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EDITORIAL

The purpose of St. Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly is to serve our English-speaking Orthodox Communicants in America in the fields of theological knowledge and religious education... The aim of the Quarterly is, on the one hand, to introduce to the English-speaking Orthodox (and other Christians) the rich Tradition of the Church; and on the other hand, to interpret the current issues of the day in the light of our Holy Faith and Tradition.

This paragraph in the “Foreword” to the inaugural issue—Fall of 1952—of St. Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly (renamed St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly in 1969) is remarkable for describing and prescribing a balance between fidelity to the dogmatic, liturgical, and spiritual inheritance of Orthodoxy and responsible engagement with the challenges of the time. It is noteworthy, too, that the “Foreword” presents the Quarterly as both “a continuation of and successor to the academic theological journals of Old Russia” and a vehicle for “spreading knowledge and understanding of our Orthodox Faith, History, and Spirituality in America.”

At the time, this was the first English-language Orthodox theological journal in the world,¹ an expression of Fr. Georges Florovsky’s vision for

¹It is noteworthy that the participants in the First Congress of Orthodox Theology (Athens, November 29–December 6, 1936) discussed a plan for a pan-Orthodox journal, called La Revue Orthodoxe, The Orthodox Review, or Orthodoxe Theologische Zeitschrift. This proposal, submitted by Prof. Nicolae Cotoș of the University of Cernăuți/Chernivtsi, was unanimously endorsed by the participants, but the project was partially accomplished only with the publication of the first issue of St. Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly in the Fall of 1952. See the letter by Fr. Alexander Schmemann addressed to Fr. Georges Florovsky on December 20, 1948 in Paul Gavrilyuk, On Christian Leadership: The Letters of Alexander Schmemann and Georges Florovsky (1947–1955): Texts transcribed, compiled, translated, introduced, and annotated by Paul Gavrilyuk (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary
academic rigor and fertile theological reflection at the Quarterly's sponsoring institution, St Vladimir's Seminary. Eminent Orthodox theologians have followed Florovsky as editors over the decades—beginning with Frs Alexander Schmemann and John Meyendorff and ending with Fr John Behr and Professor Paul Meyendorff—and made the Quarterly “a world-class scholarly journal” and the “flagship periodical of Orthodox scholarship.”

Much has changed since 1952 in the Church and in the world. Evidently, much has also changed for St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary and its Quarterly. In this day and age, the stature and vision of a single individual are not sufficient for the task at hand. Reflecting an ongoing shift towards collaboration and team work at the Seminary, SVTQ will be led, beginning with this first double issue of 2020, by an


2The Quarterly was always recognized as being “published by the Faculty of St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, a graduate school of Theology for all branches of the Orthodox Church,” but this project was undertaken during these decades either by one editor or by an editorial team as follows: Fr Georges Florovsky (Editor-in-Chief) and Julia D. Malinchoc (Managing Editor): vol. 1 (1952–53), no. 1 (Fall 1952) through vol. 3 (1954–55), nos. 3–4 (Spring-Summer 1955); Fr Georges Florovsky (Editor): vol. 4 (1955–56); Fr Alexander Schmemann, Fr William Schneirla, and Dr Nicholas Arseniev (Editorial Board): vol. 1 (5) (1957), no. 1 (January) through vol. 3 (1959), no. 4 (Fall); Fr Alexander Schmemann, Dr Nicholas Arseniev, Fr John Meyendorff, and Fr William Schneirla (Editorial Board): vol. 4 (1960); Fr Alexander Schmemann (Editor), Dr Nicholas Arseniev, Fr John Meyendorff, and Fr William Schneirla: vol. 5 (1961), nos. 1–2; Fr John Meyendorff (Editor), Dr Nicholas Arseniev, Fr Alexander Schmemann, and Fr William Schneirla: vol. 5 (1961), no. 3 (Fall) through vol. 9 (1965), no. 1; Fr John Meyendorff (Editor): vol. 9 (1965), no. 2 through vol. 19 (1975), no. 2; Fr John Meyendorff (Editor), John H. Erickson (Associate Editor): vol. 19 (1973), no. 3 through vol. 28 (1984), no. 1; Fr John Meyendorff (Editor), Dr John Breck (Associate Editor): vol. 28 (1984), no. 3 through vol. 28 (1984), no. 4; Dr John Breck (Editor): vol. 29 (1985), no. 1 through 39 (1995), no. 4; Dr Paul Meyendorff (Editor), Dr John Behr (Book Review Editor): vol. 40 (1996), nos. 1–2 through vol. 45 (2001), no. 4; Fr John Behr (Editor): vol. 46 (2002), no. 1 through vol. 49 (2005), no. 4; No Editor/Editorial Board [Published by the Faculty of St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary]: vol. 50 (2006), nos. 1–2 through vol. 51 (2007), no. 1; Dr Paul Meyendorff (Editor): vol. 51 (2007), nos. 2–3 through vol. 63 (2019), no. 4.

editorial team of three professors at St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, who also rely on a stellar Advisory Board for deep and broad theological expertise.

We endeavor to build on the legacy of our distinguished predecessors by keeping our gaze on the truth and beauty of Tradition—for authentic theology must always remain a student and disciple of those sanctified men and women of God, both the biblical patriarchs and prophets, apostles and evangelists, and the later “fathers” whom Florovsky called “true prophets in the true sense of this word [because] they beheld the mystery of God”\(^4\)—and also by taking seriously the world in which the Word of God speaks the words of eternal life (Jn 6.68) and into which he has descended to manifest God’s love unequivocally, unreservedly, sacrificially, and redemptively (Jn 3.16).

While the Quarterly retains its focus on the Fathers as a constant reference for a genuinely Orthodox theology, there are other avenues that also need to be explored. SVTQ can play a significant role in helping Orthodox academics and the Orthodox Church more broadly to rediscover the relevance of the patrimony of biblical Israel and of Second Temple Judaism for Christian theology and spirituality, to ponder the parallels and mutual influence between theological developments in the Church and the Synagogue, and to examine the opportunities all of this presents for the dialogue with Judaism.

We must also reflect, in the spirit of the Fathers, on the challenge of inhabiting a world that is religiously pluralistic and characterized by a concomitant erosion and ideological instrumentalization of religious faith; on issues affecting our worldwide human family such as mass displacement and forced migration caused by war, poverty, natural disasters, or political oppression; on bioethics, medical ethics, and the ethics of environmental stewardship within the context of the Orthodox tradition;

\(^4\)Discovered posthumously by Andrew Blanc, the handwritten text that includes the remark about the Fathers as true prophets and beholders of the divine mystery was penned by the eighty-year-old Florovsky in preparation for a talk. Blanc considers it “a digest of his theological sojourn as well as an outline of his proposed theological testament.” Andrew Blanc, ed., *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual, Orthodox Churchman* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993), 153–54.
on the difficult theological and pastoral questions that arise as a result of massive cultural and societal shifts within an increasingly post-Christian civilization, but also because of the past and present entanglement of Orthodox Christians in patterns of thought and practice incompatible with the Kingdom (e.g., slavery, racism, xenophobic nationalism, right- and left-wing political totalitarianism, economic corruption and consumerism). There is nothing particularly new here, considering that the very first essay published in the inaugural issue of SVTQ was titled, precisely, “The Challenge of Our Time.”

Theological journals play an important role in the larger scholarly endeavor of “academic theology.” Even though the latter is, in a sense, a contradiction in terms and a betrayal of the Orthodox understanding of theology, Orthodoxy cannot retreat from modernity in the name of some misremembered “tradition.” Academic theology—and all its institutions and all its pomp and all its pride—is not to be exorcized, but put to some good Levitical work. We assume this involvement decisively and with all sobriety, understanding, in the words of the same Fr Georges Florovsky (written in reaction to the mounting pressure to evaluate Bulgakov’s Sophiological speculations in terms of Orthodoxy versus heresy), that “theology should not be taken, or mistaken, for Church doctrine.”

Indeed, there can be no claim of offering readers that experiential acquaintance with God which deserves the name of Theology in the true sense. All one can aim for, within the parameters of a theological journal, is academic integrity, quality, and professionalism.

*St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* is a double-blind reviewed journal interested in publishing texts covering the entire spectrum of scholarship relevant to Orthodox thought and life, aiming to contribute to both academia and the Church something substantial, well researched, pertinent, and timely—in that order. Readers will find here original research, review articles, and translations, but also theological essays and comments of a more personal nature, short notices, and official theological statements published by the various bilateral commissions that carry out their task of theological dialogue between the Orthodox Church and other Christian bodies.

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5Blane, ed., *Georges Florovsky*, 66.
An Orthodox conscience, such as SVTQ strives to reflect, is, by definition, pan-Orthodox. The decision to publish only texts written in English is a purely practical one, and does not, in any way, imply a myopic focus on the Anglophone or, worse yet, North American world. As a matter of fact, we hope to be able to publish translations of important theological texts, old and new, from all over the world, to the extent to which their dissemination in English would highlight noteworthy contributions that should be better known and appreciated.

Assuming the editorship of the Quarterly is a task equally exciting and daunting. “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish’” (Lk 14.28–30). We rely, in this project, on those giving of their time to provide anonymous reviews of the submissions, on the members of the Advisory Board, on the support of the Seminary and its faculty, on donors and benefactors, as well as on a worldwide network of scholars and students of Orthodox theology. If the Quarterly is to confirm—by its cargo, as it were—the generous designation “flagship periodical of Orthodox scholarship,” this can only be the fruit of a collaborative enterprise. We invite your contributions, suggestions, and support.
THE EUCHARIST IN THE PASTORAL AND LITURGICAL PRACTICE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH*

Michael Zheltov

ABSTRACT

At all times the Eucharist has been at the center of liturgical life in all of the Orthodox churches; the Russian Church was no exception. The article presents a survey of the basic attitudes and perceptions associated with the eucharistic liturgy in the various periods of the history of the Russian Church, from its beginnings until our times. In particular, the article focuses on the development of the devotional practices as a precondition for the reception of communion and highlights the significant changes in the practice and understanding of the Eucharist throughout the history of the Russian Church.

KEYWORDS: Russian Orthodox Church, Eucharist, liturgy, liturgical history, communion

This article represents a broad overview and analysis of eucharistic practices and eucharistic theology in the Russian Orthodox Church throughout various periods of its history. The picture that emerges from the primary sources is quite dissimilar from the models that we may find either in classic dogmatic textbooks of the Synodal era (1721–1917) or in the twentieth century “neopatristic” theological works. It turns out that the place that the perception of the Eucharist and the participation in it occupied in the large-scale panorama of the Russian religious life in different eras was not exactly the same as we observe today. Therefore, a

*The article is an updated version of a paper presented at the Eucharistic Congress in Esztergom (Hungary) in 2018. I express my deepest gratitude to my friends and colleagues, Fr Stefanos Alexopoulos and Sr Vassa Larin, for improving my English text.
conscientious scholarly study of the history of the Russian Church and of its spiritual legacy must avoid anachronistic projections of later practices and understandings upon the evidence of earlier sources.

The Origins

The liturgical tradition received by the Russian Church after the Baptism of Rus’ in 988 was of Byzantine origin. But it was not purely Constantinopolitan; rather, it relied on a corpus of liturgical and patristic translations into the Slavonic language made by St Clement of Ohrid (†916) and his co-workers, who were active in the first half of the tenth century in the Western Bulgarian lands, in a region of modern Macedonia and Albania.¹

There can be no doubt that the Byzantine formularies of the eucharistic liturgy held a prominent place in this corpus—just as the *ordinarium* and *propria* of the Latin Mass did in the late ninth-century corpus of translations made by Sts Cyril and Methodius.² In the oldest extant Slavonic manuscripts we find partly-preserved Slavonic translations of the two Constantinopolitan eucharistic formularies, of St Basil and of St John Chrysostom,³ along with translations of different pieces from the Latin Sacramentary, and from the Jerusalemite formulary of the Divine Liturgy ascribed to St James.⁴

The Slavs’ proper understanding of the eucharistic service was safeguarded by several didactic texts translated by the creators of Slavonic

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literacy. These included the set of Mystagogical Homilies of St Cyril (or John) of Jerusalem, the Historia Mystagogica (in the oldest manuscripts it bears the name of St Basil the Great, in the later ones the name of St Germanos I of Constantinople\(^5\)), and eucharistic miracle-stories from the *Aposthagmati Patrum*.\(^6\) To these St Clement of Ohrid added a few homilies by himself, which witness to the perception of the Eucharist as seen through the eyes of a tenth-century Orthodox hierarch and ecclesiastical author.\(^7\)

The eucharistic formularies of St Basil and of St John Chrysostom translated by Clement and his associates contained regular prayers from the Euchologion of Constantinople, supplemented by certain additional ones.\(^8\) Some of them are also found in the Greek Euchologia from Southern Italy, some others appear to have no Greek prototype. Thus, the oldest stratum of liturgical tradition of those Slavs who were adhering to the Eastern rite appears to be Western-Byzantine—like that of the South-Italian Greeks—and not purely Constantinopolitan. When Rus’ was baptized in the late tenth century, this stratum spread to Rus’ and formed the initial layer of its own tradition.\(^9\)

By the eleventh century, an updated version of the Slavonic Euchologion appeared, which included the eucharistic rites. This time, it


conformed to the Constantinopolitan standard. The older stratum of tradition, however, continued to co-exist with the updated one, forming a specific Old-Russian type of the eucharistic formulary, which was a mixture of two basic liturgical layers, a Western Byzantine and a Constantinopolitan one, further supplemented by additional prayers originating in the private practices of middle- and late-Byzantine asceticism.\textsuperscript{10}

As for the understanding of the Eucharist in Old Rus’, it was framed, first, by the eucharistic formularies themselves,\textsuperscript{11} and second, by a selection of short pseudonymous liturgical commentaries, including those ascribed to St Basil and St Gregory the Theologian.\textsuperscript{12} By the fourteenth century, these commentaries, along with some other texts, were blended into a united commentary called \textit{The Liturgy Interpreted}, which was included in the Nomokanon and thus became the canonical explanation of the Eucharist for the Russians until the mid-seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{13}

The actual practice of eucharistic participation in Old Rus’ can be traced from the canonical responses of Kievan metropolitan and other Russian hierarchs. Thus, in the middle of the twelfth century, we see from the responses of archbishop Niphon of Novgorod to the “Questions of Kyrik of Novgorod” that ordinary people received Communion quite regularly, probably on a weekly basis.\textsuperscript{14} The main requirement for

\textsuperscript{10}I am currently working on a series of publications on this subject.

\textsuperscript{11}Among other things, these formularies adopted one of the aforementioned homilies of St Clement, partly reworked into a prayer (as I am going to show in a separate publication).


\textsuperscript{13}Nikolai Krasnoselscev, “Голковая служба и другія сочиненія, относящіяся къ объясненію богослужения въ Древней Руси до XVIII вѣка (библіографіческій обзорь),” \textit{Православный собеседникь} 2 (1878): 3–43.

\textsuperscript{14}Aleksei Pavlov, \textit{Памятники древне-русского канонического права, ч. 1} (памятники
communicants was sexual purity: those unmarried should not be guilty of any sort of fornication; those married should abstain from their partners for a day before Communion (and the day of Communion itself as well, excluding newlyweds). Save this, and an obligatory ablution on the day before Communion, the document does not mention any specific preparatory fast or prayer rule. The pre-eucharistic ablution may have had some baptismal overtones, since according to archbishop Niphon, the rite of baptism should find its completion in a eucharistic celebration.

In the “Questions of Kyrik of Novgorod” there is, however, a mention of the practice of keeping a forty-day penitential fast to those who otherwise were continuing to live in fornication—but Niphon himself was against admitting such people to Communion, regardless of the length of their fasting. There are also a few mentions of Communion on Pascha. It appears that Pascha was the day when most of the people did partake of Holy Communion.

The oldest extant Russian Euchologion, *Moscow Synodal Library* 604, dated to the beginning of the thirteenth century, contains two prayers, one for Pascha and another for Nativity, which were to be read over those who were going to receive Communion after keeping a forty-day fast. This contradicts what we said about the practice of frequent Communion described in the “Questions of Kyrik of Novgorod.” Two alternative conclusions can be drawn: either the Russians switched, in the

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15Ibid., 38 [#57], 43 [#72], 45 [#77], 57 [#22], 61 [#21].
16This practice was further confirmed by the Synod in Vladimir in AD 1273 or 1274: “Everyone after [his/her] Baptism should be honored with the most pure Divine Body and revered Blood . . . No one should be baptized without receiving Communion”. Ibid., 94–5 [#2] (concerning the date of the Synod see: J. Shapov, *Византийское и южнославянское правовое наследие на Руси в XI–XIII вв.* (Москва: Наука, 1978), 139–209).
17Павлов, *Памятники*, 41 [#68], cf. 31 [#30].
18Now this manuscript collection is kept at the National Historical Museum in Moscow.
19Fol. 28v–29. These prayers are also found in many later manuscripts, see: Alexander Almazov, *Тайная исповедь в Православной Восточной Церкви*, vol. 2 (Одесса: Типография Штаба Одесского Военного Округа, 1894), 238–42.
second half of the twelfth century, to the practice of receiving Communion only after a lengthy fast; or the practice in Novgorod was different from that in Volyn’, whence *Moscow Synodal Library 604* originates. The former explanation seems to be more likely, since, from the mid-twelfth century, the metropolitan see in Kiev was mostly occupied by hierarchs who, for some reason, belonged to a specific group of Constantinopolitan clergy adhering to rigorous ascetic ideals, and who were installing like-minded bishops in other Russian episcopal sees.20

Because of the Mongol invasion in the 1230s and the establishment of Mongol rule, Russian sources from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fourteenth centuries are scarce and do not provide any significant additional details over the practice of eucharistic participation described in earlier sources.

In 1395, Metropolitan Cyprian of Kiev wrote a canonical letter from Moscow, including instructions on the rite of administering Communion to laity. According to this letter, laypeople could receive the Eucharist in a church only on Pascha and on the Nativity of the Lord. Another option, reserved only for the seriously ill, was receiving in their homes. An important detail mentioned by Cyprian is the figure of a spiritual father who allows—or disallows—one to approach Communion. The spiritual father is expected to “give” a prayer to those preparing to receive Communion (see note on Paschal/Nativity prayers above) at the appropriate point of the Divine Liturgy. Male communicants were to proceed to the Royal Doors to receive Communion, while females were to receive the Sacrament at the side door of the sanctuary.21

In another letter by the same metropolitan, which contains canonical responses to Hegumen Athanasios Vysotsky the Elder, Cyprian insists on people completing the special “rule of prayers” before Communion.22


22“правило установленное . . . установлении тропари и молитвы” (“set rule . . . set troparia and prayers”): Ibid., 249–50.
This meant reading the later-well-known Akolouthia (Order) of Holy Communion, which developed in Byzantium in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and was first attested in the Slavonic manuscripts in the fourteenth century. In the same letter, Cyprian mentions that monks are allowed to receive Communion not only on Pascha and Nativity, as the laymen are, but also during the four long fasts, if their abbot blesses. This exceedingly strict eucharistic discipline became normative in Rus’ until the early eighteenth century.

The “Classical” Practice

By the seventeenth century, the usual Russian practice was to receive Communion once a year, during Lent. The widespread practice was for communicants to hold a week of “xerophagia,” which literally means “eating of food which has not [been boiled in] water,” i.e., food that had not been cooked. This term was understood by the Russians as referring


24The editio princeps of the then called Oko Tserkovnoje (“The Eye of the Church”, i.e., the liturgical Typikon), printed in Moscow in 1610, says: “If you are going to receive Communion... you should keep a whole week of xerophagia, and completely abstain from drinking alcohol. ... If there is a necessity to receive Communion sooner [i.e., before the expiration of a week of fasting], be it due to an illness, or some other circumstance, you should keep at least four or three days, eating dry food [not earlier than] at the ninth hour of the day [i.e., after 3 PM], and thereafter [you can] receive Communion, but [this is only] in the case of necessity. ... And you should not just feel awe and reverence, but be abstinent, keep fast, perform your prayers, stay vigilant, shed tears, and make 300 prostrations a day, while you are making yourself ready [to receive communion] in the course of [these] seven days” (ch. 29, fol. 83v). This instruction is included in a series of chapters on the rules of fasting, often found in the Russian fifteenth-sixteenth century manuscripts of the Typikon, which are taken from the Taktikon of Nikon of the Black Mountain (see: Ioann Mansvetsor, Церковный устав (Типик), его образование и судьба в греческой и русской церкви [Москва: Типография Э. Лисснера и Ю. Романа, 1885]), but this specific instruction does not belong to Nikon. Probably it is a description of the real Russian practice of the beginning of the seventeenth century, composed by Longin Shishkev, the editor of the 1610 Oko Tserkovnoje himself. This would explain why this instruction is omitted from the next edition, made in 1633, which was intended to replace Longin’s work. In any case, the instruction was re-introduced into the next edition, printed in 1641 (ch. 32, fol. 75v), where its 1610 text was repeated almost verbatim, but with an addition:
to strictly vegetarian meals without adding a trace of oil, whether cooked or not, but necessarily eaten cold. The discipline of keeping such a week was called govenie (= awe, reverence). During their govenie believers tried to attend every church service and read the so-called pravil'nye kanony, i.e., three hymnographic kanons a day. After a week of govenie, communicants went to confession to their spiritual father, but there was no guarantee that he would allow each one who completed govenie to receive Communion, since grave sins merited excommunication. Everyone was expected to go to the same spiritual father for years; appealing to another one was prohibited. Those admitted to participate would read the lengthy Service of Holy Communion early in the morning, before Liturgy, and then go to the eucharistic celebration to finally partake of the sacrament.

In such conditions, the perception of the eucharistic service celebrated on a weekly or—in monasteries and big cathedrals—a daily basis could only be a highly mystical one. Such a perception was firmly supported by the Liturgy Interpreted—the compiled commentary mentioned above, where the celebration is presented as an invisible angelic drama, whose acts follow the earthly liturgical rite, culminating with the angels slaughtering the Divine Child during the priest’s ekphosis, “Holy things are for the holy.” This sort of apocalyptic interpretation, however, was by no means the only way of reflecting on the Eucharist. The annual cycle of didactic stories to be read in the church included several sermons on the meaning of the Eucharist and a proper attitude towards it; literate people were acquainted with appropriate texts from St John Chrysostom, St John of each day of the preparatory week the person preparing for communion should say 600 Jesus prayers, and 100 prayers to the Mother of God.

25I literate persons repeated the Jesus prayer for thousands of times and made hundreds of prostrations instead.

26Technically, this became possible because the celebrating priests received Communion without an additional fast, though they were also expected to read all the preparatory kanons and prayers.


28See my forthcoming article, “The Sermons on the Eucharist in the Annual Cycle of Didactic Liturgical Readings Contained in the Russian Prolog (Synaxarium).”
Damascus, and some other Fathers of the Church; finally, everyone preparing for communion was obliged to read the Akolouthia (Order) of Holy Communion, which in the pre-Nikonian Russian tradition included not only a number of hymnographical texts and prayers, containing quotations from the Scripture and patristic texts (albeit rather monotonous ones), but also those biblical pericopes that are most fundamental for eucharistic theology: the narrative of the Last Supper (according to 1 Cor 11.23–32), and the Johannine Bread-of-Life Discourse (Jn 6.48–54).

The middle of the seventeenth century brought with it a large-scale reform of the Russian liturgical tradition. Usually associated with the name of the Patriarch Nikon (†1681), this reform actually embraced a period reaching far beyond his pontificate (1652–60; final deposition: 1666). Among the most important results of the reform was a profound reworking of the rites of celebrating the Eucharist.29 This concerned not only clergy, but laity as well, since the visual aspect of the Divine Liturgy had quite noticeably changed: the rite was somewhat shortened, the wording of some texts became different, as did the outer shape of the liturgical bread and of the priestly vestments. Gradually, the style of icons and church art, and the musical setting of the service also underwent drastic modifications.

In order to advocate his reforms, and in the meantime also to deepen Russians’ understanding of the Eucharist, Patriarch Nikon ordered the production of a Slavonic translation of Nicholas Cabasilas’ Commentary on the Divine Liturgy, the best Byzantine treatment of the Eucharist.30 The ultimate goal of the reform was to bring the Russian practice into

29See Aleksei Dimitrievsky, Исправление книг при патриархе Никоне и последующих патриархах (Москва: Языки славянской культуры, 2004). This study, written before 1917, remained unpublished for nearly a century, until Alexander Kravetsky edited it from a manuscript. See also: Paul Meyendorff, Russia, Ritual & Reform (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1991), where the author investigated the same problem, but, unlike Dmitrievsky, remained unfortunately unaware of the most important witnesses to the progress of the reform—the draft copies of the liturgical books, used by the editors themselves, which contain many very illuminating notes and markings.

30The translation was published, along with a few shorter liturgical treatises, in Moscow in 1655 (the book as a whole was entitled Skrivshal”—“Tablet,” after Moses’ Tablets of
strict conformity with the Greek one. This explains why the Russian formularies of the eucharistic liturgies were shortened so noticeably, as also was the Akolouthia (Order) of Holy Communion—these were reworked after printed Greek editions of the early seventeenth century. Yet, among other things, the instruction to keep a seven-day xerophagia before Communion, specific to the late Russian tradition, remained even in the newer editions of the Typikon.\textsuperscript{31}

And so it happened, that after the deposition of Nikon in 1666, Byzantine eucharistic theology gave way to a Roman Catholic one in the Russian Church. Because of the powerful influence of the Ukrainian theological school, which was strongly inclined toward Roman Catholic theology,\textsuperscript{32} and of Ukrainian ecclesiastical culture on the Muscovites in the second half of the seventeenth century, Russian liturgical books of this period began to treat the words of institution as consecratory and to deny the consecration of the chalice in the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, specifically because the formulary of this liturgy did not contain these words. Finally, this change produced a great controversy, known as the “Bread-Worshiping Heresy” (\textit{Kholebopoklonnaya yeres’}), i.e., the heresy of adoring the [still unconsecrated] bread,\textsuperscript{33} which flared up in the period of 1670–80.\textsuperscript{34} The
issue was finally resolved in 1690, by stressing the consecratory power of the epiklesis.  

Another example of Latin influence is a didactic text, called Izvestie uchitel'noe (Note of Instruction), introduced into the Russian Sluzhebnik (Service Book) in the 1670s, and corrected or modified in the 1690s. Its text is a reworking of didactic rubrics from the Euchologion of Peter (Mohila), Metropolitan of Kiev, printed in Kiev in 1646. The Muscovites seemed to be completely unaware of the fact that these rubrics were actually a slightly-revised translation of rubrics from the post-Tridentine Roman Missal. Among them were two directives that obviously contradicted the rigorous eucharistic discipline to which the Russians were accustomed. One of them prescribed the altar boys to receive Communion “often”; another stated that a week-long govenie was not obligatory; and that three days, or even just a single day, would suffice. Besides, the late seventeenth century Russian editors of the Sluzhebnik also introduced a short chapter concerning the daily reading of the hymnographical canons. According to this chapter, instead of reading three kanons daily throughout the entire week preceding Communion, one could read the three canons once. All these foreshadowed the radical changes to come in Russian eucharistic piety.

Опыт изследования изъ истории церковнаго просвящения и церковной жизни конца XVII и начала XVIII ввековъ (Санкт-Петербург: Типо-литографія М. П. Фроловой, 1899); Tamara Panich, Книга «Цит веры» в историко-литературном контексте кон. XVII в. (Новосибирск: Сибирский хронограф, 2004).

35The Presanctified Liturgy, however, remained in its altered form until now. Thus, the modern Russian way of celebrating this rite differs from that of the Greeks and of the Russian Old-Believers, who kept the original practice. See M. Bernatskij’s overview of the Russian liturgio-theological controversies of the seventeenth century in the article on the Eucharist in Православная энциклопедия (Москва, 2008), 17:647–51.


37Since the first appearance in the 1699 edition of the Sluzhebnik, the texts of both chapters, i.e. of the Izvestie uchitel'noe, and of the shorter one (entitled “Order for those who are going to celebrate liturgy or to receive communion . . .”), have remained unchanged until today.
A significant move in this direction was made by Tsar Peter the Great (†1725), who ordered that every Christian Orthodox citizen should receive Communion once a year.\(^38\) Monks were obliged to receive Communion four times a year.\(^39\) The Ukaz (Decree) of the Senate and the Synod of July 16, 1722 introduced the so-called “исповѣдныя вѣдомости” (“registers of [those who were at] confession”), in which every parish priest was to keep a record of those who had and had not come to confession and Communion in the previous year. This measure was justified by the struggle with the Old Believers schism, which had deeply divided the Russian Church.\(^40\) Another measure was the abolition of the institution of spiritual fathers. Now Orthodox Christians were to go to confession simply at the parish church to which they were assigned. The “obligation” of annual Communion meant that no one was subjected to a long-term excommunication anymore. Many people, who would otherwise not go to Communion for years, were now legally obliged to change their attitude. This, however, did not turn the Eucharist into the center of spiritual life in Russian Orthodoxy. Rather, Peter’s legislation suggested a formal attitude towards Communion, later resulting in the appearance of a “certificate of fulfilling the obligation” of confession and Communion, which anyone promoted to a new position of civil or military service, or planning to marry, was expected to present.\(^41\)

As for the practice of preparation, during the period of the Russian Empire, the rigorous practice of older times survived only among the Old Believers. Ordinary Orthodox Christians no longer kept the week

\(^{38}\)See, first of all, the Spiritual (or Ecclesiastical) Regulation of 1721, part 2, chapter on laymen, §2.

\(^{39}\)Addition to the Spiritual Regulation (May 1722), chapter on monks, §17.

\(^{40}\)In fact, “registers of [those who were at] confession” were an upgraded version of “lists of those who do not go to confession.” The latter were invented by Peter the Great himself, whose personal decree of February 17, 1718 commanded priests to compose such lists as means of discovering covert Old Believers in order to fine them. These lists were seen too much as a tool for government surveillance of dissidents, and therefore their practical implementation was quite unsuccessful (cf. decree of Synod of September 27, 1721), which eventually resulted in replacing them with the more neutral document, i.e., the above-mentioned registers.

\(^{41}\)This was sometimes issued in exchange for a bribe (see the same decree of Synod of September 27, 1721).
of “xerophagia,” now being allowed to eat hot—though Lenten—food. The first Saturday of Lent became the regular day of yearly Communion for most people. They observed the fasting rules of the first week of Lent and then received Communion; but many thereafter ceased observing Lent until Holy Week. The more devout would observe all of Lent and then receive Communion once again on Holy Thursday. No one at all, except the celebrating clergy, was expected to partake of Holy Communion at the Presanctified Liturgies or on Pascha, despite its significance, in medieval times, as the day of Communion. Outside Lent, virtually nobody went to Communion, except the day of his or her patron saint. There were some exceptions, though, especially among the monks, when certain pious souls ventured to receive Communion during each of the four fasting periods of the year, or even monthly.

Theologically, during the times of the Russian Empire the Eucharist was understood more or less in the terms of Western scholasticism, adjusted mutatis mutandis to fit Orthodox liturgical tradition and practice. The apocryphal commentaries of visionary character were mostly forgotten. The Eucharist itself was understood as an essential part of church dogmatic teaching, but personal participation in it was much more a question of private piety than a means of building the ecclesiastic community.

The Changes brought by the Twentieth Century

Both the so-called Russian religious renaissance of the beginning of the twentieth century, and the tremendous growth of academic scholar-

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42 This could be explained by theological uncertainties I have mentioned before. The practice of barring laity from Communion at the Presanctified liturgies is still alive in some places.

43 At that time Pascha was understood as a day of feasting (including excessive drinking of alcohol), by no means a day of fasting and penitence, which came to be closely associated with Communion. The paschal service was meant to be conducted quickly and in a lively manner, without the need of interrupting it for confessions and tolerating long queues of communicants.

44 See Bernatskij’s overview of the Eucharistic theology in the Russian dogmatic treatises of the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries in the same article on the Eucharist in Православная энциклопедия, vol. 17, mentioned above (here pp. 631–8).

45 On the origins and development of the Russian religious renaissance, see, e.g., a
ship in Russian theological academies before the Revolution of 1917, led to a number of significant changes in Russian traditional religious piety. The Eucharist was not an exception. This is clearly notable in the texts reflecting eucharistic themes. Russian literature of the nineteenth century hardly ever reflects on the theme of eucharistic symbolism and meaning, while ecclesiastical preaching of the time either speaks of the Eucharist in distinctly scholastic and dogmatic terms or urges the audience not to be lax in fulfilling their “obligation,” which consisted of going to Communion once a year. This dull attitude experiences a dramatic change in both secular and ecclesiastical literature of the early twentieth century.

In the field of liturgical scholarship in the early twentieth century, significant contribution to the study of eucharistic doctrine and practice was made by such renowned Russian scholars as Nikolay Krasnosel'tsev, Alexey Dmitrievsky, Ivan Karabinov, and others. The results of their studies, as well as the much more famous (to ordinary people) example of St John of Kronstadt, called for a change in the existing practice and attitude toward the Eucharist. But the religious revival of the Russian Silver Age was predominantly intellectual, and colored by romanticism. Let me quote, in this context, a famous poem written by the renowned Russian poet Osip Mandelstam in 1915:

Here is the diskos, like a golden sun—
A blessed moment—in the air it stands—


The famous Meditations on the Divine Liturgy by the great Russian author Nikolai Gogol (1809–52) must be considered an exception in this common trend. Gogol's Meditations interpreted the Divine Liturgy in a highly symbolic style, but it should be noted that the author’s intense religious piety was interpreted almost as madness by his contemporaries.

I.c., paten. However, Mandelstam’s original Russian text has “дарохранительница” instead, which means “tabernacle” (for keeping the Holy Gifts). The Russian tabernacles of the Imperial period were sometimes crowned with a stylized sun, doubtlessly imitating the Latin monstrance (though without the eucharistic host in it).
The world is held in time like an apple in one’s hands—
Here will be heard only the Grecian tongue.

A solemn zenith of the service to God’s will,
Light of round cupolas glows in July,
That with full chest, outside of time we sigh
Of endless meadows where all time stands still.

Like noon eternal is the Eucharist—
All drink the cups, all play and sing aloud,
Before the eyes of all the cup of God
Pours with a gaiety that cannot desist.\textsuperscript{48}

In 1905, another great Russian poet, Alexander Blok, wrote an even more famous poem:

The girl was singing in a church choir,
About the weary abroad, far away,
About the ships in the sea, so dire,
And those who’d forgotten their happy day.

So sweet was her voice flying up into highness
With shimmering beam on her shoulder of white,
And every one listened watching from darkness
The way the white garment was singing in light.

And every one thought that the joy was there,
That the ships were all in a quiet bay,
And the weary people abroad, full of care,
Were now all blessed with a happy day.

The voice was sweet, and the beam was shining,
And only up there at the royal rack
A child, conversant with secret, was crying
That nobody, really, would ever come back.\textsuperscript{49}


\textsuperscript{49} Alexander Blok, “The girl was singing in a church choir” (1880–1921, “Collected
I will also quote yet another poem by Blok, written in 1902:\footnote{50}

Resigning to the tender brows,
Admiring the charm of all
I throw a bunch of snow-white flowers
Into the yard,\footnote{51} across the wall.

And then the hazy screen will fall and
The Bridegroom will step down the shrine.
And from the forest border onward
The wedding day will break and shine.

It is very characteristic that neither Mandelstam nor Blok lived an active ecclesiastical life (and even more: despite his reference to an Orthodox/Catholic “tabernacle” [дарохранительница], Mandelstam was nominally a Lutheran). These poets perceived the powerful symbolism of the Eucharist, but had very little experience of the sacrament itself, as was the case for most of the nominal Russian Orthodox people of that period.

The turning point of everything and for everyone was the Russian Revolution of 1917. Initially, poets and thinkers understood it as a powerful mark of the upcoming revival of the Russian spirit. The same Alexander Blok even wrote a poem called “The Twelve,” where a gang of revolutionary sailors is matched against none other than the twelve apostles. The poem, written in January 1918, ends as follows:

Behind them follows the hungry dog,
Ahead of them—with bloody banner,
Unseen within the blizzard’s swirl,
Safe from any bullet’s harm,
With gentle step, above the storm,
In the scattered, pearl-like snow,


\footnote{50}Ibid. (poem #41).

\footnote{51}Literally, “into the churchyard” (“за церковную ограду”).
Crowned with a wreath of roses white,
Ahead of them—goes Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{52}

Very soon, however, the Russian people found out that, instead of a revival and an end to the war on the Western front, they received a humiliating peace treaty with Germany, the Civil War in Russia itself, the loss of territories, and, finally, the excruciating terror of the new Communist government, directed against virtually everyone. Religion was proclaimed a relic of the past and was to be eradicated. Already in 1918, the Russian poet Sergey Yesenin grasped this as follows:

\begin{quote}
I will not fear the doom,  
Nor the spears, nor the arrows of rains,  
So proclaims according to the Bible  
The prophet Yesenin Sergey.  

My time has already come,  
I am not afraid of the clank of a knout.  
The Body, the Body of Christ,  
I spit it out of my mouth.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

The Communists imprisoned and executed thousands upon thousands of Orthodox clergy and laypeople. The ecclesiastical hierarchy was almost completely destroyed. And in these conditions, the Eucharist finally became what it should be—the center of life of the Christian community. Now, however, it was often celebrated not in beautifully-decorated splendid churches, but rather in prison cells and on tree stumps in the forests around concentration camps. Those who escaped imprisonment gathered together in private houses or in sparse churches that had not been requisitioned by the state. In such circumstances, the Eucharist truly became the center of spiritual life. Similar developments took place in Russian émigré circles.


\textsuperscript{53}These are the first two stanzas of Yesenin’s poem, “Inoniya,” addressed “to the prophet Jeremiah”; English translation is mine.
But the strict preparation rules for Holy Communion still remained: during most of the twentieth century, the Russian eucharistic discipline presupposed keeping a three-day fast, attending services, and reading three hymnographic canons before finally going to confession and reading the Akolouthia (Order) of Holy Communion.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia and the other countries of the former Soviet Bloc experienced a decade of vigorous spiritual rebirth. Yet the rules of preparation for Communion that were described above still largely remain in effect. Presently, there still are places where, for example, the Orthodox clergy refuse to administer Holy Communion at the Paschal liturgy or during Bright Week. But alongside this older practice we see another approach emerging, which presupposes frequent reception of Communion, together with a reduced pre-Communion fast and the reduced pre-Communion prayer rule.

Nowadays, in the crowded parishes of Moscow, St Petersburg, and other large Russian cities, many people partake of the Holy Gifts quite frequently (judging by the older standards): two, three, four times a month, and even more frequently. In 2015, the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church issued an official document, entitled “On the Participation of Christians in the Eucharist,” which recommends frequent Communion and speaks of the optional character of the preparatory fasting and reading of hymnographic canons before Communion. Moreover, despite the long-held Russian tradition of always going to confession before Communion, even confession is proclaimed optional for those who have a spiritual father and have received his blessing to commune. According to this document, in an ordinary situation, clergy and


55The document formulates the omission of compulsory pre-Communion confession in a very gentle way, in order not to over-scarelize the more conservative clergy: confession becomes optional only if a spiritual father gives a specific blessing and seemingly only during the Holy and Bright Weeks (though in fact the document mentions these two weeks only as an example: “например”). Such an emphatically diplomatic approach along with an explicit reference to the canons of Dionysius of Alexandria (section 2 of his canonical letter to Bishop Basilides) and Timothy of Alexandria (question-and-answer 7) made in the document (these rules restrict menstruating women from
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laying preparing to receive Communion are obligated to 1) abstain from any food and drink from midnight until Communion (or at least for six hours before Communion if, e.g., a Presanctified liturgy is celebrated in the evening), 2) abstain from marital relations on a day and a night before Communion, and 3) read the Akolouthia of Holy Communion.\(^{56}\)

The pastors of the Church rejoice in their hearts when they see how many people approach the holy chalice. There is, however, another side to this picture. One notes that the spirit of consumerism, omnipresent in our modern-day world, has entered our church life as well. People like when they are “given” something in a church—be it holy water, a palm branch, a candle, or Holy Communion; but they tend to be far less interested in faith, in asceticism, in the work of charity, in being part of the community’s life. Many parents lead their children to Communion, hoping that this will help in their upbringing, but at the same time they themselves do not live a truly Christian life. During the evening services, when there is no Communion, but when many beautiful biblical passages and Christian hymns are read and sung, one finds far fewer people praying in church than during the services when Communion is offered.

Therefore, it behooves Orthodox pastors to teach the faithful that while Holy Communion is probably the most important tool of spiritual life it is still just a tool and not the sole content of this life. But the pastors of the Church often do not have sufficient time to explain this nuance to the people.\(^{57}\)

Conclusions

In its thousand-year history the teaching and practice of the Russian Church has gone through some significant changes, including the doctrine and practice of the Eucharist. For many centuries the Church

Communion; the document orders that they be relaxed in some cases) met with criticisms in the Orthodox West: Paul Meyendorff, “Confession and Communion in the Orthodox Church: A Modern Dilemma,” St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly 58 (2014): 253–79.

\(^{56}\)Quite ironically, this is the first synodal act ever to impose an obligation to read the Akolouthia of Holy Communion.

\(^{57}\)Either because the priests are indeed overloaded with their pastoral duties, or because of their own deficient understanding of their responsibilities.
considered the Eucharist from a predominantly mystical and strongly ascetical perspective; in the late nineteenth and then in the twentieth century, the Russian Church made a great contribution to the understanding of the Eucharist, because of the works of the great Russian liturgists and theologians of those times. In particular, the theologians of the Russian emigration had a decisive influence on the movement for the revival and transformation of eucharistic life throughout the Orthodox Church in general.

Today the Russian Church is undoubtedly undergoing a eucharistic revival, although together with it we observe certain “pitfalls” of growth—above all, an overly-individualistic and consumerist attitude to the Eucharist. A recognition of the fact that the Eucharist is not just one of the sacraments of the Church, but the center of the whole life of every church community—the life that, in its turn, cannot be limited only to ritual activity—is a prerequisite for the further growth of Christian mission in Russia and beyond.

**Postscript**

Even after this article was finished, the whole world was struck by the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus. The pandemic likewise affected the territories within the canonical structures of the Russian Orthodox Church. Suddenly churches and monasteries became inaccessible for the faithful, and both in Russia and elsewhere this took place in the most sensitive time for every Orthodox Christian—during Holy Week and Pascha. The patterns of participation in the Eucharist, which seemed to have become so familiar over the last twenty to twenty-five years, were radically disrupted. Unexpectedly, a more significant role was given to prayer at home and various forms of online communication: livestreaming of divine services, video-conferences with clergy, joint prayers over the internet, etc. It is still too early to tell, however, whether this experience will significantly affect the understanding and content of liturgical life in the Russian Church, or if, on the contrary, it will remain a brief episode that will soon be forgotten.
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