

Dylan Pahman

The Sweat of Christians is the Seed of Martyrdom: A Paradigm for Modern Orthodox Christian Witness

Abstract

This paper examines the connection between asceticism and martyrdom from a practical, historical, and theoretical point of view. It is argued that from the very beginning, Christians practiced asceticism, and that this practice was an essential preparation for martyrdom. Martyrdom, in turn, served as an inspiration for asceticism. Thus, while red martyrdom can be seen as the culmination of Christian asceticism, all Christian asceticism ought to be seen as martyric, witnessing to the kingdom of God and the cross of Christ. As such, it is argued that other forms of asceticism can also be understood through the martyric lens,



Dylan Pahman is a research fellow at the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion & Liberty where he serves as managing editor of the *Journal of Markets & Morality*

such as exile from one's homeland—as was the case with many ancient Celts—and marriage. No matter where or in what circumstances Orthodox Christians live, then, they ought to embrace a martyric way of life through their asceticism. In the end, I conclude by briefly noting the martyric character of the Eucharist, which forms the center of the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church, thus reinforcing the thesis that martyrdom should be seen as the universal character of the Christian life and commending it is a still-vibrant paradigm for modern Orthodox Christian witness.

Keywords

Asceticism, Columbanus, Death, Diaspora, Eucharist, Evangelism, Exile, Marriage, Martyrdom, *Memento Mori*, Mission, Monasticism, *Peregrinatio*, Witness

1 Introduction

Tertullian once said that “the blood of Christians is [the] seed” of the Church.¹ In this paper, I argue that the sweat of Christians, in their ascetic labors, is the seed of martyrdom and their witness to the world. First, drawing upon the work of Tilley and others, I will demonstrate the historical link, both theoretical and in practice, between asceticism and martyrdom. A life of asceticism is as much a witness (*martys*) as death for one's faith, and in many cases has proved essential to the latter. Second, on this basis, I will argue for a further theoretical broadening of common conceptions of martyrdom and asceticism. In the first place, the ancient Celts, in the concept of *peregrinatio*, which Cahill associates with “white martyrdom,”

¹ Tertullian, *Apology* 50 in: *ANF* 3:55.

offers an additional nuance to the martyric vocation, viz. exile, with contemporary relevance in the context of the vast Orthodox “diaspora” in the West today. The Celtic monastic missionaries, through austere discipline, spiritual contemplation, and active engagement with society, contributed invaluable to the re-Christianization of the West after the fall of Rome. In the second place, the connection between asceticism, martyrdom, and marriage, as noted by Schmemmann and Soloviev, testifies to the ascetic character of the family and, by extension, all society. Ultimately, I conclude that in whatever martyrdom Orthodox Christians are called to live today, their asceticism serves as a witness to the world and preparation for the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, just as we fast in preparation for the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ, our ultimate martyric ideal. In these ways, in answer to the question, “Who are the new martyrs today?” I respond that the Orthodox answer should be “all of us.”

2 The Practical Connection Between Asceticism and Martyrdom in the Early Church

Drawing on the research of psychologist Peter Suedfeld, Maureen Tilley documents five goals of torture sought by the ancient Romans against the early Christians. “The first three are rather straightforward,” she writes: “information, incrimination of friends and associates, and intimidation of other members of the community.” She continues,

“But the torturers in the stories of martyrs—and in the present—still keep torturing long after these ostensible goals are achieved. Why? Because their real goal is not merely the control of an individual but the restructuring of society. Torture attempts to control people who hold as true a vision of reality contrary to

that of the torturers. Hence, Suedfeld adds his latter two purposes of torture, isolation and indoctrination.”²

Thus, the goal of Roman torture was not simply to intimidate and extract information from the Christians but to brainwash them.³ The fact of martyrdom, however, shows that the Roman torturers often failed at their goal.

How could this be? With regards to intimidation and information extraction, Tilley shows how the culture of early Christians counteracted these goals:

With information, incrimination, and intimidation, the martyrs had the high ground. First, information: the Apologists had pointed out the anomaly of torturing prisoners in order to get them to deny the crime they were ready to admit [i.e. being a Christian] (Tert., *Apol.* 1 *ad fin.*; Justin, *First Apol.* 6 and *Second Apol.* 12). Second, incrimination: there was no need to implicate others. In fact, the Christian community had too many volunteers for martyrdom (e.g., *Pion.* 4.13; *Polyc.* 4; Clement 4.10; Tert., *Cor.*; Cyprian, *Ep.* 81; *E.H.* 6.14, 16, and 22; *Maxima* 4; *Euplus*, Latin recension 1; *Marian* 9). Third, torture as intimidation met with mixed results because Christians used stories of torture to teach the faithful to be strong in persecution (*Polyc.* 1; *Pion.* 1; *Saturninus* 1; *Donatus*; *Marculus*; *Maximian*). The victims were prepared to be victors.⁴

With regards to isolation, its dehumanizing goal proved ineffective. Early martyrs either affirmed the commonality of all before the judgment seat of Christ or the dissimilarity between themselves as servants of God and their torturers as servants of

² M. Tilley, *The Ascetic Body and the (Un)Making of the World of the Martyr*, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59.3 (Autumn 1991), p. 468.

³ As Tilley notes, this goal is not unique to the Romans of the first few centuries after Christ; the same can be said for the Soviets, for example, at Pitesti in Romania in the twentieth century. See, for example, A. Ratiu & W. Virtue, *Stolen Church: Martyrdom in Communist Romania* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1978), pp. 89–112.

⁴ M. Tilley, “The Ascetic Body,” p. 470.

the evil one. In addition, ancient martyr acts are replete with instances of Christ or angels visiting isolated Christians.⁵

It is in the martyrs' resistance to indoctrination, however, that their asceticism shows through:

The type of ascetic preparation for martyrdom was tied to the sorts of tortures the martyrs would undergo, especially deprivation of food and water. Christian communities would begin fasting as soon as they realized that police action was imminent (e.g. *Pion.* 2; *Donatus* 6; *Marculus*). They even mimicked the duration and the sporadic nature of the starvation they would undergo (*Montanus* 9). Such pre-torture practices actually helped change their metabolism so that they survived longer under torture. They could train their bodies to rely on alternative sources of glucose for the brain and to reduce their need for water⁶.

She continues, "Tertullian exhorted his readers to prepare for prison, to get used to fasting, lack of water, even the anxiety about eating. They had to enter prison in the same state as most people who were leaving. What they would suffer there would not be any penalty but the *continuation of their discipline (Iei. 12)*".⁷

Yet this asceticism was not simply a response to persecution but an aspect of daily life. "Daily life was full of opportunities for asceticism directed toward the resistance of torture," writes Tilley. "Asceticism, specifically sexual renunciation, made possible the renunciation of mortal life itself (*Thecla* 3.26). Thus did ascetic theory and practice help Christians prepare for the tortures they met."⁸ She and others note that the contest of martyrdom for the early Christians had cosmic connotations as

⁵ Idem, pp. 470–471.

⁶ Idem, p. 471.

⁷ Idem, pp. 471–472.

⁸ M. Tilley, "The Ascetic Body," p.472.

well, additionally shaping their worldview in a torture-resistant way.⁹

In the end, she concludes, “Asceticism allowed the confessors to reconfigure or remap their bodies so that they became *terra incognita* for their torturers and a safe place for the well-prepared martyrs. In addition, this evidence refutes the claim that asceticism was a substitute for martyrdom which Christians adopted once their religion was legalized. On the contrary, asceticism logically and practically preceded martyrdom. In fact, it made martyrdom possible”.¹⁰

Asceticism was thus practically linked to martyrdom inasmuch as we would have few early Christian martyrs (and arguably, if Tertullian is correct, no enduring Church) if early Christians did not first embrace an ascetic lifestyle.

3 Further Theoretical Broadening of Martyrdom and Asceticism

3.1 Early Christian Exhortation and the Monastic Ideal

When we turn to theory, the connection between asceticism and martyrdom becomes more pronounced. First of all, the Greek *martys* and related terms in the New Testament are undifferentiated compared to later usage.¹¹ That is, while it can be used in the context of dying for the faith (cf. John 12:17; Acts

⁹ M. Tilley, “The Ascetic Body,” pp. 472. See also P. Kolbert, Torture and Origen’s Hermeneutics of Nonviolence, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76.3 (September 2008), p. 563.; and P. Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity* (London; New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2006), esp. pp. 79, 94–96.

¹⁰ M. Tilley, “The Ascetic Body,” p. 475.

¹¹ For a basic overview, including the Greco-Roman and Jewish origins of the concept of *martys* as witness, see A. Harvey, R. Finn, & M. Smart, Christian Martyrdom: History and Interpretation, in B. Wicker (ed.), *Witness to Faith? Martyrdom in Christianity and Islam* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 33–48.

2:32),¹² it often carries the more general, literal meaning of witnessing to the faith (cf. Acts 22:20; Revelation 2:13, 17:6).

In Edelhard Hummel's study of martyrdom in the writings of St. Cyprian, he begins by noting that the term had already taken on a more narrow sense with Tertullian. "The word *martyr* is applied by Tertullian primarily to those Christians who have sacrificed their lives for the faith," he writes. However, even here he notes that at times the word is used for "those who have given oral testimony of their faith" or those who are in prison awaiting a martyric death.¹³

Already with St. Cyprian, the term starts to broaden again. While the martyr proper is still the one who has died for the faith, Hummel notes that "[t]here are countless passages ... in which he makes use of the expression *martyr*, when it is evident that he refers to persons who are still living."¹⁴ Hummel parses St. Cyprian's use of terms as follows: "If *physical torture and mistreatment* was added to imprisonment or to exile, then Cyprian granted the confessors in question the rank of martyrs. If such torture should lead to death, they were *martyres consummate*."¹⁵

Yet, St. Cyprian does not stop there but also "recognizes the existence of an unbloody or spiritual martyrdom."¹⁶ The nuance to this is enlightening: spiritual martyrdom requires "the same

¹² Pobeë has additionally noted the use of Jewish martyr motifs in the Christology of the Pauline epistles. See J. Pobeë, *Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1985), pp. 49, 53. See also B. W. Bacon, The Motivation of John 21:15-25, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 50.2 (1931), pp. 71-80; esp. 72, 74, and 80 for martyrdom in the Gospel of John. Bacon's work is, however, somewhat dated.

¹³ E. Hummel, *The Concept of Martyrdom According to St. Cyprian of Carthage* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1946), p. 3. see also p. 4.

¹⁴ E. Hummel, *The Concept of Martyrdom*, p. 8.

¹⁵ Idem, p. 14.

¹⁶ Idem, p. 21.

conceptual relationship to death” as martyrdom by blood. St. Cyprian thus exhorts Christians to prepare like soldiers for the battle, ready to face death and the coming judgment. He writes, “Our martial preparation should be this—that we ever keep before our eyes, our thoughts, and our senses, the punishments of the impious and the rewards of the just; that we consider what punishments the Lord threatens against those who deny Him, and also what glory He promises to those who confess Him! If the day of persecution surprises us while we are occupied with such thoughts and meditations, then, the soldier of Christ is (...) prepared to win the crown.”¹⁷

Compare this, for example, to the following from Evagrius in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*: “While you sit in your cell, draw in your mind, and remember the day of your death. And then you will see your body mortifying. Think on the loss, feel the pain. Shrink from the vanity of the world outside.” He continues, “Weep and lament for the judgement [sic] of sinners, bring to life the grief they suffer; be afraid that you are hurrying towards the same condemnation. Rejoice and exult at the good laid up for the righteous. Aim at enjoying the one, and being far from the other.”¹⁸ This should be unsurprising. As Nicole Kelley has argued, the reading of ancient martyr acts themselves was designed to be a spiritual exercise.¹⁹ Thus the ascetic language of martyric preparation lived on long after any imminent threat of physical death.

The relationship between asceticism and martyrdom thus became reciprocal. Asceticism was essential preparation for many early martyrs, and martyrdom inspired more fervent asceticism. Indeed, the spiritual exercises commended by St.

¹⁷ Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle* 57.4 in: E. Hummel, *The Concept of Martyrdom*, pp. 71–72.

¹⁸ Evagrius, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 3.3 in Owen Chadwick (trans.) *Western Asceticism*, (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1958), p. 44.

¹⁹ N. Kelley, Philosophy as Training for Death: Reading the Ancient Christian Martyr Acts as Spiritual Exercises, *Church History* 75.4 (December 2006), pp. 723–747.

Cyprian (and, we may add, Origen²⁰) to prepare Christians for martyrdom recur in the earliest Christian teachings on the *memento mori* (“remembrance of death”) in the monastic life, as noted above. Hence, we see that the connection between the white martyrdom of asceticism and the red martyrdom of physical death, as Tilley notes, was not that the former was a substitute for the latter. True, some of the first monks were disenchanted with the Church’s new place of prominence in Roman society after Constantine,²¹ but we may also say that their desire may simply have been to continue living and developing the ascetic ethos that Christians had always sought to live from the beginning.

Inasmuch, then, as Christian asceticism requires a dying to self, (red) martyrdom may be thought of as simply the consummation of Christian spiritual practice, and we may say that this, in fact, was the self-understanding of the early Church.²² As the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it, Jesus Christ died and rose again in order to “release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:15). Courage in the face of death, then, ideally ought to characterize the Christian life, in whatever form it takes and in whatever context it is found.²³

²⁰ See Kolbert, “Torture and Origen’s Hermeneutics of Nonviolence,” pp. 563–564.

²¹ This is a commonplace of Church history. See, e.g., A. Harnack, *E. Monasticism: Its Ideals and History and the Confessions of St. Augustine: Two Lectures by Adolf Harnack*, E. E. Kellett & F. H. Marseille (trans.), (London; Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1911), p. 48.

²² In addition to what has already been said herein, see, e.g., Lisa D. Maugans Driver, “The Cult of Martyrs in Asterius of Amaseia’s Vision of the Christian City,” *Church History* 74, no. 2 (June 2005), p. 244: “The martyrs won acclaim, in Asterius’s opinion, because they maintained the right organization of soul and body that enabled them to live and die for Christ.”

²³ The Western saint and theologian Thomas Aquinas even sees courage as central to martyrdom. He writes, “[M]artyrdom is an act of courage.” T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 124, a. 2 in Brian Wicker

3.2. *The Celtic Peregrinatio*

The ancient Celtic Christians represent a further historical broadening of the concept of martyrdom. Thomas Cahill popularized the concepts of white and green martyrdom among the ancient Celtic Christians in his book *How the Irish Saved Civilization*. Noting the Celts' fondness for the desert fathers, Cahill describes the Celtic green martyrdom as roughly equivalent to the eremitic life. Then, Citing St. Columcille's exile from Ireland to found the monastic community of Iona, and eventually to become the Apostle to Scotland, Cahill describes the Irish conception of white martyrdom: "all who followed Columcille's lead were called to the White Martyrdom, they who sailed into the white sky of morning, into the unknown, never to return."²⁴ Thus, by Cahill's account, white martyrdom for the Irish is specifically connected to Celtic monastic missions outside of Ireland.

Yet this account, however romantic, does not seem to be required by what little sources we have, nor do other scholars make this same distinction. One ancient Irish homily gives perhaps the clearest differentiation of these forms of martyrdom as the modern scholar could hope to find today. In particular, it defines white martyrs as those who "part for the sake of God from everything that they love, although they may suffer fasting and hard work thereby."²⁵ Certainly, white martyrdom as described here *could* mean missionary exile, but the primary literature contains no direct references to St. Columcille as inspiration, nor does it require such an interpretation. Among Roman Catholics today, for example, the

(ed.), *Witness to Faith? Martyrdom in Christianity and Islam* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), p. 141.

²⁴ T. Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), pp. 183–184.

²⁵ The Cambrai Homily, trans. Oliver Davies, *Celtic Spirituality* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1999), p. 370. Interestingly, Davies translates *glas* as "blue" rather than "green," making the third Celtic martyrdom blue martyrdom.

term “white martyrdom” is still used to speak of the monastic life in general.²⁶

Nevertheless, Cahill is right that St. Columcille's missionary exile can be seen as emblematic of a new discipline that many more soon zealously followed: *peregrinatio*. As the Irish understood this to be primarily an extension of their asceticism, we may, considering the foregoing, see in it another path of martyrdom, whether we call it white or green or any other color. Fiaich describes this *peregrinatio* thusly:

“*Peregrinatio* is the word often used by contemporary writers to describe the movement abroad of these Irish religious. It did not normally mean “pilgrimage” in the modern meaning of that word. The Irish *peregrinus* throughout the middle ages was not an Irishman who visited a shrine abroad and then returned home, but rather the man who for his soul's welfare abandoned his homeland for good or at least for many years.”²⁷

Thus, *peregrinatio* required exile from one's home country for the sake of one's soul. Cahill dramatically details the suffering of homesickness as part of these monks' ascetic struggle, writing that for St. Columcille leaving Ireland was “a much harder thing than giving up his life.”²⁸ Considering the millions of Orthodox Christians who, fleeing violent oppression in their homelands, now live in what has been called the Western “diaspora,” I would argue that the Irish *peregrinatio* offers a martyric paradigm for framing the vocation of these Orthodox *peregrini* today, and with great importance for a time of moral uncertainty in the West, increasingly termed “post-Christian.” Despite their primarily spiritual aspirations, the Irish *peregrini* are often credited for their substantial contribution to the re-

²⁶ See “Martyr” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 9 (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1967), p. 313.

²⁷ T. Fiaich, Irish Monks on the Continent, in James P. Mackey (ed.), *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), p. 103.

²⁸ T. Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, p. 183.

Christianization of Western Europe in their own time after the fall of Rome.²⁹

McNeil explains, in part, how this came about: “Complete freedom from superiors beyond their own communities in the mission field made them [the *peregrini*] adaptable to local needs and opportunities. They rapidly enlisted Frankish and other German youth who, working harmoniously with them, made Christianity indigenous and self-perpetuating.”³⁰ Their ecclesiastical autonomy gave them the ability to adapt best to their new contexts in a new land. While Celtic customs, such as monastic rules and manuscript illuminations, lingered on the Continent for centuries, from the beginning the Irish missionaries sought to help the indigenous peoples make the faith their own as well, imparting to them a lasting legacy of ascetic discipline and morality. What we see in the history of the *peregrini* is a martyric abandonment of self through exile from their native land for the sake of their Christian faith and service to others.

Perhaps the most prominent of all the Irish *peregrini* was St. Columbanus, “a monk of Bangor in Co. Down who,” according to Zarnecki, “in about 590, left Ireland with twelve companions and, in the course of the next twenty-five years, lived in Gaul and Italy, exercising a profound influence on religious life and, to a certain extent, on the civilization of Western Europe.”³¹ His influence in Gaul, where his crew first landed, was expansive. Later, exiled from Gaul after a confrontation with the local royalty, he and his companions were shipwrecked and ended up in Switzerland. From there, they traveled to northern Italy,

²⁹ See, e.g., T. Fiaich, “Irish Monks on the Continent,” 103; J. McNeill, *The Celtic Churches: A History—A.D. 200 to 1200* (Chicago, IL; London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 174–175.; G. Zarnecki, *The Monastic Achievement* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1972), p. 23.

³⁰ McNeill, *The Celtic Churches*, p. 175.

³¹ G. Zarnecki, *The Monastic Achievement*, p. 22.

where St. Columbanus founded “the abbeys of Luxeuil in the Vosges and Bobbio in the Apennines.”³²

Everywhere they went, they left a legacy of faith and education. “The Irish monks,” writes Zarnecki, “with their tradition of learning, established large libraries and encouraged the copying and decorating of books. A very large number of manuscripts from Bobbio still survive, and the earliest among them exhibit a curious mixture of Celtic and Italian elements of decoration.”³³ In short, as the life of St. Columbanus demonstrates, to the extent one can say that the Irish saved civilization, they did it through a wholehearted embrace of the martyrdom of exile and an ascetic way of life, becoming “those people who repent well, who control their desires, and who shed their blood in fasting and in labor for Christ’s sake.”³⁴

3.3 Martyrdom and Marriage

By the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we can see further broadening of asceticism and martyrdom to the realm of marriage. Or rather, perhaps we should say that it is a renewed acknowledgment of what was always already there. For example, in addition to expressing the royal nature of marriage, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann noted that “the glory and the honor” of the crowns in an Orthodox wedding “is that of the martyr’s crown. For the way to the Kingdom is the *martyria*—bearing witness to Christ. And this means crucifixion and suffering. A marriage which does not constantly crucify its own selfishness and self-sufficiency, which does not ‘die to itself’ that it may point beyond itself, is not a Christian marriage.”³⁵

Vladimir Soloviev had already picked up on this motif in the previous century. He writes of the monk Father Clement

³² Ibidem.

³³ Idem, p. 23.

³⁴ *The Cambrai Homily* in Davies, *Celtic Spirituality*, p. 370.

³⁵ A. Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), p. 90.

Sederholm that as “a young scholar,” he was present once at a marriage in a Russian [Orthodox] church, [and] was struck by the fact that in a sacred anthem bridal crowns are compared to the crowns of martyrs. This profoundly thoughtful view so touched his soul that it called forth a complete revolution, ending with the young philologist giving up secular learning and the university chair destined for him and, to the distress of his relatives, going into a monastery.³⁶

Thus, the Orthodox confluence of martyrdom and marriage *itself* acted as a witness to the faith, spurring on the conversion of this young man. Accordingly, Soloviev writes, “True asceticism (...) has two paths: monasticism and marriage.”³⁷ He further details precisely how he understands marriage as a form of asceticism and martyrdom:

“Marriage remains as satisfaction of the sexual requirement; only that very requirement now relates not to the outward nature of an animal organism but to a nature that is humanized and awaiting deification. A huge *task* appears, solved only through continuous *exploit*. In the struggle with hostile reality, it is possible to conquer only by passing through martyrdom.”³⁸

Marriage transforms sexual union by orienting it toward the higher Good through a martyric renunciation of one’s lower, egoistic impulses for that “nature that is humanized and awaiting deification.”

For Schmemmann, in fact, confusion about the martyric nature of marriage is a major cause of divorce in the modern world: “It is not the lack of respect for the family, it is the idolization of the family that breaks the modern family so easily, making divorce its almost natural shadow. It is the identification of marriage

³⁶ V. Soloviev, *The Moral Organization of Humanity as a Whole*, (1899), trans. Vladimir Wozniuk, *Journal of Markets & Morality* 16.1 (Spring 2013), p. 340n16.

³⁷ *Idem*, p. 338.

³⁸ *Idem*, p. 340.

with happiness and the refusal to accept the cross in it.”³⁹ To purge marriage of its martyric nature robs it of the witness it must necessarily bear for the kingdom of God and the cross of Christ.

As I have written elsewhere, this ascetic nature of marriage has even broader implications: “From the family come all other forms of society, and the family does not function properly apart from asceticism.”⁴⁰ That is, all the members of a healthy family must constantly deny themselves to contribute to the common good of the group. And inasmuch as asceticism is the seed of martyrdom, then martyrdom is not only the seed of the Church—when taken from this broad perspective it is the seed of all human flourishing in society as well.

4 Conclusion

The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre famously ended his book *After Virtue* with a call for a new St. Benedict to renew the dying moral culture of the West. While I do not share his rather bleak characterization of our own times as a “new dark ages,”⁴¹ he is right to highlight, albeit indirectly, the importance of asceticism in the cultivation of moral culture. For the Orthodox “diaspora,” however, perhaps St. Columbanus and the Celtic *peregrini* would make for better inspiration than St. Benedict, who historically had much less to do with the re-Christianization of the West than they did.

³⁹ A. Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 90.

⁴⁰ D. Pahman, What Makes a Society? An Orthodox Perspective on Asceticism, Marriage, the Family, and Society, in: T. Dedon and S. Trostyanskiy (ed.), *Love, Marriage, and Family in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition*, Sophia Studies in Orthodox Theology, vol. 7 (New York, NY: Theotokos Press – The Sophia Institute, 2013), p. 189.

⁴¹ A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2nd edn., 1984), p. 263.

But who are the new martyrs today? Not only is the exile of many an opportunity for a new martyric witness in Western lands, wherever we find ourselves our call is the same: to martyrdom, to the cross of Christ. For many in the twentieth century under Soviet rule, that meant the shedding of their blood and enduring perhaps the most anti-human torture in all of human history. For many Syrian, Iraqi, Egyptian, and other Middle Eastern Christians today, their lives are continually being threatened by hostile forces seeking to exterminate them from the very birthplace of the Church. Yet, it is not they alone who must embrace a martyric outlook. As Pope St. Gregory the Great (*Dialogos*) once said, “[P]eace also has its martyrdom.”⁴² Indeed, wherever Orthodox Christians partake of the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, they “proclaim the Lord’s death till he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). As Pobee has noted, “In view of the martyrological ideas involved in the crucifixion (...) the Eucharist may be said to celebrate the martyrdom of Jesus.”⁴³ And, in the early Church, Middleton has noted how “behind every martyrdom was the death of Jesus,”⁴⁴ which all Christians are baptized into (cf. Romans 6) and are called to imitate (cf. Philippians 2). Indeed, St. Polycarp’s execution is even described with a possible allusion to the Eucharist. In the vault of the flames as he was burned at the stake, he glowed “like bread being baked.”⁴⁵ And the Eucharist itself is a foretaste of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, again connecting the notions

⁴² Pope St. Gregory the Great, *Homily 1* from idem., *Homilies on the Gospels*, trans. Dom David Hurst (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990), p. 9. For more on the pope’s understanding of spiritual martyrdom, see A. Rush, *Spiritual Martyrdom in St Gregory the Great*, *Theological Studies* 23.4 (1962), pp. 569–589.

⁴³ Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 85. See also his discussion of three details—the breaking of the bread, the cup, and the covenant in Christ’s blood—that follows on 85–86.

⁴⁴ Paul Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, 82.

⁴⁵ *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 15.2 in: C. H. Hoole, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Rivingtons, 1885), p. 212.

of marriage and martyrdom. Orthodox Christians fast as preparation for the Eucharist. In the same way, through their martyric witness—whether by ascetic practice, exile, marriage, monasticism, death, or any other dying to self in their everyday lives—they prepare themselves for the great Wedding Feast to come and repeat the call for others to join them, deny themselves, take up their crosses daily, and follow Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 9:32).