



BOOK REVIEW

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TITLE: *For the Life of the World*

AUTHOR: V. Rev. Alexander Schmemmann

This book is an excellent introduction to liturgical theology. Father Alexander Schmemmann, the late dean of St. Vladimir's Seminary, first wrote this book as an outline of the Christian world view, especially from the viewpoint of the Orthodox Christian liturgical experience.

Father Alexander explains that “man is what he eats.” God created the earth as sustenance for man and given as communion with God. Furthermore, man's function was to serve as priest for creation by receiving it from God and offering it back in blessing and thanksgiving. Man fell when he decided to take what was not blessed by God and make that an end unto itself. Christ brings us back into communion with God by fulfilling God's original priestly purpose for mankind. The Christian Gospel is “the end of all religion” because it breaks down the wall between man and God; Christ has “inaugurated a new life, not a new religion”. The Eucharist is the central mystery and witness of Christ's presence and action within this new life. Man is hungry and thirsty for the sacramental life. At the Holy Eucharist we take into ourselves Christ Himself and we commune with Him into Life everlasting. The Divine Liturgy is broken down into its elements and then explained: doxology, reading of the Epistle, proclamation of the Gospel, transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, offering of gifts to God, holy Eucharist and thanksgiving, and being sent back into the world to perform Christ's mission.

The meaning of the Church's liturgical life is explained within the context of the Eucharist. The significance of time in Christian worship – for example, the time between morning and night, Sunday and Sunday, Pascha and Pascha, and the two comings of Christ – gives us meaning in our lives and serve as markers in our journey back to God. Baptism becomes the forgiveness of sins and equips us with the sword of Christ in our earthly life. Chrismation seals us with the gift of the Holy Spirit. The sacrament of Holy Matrimony is also explained within the Eucharistic context.

Throughout this book, Father Alexander warns of the tendency to believe two extreme mistakes: either secularism, the reduction of worship to merely “symbol”, or dualism, the rejection of the material world for some false spirituality. The Eucharist bring an understanding of Christ's victory over sin and death within God's creation. This is the foundation of our mission to the world, since having seen the true Light and having partaken of the Holy Spirit, each Christian is sent back into the world in joy and peace to become a witness of divine Love.

Reviewed by Mark and Anastasia Vassilakis

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