

Church's Shepherds Must Recognize "Divine Warning": Bishop Schneider on Notre Dame Fire

(Photo: Home page of Bishop Schneider's new [website](#) / Screenshot)

This week's [devastating fire](#) atop Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, which consumed the entire roof and toppled the steeple of the magnificent Gothic church, has provided ample symbolism for the current state of Holy Mother Church and evoked insightful commentary from multiple sources, including [Cardinal Raymond Burke](#) and [Christopher Ferrara](#). The fact that it happened during Holy Week, the climax of Lent and the entire liturgical year, only adds to the drama of the Church's ongoing crisis — doctrinal, moral, liturgical, and spiritual — as well as to the mysteries of our redemption which we are preparing to commemorate.

Arguably the most striking reflection on the fire and its profound significance for our times comes from Bishop Athanasius Schneider, the well-known auxiliary bishop of Astana, Kazakhstan, who graciously shared his thoughts on the tragic event with [LifeSiteNews](#) (full text below, reprinted with permission). The central point of His Excellency's reflection is summed up in the following paragraph:

"If the Shepherds of the Church refuse to do penance for the spiritual conflagration of the past fifty years, and for the betrayal of Christ's universal command to evangelize, should we then not fear that God might send another and more shocking sign, like a devastating conflagration or earthquake that would destroy St. Peter's Basilica in Rome? God will not indefinitely and shamelessly be mocked by so many Shepherds of the Church of our own day, through their betrayal of the Faith, their sycophantic serving of the world and their neo-pagan worship of temporal and earthly realities. To them as well are addressed these words of Christ, 'I tell you, unless you repent you will all likewise perish.'" (Lk 13:5)

Indeed, God will not be mocked "indefinitely and shamelessly", and the Notre Dame fire could very well be just "the beginnings of sorrows" (Matt. 24:8) for France, the world, and the universal Church. In 1917, Our Lady of Fatima told the three shepherd children during her final apparition, "Do not offend the Lord our God any more, for He is already too much offended!" (Oct. 13, 1917). Sadly, as we have seen over the past 100-plus years, seemingly the vast majority of humanity — including the Church's human element — has ignored and brazenly defied Our Lady's maternal pleading.

As we begin the Sacred Triduum — commemorating and entering into the saving Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Our Lord — let us heed Bishop Schneider's exhortation and unite ourselves to the noble hope he has expressed:

"May the fire at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, however sad and deplorable it is, rekindle — especially in the Shepherds of the Church — a love and zeal for the true Catholic Faith and for the ardent evangelization of all those who do not yet believe in Christ."

Some Considerations on the Conflagration of the Cathedral Notre Dame de Paris

The lightning vehemence with which fire engulfed the cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris left one with the impression that an unexpected event had come like a bolt from out of the blue. And yet, viewed as a phenomenon, this tragedy came after a series of hundreds of systematic arson attacks on various sacred objects belonging to the Catholic Church in France over the last year.

It is also significant that the fire in Notre Dame occurred at the beginning of Holy Week, which is the heart of the liturgical year for all Catholics. As the facts in the case are still unknown, we have no evidence on which to base allegations of a plot to destroy the cathedral. Yet one is left with a queasy feeling inside, especially as one considers the chain of systematic anti-Catholic events, marginalization, discrimination and ridicule which the Catholic Faith has undergone at the hands of the French political establishment and French media landscape, both of which are firmly in the hands of the current anti-Christian and Free Masonic powers in France.

Notre Dame is not only the most symbolic cultural and religious sign for the Catholic Church in France. Given that France bears the title "eldest daughter of the Church," her main cathedral also has deep cultural and religious significance for the entire Catholic world.

The destruction of a visible sign of such vast proportion as the cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris also contains an unmistakable spiritual message. The fire of Notre Dame is without doubt a powerful and stirring sign which God is giving to His Church in our day. It is a *cri de coeur* ["cry of the heart"] for authentic conversion, first and foremost among the Shepherds of the Church. The fire has largely destroyed Notre Dame, a centuries-old masterpiece of the Catholic Faith. This is a symbolic and highly evocative representation of what has happened in the life of the Church over the last fifty years, as people have witnessed a conflagration of the Church's most precious spiritual masterpieces, i.e., the integrity and beauty of the Catholic Faith, the Catholic liturgy and Catholic moral life,

especially among priests.

The climax of this decades-long spiritual conflagration has manifested itself in the clerical sexual abuse scandals which have profoundly shaken the entire Church. Sadly, we must say that the handling of the clerical sexual abuse scandal has remained more or less on the level of emotional dismay. The true roots of this crisis have not been transparently disclosed, nor, consequently, have effective spiritual medicine and peremptory canonical norms been applied. In a recent and detailed essay, the former Pope Benedict XVI identified one of the most important roots of the abuse crisis, i.e. the loss of the true Faith, the prevalence of moral relativism, and the heterodox and unspiritual formation of seminarians. In reactions to the statement of the former Pope Benedict XVI one could observe an embarrassed silence — and even some indignant outcries — rumbling throughout the ranks of the establishment of liberal theologians and liberal clergy, who are the true *spiritual arsonists* in the Church today. They now consider the former Pope Benedict XVI to be a troublemaker whose blunt observations obstruct their incendiary work.

If the Shepherds of the Church will not recognize in the Notre Dame conflagration a Divine warning, they will be behaving like the people in Salvation History who did not recognize the warnings that God often gave them through the uncomfortable and unabashed words of the prophets, through natural catastrophes and various events. The tragedy of Notre Dame spontaneously brought to my mind the following words of Our Lord: "Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." (Lk 13:4-5)

The tragic conflagration of the cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris is also a propitious occasion for all members of the Church to do penance for the acts of betrayal that have been committed against Christ and His Divine teachings in the life of the Church over the past fifty years. Penance and reparation must be made, especially for the betrayal of the command of God the Father that all mankind should believe in His Divine Son, the only Savior of mankind. For God wills positively only the one and unique religion which believes that His Incarnated Son is God and the only Savior of mankind. Penance and reparation must also be made for the betrayal of Christ's explicit command to evangelize all nations without exception, first among them the Jewish people. For it was to them that Christ first sent His Apostles, to bring them to faith in Him and to the New and Everlasting Covenant for which the Old and temporary Covenant was established.

If the Shepherds of the Church refuse to do penance for the spiritual conflagration of the past fifty years, and for the betrayal of Christ's universal command to evangelize, should we then not fear that God might send another and more shocking sign, like a devastating

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May the fire at the cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris, however sad and deplorable it is, rekindle — especially in the Shepherds of the Church — a love and zeal for the true Catholic Faith and for the ardent evangelization of all those who do not yet believe in Christ. And may they be mindful not to marginalize and cowardly exclude the Jewish and Muslim people from this outstanding form of charity. May the fire at Notre Dame also serve as a means to inflame in the Shepherds of the Church a spirit of true repentance, so that God might grant to all the grace of a renewal in the true Faith and in true love for Christ, Our Lord, Our God and Our Savior.

When the cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris began to burn, there was a group of faithful, with children and young people among them, who knelt on the ground and sang the Hail Mary. This was one of the most touching and spiritually powerful signs in the midst of a great tragedy. May Our Lady, Help of Christians, intercede for us, that the Shepherds of the Church might begin, with the help of the lay faithful, to rebuild the spiritual ruins in the life of the Church in our day. In the Church, as in Paris, a process of repairing and rebuilding is a sign of hope.

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+ Athanasius Schneider, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Saint Mary in Astana

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