

Sunday, September 18, 2016

A Strike from the Right (3) A Contemporary Example of A Strike from the Right

One of the more dangerous extreme movements in our current times is the movement led by Atef Aziz. Atef Aziz started as dedicated servant in the church in Asyut, but when he started to exhibit his extreme views and practices, H.E. the late Metropolitan Mikhail sent him and his group away in 1985, so his group went to Cairo.

H.H. the late Pope Shenouda III tried to give him a second chance to serve, where he would be kept under observation, but the malady of pride had taken hold of him and his group. They were warned several times but in each case he would be devious. He would sign pledges that he would discontinue his errant practices, and then not abide by them. Finally he (along with his group) were excommunicated by the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church in June 2002, and the details of excommunication decision filled four pages!

Of course the story did not end there, for their errant views were still alive, and they were attempting to attract new followers. They are a living example of the words of our Lord ***“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves”*** (Matthew 7:15). After Atef Aziz managed to attract some young men to his group, he found a way by which to move to the US and was able (through the help of some people who adopted his deviant views) to establish a new organization called “New Zion” in 2015. And he held his first worldwide conference for all his followers around the world in July 2015, after he had adopted the monastic garb in March of 2015, taking new name “Fr. Seraphim.” He picked the State of Israel to be the location for this conference as a launching point for his new church “New Zion.” He is tirelessly trying to recruit new members from the Coptic Church as well as some from South Korea. He recently established a monastery for consecrated women in California and another one for men after changing his name to be Fr. Macarius!!



**** Characteristics of the Extreme Mindset and Practices of Atef Aziz***

1- He considers the current Church as corrupt, and that the Spirit of God has deserted it. He considers that the Church has severed itself from the Church of the Early Fathers, and that he is sent in order to give the Orthodox Church new life. And this is the first idea that he imposes on his followers, by emphasizing the negative things found in some people in the Church so that others may hate the Church and despise it. And then he convinces them that he will lead them into a deeper and more pure patristic, orthodox experience which is “true orthodoxy” as opposed to the current polluted ruinous state that the current Church exists in.

2- He claims that God has spoken to him personally and has given him a mission: to establish New Zion which is connected to the Early Church, and distant from the current deviant dead church which currently exists. In this way he denies that the Orthodox Church has been alive for 2000 years and it has produced many saints, ascetics, and martyrs over the ages and until today, through the Holy Spirit that dwells in her. He also denies that the Church is growing and expanding and strong in Egypt and out of Egypt, and is a true witness to the Kingdom and the Truth.

3- He utilizes some of the prayers of the Coptic Orthodox Church such as the Agpeya and Psalmody, along with certain practices used in worship such as prostrations and long fasts. These practices he presents in a certain format in order to give the illusion that his methods and ideas are orthodox and not problematic. But he pursues these practices with an unacceptable over-zealousness; thus prostrations are numerous, and fasting is very strenuous and extreme, or his group would repeatedly pray the all 150 Psalms with prostrations offered between each psalm, after which they would sprinkle water in all four directions in order to exorcise any demons. This is in addition to other numerous unwarranted practices!

4- Many of the organizational aspects of his discipleship groups are conducted in utmost secrecy: it is not permitted for members to speak of what occurs in their closed meetings, and membership in these groups is categorized into different levels: there is the close-knit group of his inner circle, and then there are wider and wider circles which are not as close. The full details of the group’s activities are only disclosed to members of this “inner circle”. This is of course in opposition to the Church’s mindset of transparency and operating in the open, for we were called to be “sons of the light” and none of our activities are conducted in the dark.

(To be continued)

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