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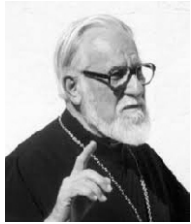
ORTHODOX EVANGELIST

“Do the work of an evangelist” - 2 Tim 4:5



Spring 2016

Vol. 50, No. 1



My Experience in the Ministry of Renewal

by
the Rev. Archimandrite Fr. Eusebius Stephanou, Th.D.

As I have grown older in age, I can't help but look back and view in retrospect the past 48 years and assess the developments which transpired over this long period of time.

It is helpful to understand that during the first 20 years, the headquarters of the ministry was basically just an office that provided a desk for me, a hired secretary and one or two volunteers. At that stage of the ministry, I couldn't call it technically a renewal Center. We held Renewal Conferences in various local chain motels, as for example, the Marriot Inn, as well as at the local Catholic Crozier House, and the Concordia Lutheran Seminary.

With few, if any, maintenance concerns to tie me down, I spent much of my time on the road in the latter part of the 1960s, then 1970s and 1980s. I traveled extensively from coast to coast, as well as overseas to such countries as Greece, Cyprus, Britain, Australia, Israel and Kenya. It was an outreach that could primarily be called evangelistic. Re-evangelizing God's Orthodox people was the way I chose for the purpose of igniting fires of revival and spiritual awakening.

So much for the first 20 years in Fort Wayne. What made the following years different was the creation of what could truly be

called a Renewal Center consisting of several buildings. Without intending to rewrite my authorized biography here, let me simply remind my faith-partners and those whom I have been teaching locally that this period of the Renewal Ministry is marked by reducing mobility on my part, originally not by intention, then later due to my older age and health. Originally, the maintenance needs of our buildings caused a sharp reduction of the itinerant nature of the Ministry.

I really missed hitting the road. The complete absence of local Greek Orthodox interest in renewal led me increasingly to using my time for authoring and publishing books and other literature on the subject of Orthodox Renewal. I have often been inclined to call this stage as **one of seclusion**. However, I would rather view it in a more positive light and call it simply solitude. It was having more quality time with my Lord Jesus – a deeper and more intimate communion with my Savior Who determined, in His inscrutable wisdom and sovereign will, the direction the Ministry was to take at this later stage of my life.

Moving into an Elijah Ministry

One direct, visible effect of this new development was the fact that the Spirit of the Lord progressively released within me an intense prophetic drive. In other words, the Lord led me to move beyond simple evangelism and preaching the word of God. Over the past few years, He had thrust me into what is usually known in renewal circles as an Elijah Ministry. Rather than feeling restrained and subdued with my advanced age, I was feeling increasingly fired up to declare – motivated, of course, by love – the counsels of God to His Orthodox people with the ultimate aim of calling them to repentance and reconversion to the Living Christ, as well as warning them of impending judgment.

As my age advanced, faith-partners naturally began asking me about who would be my successor. I had told them that it was up to the Lord to do that. This was due to the fact that previous qualified people whom I had in mind ended up disappointing me and in some cases even deserting me and the Ministry. The Lord humbled me and had taught me that it was not for me to select a successor.

The Lord reminded me that there were other earlier prophetic figures in both the Bible and church history which also left behind them no successors at all. The writings of **Saint Symeon the New Theologian** had been lost for 1000 years after his death. Another example of this pattern is **Saint Cosmas the Aetolian**.

His ministry was both evangelical and prophetic in outreach. He was traveling and preaching to the distressed and demoralized Greeks who were then being occupied by the Islamic Ottoman Empire. His biographers verify that he touched the hearts of countless fellow countrymen at a time when there were mass conversions of Greeks to Islam. He was noted as being such a spirit-filled speaker that even the Turkish soldiers would stop and listen to him with conviction. He was also a one-man ministry.

How about **Apostolos Makrakis**? He was more of a contemporary prophetic figure who died in 1906. Toward the end of his life, he was deserted and abandoned. His ministry ended with his death. His too, was a personal prophetic calling. Lack of space does not permit me to mention all of the great Orthodox prophetic figures from the past. They can be found in my book *Sacramentalized but not Evangelized*.

But, what must be pointed out here is the fact, often not taken into account, that the St. Symeon the New Theologian Renewal Ministry birthed in 1968 did not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, it was a new link in a chain of successive renewal movements that can be traced back centuries.

A Guarantee for the Future

So, we have witnessed several cases of divinely called messengers who were raised up in an hour when

God's people needed to be warned because of their being lukewarm and even disobedient and in rebellion. Remember that when I had joined into the ranks of Renewal, that there were already several priests who were deeply involved in it. They were the ones who had introduced me to Renewal. However, one by one, my fellow priests deserted their posts at the front lines, laid down their arms and fled from the field. I just **"filled in the gap"** as we are commanded to do (Ezek. 22:30). Yet, I did not realize it at the time, but as the years had gone by and no other priest joined with me in filling the gap, that I had to pick up the slack which had been left by those who had left. It was never my intention to have such a prominent role in the spread of Orthodox Renewal. I suppose that the others could not take criticism or rock the boat and became worn out. **This type of**

calling never coincides with easy living, in fact I became a burnt sacrifice to the Lord.

Whether this Ministry continues in the future depends upon the extent to which those concerned will walk in my shoes or continue to support it. This also means becoming a burnt offering, crucifying themselves with Christ, dying to self, giving up life's most cherished dreams, putting Jesus above all "loved – ones" and surrendering themselves in the cause of Renewal in the Church. **In other words, do what I have done for almost 50 years now. "Be imitators of me, as I am an imitator of Christ."** Then they can rest assured that the future of the Renewal Ministry will be secured. Concern therefore and religious rhetoric must be turned into deeds. It's what Jesus meant when he said, "The tree shall be known by its fruits." Amen. Praise the Lord!

Counting the Cost

By Joseph Abbate / President

I would like to take a moment to follow up on the previous article which Father Eusebius had written a number of years ago. I believe it is crucial to share with you this important article. Though I have strongly felt the calling from God on my life from an early age, I had never imagined that this calling would have cost me so much and that the work in the Ministry would have been so difficult.

It surprises me how many people have the notion that ministry is easy. St. Paul considered the Christian walk with *"enduring hardships as good soldiers of Christ"* (2 Tim. 2:3). Military veterans may better relate to this idea since soldiers expect the possibility of sacrifice in battle as well as personal inconveniences in military life.

It is definitely not a popular message in Christian circles and is hardly heard by pastors these days. In fact, the subject is almost regarded as not being Christian at all. Many of today's Church parishes hear about prosperity messages and that Christians don't have to suffer at all, and if they are suffering then they are doing something wrong or not tithing enough to their pastor. **Yet, this is in direct conflict with the scriptures. We read in the Bible and examples in Church History. We even witness so many Christians suffering and even being martyrs for their beloved Jesus Christ today.**

The Pastors which are not warning their people about the future issues coming upon the world

THE ORTHODOX EVANGELIST

Vol. 50 Spring 2016 No.1

A Newsletter for the promotion of Orthodox Renewal. Published by-monthly by the Orthodox Brotherhood of St Symeon the New Theologian, Inc. Founder-Editor: The Very Rev. Archimandrite Fr. Eusebius Stephanou, Th.D. 276 N. Holiday Road, Miramar Beach, Florida 32550. Phone: (850) 837-1771. St. Symeon Office: 329 N. Holiday Road, Miramar Beach, Florida 32550 Phone: (850) 654-2771. Email: st-symeon-nt@cox.net—Web site: www.stsymeon.org. Articles may be reproduced only with permission. This Newsletter is sent regularly to all those who make a contribution in support of the St. Symeon's Renewal Ministry. Past issues available upon request.

and Church are doing great damage to the lives of those they are supposed to be shepherding. Jesus said: *"No servant is great than their master; if they have persecuted me then they will persecute you as well"* (John 15:20).

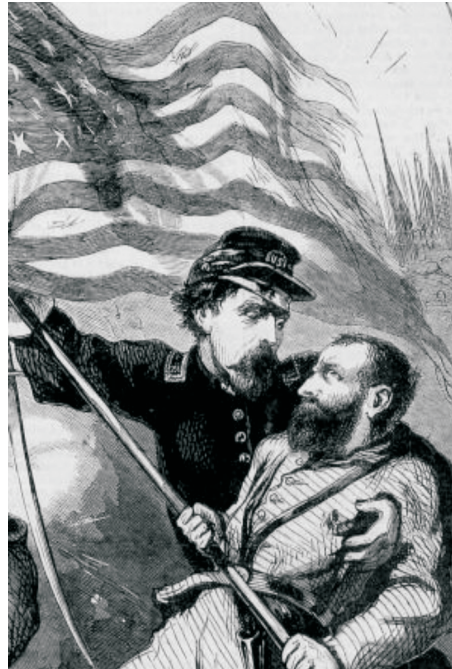
In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read about the Christians of the day and the hardships they endured. *"They were stoned to death, they were sawed in half and killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith"* (Heb. 11:37-39).

How many pastors warn their people that if they continue in their Christian faith that it may cost them their lives? Do they teach that it may cause them to wander in the deserts, as we see today when Christians in Syria and Iraq had to flee for their lives and leave behind their homes? That it may cause them to be sawed in half or lose their heads as we witness on the news stations?

I am reminded of some Civil war reenactments I was involved with over 20 years ago. I was in the 21st Ohio at the Battle reenactment of Franklin and Spring Hill Tennessee. During some Civil War battles, entire units assigned to carry the "standard" or flag were often completely shot apart and decimated. One could see the flags on both sides fall and rise rapidly on several occasions without ever hitting the ground. During some actual battles, men would have their hands or arms shot, yet they would not let go of their flag! Through all the carnage, there were never a lack of volunteers to pick up the flag and rally the troops. **If we are going to carry the banner of Christ, we should not be surprised when we become targeted by the spiritual**

forces of the enemy. Remember that we are reassured that when the enemy attacks that *"the Spirit of the Lord will raise up His standard against them"* (Is. 59:19). **Wherever there is a standard, there is an army following with it!**

You may suffer in many ways because of not compromising the Gospel or your testimony. I had seen on the news not that long ago how many people in the entertainment business were unable to get hired because of their faith as Christians. Another man in California was laid off from his job because a few years earlier he had financially supported a group who believed in traditional marriage.



We have never been proclaiming a popular message, because the message of the Gospel has never been one of compromise. When you support this Ministry, it is your consent that you wish the Ministry to continue into the future. Just as prophetic voices in the past, their messages remain heard through their writings they had left behind. Their writings continue to have just as powerful an impact on people's lives today as when they were originally spoken and when first written in books.

The Prophetic Message

Let us examine the prophetic voice in the Bible such as Daniel. He never would have thought he would have been in enemy hands for such a long period of time, yet Daniel was obedient to the Lord. He had visions of dreams without asking for it. He was thrown into a den of lions just for praying. The Lord, of course had spared him, because of the testimony which he would share through the scriptures he would write.

Jeremiah is known as the "weeping prophet" due to his grief over his native people who were in rebellion against the Lord and their stubbornness. He was thrown into a pit for being obedient to the calling of the Lord and proclaiming the unpopular messages which were given to him.

Even King Solomon with all of his wealth and power had taken time to examine life and the nature of the human race and came to this conclusion: "I have seen all the works which are done under the sun, and have found that all was vanity and a vexation of spirit" (Ecc. 1:14).

A good look at St. Paul's life demonstrates that he was beaten on several occasions, thrown in jail and finally executed. In many of today's churches, the conditions suffered by these figures would often be viewed as happening because of their disobedience. Maybe they didn't tithe enough? Maybe they weren't perfected enough? I have even heard this one; maybe they tithed in the wrong soil? No! These things happened because they were following God and doing His will.

The "feel good" churches are not ready for the upcoming trials which are going to be overtaking our world. They may not have enough spiritual strength to stand in that day, and the ones to blame for that are the feel good pastors which

had taught them a watered down gospel so it would not offend anybody. Being rejected and persecuted never feels good. Paying the price for being obedient to the Lord has its rewards, but not necessarily in this world. It's just not a popular message which pastors wish to teach these days.

But, there is an easy way out. That is not to be completely obedient. They may not even be aware of it, but they can explain it away. They may say: "Well, God would not wish me to suffer that much!" Or, "It's too high of a price." "That's not what I see around me in my church, so it must not be the correct way to go, even though I see other Christians in the world suffering these things."

In the pastor's mind, he may say to himself: "Well, the other pastors in my city have large congregations, and if I challenge my people, I may start losing them and they will go elsewhere and I will not look as successful, and even look like I am doing something wrong." They have the attitude: "This church is my team and the other churches are on another team." They are either too proud of their success or they do not feel adequate enough to team up with other churches. The end result is that the Body of Christ is divided and has no effect or impact. But they feel they are doing something good because they are busy with their church activities. They may even become convicted by other ministries which are not compromising. If we are to be "Good Soldiers of Christ" then how can we be divided? Can an effective army operate with different units going in opposite directions? If so, then that army has no effect on the field and is doomed to failure!

These types of churches are what is mentioned in the Book of Revelations as the "Luke-warm Church", which did not take a stand for anything. Christ said that He would "vomit out of my mouth." What is left after this are two different types of churches, a "False Church"

and the Church described as "The Bride of Christ", which is consumed with love for the Divine Bridegroom.

A Disturbing Trend

There is a rising trend which we have been witnessing in the world. It is a disregard of law and an increasing hatred towards Christians. More than this, is the fact that there has been a disturbing amount of moral decline which the younger generation either does not care about or are unaware of due to their disinterest in the political field and world news. This is happening while Christians around the globe are being persecuted, jailed, their property taken away and even their very lives being taken. We may not like watching these things taking place, but that does not mean that we should not be ignorant of what is happening.

Movies and television programs show Christians as intolerant bigots who hate almost everyone. They are depicted as being unlearned and even crazy at times. This is coincided with immorality being seen as cool and a normal part of life. The end result is that what was unthinkable just a generation ago, is now being pushed upon us. I stress the term, "pushed" because there is an agenda which is being pushed by many people in charge of the entertainment business and media outlets.

We are involved in spiritual warfare in which the hearts and minds of the next generations are being shaped. There is a loss of common sense in world affairs and policies in which the repercussions in the future will be of biblical proportions. This is from the outrageous spending and debt of many countries to lack of fighting terrorists. **There is an obvious madness taking place on a level which has never been seen before.** There will be financial repercussions of getting in debt into the trillions of dollars, there will be geopolitical costs of not confronting terrorism

which has been on the rise and there is a price to pay for not warning the people of what is coming in the future.

The Promises of God

Though there are trials and sacrifices for following Christ, there are also promises for God's people. In Psalm 29:11 we read that *"God will give strength to His people, the Lord will bless His people with peace."* Again the Lord promises, *"He gives strength to the weary and to them that have no more might He increases in Power"* (Isaiah 40:29).

Let there be no doubt about it. This strength cannot come from ourselves. It can only come from the Lord! It will be a supernatural strength! We can also read that though things will get worse in the world, that in the end, the Lord's people are rewarded for their perseverance.

"Therefore brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain of His calling and choosing you. For as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble. For in this way, the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you" (2 Peter 1: 10-11). We are even assured that we will be given the kingdom of heaven. I can fill this article with scriptures of God's promises to His people in rewards for their service and faithfulness to Him. When Jesus Christ returns to earth, we will be riding with Him (Rev. 19:14). More than this, we are also told that we will reign with Him (Rev. 20:6) and even share His throne (Rev. 3:21).

It can be easy to lose sight of the big picture during times of trouble, but we cannot forget that we win in the end, and until that time comes, that we have the supernatural strength and promises from God.