

ARTICLE

## Orthodox Perspectives on the Church as an Evangelizing, Eucharistic Community: A Case Study of the Orthodox Parish of St John of Kronstadt, Bath, UK

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### Abstract

This article presents a case study of the Orthodox parish of St John of Kronstadt in Bath, UK, an Orthodox Christian lay community founded in 1980 in response to the inspiration of St John of Kronstadt and Fr Alexander Schmemmann. Based on interviews with parishioners and the author's own experience of the community, the article delineates the main features of the parish's communal life of liturgical prayer, hospitality and witness in the wider community. The second part of the article explores the broader contribution of St John and Fr Alexander to the development of Orthodox ecclesial and missional understandings and practices in the contemporary world. It delineates the historical, ecclesial and theological contexts in which their teachings and practices originated and argues that amidst these contexts we can trace the origins of the Eucharistic ecclesiology and understandings of human personhood and community which have pervaded Orthodox theology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These have laid the groundwork for the perspective that Christian mission and witness are a continuation of the Eucharistic community's experience of the Kingdom of God, the 'liturgy after the liturgy'. The article concludes with a plea for greater dialogue based on the common ground between Western missiological discourse on the nature of post-Christendom evangelism and the ecclesial experience of Orthodox diaspora communities.

**Keywords:** Orthodox witness, John of Kronstadt, Alexander Schmemmann, Eucharistic ecclesiology, Liturgy after the liturgy

In recent decades, a recurrent theme of ecumenical missiological writings has been what Christian mission and evangelism could and should look like 'after Christendom', in societies where the Constantinian alliance of church and state has shattered and national identity is no longer so bound up with the Christian faith (Stone

2007: 10–1; Paas 2019: 28–54, xvi–xix). Such reflections focus almost exclusively on Western Christendom and so fail to appreciate how keenly this crisis of living in a post-Constantinian era was already felt in the 1920s and 1930s by theologians forced to emigrate from their homelands after the 1917 Russian revolution. For example, Fr Sergius Bulgakov, a founder and later dean of the St Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, wrote in the early 1930s of the crisis historic Orthodoxy was facing owing to the fall of the Russian Empire. He wrote intuitively: “We have perhaps witnessed the end of the Constantinian period in Church history.” Yet despite the challenges of exile and marginalization facing the émigré community in Paris, he continued on a positive, prophetic note: “The Orthodox Church is now faced with new problems, new perspectives, it contains not only the end but the creative way which leads to [the future].... This creative inspiration ... will bring in a new era of creative Christian life” (Bulgakov 1988: 193–4)

This article aims to illustrate one form that this “new era of creative Christian life” has taken by presenting in the first part a case study of the missional experience of the Orthodox Parish of St John of Kronstadt<sup>1</sup> in Bath, UK where the author lived in 1985–86, 1989–90 and 1994–96. Since then she has visited the parish once or twice a year, as well as being in regular correspondence and online communication with both parishioners and clergy. In early 2023, several members of the parish’s clergy and laity responded to specific questions about the forms that community and evangelism take in the community. The aim of the case study is thus to assess how one Orthodox community has sought to flesh out their understanding of mission and community in a context outside of traditional Orthodox homelands.

The aim of the second part of the article is to trace the roots of the Bath community’s understanding of mission and community by providing an overview of the historical, ecclesial and theological influences on two figures who have contributed greatly to shaping the Bath parish. The community is named after Fr John (Sergiev) of Kronstadt (1829–1908), while Fr Alexander Schmemmann (1921–83) was dean of St Vladimir’s seminary in New York when Fr Yves Dubois, one of the parish’s founders, was studying there. Each of these highly significant figures, in different ways, has also contributed to the wider development of Orthodox ecclesial and missional understandings and practices in the contemporary world. Father (now Saint) John provided one particular ecclesial response to the challenges of urbanization, secularization and poverty in the docklands of late nineteenth-century St Petersburg, capital of the Russian Empire throughout which he became a legend in his lifetime. By contrast, Alexander Schmemmann’s teaching, writings and pastoral ministry emerged out of the experience of rediscovering Orthodox ecclesial identity in the post-revolutionary

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1 Hereafter referred to as “the Bath Orthodox Parish” or “the parish”.

Russian émigré communities of Western Europe and the USA where he is therefore better known.

Methodologically, this section sets in historical and ecclesial context their lives and personal writings as well as drawing on recent scholarship about them and the broader context of the Russian Orthodox Church in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By providing this context, the article aims to explain the origins of broader Orthodox perspectives on Christian mission predominant in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and influential both in traditionally Orthodox contexts and in the diaspora. It highlights the understanding of the local eucharistic community as both goal and springboard of the Christian church's witness, which is expressed both through the liturgy and what has frequently been referred to as the "liturgy after the liturgy" (Bria 1986: 12, 38–42; Yannoulatos 2010: 94–6).

The initial case study of the parish of St John of Kronstadt will focus on both these aspects of the Orthodox understanding of mission: the parish's communal life of liturgical prayer and the way it lives out the "liturgy after the liturgy" through hospitality and other forms of witness in the surrounding community.

## **Case Study of the Orthodox Parish of St John of Kronstadt, Bath, UK**

Despite bearing the name of a Russian saint, the Orthodox Parish of St John of Kronstadt belongs to the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain which is under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The parish was founded in 1980 and since then, hundreds of people, some of them passing through, others putting down roots, have been impacted by the ways it lives as a community which seeks to witness to and draw people to the love of God. While on a typical Sunday you might find 50 to 70 people at the morning communion service, and on a major feast day you might find a hundred or more, it is not numerical growth which has been the main goal of the community. The focus has been rather on deepening relationships with Christ and with each other and out of this the community's evangelizing role has naturally emerged.

The priest Yves Dubois, one of the Parish's founders, points to Fr John of Kronstadt and Fr Alexander Schmemmann as those who particularly inspired the model of Christian community which has developed. The ministry of Fr John set a pattern for Christian engagement with the local community while his concern for a relationship with Christ through constant prayer and frequent communion has provided the model for pastoral ministry and spiritual growth. Fr Alexander Schmemmann taught that the future of Orthodoxy was in English-language parish communities led by a priest with a secular job, with a chapel in the house of the priest's family, and community meals after Sunday Liturgies.

This latter model has led to three great practical challenges which in the long run have proved to have positive consequences. The first such challenge is that the parish has never had a church building of its own. Community worship started in Fr Yves' family home, together with the family of Ann and Trevor Johnson, today Fr Seraphim, and an Orthodox nun, Mother Sarah Overton. One large room was turned into an Orthodox chapel with an iconostasis and icons, oil lamps, censers and relics of the saints, with worship and prayer always being followed by a communal meal in the kitchen downstairs.

This "house church" model eventually became impractical once the congregation grew, and in recent years two local Anglican parishes have provided a venue for liturgical worship, with community meals in the church hall. This has helped to develop good relations with other Christian confessions and stopped the parish from being too insular. For example, St John's, Bathwick Anglican parish and the Orthodox parish which they currently host are at present working on a joint fundraising project for Ukraine. Ecumenical relations have been an ongoing concern with one priest, Fr Richard Penwell, and Mother Sarah currently representing the parish in Churches Together in Somerset.

The parish's not having its own building has also resulted in the community having a strong element of mobility and a capacity to take Orthodox worship (liturgical prayer, icons, choral singing, candle stands) into many situations: to a local prison, to Greenbelt, on annual pilgrimage to the Saxon church at Bradford-on Avon and other holy places, to different homes and venues.

The second, related challenge resulting from Schmemmann's vision is that none of the pastoral team has ever been employed full time by the parish or the wider Orthodox Church. They have all had ordinary secular employment alongside their ministry in the parish, which has had the advantage that all of them have been working alongside local people and this has led to them and the parish becoming much more engaged with the local community than it could have been otherwise.

The third immense challenge has been the consequence of aiming to be an English-language Orthodox Christian community open to people of all and every nationality, rather than a parish formed to provide pastoral care largely for those from one particular country and national tradition which has often been the case with Orthodox diaspora communities. While there have always been a significant number of native English members, the community has drawn people from many countries: Greece, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Serbia, the Middle East.

On the one hand this has been a great source of enrichment to the community and has given the opportunity to many people of Orthodox background to often "rediscover" their faith in a new and meaningful way in a foreign land. Worship services

have always been in English, but phrases of other languages and their musical traditions are drawn into the worship. This change has been very demanding on choir leaders and members getting to grips with the complexities of Orthodox liturgy, all in four-part harmony without the accompaniment of organ or other musical instruments. Despite the challenges this presents to an amateur, even if highly musically literate, choir, many newcomers are drawn to Orthodox worship by the beauty of the music and the prayerful atmosphere it creates.

On the other hand, the multi-ethnic and multilingual aspect of parish life has meant that the wider political and ecclesial conflicts that have plagued the Orthodox churches in recent decades have been potential and actual sources of tension. The current war in Ukraine has put an obvious strain on relations within the community, although at the same time it has also brought out the community's strengths in looking after anyone who turns up on their doorstep. Several members are Ukrainian or have Ukrainian relatives whom they have taken into their homes.

At the heart of the community is communal worship with all the ways that Orthodox liturgical worship appeals to the whole person, body and soul: the visibility of icons, four-part choral singing, dousing with holy water, anointing with consecrated oil, as well as preaching by both clergy and laity. There are six people on the preaching rota and sermons are also distributed by email so that they reach far more people. One parishioner emphasized to me that she felt that the community witnessed to Christ particularly through its liturgical worship, the focal point of which is the Eucharist in which all participate, adults as well as children, who take communion weekly from the time they are baptized. Frequent weekly communion is practised, with each communicant participating in the sacrament of confession every month or so.

Everyone I have spoken to agrees that communal meals have been a key element of both building strong relationships within the community and of welcoming newcomers. Meals have taken different forms as the community has grown. For many years the whole community, sometimes 50 or 60 people, would visit different family homes each week and that family would make the meal. Nowadays, there is always a sit-down meal in the St John's church hall after the Sunday morning communion service, with each person bringing some part of the meal. While such meals often take place inside, towards the end of the pandemic, when restrictions had been lifted, this meal often took place outside in the street and at times had the atmosphere of a street party, leading passers-by to stop and ask what was happening. Last year's Parish Report mentions in particular the "Agape Vespers and meal" on the Sunday evening of Easter when traditional paschal foods from all around the world are eaten together. Of other special celebrations, the report says "we were blessed with the weather on many of the occasions and were able to spill out into the sunshine, and enjoy music and dancing after our meal" (Parish Report 2022).

A special role in the community is played by the Convent which is the home of the parish's nun, Mother Sarah, as well as her frequent lodgers and visitors. There is a regular cycle of morning and evening prayer at the Convent which means the community's life and outreach are rooted in communal prayer, as well as the personal prayers of each community member. Mother Sarah's home also offers hospitality to those who would like to experience Orthodox prayer and community life. I have been there on occasions when a specialist in Islamic Sufi mysticism came for such an experience, or when a group of Catholic nuns came to discuss the monastic life.

Mother Sarah is a rare phenomenon in the Orthodox Church as a woman who is involved in full-time pastoral work both within and outside the parish. For many years she has been a chaplain at Bath University and while her experience as a pastoral counsellor has been available to all the students of the university, it has led in particular to many links with students of Orthodox backgrounds who have found a spiritual home for a few years in the parish and consequently grown in their faith at an important stage of their lives.

There is a constant trickle of newcomers to the parish, not only students. A recent influx of newcomers with no particular previous church background is attributed to the online presence of such figures as environmentalist and writer Paul Kingsnorth, and artist and podcaster Jonathan Pageau. Each newcomer, if they so wish, can be involved in a catechetical process of instruction in the fundamentals of the Christian faith as well as discussing issues which arise from the experience of worship and community. This nurturing is also a continuing process which takes place in both Bible studies and a reading group which anyone in the parish can be involved with.

While much of the parish's witness arises out of its community life, there is one section of last year's annual report called "Hospitality and Evangelism" which details some more specific forms of outreach into the local and not-so-local communities. Among these are the Arts Festivals which have emerged out of the very identity of the community which has many people with some kind of artistic background: artists, icon painters, people who are skilled in pottery, embroidery, photography, stone masonry, musicians and singers. There is an art exhibition as well as interviews with artists and painters, a café with soup, tea and coffee, concerts with the Mosaic choir, a group of semi-professional young Orthodox singers of different national backgrounds, and a ceilidh to conclude the weekend.

Listed under the heading "Evangelism" in the Annual Report are environmental activism and community action concerning climate change, for example petitioning the government about burning of peatlands, and reducing its environmental footprint by aiming for zero waste. Further evidence of environmental concern was the theme of the annual parish weekend away in 2023, "God's Creation". Other forms

of outreach in the local community over the years have been involvement in the ecumenical Genesis Trust which works among the homeless in Bath, or teams of six or seven people who have gone to lead worship at a local prison. Currently the parish is working with local charities and agencies supporting Ukrainian refugees. Youth and children's work has always been a strong aspect of parish life. This is the way that the community evangelizes its own children and young people so that they develop into believing, witnessing adults, rather than just dropping out. There is a Sunday school, children's sermons once a month and an annual summer camp organized by the Archdiocese known as "The Greek Camp" which many in the community credit with enabling their young people to develop their own faith as it gives them a wider peer group and sense of the Church. Many of the parish's young people have not only attended the camp but gone on to be its leaders and in many cases it has led to long-term friendships outside of the Camp. The Camp has been a factor in the formation of the Mosaic Choir. In the same area of youth work, although further afield, the parish has developed an ongoing relationship with an Orthodox school and orphanage in Kenya to which it sends part of its annual income.

This case study has shown how the writings and vision of St John of Kronstadt and Fr Alexander Schmemmann played a significant role in the founding of the Bath Orthodox Parish and its central tenets of Eucharistic spirituality, hospitable community and pastoral care, core values which continue to undergird the parish. Yet as it has become rooted in both the local and wider ecumenical ecclesial communities, both in the UK and worldwide, with a younger generation of parishioners of diverse national backgrounds arising, the parish has acquired its own distinct ways of being a missional community. These currently embrace liturgical prayer and hospitality, social concern and service, environmental activism, international partnership, artistic expression, and ecumenical and inter-faith relationships.

In the second part of this article we shall explore in greater depth the broader influence of Fr John and Fr Alexander on Orthodox ecclesial and missional understandings in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We shall focus in particular on their understanding of the local ecclesial community and its missional role.

## **Fr John of Kronstadt and Fr Alexander Schmemmann: Historical, Ecclesial and Theological Context**

Although Fr John and Fr Alexander were born almost a century apart, they both need to be understood against the backdrop of the Great Reforms of the 1860s and the 1917 Russian Revolution. The emancipation of the serfs (1861) was arguably the most significant reform, bringing with it rapid social change and a mass influx of rural workers into the Russian Empire's cities where homelessness, unemployment and

poverty became problems on an unprecedented scale. Other aspects of modernity – industrialization, more opportunities for education and literacy, the greater circulation and influence of printed texts, the rise of politically radical movements to combat social injustice – all presented new challenges to the closely allied Tsarist government and Russian Orthodox Church (Hedda 2008). Fr John’s charismatic ministry was one particular ecclesial response to these challenges that had an immense impact at all levels of Russian society.

### Fr John of Kronstadt: Eucharistic Fervour and Mutual Responsibility

Fr John Sergiev was born in 1829 into the family of a poor church sacristan in the far north of Russia. He was ordained priest at St Andrew’s Cathedral in Kronstadt (the docklands where many of the capital’s working population eked out a living) in 1855, the year that the Great Reforms began. His diaries during the first five years of his ministry are largely meditations on the words of Scripture which he copied out with the aim of internalizing them. He frequently applied them literally, as he did with the Gospel commands about sharing one’s wealth with one’s neighbour. Consequently he often came home without his boots as he had given them away to a bare-footed pauper. Commenting on the seawater which flowed in pipes into Kronstadt homes, he wrote, “As the sea-water belongs to everyone, does not my money belong to everyone who is poor? What kind of blindness is it that I persist in regarding it as exclusively my property?” (Kizenko 2000: 13, 68). He frequently irritated the St Petersburg aristocracy and shopkeepers with his criticism of the disparity between rich and poor, seeking to arouse a sense of mutual responsibility which would persuade them to part with their wealth. He did not restrict the biblical notions of the church as a “body” and “community” to the church, but applied them to all human society,

*Ants build anthills in which they are warm and sated even in winter; ... bees build beehives.... Similarly, because people are made to live in communities and because according to God’s intent people must make up one body of whom individually they are its members, the strong must bear the burdens of the weak ... I appeal to you in the name of Christianity, in the name of loving mankind ... let us help these shelterless poor, ... let us not deny our solidarity with them as human beings ... Will we allow ants and bees to have the advantage over us? (Kizenko 2000: 74).*

The *House of Industry* he eventually set up became a model for many such workhouses throughout the Empire. Medical care, food, clothing and shelter were provided to the homeless, while the unemployed could learn various trades (Morariu 2018: 2). As his fame grew in the 1880s and 90s, charitable causes throughout the empire appealed to him as a patron, and with the creation of the Duma, he called on it to address poverty and the causes of alcohol abuse (Kizenko 2000: 76–7, 84).



These expressions of his evangelical social consciousness arose out of an intense liturgical, especially eucharistic spirituality. Until the mid-nineteenth century, it had been common practice in Russia to take communion once a year as a civic duty. Fr John, however, encouraged not only frequent communion but a fervent awareness of Christ's presence in the bread and wine. He wrote,

*When you receive the Holy Life-giving Mysteries [i.e. take communion], steadfastly represent to yourself Christ Himself under the form of the bread and wine ... send in thought into the depths of your heart and there lay and mentally preserve the Life-giving Guest ... the Body and Blood show themselves to be life-giving, burning embers in the believer's heart, according to the measure of the heart's preparedness. (Sergieff 1984: 483).*

His diaries also reflect the intensity which Fr John considered fitting for a priest serving the Liturgy:

*The celebration of the Divine Liturgy requires a man ... whose heart is wholly embraced by the flame of the Holy Ghost, by ardent love for God and mankind, for every human soul, and above all, for the Christian soul, so that with a sincere heart he may ever rise to God in prayer. (Sergieff 1984: 341)*

He himself served the Liturgy in an ecstatic manner, weeping, shouting and crying out the words in order to engage his parishioners. He sometimes changed the words of the usually strictly unchanging liturgical text to remind them of Christ's genuine presence among them. By the 1890s, in order to make frequent communion more possible, the church hierarchy had allowed him to turn the sacrament of confession, usually held one-to-one with the priest, into a mass event with thousands of people crowded together, calling out their sins (Kizenko 2000: 53, 60).

Fr John's intercessory prayer eventually became legendary, with peasants walking to Kronstadt and shiploads of devotees arriving with prayer requests concerning healing, employment, finances, family and marital troubles. Kronstadt became a major pilgrimage destination with Fr John revered for his holiness as the "spiritual father" of the entire Russian people. In 1894, when Fr John was asked to minister to the dying emperor Alexander III, he became an international celebrity and the first publication of extracts from his diaries in English translation dates to 1897 (Sergieff 1984; Morariu 2018: 2).

There was a more controversial side to Fr John. The assassination of Tsar Alexander I in 1881 and the rise of the revolutionary movement led to him espousing the politics of the far right, while his support for monarchist right-wing organizations such as the Union of the Russian People led to the radical press targeting him as a symbol

of reaction. In his final years, groups of more radical adherents to his teachings, the Ioannites, were drawn to Fr John's apocalyptic warnings that Russia must recover its Orthodox faith before it was too late. While Fr John disavowed them, they gathered in communes, defending autocracy, while condemning both mainline Orthodoxy and liberal politics (Kizenko 2000: 13, 197–8, 283–4; Morariu 2018: 3–4).

### Fr Alexander Schmemmann: the Roots of his Liturgical and Missional Understanding

Despite these controversial sides to Fr John's politics, Kizenko points to the long-term consequences of Fr John's ministry when she writes "A more regular and thoughtful observance of communion was perhaps his most significant contribution to Russian piety ... the revival of Eucharistic theology in Russian Orthodoxy which has lasted to this day, may be traced to this quiet revolution" (Kizenko 2000: 59). The footnote to Kizenko's sentence refers to Fr Alexander Schmemmann's *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom* (Schmemmann 1988a), although Schmemmann's book does not overtly acknowledge the inspiration of Fr John. However, Schmemmann's aristocratic parents and grandparents had lived in St Petersburg at the height of Fr John's ministry, and Fr John certainly influenced the Russian émigré circles of Schmemmann's youth. Fr Sergius Bulgakov, who had a profound influence on the young Schmemmann in émigré Paris, attributed to Fr John a "prophetic" ministry which was a "manifestation of the spirit and its power" (Bulgakov 1988: 51; Plekon 2016: 2, 4).

Schmemmann's eucharistic ecclesiology and the liturgical missional vision which flowed out of it also had their roots in other strands of ecclesial response to the challenges of the pre- and post-revolutionary decades. In the late nineteenth century, a movement for church reform criticized the synodal system of church government introduced by Peter the Great in the early eighteenth century which had subordinated the church to secular state control. The movement was accompanied by heated discourse revolving around the concept of *sobornost'* and how to restore conciliar practices to the life of the Russian Church. The term *sobornost'* has multifaceted meanings and has been translated variously as conciliarity, catholicity or synodality, while it has been used with a wider range of meanings embracing the relationality of the human person, and the communal perception of knowledge and truth (Bulgakov 1988: 60–1). The term emerged out of the writings of the mid-nineteenth-century Slavophile philosophers who stressed that divine truth can only be collectively or communally perceived, while the ultimate source of truth is the Holy Spirit who dwells precisely in the entire ecclesial community, the laity as well as the hierarchy of bishops (Khomiakov 2018: 71, 98, 151).

As the twentieth century dawned, critics of the synodal system made proposals to restore independence and conciliarity to the Church by replacing the Synod with

a council of bishops and restoring a patriarch as primate of the Russian Church. They also urged conciliarity at the diocesan and parish levels by holding assemblies composed of, and elected by, both clergy and laity to deliberate on local matters and restoring greater freedom and a missional role to the local parish community. The reform movement culminated in the All-Russian (Moscow) Church Council of 1917–18, the impact of which has been compared with the Vatican II Council (Kallistos 2019; Destivelle 2015: xv). It voted to restore the patriarchate and formulated wide-ranging decrees concerning many aspects of church life, including liturgical reform, the parish community and mission (Cunningham 1981; Destivelle 2015; Paert 2025).

The persecutions of the Soviet period prevented a large-scale application of the Council's decisions within the Russian Church itself. Yet its deliberations, which gave unprecedented voice to the laity, have in varying degrees influenced the Orthodox churches of Eastern Europe and the diaspora over the last century. (Stavrou 2018; Paert et al. (eds) 2025) The legacy of the Council was brought to Western Europe by many emigres including participants in the Council such as Sergius Bulgakov who became a leading theologian in Paris (Destivelle 2015: xv, 63, 413 n.129).

It was into the ecclesial and theological world of the Paris emigration that Schmemmann was plunged as a seven-year-old boy in 1928. While he attended the Russian Cathedral in *rue Daru*, during his childhood and youth he was profoundly involved in the Russian Student Christian Movement (RSCM) which sought to strengthen Russian émigré youth in their faith. The RSCM, which celebrates its centenary in 2023, had been strongly influenced by the small lay-led groups for Bible study and prayer of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). These organizations became active in Russia after John Mott's visit to Finland in 1899, and so initially attracted Finnish Lutherans, yet their small groups or "circles" soon drew Orthodox young people as well (*Understanding Sobornost* 2023). It was in the emigration, however, that the "circles" of laity took on a more distinctively Orthodox confessional orientation. Among the founders and leaders of RSCM was the above-mentioned Sergius Bulgakov who stressed that the entire ecclesial body was responsible for the renewal and mission of the Church (*Understanding Sobornost* 2023). The RSCM was inspired by the notion of *sobornost'* with its implications for the relational nature of human beings who become more truly "persons" through the experience of ecclesial community.

*Life in Christ ... is never given in isolation or separated from other men, but in a union, living and immediate, in the unity of many in one whole (the image of the Holy Trinity, consubstantial and indivisible)... He who lives in union with others, who frees himself of the "I" ... he it is alone who can receive the truth (Bulgakov 1988: 63–4).*

This understanding of personhood and the ecclesial community as both mirroring and participating in the community and unity of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity was to become a major theme of many Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century (Louth 2015: 54–5, 218–22; Zizioulas 1985; Kallistos 1990: 33–4).

RSCM also had a strong emphasis on liturgical worship and frequent communion (*Understanding Sobornost* 2023), and Schmemmann's *Journals* testify to how his sense of the central place of the Liturgy grew out of his experience in émigré Paris and RSCM (Schmemmann 2021: 51; see also Louth 2015: 51–2; Plekon 2016: 8). Schmemmann studied and later taught at the St Sergius Institute which was founded after the second RSCM conference which voiced the need to educate the laity. Among his teachers, and later colleagues, were both Bulgakov and Nikolai Afanasiev, whose influence is evident from the themes of his writings that recur in Schmemmann's later works.

In Afanasiev's *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, the opening chapters are devoted to the "royal priesthood" of all believers and the Spirit-filled ministries of all the laity. "The gift of the Spirit which every believer receives during the sacrament of reception into the Church [i.e. baptism and chrismation] is the charism of royal priesthood.... The priestly ministry of all members of the Church has found expression in the Eucharistic assembly" (Afanasiev 1994: 3–4).

Afanasiev's teaching about the fullness of the Church being present as the local Christian community gathers for the Eucharist has led to Afanasiev being considered the father of "eucharistic ecclesiology" which dominates Orthodox ecclesiology to this day (Kallistos 2019 provides a classic example; Plekon 2022: 247).

All of these themes are woven together in Schmemmann's vision of the eucharistic, evangelizing community which he presents in *For the Life of the World*, originally a study guide for a conference on mission in December 1963. Schmemmann emphasizes the missional purpose of the "priesthood of all believers" who are called to transform the life of the world by taking on Christ's intercessory role, offering the world to God and calling the world into communion with him (Schmemmann 1988b: 15).

*To be in Christ means to be like him.... And as he "ever lives to make intercession" for all "that come unto God by Him" (Heb. 7:25) so we cannot help accepting this intercession as our own.... Intercession begins here, in the glory of the messianic banquet, and this is the only true beginning for the Church's mission (Schmemmann 1988b: 44–5).*

Dwelling on the meaning of the word *leitourgia* (Gk: the work of the people) Schmemmann wrote that it "meant an action by which a group of people become something corpo-

rately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals.... Thus the Church itself is a *leitourgia*, a ministry, a calling to act in the world after the fashion of Christ, to bear testimony to Him and His Kingdom" (Schmemmann 1988b: 25). This ongoing "*leitourgia* of mission" is the church's witness to all that it has experienced of union in and with Christ, and of the Kingdom of God at the Eucharistic table (Schmemmann 1988b: 45–6; Plekon 2016: 5, 8).

This understanding of the liturgy of mission flowing irrevocably out of the Eucharistic liturgy became the main Orthodox understanding of the church as a missional community in the late twentieth century, in large part due to Schmemmann's colossal influence. It also owed much to Greek and Romanian theologians of mission, especially Metropolitan Anastasios Yannoulatos and Fr Ion Bria, who popularized this notion of mission as "the liturgy after the liturgy". There has been some debate as to who initiated the term (Yannoulatos 2010: 94–6; Marcu 2016: 191–200; Sonea 2020) although as all three theologians were moving in the same ecumenical circles from the 1950s to the 1970s, it is safest to say that there was undoubtedly a great deal of multi-directional influence.

Schmemmann's influence can most clearly be seen if we compare Schmemmann's vision with the statement on Orthodox mission drawn up under the leadership of Bria, *Go forth in peace: Orthodox Perspectives on Mission*.

*The goal and aim of the proclamation of the Gospel, and thus of mission, is the establishment of eucharistic communities in every locality [which], centred around worship and the celebration of the holy eucharist, will initiate the kingdom of God and become the focal point for active and concrete witness ... the eucharistic community will witness most effectively through its own example of openness and unity, as well as through the spirituality and holiness of its individual members. (Bria 1986: 12)*

Bria's language is more accessible than Schmemmann's and yet it is the core features of Schmemmann's vision which shine through.

## Conclusion

The Bath Orthodox Parish, as the above case study has shown, can be viewed as one expression of what Sergius Bulgakov referred to as that 'new era of creative Christian life' which has arisen out of the post-Constantinian crisis faced by the Russian and other Orthodox Churches after the First World War and 1917 Revolution. Orthodox theologians such as Alexander Schmemmann have provided vision for the way forward out of the crisis, drawing on the spiritual, theological and ecclesiological heritage of the Russian Church before and after the 1917 Revolution, including the Eucharistic

spirituality of Fr John of Kronstadt, the discourse and practice of *sobornost'* associated with the 1917–18 Moscow Council and the Russian Student Christian Movement. This article points to the common ground shared by Christian communities seeking a renewed vision and practice of evangelism “after Christendom” and Eastern Christian communities who have migrated owing to war, revolution and political and economic crisis throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Such common ground suggests that dialogue between eastern and western missiological traditions should be strengthened and more attention paid by both scholars and practitioners to the missional experience of Orthodox Christian communities, both Eastern and Oriental, who have found a home in the Western world.

## About the Author

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