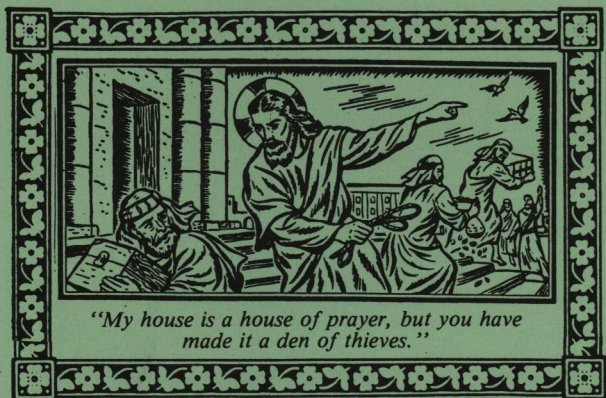


Why the Church Should Get Out of the Restaurant Business



By
Rev. Archimandrite Eusebius Stephanou, Th.D.
Orthodox Evangelist

ORTHODOX RENEWAL SERIES
Booklet No. 24

Have you noticed what a caricature we have made of the true Church? It seems to have the appearance of everything except what Christ intended it to have. You can hardly recognize its original God-appointed ministry and its God-given nature.

Many of our churches are operated like social clubs. Members gather together to socialize. Raising funds to meet the expenses of the Church is a major activity throughout the year. Until a few years ago, customers to our fund-raising functions were the Church members. Now the Church leans heavily on customers outside the Church.

The Church today has a new outreach — not to give the Gospel and save souls through Orthodoxy, but to merchandise and to gain financially from the outside world. Ticket selling, planning, year book ads, announcements, committee meetings, etc. are all-consuming in terms of time and energy in the Church.

The Greek Festival — an Institution

Without the frenzy of such fund-raising and entertaining events Church life would truly be dull and boring. Besides, the Church would never meet its operating expenses.

The liturgy and worship seem to fall into the background as mere religious routine. Fellowship, team-work, Church loyalty and enthusiasm re-

volve — not around Christ and the ministry — but around the next Greek Festival or the next Church Ball.

No sooner the Greek Festival has ended a committee is set up for the preparation of next year's Festival. Without the excitement that comes with this annual event people would probably die of religious boredom.

The annual Greek Festival has become an institution in the Church. Without it many Churches would not be able to meet their monthly mortgage payments and the priest's salary.

I always thought it was by the power of the Holy Spirit that the Church was sustained. Our trust has now switched to the annual Greek Festival to keep the Church alive. It seems as if we don't need the Holy Spirit anymore. And it is showing. We can't hide it.

The annual Greek Festival is the highlight of the year. The attention and energies of the whole year seem to focus on the biggest money-making event of the year. Church council members and pastors boast of the impressive profits in the ten's of thousands of dollars. Such financial successes open up to further temptation of the Devil to rely still more on the Greek Festival.

The annual Greek Festivals have become such huge "successes" that were anyone to even suggest discontinuing them his sanity would be questioned. Such a person would be branded as a dangerous reactionary in the parish. His head would be examined for doubting whether or not it is right for churches to attach such importance to annual Greek Festivals.

I am not condemning the people that get absorbed in money-making activities in the local parish. They mean well. They are well-intentioned. They sincerely believe they are serving their Church and pleasing God. Many of them are religious Orthodox Christians. They say they are "working for the Church."

"Active" for the Church

Such people in the Church don't know any better. They know of no other way in which they can "work to help the Church." These "active members" are responding to the only programs the Church makes available to them.

I am not blaming them. But they can "work" for the Church to the point of exhaustion and even death and still split Hell wide open. They will never make it to Heaven by being "active" in the sense that is popular in the Church today.

Is eternity important, or isn't it? Do we believe in an eternity or don't we? Is our eternal welfare at stake or isn't it? Is it right, honest and just to keep our people in ignorance of the will of God?

These people are unaware of the fact that they are dwelling under an illusion and that they are involved in activities which mischannel their energy and enthusiasm for the Church. They see their priest announcing these big money-making events at the Sunday Liturgy. They sense a divine endorsement upon them. He does not even suggest that there is anything wrong

with them. In some cases: no Festival, no salary!

Time is the most precious commodity for the Christian believer. It is not to be wasted. Indeed we will give an account to the Lord some day for how well we used time. The Scriptures tell us "to redeem the time, for the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16).

If the individual believer is instructed to "redeem the time," how much more is the Church, the body of Christ, the redeemed community, expected to "redeem the time" and to use time to its fullest potential for advancing the purposes of God both in our personal lives and in the life of the Church.

To waste time is a grave sin in the eyes of God. For a Church to idle away its time while the world is at the brink of global catastrophe reveals an incredible insensitivity and a blatant disregard for God's will. But we will not get away with it.

Christ did not found His Church by His atoning death upon the Cross so that we of the twentieth century can prostitute the divine purpose and ministry of the Church. Jesus laid His life down as a sacrifice of atonement to save the world from the wrath which is to come.

While Jesus is away with the Father at His right hand of glory, we have set up the golden calf in the place of the Holy Spirit. We have turned His house into a house of merchandise.

Jesus overturned the tables of the money-changers and sellers and with the scourge He cleaned out His Father's house. Where are the successors

of the Apostles and of Christ today to take a scourge and clean out the Orthodox Churches of their commercialism and to restore the Church as the Body of Christ?

The Insensitivity of the Church

Our Church women spend hours and hours baking Greek pastries and other Greek delicacies for the annual Greek Festival, while the unregenerate world around us cries for redemption. While suffering mankind sinks deeper and deeper into moral decay and social unrest, we couldn't care less.

The Spirit of the Lord is trying to say something to our churches today. Are we listening to the sound of His voice?

"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17).

Christ did not establish the Church to provide a Greek deli in every parish. His Church was founded to bring the Gospel of redemption to the world sighing under the bondage of Satan. With our disobedience and rebellion we bring shame to the name of our divine Savior. We are the Apostolic Church only in name. We have no apostolic witness nor apostolic zeal.

God wills that we assemble around the altar and around His word in Bible study fellowships, rather than around the Church kitchen table to bake Greek pastries and cookies. The Lord desires that His people assemble in Church to listen to the preaching of

His word on week days as well as on Sunday. He wants us to fellowship around the Gospel in study of His word and in prayer.

The hours and hours we spend on planning and preparing for a successful Greek Festival or Greek Ball we can use for "knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings." In Jesus there is no boredom. There is joy, excitement and victory power for a full and fulfilled life.

The priest is compelled to make weekly announcements to his congregation calling upon his people to attend the Festival committee meetings held during the week. Should he not rather call upon them to assemble for prayer, Christ-centered fellowship and evangelism?

Should not week-day activities be the extension of the Sunday Liturgy? Rather than secular events providing for a change of pace and for a bit of variety in the Church. For many the dismissal at the close of the Liturgy seems to signal the right to have license to do our own thing until the next Liturgy.

Only On Paper

Don't we like to talk about the Liturgical life of the Orthodox Church? Don't we hear our theologians tell us about the Eucharistic life? Should it end at the conclusion of the Liturgy service? Is the Eucharistic life of the believer to last only the duration of the Sunday service?

Where is all the sacramental life of the Church at the conclusion of the Sunday Liturgy? It sounds good on

paper, but in real life it just isn't there. **Nothing seems to be sacramental or Eucharistic about the life of the Church between Liturgies.**

Upon arrival in a town on a visit I stopped to ask for directions how to get to the local Greek Orthodox Church. The person who helped me remarked: "O, that's the place where they hold the Greek Festival each year. My wife and I go there for that delicious baklava and Greek food. We never miss it."

Our stock in trade has been — not the Gospel of salvation for the world — but Greek pastries and Greek food. Food for the belly rather than food for the soul.

How much more preferable it would be if our churches were well known for their evangelical and soul-redeeming activities! How much better for the prestige of the true historic Church if people would say: "Yes, I know where the Greek Orthodox Church is in town. That's the Church where more people get inspired and ministered to spiritually than any other Church in town!"

Our Greek Orthodox Churches should get out of the restaurant business and begin getting active about our Father's business: the kingdom of God!

Book Orthodoxy

The Orthodoxy of the Apostles and Fathers is the Orthodoxy of Christ. It is the personal and collective experience of Holy Spirit power and victory over the forces of Satan. Let's get back to it!

It is obvious that there is one Orthodoxy in the our theological manuals and another one in real Church life. Yet, we keep idealizing Orthodoxy and persist in presenting it in its theoretical form.

It is not enough to speak of the spiritual beauty and of the spiritual treasures of Orthodoxy. Rarely, if ever, do we find that beautiful, sublime Orthodoxy in the actual activities of a local parish.

Our theologians keep painting a rosy picture of Orthodoxy in all its historical richness and attractiveness. We hear about the "redeeming life of the Church," as found in the writings of the Church Fathers. Impressive lectures are given by professors of theology on the sacramental life of the Church.

But where is all this spiritual wealth between Liturgies? We hear and see only the theory of Orthodoxy. It is only in the books — not in the day-to-day activities of the local parish.

We have plenty of theologians in the Church. But what we need are prophets to call God's Orthodox people to repentance and to a reconversion to the living Christ. Only a theology that is prophetic and evangelical will produce the desired results: spiritual renewal and awakening.

Pastoral theology and systematic theology were never separate in the early Church. The pastor of souls was primarily the one who exercised the *magisterium* of the Church. Theology was the end-product of concern for the salvation and spiritual growth of the believer.

We need more theologians who will remind us of our deviation from the spiritual standards of historic Orthodoxy. They must publicly acknowledge the dichotomy within Orthodoxy between theory and experience. Our people need to be challenged spiritually and not simply informed doctrinally.

Theology is useful only for those who already know Christ and are in a right relationship with Him. "Let us attend! The Holy Things to those who are saints!"

Orthodoxy — Without the Cross?

Founding the Church was costly to Christ. It cost Him His very life and blood. The Lord "acquired the Church with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

We belong to a blood-bought Church. It is a Church that came into existence as a result of what Christ did upon Calvary's Cross — shedding His precious blood for the remission of our sins.

How then can we fool around with a Church that was purchased with the blood of Jesus? When we tamper with the Church, we are tampering with what was the object of Christ's infinite love. We are tampering with what is most precious for the Lord.

Do you see now, dear reader, why anything that prostitutes the nature and mission of the Church is an abomination in the eyes of God? Those who secularize the Church's life with worldly activities and rest contented with religious formalism tread on the blood of Christ. They are guilty of a grave offence in the sight of the Lord

and will have to give an account to Him on the day of judgment.

Those who learn to live with compromise in the Church are equally responsible before God. They are the ones who tolerate secular humanism and disobedience in the Church. They rationalize sin in the Church. They go by the dictum: "The end justifies the means."

There can be no Church without the blood of Jesus. It was founded in His shed blood and it is sustained by His blood. This means the Cross is central in the life and message of the Church.

Because much of contemporary Orthodoxy is a Christless Orthodoxy it is an Orthodoxy without the Cross. We are too busy making money for the Church to hear "the preaching (logos) of the Cross." This fact accounts for the lack of spiritual power in our parishes. Paul said it: "The preaching of the Cross. . . is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). The Gospel "is the power of God unto salvation."

The Church is devoid of the power of God when it is unable to support itself without Greek Festivals, Balls and Bingos. Supernatural power that can do the humanly impossible comes only with the **logos** or message of the Cross.

Church Power

The power that results in the miraculous is released by reason of the proclamation of the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ. The more the Cross is proclaimed the more the spiritual power becomes available in the Church to do the impossible: to change people's lives and to solve all problems

both in the Church and in our personal lives.

"It is the power of God," the apostle Paul teaches. But there is no power in Orthodoxy without the Cross. Yet, we are trying to operate the Church without the Cross.

There is a crucifix, showing Christ nailed to the Cross, behind every Holy Table in the sanctuary. The evidence, however, shows that the Cross has been reduced to a religious adornment. It has ended up being a religious symbol. It is no longer a reality in the Church.

It is self-evident why many of our parishes have to resort to Greek Festivals, Bingos and Balls on an annual basis to meet the Church budget. **The message of the Cross is silenced.** Pastors and Church councils rely on their own human efforts to raise needed funds. They lean on the arm of flesh, rather than on the "power of God."

We are not living and functioning in the realm of faith. We operate in the realm of the senses. We cannot say, as we should: "We walk by faith, not by sight." It is not the principles stated in Scripture that govern the life of the Church. The Church is administered on the level of the natural and the human, rather than the divine and supernatural. **We end up running the Church man's way, not God's way.**

It is the miracle-working power which comes from the Cross that changes lives and causes believers to live and to give of their substance generously for the work of the Church. They need teaching on the transforming power of the Holy Spirit that flows from the Cross.

The Gospel Silenced

We are doing the bidding of Satan when we silence the Gospel. He does not want to see souls redeemed and many of us are cooperating with him.

Why are we not hearing the Good News of salvation in the crucified and risen Christ? The message of the atoning death of the Lord is left for the Good Friday service. But even then it is often silenced because of the late hour and the lengthy services.

Paul emphatically stated: "I declare unto you the Gospel which I have preached unto you. . ." He spelled out the Gospel. It is not something vague, ambiguous, or abstract. It is that the Son of God died for our sins, was buried and on the third day He arose from the dead.

In the message of these wonderful acts of redemption lies the "power of God" that impacts the life of the hearer. "It pleased God by the foolishness of the kerygma to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

Is it any wonder that many of our people are not saved despite their baptism and Communions? It is not the baptism nor the Communion that is the power of God unto salvation. Paul declares: "The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom 1:16). The sacraments do not work like some kind of sublime magic.

The sacraments produce results only in the lives of those who already have appropriated the blood of Calvary's Cross (except for infant baptism for the duration of infancy). Paul said

“Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the Gospel” (1 Cor. 1:17).

Without the preaching of the Gospel the sacraments can only harm the communicants. “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). The sacraments bring upon us condemnation when we receive them with a heart devoid of faith and repentance.

Paul dwells in his epistles at great length on the matter of “power.” He refers to Holy Spirit power, power unto salvation and unto healing and deliverance. Such power does not come with human effort. It is supernatural power that comes directly from Heaven.

Paul lived and ministered in that dimension of spiritual power. He was not concerned with eloquence and human ability in the ministry of evangelism. Indeed he admits his speech weakness and inadequacy. He affirmed that he preached “not in the eloquence of human wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”

The apostle said to the Corinthians: “I will come to you shortly if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them who are puffed up but the power” (1 Cor. 4:19). He made it perfectly clear that “the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.”

Preaching the Gospel is preaching the Cross, the atoning death of Jesus Christ. Paul preached the message of the Cross with no apologies. “We preach Christ crucified.” “I determined not to know anything among you, except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

Today we hear Christ the Teacher preached. We hear "Christ our God" preached, but we rarely hear Christ Crucified preached, Savior, Redeemer and High Priest.

Paul was adamant about the urgency of preaching the Gospel. Evangelism without any doubt had priority in his ministry. He put it above every other aspect of his ministry — even above administering baptism.

The Penalty of Anathema

The apostle cautioned the Galatians against changing the substance of the Gospel message. He warned those who would tamper with the Gospel that they are cursed and anathematized by God for attempting such an act. Distorting or altering the message of the Gospel would affect its redeeming power. It naturally has to be the work of Satan whose design is to keep man from being redeemed.

Nothing could be more criminal than to falsify the content of the Gospel. It is for this reason that Paul anathematized those who would adulterate the Gospel. "Though we or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be anathema" (Gal. 1:8f).

On the basis of this teaching we can safely state that there is a curse and anathema on many parishes today because the one and only authentic Gospel is not being preached. Another Gospel is being heard.

Many priests and bishops place themselves under the anathema and bring churches under the same curse when they substitute the true Gospel

with their own. Man's message is heard rather than God's. It is their lack of faithfulness to the authentic Gospel that incurs anathema upon themselves.

No Substitutes

Nothing can take the place of the Gospel of Christ. Substitute messages can never take the place of the genuine proclamation of the Cross. There is no substitute for the one, unchanging Gospel handed down by the apostles. There is no substitute for "Christ and Him crucified."

Neither eloquence nor any other moral, noble and sublime cause can compensate for the silencing of the apostolic kerygma. There is no justification for the silencing of the Gospel message.

Eternity is at stake. Without the Gospel there is no salvation for man. "The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation." **No Gospel, no salvation.**

The Liturgy is no substitute for the preaching of the Gospel, for it presupposes salvation through the preaching of the Gospel. "No Gospel, no Liturgy!" should be our slogan. The sacraments bring judgment upon the participants when they are not prepared previously with the ministry of the word.

In the Liturgy at the altar we act out the events of redemption: the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul says: "As often as you eat of this bread and drink of this cup, you declare the death of the Lord till He come" (1 Cor. 11:26). But why are we not told about this from the pulpit?

The pulpit ends up giving us a mes-

sage different from that of the altar. We must correct this by bringing the pulpit in line with the altar. Let the pulpit declare what the altar is declaring: "The death of the Lord till He come."

Spell It Out!

I've said it before and I say it again:

Tell us, Father, in your sermon why we must observe the moral and spiritual teachings of Jesus. Why do we have to be obedient to His ordinances? What did Jesus do for us? What makes Him Lord and holder of the highest position in the universe?

Tell us, Father, that Jesus loved us so much that He accepted to suffer condemnation and the unjust cruel death upon the Cross in our place and to shed His blood out of His infinite love for us.

Spell it out, Father! Spell it out, Your Eminence and Your Grace! The passion, crucifixion and resurrection are not incidental events in the life of Jesus. They make up the very core of Christianity. They are the foundation of the Christian Dispensation.

Say it loud and clear, dear priests and bishops, to the people. The Liturgy is the proclamation of the atoning death of Jesus. When we attend the Liturgy we are present at Calvary. We are also present at the Empty Tomb and in the Upper Room.

If we do not hear the kerygma of the Cross, how can we "discern the body of Christ" in the Communion and receive without condemnation? It is the message of the crucifixion that brings us under conviction and causes us to repent and to seek renewed forgiveness at the Holy Table of Communion.

Orthodox Renewal Series

- 01 Awake! Orthodox Christians! Before It is Too Late!
- 02 From the Writings of St. Symeon the New Theologian
- 03 To be Born Again: An Orthodox Approach
- 04 Can We Know We Are Saved?
- 05 Time to Be Marked: By Christ or by Satan?
- 06 The Coming Deluge of Fire According to Bible Prophecy
- 07 Physical Healing: Is It Orthodox? Is It for Today?
- 08 World Orthodoxy in Crisis
- 09 Why is God Shaking the Church Today?
- 10 Are You Ready for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb?
- 11 Born Again: When?
- 12 Orthodox Renewal: A Response to Fr. John Morris
- 13 Time to Take Notice
- 14 The Salt of the Earth: Is It Losing Its Savor?
- 15 God's Answer to the Crisis in the Church
- 16 He is Near - at the Very Gates
- 17 The Seduction of Orthodoxy
- 18 The Urgency of the Hour
- 19 Preparing in Time for Eternity
- 20 The Antichrist Syndrome: The Cure
- 21 Is the Church a Mother or an Enemy and Alien to Her
Most Zealous Children?
- 22 Evangelism: An Orthodox Rediscovery
- 23 Orthodox in for a Surprise?
- 24 Why the Church Should Get Out of the Restaurant Business
- 25 Will Things Get Better or Worse
- 26 Sinners Go Unpunished
- 27 How Can An Orthodox Be Born Again
- 28 Two Advents of Christ: Similar Preparations
- 29 St. Symeon the New Theologian: A Forerunner of Renewal
- 30 Flesh Can Only Produce Flesh
- 31 The Renewal Message of St. Symeon the New Theologian
- 32 Satan Coming In Like a Flood
- 33 The New World Government and the Rise of the Antichrist
- 34 Forerunners of Antichrist in the Church
- 35 Collective Repentance: The Need of the Hour
- 36 Praying Between Liturgies
- 37 Repentance: the Key to Orthodox Renewal
- 38 What Are We to Do With the Book of Revelation?
- 39 Converts to Orthodoxy: A Grave Concern
- 40 A Requirement for Salvation
- 41 Making Right Judgments of Others
- 42 Rediscovering the Lay Ministry in the Orthodox Church
- 43 Need For One Thing
- 44 Time To Choose: Orthodoxy of the Letter or of the Spirit?
- 45 When God Is Against You
- 46 Repelling Satan's Two-Pronged Attack Against the Church
- 47 Possessing the Promised Land
- 48 Can God Wait For Us Orthodox Forever?
- 49 Should We Get Emotional About Christ?
- 50 When Jesus Does Not Know You

Help to spread the message of Orthodox spiritual
awakening by distributing these booklets as widely
as possible. For copies of this booklet or
those listed above, write:

St. Symeon the New Theologian Orthodox Renewal Center
244 N. Holiday Road, Destin, Florida 32541