

For the Life of the World

By Alexander Schmemmann (St Vladimir's Seminary Press: Crestwood, New York) 1973.

A Response by Joe Carlson

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The purpose of this small, yet deeply profound book, was stated as such by the author: "My only purpose in writing [this] was to outline – to students preparing themselves for a discussion of Christian mission – the Christian "world-view," i.e. the approach to the world and to man's life in it that stems from the liturgical experience of the Orthodox Church,"(7). He continues to explain that the small book circulated far beyond his expectations, due to an increasing need for authors and books that are willing to deal with issues that still are with us today. Schmemmann explains,

These issues are none other than secularism – the progressive and rapid alienation of our culture, of its very foundations, from the Christian experience and "worldview" which initially shaped that culture – and the deep polarization which secularism has provoked among Christians themselves. Indeed, while some seem to welcome secularism as the best fruit of Christianity in history, some others find in it the justification for an almost Manichean rejection of the world, for an escape into a disincarnate and dualistic "spirituality." Thus there are those who reduce the church to the world and its problems, and those who simply equate the world with evil and morbidly rejoice in their apocalyptic gloom (7-8).

The necessity of treating this subject of the secularization of the Church has never been more needed than today. To watch the decay of Christianity in America even since this book was first published has been astonishing and disheartening. Truth affirms for us that God is still sovereign and continues to orchestrate history to His liking. This however does not relieve us from the responsibility to Honor Him the way He seeks to be Honored, and to Worship Him as He has declared we should in His Word. These essays I have been working on have all shared loosely a common theme of faith working in and through life: life lived, life enjoyed, life suffered, and life sanctified. We know, honor, love, and thank our God in Christ in the physical, in the here and now, on this street corner, in that coffee shop. Our theology must by necessity work itself out in our actions. Therefore our actions give testimony to what we truly deep down believe to be true, regardless of the Sunday school answers we tell ourselves every morning. This book by Schmemmann seeks to bring us back to precisely this attitude. How do we live day in and day out in the presence of Almighty God?

All authors write from within their specific context. Schmemmann happens to be a Russian Orthodox. Therefore he speaks from within that context, and all his material stems from the Orthodox liturgy. This does not discredit him in the least from being worthwhile, and thoroughly edifying. Our preconceived notions should never be allowed to color something so much that we dismiss it without grappling with it first. The great divide between East and West exists because of such dismissals. It also exists because our framework for thought is so radically different. It would behoove us westerners to sit at the feet of this brother in Christ, and learn from him what we can, which is plenty.

The Life of the World

With this preface of purpose, Schmemmann begins by showing that the center of all life is the act of eating. We are what we eat. Our life consists entirely around the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional act of eating. Eating takes on here a broader meaning than simply the chewing and digesting of apples. We need physical food to physically survive, we need spiritual food to survive spiritually and so on. Otherwise that unfed aspect of our whole man shrivels and becomes anemic. This is the process that our great God designed in us, and for us. He saw it as perfect that we should not be self-sustaining in any real sense. We need creation to live, and in that we are creatures of dependence. In short, our life consists in things outside of us, outside of our immediate control.

This becomes an important basis for the discussion of Life as we speak of Christ being the Life, and specifically the Life of the World. The world is dead in trespasses and sins. It has rejected its maker and sustainer. But Christ is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). We can honestly say with Scripture that Christ is the Life of the World, the Life this world needs, and depends on, not only for salvation, but for the mere sustaining power of all things being held together by His will. In Him all things live and move and have their being. "And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together," (Col. 1:17). In light of this ultimate dependence on Christ, how do we live, how do we love, how do we bear testimony to the Life?

Humans have answered this question ever since it was first asked with two opposite reactions. The first is to understand life as completely Spiritual, and to deny the enjoyment of anything but abstracts and concepts. (This mindset parades itself sometimes under the name Legalism or its brother, Fundamentalism.) Sin is located in things themselves, and to partake in a certain fruit of creation automatically means you are in sin. The second, opposite way, is to live recklessly by grace, with no thought at all for obedient living. The soul is saved, therefore we can do as we will (antinomianism). Both errors however have the same father, Dualism. In both modes of thinking we separate completely with a thick brick wall the Spiritual from the Physical. But we cannot do this. It is against the grain of creation. To separate Form from Content is neither profitable or safe. God made man with spirit and body, and spoke it into existence as a whole creation. We are wholly physical and wholly spiritual. This is why we cannot deny our spiritual dependence on things consisting outside our mind or spirit. Our spirit depends on created matter for survival. Think of a man who has never seen sunshine. What would that do to the soul? Creation affects us as we are, as whole creations, both the form of our bodies and the content of our souls. They are distinguishable but inseparable. Schmemmann thus makes his point,

The Bible...begins with man as a hungry being, with the man who is that which he eats. The perspective, however, is wholly different, for nowhere in the Bible do we find the dichotomies which for us are the self-evident framework of all approaches to religion. In the Bible the food that man eats, the world of which he must partake in order to live, is given to him by God, and it is given as *communion with God*. The world as man's food is not something "material" and limited to material functions, thus different from and opposed to the specifically "spiritual" functions by which man is related to God. All that exists is God's gift to man, and it all exists to make God known to man, to make man's life communion with God. It is divine love made food, made life for man. God *blesses* everything He creates, and,

in biblical language, this means that He makes all creation the sign and means of His presence and wisdom, love and revelation: “O taste and see that the Lord is good.” (14)

This is how we are created. By God through Christ we are made to partake of Him, and in return give thanks. We in return bless this divine Giver. From the garden this was to be how life works. God gives, we receive, we bless in gratitude, God blesses in continued love. This is the very direction of the creation mandate: be fruitful and multiply and possess the earth. “So the only natural reaction of man, to whom God gave this blessed and sanctified world, is to bless God in return, to thank Him, to see the world as God sees it and, in this act of gratitude and adoration, to know, name and possess the world,”(15). This is the basis for “sacramental life.” We were created as priest, standing on behalf of all creation, receiving it, and in turn blessing God for it. Here is our true name, not *homo sapiens* but rather *homo adorans*, the worshiping man.

All of life then consists of worship. Receiving from God all things, and lifting them back to Him in thanksgiving and joy. All things here means *all things*, whether that be material or spiritual. This understood, Schmemmann goes on,

[Man] stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing it to God – and by filling the world with this eucharist, he transforms his life, the one that he receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him. The world was created as the “matter” the material of one all-embracing eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament. (15)

Genesis, however, makes us brutally aware of the first act done in Man’s desire for autonomy. In that one act, Adam stood in the place of all creation, and all creation fell with him. That first sin, that first act of transgression, defined our nature, and will until Christ comes again. Our nature is to not give thanks, for giving thanks presupposes grace, which presupposes our inability to earn our stay. Schmemmann says,

It seems natural not to live a life of thanksgiving for God’s gift of a world. It seems natural not be eucharistic. The world is a fallen world because it has fallen away from the awareness that God is all in all. The accumulation of this disregard for God is the original sin that blights the world. And even the religion of this fallen world cannot heal or redeem it, for it has accepted the reduction of God to an area called “sacred” (“spiritual,” “supernatural”) – as opposed to the world as “profane.” It has accepted the all-embracing secularism which attempts to steal the world away from God. (16)

God is all in all. He sustains all things and holds all things together. Through Him all things have life. If God stopped speaking, stopped thinking about this world, it would disappear. Right now, we are here, breathing, reading, and thinking, because God said we could, in an ultimate sense.

The natural dependence of man upon the world was intended to be transformed constantly into communion with God in whom is all life. Man was to be the priest of a eucharist, offering the world to God, and in this offering he was to receive the gift of life. But in the

fallen world man does not have the priestly power to do this. His dependence on the world becomes a closed circuit, and his love is deviated from its true direction. He still loves, he is still hungry. He knows he is dependent on that which is beyond him. But his love and his dependence refer only to the world in itself. He does not know that breathing can be communion with God. He does not realize that to eat can be to receive life from God in more than its physical sense. He forgets that the world, its air or its food cannot by themselves bring life, but only as they are received and accepted for God's sake, in God and as bearers of the divine gift of life. But themselves they can produce only the appearance of life. (17)

Here we can start to see that all of life is truly a gift. All accomplishments you have achieved, all ladders you have climbed, all heights you have reached, are fundamentally gifts. You enacted the steps to be sure, you put the hard work in, no doubt about it. But every aspect of every step is even here and available first because there is a God who continues to speak into existence all things, and second, because God is all in all, and above all and is not inactive in the deeds of men. "Man makes his plans, but the Lord directs his steps." Therefore all of life is an act of receiving from God's hand what He deigns to give. This ranges from big ticket items such as jobs and relationships, to mundane daily tasks like putting on our socks or brushing our teeth. This life of receiving can be characterized in only one of two ways. Either your life is defined by a grasping, ungrateful, self-deceiving attempt at autonomy, or it is defined by gratitude and thanksgiving, a giving back in joy to the God who gives all. It may seem like an easy and obvious choice. But gratitude is difficult, nay, impossible, because it requires an acknowledgement of self-insufficiency, and recognition of a Holy God who requires satisfaction for sin. Even for the Christian who knows God is above all, and that in Christ we have hope, even for His children it is difficult, for the flesh is strong. A daily commitment to putting self to death, and living in Christ (which is to allow Christ to live in you) is at the core of a grateful life.

All things are given to man, for him to have dominion over, to use, to enjoy. This can only be done honestly and enjoyably through a eucharistic thank-offering, offering back to the Great Giver of life thanks for all things. This means all things, things easy and difficult, times fun and hard. This means too that life is not divided into two categories, Religious Life and Secular Life. There is no division between Sunday and Monday through Saturday. Our entire life is an act of worship. Our entire life is a receiving of gifts from God's hand. Our entire life is eucharistic.

The Eucharist

Eucharist comes from the Greek word *eucharisto*, which means, "I give thanks." The early church fathers picked up on this word and it's meaning in the context of worship, and used it to give a name to the Lord's Table. So the Eucharist proper is simply another, older, name for Communion. In Catholic and Eastern Orthodox services, the Lord's Table is still referred as the Sacrament of the Eucharist. There is nothing wrong with this at all. In my opinion it is a shame that we have strayed from this particular word in the last hundred years. The table truly should be our offering of thanksgiving. It is a time where we return in gratitude, and partake in thanksgiving, having received the nourishment of the Spoken Word. In the Eucharist, we sit at the table with our Lord and partake of Him. Our only response to this is gratitude.

In a broader sense, Eucharist refer to our lives as a living sacrifice, a living sacrament, continually poured before the Spirit, as is argued above. All of life is eucharistic, in that all of life requires our position of gratitude and worship. Again, we receive all things from the Lord, and are to respond only with thankful hearts, and open hands. Eucharistic living is the only way to achieve true peace, true contentment in the Lord. If we understand that everything we go through is a gift from the Lord, our actions and attitudes will be thus shaped, and we will finally be able to say with Paul, honestly, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice!"

Schmemmann, in this next section, proceeds through an Orthodox Service, illuminating the reality of what happens in worship, as we are taken up into Mount Zion, amongst the cloud of witnesses, to offer our praise, and be nourished by the Lord. He begins,

The liturgy of the Eucharist is best understood as a journey or procession. It is the journey of the Church into the dimension of the Kingdom...Our entrance into the presence of Christ is an entrance into a fourth dimension which allows us to see the ultimate reality of life. It is not an escape from the world, rather it is the arrival at a vantage point from which we can see more deeply into the reality of the world...The journey begins when Christians leave their homes and beds. (26-27)

Here is the act of living in the world but not of it. Physically we are present here in this world. But by the Spirit of God we are members of the City on the Hill, the New Jerusalem. Every Lord's Day we ascend that hill and join with the myriad of believers from around the globe and around the ages, gathered together as the Bride of Christ to bring worship to her Husband. Schmemmann insightfully refers to this as a fourth dimension. It is a reality unseen with human eyes, but not untasted by believing hearts. Granted, this is a mystery, but Scripture demands that this is so. Therefore we accept it, and leave off figuring it out.

Every Lord's Day is a journey into His presence, and journey toward His table, which is the climax of the Service. It is a journey toward ultimate participation in the risen body of Christ. It begins when we make a conscious decision to get out of bed, dress appropriately, and drive to the meetinghouse. We choose to not sleep in. We choose to make gathering together a priority. When we wake up Sunday morning, we are individuals, with particular families, particular histories, and particular situations. As we begin the journey, we begin by leaving those particular contexts behind, but not in a way that erases them. We come rather to bring multiplicity of contexts to be fulfilled in a greater, unified context that is the Church of Jesus Christ. The Body of our Lord is what we as chosen and purchased children of God are about. That is our greater context. We bring our individuality to be a part of a greater whole. We become members, with different gifts and abilities and callings. In this the Church is not just a Social Club, where people with similar tastes meet and discuss/enjoy their similar idiosyncrasies. The Church is much grander than that. It is the Army of God, equipped with the Word, called to make war on all unbelief. We do this through preaching, baptizing, and teaching. In contrast to a Social Club, our focus is not inward, toward one another. Our focus is the worship of our Husband, He who brings us together and makes us one in the first place. This is what we experience in reality on Sunday Mornings. We come and are assembled as one Bride, with one Lord. It is true separation from our lives in the World. We are made to be different than the City of Man.

As we leave our houses, we are in a sense leaving this world, journeying into that fourth dimension, the reality of the Church, the City of God. Schmemmann describes the real separation in this way. Speaking of the disciples' difficulty in recognizing the risen Lord, he says,

It was apparently no longer sufficient simply to know that He was the son of Mary. There was no physical imperative to recognize Him. He was, in other words, no longer a "part" of this world, of its reality, and to recognize Him, to enter in the joy of His presence, to be with Him, meant a conversion to another reality. The Lord's glorification does not have the compelling, objective evidence of His humiliation and cross. His glorification is known only through the mysterious death in the baptismal font, through the anointing of the Holy Spirit. It is known only in the fullness of the Church, as she gathers to meet the Lord and to share in His risen life. (28)

We assemble to render worship and in turn to be equipped, renewed and prepared, to re-enter this world. It is ascension and descension, a journey up and a journey down, progression in, and progression out. In between our coming and going, we are broken, cleansed, equipped, nourished, fed, and charged with our mission. That mission is to return to the City of Man, and make disciples. Seen in this light Sunday's become far more exciting than simply a time to catch up with friends.

We begin with procession *toward*. We begin with ascent and journey. As we are gathered the priest begins the service with the words: "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, and unto ages of ages." The congregation then responds with "AMEN!" We are now told where we are going, what we are ascending to, where our journey is leading us. The Kingdom of Heaven, of our God, Father, Son, and Spirit, this is the destination of our procession. And we respond with Amen, consenting and affirming our joy and delight with this movement. In our responding, we should realize that our ascension is not an act we perform, but is the *object* of an act being performed. Though we drive and make our way to the place of worship, we are not the initiators of our ascent. We are being brought up. We cannot approach the throne of God, but we can be brought to it. To this we say Amen, for we know that approaching on our terms means death, but submitting to the hand of God, and being brought by Him is the only means of life in this world.

The priest, after declaring our destination, turns and comes to the alter, signifying our coming to Christ Himself. Christ is the only alter on which we sacrifice our lives, the only alter on which we can be broken and restored. In this entrance into Christ however, we are not just beholding a symbol, but entering into that grace, which gives us the ability to stand before a thrice-Holy God. It is here in our being brought to the Throne Room of the Most High that we realize our utter inability. We recognize the complete Otherness of God, His devastating Holiness. The Church together at this moment sings the words of the angels, the music, which both Isaiah and John heard first as they ascended into the Presence of God: "Holy, Holy, Holy."

"Holy" is the real name of God, of the God "not of scholars and philosophers," but of the living God of faith. The knowledge about God results in definitions and distinctions. The knowledge of God leads to this one, incomprehensible, yet obvious and inescapable word: holy. And in this word we express both that God is the Absolutely Other, the One about

whom we can know nothing, and that He is the end of all our hunger, all our desires, the inaccessible One who mobilizes our wills, the mysterious treasure that attracts us, and there is really nothing to know but Him. "Holy" is the word, the song, the "reaction" of the Church as it enters into heaven, as it stands before the heavenly glory of God. (32)

The priest, who is given the duty of leading the congregation, now turns and faces the body, and says, "Peace be with you." These are, really, remarkable words, when considered. If it is true that the reality of our ascension has brought us to the reality of the Throne Room of *the* Holy God, we should think twice about our comfort level of being in such a place. This is not, again, just a social club experience. It is a world transforming and life altering experience. To enter casually is neither safe nor wise. We must enter aware of our transformed surroundings. We must enter aware of our debilitated state. But it is here, just as with Christ in the upper room after He passed through locked doors, words of Peace are spoken. We confess our sins, and in repentance, receive the restoring righteousness of Christ. We are washed and clothed, made ready to stand before the Holy One. As confession is made, we are assured of our absolution with words of peace. Christ is our Peace, "the reconciliation with God, divine forgiveness, communion," (32).

We are now ready and prepared to hear the Words of God. The Gospel is read and preached. The hearers have been brought, and have been broken by a Holy God. They have been put together again by His Peace, and now are being nourished by the Word. In the reading and preaching of the Word, we begin to feel and sense the real presence of the Word, Jesus Christ. Here are living letters, and active sentences. The Word of God made alive to us through the Spirit.

After the ministry of the Word, in the Orthodox Service, the priest brings the bread and the wine forward to the alter. In this act, he signifies the offering of all of life to God, the tithe of the people represented by food. Food represents life, and so in offering bread and wine back to God, we offer our lives back to Him. It is in this offering of our life that we reenact Abraham's offering of Isaac on Mount Moriah, for Isaac was his life, his promise. We do this with faith in Christ, just as Abraham did with faith for Christ. We look back just as he looked forward. And just as God provided a lamb for Abraham's offering of life, so He provided the Lamb for our offering of life. The bread and wine offered becomes the body and blood of Christ returned to us for food. Transformed food, Christened food, food that leads to eternal nourishment, and eternal life. Here is our reason for calling the service *eucharistic*. What have we to be thankful for if not the Body and Blood of Christ offered up on the cross, as well as offered to us on the table? This is the crux of our faith. Here is the partaking of the Divine, as we become like Him.

When man stands before the throne of God, when he has fulfilled all that God has given him to fulfill, when all sins are forgiven, all joy restored, then there is nothing else for him to do but to give thanks. Eucharist (thanksgiving) is the state of perfect man. Eucharist is the life of paradise. Eucharist is the only full and real response of man to God's creation, redemption and gift of heaven. But this perfect man who stands before God is *Christ*. In Him alone all that God has given man was fulfilled and brought back to heaven. He alone is the perfect Eucharistic Being. He is the Eucharist of the world. In and through this Eucharist the whole creation becomes what it always was to be and yet failed to be. (37-38)

Thus we partake of Christ. We feed on Him, and in Him we stand as the perfect Man. Together we make up His Body, and are presented as His Bride. Christ is the focus, and with Him in the center, pride and self-love have no place. The concern is no longer my desires, my thoughts, my needs. But Christ and His mission. Here is complete surrender. Here is self-sacrifice. Here is our cross that we must bear: to abandon all self-promotion and self-satisfaction and self-sufficiency. Our center is Christ. Our foundation is Christ. Our desire is Christ. But as we submit ourselves to His will, and His desires, He shapes our will and our desires to match His. The more we focus on Christ, the more we find that our hopes and dreams and desires are wrapped up around Him, and what He calls us to be. This is the transforming work of the Spirit, as we offer ourselves up in thanksgiving.

And so, having been brought and broken, cleansed and clothed, nourished and fed, we are satisfied and sent out back into the world, with the mission of Christ as our goal. That mission is love. Love that is patient and kind. Love that changes people. Love that is a testimony to our brotherhood in Christ. Love that permeates through our relationships with one another and affects the world around us. Love that makes disciples of the nations, teaching them to obey all that we have been commanded. Love that will make men know that we are His disciples.

We are sent back. But now “we have seen the true Light, we have received the heavenly Spirit.” And it is as witnesses of this Light, as witnesses of the Spirit, that we must “go forth” and begin the never-ending mission of the Church. Eucharist was the *end* of the journey, the end of time. And now it is again the *beginning*, and things that were impossible are again revealed to us as possible. The time of the world has become the time of the Church, the time of salvation and redemption. (45-46)

The Time of Mission

In this next section Schmemmann gives us a brief theology of Time. What is our relation to it? How has Christ’s incarnation affected it, if at all? Is Time redeemed? If so, what does that mean for our lives, as we live necessarily in time? Time is a part of this world; it is a fellow creature. Our God is above time, outside of time, beyond time. He created it for this world (see day four, with the Sun, Moon, and Stars) giving it a specific calling and vocation. It is a steadfast and reliable creation, never altering, except a few times at the hands of its Maker. Often, I think, we do not relegate time to its rightful place, being here on earth. We imagine it as something God Himself is bound by. But that is nonsensical. God cannot be bound by anything except Himself. But if it is indeed a creation, it is something that the Creator intended for us and for our good. It falls under the declaration of “Very Good,” when the Lord pronounced His creation so. Therefore we must understand time as *gift*, for such it is. As much gift as the sea and all its creatures, our daily bread, or the bees that make our flowers grow. As part of this world, it also fell with the fall of Adam. This also means that it was redeemed in the death and resurrection of the Second Adam, along with the rest of creation. It was purchased by His blood. If this is so, our “religious” attitude toward time leaves some questions unanswered.

Much of modern Christianity sees salvation as escape. Salvation means fire-insurance. It means we get ejected from this place to be where God is, as if God is not here. This affects how we live our day-

to-day lives. Do we live as if Christ is present with us, or as if He is simply waiting for us to croak so that He can bring us home to Heaven, where we won't have to worry about all this earthly stuff? This is a dangerous conclusion to draw. Christ is with us, and calls us to be here, and to find meaning in being here. The meaning is not found in the world itself, or in tasks themselves. All of life is vapor, as Solomon tells us. The meaning that is to be found is in Christ holding this world together continually by the power of His word. And He does not do so for kicks and giggles. He does it for reason and with purpose. This means our lives are filled with meaning and purpose, because Christ holds them together and fills them Himself. Furthermore, salvation is not escape from time and world, but rather liberation from the old man. This brings liberation *to* time and world, with the purpose of redeeming it. Christ has purchased the world by His blood. It is His. He has called us to go make it so. The nations already belong to Him. He has been given authority in Heaven and on Earth. All authority. But He still calls us to go preach, baptize, and teach. We have been saved in time, to time. We are not in a holding pattern until the 'death dew lies cold on my brow.'

In fairness, I know of no one, who is honest with Scripture and would say that they are simply in a holding pattern. Modern Christianity has a zeal and passion for evangelism that few centuries have seen. However this underlying, most likely subconscious, thought has pervaded our attitudes toward what we do. Modern Christianity seeks conversions. We seek numbers. Let's get as many people out of the house before it burns down. The purpose behind our evangelism (and it shows up in the techniques of our apologetics) is to give people an escape plan. What this fails to do is teach people how to live afterwards. Now that we are all in the street, what do we do? Do we simply watch the house burn down, or do we go get buckets of water? How do we live now that we are Christ's, and Christ now lives in us?

"So what does this have to with time?" you are asking. I give this tangent to illumine our current paradigm. Time is often seen as the enemy. It is eating away our lives, and we must beat it. We do not see it as a gift, or as a part of the creation that we are to redeem, and offer back to Christ, which we can only do because He has already purchased it. There is much meaning to be found in Time. It is evident that God Himself has a high view of it. From the ordering of the days with nights, into weeks and months and years with the sun, moon, and stars, to the prolonged Second Coming, God uses time to teach, to give growth, to allow things to mature. He is concerned with age, and the process it requires. Otherwise He could have simply created us in Heaven, and forget this whole mess. No, Time is a necessary part of the equation. Our Lord delights in the process of things, He delights in the maturation of children into adults. We must see the Lord working in Time, and through it. We must not spiritualize our walk of faith, neglecting the physical, earthly work of Christ occurring every moment of every day. In defining worship as singing praise songs, and not seeing it in buying groceries or in digging up weeds, we are not rightly focused on what the Gospel means.

How can these things be reflected in our life? We choose to order our days in certain ways. We do it without even thinking about it. We structure our year on school schedules, or on fiscal operations, or on athletic seasons. The point is we make a choice, and we choose to prioritize certain things over others, merely out of necessity. Usually this choice will reflect our passions, our interests, our hobbies, our vocations, you name it. Now if we understand all of life to be bought by Christ, and under His authority, how should we understand our priorities, and should we structure our lives any

differently than we do? The answer is obviously yes, but the execution of that conviction is where we all get hung up. We desire a Christ-centered life, but have no idea how to do it in the midst of our crazed and frenetic society, where there is no such thing as true and real rest. Our culture views rest as escape, or vacation. Holidays are interruptions in the stream of 24/7 culture. We invite them to break away from hectic schedules and catch a breath. They also, often, afford us time for family interaction. However, we do not immediately see their importance in and of themselves. Holidays in any culture are representative of what that culture holds as important. In America we see Columbus as worthy of honor, as with the past presidents and veterans, and their importance has been found in the shopping mall sales. We have held on to Christmas, and to Easter, but even they have lost their inherent meaning. They are opportunities for families to reunite in a spirit of good-will.

It is important to understand that the Church has her own Culture. It is the Culture of the redeemed world. It is the culture of Christ. All other cultures pale, and will fall away. It is not simply one valid culture in the mix of valid cultures. It is the Culture. We do not often see it that way. We do not realize that we are part of this new culture, because we do not see our selves as forming anything more than a social group. We are the new City, the New Jerusalem, Mount Zion. That is real. That is reality. As members of that City are we living within our cultural bounds, or are we adopting the culture of the world, which at its very core is a God hating, rebellious culture? How can we take part of that world and not see our own hypocrisy? The answer is: very easily. It is all too easy to get lost in the day to day happenings of the world we live in, even though we are not of it. This is why it is important to understand our culture, our history, and our future, nurturing and enculturating our children in this new Society. The city of God is making war on the city of Man. It is not simply setting up an alternative hippie camp. We are called to bring into the folds of the New City the entire world. All the nations are to be enculturated in the ways of the Church. All peoples and all tongues are called to speak the language of Christ. This is evangelism. This is our apologetic.

Again, back to time. Being a different society and culture than the American one, we naturally have a different system arranging time. We have different holidays including a different new year. Not only are dates different, the mindset for celebrating is also different. The world sees holidays as escape, whereas Christians (should) see holidays as foreshadows and foretastes of the future Holiday, that is, Glory. The world looks back to times of 'innocence' and carefree wonder, such as childhood. The Church looks forward to eternal life.

The Church year itself is structured on the life of Christ. It begins with the expectation, anticipation and celebration of His birth with Advent and Christmas. It moves through His life, from His baptism to His passion, death, and resurrection, to His ascension. Following that, the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost is celebrated, followed by a season focused on the life of the Christian. There are seasons of penitence, fasting, reflection, celebration, and of feasting. Through all we find joy. Real joy that is not drummed up, or superficial like happiness can be. Real joy is fruit. Joy understands that all of life is from God, and that all of life is a gift from Him. Joy means accepting that, and resting in that. Joy revels in the truth of Christ sitting on the throne. Joy finds meaning in the 'meaninglessness' of our world, the endless cycles of dreary repetition and mundane insignificance. The world's honest prophets understand it and despair. We see it, and with the Preacher, give glory to God, for He has

delighted in it and desires us to delight in it as well. But this is a difficult thing to grasp. It is even harder to cultivate. Schmemmann argues,

Feast means joy. Yet if there is something that we-the serious, adult and frustrated Christians of the twentieth century-look at with suspicion, it is certainly joy. How can one be joyful when so many people suffer? When so many things are to be done? How can one indulge in festivals and celebrations when people expect from us “serious” answers to their problems? Consciously or subconsciously Christians have accepted the whole ethos of our joyless and business-minded culture. They believe that the only way to be taken “seriously” by the “serious”-that is, by modern man-is to be serious, and, therefore, to reduce to a symbolic “minimum” what in the past was so tremendously central in the life of the Church-the joy of a feast. The modern world has relegated joy to the category of “fun” and “relaxation”. It is justified and permissible on our “time off”; it is a concession, a compromise. And Christians have come to believe all this, or rather they have ceased to believe that the feast, the joy have something to do precisely with the “serious problems” of life itself, may even be *the* Christian answer to them. With all these spiritual and cultural connotations, the “Christian year”-the sequence of liturgical commemorations and celebrations-ceased to be the generator of power, and is now looked upon as a more or less antiquated decoration of religion. It is used as a kind of “audio-visual” aid in religious education, but it is neither a root of Christian life and action, nor a “goal” toward which they are oriented. (53)

In the face of modern secularism, the only thing that has real power, real potency is Joy. Joy sees the finish line, and knows that God wins. Joy believes with confidence and faith that Satan loses, that all wrongs will be made right, tears will be wiped away, the lame will walk, the blind will see. Joy remembers that in the midst of suffering. Joy produces that steadfastness of faith we need through the tribulations we encounter. Joy does not necessarily mean smiling. Sometimes it means weeping. But primarily Joy means the absence of hopelessness. It sees the foolishness of despair. It is this Joy that enables the Church to fellowship together and have meaningful interaction, for it is a joy that we all share in Christ. This is the purpose of Feasting. Poking Satan in the eye, if you will. Giving him the raspberry. Sticking our tongue out at him because we know that he cannot touch us, nor have any hold over us. He tries to divert our gaze by throwing persecution and trials in our path, but we continue our feast knowing with Whom we sit at the table. And He would have us laugh. And this laughter will bring salvation to the nations.

“Through the Cross joy came *into the whole world*”-and not just to some men a their personal and private joy. Once more, were Christianity pure “mysticism,” pure “eschatology,” there would be no need for feasts and celebrations. A holy soul would keep its secret feast apart from the world, to the extent that it could free itself from its time. But joy was given to the Church *for the world*-that the Church might be a witness to it and transform the world by joy. Such is the “function” of Christian feasts and the meaning of their belonging in time. (55)

We are called to show love to one another. This love is also said to be a witness to our unity in Christ. Love is not joyless. Love does not dress up in a suit and tie, and come with its calculator, ready to make exact change. Love is grace. Love covers sin. Love does not seek to please self, but rather it puts

the needs of others above your own. Love laughs, and love cries. But then love laughs again. Love sees the end of the story. Love has read the final pages of the book, and there has found real joy. Love shares this joy, and is patient with those who despair. Love conquers. Joy nourishes. Hope sustains.

Final Thoughts

Schmemmann continues with thoughts on baptism, marriage, the death of death, and our call to bear witness of these things. They are worthy of future discussions, but for reasons of time, will not be picked up here. My purpose in this essay was to explore from a different angle the call for us to be whole-body worshippers of God. Every aspect of our lives is to be taken captive to the word of Christ. Every thought, every word, every deed. We have been buried with Him in baptism, and raised to new life. This new life encompasses everything about our life here, in the here and now. We are to present ourselves as living sacrifices, and that means on Wednesday as well as on Sunday. That means in the Gym as well as in the Sanctuary. Whatever we do, whether we eat or drink, do all to the glory of God. Give thanks in all things, rejoicing always, praying without ceasing, being anxious for nothing. On top of that we are to count all things Joy when we encounter various trials and hardships. We are a new City, and the city of Man does not appreciate the threat we present. They will attempt to tear our walls down. But they cannot, for we are living stones, and will remain so. They cannot bring death where death has been conquered. And that is their only trick. Christ trumps.

We are called to work out our salvation, while living in a world we are not of. This means a Christian culture. We have a new charter, and a new set of standards and priorities. We have all the foundations for a new culture, not like the culture of the world. Our culture has Christ at its center. It is a culture of the Water and the Word, of the Bread and the Wine, of the foolishness of preaching and folly of rebirth. It is a culture of feasting and of joy, where the end is known, and it is good. It is a culture of grace, and in essence, a culture of gift. It is a gift given for the life of the world.