

Reading Together: "For the Life of the World" by Alexander Schmemmann

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 March 2017

Preacher: Kyle MacKenney

[0 : 00] I got to hear Alexandra's book club from November on Jamie Smith, You Are What You Love. If you weren't here for that book club, it was just a phenomenal book club that Alexandra led in November. And so I was really edified by listening to it again. It felt like I was hearing Smith all over again. Smith, actually, you may have, if you had read that book, you would have seen him quote from For the Life of the World. Smith is a big fan of Schmemmann and really gets to his work with modern day liturgies that Smith sees throughout our culture, in part through Schmemmann's focus on worship. So in some ways, we're backing up from Smith, who we read together this past fall, to Schmemmann, who is upstream back in the 50s, 60s, 70s, before his death in 83. I'm going to talk about both the man, Schmemmann, as well as the book, because I think both of those are important for us. I got to watch a little bit of his funeral from December of 1983 online this past week. And it was really remarkable. There was actually a CBS piece that aired on Schmemmann after he passed away in 83 as well. It's about a, maybe about a 25 minute clip. He had been involved throughout the course of his life there in New

York with CBS. And so they featured him in a nice 25 minutes special after he passed away. So that's on YouTube. It's fairly easy to find if you're so interested. For the Life of the World. Fascinating book. It's been translated now into, I think, 11 or 12 languages. It's been in print ever since it first came out in 63. And then it was picked up by a major publisher in 65.

It was first written, some of you probably saw this in the introduction, it was first written for the National Student Christian Federation. They were gathering with about 3,000 students in Ohio at Ohio University. This was from December 27th, January 2nd of 1963 into 1964. So big, big conference of 3,000 students. Schmemmann actually was already well known at that point to the college population.

His son, Serge Schmemmann, was in university at that time. But Schmemmann, through his work at St. Vladimir's Seminary in Yonkers, that originally had been in Manhattan, but then the seminary moved up to Yonkers, to Crestwood. Schmemmann had been teaching amongst college students and seminary students for a number of years already at that point, and also lecturing across North America, as well as internationally at conferences and other universities. So he wrote this book for, what's interestingly, a conference of largely Protestant students. And I think in some ways that makes it more accessible to those of us as Protestants, because it is written originally for a Protestant audience. We'll get in the latter half of my presentation, after we've talked in our groups and so forth, we'll get to some of how this work has been received, both in the Orthodox Church, but more widely as well. Schmemmann really has been quite influential and remains so today. He's on the reading lists of a number of schools and universities and seminaries, including Regent College, where I first came to know Schmemmann. So this book was written by Schmemmann in 1963 for these students, published as World as Sacrament in England, World as Sacrament. And I think you can see that pretty quickly in the book. I mentioned that it's been translated in a number of languages, Swedish, Italian, German, Greek,

[3 : 48] Dutch, Polish, Finnish, French, Japanese, Korean, and Russian. So a number of languages. Russian, originally, you may have seen this in the introduction, that was an anonymous manuscript that was typewritten. It was the underground church in Russia. And that was a very moving experience for Schmemmann to learn of that translation. So really a deep hunger for people for his writing.

Schmemmann also was well known during his lifetime for his radio broadcasts into Russia. He did a weekly sermon, actually, as part of the Radio Liberty broadcasts, and something like 3,000

sermons that have been compiled of his. Radio Liberty? Yeah. Yeah, very interesting that that was something that got into Russia. And we'll talk in the later half of my presentation just about how Russia has received his work as well. It's a little bit mixed. In fact, some of his books were burnt at one point by a priest in Russia. So pretty interesting there. Schmemmann, as a professor, that was obviously his day job at St.

Vladimir. But he was also very influential in the larger Orthodox Church in America. So he was actually pivotal in the founding of the Orthodox Church in America as its own institution. That came about in 1970. Previously had been under a specific jurisdiction, but they were granted autonomy in 1970. And that was part of Schmemmann's significant legacy to the Church in America.

I want to jump into the book. We can get back a little bit to more of him as a man later. But I want to get right into the book because I think this book is important and worth discussion. So let me get us into setting the scene. Schmemmann, writing in the 60s, was very cognizant that there were two battles that he was fighting in writing this book. First battle being secularism. The second battle being a disincarnate spirituality that he talks about. So I want to just jump into this.

The secularism that he speaks about, this is in the introduction still in page seven and eight. The secularism is the progressive and rapid alienation of our culture.

[6 : 32] It's the alienation of our culture from its very foundations, from the Christian experience and the worldview which initially shaped that culture. There's a deep polarization which secularism has provoked among Christians themselves.

This is page seven. Indeed, while some seem to welcome secularism as the best fruit of Christianity in history, others find in it the justification for an almost Manichean rejection of the world.

Thus, they escape into a disincarnate and dualistic spirituality. So these are the pitfalls that he's identifying and we'll pick up throughout the book. On one hand, you have the world which becomes more and more secular. On the other hand, you have some people, and I think he's specifically even thinking about the Orthodox in his church that he sees around him that is fleeing into a more and more removed spirituality, removed from the world, and fleeing into all sorts of idolatries from his perspective, actually.

Almost fetishizing different eras of the church, especially the Orthodox church, or different manifestations of maybe monasticism. All things that are probably good in their right perspective, although Schneeman is fairly critical in monasticism in some ways, but as the world is getting more secular, he sees a number of believers fleeing from the world and becoming spiritual.

So that's the other, there are two pitfalls on either side of the road there, two ditches. And what he says on page eight here is that both attitudes, both secularism and the spirituality, distort, I'm convinced the wholeness, the Catholicity of the genuine Orthodox tradition, which has always affirmed both the goodness of the world for whose life God gave his only begotten son, the goodness of the world, but also the wickedness in which the world lies, which has always proclaimed and keeps proclaiming every Sunday, this is the church, that by the cross, joy has entered the world, yet tells those who believe in Christ that they are dead and their life is hid with Christ in God. So Schneeman asks, how can we hold together in faith, in life, in action, these seemingly contradictory affirmations of the church? How do we avoid absolutizing either the goodness of the world or the wickedness in which the world lies? How do we hold those together in tension? And his answer, still on page eight here, is that above all, this answer comes from the living and unbroken experience of the church, which she reveals and communicates to us in her worship. That's going to be his major theme, not just in this book, but throughout all his writings, is that the church is the revelation of God in the church's worship. And that is then the foundation for our mission in the world, it's the foundation for our life in the world.

[9 : 44] Schneeman states that his purpose in this book is a humble one. This is from page 20. His purpose, let me see where it is here on page 20, is at the bottom of page 20. The purpose of this book is a humble one. It is to remind its readers that in Christ, life, life in all its totality, was returned to man. It was given again as sacrament and communion and was made Eucharist.

I made a note here for myself. Please forgive the non-gender neutral language. Steve was writing in 1963. That's important. So please, please do forgive that.

Isn't gender supposed to be a grammatical concept? How are you going? I think for Schmemmann and the Orthodox, it's much more than a grammatical concept. It's just a hunch.

I want to jump in on page 11 to his opening words. He quotes Feuerbach. Man is what he eats. Man is what he eats. Schmemmann comments, in the biblical story of creation, man is presented, first of

all, as a hungry being. The whole world is presented as his food.

So the purpose of Schmemmann's writing here on page 12, what life do we speak of? What life do we preach? What life do we proclaim and announce when, as Christians, we confess that Christ died for the life of the world?

[11 : 21] On page 12, he picks up again the themes of secularism and of spirituality. Towards the bottom of page 12, he talks about this religious life that makes the life of eating and drinking irrelevant.

This is the second to last paragraph here. It makes the life of eating and drinking irrelevant, deprives it of any real meaning, save that of being an exercise in piety and patience.

The more spiritual that we make the religious banquet, the more secular and material become the neon-lighted signs, eat, drink, that we see along our highways. He also picks up here the theme of action and says that some people, they don't flee just only into spirituality and this kind of disincarnate, removed spirituality from the world, but they also might flee into action in the world. And I think you see that in the 60s, but also in today. It's an important theme for him. But Shmemon wants to not just critique where we're at, but he also wants to propose.

And so on page 14 and 15, I think we get into the core of his proposal. And I'd be interested to hear if others have other cores of his proposal. But what I see being the core of his proposal is that life here in this world is to be communion with God.

[12 : 47] I want to just read a brief passage on that. It's in the middle of page 14. 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 spiritual functions by which man is related to God.

All that exists, all that exists is God's gift to man. It all exists to make God known to man, to make man's life, excuse me, 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.

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. According to the psalmist. So all of life is to be communion with God. The hunger, going back to Feuerbach, the hunger that we sense in our lives is actually for God.

[14 : 00] All desire, continuing on page 14, is finally a desire for God. To be sure, man is not the only hungry being. All that exists lives by eating. The whole creation depends on food.

But the unique position, the unique position of man in the universe is that he alone is to bless God for the food and the life he receives from him. He alone is to respond to God's blessing with his blessing.

So on page 15, what Schmemmann's going to propose is that, first of all, as humans, as man and woman, we are actually to be priests in the world, blessing God, all of us, not just those that are ordained, but all of us as humankind.

He calls this homo adorans. First of all, being homo adorans, the basic definition of man's is from page 15, is that he is the priest. I'll quote again, he stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God.

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. I think that is Schmemmann's proposal.

[15 : 17] That's the way that he charts the road between these two ditches of secularism and this disincarnate spirituality, is that we are to be priests in the world, blessing God, thanking God.

We do that first and foremost as a gathered body, as the church. We'll get into that in the next chapter in the Eucharist, on Sundays together. But that's what we do as Christians throughout our lives.

And we see that first and foremost through the liturgy and through our gathered worship. I'd love to hear if there are other primary theses that people see in the book.

I'm very open to there being other ones. Sam has his pen out, and I'd love to hear from others who have read it carefully, like I know many of you have. Yeah, please.

I was really struck by his emphasis on the love of God. And that without the love of God, we've got nothing. We've got empty rituals.

[16:20] We've got going through the motions. Yeah. And that God so loved us, and that we love God back. And then that cycle, that circle, is what is manifest in the interest.

That you chew the bread, that you're a corporal being, you taste it, that this is all a part of the love. And again and again and again, he comes back and he's talking about the love, the light of the world, for the love of the blood of the world.

And I just found it incredibly moving. Absolutely. Quite beautiful. And it's interesting. He doesn't just know about his theology in the Orthodox Church, but he's got little criticisms of Tony and Bob.

Yes. He's like, he's read this, he knows his stuff. And he's known where the Achilles heels are. And you're a worship for us. And I found it incredibly useful and wonderful.

Yeah. Sorry. That's great. Great. Good. I am too. Yeah. Thanks for doing it. Wonderful.

[17:27] Thanks, Connie. Others. Other main theses. I think that's what might be helpful here. So I like the, I think you pointed out this line on page 14, all that exists is God's gift to man.

Mm-hmm. I heard a preacher once talked about how some people might look at the world, the universe, and see its vastness, and say, like if man is the only sentient creature in the world, and the earth is the only place where he inhabits it, why is it so big?

Mm-hmm. Why so much? And the guy's response was, it's not about us. It's a picture of who God is, and it's an understatement.

Mm-hmm. And I, and then, as this goes on, like all of life, and then I like the distinction that you pointed out again, about, it seems fine, but, like the goodness of the world, and a lot of this, like I would be inclined to say at times that the world is full of good and evil, but it seems to be a separate, he seems to take a slightly different take on it, but the world is all good, but then wickedness lies in it.

It's not in the stuff, but there's wickedness here, and don't become wicked. Make yourself new. But the world is good. It's made good. Mm-hmm.

[18:55] I was telling Becky that, and I remember that I had told you when I first got into this, and read the first chapter, that how good I found it. I thought I was going to enjoy the whole book.

But then we really got bogged down, we read the first chapter again, and then really got bogged down. And then you guys, I should have plowed through, and it gets easier after that.

It does, yeah. Yeah. It does get easier, I think. Yeah. And each of the chapters, maybe that would be helpful just for those that, I guess not everybody has finished the book.

The chapters do progress through the different sacraments for the Orthodox, which are obviously more than the sacraments that we have as Anglicans. But each of the chapters is worthwhile in a different sense, or in a different way.

I mean, Nora and I were just talking about the chapter on death, which I find to be actually quite moving. Yeah, go ahead. I can say that I only inserted, I got a Kindle version, sorry Bill, but that's okay.

[20:03] You know, it is quite dense to read, but when I go out to this chapter on death, it's like, it's more airy, and I feel the hope of it profoundly.

And that is a wonderful chapter to read, if you were finding certain things, dance someone, a bit of relief, read the chapter. Absolutely.

Yeah. Paradoxically. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I also have enjoyed his, some of his writings on marriage in the chapter on the mystery of love.

Interestingly, he also brings together in that chapter ordination as, as love for the church, first and foremost. And so those are very interesting, the marriage and ordination pairing.

But his, his writings on baptism in chapter four are wonderful. I've been, that's actually how I first came to him. I was racking my brain this week, how, how I first came to Shmemin.

[21:13] I've loved a number of his books over the years. Um, and currently just right now, I'm reading his book called Great Lent, Journey to Pasha. Um, and, uh, it's a wonderful work.

Um, it's, it's part of his renewal within the, uh, Orthodox tradition of the various services, including the Saturday night Easter vigil, um, that, uh, that some of us as Anglicans have appropriated, but not, not as widely as I think Shmemin or even myself would, would like.

Um, I'd love to see that, that beautiful Saturday night service practiced more. Um, but just a wonderful take on, on Lent here. But what I remembered was that, um, the first book that I owned of, uh, of Shmemin's was his work, um, on baptism of water and the spirit.

And that's an extension of the chapter that he, he writes of the same title of water and the spirit. And, um, you might notice on the top here, it says, withdrawn Seattle Pacific University Library. Um, a little bit embarrassingly, I, I, I think I had gotten to page, I don't know, 80 or 90. And I was, you know, highlighting along the way with my pen and writing affirmation of, oh, I love this here and, oh, this is making me think.

[22 : 29] And one day I looked at the back of my book and I said, that's funny. I didn't realize I had gotten this, uh, this book on, on, online from the, the library. That's, that's quite odd. And I can't remember purchasing that book from the library.

It's not a book that I purchased. I had checked it out from the library and T. I had been writing in it for the past month. So. And you're still carrying that sin. I, well, no, I, I bought them a copy and traded it in.

So, that's the first book of his that I, uh, that I owned. And, and more recently, sorry for the digression, but more recently I've been enjoying his journals.

Um, I'll quote a little bit towards the end from his journals. Uh, he kept the, um, the journal for about the past, the, the last 10 years of his life. And, uh, some people remarked that they, they thought it probably was destined for publication, that that probably was his, um, goal, at least in part in keeping the journal.

Um, it wasn't simply a private journal, although it was private, of course, during his life. Um, so I really enjoyed that and full of life and joy, as you can imagine. So we'll, we'll talk a little bit about that towards the end.

[23 : 35] Um, anything else as main theses? Just returning to that, that question that people want to mention. Otherwise we'll turn to the Eucharist chapter. I like about the baptism chapter.

Yeah, yeah, thanks. The Orthodox baptisms are a little unusual. You might know more about, uh, that than I do, how unusual they are. Why? Why do I know more? Well, I saw my big fat Greek wedding.

Yeah. I, I will just talk briefly about, about baptism, um, what I enjoyed about that.

Um, he says on page 68 that baptism in particular has suffered an almost disastrous loss of meaning. And, um, I, I've talked about baptism here at Lerner's Exchange, uh, in one talk.

Um, and, uh, so for him, writing in the 1960s, there was this, uh, ecumenical movement, this liturgical renewal movement that was seeing baptism as, um, actually crucially related to all that we do in the church.

[24 : 48] So baptism being the first, uh, baptism being actually the, the act which joins us into the church. Um, it's the act which we renew in our repentance, in our confession, week after week, um, day after day, for most of us in repentance.

Um, it, it, it echoes the original baptism that we, um, underwent. And so, uh, I am really encouraged by his understanding, um, page 71 here, uh, of baptism as being a fight.

It's, it's, um, this is what he says, the first act of the Christian life is a renunciation, a challenge. Uh, he quotes from the, the liturgy here, dost thou renounce Satan and all his angels and all his works and all his services and all his pride?

And the catechumen, the, uh, that is joining the church at that point says, I do, I do renounce Satan. Um, and so instead of this, um, this idea of baptism just being performed once and, uh, simply washing away all our sin once and for all, which in some ways is true, but, um, but I think Shemman also wants to emphasize that baptism is actually the introduction, he says, of the sword into our life.

What baptism does is actually, um, cleanses and renews us and makes us able to fight against sin on an ongoing basis in our life. Um, I, I'm encouraged by that.

[26 : 21] So, um, yeah, that's what I enjoy about his, his view. Anything else that people were struck by in the baptism chapter that they want to mention?

He seemed to me to be endorsing adult baptism, you know, in that there has to be a renunciation and there is a division and in the church in which I was baptized which was Baptist, oh, I think I was maybe 14, um, my testimony had to reveal that.

I mean, there you are wet to the waist and telling a congregation what this experience, um, was like, you know, in terms of accepting Christ as Savior and identifying with that sacrifice and, um, that's something that could not possibly be duplicated by infant baptism or confirmation in my view.

It was newness of life that we were celebrating and he seemed to me to be endorsing that. Now, I am aware that they do baptize people that are not babies. And is this, is this something that, um, divides them from, uh, the Latin church?

That's a, that's a good question. Um, I'm not, I'm not current enough on my, my reading with that. Um, my, my answer to that, just to, just to kind of contextualize that in, in our examples, um, my answer to that in some ways would be that, um, you mentioned confirmation, but also the, the sacrament for him of penance, um, really is what's, what, um, on an ongoing basis refreshes the baptismal sacrament.

[28 : 11] And so if there is baptism of infants, um, I don't think that that's necessarily, uh, a concern that they're not able at that point to renounce Satan because it is this ongoing act of penance that's lifelong, um, after confirmation, which I think, um, they would maybe put some more weight in than, than you may.

Um, but those are the, the lifelong refreshings of baptism, um, at least sacramentally as well as, uh, just in our, our day-to-day life. Um, and again, we're in baptism as we surround the child and we're now Satan on their behalf.

Absolutely. Great point. So it is a sort of a community of raising up the child as opposed to expecting the child to answer. Absolutely. Right? So, yeah. It's, yeah. It's the same thing.

It's just you're great answer. to get them on their way there to make their own decisions. Yeah. So echoes of Luther there, I guess, in that all life is to be allowed to repent.

Absolutely. And he's being baptized in that. My, my thought exactly. Yeah, absolutely. Echoes of Luther. Very much so. Um, and, and in some ways also with his thought on gift and, um, all the gifts that we receive in this life.

[29 : 27] Um, I'm, I'm not sure that gift language comes up as much in this book as it does in maybe his journals, but I, I find an echo of Calvin in that language of, um, of gift and gratitude, which I think is, is quite important to Shemem and this gratitude and, and Calvin is, is absolutely on the same page.

so, there is, uh, there is the great tradition that I think, um, is much wider of course than just the Orthodox Church that I think Shemem is squarely a part of, um, with Luther, with Calvin, um, definitely with the fathers, uh, as well.

Um, but let's, let's jump in to, I think, which is maybe the most important chapter in the book. Uh, it is a tough slog, but it's the Eucharist chapter. And, um, and after that I'd love to, uh, to have just a bit of discussion and then we'll get into groups on that.

So the Eucharist, um, you know, Shemem, uh, actually said, um, that his, one of his biggest goals, uh, was to, in, in all of his life or his vocation was to refresh the Church's understanding of the Eucharist.

Um, it was something that he was actually quite successful at doing. Um, Orthodox Church, when he began his ministry was not, um, the laity were not receiving communion frequently.

[30 : 46] Um, there were specific reasons for that, but, uh, but by the end of his life there was, um, a much wider reception on a weekly basis, um, uh, of the Eucharist and a partaking of that.

So, I think he was quite successful. That's what the, the, um, Orthodox have said on that front. Um, he also was able to, uh, institute, um, an English celebration of the Eucharist, whereas previously it had been in, um, other languages.

And so that, in his time in the Orthodox Church of America, which I referenced at the beginning, founded in 1970, that's quite important. Um, so really a lot of, a lot of Schmemmann's thought, it centers in the Eucharist, and so I think that's in some ways what makes it such a tough, tough slog in this chapter, but also an important slog to, to get through.

Um, here, it begins on, on page 23, um, and what he does is he walks us through in this chapter, um, a progression of the liturgy.

Uh, maybe I should just mention that, but that's his, that's his way of reasoning, and, and I'll get to you just in one second here, Nora, the, uh, the way that he's reasoning throughout his theology is from the liturgy, which, at the time, there were some other scholars doing that as well, but it really was, um, a fairly new way of, of doing theology from the church's liturgy, uh, from the church meeting with God, um, liturgically.

[32 : 16] And so what he does is he reasons from, uh, the liturgy, and he walks us through, he begins with the cross, and, uh, and goes through the journey and procession of the Eucharist, that's how he understands the Eucharist, as a journey, it's an ascent, um, it's an ascent of the people into

the, the kingdom, uh, of Christ, and it's an ascent of the people, uh, each, each celebration of the Eucharist.

Um, I don't, I'm not sure that we always talk about ascent of the church in quite those terms, um, maybe we should, if we hear shvimin, um, others would also encourage us to, to think more about the ascension, which ultimately is in Christ, and it's in his ascension, uh, that we are able to ascend as the church in the Eucharist.

So it's a journey in procession, and then he'll walk through the doxology, uh, holy, holy, holy, the emphasis, uh, on God's holiness, the entrance, he'll walk through the gospel, um, it's brought into the, the midst of the congregation, walks through the bread and the wine, uh, the peace, the sharing of the love, uh, among the congregation, going back to what you said at the beginning, Colleen, it is ultimately God's love that grounds all of this, um, the lifting up, uh, he'll walk through the thanksgiving, the sanctus, uh, and then he'll spend some time talking about food and how, uh, again, all of, uh, all of the world in light of, uh, the Eucharist is, um, is Christ for us in, in some sense.

Uh, the transformation of the church and the intercession, the prayer of the church, and then the return to the world and this really rich, uh, Eucharistic grounding of mission, which I think, um, is actually quite helpful for those of us that are activists.

He really wants to emphasize that all mission is grounded in, uh, the church's worship, and I think that's been heard to some degree, but we, we always need to hear it. Um, worship and mission are not divided, but mission actually is grounded in our worship.

[34 : 20] So that's the outline of his, um, his chapter here on the Eucharist. Uh, he connects the Eucharist with, with joy, um, and Thanksgiving, and he quotes Nietzsche on, uh, page 24, says, of all accusations against Christians, the most terrible one, uh, was when Nietzsche said that Christians had no joy.

No joy. I think that's a, that's convicting to me, I'll be honest. Um, and I think, uh, you know, Shmeman himself is a very joyful man. Uh, hopefully we can talk about that a little at the end. Um, I want to get back to Nora because you had a question. It's actually a request. Yes. Because I have a, um, Kindle verse. Oh, yeah. He helpfully divides each chapter into sections.

I can quote that. And I don't know if you could say in section six of this, you know, so that I can find where you are. Absolutely. Good. So we can do that. Yeah. Thank you. Um, so let's, uh, let's just jump into a little bit of this, this chapter and then I'll look to, to you all to, to fill out where I've missed. Um, on, uh, page 26, this is section two, um, of the chapter. He says, uh, the liturgy of the Eucharist is best understood as a journey or procession.

[35 : 38] Um, this is what I mentioned earlier, that it is the journey of the church into the dimension of the kingdom. So then on page 28 in section three, he says, the early Christians realized that in order to become the temple of the Holy Spirit, they must ascend to heaven where Christ has ascended.

That's, uh, that's this ascent conception that, uh, that he really emphasizes pretty strongly. um, in the Eucharist on, on page 35, which is, um, which is section, uh, seven, he states that we offer the world and ourselves to God, but we offer the world and ourselves to God in Christ and remember, in remembrance of him.

He continues a couple pages later, this new state of being, this new style of life, which is Eucharist, is the only real life of creation with God and in God.

It's the true relationship between God and the world. Uh, that's on page 39 in, uh, in section 10. He continues with, um, with kind of an eschatological, excuse me, eschatological perspective, uh, which he actually was quite known for was his eschatology.

Um, he says that in the Eucharist, uh, this is the, the preface of the world to come. It's the door into the kingdom this we confess and proclaim when speaking of the kingdom which is to come, we affirm that God has already endowed us with it.

[37 : 09] The kingdom is already present among us in the world, but especially in the church. That's, uh, that's very important for him. This future has been given to us in the past that it may constitute the very present, the life itself now of the church.

It's at the end of section 10, right before section 11. Page 39. Um, his emphasis then, uh, as he, as he concludes the chapter is that, uh, on page 43 here and, uh, at the end of section 13, um, is he speaking about the bread and the wine that, uh, that all food, uh, should remind us of Christ actually

because Christ is life.

Um, that which we partake in the bread and the wine, um, is Christ. And so then all, all food that we receive, uh, and partake in throughout our life should remind us of Christ.

Um, yeah. It's rich. It's hard to do justice to this chapter, um, in some ways.

I'd love to hear what other people drew out of this section on the Eucharist. if anything.

[38 : 35] Communion with God, um, just to go back to one of his core themes, communion with God is for him the goal of, of life. It's what all the saints were hungry for.

It's what we're hungry for, even if we sometimes don't recognize it. And so in the Eucharist, um, I, I got to listen to, um, some of Sean's presentation from last week also on the Eucharist.

Uh, it's fitting in some ways, uh, many ways. Um, but for Shmemon, it's the entire service, is this movement into, um, into the life of God, into being who we are fully meant to be, uh, the church.

And, and then we, we come out of it. I've almost felt so drawn to, um, liturgical form. Yes. I think rather just being an artist, it's visual, it's corporal, it's not just heard, mind knowledge about God, it's like, it's experiential.

And, um, I, I was raised partially at an Anglo-Catholic school with Anglican nuns, and we were taught some very odd things. And I've kind of, through reading this, and through the lecture last week, I've, I've come to understand things that I didn't quite wrap my mind around.

[39 : 52] Like, for instance, the nuns taught us that when the wife was put in his arms, he was put in the present, he was put in the present, you know, the Scottish body, this transubstantiation, you know, and, and whenever I would see people walking away from our community, people chomping away on, you know, I kind of cringe a little, I think, no, it just, it doesn't matter, you know, but you kind of, you know, because it was early teaching, right?

And now, I mean, to hear, no, it should be good bread, you should be aware of it, chew it, consume it, it's, it's, it's, you know, this is symbolic, but it's also something you're experiencing, right?

And it's right to taste the wine, to chew the bread, this is a good thing. And I thought, oh yeah, they were wrong. So, so, for me, with early training and just coming to terms with some of the stuff that was sort of like ingrained in me at a young age, and I just, I think it's wonderful that I'm so glad we're doing a book and I'm so glad we had the lecture last week too, because it's really helped the story after a lot of years.

Yeah. So just a personal. That's great. Yeah. Thank you. That was before we were free. Yeah.

Becky. One of the things that I found challenging in the Eucharist chapter that then continued to be challenging in the following chapters, because things really do roll on from here, is, as Kyle mentioned, this idea of a sense.

[41 : 23] I found Schwenman to really be pushing back on a lot of the probably dichotomous categories that have unknowingly informed a lot of my thinking about things in terms of this world, God's kingdom, earth, heaven, does God's kingdom come to us, do we go to him, and Schwenman with this idea of a sense, and specifically what I found quite interesting was he talks about, he's not overly worried about, you know, he kind of critiques people who are super preoccupied by the words, and what happens to the bread, and how did this happen, and he's like, these are this world's categories, we shouldn't be overly preoccupied with this, but he says on page 43 at the end of section 13, that when we ascend to this place, what is supernatural here in this world, is revealed as natural there in heaven, so this like miracle that happens on earth and the transformation of the elements in the heavenly realm is just this thing that of course just happens, things, and so to go up, so in this

Eucharistic chapter we're like ascending to heaven to have this experience coming back to earth, transformed, arms, but he does have these strong words about this world is often a place of death, Christ is bringing life, like there just is, I could never quite locate, oh yes, I've been taught that Jesus is coming in this way, or this is what the world is like now, like he's holding us both and together in some ways that I found to be quite interesting, that are still pushing my thinking.

Thank you. Harvey? So, he would regard, this is, I read it a long time ago, my name is so, so, when he pray, give us this day our daily bread, he would think almost a product of Jesus is saying, I will be your bread every day, and your breakfast, your lunch, your dinner, is me feeding you every day, now please enter into that, eat more and more, it isn't, okay God, meet my needs, that's, that's, he'd say that's true and trivial, that it's a super, you enter into food, it's me taking you into heaven.

First and foremost, in the actual celebration of the Eucharist, as the church gathered, secondarily, on a day-to-day basis, in our meals, in our communion with others, in our homes, in our restaurants,

yeah, yeah, I think he would say that, there is a synthesis there.

The charge against that tradition is, oh, okay, we've got Plato taking over the New Testament, that's right, Tom Wright is saying, no, go back to Israel, the desert, the manna from heaven, stay, stay more in that way of thinking, rather than, his dualism might come from Plato, but I think he's kind of right, because I don't think he would divorce it from the Old Testament.

[44 : 48] I don't think he would either. I think you're right. Yeah. Yeah. Another comment? Is there another comment? Sam? Yeah. Yeah. With part of the whole world being our food, I'm reminded of Christ coming into Jerusalem and the Pharisees chasing him and saying, do you hear what they're saying?

And he says, even if they don't talk, even the rocks will cry out. Just as he was talking, I saw what I thought was a duck fly out of that yard. And I said, oh, my attention was almost drawn away and I felt bad, but I'm thinking, like, everything is, God is giving us everything for his food to praise him. And in this little bit here, I think maybe you alluded to this part, it is the movement that Adam fails to form and that in Christ has become the very life of man, a movement of adoration and praise, which all joy and suffering, all beauty and all frustration, all hunger and all satisfaction, are referred to their ultimate end and become finally meaningful.

What page is that? 35. Great. Yeah. And so, that's the section 7. And back to what Nietzsche said about Christians having the lack of joy, I would almost challenge him, how do you have joy in suffering?

suffering? And how does the Christian have joy in suffering? And I'm reminded of Christ talking about the man born blind, and the man was born blind, that he might glorify, that through him, God would be glorified.

[46 : 36] And that's our goal. And even Paul's thorn in the flesh, that God had hit. One was healed, one isn't. It's all of life is to be lived in glory to God and in gratitude for, like, to see.

And he's blessed us with blessing upon blessing. And I've been given a relatively easy life. If I was the man born blind, a new challenge, a much more strenuous challenge than I've been given to glorify God.

Absolutely. Well, and Shmemin himself died of cancer. A significant battle at the end of his life. You know, died at, was it, early 60s?

In his early 60s. And people said that he really did glorify the Lord in his suffering. You know, I've heard, I think in some of my studies, just about the orthodox emphasis on the incarnation.

And I think that's true. But I find in Shmemin also this emphasis on the crucifixion and on Christ's resurrection and ascension. So I found Shmemin to actually hold the cross much more profoundly than I expected in some ways.

[47 : 52] And I think that you're right, it makes sense of the suffering, not only for us as Christians, but also for the world. And I love that you were looking out the windows. I very purposely opened the curtains in honor of Shmemin.

because he does give us these lenses to see and love the gifts of the world that God is giving us. There's an account of one of his students talking about how he would just talk about a blade of grass for a while.

It reminds me of one of the legendary professors at Wheaton that Becky and I had heard about who would similarly encourage students to go hug a tree in their day-to-day life and to commune with creation and God's gifts in kind of odd ways.

But that's the lens that actually Shmemin has opened increasingly to me is this appreciation and this gratitude for the gifts of God. At the same time, not being content with this world as it is.

There is this expectation of the world to come and so we have both in Shmemin. So he's not wanting us to just make our home permanently in this world.

[49 : 08] He doesn't see that as biblical faith, frankly. So that's important, this expectation of the world to come, that even now is here. The kingdom is already here and yet it is also to come.

So what I want to do is just have us spend a few minutes in groups and then we'll conclude together. It sounded like there were some good conversations happening so I hope you were enjoying the conversations.

I want to just conclude with a couple main things here and then if there are any final questions we can get to that.

But I want to conclude both with a couple personal accounts of Shmemin, the man. that's an important piece I think to learning about believers. Becky and I were talking this past week about how it's nice that we don't need a disclaimer about how bad Shmemin's life was in certain ways when we talk about him.

Reason being, for instance, that we, you know, I was reading a book this month that referenced the work of John Howard Yoder, but it needs an asterisk because his sexual abuse was, yeah, it just needs an asterisk whenever you reference Yoder's work as a theologian.

[50 : 36] We don't need an asterisk with Shmemin, and I think we can be grateful to the Lord for that. His life was a very happy one in a number of ways.

his wife just actually passed away this year in January at the age of 93, and a wonderful woman from all accounts as well.

She shows up on every page of his journals almost as L for Liana, her name being Juliana. And, yeah, wonderful family.

I just was mentioning to Bill and Dorcas and that group. Their son, Search, is actually a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist for the New York Times. He actually is now an editorial page editor for the International Herald Tribune, the Times overseas paper, and has had a wonderful career.

And Alexander and his wife Liana had two daughters as well. Yeah, just nice to see that.

[51 : 44] Shmemin actually critiqued the Orthodox idolatry about the family, and so it's interesting to see him chart a different course with his family. I just want to read a couple things.

One is actually from Serge, who talks about his father here in really great terms.

father. I'll get to that in just a moment. This is what Serge says about his father. At home, Father Alexander never told us to go to church, or that you must fast, or do it this way.

He never said these things. Simply instead, he did what he had to, and we found ourselves drawn to those things which were important to him. I can't say we spent as much time in church as he did, but our joy in the services came from him.

In our house, the guiding principle of churchly life was his example. My father is fasting quietly without insisting that anyone else does so, and instinctively we begin fasting as well, because, after all, we can't let him fast alone.

[52 : 52] It was important for him, and thus, it was important for us. With him, everything was cozy. He was always extremely joyous, and you hear a number of folks say this about him. He was a joyous individual.

If we arose in the morning in foul spirits and saw that he was happy and energetic, with him each day began this way, then his attitude of energy infected us all. He always fought against the reduction of Christianity simply to forms and to rules.

In fact, Christianity liberates man from the narrowness of forms and rules. Father Alexander saw in Christianity the freedom of the person and love, and in his lectures, writings, and sermons, he always sought to reveal the deeper meaning of all things occurring in church.

It was in Christ that we were given freedom. That was something that one of the people at his funeral also remarked that Alexander was a free man and a joyful man.

So I think that's important for us to hear. This gratitude really did take root in his life that we hear that he wrote about, but it also took root in his life personally.

[53 : 59] His final sermon, actually his sermons were normally extemporaneous during the liturgy, but he actually wrote his final sermon and I think it was in the late months of 1963 and it was Thank You, O Lord, was his final sermon.

Thank you, O Lord. Let me read a couple excerpts from it. Elsewhere he writes, Everyone capable of thanksgiving is capable of salvation and eternal joy. So thanksgiving being very important to him. Let me read from this sermon. Thank you, O Lord, for having accepted this Eucharist, which we offered to the Holy Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, this Eucharist filled our hearts with the joy, peace, and righteousness of the Holy Spirit.

Thank you, O Lord, for having revealed yourself unto us and given us the foretaste of your kingdom. Thank you, O Lord, for having united us to one another in serving you and your Holy Church. Thank you, O Lord, for having helped us to overcome all difficulties, tensions, passions, temptations, and restored peace, excuse me, and restored peace, mutual love, and joy in sharing the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Thank you, O Lord, for the sufferings you bestowed upon us, for they are purifying us from selfishness. They are reminding us of the one thing needed, your eternal kingdom. Thank you, O Lord, for having given us this country where we are free to worship you.

[55 : 18] Thank you, O Lord, for this school, this is St. Vladimir's where he was celebrating, where the name of God is proclaimed. Thank you, O Lord, for our families, our husbands, our wives, and especially children who teach us how to celebrate your holy name in joy, movement, and holy noise.

Thank you, O Lord, for everyone and everything. That's great. Everyone and everything. Great are you, O Lord, and marvelous are your deeds, and no word is sufficient to celebrate your miracles. Lord, it is good to be here. Amen. That was his final sermon. His final words in his journal, the final line, was, what happiness it has all been.

What happiness it has all been. His last words, his son Serge tells us after receiving Holy Communion a day before his death, his last words before lapsing into a coma were, Amen, Amen, Amen.

Chokes me up. I'm grateful for you all getting into this book with me.

[56 : 30] I just want to close with one final quote from his journals. Shemimim says, eternal life is not what begins after temporal life.

Eternal life is not what begins after temporal life. Instead, eternal life is the eternal presence of the totality of life. The presence of the totality of life.

Thank you for studying Shemimim with me. Appreciate it very much. Thank you. Thank you.