the
Orthodox Evangelist
"Do the work of an Evangelist" - 2 Tim 4: 5

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Where Are God's Prophets?

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

This article is a compilation of writings from the late Fr. Eusebius Stephanou from the 1980's and 1990's. Sincerely, Joseph Abbate / President **"We see not our signs… there is no more any prophet" (Psalm 74:9).**

Where are God's prophets today to call upon His Orthodox people to return from their rebellion in repentance and reconversion? I often wonder if anyone in the Church is taking notice of the "signs of the times?" Jesus clearly said: *"Can ye not discern the signs of the times? (Matt. 16:13).*

We are living in an apocalyptic age in which iniquity is multiplying as never before. A tide of satanic subversion is sweeping the world. Forces of darkness are at work aiming at obliterating our Judeo-Christian heritage from every area of human life: government, education and the family.

Those who hold to traditional moral values are viewed today as right-wing religious extremists. Our familiar way of life is threatened by secular liberals who want to impose their anti-God agenda of hedonism and materialism on all Americans.

Look at the Church!

Many of us say, "Look at the courts and the schools." But I can hear God telling us, "Look at the Church!" The Bible tells us: *"judgement starts at the house of God."*

Look at the Church in Russia where the western decadence is being imported into that country and threatening what is left of the moral fiber of Russian society. It is a Church contented with religious routine and preserving traditional ritual. Any renewal outreach is distrusted and discouraged.

Look at the Church of Greece! Infighting within the ranks of the hierarchy and abuse of authority are playing havoc with the Church. In this historically Orthodox nation, too, evangelism and any renewal activity are viewed as suspect and oppressed vehemently. Currently, there is a deliberate and systematic persecution against all renewal brotherhoods, lay ministry and house prayer meetings.

It is out of love that I must warn them. Every priest, every bishop and archbishop, every patriarch should warm our Orthodox people. They are entitled to know the full counsel of God. Basically, they are God-fearing people, but have never had the chance to hear the Gospel in the Power of the Holy Spirit.

We will be held responsible for their entering into eternal condemnation. God tells us: "The same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at their hand."

Have you been warning your people, Father? Are you warning your clergy and laity, Your Eminence and Your Grace? Are you sounding the alarm? You were ordained to be a "watchman unto the house of Israel. Therefore, hear the word at my mouth, and GIVE THEM WARNING FROM ME."

You rush, Father, with a sense of urgency to administer the last rites to the dying, and I can understand why. But do you show the same urgency in preaching the message of repentance and reconversion to your people in time before they die?

Do you warn the people, Father, that they must "know Christ and the power of His resurrection," if they are to make it to the kingdom of Heaven? How can we leave our Orthodox to die without knowing the Good News that God so loved them that He sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world to be the propitiation for our sins in the blood that He shed on the Cross of Calvary.

Forerunners of the Antichrist

Forerunners of the Antichrist are on the scene. *"It is the last hour, and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour" (John 2:18).*

The winds of the Antichrist spirit are blowing throughout the Orthodox Church (as well, of course, as in other Churches). The cause of law and order has overshadowed the cause of spreading the Gospel and the kingdom of God. Renewal and evangelism are viewed as some kind of religious conspiracy that shakes the peace and stability of the Church.

Priests who have laid their lives on the line in the cause of Christ,

evangelism and revival are pursued as fugitives in the Church, punished with suspension and threatened with the ultimate penalty – defrocking from the priesthood.

God is displeased with people of His inheritance. They are self-righteous, self-indulgent and rest contented with religious formalism. The ones who are godly lament the situation in the Church. They speak about it and write extensively on the subject in religious newspapers and periodicals.

The problem is they rely on their persuasive powers and on exhortation. They forget that *"the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power."*

In the Valley of Decision

What these otherwise sincere men of faith forget is that God is waiting for us to fall on our faces before Him and cry out for His intervention of mercy. Traditional litanies have proved ineffective. Fervent prayer from the heart is what will touch the heart of God.

Litanies do not cover all our needs. I know of no litany, for example, in which we ask the Lord to raise up prophets and evangelists for the spiritual awakening of His people. Is it any wonder we have no prophets and messengers of God to call His Orthodox people to repentance and reconversion to the living Christ!

This is God's message to His Orthodox people today: *"If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14).*

The bottom line is that every member of the Church needs to make a decision. Will it be Christ or Antichrist? It is the hour of decision. We cannot escape it. By not making a decision, in effect we are casting our vote for the Antichrist. Pontius Pilate two thousand years ago asked the Jewish people to make a choice. Who will it be? Christ or Barabbas?



Time is running out! There is an urgency about getting the word out. It can't wait for tomorrow. The message must be proclaimed today. Tomorrow may be too late. A ten-minute Sunday sermon won't do the job. Routine sermons won't meet the need. They only mesmerize our people, rather than inspire and challenge them to repent and come to the foot of the Cross in renewed faith and self-surrender. It's not giving sermons that will make the difference. Rather, it is proclaiming the Gospel *"in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power."*

How can the clergy help channel God's message to His wayward people when most of them need to be inspired themselves and nudged on? The indictment St. Symeon the New Theologian directs to the clergy of his day can very well apply to the spiritual leaders of modern-day Orthodoxy: *"When I see that they understand none of the necessary and divine things, neither do they teach them to others nor guide them to the light of knowledge, what else is this but what Christ said to the scribes and pharisees: Woe unto you, scribes, for you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves and you hindered those who were entering" (Theological-Moral Chapters 10, 166, 325, 695).*

Warning: God's Expression of Love

God warns the sinner out of love. He counsels him how to escape from impending doom out of compassion: the way of repentance and reconversion is the way of deliverance from the condemnation which is to come. How much God loves us? He doesn't want to see us perish. He waits for us to repent so He can forgive us.

The word of the Lord that came to Ezekiel was not only a word of warning and a doomsday reminder. It was a call and invitation to repent from idolatry and apostasy. The purpose of the warning was to induce His people to repent of their sins before it was too late. The message of repentance invariably speaks of a time limit to God's long-suffering. Ezekiel cried out to the children of Israel in the name of the Lord God: *"Repent and turn yourselves from your idols and turn away your faces from all your abominations" (14:6).* John the Baptist, the last of the prophets in the preparation for the coming of the Messiah, directed the same familiar call of repentance: *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"*

God holds His shepherds responsible for the backslidden state of His people. Most priests preach the sacraments from the pulpit, before they

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proclaim the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ and redemption that sinners have through His shed blood.

Such pastors preach the cause of the institutional Church before they lead souls in tears of repentance and contrition to the Cross of Calvary. They put the cart before the horse. They teach before they preach. They give *didache* before they give *kerygma.*

What St. Symeon the New Theologian addressed to his fellow-priests are relevant and timely to the priests and bishops of our own generation: *"Let us neither deceive ourselves by following the desires of our flesh and being prostituted in our devices, making ourselves teachers, becoming bishops and priests and despising God and thus our own salvation. We are still embryos, or more accurately, aborted. Yet we leap upon the holy places and occupy apostolic thrones… and we seek to exercise leadership over the royal flock as shepherds without even having become lambs yet… Oh! What shamelessness – not to say, extreme insanity!" (Catechesis 28, 110f, 195, 230).*

A Call For National Repentance

Satan, however, is not afraid of icons, Liturgies and holy vessels. What truly intimidates and keeps him at a distance are Spirit-filled, spiritually regenerated Orthodox who know that they are washed in the blood of the Lamb and that Jesus our Savior dwells in them in the fulness of His victory power.

What frightens Satan and keeps him and his military hosts away is not the "Holy Orthodoxy" of the past generations that we so glibly pride ourselves on, but rather the Holy Orthodox people in the here and now who occupy the pews in our parish Churches. We must stop resting on the spiritual laurels of past generations of holy men and woman and begin imitating their virtue and their consuming love for Christ.

What will it take to humble us and to make us willing to decrease so Christ can increase in our Church? When will we start treating the Orthodox of other nationalities like a tender-hearted spiritual Mother who loves her children? When will we stop looking at them as if they were second-class Orthodox – like members of the same Orthodox body that we simply have to put up with by necessity?

Soloviev once said that if the Greeks could have had their way, they would have anathematized the Russians long ago and would have expelled them from Orthodoxy. Of course, the Russians would have loved to do the same thing to the Greeks.

How many Arab and Turkish invasions and massacres will it take to purify the Greek Church and perfect holiness and virtue in the ranks of Greek believers? How many millions of Russians and Ukrainians have to be massacred before they humble themselves and fall on their faces, repenting, confessing their sins of rebellion and disobedience, and crying out to Heaven for divine mercy, forgiveness and a new heart?

Why don't they heed the voices of the many prophets that God has been raising up in the midst of the Russian people, as for example, Dostoyevsky, Berdyaev and Solzhenitsyn? Communism is not the real enemy of the Russians, Ukrainians, Serbs and Bulgarians. The real enemy is sin; his name is Satan.

To be sure, God is longsuffering and desires not the death of a sinner. *"For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God. Wherefore, turn yourselves and live ye" (Ezek. 18:32).* God is a God of love and mercy. But the age of mercy, grace and forgiveness is rapidly coming to a close. We cannot abuse the love of God and get away with it. It is high time to sound the final alarm: Repent! For the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

Renewal, Not Reform

by Joseph Abbate / President

With so many people converting to the Orthodox Church, it will probably seem difficult to imagine that not that long ago, must cradle Orthodox had been leaving the Church. It will probably very from Church parishes, but if you were to ask cradle Orthodox to raise their hands, maybe only 5 to 10 percent of the congregation may respond.

The question may arise, what made so many people who were raised in the Church leave? Some of the Greeks who had left have started non-denominational or Pentecostal Churches. I had known of one who had left the Orthodox Church because he had claimed that no one had told him that Jesus loved him, until a Pentecostal had shared that with him.

We don't have space to write about the abuses, political positions or doctrinal differences in other Church denominations. In fact, many of today's converts to the Orthodox Church converted specifically because of these important differences, and it's good to see so many people arriving to Orthodoxy.

Yet, we must look at those past figures who had struggled to keep believers in the Orthodox Church. As a child, I remember that, on many occasions, a sermon would hardly be delivered. If it was, it was short, many times addressed in the Greek language, and be held until the end of the Divine Liturgy, so those people who arrived late to Church could hear a sermon. In the Chicago area, I would here the term "Arriving on Greek Time" for those who came late.

Fr. Eusebius Stephanou had urged that the Gospel sermons should not be held at the end of the

Divine Liturgy, but stressed that it was important for the sermon to be delivered just after the Epistle and Gospel reading. In this way, a sermon would better prepare people to receive the Holy Communion. At times, he was criticized for his strong emphasis on evangelism. He would often state that the Fear of God, Faith and Love often is a result of hearing the Gospel proclaimed.

He had even written about the importance of preaching in such writings as *"Making the Pulpit agree with the Altar"* and *"Sacramentalized but not Evangelized."* Such an emphasis on the Gospel, (he claimed), should not be viewed as a Protestant tradition, since many famous Church Fathers of the past were strong preachers.

To quote Fr. Stephanou: *"But, when the sermon is put off to the close of the Liturgy, then the Gospel reading is not fresh in the memory of the congregation. It is more likely for the sermon not to have any direct connection with the Gospel text. Such a practice is regrettable, because the word of God is less likely to be a source of inspiration and life-changing power in the heart and life of the believer.*

And, as for those who straggle into the Church after the readings of the scripture and the sermon, they might as well stay home. The Liturgy with the Communion is not designed to change people's lives, but to renew those already evangelized and regenerated in the Holy Spirit. "The holy things for those who are holy!"

When the sermon is put off to the close of the Liturgy, too often it is less likely to be Christ-centered and more apt to be moralistic. The one who preaches can end up essentially moralizing by speaking on moral and spiritual values, but not necessarily leading the listener into a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The sermon could possibly not be received as the word that "cometh out of the mouth of God." It might not be gospel preaching, that is evangelical, coming directly out of the evangelion. It may not be "good news" preaching, because the "glad tidings of great joy" should come directly out of the revealed word of God – that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life".

The moment the priest separates his message from the revealed word of God, he can be tempted to preach "with wisdom of words", to use the expression of St. Paul (1 Cor. 1:17). As soon as that happens, the pulpit becomes disconnected from the altar. This is the reason why the sermon in many of our churches loses its Eucharistic relevance.

Remember, dear reader, that the ministry of the word and the Eucharist are interrelated in the Liturgy. It is of utmost importance that we understand this basic principle of Orthodox worship" ***(Making the Pulpit Agree with the Altar P. 4-5).***

Fr. Alexander Schmemann promoted using the English language during the services and greatly pushed for more involvement for the Laypeople. He prioritized the historical Church Theology rather than relying on more strict ascetic rules. He also faced scorn and was accused of abandoning ancient practices of the Church. He was also labelled as a "Protestant."

Protopresbyter John Meyendorff was also heavily criticized for his involvement in the World Council of Churches. According to a number of resources available on the internet, he was labelled as a "Uniate" and *"He drew sharp criticism from other scholars who claimed he compromised authentic Eastern Orthodoxy. He was also labelled as progressive for is use of History based teachings."* Both Fr. Schmemann and Fr. Meyendorff were criticized for autocephaly in their structuring the Orthodox Church of America.

The Orthodox Christian Laity, O.C.L. had also been involved with encouraging the leadership in the Church to be more open to the important active roles of the Lay people.

Father Stephanou, Father Schmemann and Father Meyendorff would have been overjoyed to see the day when a great influx of people would join the Orthodox Church. Yet, their purpose was to draw the people closer to the Lord Jesus Christ. Leaving liberalism and doctrinal abuses in former denominations is one thing, and the history and theology of the Orthodox Church is indeed crucially important. However, we cannot lose our focus on the Lord and our relationship with Him. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ should be our main focus, and to deepen our relationship with Him. This has been the main goal of the Renewal in the Church.

In Rememberance Symeon McKnight

Since the previous newsletter had already been printed, we had enclosed a separate notice in the last newsletter mailing envelope regarding the falling asleep of Symeon McKnight. He had faithfully been by the side of Father Stephanou since the 1980's and had travelled with him on missionary trips to many different countries. He is greatly missed by all those who had known him, including myself, and he is now in the loving arms of the Lord. He was given a military burial at Ft. Barrancas in Pensacola, Florida. May his memory be eternal!