

School · of · the · Prophets

Theological Animation for Discipleship

The School of the Prophets (SOPs) 2nd September 2009 Session 1 @ University Church Ultimo – Brief Notes and Summary

History of SOPS

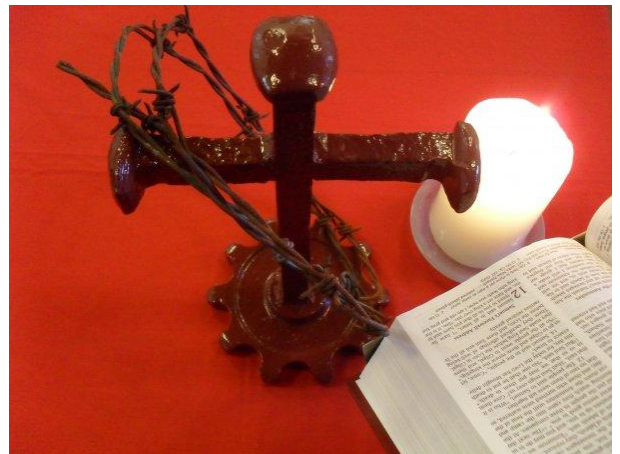
Initially, the "School of the Prophets" was put together in Australia by John Hirt and a faithful few during the time of a radical Christian experiment in Sydney, known as the "House of the New World" (2 Cor. 5:17). Strengthened by Rev. Dr. Athol Gill, SOPs eventually involved other Christian communities, such as the House of Freedom in Brisbane and the House of the Gentle Bunyip in Melbourne. As these community experiments closed or moved, SOPs was taken up by Avalon Baptist Peace Memorial Church and eventually freighted to Bartimaeus Community in Berkeley, California (Ched Myers etc). Its emergence now is timely, and its current formation is at University Church Ultimo, Sydney.

Biblical Texts

1 Samuel 10: 1-8 and 1 Chronicles 11:10-20

SOPS and Scripture

There is not a great deal of information concerning the "School of the Prophets" in scripture. Basically, they were a wandering band of prophets who sought to assist the authentic prophets (Isaiah etc) in their attempts at keeping Israel faithful to God and covenant. Among those who were also outstanding in their commitment to God in the Hebrew Bible are David's "mighty men of valour" - the chosen thirty. It is interesting to examine these two groups in that they example individuals who were there when needed to stand for faithfulness and keep the flame of faith alive. Today, as we gather in this School of the Prophets, we seek opportunity to be serious about radical discipleship, about our personal and political commitments to the faithful life of the church, and about living for the reign of God.



"If Jesus Christ be God and died for me... then no sacrifice I make for him can be too great." – C. T. Studd

Four Marks of SOPs

Confessional – Being confessional involves bearing testimony to the truth of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Confessional discipleship is a disowning of nominal Christianity: it is believing with our heads, with our hearts and with our hands, it is owning who we are as followers of Christ in every aspect of our lives. Concerning authentic Christian existence then – beyond relativistic “personal preferences” or “subjectivist notions” as to why Christianity is, or is not conversational or confessional, there is one thing in the church’s calling that cannot with impunity be doubted – the church if it stands in the tradition of the N. T. apostolic contention, and holds to the essence of its creeds, must be “confessional”.



Conversational – From the “sociology of knowledge” we know that everyone of us is – in one way or another - being converted every day. In light of this, believers are called to share the Good News of the crucified and risen One in a world where multiple conversions are happening every day - university is a place of conversion, we all undergo societal conversions. The church must not in a misunderstanding of postmodernism suffer a missional failure of nerve. Beyond liberal conversion aversion, we are called to “Go and make disciples of all nations.... (Matt 28:19)

Devotional – As Christians, we are prisoners of a divine call, and slaved in love to Christ that we might win others to the joy of his lordship (1 Cor. 9: 19). Our power to testify of Christ is not fabricated in us by our own efforts; it is released by the work of the Holy Spirit through us towards others. Strength to love and witness are found in times of devotional receptivity in which we respond to God’s call to be alone with the Alone. We know ourselves, we find ourselves in the giving of ourselves in obedience (Mk. 8: 34). The Christian’s deepest meaning is one and the same – the love of the gracious insatiable Lover in Christ. We know the meaning of devotion and the claim of God as Merton puts it, when we respond to the “deepest exigencies of love and surrender to the truth of Christ.”

Discipleship – Put simply, discipleship is the following of Jesus with all that we are. The church on all fronts is today plunged into situations of witness and crisis that can only be met with a deepening and faithful Christian assignment of discipleship. That is with a form of Christian life and witness that issues forth in radical discipleship, a form of Christian life that is “radical” – having to do with the “root truths” of what it means to follow Jesus and being bound by the praxis of his kingdom programme. *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross, and follow me.* (Mark 8:34)



A Theological Stimulus Package (some guidelines to consider)



"I AM" – As believers, we exist only because of the revelation of God. Christian faith starts with God and not with us or our views of God.

For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. Eph. 2:10

"I can" – Too often, we let what we can't do for the Lord stop us from doing what we can do. Here we need a real dependency on the Holy Spirit. Paul knew this when he said: *"I can do all*

things through him who strengthens me." Phil 4:13

"I ought" – Beyond our weak excuses (all things being equal), we do what we mostly want to do. We will find the truth of discipleship and the meaning of our lives, when we seek to will one thing – and that is to love Jesus only (Søren Kierkegaard).

"I will" – As a Christian, I am obliged, I am under holy orders, in the gospel I am seized and driven (Karl Barth). So today, here and now I give myself afresh to Christ. *What in life counts, what in my living really matters? In the end it's only what we do for Jesus that counts.*

Daily Act of Devotion

When you come across the gods of violence, discrimination and greed in your daily lives – on TV, in the street, or wherever – consider "marking yourself" with the counter cultural sign of the cross to show what you believe, where your allegiance lies ... to whom you belong!

What in life counts, what in my living really matters? In the end it's only what we do for Jesus that counts.

In the journey to Christian self-understanding, here are some mainline theologians to read and discuss

Athol Gill – The gifted teacher of Radical Discipleship in Australia.

Eberhard Jüngel – Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy at the University of Tübingen.

Gustavo Gutiérrez – Dominican priest regarded as the founder of Liberation Theology.

Søren Kierkegaard – Danish Theologian and Philosopher.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza – Mainline feminist theologian, Professor of Divinity at Harvard.

..... God's word to us in Jesus Christ is, "Come follow me." By the Spirit we are enabled, therefore we follow....

For more information regarding School of the Prophets

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