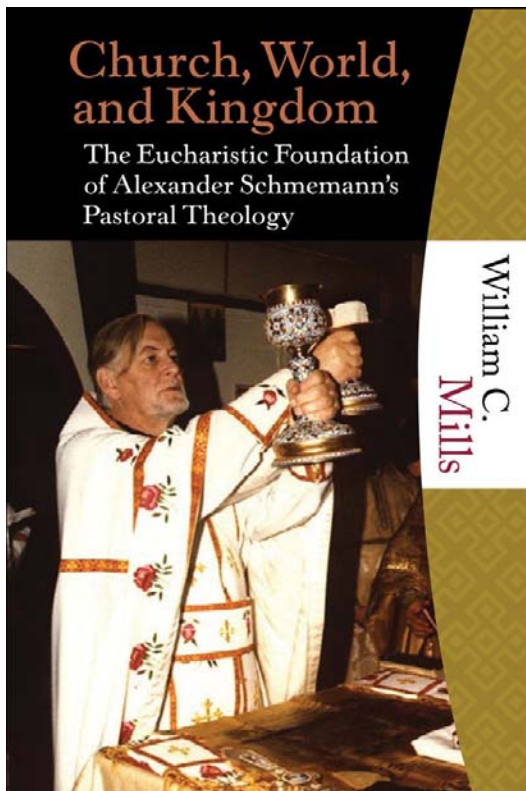


William C. Mills. *Church, World and Kingdom: The Eucharistic Foundation of Alexander Schmemmann's Pastoral Theology*. Mundelein, Illinois: Hillenbrand Books, 2012. ISBN-10: 1595250387, ISBN-13: 978-1595250384



By Win Mott

The Twentieth Century saw a major renewal of sacramental and liturgical life throughout Christianity. Many of us have experienced in our lifetime a transition from, for instance, a Eucharistic participation limited for most to several times a year, and baptism as a private family ceremony to baptisms celebrated by the whole congregation, and a norm of weekly Eucharist for all. In America, Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983) was arguably the most decisive theologian in that renewal. Born in Estonia of Russian parents, he was raised and educated in France and spent most of his adult life in the United States. In three decades, he fixed the theological imprint of Eastern Christianity in North America, both within and in the larger ecumenical world.

But to see Father Alexander as simply a brilliant theologian in tune with the Eucharistic and liturgical renewal is to grasp only the very tip of the iceberg. His vision instead was to transform us into living Eucharistic lives, to fully understand ourselves as royal priests, stewards of God's creation and priests who offer it all to him. He saw the entire people of God united in living the sacramental life, commenting that it is not a matter of the Church with sacraments attached, but rather the sacramental community life with an institution attached. In the center of not simply "the Church" or "religious life," but in the center of life itself is the Eucharist, the living, real, loving presence of the Incarnate God in the midst of his creation and creatures.

Given the profound message, made all the more so by its relevance to the worldly sciences around us, it is surprising that so little has followed in analyzing or popularizing Father Schmemmann's thought. Perhaps because it runs so counter to both North American religious trends and to the North American worldview it has not been a natural message to receive.

Father William Mills has done a great service in closing that gap. He examines Schmemmann's pastoral theology and, equally, his pastoral practice, contrasting it with the usual manner of pastoral education and practice among us. In my own seminary education, for example, I was taught how to apply the latest counseling techniques and theory from the world of clinical psychology. My professor was very competent in this, and I am grateful for the tools he gave me. But following Schmemmann, Mills asks "rather than looking to the 'new and improved' methods of pastoral care, why not return to the timeless, ageless liturgical life of the Church?" (p.124). And this includes, as Mills notes, not simply pastoral counseling, but evangelization, missionary work and preaching as well.

Schmemmann's thought, practice and life is studied carefully by Mills to explain what is meant by this. He has woven together the various threads of a man who saw all of life as the Eucharistic journey into the Kingdom and cannot be compartmentalized. He shows how Schmemmann's own pastoral theology expressed that comprehensive worldview, and records that he was no ivory tower

academic. Although comfortable in the most rarified heights of theological discourse with the great thinkers of the time, Schmemmann's ultimate joy was celebrating the Eucharist, in being a preacher and pastor both here, and for many years through Radio Liberty, to Russia. "His life revolved around the Church year; the feasts and fasts, especially Holy Week and Easter, were a major part of who Schmemmann was and what he stood for... To Schmemmann, the Eucharist is the revelation of the Kingdom of God" (p.100).

Mills also understands well the low view of the privileges and pretensions of the clergy that Schmemmann had, and the warp that sees the liturgy as the property and "turf" of the clergy. He arrived in America to a chaotic and often anti-clerical situation. Schmemmann taught in that context by reminding of the canon which forbids a lone celebration of the Eucharist, requiring at least two persons present, and comments that everyone concelebrates the Liturgy, rather than primarily being a term for multiple clergy in the Liturgy. "Who is serving, in other words, is not the clergy, not even the clergy with the laity, but the Church, which is constituted and made manifest in all fullness by everyone together" (p.80).

This book is for a wider audience than simply Eastern Orthodox. Mills is careful to ensure that Roman Catholics in particular understand Schmemmann by reference to their own context. This also follows Schmemmann himself, who saw no denominational boundaries in reaching out with his message of the all-encompassing sacramental life and often found a warmer reception outside the Orthodox community than within, especially in the earlier years.

The contemporary church is in danger of drifting away from the profound orientation that Father Alexander gave liturgical theology and being simply diffuse and scattered. Father Mills book pulls the community back to the centrality of the Eucharistic life in particular in pastoral theology and reminds us that we need to pay much more attention to the wisdom of Father Schmemmann. If you already know that, this book will be a useful reference tool and talking point. If you don't, you very badly need to read and inwardly digest this little book.

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