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Hymns on the Lord's Supper
250 Years

PAPERS PRESENTED
AT
THE SIXTH ANNUAL MEETING
OF
THE CHARLES WESLEY SOCIETY
October 1995
The Divinity School
Duke University
Durham, North Carolina

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Proceedings of The Charles Wesley Society 1995

Published in the United States by
The Charles Wesley Society, 1996

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The Wesleys' *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* and Orthodoxy

Leonid Kishkovsky*

What I am presenting in this article are notes, observations, and comparisons on the subject of "The Wesleys' *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* and Orthodoxy." I will compare some elements and themes in the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* to some eucharistic texts in two books: *The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* and *The Liturgy of St. Basil the Great*.¹ I will refer to some texts in the actual eucharistic liturgies. But primarily I will refer to the prayers of preparation for Holy Communion in the Orthodox Church which are also printed in these books. The prayers of preparation for Holy Communion are not for priests only. They are published in all the prayer books. When lay people or priests buy a prayer book, they will find a section with these prayers. Quite often the prayers of preparation for Holy Communion are also printed with the eucharistic texts themselves. I chose this approach because in a sense the prayers of preparation for Holy Communion are analogous to the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* in the sense that they are not themselves the eucharistic text. But they express the doctrine, piety, and worship of the Eucharist as an entry point to the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*. Therefore, perhaps it can be a useful way of getting some insight into analogies and differences between the approach of the Wesleys and the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, and the Orthodox Church's approach.

Let me begin by speaking of four themes or dimensions in the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, which are themes that I, as an Orthodox, gladly wish to affirm. They are key themes in the Orthodox tradition as well. These four are: the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, eucharistic piety, and the use of Old Testament images.

The Holy Trinity

The Holy Trinity is addressed in Hymn 75.

1. Father, the Grace we claim,
The double Grace bestow'd,
On All who trust in Him that came
By Water and by Blood.

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¹*Service Books of the Orthodox Church: The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, Vol. 1; *The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gift*, Vol. 2 (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikon's Seminary Press, 1984). All succeeding quotations from the Orthodox liturgies come from these two volumes, which were published in a single edition in 1984.

2. Jesu, the Blood apply,
The Righteousness bring in,
Us by thy Dying justify,
And wash out all our Sin.
3. Spirit of Faith, come down,
Thy Seal with Power set to,
The Banquet by thy Presence crown,
And prove the Record true:
4. Pardon, and Grace impart:
Come quickly from above,
And witness now in every Heart
That God is perfect Love.

In the Orthodox Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, actually in the liturgy of preparation for the Eucharist, we find the following prayer:

O God, our God, who didst send the heavenly bread, the food of the whole world, our Lord and God Jesus Christ to be our Saviour, Redeemer, and Benefactor, blessing, and sanctifying us. Bless this offering and accept it upon Thy heavenly altar. Remember those who offered it and those for whom that it was offered, for Thou art good and lovest mankind. Preserve us blameless in the celebration of Thy divine mysteries. For sanctified and glorified is Thy most honorable and majestic name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages and ages. Amen.

In the anaphora of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom we find these words:

Holy art Thou and all-holy, Thou and Thine only-begotten Son and Thy Holy Spirit! Holy art Thou and all-holy, and magnificent is Thy glory! Who hast so loved Thy world as to give Thine only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Now in these texts, both Orthodox and Wesleyan, there is a strong confession and affirmation of the Holy Trinity. What is of interest in the Orthodox approach, is that references to the Trinity permeate the whole liturgy and also the piety of the Orthodox approach to the Eucharist. That the Trinitarian faith is likewise central to the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* is particularly significant in the present ecumenical moment, when a certain erosion of the Trinitarian faith is occurring. The centrality of the Trinitarian affirmation in the Wesleyan tradition, as we have it in the hymns we are considering, and the centrality of the Trinitarian faith in the Orthodox doctrine and liturgical tradition are parallel one to another.

The Holy Spirit

We see the centrality of the *Holy Spirit* in Hymn 72:

1. Come, Holy Ghost, thine Influence shed,
And realize the Sign,
Thy Life infuse into the Bread,
Thy Power into the Wine.

2. Effectual let the Tokens prove,
And made by Heavenly Art
Fit Channels to convey thy Love
To every Faithful Heart.

In the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom the Holy Spirit is called down in the following prayer: "Again we offer unto Thee, this reasonable and bloodless worship, and ask Thee and pray Thee and supplicate Thee, send down Thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here offered." The bread is consecrated and the wine is consecrated and the Holy Spirit is again called down to effect the change of the elements.

I want you to note that the Orthodox prayer asks for the sending down of the Holy Spirit "upon us and upon these gifts here offered." I find in Hymn 72 a certain parallelism because we hear in the hymn not only about the infusion of the divine life into the bread and the divine power into the wine but also of the making of fit channels to convey God's love to every faithful heart. The congregation and the bread and wine are both involved in this moment of prayer in Hymn 72.

In Hymn 75, stanzas 3 and 4, quoted above, the imparting of grace to the faithful is even more strongly expressed.

Eucharistic Piety

In the matter of *piety* I shall cite Hymn 43 and then from an Orthodox prayer of preparation for Holy Communion. Note Hymn 43.

1. Saviour, and can it be
That Thou should dwell with me!
From thy high and lofty Throne,
Throne of Everlasting Bliss,
Will thy Majesty stoop down
To so mean an House as This?
2. I am not worthy, Lord,
So foul, so self-aborred,
Thee, my God, to entertain
In this poor polluted Heart;
I am a frail Sinful Man,
All my Nature cries, depart!
3. Yet come Thou heavenly Guest,
And purify my Breast,
Come Thou great and glorious King,
While before thy Cross I bow,
With Thyself Salvation bring,
Cleanse the House by entering Now.

The Orthodox prayer of preparation for Holy Communion from which I will quote is attributed to St. Basil the Great.

O Lord and Master Jesus Christ our God, the fountain of life and immortality, the Creator of everything visible and invisible, the eternal and everlasting Son of the eternal Father: Thou hast come in these latter days because of the abundance of Thy goodness. Thou hast put on our human flesh and wast crucified and buried for us thankless and graceless men, and through Thine own blood Thou hast renewed our human nature which is corrupted by sin. And now, O Immortal King, accept the repentance of me a sinner and incline Thine ear to me and listen to my words: I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned before heaven and before Thy face and I am not worthy to look upon the height of Thy glory. I have provoked thy goodness, I have transgressed Thy commandments, I have not obeyed Thy statutes. But, O Lord, since Thou dost not remember evil, but art longsuffering and of great mercy, Thou hast not given me over to destruction for my lawlessness, but hast ever awaited my conversion. O Lover of mankind, Thou hast said by Thy prophets, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. For Thou dost not wish, O Master, that the work of Thy hand should perish, neither dost Thou take pleasure in the destruction of men, but Thou desirest that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

What I hear in both approaches is very deep reverence and piety. A very strong piety that is being expressed in somewhat different keys, yet a very similar spiritual sensibility seems to emerge.

The Old Testament

In reference to the Old Testament I quote two of the Wesley hymns: 32 and 46.

Hymn 32

1. Jesu, to Thee for help we call,
 Plung'd in the Depth of *Adam's* Fall,
 Plagu'd with a Carnal Heart and Mind,
 No Distance or of Time or Place
 Secures us from the foul Disgrace
 By him entail'd on all Mankind.
 Six thousand Years are now past by,
 Yet still like Him we sin and dye,
 As born within his House we were,
 As each were that accursed *Cain*,
 We feel the all-polluting Stain,
 And groan our Inbred Sin to bear.

2. Thou God of Sanctifying Love,
Adam descended from above,
 The Virtue of thy Blood impart,
 O let it reach to all below,
 As far extend as freely flow
 To cleanse, as His t'infect our Heart.
 Ruin in Him compleat we have,
 And canst not Thou as greatly save,
 And fully here our Loss repair?
 Thou canst, Thou wilt, we dare believe,
 We here thy Nature shall retrieve,
 And all thy heavenly Image bear.

Hymn 46

1. How richly is the Table stor'd
 Of Jesus our Redeeming Lord!
Melchisedec and *Aaron* join
 To furnish out the Feast Divine.
2. *Aaron* for us the Blood hath shed,
Melchisedec bestows the Bread,
 To nourish this, and that t'atone;
 And both the Priests in Christ are One.
3. Jesus appears to sacrifice,
 The Flesh and Blood Himself supplies;
 Enter'd the Veil his Death He pleads,
 And blesses all our Souls, and feeds.
4. 'Tis here He meets the faithful Line,
 Sustains us with his Bread and Wine;
 We feel the double Grace is given,
 And gladly urge our Way to Heaven.

The eucharistic text that I will now cite is from the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great. The prayer begins with reference to God as "the One who has appointed us to this service in the power of Thy Holy Spirit." The prayer continues:

Look down on us, our God, and behold this our service. Receive it as Thou hast received the gifts of Abel, the sacrifices of Noah, the whole burnt offerings of Abraham, the priestly offices of Moses and Aaron, and the peace offerings of Samuel. Even as Thou hast received from Thy holy apostles this worship, so now in Thy goodness accept these gifts from the hands of us sinners, O Lord; that having been accounted worthy to serve without offense at Thy holy altar we may receive the reward of wise and faithful stewards on the awesome day of Thy just retribution.

Here we see the coming together of Old and New Testament traditions in the power of the Holy Spirit at the moment when the offering is made.

In the four themes or elements mentioned thus far I perceive analogies and deep echoes between the Wesleyan tradition as given to us in the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* and Orthodox piety and liturgical tradition.

Differences

Now I note two points of difference. (1) *There are stronger references to the Old Testament than to the New Testament in the Wesleyan hymns.* This was actually a bit of a surprise to me. I did not expect this. I find it quite interesting that as I read the Wesleyan hymns, I do not find many references to images from the New Testament. Clearly there is reference to Calvary, to Christ, but many of the images that are used, tend to be from the Old Testament and not from the New. And interestingly that is not the case in the Orthodox text in the prayers of preparation for Holy Communion. One of the few references to a New Testament image is in Hymn 29.

1. O Thou who this Mysterious Bread
Didst in *Emmaus* break,
Return herewith our Souls to feed
And to thy Followers speak.
2. Unseal the Volume of thy Grace,
Apply the Gospel-word,
Open our Eyes to see thy Face,
Our Hearts to know the Lord.

References to the New Testament are frequent in the texts I will cite from the Orthodox preparation for Holy Communion. For example: a prayer of St. Basil the Great:

Receive me, O Christ, who lovest mankind as Thou hast received the prostitute, the thief, the tax collector, and the prodigal. Take away the heavy burden of my sins for Thou takest away the sins of the world. Thou healest the infirmities of mankind, Thou callest to Thyself, and givest rest to those who labor and are heavy laden.

A very interesting series of images is found in a prayer attributed to St. John Chrysostom, giving us a chronological use of New Testament images. This is addressed to Christ:

As Thou didst deign to lie in a cavern, in a manger of dumb beasts, so now deign to enter the manger of my beastly soul and into my soiled body. As Thou didst not disdain to enter and to eat with sinners in the house of Simon the Leper, so now be pleased to enter into the house of my soul, humble, and leprous and sinful. As Thou didst not cast away the sinful woman who came to touch Thee, so have compassion on me a sinner who comes to touch Thee. As Thou didst not abhor the kiss of her sin-stained and unclean mouth, do not abhor my mouth worse stained and more unclean than hers, nor my stained and shamed and unclean lips, nor my still more impure tongue.

Or in a prayer attributed to St. Simeon Metaphrastes we read these words, again images from the New Testament, from its *salvation history*:

O Christ Jesus, Wisdom of God and Peace and Power, through the human nature which Thou didst take for Thyself, Thou didst suffer the life-creating and saving passion, the Cross, the nails, the spear—death itself. Put to death in me the soul-destroying passions of the body. Through Thy burial, Thou hast captured the kingdom of death. Bury in me the evil devices of the devil with good thoughts and destroy the spirits of evil.

Then he speaks of the last judgment.

Thou hast promised to come again to judge the world in righteousness. Grant that I might go to meet thee in the clouds, my Judge and Creator, with all Thy saints; that I may glorify and praise Thee without end, together with the Father, who is without beginning. Thy most holy and good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

(2) *There is a certain absence of the resurrection in the Wesleyan hymns.* What I find quite interesting is that the texts we have been looking at from the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* speak of the work of Christ in terms of the cross, crucifixion, Calvary, and proceed from the cross, crucifixion, and Calvary to joy and life, to Lamb of God. I found only one direct reference in the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* to the resurrection. There are some indirect allusions, certainly, but there is no direct reference, the movement is from the cross, crucifixion, and Calvary, and that seemingly in and of itself is the point of entry to joy, salvation, and life.

Certainly, Orthodox texts can easily be found which speak of the suffering of Christ, of the death of Christ as the salvation of humanity, but they are usually seen in a context in which the nativity of Christ, his ministry, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and the last judgment are part of the salvation of humankind. There is not this exclusive attention seemingly only to Calvary, the cross, and crucifixion.

There is a phrase in one of the very well known Orthodox hymns affirming that through the cross joy has come into the world. Now this is a hymn that many Orthodox people know by heart. It is sung in the Easter season again, and again, and again. But it is also sung every Saturday night, except for the eve of Palm Sunday. And, if Christmas comes on Sunday, it would not be sung on the preceding Saturday, otherwise, at every normal Saturday night Vigil. It reads as follows.

Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ,
let us worship the Holy Lord Jesus,
the only sinless one.
We venerate Thy Cross, O Christ,
and we praise and glorify Thy holy Resurrection,

for Thou art our God
 and we know no other than Thee;
 We call on Thy name,
 come all you faithful,
 let us venerate Christ's holy Resurrection!
 For behold through the Cross,
 joy has come into all the world.
 Let us ever bless the Lord,
 praising His Resurrection,
 for by enduring the Cross for us
 He has destroyed death by death.

Another prayer, part of the anaphora in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, offers yet another example:

Remembering this saving commandment and all those things that have come to pass for us, the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious Coming.

Now the relative absence of references to the resurrection in the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* is startling. Let me give you an example. What I am pointing out here is not what you will *find* but what you will *not find* in the Wesley texts. Note Hymn 21.

- 1 God of unexampled Grace,
 Redeemer of Mankind,
 Matter of etemal Praise
 We in thy Passion find:
 Still our choicest Strains we bring,
 Still the joyful Theme pursue,
 Thee the Friend of Sinners sing
 Whose Love is ever new.
- 2 Endless Scenes of Wonder rise
 With that mysterious Tree,
 Crucified before our Eyes
 Where we our Maker see:
 Jesus, Lord, what hast Thou done!
 Publish we the Death Divine,
 Stop, and gaze, and fall, and own
 Was never Love like Thine!
- 3 Never Love nor Sorrow was
 Like that my Jesus show'd;
 See Him stretch'd on yonder Cross
 And crush'd beneath our Load!

Now discern the Deity,
 Now his heavenly Birth declare!
 Faith cries out 'Tis He, 'tis He,
 My God that suffers there!

- 4 Jesus drinks the bitter Cup;
 The Wine-press treads alone,
 Tears the Graves and Mountains up
 By his expiring Groan:
 Lo! the Powers of Heaven He shakes;
 Nature in Convulsions lies,
 Earth's profoundest Centre quakes,
 The great *Jehovah* dies!
- 5 Dies the glorious Cause of All,
 The true Eternal *Pan*,
 Falls to raise us from our Fall,
 To ransom sinful Man:
 Well may *Sol* withdraw his Light,
 With the Sufferer sympathize,
 Leave the World in sudden Night,
 While his Creator dies.

We sang this hymn last night at the meeting of the Society and I looked for the resurrection and I did not find it. This is a hymn in which the birth is mentioned, the cross is mentioned, the ascension is mentioned, but the resurrection is not. I should wish to illustrate the contrast to Orthodox piety by citing "prayers of thanksgiving" read by the faithful after receiving Holy Communion.

I thank Thee, O Lord my God, for Thou hast not rejected me, a sinner, but hast made me worthy to be a partaker of Thy holy things. I thank Thee, for Thou hast permitted me, the unworthy, to commune of Thy most pure and heavenly gifts. But, O Master, who lovest mankind, who for our sakes didst die and rise again, and gavest us these awesome and life-creating mysteries for the good and sanctification of our souls and bodies; let them be for the healing of soul and body, the repelling of every adversary, the illumining of the eyes of my heart, the peace of my spiritual powers, a faith unshamed, a love unfeigned, the fulfilling of wisdom, the observing of Thy commandments, the receiving of Thy divine grace, and the obtaining of Thy Kingdom. Preserved by them in Thy holiness, may I always remember Thy grace and live not for myself alone, but for Thee, our Master and Benefactor. May I pass from this life in the hope of eternal life and so attain to the everlasting rest, where the voice of those who feast is unceasing, and the gladness of those who behold the goodness of Thy countenance is unending. For Thou art the true desire and the ineffable joy of those who love Thee, O Christ, our God, and all creation sings Thy praise for ever. Amen.

Sometimes this prayer and several other "Prayers of Thanksgiving" are read aloud after the eucharistic liturgy. Certainly, all of those who receive communion

are encouraged to use these prayers. They are well known. They are certainly part of popular piety.

The differences, as well as the commonalities, between the Wesleyan and Orthodox eucharistic theologies and pieties would provide good possibilities for fruitful dialogue.

An Ecumenical Vision: Authentic Tradition

In 1995 I attended a meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. It is quite interesting that the most lively debate in the Central Committee was on eucharistic practice. The World Council of Churches is preparing for the next Assembly of the WCC which will take place in 1998 in Harare, Zimbabwe. The Assembly Worship Committee met earlier and presented its report to the Assembly Planning Committee, of which I am a member also. The report recommended that at the next assembly there be no official assembly eucharist. There has been eucharistic renewal in many churches. A significant sign and milestone of this eucharistic renewal has been in the WCC Faith and Order Commission's study of baptism, eucharist, and ministry. Certainly, there have been important and serious theological advances made in moving toward a common understanding of the eucharist.

At the very same time in many of the churches there are developments which have made ecumenical dialogue and understanding more difficult than was the case some twenty-five or fifty years ago. This is most clearly seen in ethical questions such as abortion and sexual morality. So the reality is that there is one set of developments which is extremely hopeful and moving us towards Christian unity. But there are many other developments in the churches which are creating new signs of contradiction and new divisions. And this is not easy for the churches. We are at a point of decision, at a point requiring discernment. I readily confess that for the Orthodox churches this is a very painful ecumenical moment. It is a moment in which we want to affirm very strongly the consensus which has been achieved, ecumenically and theologically, in the common Christian understanding of the Eucharist. Yet, we cannot affirm quite a number of new developments in Christianity around the world. For some it seems clear that we are challenged to share in the Eucharist without delay. There are others, especially Orthodox, who insist this is not so simple. We Orthodox yearn for Christian unity, a common confession of the apostolic faith crowned by the sharing of one Eucharist. But we see today many, many signs of erosion of the basics of the Christian faith.

Now, when I read the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, I realize that all of us would make progress toward authentic Christian unity, if we understand our own traditions more deeply. For me it was an unexpected gift, when some months ago Dr. S T Kimbrough, Jr., sent me the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* and I began to read them. I realized as I read that here was an authentic witness to the apostolic

faith and tradition in Methodism. What is true and authentic in our traditions brings us closer to one another than we often realize. So it seems to me that the future of Orthodoxy and Methodism should be a future in which we discover or rediscover one another in the light of the authentic and genuine Christian tradition which is to be found in our older streams of theological thought and piety. Now, let me quickly say that I do not pretend that the Orthodox Church in its practices is a perfect church. Sometimes, unfortunately, the very things in which we Orthodox believe most strongly are the very things in which we are the weakest. In this sense we, the Orthodox, need renewal. This is so even in eucharistic life.

The Eucharist for the Orthodox always has been a central reference point in the practice of the Christian faith. The Eucharist has been celebrated in Orthodox congregations Sunday by Sunday through the decades and centuries from apostolic times. The uninterrupted tradition of celebrating the Eucharist is a living bond connecting us to the apostles and to Christ.

We treasure the centrality and holiness of the Eucharist, and yet it is very easy to enter an Orthodox parish church, whether in the United States, or in Greece, or in Romania, or somewhere else, and be disappointed. If you have learned about the eucharistic theology of the Orthodox Church from good theological sources and theological texts, you may be very disappointed when you observe what actually occurs. By that I have in mind, for the example, the very clear way in which in many places the Eucharist has been marginalized in practice, although it is at the very center theologically. Often enough, sadly, very few laity receive Holy Communion. In this respect, Orthodox Christians stand under judgment and require renewal.

There are ways in which Methodism stands under judgment and requires renewal. I think all of us require renewal, but in different ways. Wherever the Orthodox Church is evangelizing, is witnessing to the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, it is doing so when it is centered on the Eucharist. Saint Cosmas and Damian Church in the center of Moscow is illustrative. I attend services there, especially the Eucharist, when I visit Moscow, and I know the clergy and many of the laity in the parish. This is a church, which, at the beginning of the 1990s, was still a printing plant of the Ministry of Culture of the Soviet Union. Today it is being restored as a beautiful house of worship. Yet the priority of this parish community is not the building. Their priority is to do the work of Christ in Moscow. A group of laity, together with one of the priests, provide both a spiritual and a medical ministry in a pediatric hospital. There is another group which takes food to elderly shut-ins. There is a weekly Bible study on Wednesday nights with a hundred people participating. The Eucharist is at the very heart and center of this varied ministry. This is a church community being renewed by God's grace.

Thus, when renewal occurs in the Orthodox Church, it occurs because of a rediscovery of the meaning of the centrality of the Eucharist. The centrality of

the Eucharist does not mean that the Orthodox Church is *only* eucharistic, but the centrality of the Eucharist signifies that all the other tasks are without meaning, unless they issue from the Eucharist. I am convinced that Christian renewal for all of us is to be found in the deep sources of the Lord's Supper or Eucharist. It is here that the study of our authentic sources, such as the Wesleys' *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, may shed light and understanding upon the center from which our life flows.