

Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*
Preface and Chapter One
“The Life of the World”

Preface:

As purpose: to outline the Christian worldview, “the approach to the world and to man’s life in it that stems from the liturgical experience of the Orthodox Church.”

The urgency of the book: secularism—the progressive alienation of the culture, of its very foundations, from the Christian experience and worldview that shaped the culture and the deep secularism that has divided Christians as well. Responses to secularism:

1. Welcome it as the best fruit of Christianity in history. This group reduces the Church to the world and its problems (Christ of culture).
2. Manichean rejection of the secular world for an escape into a disincarnate and dualistic spirituality. This group equates the world with evil and rejoices in its forth-coming apocalyptic doom (Christ against culture).

This is contrary to the wholeness and catholicity (universality) of the genuine Orthodox tradition:

1. The goodness of the created world: CREATION.
2. The wickedness in which the world lies: FALL.
3. For the life of the created world God gave His only begotten Son and those who believe in Christ are “dead and their life is hidden with Christ in God”: REDEMPTION.

Question: how to hold these three “contradictory” affirmations together in faith, life, and action, and overcome the temptation to “absolutize” any one of them (creation, fall, redemption) and thus keep from the heresies that have plagued the church historically.

Answer: The way to do this is not by means of neat intellectual theories, but from that living and unbroken experience of the Church which she reveals and communicates in her worship, in the liturgy which is always making

her that which she is: the sacrament of the Kingdom, the sacrament of the world, their gift to us in Christ.

Chapter One: The Life of the World

Part One:

1. Ludwig Feuerbach: Man is what he eats

A materialist definition of man in an attempt to eliminate idealist definitions of man, but in fact hit upon the most religious definition of man as eater!

2. The Biblical definition of man is twofold:

1. Man is presented as a hungry being and the whole world as his food.

2. Second to the command to propagate and have dominion over the earth is the command to eat of the earth (Gen. 1: 29). Quote 11

3. As begins with this "secondary" theme of food. Why? He wants to answer one basic question:

OF WHAT LIFE DO WE SPEAK, WHAT LIFE DO WE PREACH, PROCLAIM AND ANNOUNCE WHEN AS CHRISTIANS WE CONFESS THAT CHRIST DIED FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD? WHAT LIFE IS THE BEGINNING, MOTIVATION, AND GOAL OF CHRISTIAN MISSION?

John 6:48 "I am the bread of life. John 6:49 "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. John 6:50 "This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. John 6:51 "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give **FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD** is My flesh."

4. There are two basic answers to this question about the nature of this life for which Jesus Christ gave his life:

a. For religious and spiritual life separated and cut off from secular daily life: spiritualists (radicals). This is the spiritualization of our life.

- b. For the better life of the secular, ordinary world of eating and drinking man: activists (culturals). This is the secularization of our religion.
5. The question still remains for both groups: what is this life for which Christ died? Quotes 13

Part Two: [Creation]

1. The sacred versus profane, spiritual versus material, supernatural versus natural paradigm of Western Christian Religion. It determines how we interpret “man is what he eats.” But what does he eat and why?

For LF: eating is only a material function in keeping with the “materialist” framework.

For Christian religionists (ourselves?): eating is also only a material function, despite our theistic framework.

The only question is this: whether in addition to the materialist function of eating there is also a spiritual superstructure added on top of it (Christ above culture)?

LF said no; Christian religionists said yes.

But both answers are given within the sacred vs. secular framework. And this framework and its sacred secular categories have been for centuries the only accepted, understandable moulds and categories of religious thought and experience.

2. But in the rest of this section, AS shows that this is not the biblical view of the world. For nowhere in the Bible do we find these categories which so divide up life. Rather, everything in the world has been given as “communion with God.” Quotes 14-16. See also page 120-21 for additional discussion***

Part Three: [Fall]

1. The biblical story of the fall amazingly centers on food, the eating of forbidden food or fruit, food and fruit that was not given as a gift to humanity and blessed by God. Why? Not because of anything in the fruit itself (it wasn't poison), but rather because it was food whose eating was condemned to be communion with itself alone, by itself apart from God. It is the image and symbol of the world loved for itself (in a disordered way) and in itself as if it

contained by itself everything necessary for happiness though without God. It is the image of life understood as an end in itself.

2. Loving the world in itself and for itself as an end in itself and not as a transparency to God seems incredibly natural. It seems natural for humanity to experience the world as opaque (blocked), and not shot through with the presence and glory of God, not to live a life of thanksgiving to God for HIS gift of the world. "It seems natural not to be eucharistic."

3. The fallenness of the world consists in its fallenness away from the awareness that God is all in all (this is eastern orthodoxy, not western juridical theology which interprets sin in legal categories). This is the original sin that blights our world, for we don't have a clue as to what the world really is! The world has been separated from God, stolen from God by an all-embracing secularism, and this becomes essential our own thought patterns, esp. in the West.

4. Religion can't heal or fix this situation by adding a spiritual dimension on top of life and to the world. This misses the point entirely. Life in the world, even with "religion" is only the appearance of life. Only in God is found the meaning and value of everything, and the world is meaningful only when it is the sacrament of God's presence.

5. In sin man chose only the APPEARANCE of life, lost the eucharistic life, lost the true life of life and the power to transform it into life in God. He ceased to be the priest of the world, and instead became its slave. Adam weeping outside the Garden is the figure of man alone, a part from God, having lost the eucharistic life.

Part Four: Redemption

Definition of original sin is not that man disobeyed God only, but that he ceased to be hungry for God and Him alone, ceased to see his whole life depending upon the whole world as a sacrament of communion with God, having a non-eucharistic life in a non-eucharistic world. Quote 18

1. The sin was that man thought of God in terms of religion, as a part of life and as a part of life opposed to life!
2. Statement of the gospel: pp. 18-19. Religion consists in fragmentary truths of human aspirations for God, but falls far short of truth.
3. Jesus and his salvation is the end of all religion, for he has inaugurated a new life, not a new religion. It is no longer religious places, geography, sites, temples, cult, etc (hence, the charge of atheism because it wasn't religious).

Jesus is the answer to all religion because the life lost in Adam is restored to man in Christ.

Part Five: Mission

1. The purpose of this book: to remind readers that in Christ, life in all its totality was returned to man, given as sacrament and communion, made eucharistic once again.
2. There is a connection between the Church as the sacrament of Christ's presence and action in the world and mission. Thru sacrament and liturgy, the church makes its witness to the world.