagrios Pontikos, *The Philokalia*, ed. G.E.H. Palmer, Kallistos Ware, and Philip Sherrard. Vol 1. (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 62.

28. Philippians 4:4-6

Contemporary Issues, Contemporary Solutions

I will now turn my attention to highlighting some issues within the American Orthodox liturgical scene that I personally find relevant, and I will attempt to offer some suggestions on how to find solutions to these issues. Note that not every issue applies to every parish or archdiocese, but through my own observations from traveling the country to different parishes, attending theological conferences, doing academic research into this subject, serving on parish council boards, and speaking candidly with clergy, theologians, hierarchs, and seminarians from around America, there are certain areas in which American Orthodoxy could make meaningful reform. One main issue is that our liturgies seem devoid of joy; a theme that Schmemmann noted frequently. Orthodoxy (to me) can at times feel so serious, pious, reserved, and solemn quite frequently, that there seems to be no room for joy, apart from perhaps Pascha. Why must liturgy be such a serious affair if the point is to give God thanks and praise? We seem to have lost sight of this important liturgical element in America.

As I have previously argued, the liturgy of the Orthodox Church will continue to undergo change, reform, and renewal over time. This is inevitable, as history shows. But how change is implemented can have a significant effect on the success or failure of any liturgical endeavor. Below I have identified eight areas that I recommend as helpful to correct some perceived weaknesses in American Orthodoxy that would (in my humble opinion) help improve the future of the Church and its liturgical praxis. The eight areas are as follows:

1. Drop the modern Greek requirements for HCHC MDiv Seminarians

Despite the ethnic foundations of most Orthodox Churches in America, ethnic ties which bind the parish weaken with the succession of every generation. In short, the parishioners naturally identify as more American and less Greek, Syrian, or Russian with every passing generation. Because of this inevitable generation shift, I argue that seminarians should not waste time learning modern Greek (unless they plan to move to Greece and

minister there) while in seminary and instead focus their time to more pressing issues, such as basic financial literacy or managerial skills classes, which are all important basic abilities that any parish priest needs to understand.²⁹ Without these skills, a parish priest can jeopardize his parish without even knowing it due to their inexperience in overseeing budgets, managing staff, all while serving as the parish priest. Knowing modern Greek as a clergy member in America is a nice luxury at best, but it's not necessary, in my opinion. In fact, I would even argue that insisting that services be conducted in Greek dissuade potential converts and multi-generational parishioners who no longer identify with their ethnic heritage. This is a big stumbling block to parish growth and renewal: no wonder Vatican II rid itself of Latin from its liturgies (because nobody could understand the prayers), why can't Greek parishes do the same? The Orthodox Church has always striven to translate its services into the common language on newly Christianized lands.³⁰ If 100% of the parish speaks English, and 10% speak Greek, then it should be clear how much of the liturgy should be conducted in English. This situation is made worse when a compromise is made between the clergy and pro-Greek parishioners, and the parish doubles up on both Greek and English prayers, hymns, and readings—essentially elongating the liturgy by 30%. Then you have another problem on your hands: lack of attendance and participation from the parish; the antithesis of liturgical renewal.

2. West vs. East: An Outdated Paradigm

Pantelis Kalaitzidis (a theologian who is Greek both by birth and residency) admits that “Orthodox Christianity is often identified with the peoples and nations that follow it; yet will never free itself of its old demons of tribalism and religious nationalism as long as it still feeds the outdated paradigm of East versus West.”³¹ This antagonism of East vs. West needs to be laid to rest, or at least attenuated in the seminaries. I'll admit it is tempting to denigrate *the West* and place the failures of Western society on Augustine's concept of Original Sin, but that view needs tempering. In an age of multiculturalism and ecumenism, we need to focus on the similarities, not the differences, that the Orthodox Church shares with other (Western) denominations. The most strident anti-Western voices are voiced from traditional Orthodox Countries (Mt Athos, Moscow, Bulgaria) and it's been my observation that American Orthodox Christians have a much more ecumenical mindset that lends itself naturally to building bridges through dialogue with non-Orthodox. That's why I'm such an advocate of training American men and women to lead the Church. There are a whole host of clergy, laity, and theologians that are coming up the ranks, American born, bred, and trained. They're open minded, ecumenical, analytical, optimistic, and creative. If Orthodoxy is going to thrive in the USA, we need to look beyond the antiquated Byzantine/Slavic East vs. West paradigm that's long obsolete, especially on the world stage such as the World Council of Churches and Pan-

29. Learning modern Spanish would be more effective for a seminarian at Holy Cross than modern Greek. The number of Latinos leaving the Catholic Church for various Protestant denominations over the last decade is a ripe harvest for new converts. Just ask any priest in the Southwestern USA (believe me, I've spoken to many). A Spanish-speaking priest would do wonders to attract Latino converts in many states outside of New England.

30. St. Innocent of Alaska worked tirelessly to translate the Divine Liturgy and the Gospel of Matthew upon his arrival to Alaska in the 18th century into Tlingit—the native language of the Alaskan Aleuts.

31. Kalaitzidis, *Challenges of Renewal*, 163.

Orthodox Councils where hopefully more delegates will be represented from diaspora (Western) countries, where currently the overwhelming majority of delegates are male clergy from the traditional Orthodox countries; hardly a Pan-Orthodox representation of the Church as a whole if one thinks about it.³²

3. Frequent Communion ≠ Frequent Confession

Although it is not as much of an issue as it was in the 20th century, frequent communion of the Holy Eucharist should be encouraged without the need for weekly confession. This was one of Schmemmann's frequent sayings and it has patristic precedent. St. Cyril of Jerusalem wrote in the 4th century, "hold these traditions spotless and keep yourselves from offense. Do not, on account of the defilement of your sins, break yourselves away of these holy and spiritual mysteries."³³ St. Germanus of Constantinople, writing in the 8th century, noted at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy after everyone in the Hagia Sofia communed: "partaking of the divine mysteries is called Communion because it bestows on us unity with Christ and makes us partakers of His Kingdom."³⁴ Although infrequent communion is more common in the Slavic tradition today, much of this stems from the practice of (compulsory) weekly confession in order to receive communion on Sunday, usually at Vespers, which can be hard for most people to attend both services. In my opinion, frequent confession diminishes the therapeutic and spiritual value of the sacrament. Furthermore, requiring confession before communion each week alludes to ancient purity laws in Judaism that one must be cleansed before engaging in worship – a practice that St. Peter struggled with God.³⁵ Furthermore, let us not forget that upon approaching the Chalice, the priest or deacon announces, "the servant of God receives the most precious and Holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins and life eternal."³⁶ The remission of sins is already implied in partaking of communion.

32. Brandon Gallaher, who was an observer of the Holy and Great Council in Crete in 2016, remarks: "Western Christianity, which has given birth to the paradigm of modernity found in Western European culture and civilization, has a strong, and much needed, emphasis on rational symmetry, legal, ecclesial and liturgical order...Orthodoxy's emphasis on particular community-visions often leads to confusion, tension and even at times a complete breakdown in decision making as was seen in the immediate run up to Crete". His observations were fascinating, especially given the last-minute pull-out from the Churches of Russia, Georgia, Bulgaria, and Antioch, and the shock and confusion it caused Cited in Brandon Gallaher, "The Orthodox Moment: The Holy and Great Council in Crete and Orthodoxy's Encounter with the West: On Learning to Love the Church". *Sobornost* 39, no. 2 (2017), 45.

33. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson, John Behr, and Augustine Casiday. (Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2017), 136–137.

34. Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy*, ed. John Behr and Paul Meyendorff. (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 107.

35. Acts 10:28 "God has made it clear to me that I must not call anyone profane or unclean"

36. The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, *The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, page 14. Emphasis mine.

4. Support and Visit Your Local Monastery

One of the richest traditions of our church is our monastic system. Monasteries have played such an important part of Orthodox Christianity since the early church and continue to this day. I will be the first to admit that American Orthodoxy does not do monasticism very well, especially when compared to traditional Orthodox countries. This is unfortunate and probably hearkens back to the Protestant origins of our country that viewed monasticism as an atavistic institution. Kalaitzidis writes that “at its heart monasticism seeks to remember the eschatological dimension of the Christian faith, as is quite simply a protest against the institutional church’s compromise with the world and earthly power.”³⁷ I have been lucky in these last two years during my studies at Holy Cross to visit several monasteries. My experiences have been life changing—especially a week spent at New Skete Monastery, which I will expand upon in a later section of this paper. Many Orthodox Christians have never spent time at a monastery (maybe a day trip, but not many for a full immersion experience lasting multiple days). One suggestion I have for any parish is to make a commitment to attend a pilgrimage to the local monastery at least once a year. Supporting your local monastery goes a long way both for the parishioner and the monastery. At the very least, an exposure to monasticism does much to strengthen one’s prayer life, which will inevitably draw one closer to God. I can personally attest to this. Seeing monks awake at 1:30 am for liturgy was literally and figuratively an eye-opening experience that encouraged me to step up my own prayer life on a pilgrimage I took to St. Anthony’s Greek Monastery in Arizona last year.

5. Reconsider Mandated Episcopal Celibacy

I will probably catch some flak for stating this, but it needs to be said.³⁸ American Orthodoxy would benefit greatly if the burden of clerical celibacy was lifted from the episcopacy. I’m not arguing that all bishops need to be married but to severely limit the pool of candidates because of marital status, given that the church allowed married bishops until Canon 12 of the Council of Trullo was passed some 1300 years ago, needs to be seriously reconsidered. Canonically, it can be done, but it would require considerable work. In the words of St. Paul, “a bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, able to teach.”³⁹ Metropolese in America are too big geographically and there is a dire need for more Metropolitans and smaller Metropolises.⁴⁰ Furthermore, given that the position of a Metropolitan has a large managerial and financial oversight component to it, opening up the position to men with a business background, versus a monastic background, would be a huge help to the Church and make the episcopate-laity relationship more robust, not to mention bolster financial and managerial oversight; the very definition of *episkopos*—

37. Kalaitzidis, 148.

38. For more analysis into this fascinating topic, see my paper that I wrote for Fr. Philip Zymaris’ class on The Sacrament of Marriage: John Maletis, *Married Orthodox Bishops: An Appeal to Return to the Apostolic Practice*. May 18th, 2023. Holy Cross School of Theology.

39. 1 Tim 3:2

40. Take, for example, the Greek Metropolis of San Francisco. One brave, tireless man whom I admire (Metropolitan Gerasimos) has the oversight of 67 parishes in the following states: Hawaii, Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Arizona. None of these states are mere car-rides like in New England.

overseer. More Metropolitans would mean more hierarchical visits to parishes, which would help foster and deepen parish-hierarchy relationships, something incredibly valuable to the well-being of both parish and Metropolis. Imagine the difference having the Metropolitan visit every 6 months versus every 4 years?

6. Women Deacons, Theologians, and Church Leaders

I won't beleaguer this point too much, but the Church can and must do more to cultivate leadership roles for women beyond Philoptochos, Sunday School, and the presbyteras (who often assume many of the former roles and are overburdened themselves). Women comprise one half of the Church, and their capabilities are woefully underutilized. Some solutions would include scholarships for women to attend seminaries—there are a handful who have already received M.Div degrees, and this is great news. Some are going on to earn their PhDs and ThDs to teach, do research, lead theological conferences, etc. This is encouraging. From a liturgical standpoint, I see no reason why women shouldn't be allowed to give the Sunday sermon. Thanks to the brave leadership of some hierarchs, the restoration of the role of women deacons is something that is seriously being considered worldwide. I highly encourage this trend to continue and hope one day we have women deacons in the US. More needs to be done to encourage the participation of women in theological conventions, such as the Pan-Orthodox council in Crete in 2016, where one (non-voting) delegate formally attended.⁴¹

7. Revise the Lectionary

The lectionary (in particular the Sunday readings) needs to be revised to include a better variety of readings. Paul Meyendorff hit the nail on the head rather comically with the following reflection:

In contemporary Orthodoxy, it would be fair to say, scriptural literacy has all but disappeared. Our only exposure to Scripture is through the brief selections from the epistles and the gospels read on Sunday...some passages, such as the account of the healing of the Gerasene demoniac are repeated several times...and pastors eventually run out of ideas in preaching about pigs jumping into the sea!⁴²

41. From Patricia Fann Bouteneff, "Orthodoxy, Women, and the Shrinking Global Parish," in *Fossil or Leaven: The Church We Hand Down* (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2016), 27–28:

"For example, in early 2016 an open letter appeared on Fordham University's Public Orthodoxy site. It was written by theologically educated women (Carrie Frederick Frost, Susan Ashbrook Harvery, Teva Regule, Alexandra Lobas Safchuk, and Gayle E. Woloschak) and concerned an important oversight in the way that the Pan-Orthodox Council taking place in Pentecost 2016 was organized. The author pointed out that—as originally conceived—its voting members would consist only of the hierarchs from each of the 14 autocephalous churches. Those delegates were to be accompanied by non-voting consultants that could include clergy, monastic, and/or lay participants, but with no guarantee that any would be female. Women comprise at least fifty percent of Orthodox congregations, but because of the way that the Council was structured, they would have virtually no opportunity to make a substantive contribution on matters that affect the entire Church."

42. Meyendorff, *The Liturgical Path of Orthodoxy*, 61–62.

Of note, the Old Testament has pretty much all but disappeared from the lectionary, save for the Psalms, a few feast days, and the weekdays of Lent. This is a pity, given that so much of our rich hymnography and theology is taken from the Old Testament. Many Church Fathers had memorized a good portion, if not most, of the bible. One of the lamentable losses in modern Orthodox theological schools is the disconnection from the Old Testament in favor of reading the Fathers.⁴³ Compared to many Protestant seminarians, Orthodox seminarians can't hold a candle to Protestant biblical literacy!

8. Liturgical Literacy Leads to Liturgical Renewal

Many cradle Orthodox are able to recite the Divine Liturgy by heart, but often struggle with trying to explain what the hymns mean, why the priest or deacon does this or that, or the source of the 40-day blessing of a baby (a Jewish purification rite). I don't blame them—the Divine Liturgy is complex and shrouded in mystery. The iconostasis doesn't help things either. Many converts (who have gone through catechism classes and are naturally more curious about the Church than a non-convert) often know more about the service than some clergy! Calivas states “the Church suffers when the clergy and the laity are theologically and liturgically illiterate, through no fault of their own but through the failure of the Church to educate and catechize them properly.”⁴⁴ I previously stated that Church catechism should be a lifetime endeavor—not just for converts. Clergy also need to be sensitive to the needs of the parish. It can be hard to strike a balance—if you have a very intelligent priest; you run the risk of sermons on dogmatic theology with quotations from John Zizioulas on the ontology on the Trinity (great stuff for a dogmatics class at Holy Cross, not so great for a Sunday sermon). On the other hand, there are clergy who run the risk of never explaining the theology behind the divine liturgy. One suggestion is to have a “Sunday of Liturgical Theology” where the clergy can pause at certain parts of the Liturgy and briefly explain what is about to happen and why. It need not be long, but it could be impactful to those wondering why things are done a certain way.

New Skete Monastery: Wholescale Liturgical Reform

The New Skete Monastery in Cambridge, NY is a unique Orthodox monastery, and the epitome of what I call *wholescale liturgical reform*. The monastery was founded right after the conclusion of the Vatican II Council, originally by a group of Franciscan friars who felt emboldened and curious about the Byzantine heritage of their own Roman Catholic Church.

43. This has been due, in part, to the implementation of Fr. Georges Florovsky's *Neo-Patristic Synthesis* concept in seminary syllabi, which advocates for theological schools to read more patristic works at the expense of other fields of theology, such as biblical studies, church history, or ecumenism.

44. Calivas, *Liturgical Renewal*, 60.

They decided to start a monastery of their own, leave the Roman Catholic Church, and become Orthodox. After some time, they were welcomed under the leadership of the OCA. Unlike other Orthodox monasteries, there is no call to prayer at 1:30 am, and the day pretty much starts around 8:00 am and ends about 9:00 pm. They are noted for raising German Shepherds to help keep them financially sustainable.

There are many things unique about the monastery, but in comparison to other monasteries, they are very egalitarian and extremely friendly. Meals are shared around one table, pilgrims, monks, and nuns all included. While I was there, topics of conversation ranged from a monk's prior life at Google as an engineer to themes of David Foster Wallace's book *Infinite Jest*. Each monk is known as "Brother (Name)" whether they are a novice or ordained priest or abbot. These are the things that are visible on the surface, but over the decades the monastery has undergone a large revision of the entire liturgical cycle, typikon, lectionary, and all liturgical services. Everything is chanted or read in modern English. There is no iconostasis, and what I found most interesting is that they have icons of non-Orthodox persons, such as Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey, St Theresa of Calcutta, and St. Francis of Assisi. The mood is very ecumenical, open, curious, and *joyful*. They are wholly committed to continual liturgical renewal—all the brothers and nuns are very well versed in liturgical theology as they have made it their vocation to enhance and create a whole new liturgical expression. Nicholas Denysenko, who has spent much time there, wrote:

The community's commitment to liturgical renewal was emboldened by two primary sources: first, their experience as Franciscan friars exposed them to the liturgical reforms unleashed by Vatican II which essentially followed the same paradigm of consulting liturgical history for the purpose of constructing a liturgical ordo suitable for the contemporary Church. Second, the monks also appealed to the freedom monasteries traditionally

enjoyed in Byzantine history in cultivating a healthy life suitable to the place and context.⁴⁵

I am not saying that New Skete needs to be the model for all Orthodox monasteries in America, rather I am using New Skete as an example of the diversity in unity of Orthodoxy in America. They saw an opportunity, given the relative freedoms of America, to do something that has never been done before at an Orthodox monastery in America: to systematically overhaul the entirety of the liturgical cycles into something that is not only contemporary, but also fits within the model and tradition of Orthodoxy. After spending a week at New Skete last summer, I agree with Denysenko when he states the following:

In my analysis of liturgy at New Skete...I have described this using diverse adjectives: surgical, bold, innovative, and sensitive, to name a few. When one projects the magnitude of the revision itself, one word aptly summarizes the entire enterprise: creative. This implementation of renewal was not a matter of fine-tuning a few areas of the liturgy or ignoring a handful of petitions in a litany, but consisted of a wholesale, carefully considered plan underpinned by a rationale of pastoral theology.⁴⁶

What I found most intriguing about my visit there was that, although it was a very different liturgical experience than I had been used to, I was pleasantly surprised to see an Orthodox Monastery that took its liturgical reformation so seriously and thoroughly. New Skete found a way to address some of the contemporary issues I outlined in my *Contemporary Issues* section with modern solutions. Above all, if I could take away one word from that week, it would be joy.

45. Denysenko, 263.

46. Ibid., 290–291.

Conclusion

I sincerely hope that my paper helped to elucidate some insights and myths surrounding liturgical reform in American Orthodoxy without leaving you confused or (too) enraged. As I mentioned in my Introductory Remarks, this paper was borne out of an experience at New Skete monastery that peaked my interest in liturgical theology, and I came away from that trip with greater appreciation for liturgical theology and reform. To be quite candid, I initially had no intention of writing my Integrative Essay on liturgical reform, but as I started to research the topic in more depth, I realized that there was a lot that I wanted to say and learn—hence this paper.

Liturgical reform has always been an integral part of the Orthodox Church, sometimes for the best (as in the Studite Reforms), and sometimes for the worst (as in the Nikonian reforms in Russia).⁴⁷ It is not a dirty term, especially given the Orthodox diaspora of the last century where the Church has had to make some serious reforms to remain relevant to the changing world and the countries where she has found herself. This is the beauty of Orthodoxy—it is liturgical diversity in unity. We all hold the same dogma, believe in the same Trinitarian God, commune as one body in Christ, but worship is our own unique, local ways.

Our Church is not perfect (after all, it requires human participation to fulfill, and God knows we are not perfect). The section on the eight suggestions is meant to share only observations and opinions that are wholly my own. I mean no disrespect and write from a heart of love and gratitude for my two years of study at Holy Cross. The research and writing for this essay have taught me so much about Orthodox liturgical theology—I pray they have done the same for you.

47. Interestingly, I live about 40 miles north of a small town called Gervais, Oregon, that is home to the highest number of Old Believers outside of Russia.

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Holy Wisdom Temple in New Skete. Note the open iconostasis which allows greater visibility into the altar from the nave.

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