**PART II**

**Chapter 1**

**From Cult to Liturgy, from Liturgy to Life and Lures of Diaspora: The Liturgical *Tainstvo* of Alexander Schmemann**

So far in this dissertation I have already sporadically conversed with the thought of Russian Orthodox diasporic theologian Alexander Schmemann while exploring the quandary of disengagement between sacramentality, liturgy, and ethics as a methodological problem for modern Western theological creativity. I now turn to Schmemann’s work in a more sustained fashion to inquire into the possibility of finding a rejuvenating diasporic perspective as well as a constructive potential that would gesture beyond at least some deadlocks of the dualistic disengagement as a methodological habitus. Yet, exciting as they are, neither the critical nor the constructive facets of Schmemann’s thought are ever free of deep cultural ambivalence and theological oblivion toward theology’s socio-ethical accountability. These are the aspects of Schmemann’s work that have hitherto merited scarce attention within liturgical scholarship.

A Russian Orthodox priest, Alexander Schmemann (1923-1983) does not let any opportunity pass without underscoring a peculiar difference of incommensurability and untranslatability between the “Eastern” and the “Western” patterns of theological reflection. For him, the difference explicitly reaches beyond discrete doctrinal divergences into much broader arenas of cultural identity as well as culturally circumscribed styles of rationality and production of knowledge. Schmemann’s unceasing lamentations about the separation and even “divorce” between liturgy, life, ethics, aesthetics, and various fields of theological creativity permeate his writings over the decades. They signal his underlying preoccupation with the patterns of fragmentation and disengagement within and beyond Christian theology as an intellectual discipline and as a mode of reflection on the existential engagement with God, and – as Schmemann would not fail to insist – simultaneously with the totality of created life.

The seductive attraction of Schmemann’s passionate texts in liturgical theology marks him as one of the magisterial liturgical theologians of the 20th century[[1]](#footnote-1) among Eastern Orthodox as well North American Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars of liturgy. [[2]](#footnote-2) Yet what has remained strangely underinterrogated (and what nevertheless constitutes the most significant tenet of Schmemann’s work for this study) is not his tendency to liturgical reduction of theology for which he occasionally has been accused not entirely undeservedly.[[3]](#footnote-3) It is rather his remarkable reflections on what under the auspices of modern and postmodern Western theology is commonly conceptualized as (the problem of) sacramentality or, in more general terms, the modes of relationality between the creator and the creation. What stands out is his theologically countercultural audacity (especially vis-à-vis Occidental Protestantism) of sacramental imagination. But secondly, it is also Schmemann’s insidious oblivion toward the provocative socio-ethical ramifications of his own sacramental-liturgical theology regarding the world as the participating “matter” of the cosmic Eucharist[[4]](#footnote-4) and the whole human life as liturgy and as participation in the work of Christ[[5]](#footnote-5). The conundrum of sacramentality and not, I submit, the often unproductively extolled enthronement of a cognitively and doctrinally depotentiated *lex orandi* as a fabricated ritual category over a dispossessed *lex credendi,* constitutes the most invigorating facet of Schmemann’s contribution to theology. Rather, the creative challenge of Schmemann’s work resides in the eccentric originality of a diasporic theological voice, especially as it emerges from within an exoticized periphery of Western Christian theology and its long love affair with the rationale of binarity. Secondly, the challenge also resides in his entanglement with the lures of passively aggressive nostalgia of a certain theological nativism. Neither of these two aspects of Schmemann’s liturgical scholarship typically gets much attention despite the fact that separate, and often acontextualized, constructive elements of his work have been appropriated by liturgical theologians into the non-Orthodox North American theological mainstream with some wild success. These concerns being noted, the radicality of Schmemann’s sacramental enlargement of liturgy as embracing the wholeness of human life still comes across as genuinely refreshing insofar as it constitutes a disturbance of the dominant binaristic configurations of modern Occidental rationality.

1. **Theology as Minority Discourse: Negotiating Liturgical Exoticism, Mystical Orientalism, and the Lures of Diaspora**

Having lived his whole life in one or another diaspora – being born in a diasporic Russian family in Estonia, then living, studying and teaching in France, and finally settling in the United States[[6]](#footnote-6) – Alexander Schmemann found the possibility and desirability of cultural inracination and univocal belonging in any of his migratory domiciles complex and ambiguous.[[7]](#footnote-7) His locus of enunciation bears the marks of two diasporic inscriptions: theologically it is the Russian Orthodox theological tradition in a frequently confrontational encounter with the Western Roman Catholicism and various strands of the Reformation traditions. Culturally and rhetorically, it is the repetitive resistance toward identification with any of the cultures of Euro-American Occident. Schmemann’s thought proceeds with a clear, yet regretful, awareness of the tempting “exoticism” and marginality of his language, spiritual tradition, and theological methodology. As Schmemann sees it, the Orthodox traditions are sought after on the grounds of their exotic attractiveness:

Have not Oriental *wisdom* and Oriental *mysticism* always exercised an almost irresistible attraction for religious people everywhere? It is to be feared that certain ‘mystical’ aspects of Orthodoxy owe their growing popularity in the West precisely to their easy – although wrong – identification with Oriental mysticism.[[8]](#footnote-8)

And since it is difficult to beat the Orthodox on the level of customs and all kinds of exciting ancient ceremonies, Orthodoxy enjoys a certain success and begins to attract more and more those who, disenchanted or even disgusted with the West, seek in things ‘oriental’ the satisfaction of their religious emotions.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Orthodoxy is presented usually as specializing in ‘mysticism’ and ‘spirituality’, as the potential home of all those who thirst and hunger for the ‘spiritual banquet’. The Orthodox Church has been assigned the place and the function of the ‘liturgical’ and ‘sacramental’ Church, *therefore* more or less indifferent to mission. But all this is wrong. The Orthodoxy may have failed much too often to see the real implications of their ‘sacramentalism’, but its fundamental meaning is certainly not that of escaping into a timeless ‘spirituality’ far from the dull world of ‘action’.[[10]](#footnote-10)

It is important to note Schmemann’s consistent differentiation between the Occident-legislated assignment of “mystical/spiritual” (i.e., “exotic” and “Oriental”!) identity to the Orthodox and their self-identification which tenaciously resists the reduction of their “Eastern” difference to some extrinsically predetermined aspects of occidentally styled utility. Since the terms “East”[[11]](#footnote-11) and “West” can be found on virtually every page in Schmemann’s corpus, it is also important to take note of the peculiarly intra-European connotations of both terms. In Schmemann’s usage, as far as Orthodoxy is concerned, the “East” primarily refers to geo-political regions that in the era of globalization would not habitually be associated with it. For him, the “East” as incessantly juxtaposed to the “West” primarily consists of such European regions as Greece, Russia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, alongside the legacies and constituencies of the Middle Eastern Orthodox milieus. It also includes their diasporic enclaves which are now supplemented by the indigenous Western converts. The “West,” obviously, is a code-word for non-Orthodox configuration of Christian cultures and theological traditions worldwide which has its origins and/or present geo-cultural location in those parts of Europe where Roman Catholicism and Protestantism reigned virtually unchallenged until recently. The always feisty and frequently self-aggrandizing rhetoric installing the “West” as the automatically predictable problem not only for itself but for everyone else as well,[[12]](#footnote-12) typically co-installs the “East” as the alternative, the solution.[[13]](#footnote-13) Such envisagement is surely problematic as it routinely homogenizes the internal diversity of both Western and Eastern Christian traditions. Additionally, it locks up the “East” and the “West” in an idealistic scheme of essentialized and binaristic clash that reifies unrelational difference and ignores the common Christian history as well as the particular historical interactions and cross-fertilizations among various Christian cultures.

However, Schmemann’s critique of the “West” does appropriately identify a prominent difficulty. Certain Occidental patterns of rationality with their enduring pretenses to universalism often embody not only a disavowal of difference but also a patronizing haste to include. What is hastily passed over is the dark side of such inclusions – reductive domestication. Schmemann’s protestations about the preconceived exoticism above all lament the reduction of the Orthodox worldview “to Western categories”[[14]](#footnote-14) whereby unacceptable alterations of meaning are produced and proliferated. In a way hardly surprising for a diasporic thinker, he experiences “a certain inner *dedoublement,*” “a certain malaise, a kind of ‘inner distance’ separating me from my non-Orthodox colleagues.”[[15]](#footnote-15) But the real “ecumenical agony” does not take place within the context of some ill-conceived Machiavellian conspiracy of the Western Christianity, but precisely in the context of unselfconscious routine of inclusion. Thus Schmemann’s ecumenical experience is that of

the Orthodox transplanted as it were into a spiritual and mental world radically different from his own; forced to use a theological language which, although he understands it, is not his language; and who, therefore, while agreeing on one level, experiences and realizes on another level the frustrating discrepancy between that formal agreement and the totality of the Orthodox *vision*.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Schmemann argues that the “rules of engagement” as pre-assigned saying that “the Orthodox were not given a choice,” “from the very beginning they were assigned, not only seats, but a certain place, role and function.”[[17]](#footnote-17) The “assignments” are based on the Western theological and ecclesiological presuppositions and categories, and “they reflect the purely Western origin of the ecumenical idea itself.”[[18]](#footnote-18) Consequently, the “radically different” East – and one must remember that this “East” is predominantly the non-Occidental Europe plus Schmemann’s ancestral homeland, the perennially Euro-Asian borderland Russia – is seen as being caught “in the essentially Western dichotomies – Catholic versus Protestant, horizontal versus vertical, authority versus freedom – … and made into representatives and bearers of attitudes and positions which we hardly recognized as ours and which were deeply alien to our tradition.”[[19]](#footnote-19) Why? It is due “precisely to the main and all-embracing Western presupposition that the Western experience, theological categories and thought forms are universal and therefore constitute the self-evident framework and terms of reference for the entire ecumenical endeavor.”[[20]](#footnote-20)

On the other hand, the altogether pertinent critique of the West is counterweighted by an equally problematic gesture present all throughout Schmemann’s works. Pertinently acknowledged by Schmemann on occasion as problematic,[[21]](#footnote-21) but nevertheless used liberally in his work, is the idea that the “East” owns the sole trustworthy prerogative to the pure, authentic, and unbroken Christian theological tradition. Thus, the “West” cannot exist otherwise than as a deformity of and deviation from the presumed initial unity and purity. The nostalgically projected original uniformity of the patristic “golden age”[[22]](#footnote-22) is envisaged as having been destroyed virtually unilaterally by the ill will and heretical leanings (papacy, *filioque)* of the Western Christianity by 1054. Of course, such a lopsided genealogy of decay is only made more bizarre by the frequently lamented misfortune of the Western “captivity” of Eastern theology,[[23]](#footnote-23) of which I will speak later. The notorious “captivity” is, beyond doubt, a much more complex matter involving long historical, cultural, and geo-political interactions – colonially asymmetrical as well as reciprocally beneficial – within Europe and beyond, than Schmemann is willing to appreciate. In addition, despite numerous and fervent critiques of the deviant Western theology, especially during the Middle Ages with Thomas Aquinas as the automatic arch-villain, Schmemann exhibits a tendency to critique by placid repetition of clichés and by vague generalizations without showing any evidence that the texts in question have been studied, rather than being preemptively dismissed without any serious scholarly effort to understand them.[[24]](#footnote-24) Thus, ironically, here is another reminder that reduction is not a uniquely Western “original sin.”

Schmemann’s conceptualizations of the “East” appear curiously provincial in the present understanding of the global East/West partition. In the postcolonial milieu, however, it is prudent to note that his concern about the projection of the Occidental patterns of thought, relation, and action as universally self-evident highlights a problem well beyond yet another petty intra-European skirmish blown out of proportion. Schmemann’s theological endeavors, like those of other thinkers working outside the Western theological tradition, pertain to the category of “minority discourse.” Minority discourse is “that which must struggle to speak”[[25]](#footnote-25) in the context of dominance. In this case, “that which must struggle to speak” is a tradition of faith and theology produced and presided over – intriguingly for a minority! – by almost exclusively white male theologians. Yet this collectivity originates, ethnically, linguistically, and socio-economically, from the “second-tier” or non-“core” Europe, i.e., those parts of Europe constituting the overlooked interstices and abject margins of the Western modernity such as Russia and the Balkans. The the socio-economically endowed “Western self-sufficiency”[[26]](#footnote-26) that Schmemann bewailed continues to pose a genuine problem for non-Western and other marginal and/or interstitial Christian cultures, let alone other wisdom traditions in the global public space. Thus his observation that “…the West had long ago lost almost completely any awareness of being just the half of the initial *Christianitas*”[[27]](#footnote-27) has not lost its critical edge. Under such a schema of inclusion, the Orthodox “East” is seen as “suppliers of that ‘mysticism’ and ‘spirituality’, of those ‘rich’ liturgical traditions which the West periodically requires as useful spiritual vitamins.”[[28]](#footnote-28) However, Schmemann is less enthusiastic to recognize the “East’s” own coziness (the so-called “symphony” theory of co-inherence of state and the church) with past and present imperial formations. It is not difficult to detect a certain nostalgic and frustrated imperial desire towards the perceived victory of the Roman empire over the Byzantine empire in terms of not merely political, but also spiritual dominance in Schmemann’s works.[[29]](#footnote-29) These features of Schmemann’s thought caution that the renewal of theological creativity beyond the gridlocks of the Occidental habits of dualistic imagination would do well to pay a particular attention to the “lures of diaspora,” not only its promises. Both are present equally forcefully and instructively throughout Schmemann’s works.

Regarding the lures: do the lures of a “closed conception of diaspora” – a diaspora resting “on a binary conception of difference” and “founded on the construction of an exclusionary frontier” which “depends on the construction of an ‘Other’ and a fixed opposition between inside and outside,”[[30]](#footnote-30) – not mimic in obverse the much-criticized Western penchant for binarisms and dichotomies? Of course, while advocating the “return” to the patristic “golden age,” which is, so goes the claim, preserved unbroken in the Orthodox tradition, Schmemann nevertheless often expressed grave concerns about the inward and backward oriented “ultra-Orthodox” preoccupations of the many clashing Orthodox diasporas in the West, theologically and culturally.[[31]](#footnote-31) But it cannot go unnoticed that his fierce critique of the Orthodox fundamentalism, is aimed at ethnocentric and liturgically formalistic fixations understood as precisely unconscious internalizations and reproductions of the Western mentality and its theological and ecclesiastical styles!

The discourse of an idealized and ahistoric difference exemplifies a lure of diasporic theological representatives who, having been removed from their native lands and cultural worlds, often become embroiled in “intensification and aesthetization of the values of ‘minority’ positions.”[[32]](#footnote-32) But, if indeed the era of claiming difference by isolation is irretrievably gone, as Schmemann himself admits[[33]](#footnote-33) – except where and when it is intentionally self-produced in the search for a “refuge in the neurotic pseudo-security of the ‘holy remnant’”[[34]](#footnote-34)– then the need for a re-envisagement of difference in a mutually dialogic, perhaps even penitential, way among genuinely different currents of Christianity should be especially appreciated. Alas, Schmemann does not venture too far in this direction.

1. **Resisting the Western “Captivity”: Exodus or Return to “the Fathers”?**

Schmemann’s critique of the Occidental rationale of binarity rests on a genealogy of Western Christianity’s degeneration and the subsequent “captivity” of Eastern Christian culture[[35]](#footnote-35) in its deviant cross-hairs of cultural and theological contamination. For Schmemann, “the West” is not merely a geo-cultural location, but also, and even more importantly, a specific and programmatic cultural and intellectual economy. It is akin to Édouard Glissant’s idea of the West as a “project,”[[36]](#footnote-36) or to Stuart Hall’s West as “an idea, a concept.”[[37]](#footnote-37) As Schmemann sees it, in “the West” the “whole frame of mind is legalistic and syllogistic;” it is made up “of those ‘dichotomies’ whose introduction into Christian thought is the ‘original sin’ of the West.”[[38]](#footnote-38) It impinges most devastatingly on sacramental and liturgical theology. The Western theological mind is attached to “the false dichotomy between Word and sacrament”[[39]](#footnote-39) and in specifically sacramental context is obsessed with “the question of the *validity*: i.e., the minimum of conditions required for the Eucharist.”[[40]](#footnote-40) It indulges in abstract theological speculation about technicalities of formulas, consecratory moments, substances and accidents, resulting in the situation when “what disappeared was the Eucharist as one organic, all-embracing and all-transforming act of the whole Church, and what remained were ‘essential’ and ‘nonessential’ parts, ‘elements’, ‘consecration’, etc.”[[41]](#footnote-41) The penchant for ontological and epistemological dichotomies – instead of the antinomical “holding-together of opposites” in sacrament/ μυστήριον [[42]](#footnote-42) – has actually enabled a regrettable relapse: “… in its historical development, Christianity has returned to the pre-Christian and fundamentally non-Christian dichotomies of the ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’, spiritual and material, etc., and has thus narrowed and vitiated its own message.”[[43]](#footnote-43) Thus, Schmemann laments as unbiblical that “West” which with its unchecked taste of dichotomizing models of rationality and culture,[[44]](#footnote-44) has been eventually producing the great “Western heresy” of modernity – secularism.[[45]](#footnote-45) This happens by disseminating the fundamental opposition of the spiritual to the material as self-evident:

‘Spiritual’ *versus* ‘material’, ‘sacred’ *versus* ‘profane’, ‘supernatural’ *versus* ‘natural’ – such were for centuries the only accepted, the only understandable moulds and categories of religious thought and experience. And Feuerbach, for all his materialism, was in fact a natural heir to Christian ‘idealism’ and ‘spiritualism’.[[46]](#footnote-46)

Secularism for Schmemann, as already noted in the Overture, does not imply atheism or agnosticism, but rather an emphatic negation of sacramentality.[[47]](#footnote-47) It is the negation of sacramental ontology and the whole incarnational economy of the world as created and being deified by God. This kind of secularism, Schmemann laments, has already been sedimented into the common sense of Western culture. The true demonic novelty of Western modern secularism, according to Schmemann, is the appearance of a secular eschatology. Secularism is first, “a stepchild of Christianity”[[48]](#footnote-48) or an exaggerated consequence of the understanding of world as created *ex nihilo* by an utterly transcendent God. Subsequently, the antinomical tension between the present dispensation and the world to come became rationalized and replaced by “an orderly, stable, and essentially extra-temporal distinction between the ‘natural’ and the ‘supernatural’, between ‘nature’ and ‘grace’; and then, in order to assure God’s total transcendence, it viewed grace itself not as God’s very *presence* but as a created ‘medium’.”[[49]](#footnote-49) The outcome is a juridical, i.e. extrinsic, model of relationality between the present and the future, nature and grace, God and creation, wherein “those who are connected remain ontologically extrinsic to one another.”[[50]](#footnote-50) In these circumstances even eschatology becomes merely futuristic.

The “West” as understood above is the source and site of the Western “captivity” of Eastern Orthodox theology and spirituality according to Schmemann. The “captivity” consists of having succumbed over the centuries, through gestures of internalization, cross-cultural interaction, and even of certain self-colonization to the “legalistic and syllogistic Western mindset” and its inability to function outside the dualistic structures of reflection and imagination. The Western “captivity” is the mimicry or the “‘pseudomorphosis’ of the eastern theological mind.”[[51]](#footnote-51) It functions by adopting Western thought forms, methodologies, and categories, as well as the Western understanding of the problems, tasks, nature, and structure of theology. It is above all a methodological captivity.[[52]](#footnote-52) The uncanny fruit of such efforts is a “tragic nominalism,”[[53]](#footnote-53) a mimicry that is by no means a menace to its predictable Western arch-rival, but rather an ambivalent medium of keeping up the required unfaltering ecclesiastical appearances of resistance while engaging in a clandestine cooptation on a much more subtle level. Liberation from the “captivity” for Schmemann demands no less than a “return to the Fathers.” Again, this is an adage expressed decades before by Georges Florovsky,[[54]](#footnote-54) yet in hands of Schmemann it undergoes a metamorphosis into an imaginary of return and resistance. Return is to be made not just to the patristic texts as fashionable proof-texts, but to “the mind of the Fathers”[[55]](#footnote-55) to recover the patristic “spirit”[[56]](#footnote-56) while resistance toward “the West” should be exercised. Patristic theology, for Schmemann is “the eternal model of all true theology” precisely because of its soteriological motivation, its “constant preoccupation with Truth as *saving* and *transforming* Truth, with Truth as a matter truly of life and death.”[[57]](#footnote-57) This for him stands in a stark contrast to the contemporary theology which is seen as failing “to reach anybody but professionals, to provoke anything but esoteric controversies in academic periodicals.”[[58]](#footnote-58) *Pace* Florovsky and despite his own disclaimers against nostalgia, Schmemann’s advocated liberation as “return” is mired in the assumption that the decolonizing break with the enduring cultural regimes of Western “captivity” can proceed as a pure, isolated and unidirectional recovery mission coupled with simultaneous resistance toward any fruitful engagement with the contemporary or future Western theological traditions. There is seemingly nothing worth considering, engaging with, and learning from the West, let alone Western modernity, for the Orthodox traditions in Schmemann’s view. But can liberation as an aperture for new and different creativity and relationality, beyond mutual indulgence in legislating others’ identities extrinsically and presumptively, ever be a true exodus from such indulgence if it remains so dedicated to resistance so exclusively and nativistically curved into itself*?* Moreover, the nativistic trajectory of the “pseudomorphosis” discourse entails a fundamental disavowal of the centuries of Orthodox tradition and most definitely the theological hybridities produced through the long histories of entanglement among various currents of Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and the Protestant traditions.[[59]](#footnote-59)

If the problem of the Western “captivity” indeed consists in a major theological disagreement on the nature of creator-creation relationality, i.e., sacramentality, then the invention of a binary opposition which installs the “East” as the solution for all and any deviations of the “West” seems to be a yet another utterly unproductive instance of inverse Orientalism. Or, perhaps more accurately, wasting the potential of being a fruitful modulation of the Western epistemic hegemony and its proliferated imaginaries of binarism, such a gesture ironically mimics the very habits it critiques – equally dualistically, equally reductively, and equally arrogantly. But this is precisely where the Orthodox tradition would seem to be prepared to keep the lures of self-serving dichotomies in check through its “preference” for the ambivalence of “the conjunction ‘and’ rather than ‘or’.”[[60]](#footnote-60) This preference ought to mean the insistence on the openness and potentiality for salvation through divine transfiguration of all socio-cultural and geo-political specificities, all historical, cultural, and theological chronotopes. In the summarily apt, if proleptic, words of John Chryssavgis,

the gift of Orthodox thought and practice lies in its ability to embrace the world as a whole, to envisage life as a complete picture, where every dimension is valued and valuable, where every detail is called to be transformed and to transform alike. This holistic synthesis of prayer and fasting, of service and holiness, of time and eternity, of spirit and matter, constitutes a unique offering of Orthodox theology and spirituality to an age in search of meaning that can hold together divers aspects of a fragmented world.[[61]](#footnote-61)

Perhaps a transformative resistance – engaged resistance, even biblically figured discerning resistance of testing *everything* and holding fast to what is good (1 Thes.5:22) – could be a way of “returning” not to the fabrications of glorious past but rather to the exigencies of the present age of onerous entanglements? Returning, that is, through a dialogic commerce with one’s own tradition and to that of the others with an attentive allocation of both generosity and suspicion to the past and the present alike. This sort of “return” envisions a performed witness no longer to aggrandized provincial truth games and bucolic nativist theo-mythologies, but to the one who is known to have said “I am the truth” and because of whom, in whom and through whom many encounters of faith and violence, of theological temperaments and of cultural sensibilities can still hope to participate in a “solidarity of others.”[[62]](#footnote-62)

**3. Liturgy: Reclaiming Its Sacramental Glories and Uncovering Its Ethical Perils**

It is now time to turn to the *Leitmotif* of Alexander Schmemann’s work – liturgy. By liturgy (in singular) I do not exclusively denote here any particular confessionally circumscribed “ordered way of performing public worship before God and the world.”[[63]](#footnote-63) Certainly liturgy is, beyond doubt, this “ordered way of performing” worship, as encompassing a myriad of particular liturgical services, or liturgies (in plural). As I outlined in the Overture without fully acknowledging my rather Schmemannian presupposition, liturgy is sacramentality enacted and embodied as it keeps appearing in, with, under, and through the sacraments as relational events being performed – in liturgies. Thus my focus in the conversation with Schmemann on the nature of liturgy will not be on his liturgiological work in elucidation of particular rites and habits of liturgical practices as it has already been for many other productive engagements[[64]](#footnote-64) with Schmemann’s thought. The present conversation focuses on his sporadically elaborated arguments that pertain to sacramental-liturgical theology as precisely a component of his overall theological outlook and doctrinal disposition. In other words, in this section I will converse with Schmemann as a liturgically embedded theologian – and not a narrowly specializing liturgist as he is occasionally interpreted. I will proceed with the presupposition that his occasionally opaque and lyric iterations on “liturgical theology” cannot simply be reduced to liturgics,[[65]](#footnote-65) and that this “liturgical theology” does not consist in the reduction of faith and theology to worship as cultic action. I approach Schmemann’s “liturgical theology” as it punctuates the whole of his writings as a liturgically embedded and ecclesially invested theological (style of) inquiry which engages doctrinal problematic beyond liturgy narrowly studied as a historical assemblage and genealogies of particular ecclesiastical rites and customs. The theological challenge of Schmemann’s thought is to be found in his soundings of liturgy as the divine-human relationality, i.e., sacramentality, *in actu* – as a passage into, inhabitation of, and witness to the Kingdom of God. Liturgy is the epiphany of sacramentality. Or, perhaps less explicitly, the imaginary of liturgy is the interface for *theosis*, or deification, or engodding, *in actu*.

Schmemann’s elucidations of liturgy as enacted sacramentality are shaped as both historical and constructive arguments. As such arguments often go, both historical facticity and “useable past” become ambiguously enmeshed with constructive desiderata in a web of provocative undecidability. Therein, of course, resides the attraction of constructive theological creativity, which is attentive to both the fecundity of tradition and the exigencies of the present, as well as the slippery predilection for finding itself and more of itself in the useable, rather than disagreeable, past. Liturgy for Schmemann is an avenue for reclaiming, recovering, and reintroducing some crucial features of marginal(ized) and exoticised worldviews of Orthodox Christianity into the late modern theological milieu in the West. The contrapuntal, sometimes openly confrontational, nature of his constructive work cannot be missed. Stylistically, the irenic and uplifting expositions of liturgy are frequently preceded by passages of dualistic (and sometimes crude) juxtapositions of Western and Eastern Orthodox traditions. Schmemann consistently, to the point of annoyance, puts in quotation marks the terms he deems pertinent only to the Western philosophical, theological, sociological, and cultural discourses and consistently alien to the Eastern Orthodox theological discourse. It appears to remind the reader of his intentional self-distancing from the epistemological imaginary of the West, occasionally with a stylistic sneer. The re-envisagment of liturgy is always offered by Schmemann as a faithful re-presentation (the “return”!) of the tradition in a way characteristic of innovative theological temperaments which are – ironically – routinely apprehensive of anything resembling innovation. Before one gets captivated by the poignancy and hope of Schmemann’s (re)visionary ecstatic enlargement of liturgy it ought not to be forgotten that his discourse on liturgy is scored in a multiplicity of keys. It is positioned as “return,” i.e., liberation from the Western “captivity” in a gesture of defiance, and as an act of exceptionally generous construction of a usable past. It is a constructive search for healing of the fragmentation of practiced spirituality as well as theological creativity in their existential engagements with the world. And, last but not least, it is a quest for renewal of the Occidental culture and all those marginally or interstitially Occidental constituencies which live and move within the West or encounter it as a globally projected “project”/“idea.” Having already pointed out the unacknowledged diasporic lures and fissures of certain sentiments entailed in the orientation of resistance which permeates Schmemann’s thought, I now turn to some of the most fascinating features of Schmemann’s imaginary of liturgy.

At the beginning of theological peregrinations into Schmemann’s lifeworld of liturgy, it is helpful to start by noting what, for him, liturgy is most certainly *not*. Liturgy is not “liturgicalness”[[66]](#footnote-66) or infatuation with colorful and arcane ceremonies for their own sake. In fact, for Schmemann “…one of the greatest enemies of the Liturgy is liturgical piety. The Liturgy is not to be treated as an aesthetic experience or a therapeutic exercise. Its unique function is to reveal to us the Kingdom of God.”[[67]](#footnote-67) Liturgy is the locus of divine revelation. Liturgy is also an enacted life of faith as a response to that revelation. It is not merely the cultic worship of the Church;[[68]](#footnote-68) it is the Church’s creed *in actu*, and it is the Church itself *in actu*.[[69]](#footnote-69) Liturgy is enabled by faith, yet faith is exercised in liturgy and through liturgy. But the most adequate way to see what liturgy *is*, is to detour back to the underlying indispensable order of sacramentality which is the structuring structure of liturgy as its epiphany. For Schmemann, liturgy is the “epiphany” or “phenomenon,”[[70]](#footnote-70) i.e., the performative articulation and implementation *par excellence* of the all-embracing sacramental relationality within the divine economy of creation, redemption, and sanctification. Liturgy is performed in and through liturgies – specific and diverse sacramental-liturgical actions, usually called sacraments, yet without being limited to these established actions and rites. The Divine Liturgy – or the Eucharist – is the central act of liturgy as the uniquely Christian divine service (богослужение)[[71]](#footnote-71) and indeed “the unique center of all Christian life and experience.”[[72]](#footnote-72) The Eucharist makes the Church what it is – the people of God, the royal priesthood and the Body of Christ: “In the Eucharist, the Church transcends the dimensions of ‘institution’ and becomes the Body of Christ.”[[73]](#footnote-73) The Eucharist is “the act of passage in which the Church fulfills herself as a new creation.”[[74]](#footnote-74) The Eucharist grounds, embodies, and discloses superlatively the prototypical template of sacramental relationality since it is

…not merely one possible relationship with God. It is rather the only possible holding together – in one moment, in one act – of the whole truth about God and man. It is the sacrament of the world sinful and suffering, the sky darkened, the tortured Man dying: but it is also the sacrament of the change, His transfiguration, His rising, His Kingdom. In one sense we look back, giving thanks for the simple goodness of God’s original gift to us. In another sense we look forward, eschatologically, to the ultimate repair and transfiguration of that gift, to its last consummation in Christ.[[75]](#footnote-75)

To reiterate what has already been addressed in the Overture, but what is also important to underscore at this juncture as the notions of liturgy and sacrament overlap and interlace ever more closely, is the significance of sacramentality. Sacramentality is the interface of relationality inaugurated by God in creation.[[76]](#footnote-76) It is inaugurated as *mysterion* to accommodate the encounter and interaction of divine self-revelation and human active receptivity and re-action in response to such revelation through the created materiality. This sacramental relationality is the underlying condition of liturgy[[77]](#footnote-77) and it is this particular model of relationality – between the Triune God and human person and also, by the same token, between human person and the world in its entirety – that (modern Western) secularism rejects, according to Schmemann.[[78]](#footnote-78) Relationality conceived as sacramental – as conductive for the transfiguration of *theosis*, for the redemptive transition, and for the engodding transfiguration without obliteration of the creation and its materiality – does not denote a compartmentalized enclave of “liturgical piety,” but emerges from and reaffirms a pivotal theological attitude which Schmemann sees as constituting the “essential difference” between the Eastern and Western Christian traditions:

…beneath all divergences and disagreements, theological and nontheological, between the East and West, there always existed the essential difference in the experience and understanding of *transcendence* itself, or rather of the essentially and uniquely Christian affirmation of both the absolute transcendence of God and of His *real presence* – that is, His immanence to the world and to man, to the totality of His creation.[[79]](#footnote-79)

Exaggeration of transcendence at the expense of immanence, or vice versa, amounts to the breakdown of the antinomical equilibrium and the elimination of the ontological and epistemological “hinge” of a sacramental economy – the “hinge” being *mysterion* (таинство). In other words, the terms sacrament and sacramentality name the quiddity of impossible, yet already accomplished (in the Incarnation as hypostatic union) relation[[80]](#footnote-80)– “holding together in one moment, in one act” – the most unlike natures without confusion, without division, without separation. Schmemann argues that “when transposed into an ‘existential key’,” all doctrinal controversies between the “East” and the “West” are underwritten by the impatience of the “West” with *mysterion* and its annoying predilection for the principle of “both” – “the holding-together, in a mystical and existential, rather than rational, synthesis of both the total *transcendence* of God and His genuine *presence*.”[[81]](#footnote-81) Here, I submit, Schmemann highlights arguably the most profound theological problem for Christian thought in a manner similar to Yngve Brilioth’s (see Overture) and it is here that sacramentality emerges particularly acutely as the ineradicable and authenticating disposition of the incarnational style in Christian thought *tout court*. However, Schmemann’s own impatience with “the impatience of the West” in relation to the *mysterion* of Christian revelation ought to be questioned again on the same grounds as his master narratives of the genealogy of Western decadence have already been questioned above. Namely, Schmemann’s arguments are unconvincing as far as the “impatience” with the sacramental imaginary of *mysterion* is supposed to unambiguously encompass the whole of the Western Christianity across various historico-cultural epochs as the homogenized “West.” As inaccurate as this impatiently sweeping gesture is in relation to, for example, Thomas Aquinas, it nevertheless does accurately pinpoint the enabling condition for the emergence of the *modern* Western quandary of competitive contrastiveness which lies at the root of such stubbornly detrimental disengagements as that between liturgy and ethics as well as between theology and ethics and between theology and anthropology, among others, in the modern Christian epistemological imagination.

Consequently, from the perspective of sacramentality as the interface of “holding-together,” liturgy as divine service for Schmemann has to be re-envisioned as the enactment of sacramental relationality and therefore re-enlarged beyond the incarceration in the assigned binaries of marginal and nominalistic “liturgical piety” belonging to the adiaphora of both theology and exercised faith. But the liturgy to be re-imaged – and not simply recovered as Schmemann often seems to advocate without taking proper notice of historical diversity of theological and liturgical practices[[82]](#footnote-82) – is the liturgy as sacramental in the sense that it embodies and enacts the salvific transfiguration of the whole creation. Liturgy here is the conduit of both christological and pneumatological constituents of the Triune *opus Dei*: the purpose of such liturgy “is truly to take the whole man and in a way the whole world into its rhythm and scope.”[[83]](#footnote-83) Most importantly, liturgy “assumes the whole of creation – matter, sound, color – and transfigures all of it in its sacramental *passage* and *ascension* into the glory of God’s presence.”[[84]](#footnote-84)

Sacramentality and sacraments are intrinsically interrelated for Schmemann: sacraments are intensely specific and particularly focused invested occasions and actions (with specific intentionalities for each sacrament) within the sacramental economy of God-creation relationality of which liturgy is the inclusive interface of enactment. But what specifically marks an action, an event, or a relation as sacramental? Here Schmemann’s designations of liturgy and sacrament overlap purposefully in a dense reciprocal cross-signification: “… the whole liturgy is sacramental, that is, one transforming act and one ascending movement.”[[85]](#footnote-85) Schmemann argues that both are a passage, a passover, or transition[[86]](#footnote-86) into eschaton – the new world of the Kingdom of God. Sacrament here emerges as a category of liminality and hybridity, a sign and act of signifying situated in the borderland of this world and the world to come as a strictly unlocatable and singularly unidentifiable transition and transformation.[[87]](#footnote-87) Sacrament, Schmemann proposes,

is always a passage, a transformation. Yet it is not a ‘passage’ into ‘supernature’, but into the Kingdom of God, the world to come, into the very reality of this world and its life as redeemed and restored by Christ. It is the transformation not of ‘nature’ into ‘supernature’, but of the *old* into the *new*. A sacrament therefore is not a ‘miracle’ by which God breaks, so to speak, the ‘laws of nature’, but the manifestation of the ultimate Truth about the world and life, man and nature, the Truth which is Christ.[[88]](#footnote-88)

To sum it up, sacrament is, as it were, a descriptive “verb” for the particular template of divinely inaugurated relationality. Liturgy as far as it is sacramental is also a “verb” denoting the performance and enactment of this sacramental template of relationality by the church as a visible sign of the Kingdom of God. Sacrament is an instantiation of the pattern of relationality where one reality operates within another and is “a manifestation and presence of the *other* reality – but precisely as *other*, which under given circumstances, cannot be manifested and made present in any other way than as a symbol.”[[89]](#footnote-89) Sacramental revelation and sacramental relation are Schmemann “epiphanical.” In an “epiphanical” relation one reality manifests and communicates the other, but only to the degree to which the created materiality participates in the signified reality. Thus, in sacrament as in symbol “*everything* manifests the spiritual reality, but *not* everything pertaining to the spiritual reality appears embodied in the symbol. The symbol is always partial, always incomplete” and ultimately, the function of sacrament “is not to quench our thirst but to intensify it.”[[90]](#footnote-90)

In Schmemann’s view, sacrament is a double-pronged revelatory event. On the one hand, it is a “revelation of the genuine *nature* of creation, of the world” so that “in the Orthodox experience a sacrament is primarily a revelation of the *sacramentality* of creation itself, for the world was created and given to man for conversion of creaturely life into participation in divine life.”[[91]](#footnote-91) On the other hand, sacrament is simultaneously and irreducibly the revelation of God who “makes all creation the sign and means of His presence and wisdom, love and revelation” so that “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.”[[92]](#footnote-92)

“Liturgy” and “sacrament” are terms that Schmemann very often uses interchangeably. Both denote (inter)action – passage and transformation. Recurrent insistence that one cannot be appreciated without simultaneous attention to the other renders Schmemann’s argument somewhat overwrought, yet it stylistically addresses the theological desideratum of speaking in terms of continuities rather than dichotomies, and seeking connections rather than separations. Perhaps a certain density (compounded with Schmemann’s aversion to philosophically precise “Western” terminology and his diasporic attunement to more than one theological tradition) is the price a theologian ought to be willing to pay for resisting the scholarly temptation to discipline the strikingly complex texture of life in its infinitely diverse orchestrations of relation and interdependence.

Regarding the trans-active/inter-active aspect of sacramental relationality and liturgy as its enactment and implementation, Schmemann does what scholars of liturgy often do, namely, investigates the term “liturgy” itself. Schmemann’s exploration of the origins of the Greek notion of λειτουργία allows conclusion that originally it did not have any cultic connotations but denoted rather a public office and services performed on behalf of a community and for the benefit of the community. Liturgy entailed the idea of service or ministry for Israel as well as for the church, whose “specific *leitourgia* is to fulfill God’s design in history.”[[93]](#footnote-93) According to Schmemann, the church adopted this notion for her worship, especially the Eucharist. Participation in the divine liturgy is the participation in the sacerdotal eucharistic celebration “of the sacrament of life, of this transformation into life in God.”[[94]](#footnote-94) Through the sacrament of baptism the human person is “made the temple of God” and the whole human life is transformed into a liturgy, passing beyond

the pseudo-Christian opposition of the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘material’, the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane’, the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’ is denounced, abolished, and revealed as a monstrous lie about God and man and the world. The only true temple of God is man and through man the world. Each ounce of matter belongs to God and is to find in God its fulfillment. Each instant of time is God’s time and is to fulfill itself as God’s eternity. Nothing is ‘neutral’.[[95]](#footnote-95)

Yet human life as liturgy is not a self-referential enterprise for Schmemann, neither individually nor institutionally. Participation in liturgy is a transformative participation in the work of Christ wherein the eucharistic life of thanksgiving, service, and sacrifice is “constantly transformed into the *liturgy* – the *work* of Christ.”[[96]](#footnote-96) Through liturgy human life has the potential and vocation to become “the sacramental sign.”[[97]](#footnote-97) Liturgy is the be-*ing* of the church as God’s holy people and as the visible sacramental sign of God’s eschatological reality.[[98]](#footnote-98) The function of liturgy as a performed sacramental sign is to serve as transformative optics[[99]](#footnote-99) facilitating “an all-embracing vision of life, a power meant to judge, inform and transform the whole of existence, a ‘philosophy of life’ shaping and challenging all our ideas, attitudes and actions.”[[100]](#footnote-100) Its vocation is to confront those participating in it as “an icon of that new life which is to challenge and renew the ‘old life’ in us and around us.”[[101]](#footnote-101) As Schmemann sees it, liturgy is the conduit or interface of transfigurative sanctification, or *theosis*, precisely as “the slow transformation of the old Adam in us into a new one;” it is “the slow victory over the demonic powers of the cosmos, the ‘joy and peace’ which *hic et nunc* make us partakers of the Kingdom and of life eternal.”[[102]](#footnote-102) The sacramental and liturgical vocation is to “proclaim and communicate the Kingdom” and it is this soteriological “mission that gives to the human response in the Church its validity, makes us real co-workers in the work of Christ.”[[103]](#footnote-103) The liturgical or sacramental transformation of a human person renders her human activity joyful due to finding Christ in everything and thus to be “the sacrament of the world’s return to Him who is the life of the world.”[[104]](#footnote-104)

To summarize, for Schmemann liturgy is not merely a sanctuary-confined talk show, as elaborate, symbolic, musical and colorful or as austere as it might be as a procedure of worship, uttered across the abyss of ontological divide between divinity and humanity. The scope and reach of liturgy for Schmemann is all-embracing cosmically, historically, and anthropologically. Most definitely, liturgy is also eschatologically interruptive in its accommodation of divine enmeshment with materiality of embodied creation in the slow process of salvific transfiguration of the fallen, yet still divinely loved and sustained, world. Schmemann’s emphasis on the eschatological configuration of liturgy does not, however, follow the same path that certain postmodern imaginaries of eschatology as pure and relentless interruption that can easily slip into being a fetish of withholding. In Schmemann’s thought as in the Orthodox outlook in general, there is no indulgence in radical separations between the “sacred” and “profane.” Thus even the eschatological interruption is rather perceived as always already entangled with the reality being so interrupted – interrupted by revelation as discovery of what is, in a sense, already there. Eschatological interruption underwrites the “slow victory” of corrective transformation in which “the *feast* is impossible without the *fast*.”[[105]](#footnote-105)

Now, what the enactment of transforming passage, i.e., sacramentally conditioned and structured liturgy, would entail in the world of ethical action in response to suffering, injustice, abuse, oppression and indifference, to “proclaim and communicate” the Kingdom of God? If indeed the “temple” of liturgy is human person and through human persons the whole world where “each ounce of matter belongs to God,” what is the transformative liturgical difference as far as the practical exigencies of lived experience of “this world” are concerned? A concise answer, and perhaps not a wholly unjustified one, would be to recognize that, ironically, Schmemann’s lack of interest in pursuing the connections rather than separations between the “sacred” and the “secular” in a responsible and responsive way is here indicative of his own participation in the zealously denounced Western “captivity” of dichotomized rationality. Even though Richard John Neuhaus is right that “there was for Fr. Alexander no divide between the sacred and the secular, between the subjects of, for instance, unisex fashions and baptismal grace,”[[106]](#footnote-106) the need to make a deliberate re-engagement between liturgy and ethical aspects of life strangely does not obtain as theological desideratum for Schmemann.

It is often the case that Schmemann concludes many of his essays and books with a paradigmatic last section or chapter (but let us remember his complaints about the Western exile of eschatology to that typically convoluted last chapter of dogmatics!) on the witnessing return to the world after the participation in the eucharistic rite. Often there appears something as vaguely enchanting as this: “We depart into life, in order to witness and to fulfill our calling. Each has his own, but it is also our common ministry, common liturgy – ‘in the communion of the Holy Spirit’.”[[107]](#footnote-107) Or, if the assumption that liturgy is expected to perform the transformative translation from contemplative spirituality to spiritual action automatically, seamlessly, and univocally in both individual and social contexts is not immediately obvious, Schmemann also provides a blunt reminder of his routine option for the scope of theological creativity and vocation: “It is in a way irrelevant to ask what a return to that eschatological world-view and experience may mean in ‘practical’ terms, how it can ‘contribute’ to the solution of the world’s agonizing problems.”[[108]](#footnote-108) Additionally, it is hard to ignore the confrontational juxtaposition between salvation as the redemptive alleviation of human suffering and injustice on the one hand, and salvation as the transfigurative restoration of created life beyond the structurally debilitating grip of sin over the whole of human life. Schmemann finds the former understanding of salvation to be “perverse and distorted” due to its focus on the “earthly evils and tribulations.”[[109]](#footnote-109) Instead, his preferred understanding of salvation focuses on the purely transcendent and purely eschatological undoing of the workings of the fall and death, namely, “the restoration of … Life with a capital ‘L’, Life eternal and unfading.”[[110]](#footnote-110) But does it need to be a question of an “either/or,” particularly from the perspective of Schmemann’s sacramental economy of “holding-together” wherein salvation is worked out through “the slow victory over the demonic powers of the cosmos, the ‘joy and peace’ which *hic et nunc* make us partakers of the Kingdom and of life eternal?”[[111]](#footnote-111) Can there be no sacramental continuity in the redemptive unfolding of *theosis* between the healing of suffering psychosomatic and socio-economic bodies and the grace-filled cosmic transfiguration of the creation into new heaven and new earth? Does such a juxtaposition not reinscribe Schmemann’s relentlessly denounced divorce between “nature” and “supernature” ever more detrimentally?

Now such an attitude does not come as a surprise against the background of Schmemann’s extensive, at times indeed reactionary, polemic against the “obsession with relevance” within those theological orientations which prioritize responsible social engagement precisely as means of faithful “proclamation and communication of the Kingdom.” Nor is such an attitude entirely surprising coming as it does from an Eastern Orthodox context where, according to the judgment of Kallistos Ware, it must be frankly acknowledged that

Orthodoxy at its best has always shown a creative compassion towards the deprived and the suffering. But all too often this compassion has taken an exclusively personal form. While relieving the anguish of individuals who are oppressed, Orthodoxy has usually shown little concern about changing the unjust structures of society that bring about this oppression. We give bread to the starving, but we do not ask why they have no bread.[[112]](#footnote-112)

What I have found to be virtually ubiquitous in Schmemann’s otherwise sustained counter-dichotomous theological orientation is his own captivity to what John Chryssavgis called the “unholy dissociation between spirituality and social justice.”[[113]](#footnote-113) Curiously, this particular divorce does not seem to bother Schmemann despite his resistance toward disciplinary divorce. Schmemann’s judgment rings true in respect to his own theology:“The Orthodoxy may have failed much too often to see the real implications of their ‘sacramentalism’” precisely because its emerging and hard-fought acknowledgment that, indeed, “its fundamental meaning is certainly not that of escaping into a timeless ‘spirituality’ far from the dull world of ‘action’.”[[114]](#footnote-114) Chryssavgis’ observation strikes a theology premised on richly embodied sacramental relations, interconnections and interpenetrations of diverse dimensions of reality – such as Schmemann’s – with particular devastation. It exposes the failure to perform exactly what such theology most ardently envisions and against the absence of which it mounts its most poignant jeremiad – the catholicity of aesthetically perceptive contemplation and praise, wide-ranging theological thought, and embodied interpersonally and even cosmically transformative spiritual practice in a single, yet versatile, incarnational economy of redemptive “slow transformation.” With liturgy so visionary enlarged (liturgy is life being transformed and participating in the redemptive work of Christ), and so sacramentally inscribed in the deepest interstices of material creation (liturgy assumes the whole creation in the transfigurative relationality of the Triune God), there is nonetheless a most disheartening failure to relate this liturgy to those lived experiences, actions, and relationships immersed in what Schmemann himself called “world’s agonizing problems.” The actual dichotomy of liturgy and lived experience in Schemmann’s work, often invisible under the presumption of seemingly self-evident, effortless, and non-contradictory translatability of liturgical rite into life, is a true symptom of the decadence of liturgical nominalism. This decadence engenders the oblivion toward the frustrating intricacies and disruptions of relation between liturgy performed in the Eucharist as rite and liturgy performed as vicarious eucharistic practice of participating in Christ’s work of the redemptive healing of this world in relation to the whole of God’s creation. In “this world,” sacramental action as rite does not self-evidently, smoothly, and necessarily translate into a transformed human subjectivity and agency even though it potentially can. It is precisely the realization of the repetitive breakdowns within the continuum of liturgy – enlarged, as in Schmemann’s thought, starting from the sacrament of the Eucharist to encompass the whole interpersonal and cosmic arena of creation as the appropriate “temple” for its *opus* of sacramental signification and change toward salvation as the grace filled wellbeing of the whole creation – that has given rise to the Orthodox insistence on the inseparable conjunction between liturgy and “liturgy after the liturgy.”

Regarding “liturgy after the liturgy” Ion Bria proposes that the Eucharist inaugurates and manifests the interpenetration of “calling” and “sending.” The “sending” engenders “liturgy after the liturgy”: it is not a secondary and nonessential addition to liturgy perceived as rite, because the very integrity of liturgy is compromised and its witness (*martyria*) is incomplete if the “calling” is detached from the “sending” – the “sending” being the celebration of the “sacrament of the brother.”[[115]](#footnote-115) Boris Bobrinskoy argues that the conclusion of the divine service is “only the announcement of the end of the first stage of the eucharist… what follows is not so much an ‘exit’ from the church as an ‘entrance’ by the church into the world” so that in the power of the Holy Spirit leaving the sanctuary is actually an entrance into discipleship as “another mode of the liturgy which is the ‘liturgy after the liturgy’.”[[116]](#footnote-116) From an Orthodox perspective Bria attributes the separation of the two intrinsically related “stages” of the Eucharist – so ironic in the case of Schmemann’s thought – to the Orthodox negligence toward the social and political consequences of *theosis* and a decade later his observations have not lost their relevance:

Under the guise of avoiding the temptation of ‘horizontalizing’ the Christian message or subjecting it to ‘social’ and ‘political’ concerns, the Orthodox have often proposed a way of life which cannot be translated into action in society. They place the social order and secular issues into the hands of the state and the political parties. Hence they are unable to translate their theological vision into the terms of prevailing intellectual and political culture. They have ignored the social and political consequences of *theosis* (deification) and disregarded the historical concretization of eucharistic spirituality. In so doing they interrupt the flow of liturgical act, breaking off diakonia at the end of worship, at the door of the church.[[117]](#footnote-117)

The vicarious eucharistic practice or “mission” of enacting a sacramental transformation cannot be described otherwise than ascetic. Here it is important to note that actions taken to change the self are not necessarily contradictory or mutually exclusive to the actions to change the world. The vicarious eucharistic practice is ascetic because it takes place amidst the reality of a fallen world overpopulated by competing and idolatrous liturgies of self-serving political and cultural power, pure economic reason, and unrepentant exploitation of the already disempowered on the basis of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and myriad other affiliations. By these liturgies the human multitude is always already formed before the liturgical life as the sacramental transformation and participation in the redemptive work of Christ can even begin. The split between liturgical life and ascetical life – or the dreadfully heroic work of living eucharistically in a blatantly non-eucharistic reality – ought to be recognized as signaling a narcissistic ecclesio-centrism, seduced by a prematurely realized eschatology.[[118]](#footnote-118) Such eschatological imagination can be deployed to legitimate undisturbed cultic existence of hierarchical and ethnic institutional ghettoes and to forget the ecclesial vocation to co-participate in the work of Christ on behalf of and for “this world,” so obviously mired in suffering and unjust deprivation. Consequently, instead of being eschatological, liturgy often becomes an actual instrument of cultivating a solipsistic utopia which disgracefully yet cozily cohabits with any existential actualities of suffering and injustice, without having its insulated utopian order disturbed.

In relation to solipsist utopias, another truly problematic and pervasive dichotomy in Schmemann’s thought, which reigns unchallenged alongside the divorce of liturgy and ethics, needs to be singled out. It is the issue of gender, especially when it comes to the meaning and vocation of human life as being transformed into the sacerdotal liturgy of the sacramental economy of salvation. Schmemann’s eucharistic anthropology entails the universal sacerdotal vocation for all human persons created in the image of God and called to participation in the likeness of God: “Man was created as a priest: the world was created as the matter of a sacrament.”[[119]](#footnote-119) Considering that the Russian language remained the primary theological language for Schmemann, it is worth remembering that in Russian the word which in Schmemann’s English texts is typically rendered as “man” is *человек*. The grammatical gender of *человек* is certainly masculine, but it does not have that other clear signification of male human being such as the English word “man” does. So, reading Schmemann generously, or with the Russian linguistic twist in mind, or perhaps simply guardedly by not expecting from him anything above and beyond the routine linguistic masculine monopoly featuring so prominently in his texts, it seems to be possible to allow an egalitarian modulation to appropriate a potentially transformative vision of human life. Especially considering the present condition of environmental crisis and the conquistador rationality of the Occidental culture throughout modernity in both its colonialist and consumerist expressions, it might be useful to read Schmemann against Schmemann precisely “for the life of the world” and indeed, for the life of the *whole* world:

So the only *natural* (and not ‘supernatural’) reaction of man, to whom God gave this blessed and sanctified world, is to bless God, 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. All rational, spiritual and other qualities of man, distinguishing him from other creatures, have their focus and ultimate fulfillment in this capacity to bless God, to know, so to speak, the meaning of the thirst and hunger that constitutes his life. ‘*Homo sapiens*’, ‘*homo faber*’… yes, but, first of all, ‘*homo adorans*’. The first, the basic definition of man is that he is *the priest*. 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 – 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.[[120]](#footnote-120)

But to leave the matter at this point is to tell only half of the story. Schmemann’s elaboration on the “specific vocation” of women[[121]](#footnote-121) reveals another dichotomy gone unnoticed and left undisturbed. As is often the case, his eucharistic anthropology – particularly if the egalitarian modulation and extrapolation alongside an equally necessary modulation of homocentrism is deemed worthy of such effort as I think it is – is juxtaposed to triumphantly sexist amendments underwritten by the dichotomous view of human nature embodied in two hierarchically endowed variations. Except that here, one must note, Schmemann does not blame the “West” for such enamoration with dualism but instead endorses it himself as indeed always and everywhere already sedimented into timeless truth! Hence, the sacramental vocation and ministry of *homo adorans* is severely amended by the default assumptions of male elitist theology in a universalizing gesture, seemingly permissive of inclusivity on the one hand, but efficiently reverting to its true *modus operandi* on the other. It is a gesture which by ostensibly including “all” nevertheless reinforces – in a sinister romanticism – the gendered binaries of an injurious social ontology, camouflaged as noble resistance to the leveling of the precious discriminatory difference. Juxtaposed to the sacramental inclusivity of the justly enlarged liturgy as human participatory work in the work of Christ is the same old and skewed division of labor along the lines of gender in precise imitation of the sexually determined division of labor within the larger framework of dichotomized public and private spheres. What emerges here is yet another variation on the *Leitmotif* of ambivalence which permeates the work of Schmemann throughout his reflections on the genealogy of decadence of the “West” and the “Western captivity” of Eastern Orthodoxy. As in Bria’s observation, Schmemann’s innovative audacity as an Orthodox does not seem to resonate fruitfully with similarly re-conceptualized socio-cultural imaginaries within the Occidental culture even though the potential of such transformational resonance is present. As I indicated in the Overture and in first chapter of Part 1, the issue of disengagement of liturgy and ethics is only a facet within a much broader web of sacramental problematic involving the Occidental rationality and lifeworlds in all their complexity. In this regard, Schmemann’s work is instrumental for the milieu of Western theological discourses precisely as a challenge, emerging from the ambiguous diasporic location of “difference within” and directed to their still largely unexamined and undertheorized, in relation to a global panorama of tribulations, epistemological and ontological assumptions. Schmemann’s voice is still worth serious consideration to not so much swoon over it in exotic ideality of liturgicalness, but mostly to appreciate the complexity of the alternatives being proposed as solutions being equal to the complexities produced, squarely anchored, cherished, and suffered from in the West. In addition, to engage non-Occidental or marginally Occidental perspectives fruitfully and maturely is to neither idealize their otherness in superficial yet entertaining connoisseurship, nor to ignore them preemptively as deficient and irrelevant.

Schmemann’s specific responses of methodological resistance to the unproductive Western imaginaries (“return to the Fathers”) and constructive re-conceptualization of liturgy also reveal the enmeshement in temptations by which a diasporically and oppositionally situated theological creativity is often scandalized. First, the resistance to hegemonic discourse and presumptive legislation of identity vis-à-vis a marginal theological lifeworld can always be matched by an equally totalizing counter-imaginary, operating according to its own similarly narcissistic constellation of values even when its critical impetus of the Western discursive hegemony is incisive and timely. In short, the diasporic difference does not automatically mean a qualitative and cathartic difference, no matter how seductive the aroma of its homing desire is. Second, regarding liturgy in particular, Schmemann’s re-conceptualizations of liturgy to renounce and move beyond the discourses and lifeworlds erected and governed by mutually alienating binarisms that stultify life and thought, contemplation and action, succeed and fail simultaneously. Namely, as some unhelpful dichotomies are dismantled, others are produced and as a conceptually intricate radical interrelatedness of the spiritual/sacred and the material/secular is proposed, other disruptions of relation are installed. If liturgy is indeed the whole of sacramentally transformed and transformative life, not singularly constituting but participating in the redemptive *opus Dei* in the whole of created life, then indifference to this very lived breadth and wholeness of dually vectored *religio* – to God and fellow human beings – clandestinely re-authorizes exactly the irrelevance of this crucial relation. The problem is that the ideality of *theologia* is seen as sufficient without precisely the fulfillment (a beloved notion of Schmemann’s) of its sacramentally soteriological momentum, in a truly incarnational directionality within the *oikonomia* of ethical interpersonal relationality. The typically brief doxological closing passages in Schmemann’s texts on “returning to the world” after the Eucharist signal simultaneously first, the exhaustion of interest in the sacramentally transformed life as a lived liturgy appropriately enlarged.

Second, it signals the anxiety of tresspassing the political and socio-cultural boundaries of propriety pertaining to theological expertise, reinforcing, of course, the very structures of dichotomous disciplinary divorce that Schmemann laments elsewhere so extensively. What surfaces repeatedly is a virtually nativist preoccupation with situating the purity of theological enterprise in the privileged and retrospectively imagined lineage of authenticity – “the Fathers.” This preoccupation with solemnized theoretical purity actually veers toward not only the abduction of any actual liturgical action, passage, and transformation of life as lived reality, but already prior to that, toward the abdication of consistent and penetrating interrogation of what such action might mean in the “this world” of systematic and institutionalized injustices and oppressions. Theologically, the notion of ethics as a *discursive* sensibility and configuration of reflective activity implies, in the words of Beverly Wildung Harrison, “critical questioning of our evaluations of the world.”[[122]](#footnote-122) Ethics as a tactically critical discursive practice, such as Rey Chow suggests, further specifies the critical questioning as willing “to take risks” and willing “to destroy the submission to widely accepted, predictable, and safe conclusions.”[[123]](#footnote-123) Schmemann, alongside many others, does not entertain the possibility of going beyond the predictable and safe cliché recognition of the “fallenness” of “this world,” despite his proposition that nothing is really “neutral” in this world as far as sacramentally invested theology is concerned. The result is a forgetfulness that risks overlooking the danger of liturgy, promisingly enlarged, on the one hand, and persistently unredeemed routine living in need of sacramental transfiguration, on the other, remaining as un-transformatively estranged as ever. This estrangement fully merits the vociferous critique of Emmanuel Levinas to which I will turn in the following chapter. But here the two remain juxtaposed in continuing suspicion of each other, as in the example of the gendered slant of Schmemann’s eucharistic anthropology, precisely when they are brought so tantalizingly close in a diasporic imaginary.

Among the greatest pedagogical merits and challenges of Schmemann’s work is, I submit, the presentation of the difficulty involved in re-envisioning theological discourse (and not just liturgical studies) by privileging marginally Occidental or non-Occidental rationalities and spiritual temperaments presented in critically polemical positionality vis-à-vis the West without repeating, as if by an abject mimicry, the very liabilities correctly identified as in need of unmasking and rectification. If a particularly liberative element of the diasporic perspective (and predicament) is to “to unlearn that submission to one’s ethnicity … as the ultimate signified,”[[124]](#footnote-124) then Schmemann’s work leaves the desire kindled yet frustrated.

Among the greatest liabilities of Schmemann’s work is the absence of critical attention to sacramental ethics as an intrinsic component of his cosmically enlarged liturgy. For liturgy for Schmemann seems to denote, so promisingly after all, a eucharistically performed life of transfigurative passage of a truly cosmic scope – by participation in *opus Dei* – well beyond sacramental rites isolated in cultic worship alone. Within the cosmic scope, theology and spiritual life are consumed by and consummated in liturgy. But, on a closer look, it turns out to be a segregated liturgy for which ethics emerges as a dichotomous afterword, always already “married below” the properly doctrinal and sacramental concerns to the theological *parerga*. Could another diasporic voice – that of Emmanuel Levinas – be helpful for the peregrinations in search for the ethical *basso continuo* of enlarged liturgy or socially responsible and responsive action as doxology alongside Alexander Schmemann towards the ends that are not necessarily their own?

1. Paul Meyendorff’s observation that “it is Schmemann who is credited, or blamed, for many of the liturgical changes that we in America have experienced in recent decades” holds true for many venues of liturgical creativity beyond the ecclesiastical orbits of Orthodoxy. See Meyendorff, “The Liturgical Path of Orthodoxy in America,” *St.Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 40 (1996): 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Lutheran theologian Gordon W. Lathrop honors Schmemann at the beginning of his own *magnum opus* and acknowledges Schmemann’s influence on his own prolific reflections on liturgical *ordo* as elucidated in Schmemann’s work; Lathrop’s own contribution was “meant as an homage of thanks for that work.” Lathrop, Preface, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998): x. Aidan Kavanagh, O.S.B. has an appreciative acknowledgement of his influential monograph “in memory of Alexander Schmemann” in *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo, 1984): v. Also, David W. Fagerberg explicitly acknowledges Schmemann’s inspiration in his work on liturgical theology in *Theologia Prima: What is Liturgical Theology?* Second edition (Chicago and Mundelein, Ill.: Hillenbrand Books, 2004). It has also brought Schmemann notoriety among contemporary theologians for allegedly instigating a lineage of historically lax liturgical romanticism. To single out just one recent example of a well-founded, somewhat reductively confessional, trajectory of critique: Michael B. Aune highlights Schmemann’s foundational role for the highly influential “Schmemann-Kavanagh- Fagerberg-Lathrop line of liturgical theology” by challenging the runaway use of such key concepts as *leitourgia* and *legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*. Most importantly, Aune questions the tendency toward “romantic attachment” to idealistic and ahistorical conceptualizations of liturgy. See Michael B. Aune, “Liturgy and Theology: Rethinking the Relationship,” Part I, *Worship* 81:1 (2007): 48. In my opinion Schmemann’s work has sadly enabled repetitive fabrications of a rather dualistic *lex* *orandi, lex credendi* binary at the expense of attentive recognition of the complexities of historical liturgical practices. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In his response to W. Jardine Grisbrooke Schmemann feels obliged to explain his meteorically popular, yet rightly confusing and routinely misinterpreted term by reduction of this definitely not the most helpful term, *lex orandi*, to the spirituality derived and legitimated narrowly and exclusively from rites and ceremonies in juxtaposition with doctrine and other elements of religious tradition and life. The reasons for such misunderstandings are more complex, as I will show later in the chapter, one of which is Schmemann’s homiletical style and an apparent nonchalance toward discursive precision, and, last but not least, arguably his general programmatic antipathy toward employing philosophical vocabulary according to what is, and was, often a common practice of certain major strands of theology from the patristic era, both in the Christian East and West, until the present time. See “Liturgical Theology, Theology of Liturgy, and Liturgical Reform,” in *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemann* (Thomas Fisch, ed.; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990): 38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2000): 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Ibid*., 75-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Helpful biographical information in English, among other sources, is offered by John Meyendorff, “A Life Worth Living” published as Postscript to the collection of Schmemann’s essays *Liturgy and Tradition,* 145-154. Also see Mathai Kadavil, “A Journey From East to West: Alexander Schmemann’s Contribution to Orthodoxy in the West,” *Exchange* 28:3 (1999): 224-246 and Kadavil’s *The World as Sacrament: Sacramentality of Creation From the Perspectives of Leonardo Boff, Alexander Schmemann and Saint Ephrem* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005): 161-174. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Schmemann has commented on his inability to identify completely with any world view and ideology rather poignantly in his posthumously published journals, see *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemann, 1973-1983* (Juliana Schmemann, trans.; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 110. See also Schmemann, “The Liturgical Revival and the Orthodox Church,” *Liturgy and Tradition*, 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Schmemann, “The Ecumenical Agony,” 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Ibid*., 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. It is important to note that what is presently known as “Eastern Orthodoxy” and its various ethnic traditions is the modern conglomeration of what can be called the religious traditions of “Byzantine East” while the term “Oriental Orthodoxy” typically describes the non-Chalcedonian traditions such as Armenian, Coptic, Syrian, and Ethiopian Orthodox churches. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Schmemann, “The ‘Orthodox World’, Past and Present,” in *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West*, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979): 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See, for example, such typically juxtaposed relation of the “East” and “West” in “Worship in a Secular Age,” *For the Life of the World*, 117-118. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Schmemann, “The ‘Orthodox World’, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Quoted from Schmemann, “The Ecumenical Agony,” *Church, World, Mission*, 199. Note the dramatic renaming of this essay which was originally published under the title “That East and West May Yet Meet” in *Against the World for the World: The Hartford Appeal and the Future of American Religion* (Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, eds.; New York: The Seabury Press, 1976):126-137. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Ibid*., 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *Ibid*., 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. For example, see Schmemann, “The ‘Orthodox World’,” 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Besides postcolonial problematizing attention to the mechanisms of production of self-indulgent mythologies of history, historians of early Christianity have also pointed to the pattern of methodological primitivism that is present in the underlying position of Schmemann’s views on history and tradition as well. Such primitivist approaches make, as Daniel Williams observes, “the common but erroneous assumption that a particular period of Christian history” can be “appropriated in a pure, unmediated way, free of social, political and economic factors.” Daniel Williams, “Constantine, Nicea and the ‘Fall’ of the Church,” in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community* (Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones, eds.; London: Routledge, 1998): 120-122. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Schmemann expands this trajectory of argument rather interestingly beyond theology in the arena of cultural history and politics by explaining the “catastrophic metamorphosis” of the Orthodox Russia “into the center of atheism and materialism, state totalitarianism and denial of all freedom” by arguing that the Russian renegade intelligentsia and imperial bureaucracy were seduced into a form of self-colonization by Western Marxism. It was the “surrender to alien ideas and ‘visions’” that is responsible for the collapse, yet the West cannot be held directly responsible for it: “This collapse is a Russian sin and Russia bears the responsibility for it. What I am affirming is that it is a sin *against*, and not a natural outcome and fruit of, the ‘Russian Idea’… The sin itself, however, and this must be said, consisted primarily in a non-critical acceptance of a ‘Western’ and not an ‘Eastern’ idea. It was the acceptance of the specifically Western eschatology without the ‘eschaton’, of the Kingdom without the King, which reduced man to matter alone, society alone, history alone, which closed his spiritual and intellectual horizons with ‘this world’ alone.” The crowning summary of the Russian Communist revolution proclaims that “what happened in Russia is one event within the great crisis of Western civilization…” Schmemann, “The ‘Orthodox World’,” 54-57. On self-colonization, see Bulgarian theorist Alexander Kiossev’s controversial “Notes on the Self-Colonizing Cultures,” available online at <http://online.bg/kultura/my_html/biblioteka/bgvntgrd/e_ak.htm>, accessed August 23, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Anna N. Williams’ *Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) presents a meticulous analysis of the cultural, historical and philosophical elements of the East/West history of mutual misunderstanding and condemnation, as well as presents attentive theological interpretations of two seminal thinkers from both traditions to suggest ways of non-exclusionary and non-antagonistic interlogue between positions heretofore presumed to be nearly mutually exclusive without neglecting the inescapable differences in theological temperament. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. I am using Rey Chow’s succinct description of minority discourse, from chapter insightfully names “Against the Lures of Diaspora,” *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993): 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Schmemann, “The Ecumenical Agony,” *Church, World, Mission*, 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *Ibid*., 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *Ibid*., 202. Schmemann describes Orthodoxy as seen and used by the Western Christianity as “a marginal supplier of valuable but unessential ‘mystical’ and ‘liturgical’ contributions, but which, when it comes to serious matters … is expected to express itself in a theological ‘idiom’ whose very adequacy to that task Orthodoxy has always questioned,” 204-205. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Essay “The ‘Orthodox World’” is a telling elaboration of this sentiment, see particularly 32-42. It is worth recalling that in the Middle Ages, during the Fourth Crusade, the Western crusaders did in fact invade Constantinople in 1204. They pillaged the *Hagia Sophia* church alongside perpetrating various atrocities, which is definitely seen as an act of desecration by the Orthodox. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Stuart Hall, “Thinking the Diaspora: Home-Thoughts from Abroad,” *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism* (Gaurev Dessai and Supriya Nair, eds.; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005): 548. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. For example, among many other instances, see “Liturgical Theology, Theology of Liturgy,” 42-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Schmemann, “The Ecumenical Agony,” 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Schmemann, “The Underlying Question,” 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. By “culture” Schmemann usually denotes the “the entire texture of national and social life.” Another term which occurs rather often is “the Orthodox world/s” which is used as a synonym for culture, denoting “a culture, a way of life, a world-view integrating religion and life and making them, however imperfectly, into ‘symphony’,” “The Underlying Question,” 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997):14. Glissant, in a footnote, remarks that “the Occident is not in the west. It is not a place, it is a project, (L’Occident n’est pas à l’ouest. Ce n’est pas un lieu, c’est un project).” [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” in *Formations of Modernity* (S. Hall and B. Gieben, eds.; Cambridge: Polity Press and Open University Press, 1992): 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Schmemann, “Worship in A Secular Age,” 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Schmemann, “The Liturgical Revival and Orthodox Church,” 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Schmemann defines μυστήριον– the Greek term for both mystery and sacrament which directly merges into the Russian term for sacrament таинство, – as the double-pronged principle of ontology and epistemology. It is “the holding-together, in a mystical and existential, rather than rational, synthesis of both the total *transcendence* of God and His genuine *presence*,” in “The ‘Orthodox World’,” 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. *Ibid.,* 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. *Ibid*., 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Schmemann, “The Underlying Question,” 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 14. This quote is one of several instances where terms identical to Henri de Lubac’s notion of *surnaturel* are used without a direct reference to de Lubac’s works. Schmemann had to be at least superficially familiar with de Lubac’s thought at least around 1970, even though this language appears already in his early work *For the Life of the World* and other essays. Incidentally, there are many affinities between the two theologians, but to my knowledge, there is only one explicit reference to de Lubac in Schmemann’s main, virtually footnote-free works, and that appears in the 1970 essay “Sacrament and Symbol”, in Appendices, *For the Life of the World*, 135-151, see footnote 8, on p. 138, where Schmemann quotes de Lubac’s *Corpus Mysticum: L’Eucharistie et l’Eglise au Moyen Age*. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Schmemann, “Worship in A Secular Age,”124. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. *Ibid*., 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Schmemann, “The ‘Orthodox World’,” 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. *Ibid*., 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Schmemann, “Liturgy and Theology,” *Liturgy and Tradition*, 53. The expression is borrowed from Georges Florovsky who was as adamant a critic of the Western theological tradition as was Schmemann. Florovsky’s critique, however, is much more nuanced and historically complex in comparison to Schmemann’s. Florovsky’s overview of the Russian Orthodox involvement with the Western theological traditions presents a rather hybridical account of irregular and fluctuating encounters and disengagements mostly between the European East and West, which recognizes that history as a multifaceted and uneven cultural-political interface upon which a forced/alien consciousness of knowing was permitted to be installed as the measure of theological adequacy. As church historian, Florovsky’s analyses are appreciative of historical facticities and concerning the Western theological traditions, his observations and conclusions, critical as they are, present not only a better knowledge of the object of criticism but also a theological sensibility of critical engagement instead of wholesale dismissal. See, for example, Georges Florovsky, “Western Influences in Russian Theology” and “The Ways of Russian Theology,” *Aspects of Church History:* *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, Vol.4. (Belmont, MA: Norldland Publishing Company, 1975):157-181; 183-209. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Florovsky has provided a rather succinct description of similar process in a more specific context of Russian theology in the 17th century Petrine era, but could well apply in a more generalized sense to most other seductive experiences, be they Roman Catholic or Protestant: “The essence of … pseudo-morphosis lies in the fact that Scholasticism screened and obstructed Patristics for the Russians. It was a psychological and cultural Latinization rather than a matter of creed,” “Western Influences in Russian Theology,” 165-166. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Florovsky, “Western Influences in Russian Theology,” 180-181. This essay was initially presented as a conference paper to the First Congress of Orthodox Theology in Athens, 1936. Florovsky denounces the heterodox West but more importantly the “inorganic ‘Western style’” yet proposes a “return” to patristic sources *together with* and *not* retreating *from* modernity: “… independence from the West must not degenerate into an alienation which becomes simply opposed to the West. For a complete break with the West does not give a true and authentic liberation.” 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Schmemann, “Liturgical Theology, Theology of Liturgy,” 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Schmemann, “Theology and Eucharist,” *Liturgy and Tradition*, 85. Schmemann explains that “… the Church has never taught that the Fathers answered all questions, that their theology is the whole theology and that the theologian today is merely a commentator of patristic texts. To transform the Fathers into a purely formal and infallible authority, and theology into a patristic scholasticism is, in fact, a betrayal of the very spirit of patristic theology, which remains forever a wonderful example of spiritual freedom and creativity. The ‘return to the Fathers’ means, above all, the recovery of their spirit, of the secret inspiration which made them true witnesses of the Church,” 84-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Schmemann, “The Underlying Question,” 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Schmemann, “Theology and Eucharist,” 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. See Dorothea Wendebourg’s incisive analysis of the internal diversity of the Orthodox world and the “pseudomorphosis” lineage of identitarian critiques among certain Orthodox circles, “‘Pseudomorphosis’: A Theological Judgment as an Axiom for Research in the History of Church and Theology,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 42:3-4 (1997): 321-342. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Milica Bakic-Hayden, “The Aesthetics of Theosis: Uncovering the Beauty of the Image,” *Aesthetics as a Religious Factor in Eastern and Western Christianity* (Wil van den Bercken and Jonathan Sutton, eds.; Leuven, Paris, Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2005): 25ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. John Chryssavgis, Review of Andrew Walker and Costa Carras, eds., *Living Orthodoxy in the Modern World: Orthodox Christianity and Society*, *Theology Today* 58:2 (2001): 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. I am borrowing here from Anselm Min’s *The Solidarity of Others in A Divided World: A Postmodern Theology After Postmodernism* (New York and London: T&T Clark, Continuum, 2004). Min suggests the “solidarity of others” implies that “there is no priviledged perspective, that all are others to one another, that we as others to one another are equally responsible, and that all are subjects, not objects.” (82) Hence, solidarity of others “rejects the centrality of one group, requires *decentering* concerns from one’s own group and *recentering* them on solidarity…,”142. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. I am using Frank C. Senn’s suitably generalized description from *New Creation: A Liturgical Worldview* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000): 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Those works which are primarily concerned with the liturgical *ordo* (Schmemann uses Russian word *чин* in what usually gets translated as *ordo*) focus prominently on his *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*. See, for example, Lathrop’s *Holy Things*. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Schmemann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (Asheleigh E. Moorehouse, trans.; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986): 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. *Ibid.*, 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Schmemann, “Liturgy and Eschatology,” in *Liturgy and Tradition*, 100. It is precisely the “‘liturgical’ understanding of liturgy” that is the real misunderstanding for Schmemann, since such a (mis)understanding is “the reduction of the liturgy to ‘cultic’ categories, its definition as a sacred act of worship, different as such from not only from the ‘profane’ area of life, but even from all other activities of the Church itself,” *For the Life of the World*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Schmemann, “Liturgical Theology, Theology of Liturgy,” 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Schmemann, “Renewal,” in *Church, World, Mission*, 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Schmemann, “Worship in A Secular Age,”120. Liturgy is the expression of the primordial intuition “… that the world, be it in its totality as cosmos, or in its life and becoming as time and history, is an epiphany of God, a means of His revelation, presence, and power,” 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Schmemann, “Liturgy and Theology,” in *Liturgy and Tradition*, 28. Also, see “The Missionary Imperative,” in *Church, World, Mission*, 214. As I already indicated in Part I, Ch. 1, the common Russian term for worship service – богослужение or literally “divine service” – resonates more tightly with the German, Swedish, and Latvian terms for the same liturgical action, than it does with the loose English term “worship.” [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Schmemann, “Theology and Eucharist,” *Liturgy and Tradition*, 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. *Ibid*., 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Schmemann, “The World as Sacrament,” in *Church, World, Mission*, 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Schmemann, “The World as Sacrament,” 227. The sacramentality of the creation is seen by Schmemann as the reason for the goodness of creation, 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. *Ibid*., 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. *Ibid.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Schmemann, “The Ecumenical Agony,” 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. As noted, the Greek *mysterion* is the Russian таинство*,* which is rendered in most Western Christian discourses by using the Latin *sacramentum* as basis for translation and meaningful appropriation of the Greek term. In Russian the term таинствeнностъcorresponds to the English term “sacramentality.” [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Schmemann, “The ‘Orthodox World’,” 60. I have put both East and West in quotation marks to draw attention to the problematically constructed nature of these terms in Schmemann’s work. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Schmemann’s assumptions about the uniformity and unity of liturgical practice in the early Christianity and their direct indebtedness to a monochromatically viewed Judaism in the 1st century CE, are typical of his generation of liturgical scholarship, and as such must be regarded as constructive rather than strictly historical arguments, especially in the light of more recent scholarship such as exemplified in Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) among others. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Schmemann, “The ‘Orthodox World’,” 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. *Ibid*. Note the christological term “assume” and also the term “ascension” usually associated with the work and person of the Holy Spirit in Eastern Christian theological traditions. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Schmemann, “World as Sacrament,” 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Schmemann, “Theology and Liturgical Tradition,” 17-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Schmemann, *The Eucharist: The Sacrament of the Kingdom* (Paul Kachur, trans.; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003): 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. *Ibid*., 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. *Ibid*., 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Schmemann, “Theology and Eucharist,” 79. See also *For the Life of the World*, 25-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. *Ibid*., 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. *Ibid.*, 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Schmemann, “Theology and Liturgical Tradition,” 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Schmemann also refers to the church as sacrament in terms of optics as the “possibility given… to see in and through this world the ‘world to come’, to see and to ‘live’ it in Christ,” *For the Life of the World*, 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Schmemann, “Liturgy and Theology,” 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Schmemann, “The Missionary Imperative,” 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. *Ibid*., 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. *Ibid*., 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Richard John Neuhaus, “Alexander Schmemann: A Man in Full,” *First Things* January (2001): 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Schmemann, *The Eucharist*, 245. See also the conclusion of “The Missionary Imperative,” 216. The last chapter of the original *For the Life of the World* ends with an exhortation to witness and mission but also with an argument that there are “no answers in the form of practical ‘recipes’” (113) to answer the question as to what actions the sacramental-liturgical mission would consist of and what ethical purchase they might have. Schmemann is careful to draw attention to the immense diversity of local factors and transformative contributions involved in “mission” to merit more than a superficial generalization. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Schmemann, “The ‘Orthodox World’,” 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Alexander Schmemann, *O Death, Where Is They Sting* (Alexis Vinogradov, trans.; Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003): 81. Schmemann elaborates that “the whole point, of course, is not about salvation from some misfortunes or accidents, from illnesses, from various sufferings, and so forth. (…) If indeed Christianity is supposed to be a religion of salvation from earthly evils and tribulations then it is certainly a total failure,” 80-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. *Ibid.*, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Schmemann, “The Missionary Imperative,” 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Kallistos Ware, *How Are We Saved? The Understanding of Salvation in the Orthodox Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life Publishing, 1996): 74-75. Ware emphasizes that “precisely because God is Trinity, my salvation is inextricably bound up with the salvation of my neighbor. The doctrine of the Trinity means, on the anthropological level, that I cannot be saved unless I make myself ‘responsible for everyone and everything’,” 70-71. In addition, Ware incisively explains that “salvation means sharing in the uncreated energies of God, but it also means caring in an active and practical way about what is happening in Bosnia and Rwanda,” 75, note the particular attention to the contemporary historical references of the time of the book’s publishing. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. John Chryssavgis, “Guest Editorial: Open to Mystery and Open to Criticism,” *Theology Today* 61:1 (2004): 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Schmemann, “The Ecumenical Agony,” 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Ion Bria, *The Liturgy After the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996): 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. *Ibid*., 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. *Ibid*., 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. A case in point is Schmemann’s emphasis on the seamlessness of ecclesiastical continuity suggesting that “there is no separation, no division, between the Church invisible (*in statu patriae*) and the visible Church (*in statu viae*), the latter being the expression and actualization of the former, the sacramental sign of its reality,” in “The Missionary Imperative,” 212. Liturgy – despite all the historical reductions and distortions as embodied in particular liturgies as rites and rituals – is still “the passage of the Church from the *status viae* to the *status patriae*, and as such the source of all real life of the Church…” in “Renewal,” 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Schmemann, “The World as Sacrament,” 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 84. In this early work Schmemann presents a variation on the notorious theme of patriarchal romantic “feminism,” imagined as fighting valiantly for the “difference” feminine dignity jeopardized by aspirations for equality in social sphere. As the posthumously published *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemann* show, his views in this regard did not vary significantly until the end of his life in early 1980s, gravitating around the strange idea that social equality would necessarily entail denial of distinctions and would lead to totalitarian uniformity. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Beverly Wildung Harrison, “Doing Christian Ethics,” in *Justice in the Making: Feminist Social Ethics. Beverly Wildung Harrison* (Elizabeth M. Bounds, et al, eds.; Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004): 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Rey Chow, *Ethics After Idealism: Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998): xxii. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, 241. The case, however, is not clear-cut at all with Schmemann – a typical diasporic aporia – regarding the ethnic demarcation of the Orthodoxy because he explicitly rejects the self-enclosures of various ethically circumscribed Orthodox communities as impoverishing and even narcissistic. Yet, the problem with “ethnicity” understood as Russian Orthodox-ness is its self-identification as rightness – *ortho-doxia* – of theological existence being *a priori* absolved of any necessity or desire to engage in lateral interaction with differently formed Christian cultures in *reciprocally* productive way. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)