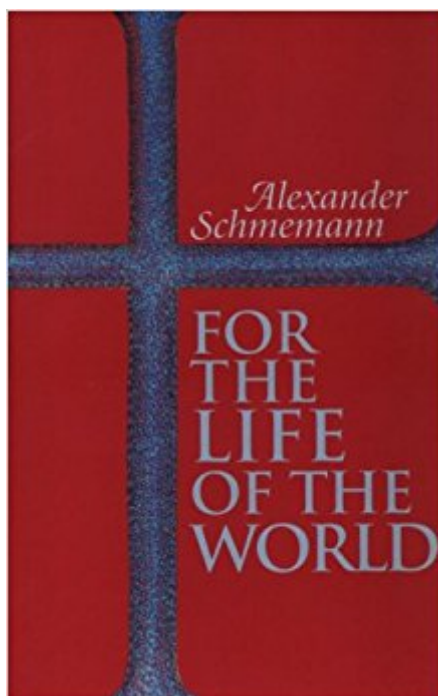


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# For The Life Of The World: Sacraments And Orthodoxy



## Synopsis

In *For the Life of the World* Alexander Schmemmann suggests an approach to the world and life within it, which stems from the liturgical experience of the Orthodox Church. He understands issues such as secularism and Christian culture from the perspective of the unbroken experience of the Church, as revealed and communicated in her worship, in her liturgy - the sacrament of the world, the sacrament of the Kingdom.

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## Customer Reviews

Father Alexander Schmemmann (+1983) was a prolific writer, brilliant lecturer, and dedicated pastor. Former dean and professor of liturgical theology at St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, his insight into contemporary culture and liturgical celebration left an indelible mark on the Christian community worldwide.

Alexander Schmemmann's book is imbued with great passions for a true understanding of the sacraments - as means of grace and pointers to the transformed (and transforming) Christian life in the light of Christ's self-offering to the world. Schmemmann poignantly exposes the secular subterfuge of a sacred-profane, religious-secular dichotomy that is inimical to the nerve centre of the Christian view of life as one that belongs wholly to God. What the sacraments do is neither to offer a kind of solace from the 'real world' nor a self-help scheme that dishes out remedies for life's problems. Rather, they are vivid and concrete expressions of the whole life that has now been

redeemed by Christ and given back to us for communion. Whereas, the fall has alienated us from God and life and renders food, nature, work, family and life outside the dominion of God, Christ by virtue of his life, death and resurrection has begun to restore all things in God till he be all in all. Expositing the sacrament of Time and the various ordinances/mysteries (Eucharist, Baptism, Chrismation, Confession, Matrimony, Ordination, Unction) in the Orthodox tradition, Schmemmann graces us with a passionate guide on how these are not to be co-opted by the world as the innocuous religious rites of hatch, match and despatch but the very windows through which we see the world in the process of being recapitulated by God. Hence, they are intimately connected with the mission and calling of the church to be the witnesses of Christ, who has offered himself as the sacrifice for the life of the world. For example, the Eucharist is the restoration of food as not just something for the stomach but as a means of communion with God. It satisfies our real hunger for God. Sunday is not just a day-off to do religious things, quite independent of the workaday week but the first day of the new creation! It invites us to enter into the Time (kairos) of God's new kingdom inaugurated on the Resurrection morning. While the secularist bemoans that 'there's nothing new under the sun' (Eccl 1), the Sunday liturgy points to the day when 'God will make all things new' (Rev 21)! Though written from an Orthodox perspective, it will find ready resonance from Christians across the board, especially those from a liturgical background and are attuned to how the sacraments work and what they are meant to be - as the intersections of heaven and earth as well as the physical signs of a larger objective spiritual reality. However, a caveat for those looking for a simpler introduction to Orthodox sacramental theology, this may not be the book for you. While articulate and clear a writer Schmemmann certainly is, he does not make for straightforward reading, as it assumes a certain level of familiarity with liturgical (even Orthodox) language and he writes with a quasi-poetic style. I would recommend instead the introductory books by Timothy Ware and Daniel Clendenin.

I just finished reading this book, and I am very sad that it is finished. I have never read an Orthodox book that was so inspirational and motivating. I couldn't put it down. I have already purchased an additional copy to give as a gift. I can't recommend this book enough.

The late Orthodox Priest, educator, and writer, Alexander Schmemmann has written a profound text dealing with the sacraments of the Church. The book works on several fronts. One, the text works well for laity who have little academic training, but want a truly deeply provoking book on the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church. Secondly, it is written well enough for academics to

read and ponder insightful scholarship on doctrines such as the Eucharist and its relevance when looking at the creation, man's present condition, and the Kingdom of God. Further, it gives a perspective not often read about in Western Protestant circles and brings historical teachings into a mystical, yet, understandable (though not completely comprehensible) way. This may appeal to Western Christians who want mystery, but are afraid of leaving their mind at the door. This book is a must read. Edifying for all, whether Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox.

This book is so deep and far-reaching in terms of illustrating a Christian worldview which is distinctively Orthodox that I don't know where to begin. It is as fundamental a shift as atomic theory was in physics. For the Life of the World challenges some classic dichotomies between "now" and "later", earth and heaven, secular and sacred. It's all the same \*stuff\*, we don't have to wait until later to experience the Kingdom - it's present NOW, in the sacraments. We don't have to view sacraments in opposition to the world, they are the completion of it, the satiation of a hunger for GOOD things. This book is comforting, challenging, and stimulating... and has refined my perspective on life, the world, worship, and the sacraments. A blessing to read that I plan to gift to close friends.

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